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NEWSLETTER

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Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The materials are realized by Lina Grau, foreign policy expert and programme coordinator with APE.

TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. The Republic of Moldova after the first round of presidential elections. The first statements of **Igor Dodon** and **Maia Sandu**, and the reactions of the electoral competitors excluded from the presidential race.
2. Experts' opinions about the first round of presidential elections: **Arcadie Barbaroșie**, **Victor Chirilă**, **Pavel Postică**, **Nadine Gogu**, **Sorin Ioniță**
3. **Andi Cristea**: The west should remain Moldova's soul project

The last period was marked by several important events for Moldova.



The observer mission of OSCE and other organizations that have monitored the first round of presidential elections from October 30th concluded that, in general, the elections complied with the criteria of free and fair elections, despite the criticism as to the use of administrative resources, biased coverage of the election campaign in the media, lack of transparency in the financing of candidates and the atmosphere of the electoral campaign.



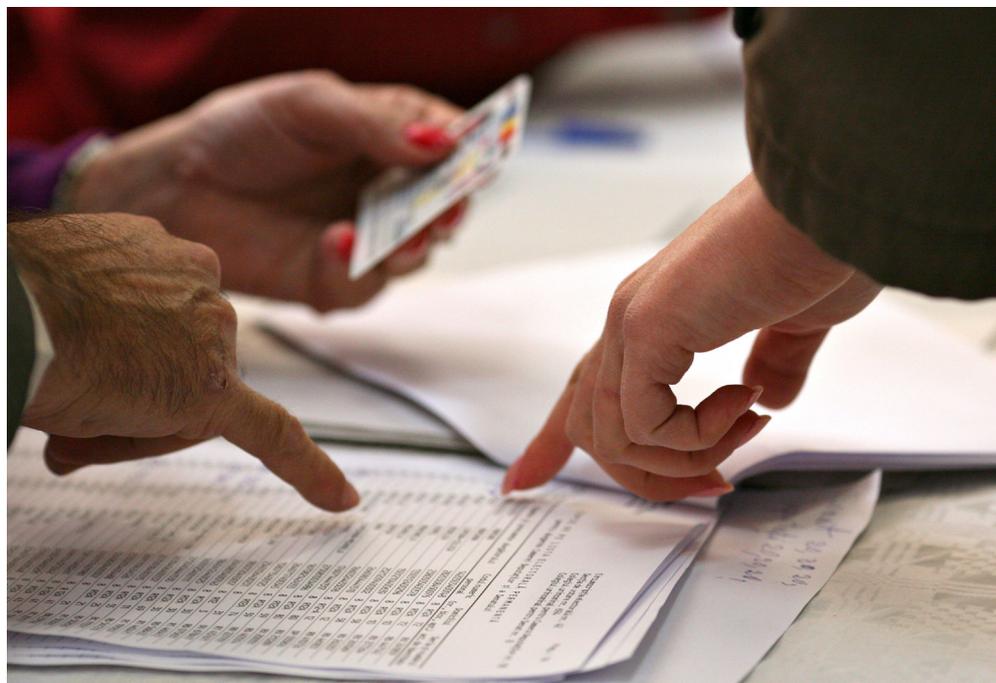
The Romanian President, Klaus Johannis, expressed hope that the second round of presidential elections in Moldova will take place "in compliance with the European standards for the conduct of elections- fairness and transparency". The Romanian leader did not mention any explicit support for any of the two remaining candidates in the race, but his message says that Moldova should continue "the process of reforms in the European spirit". However, the ex-Romanian President, Traian Basescu, expressed explicit support for the pro-European candidate, Maia Sandu.



While several Romanian politicians welcomed the entry of Maia Sandu in the presidential runoff, the Moscow officials emphasised that the good score of Igor Dodon shows how big the potential of Eurasian integration in Moldova is.

The Ukrainian Ambassador to Moldova, Ivan Gnațișin, was called to Kiev for consultations, according to Realitatea TV. The reasons were not announced, but according to Interfax.ua, this happened in the context of the results of the presidential elections, according to which the candidate Igor Dodon obtained more than 48% of the votes. The press agency is reminding that during the electoral debates, Igor Dodon said Crimea belongs to Russia, a fact which worries the Ukrainian authorities.

The Republic of Moldova after the first round of presidential elections



For the first time in the last 20 years, the Moldovans have been called to the ballot boxes to elect the president. The elections held Sunday, October 30th, have ended with a turnout of just 48.95 percent, propelling in the runoff the Socialist Party leader, Igor Dodon, with 47.98 percent, and the chairwoman of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS),

Maia Sandu, who was voted by 38.71 percent of voters.

The socialists' leader Igor Dodon, missed more than two percent to win the first round, obtaining a high score that was not predicted by the public opinion polls. On the other hand, the observers have noticed a strong mobilization of

the voters around Maia Sandu, a new politician on the Moldovan political arena, who succeeded without major media support and without large financial investment. The data of the Central Election Commission (CEC) show that PAS has spent 1MDL per vote. Maia Sandu was the joint candidate supported by the Dignity and Truth Platform (DA) led by Andrei Nastase, and the Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) led by Viorel Cîbotaru.

