

Moldovan democracy: one more hurdle down

4 November 2024

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum welcomes the outcome of the second round of the presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova. The result confirms Moldova's commitment to join the European Union. We hope this vote will further boost the internal reform agenda following the official opening of EU accession negotiations last June.

This result also shows Moldovans' resilience despite serious foreign interference. The first round of the election on 20 October saw an "unprecedented assault" on the country's democracy to quote President Maia Sandu. Pro-Russian vote-buying schemes were unearthed, and strong anti-EU messages were spread. Yesterday's second round saw no difference: several voters reported receiving anonymous death threats to induce fear and disincentivise them from voting. Moreover, fake bomb threats targeting foreign polling stations on the election day attempted to disrupt the electoral process of the diaspora across Europe.

These sabotage attempts on the voting process have not prevented Moldovans from voting. The determination and engagement of the more than 300,000 Moldovans in the diaspora must also be recognised.

Two weeks ago, Moldovans already confirmed their European aspirations in a constitutional referendum on EU membership. Yesterday's election confirms Moldova's strong interest in joining the EU. The recently adopted European Commission's 2024 Report confirmed that Moldova has made steady progress on its EU accession path. We therefore call on the Moldovan authorities to continue implementing the necessary changes to see a speedy Moldovan accession.

We particularly call on the following actions:

- Moldovan authorities to pursue its “de-oligarchisation” efforts and implement a comprehensive justice reform and further advance in reforming the justice sector, particularly on the vetting process,
- The Moldovan authorities to put further efforts towards increasing meaningful participation of civil society in the decision-making processes,
- The EU and Moldovan authorities to open the “fundamentals” negotiation cluster during the upcoming Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union next year,
- The EU Institutions to continue building resilience to hybrid threats and disinformation in the framework of the EU-Moldova Security and Defence Partnership and strengthen cooperation with the country in the fields of strategic communication, support for journalists and civil society,
- The EU and its Member States to ensure speedy negotiation of the Reform and Growth Facility for Moldova within the Moldova Growth Plan and urge them to start the Facility as soon as possible to accelerate Moldova’s reform process and boost socio-economic growth.

The relatively weak mandate obtained in the referendum risks undermining Moldova’s fragile resilience against foreign interference. Pro-Russian opposition is ready to exploit narrow referendum result to fuel the anti-Western propaganda ahead of next year’s parliamentary elections. Despite pro-Russian candidate vowed not to oppose European integration, the risk of a parliament not having the power to advance on the internal reform agenda stemming from the country’s EU commitment remains high.

It is therefore particularly essential for the EU and the international community to stand behind Moldova to support its ambitious reform agenda.

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