

MOLDOVA

Election Observation Mission 2024 Preliminary Report



Introduction

We are pleased to present this preliminary election observation report, which offers key findings and observations during the **Moldovan Presidential elections and the Moldovan European Union membership referendum**. Our mission is aimed to assess various aspects of the electoral process to uphold democratic values and ensure a fair and transparent election. Therefore, the report does not cover the result of the elections, but the observations made on procedural aspects and adherence to the Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova.

This preliminary report highlights essential elements, such as the opening procedures, challenges related to polling stations and the voting procedure, and issues with the counting process. Our mission has exclusively focused on the short-term election observation, therefore this report only includes data from the observation from the election day only. It offers a glimpse into our observations, but it is important to note that this report is not exhaustive, and a comprehensive final report with recommendations on improving the electoral process will be released soon.

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Preliminary Findings

Opening Procedures

Our observer teams observed 21 opening procedures across three observed municipalities (9 in Chişinău, 8 in Bălţi, and 4 in Comrat).

Ballot packages

In 2 cases, packages with the ballots were partially intact or not intact. In one case, observers did not have a clear view if the ballots were intact or not. According to Moldovan Election Code [§80.2], ballot papers need to be stored in packages of 100, and opened where necessary and distributed by the Chairperson of the Precinct Electoral Bureau to the members of the Bureau to be issued to the voters.

Protocol sheets in ballot boxes

In 10 cases, signed protocol sheets were inserted into every ballot box, while in 11 instances, they were only inserted into one ballot box. According to the Moldovan Election Code, they should only be inserted into one, yet the paragraph stating this [§80.1] is up for interpretation. Because of that, Silba has also received guidance from a representative of the Center for Continuing Education in the Electoral Field. This is also reflected in the differentiation between the two practices.

Opening of the polling stations

In 3 cases, the polling stations were opened late, with the latest opening at 07:11. In additional two cases, people were allowed to enter the polling station before the opening at 07:00, while the opening procedure was being conducted. In one of these cases, people were asked to leave and come back again to the polling station at the voting start at 07:00.

Voting and Electoral Procedures

Our observer teams observed at 124 polling stations across three observed municipalities during voting and electoral procedures (53 in Chişinău, 46 in Bălţi, and 25 in Comrat).

Secrecy of Vote

In 21 cases, the observers reported that the secrecy of the vote was not secured. Observers noted recurring issues across cases with the placement and proximity between the voting booths allowing voters to see other voters' ballots while voting.

Furthermore, the secrecy of the vote was more often not achieved for individuals with disabilities. At least 7 observations have been made that the placement and height of the voting booth was not sufficient to ensure the secrecy of the vote, as it was visible what the voters were marking. In one instance, a person with mobility limitations was denied using a booth designed for people with disabilities.

Additionally, the cameras put in place to document the ballot box were at times put too broadly. Observers reported a potential of cameras being able to capture the content of the ballots.

Furthermore, there were 2 instances of mirrors being placed beside voting booths and ballot boxes which at times allowed observers and PSOs to see voters' ballots.

Group Voting

Our teams observed group voting in 29 polling stations. Most common situations include: voters voting in the same booth or talking to each other over the shields of the voting booths while voting in the separate voting booths. In 5 situations observed in the polling stations, some people were clearly telling or pointing to the ballot and describing to other voters how they needed to vote.

In one instance, a voter has left a ballot in the voting booth, which was then picked up by a PSO. PSO announced that a person has left the ballot behind in the voting booth, then stated how the ballot was marked and has placed the ballot in the ballot box, which could be deemed as both obstructing the secret voting and a case of proxy voting.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

Out of 124 general observations at polling stations, 59 lacked accessibility for voters with mobility limitations. These were often due to stairs outside the polling stations, both outside the building and in the building on the way to the hall/room where the voting was held.

Inconsistency in PSO training, and whether procedure were followed properly

A substantial number of observations indicated a lack of adherence, particularly concerning the management of ballots and how voters were treated. It was not consistent whether the PSOs should ask voters if they wanted both ballots for the referendum and the presidential election. Some PSOs were instructed not to ask whether voters wanted both ballots, and some were instructed to specifically ask.

Our teams have also observed inconsistencies in how many hours of training the PSOs have received, with the variation between 30 minutes and 104 hours of training. In addition, some PSOs were hesitant to talk about their training at all.

It also seems that there is no consistent way of electing the Chairperson of the polling stations. Some were chosen through a longer process, while others seem to have been elected by the rest of the PSO's during the opening. We have observed a lack of PSO supervision on several occasions, including instances where voters were talking among themselves while voting.

Furthermore, there was an inconsistency in how many PSOs were appointed. As per the Electoral Code, the Precinct Electoral Bureaus should start from an odd number of members, of at least 5 and a maximum of 11 members [§38.9]. However, in 77 out of 124 general observations, the Precinct Electoral Bureau members were either an equal number or more than eleven members.

Observer access

In some instances, observers were restricted in their ability to observe the whole area of the polling station or the ballot process. In 2 instances, our observers were denied entry after refusing to let the PSOs write down their passport numbers.

Presence of unauthorized personnel without accreditation

In 2 cases, our teams have registered unauthorized personnel who have pretended to be observers, although they did not have a visible accreditation with them.

