



Young people carrying the flag of Moldova. Photo source: Presidency of the Republic of Moldova

**Friedrich
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The citizens have decided: Moldova, only towards the West!

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The citizens of the Republic of Moldova have unequivocally chosen the European path and have categorically rejected the option of Moldova returning to Russia's orbit as a docile satellite. Regardless of their political views and ideology, all MPs, without exception, will have to work towards this goal of Moldova joining the EU. The vote for the pro-European party, coupled with the inclusion of the objective of European integration in the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova following the October 2024 referendum, must make all 101 MPs in Parliament accountable for working together over the next four years.

On the other hand, the new majority needs work much more inclusively with all opposition MPs in order to involve them as much as possible in this process. Those who fail to do so should be publicly sanctioned as such.

In other words, against this extremely favourable domestic and external backdrop, the current majority has a duty to step on the accelerator even more in terms of reforms and alignment with European Union standards. A precise master plan is now needed for the intelligent investment of the €1.9 billion that will come from the EU as aid for the country's development.

The Republic of Moldova has about three years to achieve definitive energy interconnection with the EU by accelerating strategic energy projects. Similarly, hard work is needed to ensure the launch of the major motorway project that will link Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. All these major projects will inevitably improve the quality of life and increase internal cohesion with the European Union.

News in Brief:

■ Former MP Marina Tauber, affiliated with fugitive Ilan Shor, was sentenced on 30 September to seven years and six months in prison, with partial accumulation of sentences. She is currently in Moscow. Tauber was also deprived of the right to hold public office and carry out activities related to accounting and financial organisation within political parties for a period of five years, and 206 million MDL was confiscated for the state benefit. Tauber was convicted on four counts of falsifying reports on the financing of the election campaign and the political party, and accepting illegal financing from an organised criminal group.

■ The leader of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), Igor Grosu, said that ministers who have worked hard and done their job well could be part of the new government formed after the parliamentary elections on 28 September. Asked to specify who could lead the future executive, Grosu replied: "A little patience, let's discuss it. We have not yet discussed the candidates for the position of prime minister." However, he confirmed that the current prime minister, Dorin Recean, could be an option for a new term.

■ President Maia Sandu said on 30 September on public television that European integration will not happen unless justice reform is completed. She stressed that this process, although difficult, remains the cornerstone of the country's path to the European Union. "The signal for justice was clear. Those who hoped that after the elections something would change and they would be able to return to what they had been doing for three decades understood that this is no longer possible. The clean-up of the justice system is not over and must be completed. There are judges who have integrity issues and must go before the evaluation committee. We must not get carried away. If we have seen two or three correct decisions, that's it, the justice system is working. No. We must continue the vetting process," said the president.

If you want to emerge victorious from this hybrid war, you need a legal framework that allows for the prevention and punishment of external interference



Tatiana Cojocari, an expert in sociology and the post-Soviet space. Photo: Facebook

Tatiana Cojocari, an expert in sociology and the post-Soviet space, gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter, in which we discussed how a hybrid war can be won, the scenarios for consecutive single-party rule by the Action and Solidarity Party, and the consequences of populist parties entering the Moldovan Parliament. We also discussed the vote in the Transnistrian region and what strategies the pro-European government should adopt to change perceptions in the Gagauz Autonomous Territorial Unit. We invite you to read the full interview:

■ Was such a result in the parliamentary elections predictable for PAS, given the consolidation and positioning on the left, while no other party in the pro-European camp rose to challenge PAS?

■ Here, I think, we can say one thing for sure, namely that PAS was the favourite in the polls that appeared before the election campaign.

Although the polls did not necessarily show a majority for this party, PAS was still better positioned than the other parties.

Judging by the example of the 2024 presidential elections, I don't think it was possible to make a predictable forecast, even if some people claim it was. Because we were somehow burned by the referendum, and one of the scenarios we were working with was that PAS could have won a majority on its own. But this majority would have been fragile and dependent on certain risks. I will explain this below.

Firstly, there are two major factors that we saw in the referendum, but also previously – turnout in the elections. We saw exemplary participation in the diaspora in 2024, and we were counting on this again now.

Secondly, the most important and risky factor was the existence and dismantling of electoral corruption networks. We are talking here about

the efforts and capacity of our authorities to dismantle these networks. That is why it was quite difficult to anticipate certain things, and the result is still better than most experts and society expected.

However, one thing is certain here – the lessons that the Republic of Moldova should teach European states affected by hybrid warfare. Namely, if you want to emerge victorious from this hybrid warfare, it is not enough just to communicate well, debunk false information, and so on. What is really needed are measures based on a legal framework that allows external interference to be stopped and penalised.