Approximately 93.44% of voters cast their votes for the candidates of the opposition parties, while only 4.91% voted for the candidates of the ruling parties.

The Liberal Party Chairman, Mihai Ghimpu, has accumulated 1.8% of votes, the chairman of the European People's Party of Moldova, Iurie Leanca, has scored 3.11%, and Dmitri Ciubashenco, the candidate of Renato Usatii's Our Party has been voted by 6.03% of voters. From among the independent candidates the best placed is the Baptist pastor Valeriu Ghilețchi with 1.08%, followed by the professional protester Maia Laguta with 0.76%. The former director of Union Fenosa, Silvia Radu, was voted by 0.37% and the Right Party chairwoman, Ana Gutu, obtained 0.17%.

Regarding the profile of Moldovan voters who voted in the first round, 10.07% are aged between 18 and 25; 26.36% - between 26-40; 26.02% - between 41-55; 29.06% - between 56-70; and 8.49% represents the voters aged over 71.

Diaspora was less active than in the parliamentary elections from 2014. Approximately 67,000 citizens voted at the polling stations opened abroad, which is by 6,000 people less than in 2014.

Lina Grău

Igor Dodon: I'm calling on the left-wing forces to unite and obtain a deafening victory



The chairman of the Socialist Party, Igor Dodon and the leading candidate of the first round of presidential elections with 47,98%, said his results in the first round are much better than the polls showed and that the Moldovan citizens want a leftist government. He said that if the left-wing parties had had a single candidate, they would have won in the first round. Dodon has estimated a victory in the runoff by 52% if he runs on his own, or 60% if he is supported by other leftist parties, calling on Maia Sandu to prepare for defeat. He stressed the citizens have to choose in the second round "between the opposition and the one who has been seven years in government together with Plahotniuc".

Igor Dodon: "I am firmly convinced that Maia Sandu will lose in the second round. And I think they understand that. So, my dear political opponent Maia Sandu, get ready to lose these elections.

You haven't grown up enough to win these elections."

Igor Dodon came up with a message to the voters and the leftist parties in Russian language:

Igor Dodon: "We are much more in Moldova – let's consolidate our forces. Why can the right-wing parties unite and we cannot? I'm asking first Usatii, Cibașenco, Voronin. Let's leave aside the personal ambitions. The fight among the leftist parties will only strengthen the right-wing parties. If we fight between ourselves, Plahotniuc and the Americans will be the ones to win.

That is why I'm calling on all supporters and members of other leftist parties. There are several clear things that unite us - we want early elections, we all want to remove Plahotniuc from power, we want good relations with the Russian Federation, we advocate for the Moldovan statehood, language and history, we advocate for neutrality and for our orthodoxy.

And now when the Moldovan statehood is under real threat, the question that stands is: to be or not to be. That is why, I'm calling to unity so that we can win and make this victory deafening. I'm calling to unite our efforts for a victory in the runoff as we have the same values that unite us."

Igor Dodon said the Socialist Party will mobilize in the next two weeks to work in the districts with low turnout in order to mobilize the voters there.

Maia Sandu: Nobody thought it was possible, but together we have succeeded

The chairwoman of the *Solidarity and Action Party (PAS)*, *Maia Sandu*, placed second in the first round of presidential elections with 38,71 percent, held a press conference together with the leader of the *Dignity and Truth Platform (DA)*, *Andrei Nastase*, and the chairman of the *Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM)*, *Viorel Cîbotaru* – the political forces that supported a single candidate in the presidential elections.

Maia Sandu thanked all those who voted for her, particularly the supporters of other right-wing parties, and called for mobilization in the second round.

Maia Sandu: “Nobody believed it was possible, but we have succeeded together. We are celebrating today the first common victory over the lies and theft. The elections have shown it very clearly - we have a weak government. The soap bubble has broken. The people’s vote has confirmed that this government is totally illegitimate and is not representing anyone.”

Maia Sandu asked for massive support in the second round in order to win. She replied to *Igor Dodon*, who said that in the runoff “the people will have to choose between the opposition and the one who has governed together with *Plahotniuc*



for seven years,” accusing him of being the oligarch’s business partner for years.”

Maia Sandu: “In Moldova there is room for both right and left wing parties. Now, it is important to mobilize to ensure a truly democratic environment for all political forces. My opponent, *Igor Dodon*, says he wants to be the president of the leftists, while I will be the president of all citizens of Moldova.

Dodon declares himself to be anti-oligarch. He is lying. In reality, he shared with *Plahotniuc* all the illegal schemes through which they make their fortunes. He has never fought against corruption and he will not do it from now on.

I’m calling on you to mobilize. We have another two weeks at our disposal. Let’s bring the truth in

every home and convince other people to join us.”

