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**Signature collection in the context of
the pandemic in support of
candidates in elections or for
initiating referenda: solutions and
alternative mechanisms**

Chisinau 2021

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Key terms

Signature collection – set of actions comprising the collection of signatures in support of a candidate in elections or in order to initiate a referendum by the initiative group and the issuance of the signatures collecting list until the last day for submission of the signatures collecting list to the body in charge of signatures verification.

Initiative group – a group established out of citizens eligible to vote aimed to collect signatures supporting a candidate for an elective position or to initiate a referendum;

Collector – person who collects signatures.

Signatures collecting list – a list of collected voters' signatures supporting a candidate in elections or initiating a referendum;

Election deposit – financial guarantee that a candidate is required to pay before he or she is permitted to stand as candidate in elections.

Electronic signature – data in electronic form which are attached to or logically associated with other electronic data and which serve as a method of authentication.

Introduction

The collection of signatures is a democratic exercise whereby voters support voluntarily a certain candidate for an elective position or the initiation of a referendum. For a candidate to join an electoral race – the condition to collect signatures represents a filter based on voters' support. For the initiation of the referendum – it represents an evidence of citizens' will to initiate a consultation among the population.

Signature collection is an important stage of the electoral process. Given that the organisation of elections or referenda implies certain expenses, the candidates – in almost all countries – are required to collect signatures in order to be registered in the electoral race. In this regard, the signature collection is a mechanism that guarantees the substantiated intentions of those who want to participate in the elections, and a guarantee that the state will not incur additional financial costs during the organisation of elections, respectively.

In Moldova too, candidates running for an elective position are required to submit signatures collecting list with a sufficient number of signatures of their supporters in order to be able to apply for registration in the electoral race¹. As opposed to presidential elections, in the case of local and parliamentary elections, independent candidates are treated unfairly compared to the candidates nominated by political parties or electoral blocs because only independent candidates are required to collect signatures in support of their own candidacy².

This analysis aims to present the key challenges and solutions to the current mechanism of collection of signatures in support of a candidate for an elective position from the perspective of international practice. The need for the study was particularly determined by the risks generated by the pandemic, but the solutions proposed can be implemented even when the epidemiological issues are solved.

¹ Article 49, paragraph (1), letter (b) of the Electoral Code.

² In the [Report](#) No 1 – Observation Mission for the General Local Elections and New Parliamentary Elections of 20 October 2019, Promo-LEX OM reiterated its position that the conditions for the registration of independent candidates should be similar to the conditions for the registration of candidates nominated by political parties or electoral blocs, just like in presidential elections, p.14.

The challenges of collection of signatures in support of candidates amid pandemic

The Presidential Election in the Republic of Moldova of 1 (15) November 2020 was organised and held amidst a countrywide public health emergency³.

To protect all the participants in the electoral process, the NEPHC established a set of mandatory general rules to prevent and combat the spread of the COVID-19 infection during elections⁴, and approved the *Instruction on the organisation and conduct of elections by the Central Electoral Commission amidst the COVID-19 pandemic*⁵. Neither the decision, nor the document did not set any special rules on signature collection in pandemic conditions. Thus, the signature collection mechanism was not regulated separately as the rules represented general restrictions applied to the behaviour of citizens in a pandemic setting.

The *Handbook for members of initiative groups supporting candidates for President of the Republic of Moldova*, developed by CICDE, contains three practical recommendations regarding signature collection: wear the protection mask and keep the social distance of 1.5 meters; avoid touching the identity document of the supporters; supporters should use, to the extent possible, their own pen to sign in the list⁶.

According to Article 113, paragraph (1) of the Electoral Code, to be registered in presidential race, all candidates are required to present to the Central Electoral Commission the signature collecting list containing the signatures of at least 15,000 and not more than 25,000 voters. The voters should be from at least half of the second-level administrative-territorial units of the Republic of Moldova. An initiative group shall be established to collect signatures. It must be composed of at least 25 people and at most 100 people eligible to vote⁷.

According to Article 114, paragraph (2) of the Electoral Code⁸ and item 24 of its schedule, CEC registered 13 initiative groups in support of the candidates for the position of President of the Republic of Moldova with the size of the IGs varying between 33 and 100 members, summing up 1007 collectors⁹.

In September, the NEPHC found in certain administrative-territorial units serious negative trends and established, starting with 1 October 2020, state of emergency in public health¹⁰ in 26 (68% out of 38) second-level administrative-territorial units in which the 'Red Code' alert status was enforced¹¹.

