

Moldova's Pivotal Parliamentary Elections

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Executive Summary

The 28 September 2025 parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova will determine whether the country continues the challenging path towards EU accession, following last year's presidential election and the narrowly passed constitutional referendum on the EU.

Recent legal reforms in Moldova have aimed to address transparency, oversight of political parties and electoral integrity. However, these reforms face continuing structural challenges. The upcoming parliamentary elections are the most serious test of Moldova's ability to withstand Russian hybrid attacks, electoral interference and electoral corruption, which plagued earlier elections.

If Moldova swings back towards Moscow, this would significantly weaken the EU's influence not only in Moldova, but in Eastern Europe as a whole. This would leave Ukraine, already under Russian attack, even more vulnerable. Russia could use Moldova as a launchpad for hybrid attacks against the EU – and potentially even for a war against NATO and the West.

Introduction

The parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova on 28 September 2025 will be the third set of elections in three years, following the 2023 local elections and the 2024 presidential elections and constitutional referendum on the EU.

Moldova is a parliamentary republic, which means that its parliament has the main authority to create laws and appoint the government, while executive powers are primarily derived from the legislature rather than a single leader or president. The parliamentary elections will therefore probably determine the country's future for many years ahead, including whether it continues its push for EU integration or risks falling back under stronger Russian influence.

In her [speech](#) to the European Parliament on 9 September 2025, President Maia Sandu called the upcoming elections the most consequential in the history of the country. She stated that the outcome would decide “whether we consolidate as a stable democracy” or “...Russia pulls us away from Europe” – turning Moldova into a threat on Europe's eastern frontier.

Moldova's EU integration has taken rapid steps since the country received candidate status in June 2022 and began accession negotiations in June 2024. At the first ever [EU-Moldova Summit in Chişinău](#) on 4 July 2025, European Commission President von der Leyen announced the release of €270 million in pre-financing from the €1.9 billion EU Growth Plan for Moldova, in support of the country's reforms and bringing its economy closer to the EU Single Market. On 22 September 2025, less than a week before the elections, Moldova reached an important [milestone](#) on its EU accession path with the completion of the bilateral screening with the European Commission.

The EU's strategic communication on Moldova focuses on supporting democratic reforms, increasing the visibility of EU assistance, countering disinformation and enhancing Moldovan resilience against hybrid threats, especially in the run-up to accession talks and the up-coming elections.

Although EU integration is supported by a clear majority of the Moldovan population, the result of the 2024 [EU referendum](#) was extremely close, ending with 50.35 percent in favour and 49.65 against. Only 10,500 yes votes decided the outcome, depending decisively on the mobilisation of diaspora votes.

The aim of this report is to analyse how different outcomes in the elections could affect Moldova's further EU integration and future accession.

A domestic scene setter

In the most recent parliamentary elections, on 11 July 2021, the pro-European and liberal Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), founded in 2016 by Maia Sandu, won a landslide victory (52.80%), securing its own majority in parliament. This was largely due to voters' [demands](#) for an end to deep-rooted corruption and support for reforms based on the rule of law.

PAS [election promises](#) in 2021 focused on fighting corruption, implementing the rule of law, advancing European integration and improving social conditions. Four years later, the results are somehow mixed. Only advancing European integration could be called a success, although these achievements were due first and foremost to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine rather than the product of internal reform efforts.

In its assessments, the European Commission has also [noted progress](#) on justice reform and fighting corruption, especially in the push for EU accession, but emphasises that significant challenges remain and further reforms are needed, particularly on combating high-level corruption and strengthening judicial independence, and efficiency. Social conditions have not improved noticeably for most of the population during this period. However, it is important to note that the past four years has been marked by constant crises such as the covid pandemic and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In addition, [the energy crisis](#) of 2025 has had a negative impact on most people as rising energy costs have been passed on to consumers.

Despite Russia's ongoing aggression against neighbouring Ukraine, Moldova's election campaigning has mainly focused on the internal situation. About 61 per cent of respondents to an [iData Barometer](#) in August 2025 said that the next parliament should be most concerned with increasing pensions and salaries (54.6%), followed by the country's economic development and combating corruption (48.4%).

Russia's hybrid warfare

The Kremlin's main tool of leverage over Moldova has for decades been the secessionist Transnistrian region, where Russia has troops. Russia used the 2025 energy crisis in Transnistria to pressure Moldova by cutting off gas supplies to the breakaway region, thereby disrupting the production of electricity that Moldova had relied on, driving up energy costs and the risk of instability before important elections.

