

Parliamentary Elections in Moldova 11 July 2021

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Abstract

Moldova is organising snap parliamentary elections on July 11, 2021, with only two years having passed from the 2019 elections. In 2020 presidential elections the majority of Moldovans supported Maia Sandu, who promised to fight corruption and conduct pro-European reforms. Despite having won the presidential election by a landslide, Sandu has been left with a hostile parliament, which has left little opportunity for Sandu to enact the kind of sweeping changes that she promised during her presidential campaign. Therefore, from the beginning of her presidency she and her party have pushed to organise snap parliamentary elections. Maia Sandu's Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) is leading in opinion polls and has the best chances to win the election and even majority of seats in the parliament. The main opposition force, Socialist and Communists electoral alliance is situated in a strong second position and also has a possible chance to achieve victory if they conduct a successful electoral campaign, as previously their popularity has been equal to PAS.

Electoral Code of Moldova

Snap parliamentary elections will be held in Moldova on 11 July 2021. According to the Moldovan electoral code the 101 seats in the Parliament are elected by party-list proportional representation in a single nationwide constituency. An electoral list may contain 51 to 103 candidates. The nation-wide electoral threshold depends on the type of list; for single parties or organisations it is 5%; for an electoral bloc of two or more parties, it is 7%. For independent candidates the threshold is 2%. The Constitution of Moldova mandates that a government must be formed within three months of official results of parliamentary elections being proclaimed by the Constitutional Court.¹ The Moldovan authorities want to open more polling stations abroad (146) to make voting easier and avoid long queues – a

1 – Кодекс о Выборах. № 1381-XIII. Кишинэу. 21.11.1997. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=125214&lang=ru

move that could benefit pro-EU parties in July's parliamentary elections.² Also, for the first time ever, the Moldovan Central Electoral Commission decided to establish three polling stations in the territory which is currently controlled by the so-called Tiraspol authorities. In case of potential incidents and fraud, Moldovan authorities will not be able to intervene in those polling stations, according to critics of this decision.³

Moldovan Acting Prime Minister Aureliu Ciocoi has stressed the need that parliamentary election should be held fairly, inclusively, transparently and in absolute accordance with the European standards.⁴

Political situation in Moldova prior the parliamentary elections

Former prime minister and Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) leader **Maia Sandu** was elected new President of Moldova on 15 November 2020. Maia Sandu became the first woman to lead Moldova as president after winning almost 58% of the vote.⁵

Maia Sandu, a progressive and pro-European candidate who wants closer links between Moldova and the European Union, defeated the incumbent Socialist party (PSRM) leader and sitting president **Igor Dodon**, who is openly pro-Kremlin. Moldova has a political and cultural divide between those that look eastwards and those who look west. Sandu galvanised voters in that latter camp, who see Moldova's future with Europe rather than with Russia. They included many among the between one and two million Moldovans that have left the country (out of a country's four million residents) in recent years to find work and opportunities abroad, the majority of them to the EU and in lesser numbers in Russia. The money that they send home still accounts for some 16% of the country's total GDP.⁶

But despite the fact she beat Igor Dodon, Maia Sandu was left with a parliament that was elected in 2019 and in which her Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) has just 15 of 101 seats.

2 – Madalin Necsutu. Moldova Encourages Diaspora to Vote in Parliamentary Polls. – Balkan Insight. 25.05.2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/05/25/moldova-encourages-diaspora-to-vote-in-parliamentary-polls/>

Moldovan citizens from abroad to participate in snap parliamentary elections at 146 polling stations. – Moldpres. 08.06.2021. <https://www.moldpres.md/en/news/2021/06/08/21004093>

3 – Maria Dulgher. Parliamentary elections: a controversy over the number of polling stations and a (lack of) compromise. – Moldova.org. 10.06.2021. <https://www.moldova.org/en/parliamentary-elections-a-controversy-over-the-number-of-polling-stations-and-the-lack-of-compromise/>

