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Pro-European Parties Ahead in Moldova's Local Elections

By The Moscow Times

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A view of Chisinau, the capital city of Moldova.

CHISINAU — Pro-European parties came out ahead of those favoring closer ties with Russia in Moldova's local elections, an overall vote count indicated Monday, although many cities had no outright winner and will hold runoffs in two weeks.

In Chisinau, the incumbent mayor, pro-European Dorin Chirtoaca was ahead but without enough votes to secure a majority.

Pro-European parties scored about 51 percent of the votes nationwide in Sunday's ballot, with pro-Russian parties polling at about 36 percent, the results showed. The remainder of votes went to independent parties.

The elections were seen as a test of whether Moldova would remain committed to European integration or choose to move closer to Russia.

Pro-European parties won outright in 348 cities, towns and villages, while pro-Russian parties won in 56 others and independent candidates in 34. In some 458 other places runoffs will be held June 28 because no candidate secured more than 50 percent of the vote.

They include Chisinau, where Chirtoaca had 37.4 percent of the vote and pro-Russian challenger Zinaida Greceanai had 35.9 percent after 99 percent of the vote was counted Monday.

Renato Usatii, a pro-Russian businessman, won outright in Moldova's second-largest city, Balti, taking 73.7 percent of votes. The city in northern Moldova is traditionally pro-Russian.

Usatii, who headed the Patria party, fled to Russia in November ahead of parliamentary elections, saying he feared arrest by Moldovan authorities after a court banned his party from taking part in the ballot because it received money from abroad.

Pro-Russian businessman Ilan Shor, who is being probed over the disappearance of $1.5 billion from three Moldovan banks before the November elections, won outright in the eastern town of Orhei, polling 62 percent of the vote.

The local elections in the former Soviet republic came days after pro-European Prime Minister Chiril Gaburici resigned amid questions about the authenticity of his high school diploma and university degree.

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