Russian interference in Moldovan elections also features disinformation campaigns on Telegram TikTok and Facebook, vote buying schemes and the funding of pro-Russian political parties and demonstrations. The Kremlin's goal in the parliamentary elections is to secure a constitutional majority for pro-Russia parties, which would undermine the country's EU integration.

During campaigning for the [2024 presidential election](#), and the constitutional referendum held in parallel with the first round of the presidential election, a massive attempt was made to influence the election results through 138,000 accounts in a sanctioned Russian bank. Moldovan police identified the Moldovan fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor, who lives in exile in Moscow, as the mastermind behind the operation. Moscow denied any involvement and did not acknowledge the election results.

In this year's elections, the Moldovan authorities expect a record amount of money – the equivalent of more than one per cent of Moldova's GDP (approx. \$180 million) – to be spent by Russia on influencing the election outcome.¹ Russia is expected to try to increase the efficiency of the influence operations and vote-buying schemes it used in previous elections. Russia has been using more crypto currency than cash for its vote-buying schemes in these elections and Telegram channels instead of SMS (which in the previous elections was possible to link to a person and used in the court as proof). This has made it more difficult to collect evidence for the courts. For the same reason, Șor activists have been using minors to some extent for sabotage and demonstrations, since they cannot be fined.²

The principal decision-making centre and coordinator of Russian state bodies on interfering in Moldova's elections is the Presidential Administration, under the direction of its first deputy, Sergei Kiriyyenko. The [procedure](#) has been streamlined compared to the 2024 election, when responsibility was shared between Kiriyyenko and Dmitry Kozak, another deputy Kremlin chief of staff, which led to mixed messages and some inefficiency.

Most of Moscow's influence is still expected to be channelled through Ilan Șor, but recent [media reporting](#) in Moldova has shown that Russia is directly financing vote buying and paid protest in Moldova. For the first time, Russia's disinformation is also targeting the Moldovan diaspora as a collective. The aim is to disappoint and discourage the diaspora, which usually votes pro-European, to reduce its voter turnout. The Moldovan Police have also [reported](#) several attempts by Russia to corrupt the electoral process through vote buying schemes within the Moldovan diaspora in various EU member states.

1 Author's interview in Chișinău, September 2025.

2 Author's interview in Chișinău, September 2025.

Since 2024, Moldova has updated its electoral and criminal laws in order to plug loopholes on electoral corruption, illegal party financing and disinformation. At the same time, however, Moscow has also improved its tools. Although Moldova is more resilient and better prepared to counter Russia's interference than in previous elections, the imminent danger of Russian interference in the electoral process persists.

The parties and electoral blocs contesting the elections

The 101 seats of the Moldovan Parliament are elected through a system of proportional representation involving party lists within a single nationwide constituency. The Central Election Commission (CEC) has registered 23 candidate entities, broken down into 15 political parties, four electoral blocs and four independents.

Pre-election opinion polls in Moldova do not take account of diaspora votes or voters on the left bank (Transnistria), which make them rather unreliable. Nonetheless, according to opinion most polls, only four parties or blocs are likely to exceed the parliamentary thresholds, which are five per cent for parties and seven per cent for electoral blocs. No independent candidate has ever exceeded the threshold of two per cent in any Moldovan parliamentary election. The proportion of [undecided voters](#) in the weeks before the elections is still very high (37.2%), which further increases uncertainty.

The ruling Party of Action and Solidarity is [expected](#) to receive 30–40 per cent of the vote. The previous dominance of PAS since 2021 is thus seriously threatened, primarily due to the rising popularity of pro-Russian opposition blocs, Russian interference, widespread economic dissatisfaction and concerns about corruption and poor governance in the country. PAS has also been criticised for working against the other smaller parties in the pro-European camp to secure its position as the principal pro-European force.

PAS is highly dependent on a good turnout among the Moldovan diaspora in the EU. In last year's presidential runoff, a historic total of more than 327,000 voters from the Moldovan diaspora participated and Present Sandu received over 82 per cent of their votes. Sandu is generally more popular than the PAS party, however, and disenchantment with the reform process in Moldova can also be observed within the diaspora.