4 – Moldovan acting PM says parliamentary elections must be held in absolute accordance with European standards. – Moldpres. 14.06.2021. <https://www.moldpres.md/en/news/2021/06/14/21004209>

5 – Moldova election: Pro-EU Maia Sandu wins presidency. – Deutsche Welle. 15.11.2020 <https://www.dw.com/en/moldova-election-pro-eu-maia-sandu-wins-presidency/a-55611249>

6 – Orlando Crowcroft. In Moldova, a snap election could help President Maia Sandu finish what she started. – Euronews. 10.05.2021. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/05/10/in-moldova-a-snap-election-could-help-president-maia-sandu-finish-what-she-started>

By contrast, Dodon's Socialist party and its coalition partners have a comfortable majority of 56 seats. Despite having won the presidential election by a landslide, Sandu was thus left with a hostile parliament. The hostile parliament has left little opportunity for Sandu to enact the kind of sweeping changes that she promised during her presidential campaign. In Moldova, legislative power is concentrated in parliament rather than in the president, who has little effective power to implement reform. The present Interim Government, lead by acting prime minister was nominated by president and has worked without support of parliamentary majority.⁷

To find support for her reform plans Maia Sandu wanted from the beginning of 2021 to trigger snap elections. Sandu claimed that an election is needed both to end a political impasse that has left the country without a formal prime minister since Ion Chicu resigned on 23 December 2020, as well as to, in her words, "elect a parliament that truly represents Moldovans, and a government that will work in their best interests."⁸ But under the Article 85 of the Constitution, the Moldovan parliament can be dissolved only if it is impossible to form the government or the procedure of laws' adoption is blocked during three months.⁹

Sandu therefore planned to appoint Natalia Gavrilița to the position of Prime Minister twice in order to trigger early elections. Sandu first nominated Gavrilița to the position on 27 January 2021,¹⁰ with her candidacy being unanimously voted down by the parliament on 11 February.¹¹ The Socialist party (PSRM), and its allies, which had majority in parliament then proposed Mariana Durleșteanu for the position with the support of 54 of 101 MPs,¹² but Sandu instead re-nominated Gavrilița on 11 February 2021. However, the Constitutional Court ruled on 23 February 2021 that Sandu should not have nominated Gavrilița twice.¹³ Sandu then nominated Igor Grosu to the position on 16 March after Durleșteanu withdrew her candidacy. Grosu failed to get his government approved due to the socialist-led opposition boycotting the vote, which resulted in the vote failing due to a lack of a quorum.¹⁴

7 – Orlando Crowcroft. In Moldova, a snap election could help President Maia Sandu finish what she started. – Euronews. 10.05.2021. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/05/10/in-moldova-a-snap-election-could-help-president-maia-sandu-finish-what-she-started>

8 – Craig Turp-Balazs. Moldova's tough president gets the election she wanted. – Emerging Europe. 29.04.2021. <https://emerging-europe.com/news/moldovas-tough-president-gets-the-election-she-wanted/>

9 – Moldovan parliament cannot be self-dissolved. – Moldpres. 18.01.2021. <https://www.moldpres.md/en/news/2021/01/18/21000257>

10 – Moldovan head of state puts forward Natalia Gavrilița for PM office. – Moldpres. 27.01.2021. <https://www.moldpres.md/en/news/2021/01/27/21000575>

11 – 2021 Moldovan parliamentary election. – Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Moldovan_parliamentary_election

12 – Madalin Necsutu. Moldova Socialists Scramble to Stall Snap Election, Fearing Defeat. – Balkan Insight. 16.04.2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/04/16/moldova-socialists-scramble-to-stall-snap-election-fearing-defeat/>

13 – Madalin Necsutu. Moldovan President's Appointment of PM Declared Unconstitutional. – Balkan Insight. 23.02.2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/02/23/moldovan-presidents-appointment-of-pm-declared-unconstitutional/>

