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Moldova's Crucial Parliamentary Election

What's at Stake?

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Key Takeaways

- With the September 28, 2025 parliamentary elections approaching, Moldova is going through a critical phase marked by political polarization and geopolitical tensions.
- President Maia Sandu's "Action and Solidarity Party" (PAS) is facing off against the Patriotic Electoral Bloc (BEP), the country's main pro-Russian force. The campaign reveals partisan fragmentation and rising distrust of the elites, with the emergence of hybrid formations such as Alternativa.
- In the grip of economic difficulties, Moldova is particularly suffering from an energy crisis linked to the war in Ukraine

- and structural vulnerability exacerbated by emigration. The European Union support's Moldova's pro-European course, while Russia is stepping up its interference through covert funding, disinformation, and pressure, particularly in Transnistria and Gagauzia.
- This election represents a strategic test for democracy and Moldova's European future. Three post-election scenarios are possible: victory for the PAS, a heterogeneous pro-Russian coalition slowing down integration, or a fragmented parliament leading to instability. Moldova is thus becoming a testing ground for EU-Russia relations in the post-Soviet space.

On the occasion of Moldova's National Day, August 27, 2025, Chişinău hosted a high-level European delegation composed of Emmanuel Macron, Friedrich Merz and Donald Tusk, who sought to reaffirm their support for the country's sovereignty and pro-European course. This unprecedented and highly symbolic visit took place at a pivotal moment. Moldova is preparing for decisive parliamentary elections on September 28, whose stakes extend far beyond the national framework.

The electoral campaign, running from August 29 to September 26, crystallizes a profound reconfiguration of internal divides—between pro-European and pro-Russian forces—and external ones, in a regional context shaped by the war in Ukraine and Moscow's attempts at interference. The vote, organized under a proportional system—with thresholds of 2% for individual candidates, 5% for parties and 7% for electoral blocs—will renew the 101 seats of the Moldovan Parliament. This election is shaping up to be crucial, as it will determine the geopolitical future of this former Soviet republic, located between the European Union's eastern border and Ukraine.

Reorganization of the party system

As the parliamentary elections approach, Moldova's political landscape is undergoing a profound reconfiguration, marked by the erosion of traditional reference points and the emergence of new partisan constellations. The historical divides—pro-Romanian versus pro-Russian, then pro-European versus pro-Russian—illustrate the permeability between identity issues in domestic politics (majority population versus ethnic minorities) and orientations in foreign policy, whether pro-Russian or pro-European. Specific political behaviors are characteristic of the autonomous region of Gagauzia, strongly inclined toward the pro-Russian camp, as well as of the separatist region of Transnistria in the east of the country. Added to these are more classical variables, opposing urban and rural populations, as well as different generations. This fragmentation reflects a society under strain, torn between contradictory aspirations and growing distrust toward the elites.¹

The "Action and Solidarity Party" (PAS), the pro-European formation of President Maia Sandu—reelected in November 2024—remains the country's dominant political force. In the previous parliamentary elections of July 2021, it secured 52.8% of the vote and 63 deputies, thereby creating the conditions for a stable majority around the presidential program. Firmly established in Chişinău, in the west of the country, and strongly supported by a mobilized diaspora, especially in Europe, PAS embodies reformist continuity. Yet its partisan isolation on the political spectrum undermines any prospect of alliance, a path explicitly rejected by the President. This strategy is a double-or-nothing gamble; ruling out alliances before the elections may consolidate the pro-European electorate, but it also limits options after the vote in case of failure. By contrast, the

^{1.} F. Parmentier, "Moldova, a Political System Under Pressure: Between European Aspirations and War in Ukraine", *Russie.Eurasie.Visions*, No. 128, Ifri, May 2023, available at: www.ifri.org.

Impreuna ("Together") Bloc, which seeks to rally disillusioned pro-European voters without drifting into anti-Westernism, struggles to cross the 7% electoral threshold despite its "Pact for Europe"—inspired by similar agreements in Romania prior to its EU accession—committing its members to support Moldova's EU membership.²

Facing them, two pro-Russian blocs structure the opposition: the Patriotic Electoral Bloc (BEP) and movements linked to Şor. The former is an alliance of former Presidents Igor Dodon (2016-2020) and Vladimir Voronin (2001-2009), strengthened by regional figures such as former Gagauzia Governor Irina Vlah (*Inima Moldovei*, "Heart of Moldova"), as well as former Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev (*Viitorul Moldovei*, "The Future of Moldova"). The bloc emphasizes Moldova's neutrality and sovereignty, presenting European integration as a threat to national independence, while advocating closer ties with Russia. As for the "Victory" bloc of exiled oligarch Ilan Şor, it was excluded from the ballot for illegal financing, a decision embedded in a broader effort to curb Russian interference. This exclusion found an international echo in the European Council's July 15, 2025 move to impose targeted sanctions on seven individuals and three entities linked to Ilan Şor,³ reflecting the convergence of Moldovan and European efforts to counter destabilization attempts. As a result, most of the electorate considered "pro-Russian" is expected to concentrate around the BEP.