What we have seen now, compared to the presidential elections and referendum in 2024, are the measures initiated by our authorities. More specifically, we are talking about evidence that has nevertheless allowed for the preservation of democratic and transparent voting and elections, obviously with certain deviations as in other years, but not so many as to affect the score and the result.

Single-party government or multiparty system?

■ **We know that democracy requires a multi-party system. This is the second consecutive legislative term in which a single party will govern by itself. How beneficial is this situation, and could it be the political formula needed for EU accession?**

■ I believe so, and I will explain why. Looking back at the history of parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova, we can see that only one political party has had a similar performance. I am referring to the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova. They were the ones who managed to win a majority in several consecutive parliamentary elections and governed without forming a coalition.

I do not intend to compare the two parties – PAS and PCRM – but I have seen that when we had alliances and coalitions in government, governing was difficult and no tangible results were achieved.

Today, we once again have a party that has been re-elected with a specific and very important goal. Earlier, I spoke about erosion, but this erosion does not seem to have been so great for PAS. However, we must admit that this party has also benefited greatly from the trust capital of President Maia Sandu.

People are waiting for concrete reforms – especially in the economic sphere – and this should be PAS's focus. I believe that a majority given to a single party will accelerate reforms for integration into the European Union. Obviously, many are concerned about this multi-party system and whether or not it is a good thing.

We saw certain abuses during the PCRM government, but the fact that we still had other opposition parties with different ideologies was able to protect the Republic of Moldova from a possible slide into autocracy, in my opinion. And we are seeing this now as well. However, we have five different political parties that have entered the Moldovan Parliament, and this will matter because we will have those critical voices that will penalise any deviation from governance, more specifically any violation of the law.

Populism in Parliament

■ **How do you view the entry into Parliament of two populist party leaders – Renato Usatii and Vasile Costiuc – and how do you think this will affect the legislative process?**

■ The vote on 28 September indicates that the Republic of Moldova is gradually maturing politically. First of all, I see this vote as a sign of political maturity in society. Political maturity often comes with the erosion of existing parties – the established ones – with classical ideologies, even if in the Republic of Moldova it is difficult to talk about ideology, but rather about geopolitics.

The parties of the two leaders, Renato Usatii and Vasile Costiuc, show that a phenomenon similar to that in other European countries is beginning to manifest itself in the Republic of Moldova. And here I am referring to populism and the emergence of parties that do not position themselves with a very clear ideology. It is a mixture of everything.

As we know, Mr Costiuc's party did not even have an electoral programme, so I am not sure what it has to offer. It depends very much on the success of the current Parliament and how it governs whether these populist parties will gain more ground in the future in the next elections or not. But it is clear that the Republic of Moldova is not immune to international trends.

What can be done now to reconcile society, because the pro-European project that is being prepared must be approved by as large a majority as possible. What mechanisms do you see for society to recover after the fierce presidential, referendum and now parliamentary election campaigns of the last year?

If we look at this year's political map of the parliamentary elections, I would say that it shows us the social polarisation we have been discussing, but which is gradually diminishing.

We have a much more uniform map now than we had during the referendum, which again indicates that when it comes to political and economic stability, things are a little different, regardless of people's political affiliations.

This time, we cannot say, as the opposition claimed in the past, that it was the diaspora that elected the president and so on, because we saw that PAS still won the majority in the Republic of Moldova. This is one of the factors.

The second interesting factor is the adverse effect of Russian interference in the Republic of Moldova, which has actually managed to consolidate society a little. We have seen a major turnout and support for the party that is already in government.

What I think can be done is to reduce the volume of discussions about geopolitics and discuss national economic programmes more intensively. I believe that this is the priority for the coming years, namely for the government to focus on regional development, economic investment, attracting investors and much more citizen-oriented policies. Only in this way will it be possible to change political opinion and political behaviour. In such a scenario, we will have a society that is more united around the national idea of integration into the European Union.

The process of advancing on the European path

■ **How can the Republic of Moldova now advance on the path of reform? Is the 2028 horizon for the country's accession to the EU now more tangible, assuming that the EU's interest in the Republic of Moldova remains as high?**

■ It is indeed important to see what changes will take place at the European Union level, because we are also discussing certain transformations here. It remains to be seen. But what can the Republic of Moldova do? I believe it is important to have continuity as a country. Some reforms have been started and they need be continued. We already have specialists and professionals who are engaged in aligning national legislation with that of the European Union.

Continuity is what matters most now. And I believe that 2030 is a more realistic deadline than 2028. Whether we will integrate together or without Ukraine remains to be discussed. These are separate issues. Obviously, this also depends greatly on the position that the European Union will take.