The Patriotic Bloc, which is second in popularity with 20–30 per cent of the vote, is a pro-Russian left-wing electoral alliance between the Bloc of Communists and Socialists (BCS), the Heart of Moldova Republican Party (PRIM) and the Future of Moldova Party (PVM). The Patriotic Bloc is the main pro-Russian alternative, campaigning for traditional values, neutrality and restored ties with Russia. It blames PAS for cutting ties with Moscow, which, in its view, led to the energy crisis, inflation and price hikes for ordinary people, as well as an increased risk of war. The Patriotic Bloc calls itself "sovereigntist" because its central political agenda emphasises strengthening Moldova's sovereignty, statehood and territorial integrity. It resists incorporation into other national or geopolitical projects, especially those linked to Romania or the EU.

The Patriotic Bloc has shown itself to harbour discord within its leadership, which comprises two former presidents – the socialist Igor Dodon and the communist Vladimir Voronin – as well as a former governor of the Gagauz autonomous territory, Irina Vlah, and Vasile Tarlev, a former technocratic prime minister in the communist years.

The third entity likely to reach parliament is Alternative (7–12%), a political bloc led by Chişinău's mayor, Ion Ceban, the 2024 presidential candidate, Alexandr Stoianoglo, a former prime minister, Ion Chicu, and a former lawmaker, Mark Tkachuk. Alternative presents itself as a “third way”, a softer alternative to the Patriotic Bloc and rhetorically EU friendly, although its leaders all have backgrounds in pro-Russian parties.

In fact, both the Patriotic Bloc and Alternative are Russian projects, created on Moscow's initiative to maximise its preferred result and minimise the risk of votes being wasted on parties that cannot win seats in parliament.³ As with the Patriotic Bloc, there is open discord among the leading figures within Alternative. Ion Ceban, the leader within the bloc with the greatest political potential, who also has his own political party called the of the National Alternative Movement (MAN), has carefully tried to wash away his former pro-Russian past in favour of a pro-European image. This effort risks being thwarted by being connected with openly pro-Russian politicians such as Chicu and Tkachuk. It probably also did not help that [Romania banned him](#) from entering the country and the Schengen zone for five years on 10 July as a “threat to national security”.

The fourth party expected to enter the parliament is Our Party (5–12%), led by Renato Usatîi, a former mayor of the city Bălţi. Usatîi obtained third place in both the 2020 and the 2024 presidential elections. This allowed him to play a “kingmaker” role in the second round of both elections, which were won by Maia Sandu. He was previously known for his pro-Russian views and had ties to Russia. After 2019, however, his relations with the Russian authorities deteriorated significantly after criminal proceedings were launched against him in Russia.⁴ Our Party is a left, populist and anti-establishment party that attracts voters dissatisfied with both pro-western and pro-Russian mainstream parties.

After the original Şor Party was declared unconstitutional and banned in 2023, new parties and blocs with clear organisational and financial links to Ilan Şor, such as Chance, the Revival Party and the Victory Bloc, began to emerge. Total support for these parties and blocs is estimated to be around 10 per cent. Most of these parties – the exception is Greater Moldova Party – have been banned by the CEC from participating in the parliamentary elections as they have been declared unconstitutional for allegedly promoting Russian interests, illegal financing and activities considered a threat to Moldova's sovereignty and state security. According to an amendment to the 2025 electoral law, it is sufficient for a judge to prove a link, not based on the party's activities as such, for successors to already banned parties to be banned.

Election Scenarios

Four major scenarios can be foreseen for the outcome of the 28 September Moldovan parliamentary elections. The scenarios are ranked from the most likely to the least likely. There could, of course, be variations within these main scenarios.

Scenario 1: A new PAS majority. Another PAS majority is still possible, albeit probably not as convincing as the one in 2021, and more thanks to the redistribution of the votes cast for parties that fail to reach parliament. [Access to administrative resources](#), reinforced by strong external backing, could nonetheless prove decisive for PAS in securing at least a simple majority.

3 Author's interview in Chişinău, September 2025.

4 Author's interview in Chişinău, September 2025.

As in previous elections, a mobilisation of the diaspora votes would be needed for this to happen. Russia has already prepared a narrative of “rigged elections” for such a case, mentioning the limited number of voting stations (2) in the Russian Federation compared to the large number in EU member states and the dramatically fewer voting stations on the right bank of the Dniester River for the voters from the left bank (Transnistria) in this year’s elections compared to last year’s (12 instead of 30).⁵ This scenario would likely provide positive impetus for further accession talks with the EU, although in itself not enough to re-energise the internal reform process, especially on justice reform and anti-corruption.