According to the Central Election Commission, the electoral campaign of *Maia Sandu* was made with minimum investment of 1MDL per voter. This is how *Maia Sandu* is explaining it:

Maia Sandu: “We have shown that when our goals are sincere and meet the citizens’ expectations, no money is needed. Because we are many—those who are ready to cooperate and make an effort for ourselves and not for the dirty money paid in campaigns. I think this is the most important victory. This is how we are going to change the political class and prove that politics can be done by honest people who do not necessarily have big financial resources.”

Iurie Leancă: I'm inviting you to vote for Maia Sandu

The presidential candidate and chairman of the Moldovan European People's Party, Iurie Leanca, who obtained 3.1%, welcomed Maia Sandu's accession in the second round and promised unconditional support for a victory over her counter candidate, Igor Dodon.

Iurie Leancă: "Maia Sandu has a chance today to fight with Igor Dodon and bridge the votes that separate them. Let's not lose this chance. Regardless of the differences between us in the electoral campaign, Maia Sandu is today the last chance to avoid Igor Dodon's reign in Moldova. I will vote for Maia Sandu. I'm inviting you to vote for Maia Sandu and bring your family and friends to vote, because every vote counts."



Iurie Leanca admitted he had a poor result in the elections, but said he did not withdraw before elections, because there was a risk that his votes might not have been channelled

immediately to Maia Sandu, rather contribute to abstention from voting, which could have benefited the socialist Igor Dodon and would have ensured his victory in the first round."

Iurie Leancă: "I took into account the fact that my voters could not have immediately oriented towards Maia Sandu. These 3% that I have been left with despite the defamation campaigns are a loyal electorate, a solid electorate that could have stayed at home as they were not ready to mobilize in the first round for Maia Sandu. I wanted to avoid at all costs Dodon's victory in the first round and I'd like to think I've also had a role in preventing the triumphant march of the socialist."

Dorin Chirtoacă: Maia Sandu will be president in two weeks, but we all need to mobilize

Dorin Chirtoaca, mayor of Chisinau and the first vice chairman of the Liberal Party, whose leader, Mihai Ghimpu, obtained 1.8% in the first round of elections, has welcomed the relaunch of what he called the "pro-European vote" and said Maia Sandu has a chance to win, but for that there is need for a total mobilization of the right-wing electorate.

Dorin Chirtoacă: The "Pro-European vote was relaunched in Chisinau and consolidated and expanded strongly in the central region of the country. In Chisinau, Dodon got 20 thousand votes less than in 2011. Congratulations, Ms. Maia Sandu! And, Igor Dodon, get ready

to already traditionally lose in the runoff election. However, this requires total mobilization and there is room for it.

I tell you frankly that after the 2015 local elections I was worried that we have stayed here as an island, because only in Chisinau things were moving in the pro-European direction that we started in 2007. And we didn't know what was going to happen. Now it is clear that the desire for Europe is growing, it has been revived and it is strengthening. Now, step by step, we will manage to overcome poverty, corruption, and oligarchs. And then the most important step will follow – the unification. Eventually, this will happen sooner or later.



But this "Colorado beetle" has to be crushed and this will happen in the second round, while Maia Sandu will become president in two weeks. But we all need to mobilize."

Opinii ale experților:

Arcadie Barbaroșie: The society wants the change of the political class and we could see this in elections

The director of the Institute for Public Policy, Arcadie Barbaroșie, doesn't think the results of the first round of elections are surprising and says the score in the runoff is going to be extremely tight.



Arcadie Barbaroșie: There is no big surprise. One of the few surprises is that we have a lower turnout than in the 2014 parliamentary elections. More than 160 thousand citizens chose not to participate in these elections.

Virtually all observers forecasted a high participation rate for the following reasons: first, we have had direct presidential elections that we haven't had for 20 years; second, in the polls, about 80% of the respondents, varying slightly from one poll to another, were in favour of parliamentary elections. In fact, this means there must have been a major interest in these elections. What happened is that the interest expressed in the polls has not translated into a higher participation rate.

It is hard to explain why. Maybe the election campaign was too short or the candidates may not have met the citizens' expectations and preferred to stay at home. This remains to be analyzed. A relatively low turnout is observed among the youth though not very low. The number accounts for 10 percent of the voters between 18 and 25 years old. This segment accounts for 13% of total voters in the statistics if I'm not mistaken. I mean, yes, there is an underrepresentation of this segment of the electorate, but not that big. I think it is the candidates to blame as they failed to attract this segment of voters, but probably this is also an older problem of our youth that have generally shown a pronounced civic passivity.

