

Moldova Uncovers 'Unprecedented' Pro-Russia Vote Rigging

By [AFP](#)

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Moldovan President and candidate to re-election Maia Sandu (C) applauds on stage during a rally to launch her electoral campaign in Chisinau. **Elena Covalenco / AFP**

Moldovan police carried out dozens of raids Thursday after discovering that at least \$15 million was transferred from Russia to Moldovan citizens in an "unprecedented" effort to tamper with presidential elections this month.

Moldova's pro-European President Maia Sandu, who is seeking a second term, has repeatedly accused Russia of political interference in the country, which lies between war-torn Ukraine and EU member Romania.

A total of \$15 million was transferred from Russia to Moldovan citizens in September alone, police chief Viorel Cernauteanu said at a press conference.

More than 100,000 people with the right to vote were thought to be involved in the vote-

buying scheme, Cernauteanu said.

Police raided 25 locations over what he called an "unprecedented" and "large-scale phenomenon... to disrupt the electoral process."

The money was funneled into the country of 2.6 million by people affiliated with Ilan Shor, a fugitive businessman and former politician, police said.

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People affiliated with his "criminal organization" recruited 70,000 sympathizers to cast their ballots for a specific candidate in exchange for money. Voters were also told to reject joining the European Union in a referendum set for October 20, the same day as the presidential elections.

Shor, who was convicted of fraud in absentia last year, said in a Telegram post that "all payments are legal." "Moldova has finally turned into a police state," he added, calling on supporters to "continue the fight together".

In April, Shor announced, from Moscow, the creation of a political coalition called "Victory" with other pro-Russian activists.

However, the Moldovan electoral commission refused to register the Victory bloc for the presidential elections and referendum, citing several non-compliance issues.

Moldovan police also seized about \$1 million of what they called "illegal political financing" from people returning from the April gathering.

In June, the United States, Britain and Canada warned of a Russian "plot" to influence Moldova's presidential elections and "incite protests" if a pro-Russian candidate failed to win.

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