

# Moldovan Elections: Russia and Europe Face Off

written by Shahin Jafarli Şahin Cəfərli

On 28 September 2025 the next parliamentary elections will be held in Moldova. The significance of this election goes beyond Moldova itself. The results will seriously affect the geopolitical situation and security in post-Soviet space and in Europe as a whole. Although Moldova has officially obtained candidate status for European Union membership, it is still too early to say that its strategic choice is final and irreversible. There is a possibility of a pro-Russian comeback in the country. In a period when the war in Ukraine continues, the return to power of political forces linked to Russia in Moldova would create new risks for both Ukraine and the West. For this reason, the European Union and the continent's major states do not hide their support for President Maia Sandu and her party in Moldova. This article analyzes the pre-election situation and the potential security risks in Moldova.

There are about 3,3 million [registered voters](#) in Moldova. The country applies a proportional electoral system. A minimum threshold has been set at 5% for political parties, 7% for electoral blocs, and 2% for independent candidates in order to be represented in the 101-seat legislature. Fifteen political parties, four blocs, and four independent candidates – a total of 23 entities – have [registered](#) with the Central Election Commission and obtained the right to participate in the 28 September elections. Although opinion polls give varying figures, there is no doubt that the [main competition](#) will be between the ruling *Party of Action and Solidarity* (PAS) and the opposition bloc called *Patriotic Electoral Bloc of Socialists, Communists, the Heart of Moldova and the Future*. PAS and the left-wing alliance represent two opposing ideological and political poles in Moldovan society. *The Alternative* bloc and *Our Party* also have a chance of passing

the minimum electoral barrier. The new parliament will likely include three, or at most four, political parties and blocs.

### **PAS or the Left Alliance?**

The center-right, liberal Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) is the ruling party in Moldova. It was founded in 2016 by the current president Maia Sandu and is now led by Igor Grosu, the speaker of parliament. PAS is the main address for the pro-Western electorate and has united the overwhelming majority of these groups, especially the diaspora, around itself. In the most recent parliamentary elections in 2021, which were held early, PAS won 52,8% of the vote and achieved a majority on its own.

The main interest for pro-Russian voters is the electoral alliance called the *Patriotic Electoral Bloc of Socialists, Communists, the Heart of Moldova and the Future*. [Announced](#) on 22 July 2025, this left-wing coalition includes former president Igor Dodon's *Socialist Party*, former president Vladimir Voronin's *Communist Party*, the *Heart of Moldova Party* led by former Gagauzia leader Irina Vlah, and the *Future of Moldova Party* led by former prime minister Vasile Tarlev. In the 2021 elections, the *Socialist and Communist Bloc* led by Voronin and Dodon won 27% of the vote.

The worldview of these political forces and leaders, as well as their close ties with Russia, are well known. Vladimir Voronin held high positions in party structures during the Soviet period. Shortly before the collapse of the USSR, he was Minister of Internal Affairs of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. Since 1994 he has led the Communist Party of Moldova, and he was twice elected president by parliament in 2001 and 2009. Igor Dodon held the positions of Minister of Economy and Trade and Deputy Prime Minister during Voronin's presidency. In 2011, he split from the communists and was elected chairman of the Socialist Party. In 2016, he won the second round of the presidential election. Three days after

being sworn in, he removed the EU flag from the presidential residence. In May 2018, based on a request from Dodon, Moldova was admitted as an observer to the Eurasian Economic Union. However, then speaker of parliament Adrian Candu stated that this decision had no legal force and would not be ratified. The leader of the Future of Moldova Party, Vasile Tarlev, was also a member of Voronin's team and served as prime minister from 2001 to 2008. He is the head of the public organization *Friends of Russia in Moldova*. The leader of the Heart of Moldova Party, Irina Vlah, was governor of Gagauzia, an autonomous region of the country, from 2015 to 2023. Gagauzia is Moldova's most pro-Russian region, where the Gagauz, a Turkic-speaking Orthodox Christian people, consistently support pro-Russian political and ideological platforms.

It is worth recalling that in 2023, Gagauzia's new governor, Yevgenia Gutsul, was detained by police in March and in August was [sentenced](#) to seven years in prison. Gutsul was elected governor of Gagauzia as a candidate of the banned *Shor Party*. The leader of this party, businessman Ilan Shor, fled the country in 2019. He was charged in the infamous one-billion-dollar bank theft case and sentenced in absentia to [15 years](#) in prison. Before Moldova's presidential election and the referendum on enshrining EU membership in the Constitution in April 2024, Ilan Shor announced in Moscow the creation of a political bloc called *Victory*. Gutsul was the executive secretary of this bloc. The illegal *Victory* bloc was [barred](#) by the Central Election Commission from participating in the 2024 presidential election and referendum, as well as the current election campaign. Irina Vlah also faces legal problems. On 17 September, the Central Election Commission [appealed](#) to the Ministry of Justice to restrict the activities of the Heart of Moldova Party due to illegal financing. By decision of the Interdepartmental Oversight Council under the Moldovan government, five of Vlah's bank accounts were [blocked](#). She had not declared these accounts in her income statement submitted to the CEC. In August Canada and in September Lithuania

imposed sanctions on Vlah for supporting Russia's interference in Moldova's political processes and banned her [entry](#) into their countries.

In July, Dodon, Vlah, and Tarlev visited [Russia](#) and met with Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak.

