

Moldovans Vote in Tense Polls, Torn Between EU and Russia

By [Ani Sandu for AFP](#)

September 28, 2025



Performance outside a polling station at the Moldovan Embassy in Moscow. **Sergei Karpukhin/TASS**

Moldovans were voting on Sunday in parliamentary elections that could see the country neighbouring Ukraine swerve from its pro-European path towards Moscow, with the government and the EU accusing Russia of "deeply interfering."

Moldova, a European Union candidate country, has long been divided over closer ties with Brussels or maintaining Soviet-era relations with Moscow.

Most surveys ahead of the vote showed the pro-EU Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), in power since 2021, in the lead. But analysts say the race is far from certain.

"I want higher wages and pensions... I want things to continue as they were during the Russian times," Vasile, a 51-year-old locksmith and welder, who only gave his first name, told AFP at a polling station in Chisinau.

Another voter, Paulina Bojoga, 68, said she wanted Moldova "to catch up with European countries because Europe has everything we need."

"The situation is on a knife-edge," the pensioner, who has returned after having lived in Italy, told AFP.

Sunday's ballot is overshadowed by fears of vote buying and unrest, as well as "an unprecedented campaign of disinformation" from Russia, according to the EU.

Moscow has denied the allegations, while Moldova's largely pro-Russian opposition, in turn, has accused PAS of planning fraud.

'Lose everything'

Pro-EU President Maia Sandu of PAS warned of the "massive interference of Russia" after casting her vote, saying Moldova was "in danger."

"If Moldovans will not mobilize enough and if Russia's interference will impact significantly our elections, then Moldova might lose everything it has won and this could be a significant risk also for other countries like Ukraine," she told reporters outside a polling station in Chisinau.

Polling booths opened at 7 am (0400 GMT). They will close at 9 pm, with results expected later on Sunday.

Voters in the country of 2.4 million — one of Europe's poorest — have expressed frustration over economic hardship, as well as scepticism over the push to gain EU membership, launched after Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

A loss for the PAS could throw up hurdles in the push towards EU integration.

"It is the day when the people are not afraid, but others are afraid of the people...We choose a country where people's fear disappears. We choose a normal life for citizens," former president Igor Dodon of the Socialists, one of the leaders of the pro-Russian opposition, posted on Telegram on Sunday.

He told AFP in an interview earlier this week that on foreign policy, he would "continue discussions, negotiations with the EU, but we will also re-establish relations with the Russian Federation."

Turnout decisive

The government has accused the Kremlin of spending hundreds of millions in "dirty money" to interfere in the campaign.

In the lead-up to the vote, prosecutors have carried out hundreds of searches related to what the government says are "electoral corruption" and "destabilisation attempts," with dozens arrested.

Foreign interference and threats of stirring up unrest are "the most significant risks,"

according to Igor Botan, the head of Moldovan think tank Adept.

Turnout will be decisive — especially in the large and powerful diaspora, which tends to vote PAS, and in the breakaway region of Transnistria, which leans pro-Russian, analysts say.

Some 20 political parties and independent candidates are running for the 101 parliamentary seats.

Botan said the result is "very difficult to predict."

"Post-election negotiations to form an alliance are highly likely and here too, things are unclear," he said.

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