

**DECLASSIFIED<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)**

### **Honouring of obligations and commitments by the Republic of Moldova**

#### **Information Note by the co-rapporteurs on their visit to Chisinau (1 to 3 July 2024)**

Co-rapporteurs: Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez, Switzerland, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group and Ms Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica, Latvia, Group of the European People's Party

#### **1. Introduction**

1. We paid a visit to Chisinau from 1 to 3 July 2024, as a direct follow-up to our visit of February 2024. This visit focussed on the preparations of the upcoming elections as well as on the increasing foreign interference in the domestic politics and electoral processes in the Republic of Moldova. In addition, we looked at the recent developments concerning the main issues discussed during our last visit, in particular regarding the judicial reforms. This information note should therefore be seen in conjunction with the note<sup>2</sup> we produced after our visit in February 2024.

2. During our visit we met with, inter alia: the President of the Republic of Moldova; the Speaker and the Vice-Speakers of the Parliament; the Deputy Prime Minister – Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Prosecutor General and the Chief Prosecutor of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office; the Head of the Security Service of the Republic of Moldova; the President and members of the Vetting Commission for judges and prosecutors (Vetting Commission); the Chairperson of the Central Election Commission (CEC), the Chairperson and members of the Moldovan delegation to PACE; the leadership of the political factions in the Moldovan parliament; as well as representatives of civil society organisations (CSO) and of the diplomatic community. The programme of our visit is attached to this note in Appendix 1.

3. We would like to thank the Moldovan Parliament and Moldovan delegation to PACE for the excellent programme and hospitality, and the Head of the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau and his staff for the support given to our delegation. The statement issued at the end of our visit is attached in Appendix 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Document declassified by the Monitoring Committee on 11 September 2024.

<sup>2</sup> [AS/Mon \(2024\) 10](#).

## 2. Political Environment and election preparations

4. The political environment in the Republic of Moldova at the time of the visit was dominated by the upcoming Presidential Elections and the Constitutional referendum on European Union membership that are scheduled to take place on Sunday 20 October 2024. In line with legal provisions, the electoral period formally started on 22 July and the electoral campaign will formally start on 22 September. However, in reality the election campaign is in full swing which is affecting the already polarised political climate in the country.

5. The upcoming Presidential elections and referendum are widely seen as a key moment for the country's European integration and foreign alignment vectors, as well as a rehearsal for the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2025, which, for a parliamentary republic, will define Moldova's domestic political course. As a result, the Russian Federation has started an unprecedented campaign of interference in the domestic political process and election preparations that is compounding the already tense political climate. We will outline the foreign interference in the Republic of Moldova's domestic political processes in a next section.

6. The upcoming Constitutional referendum was called by the authorities to ensure the irreversibility of Moldova's European Union membership process. In order for the referendum to be valid at least 1/3 of the registered voters need to participate in the referendum of which 50% plus one need to vote in favour of the referendum question. However, the authorities have stated that for the referendum to have the required political legitimacy it will be important for the participation to pass the 50% of the registered voters for these elections. Unfortunately, this has created a vector for foreign interference, with several of the parties that are considered close to the interest of the Russian Federation already having called for a boycott of the referendum.

7. On 22 April, Ilan Shor announced in Moscow the establishment of a new political bloc in the Republic of Moldova called the Victory Bloc. This bloc consists of the Renaissance, Alternative Force, Alvara a Moldova, Victorio and the Change Party that is widely seen as a successor of the Shor Party. The Victory bloc has announced that it will campaign against EU integration in the upcoming referendum.

8. The Victory Bloc has announced that it seeks close co-operation with the PSRM (Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova) of former President Dodon, which however has not joined the Victory bloc. Both parties have said that they would prefer to run with a single candidate against Ms Maia Sandu in the next elections, but reportedly have difficulties to agree on such a candidate, also as a result of the rivalries between Shor and Dodon. On 8 July 2024, the PSRM proposed former Prosecutor General Alexandr Stoianoglo<sup>3</sup> as a single "unified opposition" candidate for the upcoming Presidential elections. However, Mr Shor and his Victory Bloc have, at the moment of writing, not expressed any support for Mr Stoianoglo's candidature.