According to the information presented by the MHLSP, as of 1 October 2020, the number of people infected with the new coronavirus was 50,981¹² in the population group 18+ (1.6%) of the total

³ Established on 17 March 2020 by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, the state of public health emergency was extended by the NEPHC until 30 June, 31 July, 31 August, 15 September 2020, 15 January, 15 February 2021, all over the country.

⁴ [NEPHC Decision](#) No 24 of 12 August 2020.

⁵ [Guidelines](#) on the Organisation and Conduct of Elections by the Central Electoral Commission Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, approved by NEPHC Decision No 24 of 12 August 2020, amended and supplemented by NEPHC Decision No 34 of 13 October 2020.

⁶ [Handbook](#) for members of initiative groups supporting candidates for the position of the President of the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2020, p. 10-11.

⁷ Article 114(1) of the Electoral Code.

⁸ Article 114(2) of the Electoral Code: The list of initiative group members, stating the group leader, shall be submitted to CEC at least 50 days before the date of elections by the person proposed as candidate for the position of President of the Republic of Moldova.

⁹ [CEC Decision](#) on the Registration of Initiative Groups.

¹⁰ [NEPHC Decision](#) No 33 of 28 September 2020.

¹¹ [Annex](#) No 1 to NEPHC No 33 of 28 September 2020.

¹² [Information](#) about COVID-19 presented by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection on 1 October 2020.

number of voters registered in the State Registry of Voters when the update of the voter's list ended (3,287,140)¹³. The analysis of the information on the epidemiological COVID-19 situation presented on 15 October 2020 reveals an increase by 29% of the number of cases registered in the population group 18+ as compared to the signature collection period.

It is still not clear if there is a correlation between the total number of registered cases and the signature collection, but it is clear that the signature collection in support of the candidates for the presidential elections of 1 (15) November 2020, without a clear regulatory framework, was a genuine challenge posing a high risk of infection.

Of the 13 IGs registered by CEC, 9 IGs¹⁴ managed to collect the required number of signatures and apply for the registration of electoral competitors on time¹⁵. As for the remaining four IGs, they did not manage to complete signatures collection for various reasons, and did not apply for the registration¹⁶. Moreover, three out of four IGs that did not manage to collect the required number of signatures supported independent candidates, which reveals that the signature collection proved to be challenging, particularly for independent candidates¹⁷.

Thus, this analysis strictly pursues addressing the problem of signature collection as a potential source of infection of the citizens during the signature collection period. Overall, suggestions will be made with regards to potential improvements to the nomination of candidates drawing on international practice.

Conditions for the registration of candidates in the electoral process: international practice

In international electoral practice, the right to be elected is subject to certain conditions. Thus, for electoral candidates/political parties to participate in the electoral process, the states imposed on them the condition to collect a particular number of signatures and/or to make an election deposit.¹⁸

Signature collection

The obligation to collect a particular number of signatures to propose a candidate, in fact, is in line with the principle of universal suffrage. It seems that in international practice, none of the political parties, except for certain ghost political parties, seem to encounter any difficulties in collecting the required number of signatures. This is a valid statement provided that the rules that regulate the signature collection are not used to prevent the candidates from exercising their right to be elected. To avoid any manipulations of this type, the law should set a maximum number of signatures that should not exceed the threshold of 1% of voters in a given constituency¹⁹.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, many countries in the world that were supposed to organise elections or referenda, had to decide whether to conduct them as initially planned and

¹³ [Total number](#) of voters included in the SVR when the update of the list of voters ended, presented by CEC on 8 October 2020.

¹⁴ According to item 29 of the Regulation on the Peculiarities of Nomination and Registration of the Candidates for the Presidential Election of 1 November 2020, in order to register the candidates, at least 30 days before the elections, they should submit to the Central Electoral Commission, the documents provided for in Article 44 and the candidate nominating petitions according to Article 102 of the Electoral Code.

¹⁵ IGs supporting candidates: Renato Usatii, Andrei Nastase, Andrian Candu, Tudor Deliu, Violeta Ivanov, Maia Sandu, Octavian Ticu, Dorin Chirtoaca.

¹⁶ [Report](#) No 3. Observation Mission of the Presidential Election in the Republic of Moldova of 1 November 2020, p. 27.

¹⁷ [Statement](#) of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions of the ENEMO international election observation mission, 3 November 2020, p. 14.

¹⁸ [Use of election deposit](#) during electoral processes in European countries, Legislative Unit of the Directorate for Relations with the Parliament, Permanent Electoral Authority, April 2020, p. 1.

