



## Sandu Wins, Constitutional Referendum Passes in Moldova

Jakub Pieńkowski

Moldova held a second round of presidential elections on 3 November. In it, pro-European Maia Sandu, running for re-election, defeated the formally independent but pro-Russian Socialist Party-backed former prosecutor general Alexandr Stoianoglo. A referendum was also held on 20 October, on the sidelines of the first round, in which citizens answered affirmatively to the question “do you support amending the Constitution in connection with the Republic of Moldova’s accession to the European Union?”.

### What are the election results?

Sandu won, garnering 55% of the vote against 45% cast for Stoianoglo. Her victory was determined by the support of the diaspora, which numbers more than a million people, mostly living in the EU. Diaspora members cast one in five of the 1.699 million votes, with 83% of those cast for Sandu. Meanwhile, Stoianoglo narrowly won in Moldova with 51% support. He was particularly supported by the traditionally pro-Russian autonomous Gagauzia and the Bulgarian-populated Taraclia region, with 97% and 94% of the vote, respectively, as well as the second-largest city of Bălți and the northern regions of the country, where he received 60-70% support. The authorities in breakaway Transnistria did not get involved in the Moldovan elections. Citizens living there cast 26,000 votes in special commissions in government-controlled areas, 21% of them for Sandu.

### What determined Sandu’s victory?

Before the second round, Sandu changed her message, calling for Moldova to be saved from anti-European and pro-Russian forces. Fear of a Stoianoglo victory prompted an unprecedented mobilisation of the pro-European electorate, especially the diaspora, which cast 130,000 more votes than in the first round. Although Stoianoglo won only 26% of the vote at the time, while Sandu won 42%, all pro-Russian candidates called for a vote against her in the second round,

with a combined 16% of the vote. Only Renato Usatîi—he was third, with 14% of the vote—did not name a favourite. The mobilisation was also a reaction to the massive vote-buying before the first round by [Moscow-based Ilan Șohr](#), according to Moldovan services, he bribed some 130,000 voters, spending \$39 million. Before the second round, the services began to fight his network more intensively, probably discouraging some voters who wanted to sell their vote with a penalty of €1,900.

### What is the significance of Sandu’s win?

Sandu’s win means maintaining Moldova’s genuine desire for EU membership and effective reforms. Stoianoglo, who is associated with the pro-Russian Socialists, although he asserted his European views in the campaign, in political practice he contradicted them. Sandu’s second term increases the chances of a good result for the presidential Action and Solidarity Party in the parliamentary elections in June 2025. However, it will need a coalition partner to maintain its rule, which in practice could only be the currently extra-parliamentary centre-left National Alternative Movement of popular Chisinau mayor Ion Ceban, with which PAS rejects cooperation. It is in the interest of Poland, which supports Moldova’s European aspirations, to point out to Sandu the importance of dialogue with other pro-European circles.

## PISM SPOTLIGHT

### **What is the significance of the constitutional referendum?**

The constitutional amendment came with the publication of the 31 October decision of the Constitutional Court, which approved the Central Election Commission's referendum report. The preamble included "the European identity of the Moldovan people" and EU integration as a strategic goal of the country, and added a chapter regulating the adoption of European treaties through organic laws (with a majority of 51 out of 101 deputies). A new referendum on the same issue cannot be announced earlier than two years from now.

According to Sandu, this will safeguard the country's pro-Western course even if pro-Russian parties take over the government, which is possible after the next parliamentary elections. The Socialists, the main opposition party, refuse to recognise the referendum result, pointing out that it was decided by a minimal majority—50.35 to 49.65%. Nearly one in six votes—77% "in favour"—was cast by the diaspora. According to the socialists, PAS favoured compatriots living in the EU, the U.S., and Canada, and hindered the voting of the community in Russia of allegedly half a million, but actually numbering less than 90,000 members.