■ **How do you view the nearly 30 per cent vote in Transnistria for the pro-European party? Is this an indicator that the population there has also begun to see the benefits of the EU accession process, and that the right bank has become much more attractive in recent years?**

■ I believe that this 30 per cent vote is not a vote for PAS, it is a vote for the idea of integration into the European Union. We saw the same percentage in the

2024 referendum among residents on the left bank of the Dniester.

The population of the Transnistrian region feels increasingly trapped between a Ukraine that is being invaded by Russia and a Republic of Moldova that wants to integrate into the European Union. And so, the question for those in the Transnistrian region creates uncertainty. It is not known what will happen to the population there, and in this context, I believe that they will have to make a decision as to whether they want to join the Republic of Moldova or not.

The second factor is that the Transnistrian region has been hit by increasing economic problems in recent years, and it is impossible not to see certain changes for the better on the right bank, thanks to European investments.

This is also explained by the fact that around 12,000 cars cross the illegal border from the left bank to the right bank of the Dniester to come and work in the Republic of Moldova. In practice, little by little, the citizens of the Transnistrian region are making a choice, and this choice is also reflected in their voting behaviour at the polls.

Strategies for UTA Gagauzia

■ **What can pro-European forces do to penetrate the Gagauz region? Because we talked about the Transnistrian region and the vote in the referendum and now in the parliamentary elections, but in Gagauzia we cannot talk about the same thing. The vote has remained at around 3% for the main pro-European party.**

■ It is very important, however, for the ruling party to be present in the region, regardless of the score they achieved in these elections. This time, we had only one representative from the region on the PAS list, but she did not bring in many votes.

It is important that, in the next round of elections for the Bashkan of Gagauzia, PAS supports a candidate. At most, it should remain neutral if it does not support a candidate, and PAS should work hard with local actors and opinion leaders, with entrepreneurs who are very interested in the European market and leaders there who are interested in attracting more investment through European projects.

It is equally important for the ruling party to work with opinion leaders in the region, because neither the Government nor the Parliament can change the opinion of the Gagauz people. We have seen this before when, despite the fact that there are investments in the region, their opinion of the authorities in Chişinău and the EU has not changed. Only opinion leaders in the region will influence the political behaviour of the residents of Gagauzia.

■ **Thank you!**

From polarisation to consolidation on the path to the EU

Editorial by Mădălin Necșuțu, TVR Moldova journalist published in IPG Journal

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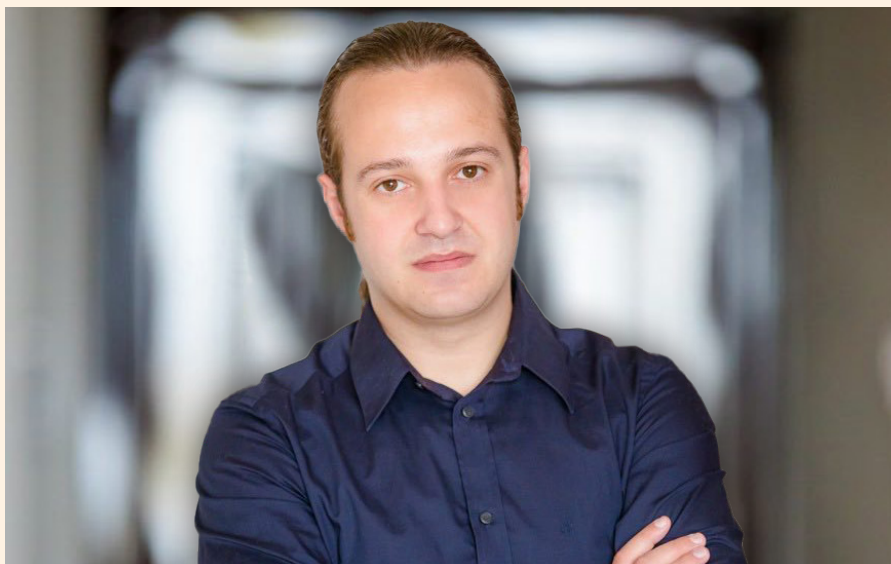
Despite external pressures and internal challenges, Moldova must unite a society divided by election campaigns.

The parliamentary elections held in Moldova on 28 September showed significant support for pro-European forces and represented an important moment in the short history of the independent country. Despite significant Russian intervention – organised and paid protests, promises of substantial payments in exchange for votes, extensive campaigns to discredit Maia Sandu and attempts to undermine Moldova's EU accession process – the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) achieved a resounding victory (50.16% of the vote).

Coordinated actions by the police, the prosecutor's office and the special services effectively thwarted Moscow's plans to overthrow the pro-European authorities and replace them with a government acting in Russia's interests, creating a situation in the country similar to that in Belarus or Georgia. Although critics consider these measures excessively harsh and punitive towards the opposition, they were necessary to protect the security of the country and the region.