¹⁹ [Code](#) of Good Practice in Electoral Matters. Guidelines and Explanatory Report, item 8, p. 17, European Commission for Democracy through Law, Strasbourg, 28 July 2016.

take mitigation measures, or whether to postpone them²⁰. In those instances where the decision-makers decided to conduct the elections, they had to take into account a series of parameters and legal, technical and sanitary implications as well as constitutional arrangements in order to ensure that the democratic institutions could operate as they would in normal circumstances and that the fundamental rights and freedoms of people were observed.

To organise and conduct safe elections, in observance of the measures aimed at preventing the spread of the virus, the countries around the world adjusted their legal electoral framework so as to facilitate the registration of the candidates by addressing:

- online collection of signatures;
- cancelling or reducing the number of signatures required to stand as a candidate.

Online signature collection

Online signature collection is a reasonable method as it ensures public health security, provides a high degree of comfort and speed and facilitates the registration of candidates and the organisation of elections during sanitary crises.

The states that have turned to digital tools for signature collection, including in response to the COVID-19 pandemic include: Austria, Finland²¹, the Netherlands, Latvia²², Denmark, certain American states (Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Columbia, Denver, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan²³, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, Washington)²⁴, Switzerland, certain EU states, Iceland, Romania.

For example, in the case of Iceland, following the temporary amendments of the legal framework, in April 2020, the presidential candidates were able to collect the signatures both on paper and electronically. According to the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, about 87% of the signatures submitted by the candidates were collected electronically through ID validation. Moreover, the online collection of signatures is being considered as an alternative method for the 2021 Parliamentary Elections too as no concerns regarding the collection and validation of signatures were raised²⁵.

For smooth elections amid the pandemic, the Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority permitted the collection of signatures via email and via any other electronic platform that allows processing personal data in observance of the regulatory framework on personal data protection²⁶. According to the Methodology for submitting the application for registration as candidate and the candidate nominating petitions for the 2020 local elections, the electronic candidate nominating petitions are valid only if they are accompanied by a declaration on the collector's honour confirming the authenticity of supporters' signatures²⁷.

In Denmark, for instance, online signature collection became possible starting 2014 and is used by new parties to enter parliamentary elections. To start collecting signatures, the party is required to send to the institution in charge the electronic addresses of the potential supporters. After 7 days – *the cooling-off period*, the institution sends the potential supporters an email with a link to finish

²⁰ According to the [International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance](#) (IDEA International), 101 countries and territories organised elections during the pandemic and 75 other states and territories postponed the elections.

²¹ Despite Covid-19, [digital signature collection](#) has not taken off, Direct Democracy, Swissinfo.ch, accessed on 17.01.2021.

²² Starting with [1 January 2015](#), citizens can support online the initiatives to start referenda.

Optional ²³ [procedure](#) for collection of signatures, State Department of Michigan state, April 2020.

²⁴ [Methods](#) for signing candidate nominating petitions, Ballotpedia digital encyclopedia, accessed on 18 January 2021.

ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission ²⁵ [Report](#) of Iceland Presidential Election of 27 June 2020.

²⁶ [Decision](#) of PEA No 2 approving the Methodology for submitting the application for registration as candidate and the candidate nominating petitions for the 2020 local election, 17 July 2020.

²⁷ Article 10(4) of the [Methodology](#) for submitting the application for registration as candidate and the candidate nominating petitions for the 2020 local election, approved by the Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority on 17 July 2020.

the supporting procedure. The system accepts both the signatures collected on paper and those collected via email. One voter can support only one party²⁸.

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is an important tool of participative democracy in the EU, through which a million citizens residing in 1/4 of the Member States, have the possibility to ask the Commission to submit a proposal of Legal Act to apply the EU Treaties. Signatures can be collected on paper and online. The European Commission provides free and open-source software for online signature collection²⁹. Since 2020, the EIC procedure has become more accessible, less bureaucratic and more user-friendly for organisers and supporters³⁰.

Advantages of the online signature collection mechanism:

- it is a viable option for reducing physical contact between individuals;
- the procedure is faster, safer, more efficient, more accessible, including for supporters with special needs;
- it makes things simpler both for collectors and supporters;
- it reduces the time and the effort needed to check the manually collected signatures;
- it allows collectors to check in real time the number of valid signatures;
- it allows checking repeated signatures and confirming the eligibility of supporters before they sign³¹;
- it allows viewing the total number of signatures collected by all the collectors;
- it allows generating reports, disaggregated data, etc.