What has surprised many people was Lupu's withdrawal from the race. The way it was done - without any internal consultations in the Democratic Party - was interpreted by many as a step to facilitate Igor Dodon's victory already in the first round. The fact that this has been a conscious policy promoted by the leadership of the Democratic Party was seen from the enormous pressure put on another candidate from within the same electoral segment - Dmitri Ciubashenco - through his employer, the leader of Our Party, Renato Usatîi. Usatîi has been issued an international arrest warrant, while some of his colleagues from Balti were detained... These, I think, demonstrate very clearly the interest of the Democratic Party in promoting Igor Dodon as president in the first round. Perhaps, this is also the cause of the ban imposed to Mr. Lurie Leanca to leave the electoral race. Many assume this prohibition did exist, although it has not been publicly expressed. Both Mr Leanca and Mr Mihai Ghimpu, controlled, in the opinion of many people, by Mr. Plahotniuc, remained in the election race as well as Mr. Valeriu Ghilețchi, the independent candidate. And they have attracted, of course, the pro-European votes.

So we cannot say the withdrawal of Mr Marian Lupu had explicitly the role to support Ms Maia Sandu in order to win in the first round.

Another important thing worth mentioning and noticed also by the observers is that Plahotniuc's media holding has worked, de facto, sometimes subtly and other times less subtle in order to undermine Sandu's campaign - lies and direct allusions of alignment with Mr. Plahotniuc...

To add to this, the fact that the church involved in the most direct, brazen, and shameless way to support Igor Dodon is not a new thing: the church in our country has always supported the power and made partners with those in power no matter if they were communists or so-called democratic pro-Europeans.

Lina Grâu: Mr Barbaroșie, you are a sociologist and if we look at the score the two leading candidates obtained, what do they tell you?

Arcadie Barbăroșie: I think, if you look at the figures, a first conclusion is that Maia Sandu and her team have obtained a remarkable success in the elections given the extremely

limited resources. According to the financial declaration of PAS, the party and its partners have spent about 1Moldovan Leu for every vote and thus have demonstrated that it is possible to do politics also with modest means and that a different politics can be done in Moldova.

Lina Grău: What messages does this first round of elections convey as regard to the domestic politics in the Republic of Moldova? On one hand, we are witnessing the disappearance of the Communist Party from the political scene, and on the other hand, the consolidation of the right-wing segment of the electorate around the newly created party of Maia Sandu. Are we witnessing a beginning of a new political stage in Moldova?

Arcadie Barbăroșie: If you look at the Barometer of Public Opinion, 60% of respondents want the change of the political class. This is a very clear message which has been seen also in the Sunday's elections results. It is very clear that the PLDM is disappearing as well as the Liberal Party - Mr. Ghimpu's results are absolutely deplorable. He was defeated even in Bucharest by Igor Dodon.

And this means, actually, that the citizens want new parties. The "old" parties didn't meet their needs and thus new parties emerge on the so-called pro-European segment. So, PAS led by Maia Sandu and the DA Platform will maintain themselves on the political arena. The two parties will make full use of this electoral campaign to promote themselves and prepare for the 2018 parliamentary elections.

The results confirm once again the geo-strategic changes in the public opinion. For several years, the orientation towards the inexistent Eurasian Union has been supported by a larger segment of the electorate than the European orientation. This could be seen also in the presidential election results. The political actors supporting the European orientation should think very well about the messages they convey and try to understand the causes that led to this change in the public opinion and respond to them.

Lina Grău: What are your expectations from the presidential runoff and what are your messages to the electorate and the political class?

Arcadie Barbăroșie: My message for the society is that the turnout in the first round of presidential elections is unacceptably low. I'm calling on voters to participate in the elections, otherwise you cannot complain there are no changes in the country and that the country's leadership is not delivering on its promises as they had made promises only to those who vote. And those who did not vote should assume

the responsibility for the fact that changes don't occur as expected by them.

In addition, there is need for a more active participation in the elections of the youth. This is the solution if you want to combat corruption, to get the billion back, to take the burden of the theft off our shoulders and put it on the shoulders of the thieves, to punish the thieves, and if you want a better life. Every single vote counts and this is not just rhetoric.

As to the politicians, I'm calling on them to review their platforms, the discourse and try to mobilize the voters.

Lina Grău: So you think the score will be rather tight in the second round?

Arcadie Barbăroșie: The score is going to be very tight, as shown by our experience over the last years. For example, in the municipal elections in Chisinau Dorin Chirtoaca won due to the extraordinary mobilization of the pro-European voters in the runoff election.

Victor Chirilă: The society wants changes and is looking for new political leaders



The executive director of the Foreign Policy Association, Victor Chirila, says the results of the first round of presidential elections show that the Moldovan society wants changes and is looking for new political leaders, and that the results

of the second round will depend very much on how the two opponents will manage to mobilize their voters.

Victor Chirilă: As for me, Igor Dodon's results were as expected, especially after the withdrawal of the Democratic Party's candidate, Marian Lupu. Maia Sandu's results was a nice surprise and we must admit that was an achievement. To some extent, the people have mobilized, except for the younger generation, unfortunately. And, I think, in the next two weeks we will all have to look for answers to the question: "Why didn't the young people go to vote?" We will also have to persuade the youth to participate in the runoff from November 13th. By and large, I think the results were as expected.

Lina Grâu: How do you find the results? What is the message they send in the country?