The current parliamentary elections should be seen as a preliminary victory for pro-European forces, marking the beginning of a new stage in negotiations with the EU and efforts to align the national system with European standards. This task is difficult for a post-Soviet state undergoing a transition to democracy while also engaged in a constant geopolitical struggle between pro-Western and pro-Russian forces.

The election results demonstrate not so much the excellent governance of the ruling party as



Editorial by Mădălin Necșuțu, TVR Moldova journalist published in IPG Journal. Photo: Personal archive

the conscious choice of citizens who aspire to a European future.

The election results demonstrate not so much the excellent governance of the ruling party as the conscious choice of citizens who aspire to a European future. However, political will is not enough – there is an urgent need to improve managerial skills, expertise and specialists to implement a well-structured plan. Future reforms may be difficult to be accepted by both the existing system and ordinary citizens. Communication has traditionally been the PAS's weak point, so now the authorities must avoid the tactic of intimidating citizens, which was previously used to hide administrative shortcomings.

Today, Moldova's success in the EU depends on the following key factors: the ability to effectively counter Russia's hybrid threats and implement internal reforms in line with EU standards, as well as the effective management of European funds to improve the living standards of citizens.

PAS must not be satisfied with what it has achieved or take excessive credit for its success in the elections. Power can be corrupting, and some politicians risk losing touch with reality, mistakenly believing that they were elected because of their outstanding achievements, rather than because of favourable conditions that left citizens with few options.

PAS has almost completely monopolised power and has no real competition

Moldova currently faces a serious challenge on the centre-right political scene: PAS has almost completely monopolised power and has no real competition. In a healthy democracy, the political landscape cannot thrive without real competition. And although PAS does not bear full responsibility for this situation, the party will certainly benefit from it.

The opposition, largely centre-left, pro-Russian or covertly pro-European, does not pose a real threat to PAS. As a result, the party can focus less on forming a social contract with citizens and may become less open to constructive solutions from the opposition. Under these circumstances, civil society becomes, in some cases, the only real opposition, keeping the government in check when it makes mistakes or deviates from its promised course.

From polarisation to consolidation

For more than a year, Moldova has been in a permanent election campaign, which has significantly divided society and created a dangerous rift. This rift can be exploited politically and, in the medium and long term, threatens the country's stability and progress. Now, the authorities must try to unite citizens, regardless of their political preferences. As a pro-European democratic force, PAS has a moral duty to abandon rhetoric that fuels geopolitical fears and to take concrete steps to unite society around the ideals of prosperity and peace in the EU.

It is also necessary to develop mechanisms to mitigate the pressure of the geopolitical struggle between factions and to ensure reconciliation between Romanian-speaking and Russian-speaking supporters of the EU and those influenced by the "Russian world".

The authorities must abandon rhetoric that fuels geopolitical fears

It is also important to pursue a cautious information policy: so far, PAS has refrained from banning the social networks Telegram and TikTok, which are the main channels of Russian propaganda, demonstrating a democratic approach. However, with a comfortable majority, there is a temptation to ban Russian propaganda channels by law, which may create new information bubbles controlled by Moscow through alternative platforms.

Russia's influence

It is expected that in the near future, the Kremlin will intensify its malicious actions against Moldova through new channels.

In terms of maintaining influence within the country, Russia faces problems in the Romanian-speaking regions, while the autonomous region of Gagauzia, where the majority of the population is Russian-speaking, is becoming increasingly radical, and pro-Russian forces are gaining a significant advantage.

Interestingly, the elections in the Transnistrian region showed almost 30% support for PAS. This unprecedented result shows that the extreme poverty imposed by Russia in this region, in contrast to the better standard of living in Moldova, does not satisfy the Transnistrians.

In addition, this time, voters in the Transnistrian region had free access to voting (they were no longer organised into specific interest groups). All this points to a new reality: Transnistrians are beginning to perceive their relations with the government in Chişinău differently. To be fair, it is important to note that the number of polling stations was reduced from 30 to 12 compared to the presidential elections on 20 October 2024. In addition, all seven bridges and access roads from the left bank of the Dniester to the right bank were closed due to simultaneous repair works.

Economic attractiveness

The next legislative term of the PAS need ensure a significant improvement in the standard of living of all citizens, regardless of ethnicity or language.

Although the EU has already paid the first tranche of approximately €270 million of the €1.9 billion promised for the next three years, we do not yet see a comprehensive plan outlining how these development funds will be distributed between different sectors of the economy. Currently, the government does not have a detailed strategy, which is causing some concern.