Disadvantages of the online signature collection mechanism:

- one must have an electronic signature or an email address;
- validity period of electronic signatures;
- system costs;
- potential issues with keeping records of the number of signatures collected in mixed format, particularly for local and regional elections.

cancelling or reducing the number of signatures required for standing as a candidate

According to the standards of the Venice Commission that are to be followed upon organising or postponing the elections, so as to observe the fundamental principles set in the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, *if the elections are organised during a state of emergency certain procedural amendments may be required, such as extending different terms, including for counting votes or **giving up the requirements for candidates registration such as the requirement to collect signatures (if it is not possible to do it online)***. In this respect, the best option would be to conduct some preliminary procedural amendments to the Electoral Code. Thus, late amendments to the electoral law that are applied only to particular elections are not necessarily a violation of the European principles of electoral law³².

In the European Union, the problem of elections in states of emergency is relatively new, but other countries in the world have already had to address this issue following public health crises (Liberia) or terrorist attacks and natural disasters (USA) that disrupted the government operations, including the organisation of elections³³. Thus, in response to the coronavirus pandemic, various US states amended their electoral law on the registration of candidates:

- *the requirement to collect signatures was cancelled* (Arizona³⁴; Vermont, New York, Utah³⁵);

²⁸ [Report](#) of Venice Commission on Electoral Law and Electoral Administration in Europe of 8.10.2020, item 126.

²⁹ [Fact Sheets](#) on the European Union European Parliament. European Citizens' Initiative.

³⁰ Since 2011, the European Commission received four initiatives.

³¹ The individuals are citizens of the Republic of Moldova, they have the right to vote and reside on the territory on which signatures are collected.

³² [Respect](#) for democracy, human rights and the rule of law during states of emergency-reflections, European Commission for Democracy Through Law, pct. 115, p. 74.

³³ Coronavirus and elections in selected Member States, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2020, p. 2.

³⁴ [Bloomberg News](#). How Coronavirus Is Killing Off Ballot Measures, accessed on 27 January 2021.

- *the number of required signatures was reduced* (Illinois – 10% for independent candidates and new parties; Connecticut – 30%; New Hampshire – 35% for the candidates of liberal party in general elections; New York; Virginia – for independent candidates and minority parties; Maryland – 50% for independent candidates; Massachusetts, Michigan – 50% for candidates running for mayor office; Rhode Island – 50% for the candidates in primary and general elections; Georgia – 70% for independent candidates and minority parties)³⁶.

Election deposit

In electoral law, a monetary deposit represents an amount of money that a candidate to an elective position must pay to be allowed to appear on the ballot. The obligation to pay an election deposit is additional to the other requirements that the candidates must meet in general, such as citizenship, age, place of residence³⁷.

The analysis of the international experience in this field, including the states of the OSCE region, revealed that the legislative body and the electoral bodies pay great attention to how election deposit – as a precondition for being registered as candidate – are made. What is more, according to the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, this alternative procedure is more efficient than signature collection³⁸.

Thus, the legal framework in Armenia, Austria, Australia³⁹, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, South Korea, Estonia, France, Greece, Hong Kong⁴⁰, India, Ireland, Japan⁴¹, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Latvia, Malaysia⁴², Malta, United Kingdom, New Zealand⁴³, Romania⁴⁴, the Czech Republic, Singapore⁴⁵, Slovakia, Turkey, the Netherlands, Ukraine⁴⁶, South Africa, Benin, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Kena, Namibia, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Zambia⁴⁷ provides the obligation to pay election deposit.

Table 1. Size of election deposit in different countries

<i>Presidential elections</i>				
Armenia 5000 minimum wages ⁴⁸ <i>Reimbursable</i> (5% of VVC ⁴⁹)	Austria EUR 3,600/PP	Bosnia and Herzegovina ⁵⁰ EUR 10,200 <i>Reimbursable</i> (1/3 of VVC)	Bulgaria ⁵¹ EUR 51/IC EUR 1,278/PP <i>Reimbursable</i> (1% of VVC)	Cyprus ⁵² EUR 2,000 <i>Reimbursable</i> (3% of VVC)
France EUR 2,000	Kyrgyzstan KGS 1,000,000 <i>Reimbursable</i> (1% of VVC) ⁵³	Lithuania ⁵⁴ 5 average wages per economy ⁵⁵ <i>Reimbursable</i>	Turkey EUR 16,140/IC <i>Reimbursable</i> ⁵⁶ (only for registered)	Ukraine UAH 2.5 million ⁵⁷ <i>Reimbursable</i> ⁵⁸ (victory, second round,

³⁵ [Ballotpedia](#) Digital Encyclopedia, Candidate filing changes in response to the coronavirus pandemic, 2020, accessed on 27 January 2021.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ [Use of election deposit](#) in electoral processes in European countries, Legislative Unit of the Directorate for Relations with the Parliament, Permanent Electoral Authority, April 2020, p. 1.