Scenario 2: A pro-European coalition. A scenario with a PAS-led coalition containing either Our Party or Alternative or both has a similar likelihood to the first scenario, despite categorical denials during the election campaign from some parties that they would never ever enter such coalition after the elections. This coalition would, however, most likely be short-lived. The presumed purpose for the opposition parties in joining with PAS would be to later jump off in order for their leaders to position themselves for the 2028 presidential elections, when Maia Sandu is prevented from running for re-election due to constitutional term limits. If Russia’s maximalist goal of achieving regime change is not achieved this year, Moscow might be satisfied with slower progress under a PAS-led coalition government with “pro-Russian” spoilers, which would discredit the EU integration process in the eyes of both Brussels and the Moldovan population.

Scenario 3: A pro-Russia Coalition. This scenario, which is less likely than the first two, would demand unrestricted, effective and unrevealed vote buying by Russia. Even under such circumstances, a fully pro-Russian takeover is not realistic, giving way to a “Georgian scenario”, as a government loyal to Russia gradually distances the country from EU integration. The imposition of new laws, such as a “Foreign Agents Registration Act” (FARA) and anti-NGO and anti-LGBT+ laws, imitating Russian legislation, would gradually hollow out EU integration, as well as support for the EU. Such a coalition would also adopt more anti-western rhetoric, labelling western states a “Global War Party”, like the Georgian Dream government. It would also work on limiting the diaspora’s voting rights, making it easier for it to win future elections.

Scenario 4: A chaotic scenario. If no clear majority is reached and there are mutual accusations of election fraud, a “Romanian scenario” cannot be completely excluded. If there is credible evidence that electoral interference by Russia or other actors has significantly affected the result, the Moldovan Constitutional Court could consider annulling or cancelling the elections, mirroring what happened in Romania’s December 2024 presidential election where interference led to the annulment and rerun of the vote. A potentially violent outcome – including riots and demonstrations – could not be excluded in such a case. A variant of this scenario played out after the April 2009 parliamentary elections, which led to riots and a re-run of the elections. According to the Moldovan Constitution, the court can also declare parliamentary mandates expired if parliament fails to form a government within three months of elections. This triggers mandatory dissolution by the president and the calling of new elections.

Conclusions

The parliamentary elections in Moldova are pivotal. They will have a direct impact on future domestic developments in Moldova, but also on the geopolitical context of EU integration versus Russian hegemony in the region, as well as the security situation in general.

5 Author’s interview in Chişinău, September 2025.

The outcome of the elections is uncertain since the number of undecided voters is extremely high. Deciding factors in the election result will, to a larger extent, be Russia's capacity for vote buying and the mobilisation of the largely pro-European Moldovan diaspora in the EU, as well as to a lesser extent the mobilisation of the less active and largely pro-Russian voters on the left bank of the Dniester River.

The most likely scenarios are based on a continuation of the pro-European government, either a re-election of the ruling party or a pro-European coalition government, even if other scenarios such as a pro-Russian coalition government or more indefinite outcomes cannot be excluded. A decisive victory for the pro-European side would provide a positive injection to EU integration with the opening of negotiating clusters, starting with the 'Fundamentals' cluster.

The picture is not black or white but rather grey. Even a coalition of pro-Russian forces would be unlikely to abandon European integration completely, if only to sustain EU funding for Moldova. In addition, giving candidate status to Moldova and starting accession talks were strategic decisions by the EU, which will lead Brussels to try to find common language with any government in Chişinău.

Policy recommendations for the EU

- The EU should continue to enhance its political and financial support to Moldova in order to achieve its long-term core interests, which are safeguarding democratic integrity in Moldova, countering Russian interference, advancing Moldova's EU accession process and reinforcing socio-economic, judicial and security reform in the country.
- Should the election results produce deadlock, the EU should be ready to support Moldova by mediating between elite groups and avoiding a worst-case chaotic scenario, which would threaten the country's territorial and social cohesion.
- Given the tight result in the 2024 constitutional referendum on EU integration, and the likelihood of a tight race in this year's parliamentary elections, the EU should not take its attractiveness to Moldova for granted. It will have to deliver better. This includes accelerating socio-economic support through the Moldova Growth Plan in order to achieve tangible results that are visible to Moldovan citizens, and civil society engagement to counter emigration and social fragmentation.
- The EU should enhance its strategic communication on Moldova and its engaging with Moldovan citizens – particularly the youth – through clear information and free media, especially in the regions outside Chişinău. Its engagement with divided regions such as the Gagauz Autonomous Territory and the Transnistrian region should provide inclusive economic and governance support within Moldova's constitutional framework.
- The EU should deepen its efforts to increase Moldova's energy resilience and integration through EU support for grid upgrades, renewable energy, energy efficiency and legal alignment via the Energy Community.



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