9. On 26 May 2024, twelve political parties that support European integration and EU membership, signed a "Pact for Europe". Among the signatory parties are the "Together" Bloc, Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), and the National Alternative Movement Party (MAN) led by Chisinau mayor Mr Ion Ceban. On 27 May 2024, Mr Ceban, who was rumoured to be a candidate, announced that he would not running against Ms Sandu in the next Presidential elections.

10. During our meetings with Civil Society and the CEC, all interlocutors expressed their confidence in the preparedness of the election administration for the conduct of the next elections (both 2024 Presidential and 2025 Parliamentary) as well as referendum, although the simultaneous holding of

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<sup>3</sup> Mr Stoianoglo had been dismissed by President Sandu for exceeding his authorities and for failure to address the endemic corruption in the country. Mr Stoianoglo appealed to the ECHR against his dismissal (application no. 19371/22). On October 24, 2023, the ECtHR held that there had been a violation of Article 6 § 1 (right of access to a court) of the European Convention on Human Rights. While the Court noted that the suspension itself could in principle be justified by the applicant's status as Prosecutor General, the Court noted that procedural safeguards should be implemented to ensure that the suspension mechanism was not used arbitrarily and, in that connection, Mr Stoianoglo had not been afforded any form of judicial protection in relation to his suspension.

the Presidential election and referendum had opened some specific issues, and vulnerabilities, that needed to be addressed. In this aspect two issues were seen as a priority. First of all is the issue of political party and campaign financing. A recent study by the well-known NGO Promo-lex estimated that political parties, mostly allied to Mr Shor, had failed to declare 14 to 20 million Euros in party financing. While the CEC had increased powers and a strengthened capacity to regulate campaign financing, parties seemed increasingly adapt in finding mechanisms to circumvent legal provisions, as clear from the most recent elections in Gagauzia. This is of concern in the context of the increased illegal money streams into the country to interfere in the electoral processes.

11. A second issue noted was the need for clarity regarding the regulations for the so-called third party participation in the referendum process. Many civil society organisations informed us that it was not clear to them what the exact status of their programmes and activities, which are often promoting increased European integration, would be under the referendum legislation and CEC rules. During our meeting with the CEC, the latter clarified that according to the new electoral legislation, only political parties and blocs could participate in the referendum process. As long as civil society organisations were just promoting participation in the referendum, without expressing a preference for “yes” or “no”, their actions under the current legislation would not be counter to the Electoral Code or CEC regulations. However, the moment that they would actively promote either a “yes” or a “no” vote as a CSO, they would be in violation of the electoral code. The possibility of participation of CSOs in the referendum campaign had been considered when the relevant legislation was drafted, but the legislator had decided against it as it would make the regulation and control of campaign financing impossible, thus creating a vulnerability for foreign interference.

12. The Republic of Moldova has a very sizeable diaspora. About one third of its citizens live outside the country. Previous elections have demonstrated the keen interest of the diaspora to participate in the elections. During the last parliamentary elections, 14.3% of all votes were cast in polling stations abroad. Until now, voting abroad was only possible in person in special polling stations. The selection of the countries where polling stations will be established, as well as the number of polling stations in each of these countries, is understandably a sensitive issue as that choice could potentially skew the outcome of the election in one direction or the other. The lack of clarity and transparency of the criteria for the establishment of polling stations abroad has been criticised in observation reports of previous elections. Therefore, the Venice Commission, as well as the Assembly, has repeatedly recommended that the establishment of polling stations abroad be based on transparent and consistent criteria, and following consultations with, and preferably with the consensus of, the various stakeholders in the elections.

13. In order to address concerns and to facilitate the voting by the diaspora, the CEC has increased the number of polling stations abroad from 150 to 209 in the next elections. Moreover, on 1 March 2024, a draft law was introduced into the parliament that introduced, on a trial basis, postal voting during the next presidential elections and referendum in the following 6 countries: United States, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland. The draft law was adopted, after a short period of consultations with the relevant stakeholders, on 26 April 2024, five months before the elections are scheduled to take place.