³⁸ [Code](#) of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, Guidelines on Elections, the Venice Commission, p. 18.

³⁹ [Information](#) about qualification and nominating as a candidate, Australian Electoral Commission.

⁴⁰ The Government of the Hong Kong special administrative region [press releases](#).

⁴¹ Japan's [electoral deposit](#).

⁴² How to become an [election candidate](#), RojakDaily, accessed on 11 January 2021.

⁴³ Electoral [Act](#) New Zealand.

⁴⁴ [Law](#) No 35 of 13 March 2008 on Chamber of Deputies and the Senate Elections, Chapter V, Article 29(5).

⁴⁵ Singapore general elections 2020, [election deposit](#).

⁴⁶ 2019 Presidential election in Ukraine, IFES post-election [report](#).

⁴⁷ Registration [fees](#) for political parties and candidates standing for elections, the Electoral Knowledge Network.

⁴⁸ In 2020, the minimum [wage](#) in Armenia was AMD 68000, i.e. EUR 109.

⁴⁹ Votes validly cast (VVC).

⁵⁰ Bosnia and Herzegovina General elections of 7 October 2018, ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission [Report](#), 25-27 June 2018, p. 10.

⁵¹ Election [Code](#) of the Republic of Bulgaria, art. 129.

⁵² The elections (President and vice-president) of the Republic [Laws](#) 1959 to 2017, p. 13.

⁵³ The [Constitutional Law](#) of the Kyrgyz Republic on elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and the deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic, art. 41, pct. 16.

		(7% of VVC)	candidates)	candidates whose registration application was rejected)
South Korea ⁵⁹ KRW 500,000,000 <i>Reimbursable</i> (for the winner of elections)				
<i>Parliamentary elections</i>				
Armenia 2500 minimum wages	Austria EUR 435 <i>Non-reimbursable</i>	Australia AUD 2,000 <i>Reimbursable</i> (4% of VVC)	Bosnia and Herzegovina EUR 10,200 <i>Reimbursable</i> (3% of VVC)	Bulgaria EUR 51/IC EUR 1,278/PP <i>Reimbursable</i> (1% of VVC)
Canada CAD 1,000 <i>Reimbursable</i> (15% of VVC)	The Czech Republic CZK 200,000 <i>Non-reimbursable</i>	Cyprus EUR 500 <i>Reimbursable</i> (1/3 of VVC)	South Korea KRW 15,000,000 <i>Reimbursable</i> (for the winner of elections)	Estonia 5 minimum wages per candidate/EUR 2,700 ⁶⁰ <i>Reimbursable</i> (minimum of the VVC)
France 1000 francs	Greece EUR 146.74 <i>Non-reimbursable</i>	India INR 25,000 <i>Reimbursable</i> (16.5% of VVC)	Ireland 500 EUR/IC ⁶¹ <i>Reimbursable</i> (5% of VVC)	Japan JPY 3,000,000 <i>Reimbursable</i> (10-12.5% of VVC)
Kazakhstan 15 minimum wages/PP <i>Reimbursable</i> (7% of VVC)	Latvia EUR 1,400/PP <i>Reimbursable</i> (2% of VVC)	Lithuania 1 to 10 average monthly wages per economy depending on the constituency	Malaysia EUR 2,000 <i>Reimbursable</i> (12.5% of VVC)	Malta 90 EUR <i>Reimbursable</i> (10% of VVC)
United Kingdom GBP 500 <i>Reimbursable</i> (5% of VVC)	Netherlands EUR 11,250	Romania 5 gross minimum wages countrywide for every candidate <i>Reimbursable</i> (2% of VVC)	Slovakia EUR 17,000/PP	Tadjikistan TJS 5,800
Turkey EUR 1,600/CI <i>Reimbursable</i> (only for elected candidates)	Ukraine ⁶² 10 minimum wages/IC 1000 minimum wages/PP <i>Reimbursable</i> (for the winner of elections)			
<i>Local elections</i>				
Greece EUR 50	Ireland 100 EUR/IC	United Kingdom GBP 500	Japan JPY 300,000-3,000,000	Bosnia and Herzegovina EUR 7,150 <i>Reimbursable</i> (3% of VVC)
Netherlands EUR 1,125				

⁵⁴ [Law](#) on Presidential elections, Republic of Lithuania, art. 136(2).

⁵⁵ In 2020, the average [wage](#) per economy in Lithuania was EUR 1455.

⁵⁶ Republic of Turkey Early Presidential and Parliamentary elections 2018, ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final [Report](#), p. 12.

⁵⁷ UAH 2.5 = EUR 74,346, EUR 1 = UAH 33.63.

