



*Election Observation Delegation to the parliamentary elections
in the Republic of Moldova*

REPORT

**of the European Parliament Delegation
for the observation of the parliamentary elections
in the Republic of Moldova
headed by Ms Rebecca HARMS**

24 February 2019

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Introduction

On 17 January 2019, the Conference of Presidents (CoP) authorised the sending of an Election Observation Delegation to observe the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova. This decision was in response to an invitation sent on 19 August 2018 to President Tajani from the Chairperson of the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova. The Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG) had included Moldova in the list of possible priorities for observation of elections in the first half of 2019. The EP has observed elections in the country for many years, most recently observing the parliamentary elections in 2010 and 2014 and the presidential elections in 2016. When requesting authorisation the DEG Co-Chairs had argued that it was extremely important that there should be a strong EP observer presence in a strategic neighbourhood country where development had been hampered by the current political context of public distrust in state institutions, ongoing corruption investigations¹ and lingering poverty, particularly in rural areas.

The European Parliament Election Observation delegation was composed of five Members: Ms Rebecca HARMS (Greens/EFA, Germany), Mr Marian-Jean MARINESCU (EPP, Romania), Mr Joachim ZELLER (EPP, Germany), Mr Miroslav POCHE (S&D, Czech Republic) and Ms Monica MACOVEI (ECR, Romania). Ms Harms was elected as the Head of the Delegation at the constituent meeting on 30 January 2019.

The European Parliament Delegation performed the election observation in accordance with the [Declaration of Principles of International Election Observation](#) and the [Code of Conduct for international election observers](#). It followed the OSCE/ODIHR's methodology in the evaluation procedure and assessed the election for its compliance with OSCE commitments for democratic elections. All Members of the EP Delegation signed the [Code of Conduct for Members of the European Parliament Election Observation Delegations](#), in conformity with the decision of the Conference of Presidents of 13 September 2012.

On the first day of the briefing programme, the Head of the EP delegation was informed that four other MEPs had received accreditation through the domestic non-governmental organisation "CREDO". These Members did not form part of the official EP delegation and there was an obvious risk that any statements that they might make could be presented as being the position of the European Parliament. The DEG Co-Chairs urgently issued a statement in which they underlined that there was a single official observer EP delegation in the country and that "*no other Member of the European Parliament has been mandated to observe these elections*". Consequently, "*no other MEP was... authorised to take a position or express an opinion on behalf of the European Parliament*". Subsequently the Head of the EP Delegation wrote to the Chair of the Central Electoral Commission asking how this accreditation had been granted and in what capacity the four Members had applied to be observers. Three of the four MEPs did not travel to Moldova and there was no record of any of them making a statement.

Thanks are extended to the OSCE/ODIHR IEOM in Chisinau headed by Mr Matyas Eorsi, as well to Mr Peter Michalko, Head of the European Union Delegation to Moldova and his staff for their support in organising the programme and assisting the delegation during its time in Moldova.

¹ Moldova ranks 117th in the Transparency International ratings of corruption in countries.

Background

For the European Parliament the elections represented a crucial test of the commitment of the Moldovan authorities to its implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement, which had entered into force in 2016 and was based on common values of “*respect for democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms*”. The elections came at a time of ongoing EU concern about the deterioration of democratic standards in Moldova, notably the invalidation of the mayoral elections in Chisinau in June 2018, the July 2017 electoral reforms that had been adopted against the recommendations of the ODIHR and the Venice Commission, the lack of progress in the prosecution of those responsible for the €1 billion banking fraud in 2014 and finally the increased number of reports of breaches of human rights. These negative developments had led the EU to suspend the disbursement of its macro-financial assistance (MFA) to Moldova in 2018.

In its resolution of 14 November 2018, the European Parliament underlined that “*any decision on future MFA disbursement should only take place after the parliamentary elections...and on condition that they are conducted in line with internationally recognised standards and assessed by specialised international bodies, and that the payment of all budget support programmes should remain on hold until meaningful progress in democratic standards takes place*”.