Technical issues

In 3 instances, cameras to document the ballot box were malfunctioning at times, and, therefore, not filming at times.

Closing and Counting Procedures

Our team observed 20 closing and counting procedures across three observed municipalities (8 in Chişinău, 8 in Bălţi, and 4 in Comrat).

Sealing the ground of the polling stations

In 1 instance, our team observed issues regarding the sealing of the grounds of the polling station for the closing and counting procedure, including polling stations officers (PSOs) leaving the polling station for fresh air for a minute and coming back, or a PSO being let in to attend the closing and counting procedure at 21:10.

About the Elections

Presidential elections

The Presidential election was held on the 20th October 2024. In the past decade, Moldovan Presidential elections have been marked by a deep divide between pro-European and pro-Russian orientations, reflecting the country's geopolitical struggle. The 2016 election saw a significant shift, as Igor Dodon, a pro-Russian candidate, won against Maia Sandu, who later became President in 2020 with a pro-European, anti-corruption platform. This ongoing ideological tug-of-war underscores Moldova's political volatility and broader societal polarization. With the current election, tensions between these factions are expected to intensify, as each side seeks to assert its vision for Moldova's future amidst a complex regional landscape.

Referendum

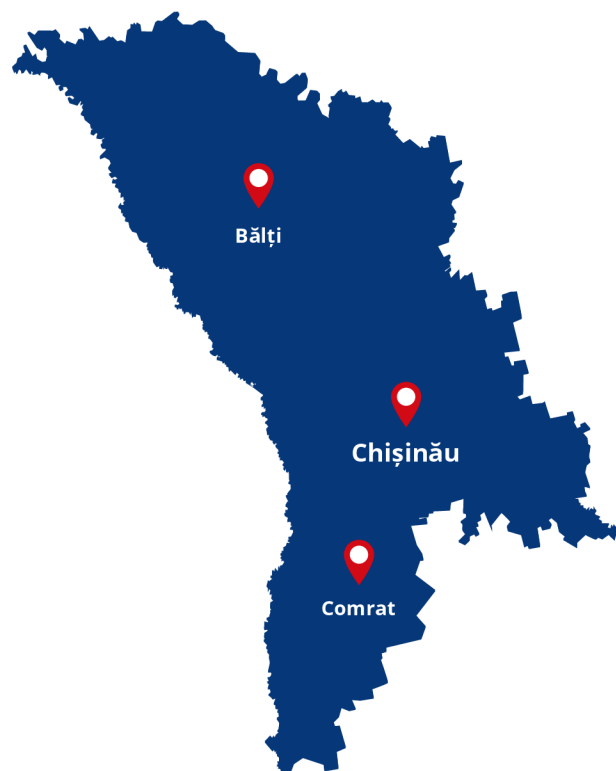
The Moldovan Parliament has voted to hold a referendum on European Union membership the same day as the presidential election. The vote was held at the same time as the Presidential election vote on the 20th October 2024. Voters were asked if they agree or disagree with amending the constitution by introducing changes that would add a preamble reconfirming Moldova's European identity, a new title "Integration into the European Union," and provisions establishing that EU founding treaties will be regulated by organic law adopted by Parliament. Additionally, the amendments would establish the precedence of domestic laws in accordance with the provisions of the Act of Accession.

This move is a key part of the President's strategy to align the country more closely with the EU, arguing that Russian influence and corruption pose threats to Moldova's sovereignty. However, opposition parties, wary of the deepening political divide, argue that the referendum is ill-timed and risks alienating the country's pro-Russian minority, exacerbating internal tensions.

Methodology and Deployment Plan

The methodology used by Silba in this election observation mission is based on the OSCE/ODIHR election observation (EOM) methodology, leveraging the Okutool app (Kloop Media Foundation) by collecting real-time field observations from the short-term election observers (STOs). Observers from Denmark are recruited by Silba and DUF, while observers from Moldova are provided by CNTM. Additionally, all observers in this mission have received certification beforehand for completing OSCE/ODIHR short-term election observation training. This methodological foundation, combined with the IT tool, ensures that our observers are well-prepared to assess elections thoroughly and efficiently.

Observers have collected data on all electoral procedures, from the opening, closing, and vote counting in the polling stations. This provides a comprehensive and well-rounded assessment of the election day. The mission has deployed 44 STOs, 21 teams combining one observer from the Danish delegation and one observer from the Moldovan delegation. The teams have deployed in 3 of 5 Moldovan municipalities namely Chişinău, Bălţi, and Comrat. The teams have in total made 165 observations, 21 opening procedures, 124 voting procedures, and 20 closing procedures.



Organisers



Silba - Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy is a Danish non-partisan and non-profit youth organization which aims to strengthen democratic dialogue, institutions and organizations. Silba organizes local and international activities, with a main focus on election observation missions, long term international projects and local engagement.



The Danish Youth Council (Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd) is an umbrella organization with 78 children and youth organizations as members. The member organizations of DUF range from scouts to political youth organizations, voluntary social organizations, cultural organizations, environmental organizations, organizations for youth with disabilities and many more.



The National Youth Council of Moldova (Consiliul Național al Tineretului din Moldova) is the associative structure of 36 Moldovan youth organizations, which promotes the rights of young people and represents the interests of youth organizations in the process of elaboration, implementation and evaluation of youth policies.

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