14 – Craig Turp-Balazs. Moldova's tough president gets the election she wanted. – Emerging Europe. 29.04.2021. <https://emerging-europe.com/news/moldovas-tough-president-gets-the-election-she-wanted/>

The two failed attempts made early parliamentary elections possible and Sandu asked the Constitutional Court to verify the constitutionality of dissolving parliament and holding snap elections. However, on 31 March Parliament voted to impose a 60-day state of emergency, during which a snap election could not be held, to curb the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵ On 15 April 2021 the Constitutional Court ruled in favour of dissolving parliament and on 28 April the Constitutional Court declared the state of emergency (voted by the Parliament on 31 March to block conducting snap elections) unconstitutional as the decision of Parliament which instituted it was adopted in violation of the rules of procedure, having failed to establish why exactly the executive need extended powers. Later the same day, president Maia Sandu signed the dissolution decree of the Parliament and established the snap parliamentary elections to be held on 11 July 2021.¹⁶

Main political parties in Moldova

The Action and Solidarity Party (Romanian: *Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate*, PAS) is a centre-right liberal pro-EU political party. The PAS leader was till presidential elections Maia Sandu and it currently has only 15 seats in parliament. The PAS supports the integration of Moldova into the European Union, establishing a strategic partnership with the United States and maintaining a normal and non-confrontational relationship with Russia. The party also supports strengthening Moldova's relationship with Romania. The PAS supports the idea of an economy based on private initiative and is in favour of a significant reduction of bureaucracy in all stages of business.¹⁷ In the 2020 Moldovan presidential elections Maia Sandu centered her presidential campaign on eradicating poverty and fighting the corruption in what remains Europe's poorest country.¹⁸

The Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Romanian: *Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova*, PSRM) is a social conservative and Eurosceptic political party in Moldova. It promotes a separate Moldovan identity as opposed to Romanian ethnic identity. The party has an anti-NATO, anti-European Union and pro-Russian stance.¹⁹

The Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (Romanian: *Partidul Comuniștilor din Republica Moldova* (PCRM),) is the rare example of a communist party to have held a

15 – Moldova Introduces Two-Month State Of Emergency To Contain Pandemic. – RFE/RL. 31.03.2021. <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-covid-state-emergency-sandu-criticism-snap-elections/31180618.html>

16 – Craig Turp-Balazs. Moldova's tough president gets the election she wanted. – Emerging Europe. 29.04.2021. <https://emerging-europe.com/news/moldovas-tough-president-gets-the-election-she-wanted/>

17 – Party of Action and Solidarity. – Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Party_of_Action_and_Solidarity

18 – Craig Turp-Balazs. Moldova's tough president gets the election she wanted. – Emerging Europe. 29.04.2021. <https://emerging-europe.com/news/moldovas-tough-president-gets-the-election-she-wanted/>

19 – Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova. – Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Party_of_Socialists_of_the_Republic_of_Moldova

majority in government in the post-Soviet area. It follows Leninist tradition and has been able to attract the votes of ethnic minorities and Moldovans, by supporting Moldovan separate identity and is strongly opposed to any unification of Romania and Moldova.²⁰

The Șor Party (Romanian: *Partidul "ȘOR"*) is led by hideaway businessman and politician **Ilan Șor**, who was central to Moldova's 1-billion-dollar bank fraud case. Party ideology is declared to be based on cultural conservatism, Moldovan identity and Euroscepticism and support for establishing a strong welfare state.²¹

Electoral Bloc "Renato Usatii" (BERU; Romanian: *Blocul electoral "Renato Usatii"*) is a political alliance in the Republic of Moldova between two parties founded by a businessman Renato Usatii, Our Party and Patria Party, in order to participate jointly in the early parliamentary elections. **Our Party** (Romanian: *Partidul Nostru*) is a party led by a politician and businessman **Renato Usati**. Its positions are based on economic nationalism, social conservatism, Euroscepticism, supporting Moldovan identity and pro-Russian foreign policy.²²