Positioning itself as pro-European, the *Alternativa* Bloc—founded on January 31, 2025—is led by prominent political figures: Chişinău mayor Ion Ceban, former prosecutor general and 2024 presidential runner-up Alexandru Stoianoglo, former Prime Minister Ion Chicu, and political strategist Mark Tkaciuc. This bloc seeks to attract the "neithernor" electorate (neither Russia nor the West), weary of ideological confrontation, while adopting a pragmatic stance and maintaining ambiguous international connections. However, the bloc suffered a major diplomatic setback when Ion Ceban was denied entry into Romania and the Schengen Area for security reasons on July 9, 2025.⁴ This decision highlights potential contradictions between its declared European ambitions and the realities of relations with EU partners, even though Ceban himself framed it as a politically motivated move influenced by President Sandu, a close ally of the current Romanian President Nicuşor Dan.⁵

^{2.} The *Impreuna* bloc was formed in April 2024 by four pro-European political parties: *Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr* ("Dignity and Truth Platform", DA), *Coaliția pentru Unitate și Bunăstare* ("Coalition for Unity and Welfare", CUB), *Partidul Schimbării* ("Party of Change", PS) and *Liga Orașelor și Comunelor* ("League of Cities and Municipalities", LOC). This political bloc aims to strengthen Moldova's European integration and has been preparing for the 2024 presidential and 2025 legislative elections. Following several reshuffles, the bloc is running in the September 28 legislative election as a coalition of two parties: the "Party of Change" and the *Partidul Verde Ecologist* ("Green Ecologist Party", VE).

^{3. &}quot;Republic of Moldova: Council Lists Seven Individuals and Three Entities for Actions Destabilising the Country", Council of the European Union, July 15, 2025, available at: www.consilium.europa.eu.

^{4. &}quot;UPDATE Oficial: Ion Ceban și alți doi cetățeni ai R. Moldova, interziși în România 'din motive de siguranță națională" [Update/Official: Ion Ceban and Two Other Citizens of the Republic of Moldova Banned from Entering Romania for "Reasons of National Security"], zdg.md, July 9, 2025, available at: www.zdg.md.

^{5.} O. Bodnar and S. Pricop, "Alianța electorală fondată de Ion Ceban acuză o comandă venită de la Maia Sandu după ce primarului Chișinăului i s-a interzis accesul în România" [The Electoral Alliance Founded by Ion Ceban Accuses Maia Sandu

On the margins, Renato Usatîi's "Our Party", led by the former mayor of Bălţi, plays the populist and anti-corruption card, with pro-Russian and regionalist rhetoric. Although strong at the local level and successful in presidential elections, where Usatîi twice finished third, it has struggled to translate this popularity into national representation, as evidenced by its 4.1% share in the previous parliamentary election.

Against this backdrop of chronic coalition instability and ideological realignment, the September election could usher in a new phase of fragmentation, in which no single actor seems capable of durably uniting the aspirations of a society seeking stability, sovereignty, and clear prospects in both economic and security matters.

Economic stagnation, reforms and internal polarization

Moldova heads into the September 2025 parliamentary elections in a climate of social and economic tension marked by persistent stagnation. This economic gloom is reflected in GDP figures. According to the World Bank, after a contraction of 4.6% in 2022, GDP grew by 1.2% in 2023 and just 0.1% in 2024.6 The country, already weakened by structural imbalances, was hit by an inflationary shock of nearly 30% as a result of the war in Ukraine. The energy crisis that struck Transnistria in early 2025 exposed the vulnerability of the national supply system and deepened territorial disparities.7 As the campaign begins, economic issues dominate Moldovans' concerns.8 Productivity remains low, foreign investment limited, infrastructure underdeveloped, and massive emigration—particularly of young workers—continues to drain the country of its human capital. It is estimated that more than one million Moldovans now work abroad, representing more than a quarter of the total population—including residents and the diaspora population. Each year, between 35,000 and 40,000 people leave the country, an exodus that could reduce the population to 1.9 million by 2040, according to projections by the Center for Demographic Research.9

At the institutional level, judicial reform remains the flagship but unfinished project of Maia Sandu's mandates. While the president maintains an image of integrity, tangible results have been slow to materialize. The arrest on July 24, 2025, of oligarch

of Ordering the Mayor of Chisinau to Be Banned from Entering Romania], hotnews.ro, July 9, 2025, available at: www.hotnews.ro.