Victor Chirilă: Both Dodon's and Maia Sandu's vote, I would say, is a protesting vote. The society wants changes and this is the key message that our politicians need to understand. The people want a real change in their daily life.

Lina Grâu: As for the message regarding the geo-strategic orientation, we are facing two options: if Igor Dodon wins, we can talk about a reorientation of Moldova towards the Customs Union and the Russian Federation, and if Maia Sandu wins, she will have to face quite a difficult situation- a Eastern- oriented parliamentary opposition, while she will have to promote the European course. How do you assess this situation?

Victor Chirilă: I think the first thing that our foreign partners will pay attention to is that our society is divided and polarized between East and West. I think this is of serious concern to them, because this means that the society is actually not ready, not mobilized enough to make changes and that the geo-political struggles will prevail in the coming years in Moldova, while the reforms could stagnate.

Therefore, our partners, especially the western partners, will expect from the next president to be a person able to mobilize the whole society and try to build bridges between these two parts of the society; to focus on real reforms and less on geopolitics; to try to encourage the state institutions and the political class, but also to mobilize the society to make real changes in the field of justice, combating corruption, improving the business climate in Moldova, solving social problems, such as, for example, the pension system reform, which is at its limits.

So these are actually the objectives the western partners would like the president to focus on.

Lina Grâu: During the elections you have hosted a mission of international observers from abroad- a group of journalists and foreign experts who observed the Sunday's elections in Moldova. What are the most important messages you could pick up from your conversations?

Victor Chirilă: The western partners would like that the energy of our society and of the political class is not consumed on the geo-political fight but rather on the strengthening of the state institutions, on the judiciary reform, fight against corruption, Transnistrian settlement and consolidation of the society, regardless of the nationality of our fellow citizens. This is,

actually, the key message of our Western partners.

They want that finally a political class and political leaders emerge that would talk less about where we are heading to – East or West- but would do concrete things in order to stabilize the political and economic situation in the country. The people would then decide for themselves which way to go- to the West or the East- and what is representing them better. Every citizen wants to have a decent life in Moldova and that the institutions work for him and not for a certain person or group of people, that the banking system is credible and strengthened. These are real things. The candidate who will be able to formulate concrete messages around these priorities will win the elections.

I think Maia Sandu has this chance, but she needs the support of the society. It is important that the TV channels belonging to Mr. Plahotniuc offer her a chance to convey this message to our citizens. Unfortunately, I have not seen, despite the fact that PDM said it supports Maia Sandu, for Plahotniuc's TV channels to support Maia Sandu very actively.

Lina Grâu: In conclusion, what is the message sent by these elections and what is your message to the Moldovan society for the second election round?

Victor Chirilă: The message is clear: the society wants changes and is looking for new political leaders who will help them achieve the changes in a short time, and my message would be: the Moldovans, if they care about their future and life, about the country where they grew up, should go to vote and support the candidate who can fulfil these wishes.

Pavel Postică: No violation of the electoral process should be overlooked



The Promo-Lex Association has organized this year an observers' mission that was present at almost every polling station in Moldova and partially at the polling stations opened abroad. The mission's mandate included monitoring of the electoral campaign, therefore, we asked the head of the observers' mission, Pavel Postica, to point out the main



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problems identified in connection with the preparation of the first round of elections.

Pavel Postică: There exist shortcomings in the regulatory framework that was adopted in haste: there are certain loopholes that allow, especially for the political parties to conduct parallel and hidden campaigns in order to promote the political party, on one hand, and the potential candidate or even the registered candidate, on the other hand.

Another problem has to do with the financing of the campaign for collection of signatures as well as of the electoral campaign itself. There were cases when the Central Election Commission accepted reports with zero expenditures even though it was obvious that the transportation of subscription lists in the country areas and back to Chisinau involved at least transportation costs.

Another major issue was the use of administrative resources by most of political actors who had such opportunities: starting from the ruling party in the central government and ending up with the parties, including the opposition ones, who have elected mayors and thus access to local government.

Regarding the election day, the turnout was not the best, but at least it was above the minimum threshold necessary to validate the elections.

During the election day, there have been observed several types of incidents most of which could affect the will of the voters. Most of them happened in the Orhei region where the voters were intimidated to come to exercise their right to vote. The others were isolated incidents – power failures that affected the access to internet, cases of intimidation and violence inside or near the polling stations, including obstruction of observers in carrying out monitoring work. The most evident were the organized transportation of voters, especially at polling stations where the Transnistrian residents voted, and cases of intimidation of voters and observers. Even though not very serious, they still created a bit of tension and pressure.

Lina Grâu: Mr. Postică, in the opinion of the observers' mission, how serious are these violations? Can they question the fairness of elections or they are minor issues that can be overlooked?

Pavel Postică: I think none of the violations of the electoral process should be overlooked. From our point of view, any situation should be treated seriously.