The Dignity and Truth Platform Political Party (Romanian: *Partidul Politic "Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr"*, PPDA; stylized as "*Platforma DA*", or "YES Platform") is a centre-right political party in Moldova led by **Andrei Năstase**, a lawyer and former prosecutor, formerly member of ACUM alliance with PAS. It supports a pro-EU reformist agenda and holds a liberal-populist standpoint against corruption in Moldova.²³

The Democratic Party of Moldova (Romanian: *Partidul Democrat din Moldova*, PDM) is a formally centre-left social democratic party led by former Prime Minister **Pavel Philip**. However, during its dominant period in Moldovan politics under influence of oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc. Until leaving Moldova in 2019 he was considered to be controlling Moldova's government and parliamentary majority and party was akin to a "party of power."²⁴

Also, Romania's right-wing nationalist the **Alliance for the Union of the Romanians (AUR) party** has also registered in Moldova, where it intends to take party in the July elections – and create a rejuvenated pro-Romanian force in the country, but in public opinion polls they have so far showed no significant support among Moldovans.²⁵

20 – Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova. – Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Party_of_Communists_of_the_Republic_of_Moldova

21 – Șor Party. – Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C8%98or_Party

22 – Our Party (Moldova). – Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Party_\(Moldova\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Party_(Moldova))

23 – Dignity and Truth Platform Party. – Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dignity_and_Truth_Platform_Party

24 – Democratic Party of Moldova. – Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Party_of_Moldova

25 – Madalin Necsutu. Romanian Nationalist Party Joins Election Race in Moldova. – Balkan Insight. 05.05.2021.
<https://balkaninsight.com/2021/05/05/romanian-nationalist-party-joins-election-race-in-moldova/>

Pre-electoral political situation

Final list of contenders for 11 July parliamentary elections as published by Moldovan Central Electoral Commission on 18 June 2021 includes 23 parties, electoral alliances and single candidates.²⁶

According to the **public opinion polls** conducted in June (CBS-AXA / IPN-EEfD), the most popular parties/blocs are PAS (38% of all respondents, decided voters 50%), PSRM/PCRM alliance (21% of all respondents, decided voters 28%), followed in distance by Electoral Bloc "Renato Usatii" (4.8% of all respondents, decided voters 6%), SOR (3.6% of all respondents, decided voters 5%), DA (2%) and PDM (1%). However, Vox Populi poll conducted earlier in May-June shows more equal competition situation of general support: PAS 36,5%, PSRM/PCRM alliance 36,1%, SOR 7,3%, Electoral Bloc "Renato Usatii" 4,8%, DA (4,4%) and PDM (2,2%).²⁷

Pre-electoral political situation in Moldova is therefore characterised mainly by the political competition between pro-European **The Action and Solidarity Party** (PAS, the party of now President **Maia Sandu** and led in parliamentary elections by party's chairman **Igor Grosu** and vice chairman **Natalia Gavrilița**) and **Socialist** (PSRM, led by former President **Igor Dodon**) and **Communist** (PCRM, led by former president **Vladimir Voronin**) **parties electoral alliance** (as until recently their popularity was comparable to PAS). **SOR** party and **Electoral Bloc "Renato Usatii"** have probably chance to enter the parliament. Other parties and electoral alliances will probably fall below the electoral threshold.

The central issue in elections for Maia Sandu and PAS party is the **fight with corruption**. Maia Sandu has launched before the elections an extra-governmental corruption monitoring body after declaring the state's own institutions "too slow". The new "Anticorruption Independent Consultative Committee" is co-chaired by United States diplomat James Wasserstrom.²⁸

The general programme objectives pursued by the The Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) are:

In politics – building a balanced and integrity political system; the fight against corruption; ensuring the independence of the judiciary; modernization of public administration.