14. The introduction of postal voting so short before the elections are scheduled to take place was decried by the opposition, which also questioned the choice of the six countries selected for the trial. In our meeting with the opposition parties, they expressed concern that, in their view, these countries had been chosen with the aim of skewing the outcome and turnout in the upcoming elections and referendum. On 14 May 2024, the Victory Bloc challenged the constitutionality of the new law before the Constitutional Court on the ground that the adoption of the law, only five months before the elections, would violate the stability of election legislation contrary to international standards and obligations. On 20 May 2024, the Bloc of Communists and Socialists, also challenged the law before the Constitutional Court for the same reason as well as on the ground that the law would violate the equal rights between voters inside the country and those residing abroad. These court cases are currently ongoing.

15. On 3 May 2024, the Speaker of the Moldovan parliament requested an opinion of the Venice Commission on the law on postal voting. In its opinion,<sup>4</sup> adopted during its plenary session on 21 and 22 June 2024, the Venice Commission noted that the total number of Moldovan citizens registered in

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<sup>4</sup> [CDL-AD\(2024\)022](#).

the 6 countries selected reportedly amount to less than 10% of the total Moldovan diaspora. The impact on the outcome should therefore be limited, although it can affect the turnout. The limited number of voters concerned also means that the law does not so fundamentally change the electoral rules that it would violate the principle of stability of fundamental aspects of electoral legislation. Nevertheless, the adoption of postal voting so shortly before the elections, as well as the lack of transparency and consensus on the countries selected for the trial, are of concern.

16. The Venice Commission reiterated the principle that care must be taken to avoid not only manipulation of electoral legislation for the advantage of the party in power, but even the mere semblance of manipulation, even if not intended, which could undermine the trust of the stakeholders and citizens in the election process. It therefore emphasised the importance of the trial period only applying to the Presidential elections and Referendum and that if it is decided to maintain postal voting – which should be decided well before next elections take place – the postal vote will take place in all countries where postal voting is considered to be safe. Those countries should be selected by an independent body – the CEC – on the basis of broad consultations, and preferably consensus, with and between the different stakeholders and on clear and transparent legal criteria.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Foreign interference

17. While covert foreign interference by the Russian Federation in Moldova's domestic politics and security situation has many vectors and aspects, currently the main focus is on the upcoming Presidential elections and Referendum on EU accession.

18. We are extremely concerned by the exponential increase in attempts by the Russian Federation to nefariously interfere in the domestic politics and electoral processes in the Republic of Moldova. This increase, as well as the still existing vulnerabilities of the country's political processes for such actions were highlighted by nearly all counterparts we met. In our view, these attempts to interfere in the domestic political processes should be met with a coordinated and comprehensive response from Moldova's international partners in particular from the side of the EU and Council of Europe member States.

19. As we highlighted in our statement, we are especially apprehensive about the large influx of Russian money into the Republic of Moldova with the clear aim to buy votes and subvert the democratic process. These illicit money streams often pass through third countries, including Council of Europe member States. We therefore urge all member States to be alert for this and to take all necessary precautions to counteract such malicious practices.

20. In the recent months the Moldovan authorities have noted a sharp increase in Moldovan citizens returning from the Russian Federation with just under € 10.000 in cash on them, which is the legal threshold when cash needs to be declared when entering the country. The recipients of this money are operatives of political parties and movements that are considered close to Mr Ilan Shor, with a view to buy votes and illegally fund these parties and their campaign activities. In addition to cash, money is also brought in the country via pre-paid debit cards, the so-called MIR debit cards. The authorities have therefore outlawed the use of the pre-paid debit cards. The money couriers are reportedly paid around the €100 plus expenses for their services and arrive in the Republic of Moldova via European countries that have maintained flight connections with the Russian Federation (in particular Türkiye, Georgia, and Armenia), but also, especially since the authorities have become more alert to these practises, via Central Asian Countries. As many of the persons stopped by the custom authorities are not able to explain the provenance of their cash, the Moldovan authorities have been able to confiscate a

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<sup>5</sup> The law set the following criteria for the implementation of postal voting:

*Article 8(1) specifies that the countries where the postal vote will be implemented shall be established considering the following criteria:*

*a) the lack of polling stations in the host country or long distances to nearest polling stations established previously;*  
*b) the experience of the postal vote implementation in the host country;*  
*c) prior registration at the previous elections of at least 30 applications;*  
*d) safety and reliability of the postal/courier services.*

*Article 8 (2) prohibits postal voting in countries "with which the Republic of Moldova has not established diplomatic relations, in the countries under military conflicts and in the countries disrespecting the international standards regarding the conduct of free and fair elections.*

considerable sum of this illicit money. However, it is widely considered that the amount of cash confiscated is just a tip of the iceberg, which a much larger amount entering the country unhindered or undetected.