⁵⁸ Ukraine Presidential Election 2019, ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final [Report](#), p. 15.

⁵⁹ KRW 500,000,000 = EUR 373,408, EUR 1 = KRW 1339.

⁶⁰ European Parliament Election [Act](#), art. 29, of 23.01.2003.

⁶¹ Independent candidates in national and European elections [study](#), Policy Department C: Citizens' rights and constitutional affairs, Directorate General for Internal Policies 2013, p. 22.

⁶² Ukraine Early parliamentary elections of 21 July 2019, ODIHR Final [Report](#), p. 15.

In the European space, the stringency of ballot access rules – such as deposit and signature requirements – varies widely. In the majority of cases, parties and independent candidates must pay the same deposit amount⁶³.

According to OSCE/ODIHR, where paying an election deposit is a precondition for one being registered as candidate, the amount must be big enough to deter frivolous parties and candidates, but also small enough not to restrict parties' or candidates' access to the ballot⁶⁴.

Advantages of election deposits:

- safe, rapid, facile method to apply when there are restrictions to travelling as, for instance, those imposed by the pandemic;
- the right to efficient representation is ensured;
- candidates' chances depend on financial capacity rather than on citizens' support;
- signature collection and verification is not time- and effort-demanding;
- direct contact between people is maximally avoided;
- candidates' accountability is ensured;
- no spending of public funds ⁶⁵.

Disadvantages of election deposits:

- might lead to greater levels of corruption in the electoral process;
- candidate selection is too harsh because some candidates cannot afford losing their financial resources;
- this method could restrict the access to ballot for candidates who do not have the funds, but have voters' support;
- the election deposit not being reimbursed if the candidate doesn't reach a particular threshold;
- large deposit requirements could limit female candidates' access to the electoral race⁶⁶;
- the inflation rate could influence the size of the deposit⁶⁷.

To conclude, election deposit are used by at least 41 countries (19%) worldwide⁶⁸ and by 14 (52%) EU member states. Using election deposit, including as an optional condition, contributes to political stability, ensures the right of well-intentioned candidate to efficient representation and filters out candidates with minimum chances of being voted. Still, the size of the election deposit must be rational, and the reimbursement conditions – reasonable⁶⁹.

Alternative solutions to the current signature collection mechanism implemented in Moldova

The COVID-19 pandemic and the public health crisis brought along extraordinary circumstances that demand adjustments to the current electoral framework in terms of signature collection – an important stage of the electoral process. Considering that the further development of the epidemiological situation is unpredictable, and in order to improve the legal framework in this field, we propose the following solutions for the current signature collection mechanism:

Streamlining the signature collection mechanism

1. *Implementing a mixed signature collection mechanism.* The current national legal framework provides the collection of signatures on paper, which requires filling in personal data and signing the signature list, in person. We believe that, against the current epidemiological background,

⁶³ Independent candidates in national and European elections [study](#), Policy Department C: Citizens' rights and constitutional affairs, Directorate General for Internal Policies 2013, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Guidelines for reviewing a legal framework for elections, OSCE/ODIHR, 2013, second edition, p. 40.

⁶⁵ According to reports submitted to CEC, the eight registered electoral contestants reported, during the election campaign, total expenses of MDL 23.1 million for election campaign activities.

⁶⁶ [Monetary deposits for ballot access](#), The electoral knowledge network, accessed on 27 January 2021.

⁶⁷ Typically, in systems around the world, female candidates have to cope with more disadvantages than male candidates.

⁶⁸ Of a total of 216 states.

⁶⁹ Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, Guidelines on Elections, the Venice Commission, p. 18.

*candidates for an elective position must be provided with the possibility to collect signatures both on paper and online, through a program managed by the electoral authority. CEC's experience in using the digitised modules of the 'Elections' State Automated Information System makes it technically possible to implement the online signature collection mechanism within up to six months*⁷⁰.

Additionally, according to the CEC 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, the first strategic pillar is *Citizen-oriented services*, its objective 1.1. provides for *Developing accessible, secured and innovative services, the further development of ESAIS being a strategic action*⁷¹. According to the CEC 2020 Action Plan, with a view to achieving the aforementioned objective, the electoral authority adjusted the 'Candidate nominating petition verification' module and drew up the terms of reference for a system supporting the online collection of signatures⁷². Considering the importance of this matter in the pandemic period and its relevance for the CEC objectives of digitising the electoral procedures, we believe that development partners could also support, including financially, the speedier implementation of efforts to digitise signature collection.

