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MOLDOVA ELECTION ALERT #1

Polling stations abroad – a controversial and non-transparent process

On November 1, 2020 Moldova will hold the first round of presidential elections. Like in 2016, the final election results will considerably depend on the voting of two groups of constituents – Moldovan diaspora and Moldovan citizens residing in the Transnistrian region. The undue increase of polling stations especially in the Russian Federation, as proposed recently by the Central Election Commission, raises concerns over its independence.



Image source: ipn.md

In 2016, the 9.27% gap in the first round between the winner – the incumbent president Igor Dodon, considered 'pro-Russian', and the second-placed 'pro-Western' opposition leader–Maya Sandu, had shirked to 4.22% in the second round mainly due to the unprecedented mobilization of Moldovan diaspora. A significant number of diaspora voters were unable to cast their ballot because of insufficient voting ballots and poor organization of the voting process by public authorities – the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and European Integration and Electoral Commission. When validating the election results, the Constitutional Court [issued](#) special referrals to the Parliament to modify the mechanism for outside voting, to provide additional criteria for the calculation of the number and location of the polling stations abroad, and increase the number of ballots per polling station (PS). Subsequently,



three criteria were introduced for the opening of outside-the country polling stations (1. the number of previous voters, 2. Voters' pre-registration results and 3. number of Moldovans residing in foreign countries) and increased the number of ballots per PS from 3000 to 5000. And starting in 2019, the Central Election Commission took over the Government's duty to establish the PS abroad, based on the notice provided by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Thus, in 2020 the issue of out of country voting returned to the center stage. Unlike previous elections, this year, in the beginning of July the Election Commission made an appeal to the Moldovan diaspora to submit directly to the Commission their proposals on the number and location of polling stations, besides the official pre-registration procedure. Moldovan diaspora in Russia, traditionally very apathetic, proved to be the most active with their proposals sent to the Commission next days after launching the call. The same activism of the Russian diaspora has been observed during the pre-registration process. The number of voter pre-registrations in Russia increased 11 times compared to 2019, while 85% of all pre-registrations submitted on paper have also indicated localities in Russia. Few testimonies of voters who discovered that their personal data has been fraudulently used to complete on-line pre-registration in Russia got the attention of investigative journalists, who later [found out several forged signatures](#) on written pre-registrations collected by Socialist supporters. Faced with these facts, the Electoral Commission declined any responsibility in this regard, stating that the Ministry of Interior and Intelligence Service should handle this situation.

On September 11, 2020, five days before the end of the pre-registration process, the Central Election Commission submitted [proposals](#) without any public consultation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration on the establishment of 202 polling stations abroad in 36 countries. The increase in the number of polling stations as compared to the budgeted 150, especially in Russia (38 versus 8 in 2016) has raised [concerns of the civil society](#) on possible favoritism of the socialist-leaning Moldovan diaspora in the East, to the detriment of Moldovans living in Western countries, which traditionally support the pro-Western candidates. The CEC proposals were not accompanied by any analysis of methodology that would justify the number and geographical distribution of these polling stations. All public calls made by the Civic Coalition for Free and Fairs Election on [September 8](#) and on [September 15](#) on the Electoral Commission to organize genuine public consultations on the establishment of polling stations abroad has been ignored.

Promo-Lex in their [second report](#) proposed their estimates on the number and distribution of polling stations as compared to the CEC's list, considering two scenarios, the opening of 202 PS and of 150 PS, as budgeted. In both scenarios, the CEC's list needs to be revised, as it does not reflect the data provided by requirements for decreasing the number of PS in some states, namely Russia, USA, Spain, Belarus, Italy, Romania etc., and increasing in others – United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Ukraine etc.

On September 21, the Central Election Commission sent a second list to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs comprising 145 PS in 36 countries. The ministry answer came a few days later, on September 23, with a reduced list. Based on the information gathered from the diplomatic missions, the agreements reached with foreign countries and considering the restrictions



imposed by the pandemic, the Ministry proposes to open 136 PS in 36 countries, namely in: Italy -30, Russia – 17, in USA and Romania – 12 each, France – 8 , UK – 7, Germany – 6 , in Spain, Canada and Ireland – 4 each, Portugal – 3-, in Ukraine, Turkey, Israel and Belgium – 2 each, and the rest of countries – 1 each. The document was made public by the Association ADEPT, on September 24, on its webpage www.alegeri.md (the headline “Lista preliminară a secțiilor de votare peste hotare”).

Although September 26 is the due date for the Central Election Commission to set out the polling stations abroad, no draft of its decision or of the list of polling stations has been made public so far, which means that the Commission has failed again to act in a transparent and correct manner in organizing the out of country voting. The manner in which the Commission dealt with such a sensitive subject is undermining the public trust in the fairness of the forthcoming presidential elections.

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More reports on the presidential election campaign in Moldova can be found [here](#).

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