The authorities need to develop a well-thought-out strategy that includes cross-border projects with Romania and Ukraine. There is an urgent need to build bridges, roads, railways and ports in order to create conditions for regional economic growth. This requires not only political will in a trilateral format, but also sincere and timely trust-building.

These are just some of the challenges that the new pro-European majority will face during its next term. It is important to take into account both domestic and regional issues, especially in the fight against Russian influence, by strengthening Moldova's relations with its neighbours and the European Union.

I hope that the new Parliament will succeed in being more inclusive

Promo-LEX Programme Director Nicolae Panfil gave an interview for the FES/APE foreign policy newsletter, in which we discussed the results of the parliamentary elections and the main findings of Promo-Lex's monitoring of the electoral process. We also discussed what we can do to have an inclusive Parliament, given that citizens have consistently stated, since the accession to the EU was enshrined in the Constitution, that the Republic of Moldova must continue its European path with determination. We invite you to read all these ideas in detail in the following interview:



Nicolae Panfil, Promo-LEX Programme Director. Photo: Facebook

■ Broadly speaking, what are the most important irregularities you have noticed in this parliamentary election campaign? Who committed them and how did they manifest themselves?

■ First of all, it was a pretty intense campaign, which is what everyone we talk to and discuss with says. It's not just our perception, even though we, as observers, are maybe used to this. The intensity or tension was mainly due to the geopolitical context we're in. On the one hand, we are talking about the aspirations of the majority of citizens for European integration, as seen in the vote cast, but also in the election campaign run by PAS, because they largely focused on this goal.

At the same time, we all know that there was a lot of pressure from outside. The foreign interference we are talking about refers to the Russian Federation, which, as in last year's elections, manifested itself through illegal financing, support for political actors, and schemes to corrupt voters. But even more interestingly, it seems that this time special operations have also been carried out through social media, intensifying hybrid attacks and pressure on public institutions.

So there were several phenomena, and the intensity of the campaign was also influenced by this construction of narratives and disinformation. In my opinion, even more emphasis was placed than last year on constructing false narratives, including the fact that the elections were rigged. This was discussed weeks before election day,

claiming that the elections in the diaspora were rigged, and so on and so forth. In conclusion, it was a tense campaign, with pressure on everyone – voters, institutions, etc.

Excessive use of hate speech

■ How often and who used hate speech? Which groups were most targeted?

■ We monitored hate speech in the context of the elections. If we were to talk in terms of numbers, there were over 400 cases of hate speech monitored by our colleagues and monitors, and 300 of these cases were in the electoral context. I should mention that about 75 percent of these were promoted through social media, and the groups targeted were mostly electoral competitors and citizens based on criteria such as political affiliation, gender and sexual orientation, health, and ethnicity.

Hate speech was used extensively by some top politicians in the Republic of Moldova, such as Igor Dodon and Ion Ceban, but also by other less popular politicians, such as Victoria Furtună.

■ Were there any hate speech messages from PAS members? Do you monitor such cases?

■ We know that certain messages with negative connotations from the PAS campaign were discussed and attempted to be presented in

the public sphere. Allegations were made that this constituted hate speech. Some electoral competitors complained about this.

Our colleagues who monitored the situation using an internationally recognised methodology did not consider the PAS messages that were discussed in public to be hate speech. There were negative campaigns, there was black PR, but we cannot classify it as hate speech. Instead, we saw how hate speech was most frequently used against PAS.

Need for social reconciliation

■ **How would you characterise the entire election campaign? There are voices saying that it was one of the dirtiest and that society was polarised to the maximum. How did you perceive it? How much need is there now for reconciliation in this extremely divided society?**

■ As a well-informed journalist, you know that this was also discussed in previous elections – after last year’s presidential elections and referendum – about the need for reconciliation in our divided and polarised society.

It is good that we had elections and that we are always in a position to confirm or promote our electoral democracy, but it seems that we need a little time between elections to be able to consolidate and grow something. Because election periods are always heated and cause divisions in society. I hope that in the coming years, excluding any periods of instability, the new Parliament will manage to work in a more inclusive manner.

First of all, it needs to start with the work of Parliament itself. I can say that the previous legislature was not very inclusive. The opposition was not very involved and was marginalised, which had a negative impact on legislative activity. This was detrimental to society, which did not have access to high-quality public debates.

All electoral competitors should now understand that the elections are over. In my opinion, the results are quite clear and it is time to get to work. In my view, for the next few years, I would say that, through the citizens’ elections, society has reconfirmed that the European path is the way forward. At the same time, political actors must understand that these are the citizens’ elections and must respect their decision as expressed through their vote.

This does not mean that there cannot be debates on various issues in Parliament and in society, but

this is a matter for Parliament, civil society and political parties.