26 –Final list of contenders for 11 July parliamentary elections made public in Moldova. – Moldpres. 18.06.2021. <https://www.moldpres.md/en/news/2021/06/18/21004339>

27 – Opinion polling for the 2021 Moldovan parliamentary election. – Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_2021_Moldovan_parliamentary_election;

Ioana Hurdea. Sondaj fabulos in Moldova: „Maia Sandu va rupe capul mafiei reunite”. Mafia prorusa va cunoaste o infrangere zdrobitoare la alegerile din 11 iulie. – Aktual 24.ro. 21.06.2021. <https://www.aktual24.ro/sondaj-fabulos-in-moldova-maia-sandu-va-rupe-capul-mafiei-reunite-mafia-prorusa-va-cunoaste-o-infrangere-zdrobitoare-la-alegerile-din-11-iulie/>;

Опрос: В парламент Молдовы проходят только три партии. – Комсомольская правда. 08.06.2021. <https://www.kp.md/online/news/4321449/>

28 – President of Moldova Maia Sandu launches committee to investigate grand corruption. – Euronews. 08.06.2021. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/06/08/president-of-moldova-maia-sandu-launches-committee-to-investigate-grand-corruption>

In economy – developing a strong economy based on a healthy private initiative; creating the conditions for increasing the competitiveness of agriculture; development of a modern infrastructure; ensuring environmental protection and sustainable development.

In culture – ensuring a quality education; consolidation of cultural values.

In social sphere – development of accessible and quality health services; providing adequate social protection.

In foreign policy – promoting a foreign policy subordinated to the interests of the citizens; involvement of the diaspora in the development of Moldova.²⁹

PAS politicians' specific pre-electoral promises are to bring to Moldova back "*good times*", meaning economic growth, openness and wealth accumulation. PAS promises to create a stable government that creates the conditions for entrepreneurs to create and grow their businesses, investors who do not fear that their property will be expropriated through court decisions paid by corrupt people. PAS also promises decent wages and pensions, reasonable prices for quality goods and services. PAS also promises balanced budget, which is not stolen by smugglers and corrupt people and regional development.³⁰

In foreign policy PAS promises to create a country open to neighbours and external partners, opening up markets for Moldovan exporters and creating financing conditions for large investment projects that reach every citizen.³¹ PAS foreign policy is also strongly supportive of further integration with the EU. Also, immediately after the presidential elections in 2020, Maia Sandu announced that for unification of a country her goal is the withdrawal Russian troops from Transnistria and replacing them with OSCE observers. Maia Sandu has announced also a desire to join the US-initiated Three Seas Cooperation and renewed relations with neighbouring Romania and Ukraine.³²

In general, it could be said that PAS electoral promises are typical to European centre right liberal party. They promise to build European oriented western type of democracy and welfare society in Moldova, where systemic corruption is eliminated. However, some of their electoral promises in one of the Europe's poorest countries (to create good conditions for businesses and at the same time raise pensions and wages) are populist in character and difficult to realise at the same time. Also, the fighting against corruption, taking its

29 – PAS Programme <https://unpaspentru.md/despre-pas/>

30 – Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate a depus actele la CEC pentru a se înregistra la alegerile parlamentare anticipate: „Pornim vremurile bune”. PAS candidate's electoral statements. May 17,2021 <https://unpaspentru.md/2021/05/14/21671/>

31 – Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate a depus actele la CEC pentru a se înregistra la alegerile parlamentare anticipate: „Pornim vremurile bune”. PAS candidate's electoral statements. May 17,2021 <https://unpaspentru.md/2021/05/14/21671/>

32 – Aap Neljas. Analysis of Moldovan Political Situation and Reforms 2019-2021. – ECEAP. Publications. 08.03.2021 <https://eceap.eu/publication/analysis-of-moldovan-political-situation-and-reforms-2019-2021/>

extent in Moldova, will be a very challenging exercise. However, in foreign policy PAS will be orientated towards deepening integration with the EU and probably will be more ready to fulfil association agenda than their contenders.