Experts say that currently about 120-130 thousand citizens of the Republic of Moldova own and actively use their electronic signature. In addition, the total number of people who used their electronic signature at least once is about 400-500 thousand citizens (about 15% of the total number of voters in the State Registry of Voters)⁷³. Given the noticed trends, the number of users will certainly keep increasing. However, the state authorities must conduct additional national citizen awareness campaigns on the usefulness, benefits and safety level of the electronic signature.

Although, currently, the period of validity of the public key certificate for the electronic signature users amounts to 2 years⁷⁴, Article 32(1) of the Law on Electronic Signatures and Electronic Documents states that *the period of validity of user's public key certificate is established by the certification services provider and cannot be longer than 5 years, depending on the hardware's capacity to create electronic signatures*⁷⁵. Consequently, at present, the validity of the electronic signature is only a technical aspect of time, not a problem.

The online collection of signatures would be enabled as soon as CEC registers the initiative group in support of the candidate and issues the signature collecting list and it would be disabled once the candidate applies for registration in the electoral race. The advantages of the online signature collection mechanism include: lack of physical contact between people, collectors being able to check the number of valid signatures in real time, reduced time and efforts to check signatures and a smaller workload for electoral bodies, enhancing the citizens' credibility when checking the signatures as it is possible to see the exact moment when an electronic signature was applied.

Note that the Republic of Moldova already has a positive experience with electronic data collection. To use the optional service of '*Preliminary registration*' available in the presidential, parliamentary elections and/or republican referenda, voters abroad and living on the left bank of the Nistru River (Transnistria) need to fill in an online form in which they identify themselves and whereby they register in advance, thus expressing their will to vote in elections for which the application is activated⁷⁶. Compared to 24,125 preliminary registrations in 2019, 35,910 new registrations were made in 2020 for the presidential elections, amounting to 60,035 total preliminary registrations by the end of the procedure⁷⁷.

⁷⁰ According to the estimates of Alexandru Balmos, head of the Department of Information Technology and Management of Voter Lists within CEC and Artur Reaboi, information systems architect from the E-Government Agency, deduced during the preliminary discussions on the content of the policy paper.

⁷¹ Central Electoral Commission 2020-2023 Strategic [Plan](#), approved by CEC Decision No 3586 of 15 January 2020, p. 32.

⁷² Central Electoral Commission 2020 Strategic [Plan](#), approved by CEC Decision No 3721 of 18 February 2020, p. 1.

⁷³ According to Artur Reaboi, informational systems architect at the E-Government Agency, in a workshop on the analysis: '*Signature collection in the context of the pandemic in support of the election candidates or in favour initiating a referendum: solutions and alternative mechanisms*', organised by the Promo-LEX Association on 25 February 2021.

⁷⁴ [Period](#) of validity of the public key certificate, Information Technology and Cybersecurity Service.

⁷⁵ [Law](#) No 91 on Electronic Signatures and Electronic Documents of 27 June 2014.

⁷⁶ [Regulation](#) on preliminary registration, approved by CEC Decision No 1568 of 24 April 2018.

⁷⁷ [Report](#) No 2 | Observation Mission of the Presidential Election in the Republic of Moldova of 1 November 2020, p. 4.

At the same time, the issues with the mixed collection of signatures is about observing Article 42, paragraph (5) of the Electoral Code which provides that voters are allowed to sign in support of only one candidate in one electoral race. Against this background, item 8 of the Regulation on the filling out, submission and checking of signature collecting list states that, if the voter supported several candidates, only the signature applied first according to the date in the signature collecting list is considered valid, the rest being considered invalid. As far back as in the Final Report on Presidential Elections Observation, Promo-LEX concluded that: 'By specifying the date from the signature collecting list as the criteria for identifying the first signature applied, CEC might, in practice, receive, check and subsequently register a candidate for whom some supporters will have signed more than once, after having already signed for other candidates too, but who submitted the signature collecting lists later'⁷⁸. The approach to signatures collected online and on paper must be identical. Therefore, applying – by analogy – the online voting rule, when only the last signature is valid, could raise a number of questions in the context of the mixed format of signature collection.

As a solution, we propose adjusting the legislation to the relevant international standards. Thus, according to item 77 of Guidelines on Political Party Regulation, the Venice Commission recommends that 'in order to enhance pluralism and freedom of association, the legislation should not limit a citizen to signing a supporting list of only one party. Such a limitation is too easily abused and can lead to the disqualification of parties who in good faith believed they had fulfilled the requirements for registration'⁷⁹. In this context, we believe that voters should have the possibility to support several candidates for an elective position. For instance, voters' possibility to support several candidates is provided by the legal framework of Romania⁸⁰, Lithuania⁸¹, Kyrgyzstan⁸², Macedonia⁸³, Ireland⁸⁴, Poland⁸⁵, Greece⁸⁶, Belarus⁸⁷, Azerbaijan⁸⁸ etc.