The previous parliamentary elections in November 2014 had resulted in five political parties obtaining seats in the parliament, with the largest number won by the Socialists with 25 seats. The elections were followed by a period of prolonged political instability with five Prime Ministers (including caretakers) taking office in quick succession². The ongoing crisis came to a head in October 2015 with the collapse of the government of Valeriu Strelet, which - after another interim Prime Minister - was succeeded in January 2016 by the government of Pavel Filip of the Democratic Party (PDM). Mr Filip’s arrival in office was accompanied by significant defections to the Democratic Party by MPs from the Communist Party (PCRM) and the Liberal Democrat Party (PLDM)³. Many observers considered that the PDM leader Vladimir Plahotniuc⁴ had engineered these defections through bribery or other forms of pressure. As a result, the PDM increased its representation in the Parliament from 19 seats in 2014 to 42 seats in January 2019. The PDM is nominally a pro-European party, although this is questioned by a number of observers who consider that its main aim is simply to advance the personal interests of its leaders⁵.

For the 2019 elections, the Central Electoral Commission registered 14 political parties and 1 electoral bloc. Four parties represented in the outgoing Parliament were competing: the dominant Democratic Party, the broadly pro-Russian Socialist Party (PRSM), the depleted Communists and the Liberal Party (PL), which had been supporting the Filip government. The Liberal Democrats, who had lost 18 of their 23 seats thanks to the aforementioned defections, supported the new ACUM alliance of two opposition parties, which were not represented in the 2014 Parliament.

² One of the post-2014 Prime Ministers, Vlad Filat of the PLDM, was sentenced to nine years imprisonment in connection with the banking fraud involving the disappearance of €1 billion from three Moldovan banks.

³ The Communists were reduced from 21 to 6 seats and the Liberal Democrats from 23 to 5 seats.

⁴ Mr Plahotniuc is the country’s largest oligarch and had been earlier prevented from becoming Prime Minister by President Pavel Timofti who did not consider that he met the integrity criteria for becoming Prime Minister.

⁵ There were allegations that the PDM was forcing officials in polling stations to become members of the party.

The ACUM bloc was made up of the Party of Action (PAS) of former presidential candidate Maia Sandu and the Platform Party for Dignity and Truth (PPDA) of Andre Nastase. Commentators regarded ACUM as the most genuinely pro-European party in Moldovan politics and considered that it had a real commitment to tackling corruption. ACUM leaders declared during the campaign that they would not enter into a post-election understanding with the other parties in parliament.

The final significant party with a chance of winning seats in the parliament was the Shor Party of businessman and Orhei mayor Ilan Shor. Mr Shor had been implicated in the aforementioned banking scandal and had been sentenced to seven and half years' imprisonment, which was currently under review in the Court of Appeals. Pending this appeal, Mr Shor had obtained a certificate of integrity to participate in the elections and was standing on a broadly populist platform.

The 2019 elections were the first significant nationwide test of Moldovan democracy since the 2016 presidential elections, which had been won by the Socialist candidate Igor Dodon. As noted above, they were taking place in a context of political discord, ongoing corruption investigations and endemic poverty. There was also lingering controversy over the Chisinau mayoral electoral contest of June 2018, which had been won by the PPDA candidate Andre Nastase. Mr Nastase had been unable to take up office following a ruling of the Supreme Court that annulled the election for alleged violation of electoral rules because both candidates had been campaigning on social media on Election Day. Many citizens considered that this ruling was an attempt by the government to interfere in the judiciary and prevent the opposition candidate from winning a position of influence. It led to a series of protests against the government and a further decline in confidence in state institutions. Tensions were further exacerbated when the two leaders of ACUM alleged that they had been poisoned in the run up to the February elections.

The elections were the first held under the newly introduced mixed electoral system, which -according to ODIHR and the Venice Commission - had been adopted through a process that lacked inclusive public debate or consultation. Under the new system, 50 MPs were elected through proportional representation from closed party lists in a single national constituency and 51 MPs were elected in single member constituencies through the first-past-the-post system. ODIHR and the Venice Commission had stated that such a change was "not advisable at this time" and risked giving undue influence in single member constituencies to local oligarchs. Moreover, there was less chance of women being elected in the single member constituencies. Finally, it was unclear if the public had understood the new system.

There was further potential for confusion following the announcement on 30 November 2018 that two consultative referendums would take place on the same day as the parliamentary elections. Many observers pointed to the complications that were likely to result by having extra ballot papers and they reported concerns among some interlocutors that the PDM government had called the referendums to confuse voters.

Most observers considered that in general the legal framework provided an adequate basis for conducting democratic elections and welcomed the fact that some previous recommendations by the ODIHR and the Venice Commission had been implemented. However, they believed that there remained a number of important issues to be addressed. These included the application of provisions against the misuse of state resources, loopholes concerning the use of charities in finance campaigns, and the concentration of media ownership.