21. In addition to the cash being brought in by couriers, the authorities have noted an increase in suspected bank and cryptocurrency transfers. In response, crypto-currency payments have been prohibited in the Republic of Moldova, but the authorities contend that crypto currency use is by nature difficult to monitor and regulate. To give an idea of the scale of the problem faced by the authorities: the Moldovan Secret Service estimate that in the last 6 months, the Russian Federation used in excess of 50 million Euros to influence and interfere in Moldova's domestic political processes.

22. According to official estimates, about 11% to 15% of the population use Russian as a first language and rely on Russian language media as the primary source of information. A large part of the Russian language media is either based in the Russian Federation or are controlled by economic interests supportive of the Russian leadership. In that context, a number of civil society organisations stressed that it would be important for the Republic of Moldova to start producing high quality information and entertainment programmes in the Russian language in order to decrease the dependency on Russian produced materials. This is all the more important as the Moldovan authorities have registered a substantial increase in misinformation and fake news through media aligned with the Russian Federation and its supporters, as well as – increasingly – through social media, such as TikTok and Telegram channels.

23. The Moldovan authorities, jointly with its international partners, have been reflecting on mechanism to counter this manipulation of the information space, while at the same time respecting international democratic and rule of law norms and standards. A number of media outlets have been closed and taken offline for undermining the country's Constitutional stability. This has started a domestic debate on national security versus censorship of legitimate dissenting opinions on the country's integration trajectory and reforms. In that respect, commenting on the closure of 12 Media stations by the Moldovan authorities in the beginning of 2024, the EU Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova, Mr Janis Mazeiks, stressed that "While we understand that suspending licences is a necessary step in this fight against hate speech [...] it is essential that these actions are carried out through transparent and fair rules to maintain public trust."

24. The increase of misinformation and fake news has been accompanied by the worrisome use of hate speech in particular against the LGBTIQ population and refugees from Ukraine with the objective of instrumentalising homophobia and xenophobia for electoral purposes. In this context, the Security Services have informed us of their concern that pro-Russian and right-wing political and social activists are invited to "training courses" in the Russian Federation on techniques to foment social tensions and unrest as a means to destabilise the country following the elections.

25. The unresolved conflict over Transnistria has traditionally been one of the main vectors for Russian interference in Moldova's security situation and internal stability. The concerns about the instrumentalisation of Transnistria were compounded by the Russian invasion in Ukraine. However, we were informed that, despite bellicose statements by the de facto authorities in Tiraspol, there seems little appetite among both the Transnistrian population, as well as the de facto authorities, for an escalation of the tensions. On the other hand, the developments with regard to Gagauzia are increasingly of concern and a main vector for instability and Russian interference, including with regard to the elections.

26. Therefore, worrisome from a security and stability perspective is the fact that both the current Bashkan, Ms Evghenia Gutul, and the chairman of the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, Mr Dmitry Konstantinov, attended the establishment meeting of the Victory Bloc in Moscow. In the sidelines of this meeting, Ms Gutul reportedly asked for meeting with Russian President Putin, to request "protection" for the Gagauzian people against Chisinau (SIC). For its side, in order to counter the increasing isolation of Gagauzia, the authorities announced that they were trying to bypass the regional structures of the ATUG (Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia) and seek direct co-operation with the elected mayors and city councils in Gagauzia, as well as with civil society representatives.

27. As we outlined in our previous information note, the Chief Anti-Corruption Prosecutor (APO) has initiated formal investigations into Ms Gutul's election, as well as the financing of her campaign. On 24 April 2024, the APO filed criminal charges against Ms Guțul for obtaining illegal financing for, as well as paying participants in protests organised by, the now banned Shor party. If convicted, these offences carry penalties of fines ranging from 57,500 to 92,500 Lei or imprisonment from 2 to 7 years, as well as a ban on holding certain public offices and functions for a period between 2 to 5 years. Therefore, if convicted, new elections would have to be organised for the Bashkan position. We hope that the legal proceedings against the current Bashkan will be soon finalised in order to obtain clarity in this difficult and tense standoff, and to reduce its potential as a vector for foreign interference.