In our opinion, only the situation from Orhei, in one way or another, could affect directly the election process, while the other cases attested by the Promo-Lex observers don't seem to have influenced directly the voters' options or their presence at the ballot box.

Lina Grâu: Regarding the issue which was pretty much discussed in the election campaign and that refers to the increasing number of voters on the voting lists announced by the Central Electoral Commission, some political parties were quick to announce that it was an attempt of election rigging, as in Moldova there are not so many people with the right to vote as it appears in the voting lists. Have you analysed the situation?

Pavel Postică: Our observers have payed special attention to the voting lists. Obviously, we have found out certain problems regarding the quality of the voting lists and namely problems with the quality of data in the state registrar of voters. But we don't fully agree with those who say that the voting lists contain many errors.

Yes, we have attested an increase in the number of voters in the state registrar of voters, but I would like to make an important remark here: the increase in the number of voters in the state registrar is parallel to the decrease in the number of voters on the supplementary voters' lists of each polling station. This is, in one way or another, an indication of the quality of the lists as the smaller the number of voters on the supplementary electoral lists, the cleaner and more qualitative the main voting lists are.

Regarding the increase in the number of voters, most often various candidates or political actors use the electoral lists as an instrument in the political struggle. We have more than 3 million 200 thousand voters in the state registrar of voters. We have to admit that at least 220 thousand voters residing in Transnistria are not directly subordinated to any polling station. We have to admit also that about 160 thousand voters who have no home or residence just cannot be subordinated to the polling stations. And if we deduct these numbers from the total of 3 million 200 thousand, we will get approximately the figure that reflects the reality - about 2 million 800 thousand in the main voting lists.

Secondly, the remark that the Moldovan population is decreasing is true. But when it comes to the elections, the comparison should take account of the situation from 18 years ago –the births that occurred 18 years ago compared to the deaths in the current year. In 2016 there is a negative

population growth as there are more deaths than births, but if we compare it with the situation 18 years ago, the population growth is still positive.

Lina Grâu: Promo-Lex has done also a parallel vote count in the first round. Do your results correspond to the official results?

Pavel Postică: We were not able to process all the vote-counting minutes compare to the Central Election Commission, because we did not have observers in all of the polling stations abroad, we had observers only in 44 out of 100 polling stations. Accordingly, our vote-count cannot be compared with the official count.

However, the data we have collected in all the other polling stations, except for the 58 polling stations where we had no information from, have in general confirmed the figures announced by the Central Election Commission. Certainly, no candidate has obtained the majority of 50% plus one that would have allowed him/her to become president in the first round. Respectively, we will be facing a runoff on November 13th.

Nadine Gogu: The politically controlled media didn't inform but made propaganda and manipulated instead



The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) and the Independent Press Association (API) have monitored during the election campaign the mass media from the point of view of fair and balanced coverage of the candidates and their

electoral platforms. Manipulation and political partisanship were the greatest sins of most of the media outlets affiliated to political owners, says Nadine Gogu, the director of the Centre for Independent Journalism.

Nadine Gogu: We have started the monitoring of the media during the election period, in mid-September and we have monitored the situation for two weeks in order

to see whether or not the media covered the electoral candidates. From our observations, they have been pretty much involved, making propaganda and even campaigning in favour of certain candidates.

We will see it in the next two weeks if the things have changed. We anticipate changes as the picture is different now: we have only two candidates.

Lina Grâu: What are the main observations in terms of the media monopolization? What candidates have been particularly favored?

Nadine Gogu: We have found out problems related to the manipulation of information, biased news, mixture of facts and opinions at seven or eight of the 12 stations monitored. In fact, we have often seen teams of journalists accompanying the electoral staff of a candidate, going to different places and coming out with positive materials in which the respective competitor appeared in a positive light.

Often, when it came to the competitor's opponents, there appeared calumnious news, while certain experts and representatives of the civil society invited to the TV programmes were supporting their point of view. Typically, they were praising one competitor and attacking his/her opponent.

Lina Grâu: What were the most favoured political parties in this electoral campaign and respectively, what are the media trusts affiliated to them? Could you tell what media belongs to whom?

Nadine Gogu: Yes, of course. The four private TV stations with national coverage belonging to Plahotniuc, have clearly favoured the Democratic Party candidate, Marian Lupu.

Mention should be made that these four TV stations, despite the legal requirements according to which they should broadcast election debates in order to provide access to all candidates, during the monitoring period, no debates were organised from 6 pm until 12 am. We have found out later that on Saturdays and Sundays they broadcast debates at 6 am. This issue has been discussed at the Audio-visual Coordination Centre. This is a kind of defiance both of the law and common sense, as people usually watch news in the evening wanting to get informed about the election campaign and electoral candidates.

Lina Grău: If you compare the current election campaigns with the ones you've monitored before, what is your assessment of what is happening in the media in this campaign? Are we talking about radicalization, more propaganda and political partisanship in this election campaign?

Nadine Gogu: We cannot talk about political partisanship in the case of all media, because generally, in the media monitored the situation is not that bad. There were TV stations and online portals that have had a balanced coverage.