There also remained gaps in the party and finance regulations concerning the supervision and enforcement of party and campaign finance rules and strengthening sanctions. Some

parties (notably the PDM, the PSRM and the Shor Party) were suspected of circumventing restrictions on funding by channelling money through charitable and non-profit organisations. The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) declared that it lacked sufficient human resources to enable it to monitor campaign finance effectively and that it could only conduct enquiries in response to complaints.

The media landscape was reported as being diverse, with television the main source of political information, followed by online media. However monitoring of the media by the long-term observer mission indicated that some national TV channels did not comply with the legal requirement to provide fair, balanced and impartial campaign coverage. Media outlets were under the control of political parties and the Church. The PDM, PRSM and Shor Party in particular benefited from free and paid electoral advertising, which allowed them to enjoy a higher level of visibility in the media.

In general, technical aspects of the election campaign were reported as being managed professionally at all levels, with electoral commission sessions open to observers and media and women represented at all levels of the election administration. However, there was a lack of clarity over the jurisdiction to hear complaints. In addition, the CEC's view that it could not overrule district committee decisions on candidate registration resulted in the denial of the right to an effective remedy in a number of cases.

European Parliament programme

In line with normal practice, the EP delegation was integrated within the framework of the International Election Observation Mission. It cooperated closely with the OSCE/ODIHR long term Election Observation Mission and the delegations of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe led by Mr Claude Kern and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly led by Ms Kari Heriksen.

On 23 and 24 February 2019, experts from the OSCE/ODIHR mission provided extensive briefings to the parliamentary delegations. There were presentations on the political environment, the campaign activities, the media landscape and the legal framework of the general elections. The joint programme also included a series of meetings with heads of political parties or their representatives, with media representatives, with NGOs/INGOs, and with the Central Electoral Commission (CEC).

In a separate programme, the EP delegation met the Head of the EU Delegation, the Heads of the other EU Missions present in Chisinau and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mr Tudor Ulianovschi.

One issue that was raised throughout the meetings was the particular concern of Members that many among the substantial Moldovan diaspora⁶ would not be able to vote in these elections because of the decision of the Constitutional Court to end the practice of past elections that allowed Moldovans living abroad to vote with expired passports. Whereas in Moldova itself it was possible for citizens to vote on presentation of their national ID cards, it was now a requirement for Moldovans living abroad to be in possession of a valid passport. The Constitutional Court ruling, which was issued on 14 January 2019, stated that the requirement for a valid passport was a legitimate limitation on the right to vote. An appeal against this ruling by ACUM was subsequently rejected by the CEC which cited the Court ruling and noted that in the 2016 Presidential elections only 175 citizens living abroad had voted with expired passports. MEPs questioned whether this change was made for political

⁶ It is estimated that over a million of Moldova's 4.3 million citizens live abroad with their remittances making up around 20% of GDP.

reasons as it might discriminate against those voters who were likely to support ACUM. Moreover, they argued that there was a “reasonable legal expectation” that the established practice of many years of accepting expired passports would continue. They questioned why the Court’s decision had come less than six weeks before the date of the election, thus preventing citizens from obtaining new passports in time.

MEPs also raised the issue of the number of polling stations outside Moldova - which, although greater than in the past - they considered to be inadequate to accommodate the large diaspora. They also questioned the location of many of the polling stations, which did not appear to reflect the size of the Moldovan population in some countries and regions.

In all the meetings, MEPs underlined that it was essential that the elections were seen to be credible, inclusive and transparent. In addition, those who were elected should be allowed to exercise their functions without hindrance.

In the meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mr Tudor Ulianoschi, the Minister made the following points:

- the government of Moldova was continuing to promote the path of democratisation, EU integration and the implementation of the Association Agreement - proper conduct of the elections was a key element in this;
- it was to be hoped that the EU would not continue to block macro-financing as this was funding that Moldova needed;
- there should not be a repeat of the invalidation of the vote as had been the case with the 2018 Chisinau mayoral elections;
- the Minister accepted that there was a need to continue to make reforms to the electoral system;
- the Moldovan authorities had opened out of country polling stations wherever there were significant numbers of members of the Moldovan diaspora⁷, however there was a legal requirement that the presiding officer should be an accredited diplomat, which limited the numbers of stations;
- the Minister accepted that some polling stations were being opened in cities with a small Moldovan population, however these stations were situated in central locations with good transport links to other centres of population;
- in some countries such as Canada it was only permitted to open polling stations in diplomatic missions, thereby limiting the number and locations of these polling stations;
- Moldovan citizens were less motivated to hold Moldovan passports as most also held Romanian passports and some were afraid of losing their second nationality if it became known that they were working illegally - there were therefore many with expired passports;
- the Minister was not aware of the case of the MEPs who were not part of the official delegation but who had been accredited by the CEC.