### **The Diaspora Factor and Europe's Position**

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova, about 1.250.000 citizens are currently [abroad](#). The CEC will set up 301 polling stations abroad. In recent years the diaspora has become a decisive factor in the sharply polarized Moldovan political scene. The fate of the referendum and presidential election held in October and November 2024 was determined by the diaspora vote. During the referendum on enshrining the course of European integration in the Constitution, the *no votes* were leading inside the country as ballots were counted, but as the [diaspora votes](#) were included, the gap narrowed and the proposal was finally adopted by a slim margin (50,35% in favor, 49,65% against). In the second round of the presidential election, when 95% of ballots cast inside Moldova had been counted, the socialist candidate Alexandr Stoianoglo was leading with 51%. However, once the votes of about 330.000 Moldovans abroad were counted, [Maia Sandu](#) won with 55%. President Sandu is again counting on the diaspora because it seems unlikely that the ruling party can win a majority based solely on the votes cast inside the country. PAS can only maintain its majority through active participation by voters abroad. For this reason, in recent weeks Sandu has visited Europe and held meetings with representatives of the [diaspora](#).

The European Union and continental leaders have not hesitated to demonstrate open support for Sandu's government ahead of the elections. The EU has allocated [1,9 billion euros](#) for Moldova for the next two years, which is a large amount for such a small country. On 27 August, the presidents of France

and Romania, the German federal chancellor, and the prime minister of Poland [attended](#) official ceremonies in Moldova marking the 34th anniversary of its independence. This was an unprecedented level of attention. Just ten days before the elections, on 17 September, the [first Moldova–EU summit](#) was held in Chişinău with the participation of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa. EU leaders announced the disbursement of the first tranche of 270 million euros from the 1,9 billion euro aid package. Despite the Trump administration's sharp cuts to foreign aid and its generally negative stance toward such assistance, the [US government allocated 130 million dollars](#) for the construction of a high-voltage power line that will connect Moldova to Romania and Europe's power grid. This fact shows how interested the West is in ensuring Moldova's energy security. All of this is important to demonstrate to the Moldovan people that the country's integration into the EU is not an illusion but has real substance. The Romanian president even mentioned [a specific date](#), saying that Moldova could become an EU member in 2028. He stressed that achieving this goal depends on the results of the 28 September elections. Since nearly one million Moldovans hold Romanian passports, Bucharest has leverage in Moldova's domestic politics.

## **Moldova's Importance for Security in Europe**

The [national security strategy](#) adopted by the Moldovan parliament in December 2023 is an important conceptual document that assesses external and internal threats and risks. For the first time, Moldova officially declared the Russian Federation and its domestic supporters to be the most real and constant threat to its national security. Corruption was identified as the second threat.

The increased risks after Russia's military intervention in Ukraine have pushed Moldova to seek new options, and cooperation with the EU in the field of security has begun. In May 2024, an agreement on cooperation in defense and security

was [signed](#) between the two sides. The agreement provides for joint military exercises, the exchange of intelligence information, and Moldova's inclusion in the EU's arms procurement system. Moldova is the first country to sign such an agreement with the EU. In addition, a bilateral [agreement on security](#) was also signed with France. These agreements do not, of course, create direct security guarantees for Moldova. However, the paradigm shift in EU policy after Russia's attack on Ukraine is clear. By granting candidate status to Moldova and accelerating the membership process, the EU is signaling that it has taken Moldova under its protection. According to the constitution, Moldova is a neutral state, but the new realities show that neutrality does not provide security guarantees. At a time when Sweden has abandoned neutrality and joined NATO, Moldova's search for real and practical security guarantees is understandable.

The importance of the elections in Moldova lies in the fact that if pro-Russian forces win, the security situation in Europe will deteriorate further. If they succeed in a comeback, the new government could halt membership talks with the EU and redirect the country's strategic development back toward Moscow. The greatest risk is that Moldova could become a springboard for Russia's aggression against Ukraine. As is well known, the Transnistrian region, which borders Ukraine, is under Russia's de facto control. The illegal Operational Group of Russian Forces is stationed there. This military contingent is the continuation of the 14th Army of the Soviet era. Although its size has been reduced, it has never left Moldova. In addition, Russian peacekeeping forces are also present in the area. The Moldovan government demands the withdrawal of Russian troops from its territory and does not allow their rotation or increase. However, if the left-wing bloc comes to power, Russia could, with their permission, concentrate a large force in Transnistria, which borders Ukraine's Odessa region, and open a new front. It is no secret that the Putin regime intends to occupy the Odessa region. For

example, during a briefing on August 30 this year, the [map](#) in the office of Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, caught journalists' attention. On the map, Crimea, Donbas, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia were shown as part of Russia along with the regions of Odessa and Mykolaiv.

If Russia captures Odessa, it will achieve several strategic goals:

1. It will cut off Ukraine from the sea.
2. It will establish a land connection with Moldova and its Transnistrian region.
3. It will gain access to the borders of another NATO country, Romania.

Article 19, paragraph 1 of Moldova's national security strategy states that Russia's military intervention in Ukraine and its ambition to open a land corridor to Moldova pose the risk of violently changing Moldova's constitutional order and eliminating its statehood. This official assessment confirms that the elections in Moldova are of critical importance for the security of all of Europe, especially Ukraine and Romania. If the ruling PAS party wins, the dangerous scenarios will not come to pass. A favorable environment will emerge for Moldova's successful European integration. Ukraine and Europe will be able to breathe easier.