It is important that the broadcasters, especially those that use state frequencies and have national coverage, have a balanced behaviour. Even if we ignore the rules regarding the covering of the electoral campaigns imposed by the Central Election Commission, the Audiovisual Code has its own provisions that should be respected by all broadcasters and applied by the Broadcasting Coordinating Council. The latter, however, did not do that.

Comparing the current electoral campaign with the one from 2014, I would say the situation has been worse now. Before they tried at least to simulate a certain objectivity, balance and there was no such discrepancy as we have seen in the current electoral campaign when some candidates were openly favoured, while others - disfavoured.

Lina Grău: It's being very much discussed now who is the candidate supported by Plahotniuc. Judging by the way his media trust has reflected the campaign, what can you say about the leading candidates Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu? Can you draw a conclusion from the way the two candidates were presented, who is the favoured candidate of Plahotniuc's media trust?

Nadine Gogu: It was interesting for us in the last days before the election to monitor and see if something has changed in the behavior of those four broadcasters after the statement was made that they would support a pro-European candidate.

We have analysed all the news and topics and could see clearly that, in fact, indirectly, Igor Dodon was favored and not Maia Sandu. They haven't done it that openly and the manipulation was more professional and one had to read between the lines. But anyway, the messages that are continued to be sent are anti-Maia Sandu, as it was the case at least one week before the elections.

Sorin Ioniță: A vote of no confidence against the political class that has been in power over the last years



The political analyst and the director of the Expert Forum Romania, Sorin Ioniță, has been accredited as an international observer in the first round of presidential elections and has closely monitored the election campaign. We asked Sorin

Ioniță what he thinks about the results of the first round of presidential elections in Moldova.

Sorin Ioniță: I think the outcome of the first round of presidential elections in Moldova is unexpected. And it's good what's been happening over the last three weeks, precisely when the parties led by Maia Sandu and Andrei Nastase have decided to support a single candidate in the elections. And I think the results have been noticed. Actually the surprise was when the decision was adopted as the people were not hoping that was possible. And this is the result of that wise decision. And if some were saying that a common candidate will take less than the votes of the two put together, what happened was that they obtained even more than that. This means the voters can give a bonus and support good ideas.

But, sure, it's about the first round of elections. At one point, on Sunday night, we were wondering if there would be a second round, so in that sense, this result can be considered a success.

On the other hand, the turnout was fairly low everywhere, which is kind of a vote of censure to everyone, to the entire political class in general, especially to those who have been in power for many years.

And the third and final conclusion: the loser is not Igor Dodon, but the Government- which by withdrawing the chairman of the Democratic Party, Marian Lupu,- that has clearly counted on Igor Dodon's victory already in the first round. So the battle is not finished. So far, it's the government that lost. We don't know if Dodon or Maia Sandu will lose, but we can certainly say that the government and the party that controls the government have lost quite a lot. Sure, when you give up on your own candidate and still want to be the main ruling party, it is a bit bizarre. Well, these are presidential elections and they will say now that what matters are the future parliamentary elections.

And that is true, what counts are the parliamentary elections, but it is important to bring to a good end the presidential elections and thus maintain a balance of power at the top of the state. Because what follows are the appointment of the prosecutor general and important decisions and, even if the President does not have direct executive powers, it is an important voice that keeps the balance.

Lina Grău: You have monitored other electoral campaigns before. Where does this unexpected result come from in your opinion?

Sorin Ioniță: The decision to create a political pole that people had no much hope for and the fact that an alternative has been created was extraordinary. The public has responded immediately. It is true that these people do not form a majority yet but they are important and they are awaiting something different- an alternative. And this is how they responded to this call.

In the second round, both candidates will have to fight for their own electorate in order to bring them from home. I think this is a vast reserve. It is assumed that the votes of Usatîi's party will go to Dodon, while the votes of the remaining two parties led by Mihai Ghimpu and Iurie Leanca will go to Maia Sandu and thus the scores are likely to be cancelled. So the big fight will be fought for those who did not vote, the undecided, diaspora, young people who had a low turnout maybe because many of them are away. So these are the reserves on the right wing.

Regarding the socialist camp, we will witness a mobilization of the party apparatus, taking people to vote. It will depend very much on how the mayors of the Democratic Party will act as well as the mayors who don't have a candidate of their own party. So all of these "ifs" will build the presidential runoff.

Lina Grău: Speaking about the low turnout of the youth, many people, at least on the social networks, are blaming the young people for their lack of interest and civic spirit. How do you explain this?

Sorin Ioniță: I would not venture to support these criticism. First, maybe there are no longer many young people left in Moldova, I mean physically left. We are talking about those who are high school graduates and students. They probably, to a greater extent than pensioners, are missing in Moldova. So yes, they should be called to take part in elections, but let's see, because when "calling people to church", maybe the village is empty and there are no people "to come to church."