⁷ There were 123 polling stations (including 42 in Moldovan diplomatic missions) in 37 countries and three constituencies for overseas voters.

Election Day

On Election Day, the three teams of the EP Delegation were deployed in and around Chisinau, Gagauzia, Anenii Noi, and in the region of Dubasari. In the last two areas, this enabled them to observe in particular in the polling stations that had been designated for the large numbers of voters who travelled from Transnistria to cast their ballots.

The EP delegation concurred with the findings of the long-term mission, which stated that the vote had taken place without major incident and had been generally well managed. However, MEPs commented on the large-scale and well-organised movement of voters that took place by bus from Transnistria. They noted that there was often over-crowding in the polling stations when a number of buses arrived at the same time. However, they considered that the stations where they observed dealt with the periodic influxes in an effective manner. Nevertheless, they were concerned about reports that these citizens were being paid to vote for particular parties. They also contrasted the facilities provided to Transnistrian voters to help them to vote to the obstacles faced by voters who lived outside the country.

One other issue of concern to MEPs was the inconsistent management by polling stations of the ballot papers for the referendum. In some stations, citizens were put under pressure to vote, whereas in others there was no compulsion to take a ballot paper. There were also concerns about the lack of secrecy of voting in some polling stations, which were too small for the number of voters.

The Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions of the ODIHR long-term mission concluded that Election Day had passed without major incidents and gave a broadly positive assessment of the opening and voting processes, while criticising the closing procedures in a number of polling stations. The Statement also referred to concerns over the large-scale bussing of voters from Transnistria and the confusion caused in some polling stations by the holding of a referendum on the same day, as well as the introduction of the mixed system.

Post-Election Day

In line with normal practice, the Statement was discussed in a number of meetings between the Chairs of the parliamentary delegations and the OSCE/ODIHR mission. The EP Delegation therefore fully endorsed the findings of the IEOM. In particular, the Head of Delegation ensured that the statement included references to the conclusions of the EP Resolution of 14 November 2018 on issues such as the changes to the electoral system, concerns about campaign finance, and the subordination of the media to political and business groups.

At the press conference on 25 February, the Head of the EP delegation reiterated the concerns about the deterioration of democratic standards in Moldova following recent decisions by the authorities, including the electoral reform changes in July 2017 and the invalidation of the mayoral elections in Chisinau in May 2018. She noted that these developments had led to the suspension of the disbursement of the macro-financial assistance and that the EP had stated that any resumption of this assistance would depend on the elections being conducted in line with internationally recognised standards. She stressed that the EP would *“closely follow post-electoral developments in Moldova (because) what takes place here in the coming weeks and months will have a major impact on the future of our relationship”*.

This position was underlined in the statement by the EEAS, which stated that the EU would *“continue to base our relationship with the Republic of Moldova on the principle of conditionality and respect for the rule of law and democratic standards”*.

Results and conclusions

The final results of the election were as follows:

- Socialist Party - 35 seats (18 by party lists and 17 by single-member constituencies);
- Democratic Party - 30 seats (13 by party lists and 17 by single-member constituencies);
- ACUM - 26 seats (14 by party lists and 2 by single-member constituencies);
- Shor Party - 7 seats (5 by party lists and 2 by single-member constituencies);
- Three independent deputies.

On 4 March 2019, the Head of the EP Delegation reported to the EP Foreign Affairs Committee on the mission. She summarised the report of the EP delegation and the long-term mission, pointing to the problems outlined above - both during the electoral campaign and on Election Day.

Other points made in the debate and a subsequent statement⁸, included the following:

- Moldova is one of the three Eastern Partnership countries with an Association Agreement in force and there should be ongoing support for the reform process and democratisation in the country;
- the electoral process was ongoing and it was necessary to observe how the Moldovan authorities dealt with the complaints and appeals procedures and how the majority in parliament will be formed, in particular whether that process will be transparent, without pressure being exerted on the newly-elected MPs, and whether they will be able to take up their mandate;
- particular attention should be paid to “party migration” or the movement of MPs elected for one party to another party;
- there are significant concerns about the weak judiciary and its implications for the rule of law and the level of corruption;
- there is a risk of Moldova following a very different geopolitical trajectory if pro-Russian forces form the new government or have a major influence in it.