Socialist PSRM party promises in its programme to uphold Moldovan statehood and neutrality, Moldovan identity, historical memory, traditional values, interethnic world, pro-Moldovan foreign policy and so-called eastern vector. Also, the unification of the country through political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. In social sphere they promise “state for people” that guarantees social justice. In economic sphere they promise to build advanced economy, to create effective state bureaucracy and fight corruption. In regional and environmental sphere they promise to develop regions and defend interests of local producers set goal of clean environment.³³

Compared to PAS the PSRM (and PCRM³⁴) support different geopolitical orientation. They see Moldova’s future in close cooperation with Russia as opposed to cooperation with West and neighbouring Romania. Clearly, they also sympathize with Russia’s more autocratic style of government. They also promote separate Moldovan identity, that is a legacy of Soviet period and the unification with Transnistria on the basis of such identity. With their appeal to the “traditional values” of the family and anti-LGBT stance, the left-wing but socially conservative parties aim to consolidate their support among the traditional electorate.³⁵ In general, their programme is also more left leaning and supporting more state support in social sphere. In economy their promise to support local producers could interfere with Moldova’s obligations under Free Trade Agreement with the EU. Also, their pro-Russian stance would mean less interest in fulfilling association agenda with the EU in general.

Moldovan elections are characterized also by promises for external support coming to main contestants. On 2 June 2021, with barely a month to go until a snap parliamentary election in Moldova, the European Commission, announced an economic recovery plan for the impoverished country worth up to 600 million euros in macro-financial assistance, subsidies and investment. A day later, Russia made a counter-offer – a loan of an unspecified amount on condition there is “political stability” in Moldova.³⁶

Conclusion

Presently there is no reason to doubt, that Moldovan elections will be conducted in free and competitive manner. The main contentious issue is opening polling stations abroad (both in

33 – Програма Партии Социалистов Республики Молдова <https://socialistii.md/ru/>

34 – Програма Партии Коммунистов Республики Молдова <http://www.e-democracy.md/ru/parties/pcrm/>

35 – Iulian Ernst. Moldovan left-wing coalition begins electoral campaign with anti-LGBT bills. – bne IntelliNews. 14.05.2021. <https://intellinews.com/moldovan-left-wing-coalition-begins-electoral-campaign-with-anti-lgbt-bills-210556/>

36 – Madalin Necsutu. BIRN Fact-check: Aid Offers and Counter-Offers in a Moldovan Election. – Balkan Insight. 16.06.2021. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/06/16/birn-fact-check-aid-offers-and-counter-offers-in-a-moldovan-election/>

West and Russia) and in separatist Transnistrian territory. It could influence electoral results as many of country's inhabitants reside abroad or in not Government controlled territory.

From the point of view of European integration, if the PAS wins elections and forms the government, it could be expected, that they will want to work closely with the EU, as well as with Ukraine and Georgia to forward the goal of deepening association with the EU. At same time, the relations with Russia and Russian backed Transnistrian separatist could become more confrontational. If the PSRM/ PCRM alliance wins, the country might orientate more towards Russia and will have less enthusiasm for European integration.

Presently it seems the PAS party is leading in opinion polls and has the best chances to win election and even majority of seats in the parliament. Socialist and Communists electoral alliance is situated in the strong second position and also have chance of winning elections, as previously their popularity was comparable to PAS³⁷ and public opinion can change again to their favour depending on their electoral campaign success. If, however, neither of the main parties will not be achieve clear majority, and the smaller parties succeed in entering parliament, their support could be decisive which of the main parties achieves the ruling position.

37 – Opinion polling for the 2021 Moldovan parliamentary election. – Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_2021_Moldovan_parliamentary_election