Lina Grău: What kind of message, from the point of view of the geostrategic orientation of Moldova, has this first round of presidential elections sent? What can you say at a first glance?

Sorin Ioniță: I think these are things we knew already- a fractured identity, lots of Soviet-nostalgia among older people that can be explained to some extent.

And, on the other side, the Europeanism has not become a majority yet. It is very intense among the informed, urban, mobile and professional population. But the question is: "How much is this class in Moldova and to what extent can it be held in the country?" The ones who stay in the country are those from the state apparatus. The entrepreneurs seem to stay no longer in the country.

Lina Grău: In conclusion, with these elections, where is Moldova heading to?

Sorin Ioniță: Let's look on the bright side. What we're having is at least interesting and a fair game is being played in Moldova, not like in other Eastern countries, where there is no play at all or where the result is known beforehand. There have been elections in the Russian Federation recently and I do not think that anyone stayed the night to see the results.

It may seem little to the Moldovan citizens compare to their expectations, but this is a form of gain too. So it's a real competition and the people get used to it. The results are not determined in advance and the people learn that it really matters to go drop a vote in the ballot box, especially when the score is so tight.

But there is a second round and there are two paths going into almost opposite directions, depending on who wins the runoff. Without dramatizing - nothing catastrophic will happen in Moldova - but there will be kind of mini-Brezhnevism if Dodon wins. Theoretically, Moldova will remain on the European path. It will not tear the Association Agreement the following day. But there will be a lack of enthusiasm that the external partners will know how to read immediately. So if you send signals that you're not interested, goodbye!

On the contrary, it will be hard if Maia Sandu becomes president as the latter has no executive powers. Perhaps, her segment of the electorate that is hyper-enthusiastic is expecting miracles to happen the following day after elections but the president's power is as it is. But maybe the people will be patient and understanding. There will be changes, starting with the appointment of the prosecutor general. I mean, at least there will be a discussion around his selection. There will be opinions and things will be put on the table - it's a big thing to get the dirt from under the table and put it on the table in order to clean it.

Andi Cristea: The West should remain Moldova's soul project

Andi Cristea, MEP and chairman of the European Parliament Delegation to the Republic of Moldova salutes the fact that there will be a second round and hopes that Moldova's European orientation will win.

Lina Grău: How do you assess the results of this first round of presidential elections in Moldova? What are its main messages? Were there any elements of surprise?

Andi Cristea: I'm glad to see there is a second round and I think it balances the situation. A president elected in the first round could have had political intentions beyond the constitutional limits of its position and most likely would have been tempted to force the political and constitutional rules of the game. A president elected in the second round will be legitimate, will have a strong voice, but will not be able to "scream" excessively. The constitutional order of the country remains basically parliamentarian.

The runoff is therefore saluted. From my perspective as a Romanian and European Union citizen, I am glad there is a second round including from the perspective of the chances given to the pro-European candidate, Maia Sandu, to occupy this position.

Otherwise, in terms of the signals sent, it is obvious that the Moldovan society is divided along geopolitical lines and that the popularity of the East has increased. The West can take revenge not only through a pro-European president, but also through the success of the pro-European reforms. I'd love to see a viable team between the President and the Government regarding the reforms, so that the country can progress



in an accelerated way. I would love this to be the surprise after a rather polarizing and relatively aggressive political campaign.

Lina Grău: What signals do the election results send from the foreign policy and geostrategic perspective?

Andi Cristea: The signal is that the East is getting more popular with the public not so much because of the quality of the offer, but rather because of the attrition of the so-called exponents of the West. I think it's useful to communicate and explain that the East is not really an alternative as it doesn't provide a recipe for economic success, but a commercial market that is more or less big. Consequently, the West should remain Moldova's soul project. With patience and work, in the coming years, we will see that we are talking about a serious project as the implementation of reforms will yield results.

Lina Grău: To what extent the results of presidential elections in Moldova will be crucial for the implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU and for the continuation of the country's European course?

Andi Cristea: If Dodon becomes president, he will definitely have a more or less provoking position regarding the European course of Moldova. But let's not forget that he will not be able to override the parliamentary majority, which is pro-European, the Parliament being the cornerstone of the Moldovan constitution. The clock cannot be turned back as far as the European reforms are concerned, but the political declarations hostile towards the EU can slow down the speed towards Brussels.

Regarding Maia Sandu, I see no problems with the European path. What could happen is that she may focus on the fight against corruption meeting thus the popular expectations.

Lina Grău: What are your expectations from the second round? What is your message for the Moldovan citizens and the political parties in the presidential runoff?

Andi Cristea: My message is simple: no matter who and what is suggesting, you should not let yourselves influenced. Don't let your choice be influenced: Europe means respect for each person's option. I can only say: Vote with the soul, but also with the mind, because Moldova needs a President you can be proud of internationally and at home. It's important to have a country open to the world, not closed towards itself.

Vote as this is your right and you are citizens of a democracy. I would like a president with a European compass in hand, but we will see how the citizens will decide.

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