In conclusion, it is worth underlining the relevant passage from the EP resolution of 14 November 2018 which stated that “*any decision on future MFA [Macro Financial Assistance] disbursement should only take place after the parliamentary elections (...) and on condition that they are conducted in line with internationally recognised standards and assessed by specialised international bodies, and that the payment of all budget support programmes should remain on hold until meaningful progress in democratic standards takes place (...)*”.

The European Parliament - and the EU as a whole - should wait until the final OSCE/ODIHR IEOM report is issued before it adopts a final position on whether the disbursement of the macro-financial assistance should be resumed and bilateral relations can return to a more normal footing.

⁸ Statement of 5 March 2019 of the AFET chair Mr David McAllister; the EP rapporteur on Moldova, Mr Petras Austrevicius; and the Head of the EP Observation Delegation, Ms Rebecca Harms.

A. List of Members of the delegation

Ms Rebecca HARMS, Head of the Delegation (Greens/EFA, Germany)

Mr Marian-Jean MARINESCU (EPP, Romania)

Mr Joachim ZELLER (EPP, Germany)

Mr Miroslav POCHE (S&D, Czech Republic)

Ms Monica MACOVEI (ECR, Romania)

B. Statement by the Head of the EP delegation

Press Statement by Ms Rebecca HARMS

Head of the European Parliament election observation delegation

Parliamentary elections in Moldova – 24 February 2019

The delegation of the European Parliament was very pleased to have been present as observers at these parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova. This is a country with which the European Union has a deep relationship founded on the Eastern Partnership and the EU-Moldova Association agreement which entered into force in 2016.

This Agreement is based on common values, including respect for democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is a relationship which we want to develop and strengthen. However, there has been a deterioration of democratic standards as a result of recent decisions by the Moldovan authorities, including the adoption of the July 2017 electoral reform. This was adopted despite the negative recommendations of our ODIHR and Venice Commission friends. Another issue of concern was the invalidation of the results of the early mayoral elections in Chisinau.

These developments have led the EU to suspend the disbursement of its macro-financial assistance to Moldova. The European Parliament has stated that any future disbursement of this assistance should be on the condition that these parliamentary elections are conducted in line with internationally recognised standards.

The concerns raised by the European Parliament in its past resolutions are even more important now in the light of these elections, which are of huge importance to the future of the EU-Moldova relationship.

Our delegation subscribes fully to the statement of preliminary findings and conclusions of the international election observation mission and I would like to express our thanks to Mr Matyas Eörsi, the Head of the ODIHR EOM, and his team for their excellent support and cooperation, and also to the other Heads of parliamentary delegations and their colleagues. I would also like to thank the Head of the EU Ambassador, Peter Michalko, for his huge assistance to us during our time in the country.

On Election Day our delegation observed the vote and the count in and around Chisinau, Anenii Noi and Comrat. It also observed in the region of Dubasari. Our conclusions echo those of the other observers, however I would like to focus on a number of specific issues. Firstly, we observed the large scale organised movement of voters that took place by bus from Transnistria to polling stations. This situation contrasted starkly with the difficulties experienced by members of the substantial Moldovan diaspora in voting in the elections because of the decision of the Constitutional Court to end the practice of allowing Moldovans abroad to vote with expired passports – a decision which came less than six weeks before the election, thus preventing many from obtaining new passports in time. At the same time they were not allowed to vote with their IDs, unlike the voters in Moldova itself. The European Parliament Delegation was also struck by the lack of consistency between polling stations in

the treatment of the ballots for the referendum. Other concerns that we had include such issues as the inadequacies in the secrecy of voting in polling stations.

We were impressed by the vital role played by women in the management of the electoral process. However, it is a matter of regret that a relatively small number of women were in the ten top positions on the national lists.

Turning to another area of concern that is also covered in the Preliminary Statement, we regret that the elections have taken place against a backdrop of decreased public trust in state institutions. This distrust has been deepened by the introduction of the new electoral system which took place with a lack of inclusive public consultation.

We call on all stakeholders to show political maturity and responsibility and to give priority to the country's interests. No one else can do this for them, and it is the only way to restore the trust of the people of Moldova and renew their faith in the country's future.

The European Parliament - and the European Union in general - will closely follow post-electoral developments in Moldova. And what takes place here in the coming weeks and months will have a major impact on the future of our relationship.

Thank you for your attention.

