

Opinion – Voices from Moldova’s 2025 Parliamentary Election

Written by Martin Duffy

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MARTIN DUFFY, OCT 5 2025

Moldova has become a significant political acid-test in the renewed struggle between Russian and EU influence. Its elections in the past decade have been conducted against an ominous power-struggle. The apparently intractable war in Ukraine has made the outcomes of Moldova’s elections, symbolically and tangibly, crucial. Transnistria and Gagauzia are ever-present reminders that genuine political control in Moldova is an abstract concept. Any Moldovan President, or minister-of-state exercises authority with implicit knowledge of their territorial limitations. When one speaks to the Moldovan public, one observes people living under continuous threat. Entering Transnistria one encounters a “state-within-state” nightmare which John Elledge eloquently describes in his critique of world borders. Not even Transnistrians are satisfied with their current political lot.

It will bring relief to Moldovan President Maia Sandu that pro-EU forces have won a clear parliamentary victory, despite well-substantiated claims of Russian interference. Throughout the election, Sandu’s voice had been crystal clear. She stated at the outset of polling that “Moldovan democracy was young and fragile and Russia endangered it”. Sandu was also justified in her appeal — pointing to “massive Russian interference...[Moldova’s] very existence, flanked by Ukraine and Romania, was at risk. Do not play with your vote or you’ll lose everything...the future of democracy!” International and domestic observers had compiled extensive evidence of Russian propaganda, intimidation, media-manipulation and miscellaneous dirty tricks. OSCE have covered much of this ground in their recent reportage.

The preponderance of a Europe-leaning vote in Moldova is significant. Thus, Sandu decisively claimed victory and a new majority in parliament in elections that are seen as critical for her country’s future path to the EU. To quote Igor Grosu, leader of Sandu’s Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS): “This election has been an extraordinarily difficult battle...Russia had thrown everything it had at the election...Moldovans defiantly showed their European loyalty despite formidable opposition”.

In fact, Russian influences were as subtle as brick-bats, and Sandu’s opponents sought to exploit every single chink in PAS’s armour. Opposition leader and Socialist Party chief Igor Dodon, even claimed victory before results appeared. He called for protests outside parliament, stirring up unrest and potentially disrupting Transnistria. Dodon alleged there had been “all sorts of harassment, stopping (Transnistrians) from voting”. He exploited Russian TV to claim his pro-Russian allies in the Patriotic Electoral Bloc (PEB) had won the election, without even exit polls. No evidence of PAS interference in Transnistrian polling was found by international observers. The same could not be said of PEB.

Statistically, PAS has secured approximately 50% of the vote with virtually all 1.6m votes counted, far ahead of PEB (under 25%.) Turnout was 52%, higher than in recent years. Those are comfortable numbers for psephologists to work with. EC President Ursula von der Leyen welcomed the result. “You made your choice clear: Europe. Democracy. Freedom,” Polish PM Donald Tusk stated: “Sandu has saved democracy and stopped Russia in its attempts to take control over the whole region. A good lesson for us all”.

It was obvious from the start of counting that Sandu’s party was on course for another majority in the 101-seat

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parliament. Four years ago, PAS won 52.8% of the vote, and PAS will most likely secure 55 or even 56 seats. To form government, it will not require support from other parties, such as the Alternativa bloc or the populist Our Party.

The election was marked by alleged voter intimidation from all sides. Problems even spilled over into voting abroad with bomb scares reported at polling stations not only in Moldova but in Italy, Romania, Spain and the US. Igor Grosu blamed Russian criminal groups for Sunday’s incidents, and appealed for “patience and calm” to let voting continue. Before the vote, police reported evidence of an unprecedented effort by Russia to spread disinformation and systematic vote-buying in virtually every town across the country. There were almost a hundred arrests on charges of undermining the election. Examples of offences included Moldovans present in Serbia for firearms training and co-ordinating unrest. A comprehensive BBC investigation had previously exposed a clandestine Russian network funding pro-Russian propaganda and fake news.

Naturally, parties sympathetic to Moscow rejected police claims as fabrications, but international observers found similar evidence across almost every polling district of the country. It was felt that the presence of tripod CCTV overlooking ballot boxes had added to voter confidence. Domestic election observers reassured people they were recording everything, to be checked if there were any reports of violations. However, the big emphasis on CCTV also sustained conspiracy-theory. It is interesting to contrast pro-EU and pro-Moscow camps. These are ultimately the real voices which matter in any election.