At the same time, I believe that the state’s law enforcement agencies should continue to combat foreign interference, particularly in terms of electoral corruption, foreign interference with money in political financing, and so on. But also in terms of disinformation, so that we can be better prepared and better protected against the Russian Federation. Each actor needs to do its part in its own area.

Restrictions motivated by security interests?

■ **There have been accusations that the voting process was restricted for those in the Transnistrian region. How do you see things and was the reduction from 30 to 12 polling stations for residents on the left bank of the Nistru justified?**

We know that the authorities cited security reasons, including for reducing the number of polling stations. Subsequently, there were also decisions to relocate polling stations. When you look at it from one side, all of this seems to be related, being justified by major security concerns.

From our perspective, and also in our interim reports, we have emphasised that we do not consider the reduction in the number of polling stations to be justified. We were referring to an analysis we conducted in 2021, when we said that 28 polling stations would be an acceptable number to ensure free voting for citizens in the region, without any tension or animosity.

What is disturbing now is that this story has created false narratives. At one point, fake accounts were even created, for example, of the Central Electoral Commission, to promote them. There was an attempt to exploit these things extensively, and I don’t know if it was worth it. I don’t know if the security concerns were that serious, compared to those narratives and the effects generated by propaganda as a counter-effect.

Let us admit that the authorities had reasons to be concerned, but at least now that the elections are over, it would be good to communicate publicly what those reasons were. The Intelligence and Information Service and the police have to communicate exactly what the security considerations were for limiting voting in the Transnistrian region, so that society can be

reassured. Otherwise, the perception will persist that the decision was made for other reasons.

The investigation into the cases of mining of bridges and polling stations, etc., must certainly continue. Law enforcement agencies need to explain what has been identified or who has been punished, if anyone.

We must all bear in mind in the coming period, especially state institutions, the need to increase trust in public institutions. I was talking to some international observers the other day about these situations [regarding the vote in Transnistria – ed.] and asked them whether in Germany, for example, such messages would have been communicated – that there are security risks in certain polling stations – and how society would have reacted. Would they have trusted it? And the answer was, for the most part, yes. That is precisely why we need to increase trust, and this can only be achieved through communication and transparency.

Social media populism versus legislative work

■ **How do you view the entry into Parliament of two populist party leaders – Renato Usatîi and Vasile Costiuc – and how do you think this will affect the legislative process? Will they bring any added value or will they just launch into actions that they can then promote on social media?**

■ Having seen them both during the election campaign, but also before these elections, and knowing them both from the public sphere, we probably cannot imagine that such strong

personalities as they are will disappear, nor will their showmanship in the mass media or on social media. They will probably continue in the same way, but the important thing is that all MPs were elected to Parliament to represent the citizens. Earlier, I was talking about the need for Parliament to work in an inclusive manner. These MPs and smaller factions need to be drawn into the real work that Parliament has to do.

We do not need MPs who are just putting on a show. We need transparency and communication. They certainly have the necessary communication skills and the ability to reach citizens. This will also put pressure on the majority faction. But more than that, everyone needs to roll up their sleeves and work constructively in Parliament.

Because we know that the problems of citizens are also those of the people who voted for PAS and who voted for Renato Usatîi or Vasile Costiuc. The problems are the same. I don't see why they couldn't work together. Of course, they may have different views, but that's why we need discussions, we need debates.

And I believe that the next Parliament will still be one in which we, as citizens, will have a little more opportunity to follow what is happening and how the debates and discussions take place. We know from the previous legislature that the Socialists and Communists often sat out the debate on various bills, and the PAS voted alone, without much discussion. I hope that this time we will have the opportunity to see different kinds of debates in Parliament.

■ **Thank you!**

Moldova has chosen Europe: a historic vote against Russian influence

Analysis by Laurențiu Pleșca, programme coordinator, German Marshall Fund

The results of the 2025 parliamentary elections send a clear message: Moldova can no longer be perceived as a land ceded to Russian narratives and influences. With over 50.2% of the vote going to the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), citizens have reaffirmed their European choice, demonstrating that EU integration is not a passing trend, but a strategic and conscious choice.