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C. Press statement by the International Election Observation Mission



Fundamental rights generally respected in competitive Moldovan elections, though campaign tainted by violations, international observers say

CHISINAU, 25 February 2019 – Moldova's 24 February parliamentary elections were competitive and fundamental rights were generally respected, but the campaign took place against the backdrop of disaffection with public institutions and was tainted by allegations of pressure on public employees, strong indications of vote buying and the misuse of state resources, the international observers concluded in a preliminary statement released today.

Control and ownership of the media by political actors limited the range of viewpoints presented to voters, the observers said. Most aspects of the elections were administered in a professional and transparent manner, and the observers assessed the voting positively, despite difficulties and confusion caused by the introduction of a new electoral system and the concurrent holding of a referendum, which caused problems in counting procedures.

"This was an active, hard-fought and polarized campaign in generally well-run elections. It is no secret that there is overall disappointment among citizens in political processes and institutions here," said George Tsereteli, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. "I call on my newly elected parliamentary colleagues to now deliver on promises, address the problems we identified, and meet the expectations of the people."

These were the first elections held under the new mixed electoral system, which was adopted without inclusive public debate and consultation. Under the new system, 50 members of parliament are elected through proportional representation from national party lists and 51 in single-member constituencies.

"The changes to the electoral system and the concurrent holding of the referendum clearly led to confusion, both on the part of voters and some polling station workers," said Rebecca Harms, Head of the EP delegation. "The decision by the Central Election Commission that only holders of valid passports could vote abroad came just six weeks before election day, and departed from practice in past elections, where holders of national ID cards could also vote. There were concerns about the motives behind this decision."

The legal framework generally provides an adequate basis for conducting democratic elections, and recent amendments partially addressed some previous recommendations by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission. These elections demonstrated, however, that important issues remain to be addressed, including the application of provisions against the misuse of state resources, loopholes concerning the use of charities to finance campaigns, and the concentration of media ownership.

Substantial recent amendments to party and campaign finance regulations addressed some previous recommendations, but other key recommendations remain unaddressed, particularly those to enhance the supervision and enforcement of party and campaign finance rules and

strengthening sanctions. According to the CEC, it lacks sufficient human resources to monitor campaign finance effectively, and it conducted inquiries only in response to complaints.

Claude Kern, Head of the PACE delegation, said: "Election day was generally well organized. As demonstrated by the campaign, the new electoral system regrettably confirmed the main concerns raised by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, in particular the lack of effective mechanisms to prevent undue influence by wealthy businesspeople, combined with a poor system of supervision of party and candidate funding, and inadequate penalties."

The media landscape is diverse, with television as the main source of political information, followed by online media. Media monitoring showed that some national TV channels did not comply with the legal requirement to provide fair, balanced and impartial campaign coverage.

Most technical aspects of the election were managed professionally at all levels, and election commission sessions were open to observers and media. Women were well represented at all levels of election administration. The lack of clarity over jurisdiction to hear complaints and the CEC's view that it could not overrule district committee decisions on candidate registration resulted in the denial of the right to an effective remedy in a number of cases.

"The prominent role that women play in running elections was on display yesterday in polling stations across the country," said Kari Henriksen, Head of the OSCE PA delegation. "Considering that women are the majority of the population, political leaders must assume their responsibility to step up and effectively translate this into equal political power and representation."

In an inclusive process, the CEC registered all 14 parties and one bloc that submitted national lists. Of the 632 candidates on national lists, 264 are women, but only 49 were in top 10 positions. There were 325 candidates registered in single member constituencies, of whom 70 are women and 58 ran as independents.

"The elections offered voters a wide choice of political alternatives, the campaign was competitive and fundamental rights were respected, but reports of pressure on public employees, vote-buying and the misuse of state resources have to be addressed to increase public confidence in elections," said Matyas Eörsi, Head of the ODIHR election observation mission. "We hope the authorities will follow up on the recommendations contained in our final report on these elections to address these issues."

Citing security considerations, the CEC changed the locations of 31 of 47 polling stations opened for the first time specifically for voters residing in Transnistria. One major contesting party alleged this was a government attempt to reduce the number of votes from Transnistria. The CEC established 123 polling stations in 37 countries for out-of-country voting, an increase from previous elections. The lack of transparency in how these polling stations were allocated contributed to a perception that that the decision was made for political reasons.

Candidate, citizen and international observers have broad rights, including the right to attend sessions of all election commissions and to receive results protocols, and contributed to transparency. Citizen observers conducted long-term observation, deployed short-term observers on election day and conducted a parallel vote tabulation.

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