^{6.} World Bank, available at: www.data.worldbank.org.

^{7.} F. Parmentier, "Crise énergétique en Transnistrie 2025 : un tournant regional ?", Le Rubicon, July 2, 2025, available at: www.lerubicon.org.

^{8.} An iData poll shows that when asked, "In your opinion, what is the most serious problem facing the Republic of Moldova at present?", respondents cited corruption (16.8%), poverty (10.8%), and low wages (9.6%), with the war in Ukraine coming in thirteen place (1.7%). iData Election Barometer, August 20, 2025. Representative sample of 1,071 people, excluding the diaspora and Transnistria.

^{9.} T. Kaukvere, "Is Moldova's Diaspora Ready to Return Home?", Emerging Europe, April 13, 2024, available at: www.emerging-europe.com.

Vlad Plahotniuc—the central figure behind the 2014 "stolen billion" scandal¹o—marked an important step in the fight against corruption.¹¹ However, Russian influence networks persist, particularly in autonomous regions. The seven-year prison sentence handed down to former Gagauzia governor Evghenia Hutsul for illegally financing the *Şor* party with undeclared Russian funds reignited tensions between Chişinău and pro-Russian strongholds. Gagauzia, historically close to Moscow, now presents itself as a hub of opposition openly hostile to the government's pro-European agenda.

In this context, the September elections will not only be a democratic test; they will embody a moment of truth for a country seeking coherence between its European ambitions, its economic realities and its internal tensions.

Between European attraction and Russian interference

Since obtaining EU candidate status in June 2022 and the official opening of accession negotiations in December 2023, Moldova has embarked on an ambitious process of internal transformation. Chişinău has made its objective clear: to be ready to open all negotiation chapters before 2030. This European path—backed by Brussels institutions and reinforced by a strategic partnership with Romania in the energy, diplomatic and cultural spheres—forms the foundation of President Maia Sandu's political project. In this respect, Sandu emerged strengthened from the election of Nicuşor Dan to the Romanian presidency, a candidate she openly supported, though not without provoking hostility from Romanian nationalists united behind former presidential contender George Simion—himself banned from entering Moldova.

But this trajectory is far from linear. Ahead of the September 2025 parliamentary elections, Sandu has repeatedly warned of Russian attempts at interference: disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, the organization of violent protests (with participants paid), and covert financing of pro-Russian parties. According to her, Moscow is seeking to tip the election in favor of its political proxies, with the goal of sabotaging Moldova's European integration and replacing the current government with one aligned with Kremlin interests. Prime Minister Dorin Recean told the *Financial Times* in June 2025 that Russia wished to deploy 10,000 troops in Transnistria, on the condition that it could install a pro-Kremlin government in Moldova.¹²

^{10.} In 2014, the embezzlement of \$1 billion (between 12 and 15% of Moldova's GDP at the time) involving three Moldovan banks caused a major political crisis. This affair, referred to as the "theft of the century", profoundly destabilized Moldovan political landscape and contributed to a crisis of confidence in public institutions. Indeed, the fraudulent system, linked to Ilan Sor, highlighted the weakness of institutions and the country's vulnerability to corruption.

^{11. &}quot;Vladimir Plahotniuc, arestat în Grecia. Oligarhul avea peste 20 de acte false de identitate, o parte eliberate în România" [Vladimir Plahotniuc Arrested in Greece. The Oligarch Had Over 20 False Identity Documents, Some of Which Were Issued in Romania], stirileprotv.ro, July 24, 2025, available at: www.stirileprotv.ro.

^{12.} H. Foy and P. Ivanova, "Russia Wants to Deploy 10,000 Troops in Moldovan Breakaway Region, PM Warns", Financial Times, June 4, 2025, available at: www.ft.com.