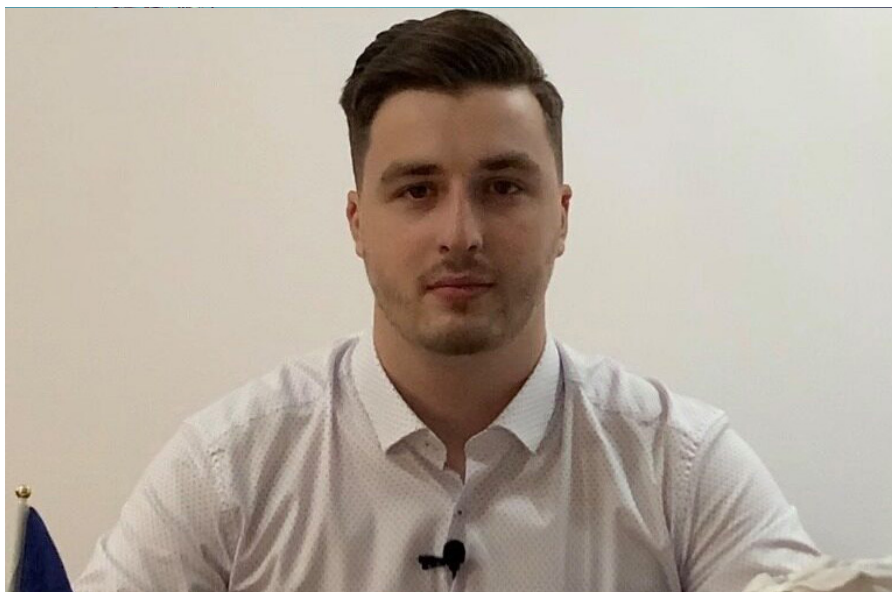
The PAS campaign, centred around the European ideal, reinforced this orientation by portraying Moldova as a “besieged city”, threatened from outside but resilient and capable of defending itself, thus mobilising the pro-European electorate both in traditionally contested areas, in the capital, and in the diaspora.

The record turnout for any parliamentary election – with over 1.57 million voters (including nearly 277,000 outside the country) – lends legitimacy to the election and confirms the democratic maturity of the electorate, even though the pro-Russian opposition, in particular the Patriotic Bloc and groups close to Shor, tried to contest the results with allegations of fraud and protests.

Pro-European mobilisation and the role of the diaspora

The mobilisation of the pro-European electorate exceeded expectations, particularly in the northern regional capitals and among the diaspora. For the first time, PAS gained ground in traditionally pro-Russian districts such as Drochia, Făleşti and Soroca, signalling a structural shift in political preferences. The diaspora, with over 216,000 votes for PAS, was one of the decisive factors, showing that Moldovans living abroad not only follow the country’s developments, but also have a real impact on election results, as we have seen in previous elections.

At the same time, the extremely low turnout of Moldovan citizens in the Russian Federation, with only 4,100 votes, highlights the limits of the pro-



Laurențiu Pleșca, programme coordinator, German Marshall Fund. Photo: Facebook

Russian strategy to influence the elections. Even though there had been massive pre-registrations, the organisation of voter transport and attempts to mobilise voters through clientelist networks and online propaganda proved ineffective. This failure is not isolated, as it reflects the same trend observed in the country, where vote buying and influence through pressure or illegal means did not have the same effect as in 2024.

The result confirms that the Moldovan electorate, including the diaspora, has become much more vigilant, aware of attempts at manipulation and able to prioritise political options based on real criteria of reform and European orientation. In this context, pro-Russian narratives, electoral corruption and patronage networks are losing their credibility and ability to destabilise the democratic process, thus strengthening Moldova’s resilience against external interference.

Although the victory is decisive, we must not neglect the responsibility that comes with it. PAS has received a strong mandate, but it is not a blank cheque. A large part of the electorate voted not so much for the party’s programme as for stability and the rejection of compromised alternatives.

The promised reforms must be visible quickly: from the justice system, where citizens expect convictions and cases to be resolved, to administrative-territorial reform and the strengthening of local government in marginalised districts. Dialogue with Gagauzia and with the citizens of the Transnistrian region must be

a priority in the coming period in order to trigger the processes of decriminalising political corruption in Comrat and reintegration with Tiraspol.

Moreover, beyond reforms and the pressure of European integration, the Republic of Moldova also needs a national reconciliation agenda. Political and geopolitical polarisation has divided society for decades, which is why debates are needed on the major issues that plague society, and this includes engaging the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition in discussions.

The fragmentation of the opposition and the limits of a real alternative

The Patriotic Bloc, which brings together established figures from the old system such as former socialist president Igor Dodon, former communist president Vladimir Voronin, ex-prime minister Vasile Tarlev and former governor of Gagauzia, Irina Vlah, all former political figures in high-level politics, obtained 24.2% of the vote. Although the percentage seems significant at first glance, it rather reflects the real limits of pro-Russian influence in the capital and in the north of the country (only in Gagauzia do we have an unchanged situation). The result indicates a clear weariness with the old elites and confirms that the electorate is looking for new and reformist alternatives capable of delivering concrete results, rather than being mobilised solely by big names or traditional pro-Russian rhetoric. In practice, the Patriotic Bloc failed to reach its traditional electoral base, signalling a structural loss of support and a reduced ability to decisively influence future parliamentary negotiations.

