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Kremlin Calls Moldovan Presidential Election 'Undemocratic' and 'Unfair'

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Moldovan President Maia Sandu. **Daniel Mihailescu / AFP**

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Moldovan authorities of blocking thousands of Moldovans living in Russia from voting in Sunday's presidential election and questioned the legitimacy of the results.

"We can objectively assess these elections by noting that hundreds of thousands of Moldovans who live in the Russian Federation were not given the chance to vote," Peskov told reporters.

"A significant portion of the country's population lacked the opportunity to vote, unlike Moldovan citizens working in European countries," he added. "These elections were neither democratic nor fair."

Moldovan President Maia Sandu won a second term on Sunday in an election marked by accusations of Russian interference and voter fraud. Sandu defeated her opponent, former Prosecutor General Alexandr Stoianoglo, who was backed by the Moscow-friendly Party of

Socialists.

Sunday's voter turnout exceeded that of the first round on Oct. 20, which coincided with a referendum asking voters whether to define EU accession as a national goal. The referendum passed by a narrow margin.

Following her victory, Sandu said Moldova had faced an "unprecedented attack... by hostile forces from outside the country" during the election period.

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Peskov's comments on Tuesday echoed accusations by Moldova's Party of Socialists, which claimed that voting irregularities and a limited number of polling stations for Moldovans in Russia marred the election.

"Maia Sandu is an illegitimate president, recognized only by her sponsors and supporters abroad. The people of Moldova feel betrayed and robbed," the party said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Russia's Foreign Ministry accused the West of "blatant interference" in the election and Moldovan authorities of conducting "unprecedented repression against the opposition."

When asked about Moscow's relations with Moldova after Sandu's win, Peskov questioned her legitimacy as president and indicated strained future relations.

"She is not the president of her country because the majority of the population did not vote for her," Peskov said. "We are talking about a very divided society."

"As for Moldova's current leadership, it will likely continue its work without showing interest in building good relations with Russia. On the contrary, they were the initiators of scaling back cooperation and organizing pressure on our media," he added.

In early October, Moldovan authorities arrested hundreds in connection with an "unprecedented" vote-buying scheme linked to fugitive businessman Ilan Shor, who lives in Russia. Law enforcement said millions of dollars were funneled from Russia to voters to sway the election and referendum.

AFP contributed reporting.

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