In Moscow, the Moldovan case is closely monitored by Sergei Kirienko, first deputy chief of staff of the Russian presidential administration. Though officially in charge of Russian domestic policy, Kirienko also oversees sensitive dossiers in the post-Soviet space, such as Abkhazia, Moldova and, more recently, Armenia. He is said to coordinate destabilization efforts aimed at weakening Maia Sandu's camp and derailing Moldova's European integration project. In response, President Sandu is betting on mobilizing the pro-European electorate by raising issues of security and sovereignty. At the same time, she has called for stricter regulation of political financing and stronger oversight of elections.

As in the 2024 elections, it is highly likely that the legitimacy of the vote will be contested once again. The issue of polling stations in Transnistria and Russia crystallizes these tensions, with each side viewing it as a major strategic battleground. On the Transnistrian and pro-Russian side, the aim is to maximize turnout in favorable districts. Tiraspol initially demanded the opening of 41 polling stations, ¹³ counting on the massive mobilization of its supporters. Similarly, the Moldovan diaspora in Russia—hundreds of thousands strong and predominantly Russian-speaking-represents a potentially decisive electoral reservoir. Moldovan authorities, however, have adopted a strategy of calculated limitation. They authorized only 10 polling stations in Transnistria (compared to 30 during the 2024 presidential election) and just 2 in Russia (exclusively at the Moscow embassy), while countries such as Italy and France benefit from 75 and 26 polling stations, respectively. This restriction is intended to curb the electoral influence of pro-Russian segments while maintaining a democratic façade. This selective electoral geography reflects a deliberate political calculation: limiting opportunities for manipulation while formally safeguarding democratic rights, albeit at the cost of a manifest imbalance in voting access depending on the geopolitical orientation of Moldovan communities abroad.

Conclusion: scenarios and prospects

Moldova's path remains uncertain, shaped by multiple challenges ranging from internal political polarization to external geopolitical pressures, as well as economic and energy vulnerabilities that continue to threaten its democratic trajectory.

Three potential scenarios emerge from the September 2025 parliamentary elections, which must lead to the formation of a government within a constitutional deadline of three months:

A fragmented Parliament (probability: 45%), the most likely scenario, in which no bloc would secure a clear majority. With several parties hovering near the electoral threshold and no political force able to rally broadly, coalition-building

seems almost inevitable. Negotiations could prove particularly long and difficult, especially in the event of deep disagreements over European orientation, constitutional neutrality, foreign policy, or relations with Russia. Such talks could easily overrun constitutional deadlines and result in new elections.

- A PAS victory (probability: 35%), with Maia Sandu's party remaining, according to polls, the strongest force, though not guaranteed an absolute majority. This scenario, which would theoretically allow the continuation of pro-European reforms, depends largely on PAS's ability to mobilize the Moldovan diaspora in Western Europe, a group traditionally supportive of the European project but with volatile turnout rates.
- A heterogeneous coalition uniting centrists and pro-Russian forces (probability: 20%), potentially slowing down or even reversing the accession process desired by a majority of the population. This outcome hinges on the opposition's ability to overcome internal divisions and unite, despite a regional climate that is relatively unfavorable—marked by widespread suspicion toward pro-Russian parties and the risk of European sanctions targeting their leaders.

These projections, however, remain fragile in the face of numerous variables that could reshape the electoral landscape: disinformation campaigns, foreign interference, and opaque financial backing. Voters' daily concerns about the economy, cost of living, and energy prices will also play a central role.

This election represents not only a challenge for Moldova but also a test of the European Union's enlargement policy. Amid emerging discussions over a potential decoupling of the accession processes of Moldova and Ukraine—the latter being seen as more complex due to the ongoing war—Brussels may be tempted to showcase the "Moldovan case" as a success story for its eastern enlargement. A successful advance would bolster the appeal of the European project in the post-Soviet space and demonstrate that integration remains possible despite Russian pressure.

By contrast, for Russia, Moldova constitutes a strategic buffer zone. In this light, the evolution of the Moldovan dossier will also be closely tied to US-Russia negotiations over Ukraine and the broader European security architecture. While Maia Sandu has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine, some political actors, such as Igor Dodon, call for compromises to "end the war", opening the door to a rapprochement with Moscow.

Thus, Moldova's September 2025 parliamentary elections will not only determine the country's European future but may also redefine its position in the wider geopolitical game unfolding among major powers, turning this small state of 2.6 million inhabitants into an important laboratory for continental power dynamics.

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