The “Alternative” bloc, with 7.96%, led by figures such as Chisinau Mayor Ion Ceban, former presidential candidate Alexandr Stoianoglo, Mark Tkaciuk and former Prime Minister Ion Chicu, failed to establish itself as a relevant alternative to PAS. The results suggest that pragmatic alliances, built on personalities with ambiguous political pasts, no longer mobilise the electorate in the same way, and some voices argue that the National Alternative Movement (MAN) could have achieved a better score if it had participated independently, given its poor performance in the Chişinău elections compared to Ceban’s victory in the first round of the 2023 local elections.

Our Party, with a score of 6.2%, reflects the existence of a niche of voters dissatisfied with the dominant options and looking for political formulas perceived as “anti-system” or closer to local issues. However, the below-expectation results, including in the north of the country where the party has mayors and local

networks, suggest that mere presence in the territory no longer guarantees electoral support.

A special case is “Democrația Acasă” (Democracy at Home), which passed the electoral threshold with 5.62% and represents the “surprise party” phenomenon in these elections. Its success was fuelled by a well-orchestrated digital campaign, highlighted by journalistic investigations, similar to recent models in the presidential and parliamentary elections in Romania.

However, even with its online visibility, the party does not have solid structures on the ground, which limits its real impact on the parliamentary configuration. Overall, the fragmentation of the pro-Russian opposition and others, combined with the consolidation of the pro-European vote, gives PAS the opportunity to govern with a clear mandate and to extend its impact in areas where pro-European messages have been more difficult to convey in the past.

At the same time, the results indicate that pro-Russian forces remain active but are dispersed and lack the cohesion necessary to challenge the outcome or block major reforms. This frees up space for centrist parties, as well as new parties that focused their attention in this campaign on specific issues rather than the systemic challenges highlighted by the larger parties.

Moldovans have passed the test of democratic resilience with flying colours

Ultimately, this election shows that Moldova can no longer be the subject of geopolitical experiments. Citizens have demonstrated resilience, and state structures, supported by the international community, have proven that they can counter external manipulation. PAS’s victory is not only an electoral success, but also a signal to Europe: Moldova can be a stable partner and a bridge of democratic resistance in the wider Black Sea region.

This pro-European success is not only an internal victory, but also a geopolitical milestone for the entire region. It is proof that a small state in a tense area can build mechanisms of democratic resilience that protect citizens’ votes and maintain political stability on the European path, even in the context of a war on its border.

International investments in critical institutions such as the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation or the National Agency for Cyber Security have proven effective, demonstrating that state structures can cope with hybrid threats

and ensure electoral security and long-term political stability.

From an economic and political point of view, Moldova is relevant in the region on several levels. On the one hand, due to its long border with Ukraine and the Transnistria region, where Russian troops are stationed, there is a risk of a second front opening up if Moldova were to fall back under Russia's political control.

In this context, a clear commitment to European integration and support for Ukraine are essential for the regional situation. On the other hand, Moldova serves as a testing ground for Russian destabilisation tactics, as it has a significant European population and a third of its citizens live in the diaspora, holding European passports. This allows Russia to test various narratives and hybrid interference tactics that are then spread throughout Europe.

What can we learn from these elections?

The result of the recent elections confirms the resilience of Moldovan society. Despite multiple crises – from the security challenges generated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine to the energy crisis and internal economic difficulties – citizens remained vigilant and made a clear choice. The independent media and civil society played a decisive role, ensuring public access to accurate information and limiting the impact of manipulation.

For PAS, the victory and consolidation of electoral support open up two major directions. The first relates to the external agenda, accelerating and implementing the full package of reforms necessary for the process of accession to the European Union. The second is internal and aims to reduce disparities between regions, particularly in the north of the country, close to Transnistria, but also in the Gagauzia Autonomous Territorial Unit, where attachment to Russia remains strong. The population in these areas must feel the concrete benefits of closer ties with the EU through improved economic and social conditions.

Moldova's ability to stay on the European path and counter Russia's hybrid actions, from vote buying to disinformation campaigns and funding protests, shows how mature the state institutions are and how responsible the citizens are. Moldova's experience thus becomes a relevant lesson for European Union member states, which need to strengthen their own democracies in the face of the same hybrid threats.

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Foreign Policy Association (APE) is a non-governmental organization committed to supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and facilitating the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the context of the country Europeanization. APE was established in fall 2003 by a group of well-known experts, public personalities and former senior officials and diplomats, all of them reunited by their commitment to contribute with their expertise and experience to formulating and promoting by the Republic of Moldova of a coherent, credible and efficient foreign policy.