Daria from a satellite town to Chisinau told me:

Moldovans watch news from Ukraine minute by minute. We look at Transnistria and we see traitors in our midst. Like the quislings of the old war. The biggest enemy is watching within. The greatest casualty is the good friendship that used to exist between neighbours (before) Russian interference. Moscow bombards them with fake promises.... There is a joke here about accepting Russian gifts. Well, you know people always say beware of Greeks bearing gifts- a reference to the Trojan horse. Well, any horse given us from Moscow is more likely to have anthrax. The Russian Bear is a constant threat undermining Moldova from within, and in the villages close to Transnistria and Gagauzia, we see all the evidence of Russian interference. The troops do not respect their territorial mandate and use dirty tricks to make the government in Chisinau look weak. It is like we are in constant threat of being undermined from within. Phone lines mysteriously get cut. The water and gas fail. Weeks are spent without electricity. Power stations are vandalised and sabotaged. All of this is designed to intimidate Moldovan voters and make it seem like the state is kaput. But we are not fools. We have hope in the EU. We know it would be impossible to move to Europe with a pro-Russian government. We see what happens in Ukraine. We do not want to become a second Ukraine.

Moldova was awarded EU candidate status in 2022 along with Ukraine, four months after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. International observers noted the number of voters from Transnistria at about 12,000, significantly down on previous years. Close to the separatist enclave of Transnistria, cars waited to drive to the 12 polling stations which had been opened beyond the administrative border to ensure fair access to the vote. There was bussing but, in the circumstances, this was to be expected with the polling stations being some distance from Transnistria itself. Moldovan police meticulously checked documents and car boots. There were few reports of police misconduct or that the checks were anything but courteous and friendly. Even pro-Russian politicians avoided comment on the conduct of the state security operation. It was interesting to see the cars driving in convoy from the Soviet-style hammer-and-sickle emblem festooned across Transnistria and into the terrain of Moldovan flags. There was a juxtaposition of the green-and-red striped flag of Transnistria and the Moldovan flag on the other side and round the polling stations.

A Transnistrian voter told me:

I do not want to vote under that flag; I want to vote under the flag of my beloved Transnistria. This is a sell-out to Brussels and soon our Russian past will be whitewashed and forgotten. Do they want us to leave our homes and go to Russia. I am not sure there is room for us there anyway and we have our own farms and lives to preserve here. We are Russians but we are not Muscovites ...We are abandoned by Chisinau and Moscow. We are Russian Transnistrians and friends and brothers of our family among the Gagauzians. We are what we have always been. But

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what are we anymore?

There was relatively little pro-Moscow campaigning among the people arriving to vote, almost as if they had been schooled to tone down their Putinesque rhetoric. Another voter in an expensive saloon-car, a Transnistrian businessman stated:

If you wanted my honest opinion, I would say that we have years of promises of plenty from the PAS Party but no real change in living conditions, and we are just neglected here. In fact, we are starved out of our own country and even it is so difficult to get out and vote with all the roadblocks and confusion. It is no surprise that the vote seems a bit down today on previous years. Do not be fooled by Sandu and the group of liars that she is surrounded with. She is only interested in building up a nest-egg for herself. Maybe she might even have plans to quit the whole country before too long, as I expect she has dishonestly concealed away millions from the state funds to make her escape.

It was interesting to linger on the perimeter with Transnistria and to be able to see in the distance a colossal statue of Lenin, while just across the limits of Transnistria the electoral authorities had signposted the way to polling stations and bedecked them with Moldovan flags. In the 21st century world it is apparent that in politically divided societies, flags remain idiomatic.

About the author:

Martin Duffy has participated in more than two hundred international election and human rights assignments since beginning his career in Africa and Asia in the 1980s. He has served with a wide range of international organizations and has frequently been decorated for field service, among them UN (United Nations) Peacekeeping Citations and the Badge of Honour of the International Red Cross Movement. He has also held several academic positions in Ireland, UK, USA and elsewhere. He is a proponent of experiential learning and holds awards from Dublin, Oxford, Harvard, and several other institutions including the Diploma in International Relations at the University of Cambridge.