28. On 13 June, the governments of the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom issued a [statement](#) warning that "Russian actors are carrying out a plot to influence the outcomes of Moldova's fall 2024 presidential election" and expressing their full supports for the Moldovan people's aspirations for European integration.

#### **4. Reform of the Judiciary**

29. The reform of the judiciary with a view to ensuring its independence and efficiency remains a key priority for the Moldovan authorities. In a welcome development, on 31 May 2024 the Superior Council of Prosecutors proposed acting Prosecutor Mr Ion Munteanu as a candidate for the post of Prosecutor General. President Sandu appointed him the next day, therewith fulfilling one of the key remaining conditions to start the EU accession negotiations. Mr Munteanu will serve a single non-renewable seven-year term. On 12 June the Superior Council of Prosecutors appointed Mr Munteanu's deputies.

30. The National Anti-Corruption Centre, which is tasked to both prevent and combat corruption has now been fully separated from the prosecutions service. The Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office is in charge of the criminal investigations conducted by the investigators of the National Anti-Corruption Centre as well as its own criminal investigations and is now a completely autonomous entity within the prosecution service, which can make proposals for its own budget to the parliament, and which will soon move to its own premises. The members of the anti-corruption prosecutor's office will be subjected to the vetting procedure in the coming months. All prosecutors concerned were given the choice to either resign before 13 June 2024 or to be subjected to the vetting procedure. Approximately 25% of the prosecutors concerned resigned.

31. The vetting procedures for judges and prosecutors are key mechanisms to combat the still prevalent corruption among the judiciary and to ensure the integrity of these institutions. The vetting of the members of the Supreme Council of Magistrates and Supreme Prosecutor Council has been finalised and the vetting of the Supreme Court should be finalised by the end of the year. The vetting of all key judge and prosecutor positions is ongoing. All these vetting processes are taking place simultaneously to speed up the vetting as much as possible without losing on the quality of each individual vetting process. In that respect the members of the vetting commissions underscored that they were benefitting from vetting experiences of Albania and Ukraine, as well as the ECtHR jurisprudence that resulted from these two vetting procedures. In total about 250 positions still need to be vetted which is not realistically possible before the end of the year.

32. There have been pushbacks from within the judiciary against the judicial reforms and strive of the authorities to rid it of its endemic corruption. In this context, the members of the vetting commission informed us of actions by individuals aimed undermining the credibility and effectiveness of the vetting process. In a case that gained much public attention, Ms Tatiana Răducanu, who is a member of the Pre-Vetting and Vetting Commissions, announced on 14 May 2024 that she was resigning from her functions after the publication of a letter by the Head of the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office, Ms Veronica Dragalin, to several judges, prosecutors and civil society representatives, in which she accused Ms Răducanu of being close to, and acting on orders of, Messrs Platon, Colenco and Shor. These allegations are denied by Ms Răducanu. A number of interlocutors have qualified the letter as an attempt by some anti-corruption prosecutors, whose vetting is about to start to discredit the vetting commission. These developments were equally denounced by the ruling party Chair of the Parliamentary Judicial Appointments and Immunities Commission as "another attempt to discredit the commission". It is important that the authorities continue to express their strong support for the vetting procedure and the vetting commissions in order to counteract such individual attempts.

33. On 31 May 2024, the Moldovan parliament adopted in final reading a new judicial map for the country to provide for a streamlined and more efficient system of first instance and appeals courts. According to this new map, the appeals courts will be reorganised into three Central, Northern and Southern Appeals Courts, with the latter having a seat in both Cahul and Comrat (Gagauzia). The Bashkan of Gagauzia announced that she would challenge the new map before the Moldovan Constitutional Court as the new map would violate Gagauzia's judicial autonomy as guaranteed by the Moldovan Constitution.

34. We intend to return to the Republic of Moldova as part of the election observation mission of the Assembly of which we are ex-officio part.

