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Kremlin Says Moldova's Election Results 'Raise Questions,' Denies Meddling Claims

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Moldovan citizens line up outside the country's embassy in Moscow to vote. **Sofia Sandurskaya / TASS**

Authorities in Moscow claimed Monday that the narrow margin in Moldova's constitutional referendum on EU membership "raises questions," while also rejecting Moldovan President Maia Sandu's accusations of Russian interference in Sunday's presidential election.

After nearly 99% of the votes were counted in a referendum that asked Moldovans whether to insert a clause into the constitution defining EU accession as a national goal, the "Yes" vote inched into the lead with 50.31% of the total ballots cast, election authorities said early Monday.

In the country's presidential race, held alongside the referendum on Sunday, none of the 11 candidates that stood for election managed to get more than 50% of the votes, setting the stage for a second round on Nov. 3 between Sandu, who received about 42% of the votes, and Russia-friendly former prosecutor Alexandr Stoianoglo, who earned around 26%.

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Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was "difficult to explain" how the number of "Yes" votes in the EU referendum managed to outnumber the number of "No" votes, which were leading late Sunday as the ballots were gradually being counted.

"The figures we're seeing and the pace with which it changed, of course, raises a lot of questions," Peskov told reporters, repeating previous claims that Moldovan authorities were stifling opposition and working to prevent Sandu's political contenders from running in a fair race against her.

"Even in these circumstances... we saw just how many people don't support President Sandu's ideology," Peskov said as he urged reporters to wait for the final results of the election.

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> Moldova has faced an unprecedented assault on our country's freedom and democracy, both today and in recent months.
>
> — Maia Sandu (@sandumaiamd) October 20, 2024

Sandu said late Sunday that "criminal groups, working together with foreign forces hostile to our national interests carried out an unprecedented assault on our country's freedom and democracy."

Peskov, responding to her comments, called on the Moldovan president to "present evidence" backing up the election interference accusations.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea for her [Sandu] to explain why so many people voted against her position," Peskov said. "Are they criminal groups too? Or does she mean that Moldovan citizens who don't support her are associated with criminal groups?"

Earlier this month, Moldovan police arrested hundreds of people after uncovering what they described as an "unprecedented" vote-buying scheme linked to fugitive businessman Ilan Shor, who currently lives in Russia. Law enforcement said millions of dollars were sent from Russia to voters to undermine the election and referendum.

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