**Programme of the fact-finding visit to Chisinau  
(1 to 3 July 2024)**

Co-rapporteurs: Mr Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ, Switzerland, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group  
Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA, Latvia, Group of the European People's Party

Secretariat: Mr Bas KLEIN, Deputy Head of Secretariat, Monitoring Committee

Main topics:

- Recent political developments and preparations of the Presidential elections and Constitutional Referendum (including postal voting)
- Foreign interference
- Follow-up to key points raised during the previous visit (inter alia: criminal charges Bashkan; progress justice reform, in particular appointment of the General Prosecutor, investigation vetting commission members, etc.)

**Monday, 1 July 2024**

15:00 Civil society/expert roundtable on election preparations

*Participants:*  
CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation  
ADEPT  
Promo-LEX  
IPRE  
“Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections”  
CoE Office in Chisinau

16:15 Civil Society/expert roundtable on foreign interference

*Participants:*  
IPRE  
PISA (Platform for Defence and Security Initiatives)  
GenderDoc-M  
IMS (International Media Support)  
WatchDog.md  
CoE Office in Chisinau

17:30 Meeting with the EU Partnership Mission (EUPM) representatives

*Participants:*  
Deputy Head of Mission  
Head of Operations  
Head of Crisis Management Component

20:00 Briefing by Mr Falk Lange, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau



<b>Tuesday, 2 July 2024</b>
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- 08:45-09:45 Meeting with the international community (\*)
- Participants:*  
*Belgium, Denmark, EUD, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA.*
- 10:00-10:40 Meeting with H.E. Mr Igor GROSU, Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova
- 11:00-11:45 Meeting with Ms Doina GHERMAN, Chair of the parliamentary faction of the Action and Solidarity Party and the members of the faction
- 12:00-12:45 Meeting with Mr Vlad BATRÎNCEA, Chair of the parliamentary faction of the Bloc of communists and socialists and the members of the faction
- 13:00-14:30 Working Lunch offered by Ms Doina GHERMAN, Vice-President of the Parliament
- 14:45-15:30 Meeting with H.E. Mr Mihail POPȘOI, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova
- 15:45 -16:30 Meeting with Mr Ion MUNTEANU, Prosecutor General and Ms Veronica DRAGALIN, Chief Prosecutor of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office
- 16:45: 17:30 Meeting with Mr. Alexandru MUSTEAȚA, Head of the Security Service
- 19:00 Dinner hosted by Mr Ion GROZA, Chairperson of the Moldovan delegation to PACE with the participation of members of the Moldovan delegation to PACE

<b>Wednesday, 3 July 2024</b>
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- 09:00-09:45 Meeting with H.E. Maia SANDU, President of the Republic of Moldova
- 10:00-10:40 Meeting with the President and members of the Vetting Commission for judges and prosecutors
- 10:50-11:30 Meeting with Ms Angelica CARAMAN, Chair of the Central Electoral Commission

## **PACE rapporteurs express deep concern about attempts of interference by Russian Federation in upcoming elections in Moldova**

05/07/2024 | [Monitoring](#)

Following their visit to Chisinau from 1 to 3 July 2024, the PACE co-rapporteurs for the monitoring of the Republic of Moldova, Pierre-Alain Fridez (Switzerland, SOC) and Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica (Latvia, EPP/CD), expressed their deep concern about the increasing number of reported attempts by the Russian Federation to nefariously interfere in the domestic politics and electoral processes in the Republic of Moldova.

“We are especially apprehensive about the large influx of Russian money into Moldova with the clear aim to buy votes and subvert the democratic process. These illicit money streams often pass through third Council of Europe member countries, and we urge all States to be alert for this and to take all necessary precautions to counteract such malicious practices,” they said.

The rapporteurs were informed about the ongoing preparations for these elections, including the trail of postal voting in selected countries, with the aim of facilitating the vote of the country’s large diaspora. Welcoming these preparations, they stressed the importance of a stable election legislation based on a broad agreement between the stakeholders and are confident that no further last-minute changes to the election legislation shall take place.

During their visit, the rapporteurs also discussed the ongoing judicial reforms and especially the important vetting of judges and prosecutors. During their meetings, they received information about individual actions that could be perceived as attempts to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the vetting processes. In this context, “we reiterate our strong support for the vetting procedures and vetting commissions, and hope that all other stakeholders would do the same,” they concluded.

The rapporteurs will be returning to Chisinau in September as part of the pre-electoral delegation to observe the upcoming elections and referendum.