International practice shows that the online signature collection, introduced by some countries, including as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has gone well, being a fast, safe and effective procedure.

2. Adjusting the required number of signatures to the international standards. Chapter 1 of the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters of the European Commission for Democracy Through Law notes that 'The law should not require collection of the signatures of more than 1% of voters in the constituency concerned'.

In the course of monitoring the general local elections, Promo-LEX OM found that independent candidates were treated unfairly in terms of the signature collection obligation, compared to the candidates nominated by political parties or electoral blocs⁸⁹.

⁷⁸ [Final Report](#). Promo-LEX Observation Mission of the Presidential Election in the Republic of Moldova of 30 November 2016, p. 15-16.

⁷⁹ [Guidelines](#) on Political Party Regulation, OSCE/ODIHR 2010, pct. 77, p. 43.

⁸⁰ [Law](#) No 148 of 24 July 2019, Article 4(2).

⁸¹ [Law](#) on Presidential elections, Article 33.

⁸² The Constitutional [Law](#) of the Kyrgyz Republic on elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and the deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of Kyrgyz Republic, art. 52, alin. (5).

⁸³ Electoral [Code](#) of the Republic of Macedonia, art. 63, alin. (3).

⁸⁴ Electoral [Act](#) of Ireland, art. 52, alin. (1), lit. c).

⁸⁵ Election [Code](#) of Poland, art. 265, parag. 2.

⁸⁶ Greece early Parliamentary elections 2019, ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final [Report](#), p. 8.

⁸⁷ Republic of Belarus early parliamentary elections 2019, ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission [Report](#), p. 7.

⁸⁸ Republic of Azerbaijan early parliamentary elections 2020, ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final [Report](#), p. 13.

⁸⁹ [Report](#) No 1 | Observation Mission for the General Local Elections and New Parliamentary Elections of 20 October 2019, p.14.

Table 2. Number of required petition signatures

to support a candidate for one of the elective position		
at least 2000 and at most 2500 supporters eligible to vote (male candidate)	under 1%	in elections of MPs (IC)
at least 1000 and at most 2500 supporters eligible to vote (female candidate)		
at least 15,000 and at most 25,000 voters from at least half of the second-level administrative-territorial units of the Republic of Moldova	under 1%	in Moldovan presidential elections
2% of voters from the respective constituency, divided by the number of seats for the respective council, but not less than 50 people	under 1%	in electing councillors for the local council
5% of voters from the respective constituency, but not less than 150 people and no more than 10,000 people	over 1% (5%)	in mayoral elections (IC)
to support the initiation of a referendum		
of at least 200,000 citizens of the Republic of Moldova eligible to vote	over 1% (6%)	for any type of republican referenda, except for the constitutional one
10% of the citizens eligible to vote who reside in the respective administrative-territorial unit.	over 1% (10%)	in local referenda

According to Promo-LEX observers, the biggest impediments to the registration of candidates on the basis of candidate nominating petitions were encountered by independent candidates for the position of mayor of Balti municipality – about 5,500 signatures (5%) and of Chisinau municipality – 10,000 (1.56%)⁹⁰.

According to Promo-LEX, the number of signatures required to appear on the ballot as an independent candidate in Balti and Chisinau municipalities was excessive. In this regard, *we reiterate the need to review the calculation formula in order to reduce the number of required signatures* so as to fall within the limits imposed by the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters⁹¹. Also, we repeatedly emphasize the need to provide for fair conditions for candidates in local and parliamentary elections by making the collection of signatures mandatory for all the categories of electoral competitors⁹².

3. *Addressing other deficiencies of the legal and regulatory framework in the field.* In the course of monitoring electoral processes, Promo-LEX identified a series of other issues with the collection and validation of signatures on signature collecting lists. We believe that the streamlining of signature collection should provide for solutions to at least three other deficiencies identified by Promo-LEX, in addition to those discussed above:

- removing the excessive format requirements provided for by the CEC Regulation on the Filling Out, Submission and Checking of the Signature Collecting Lists, which are not consistent with the minimum requirements of the Electoral Code, but which can result in the invalidation of signatures⁹³;
- eliminating the obligation to include on signature collecting list signatures of supporters who reside in the same settlement⁹⁴;
- impose – on all candidates, not only on the independent ones – the obligation to collect signatures to be able to stand as candidates in local and parliamentary elections.

Implementing the election deposit mechanism

The Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters states that this alternative procedure is more efficient than signature collection⁹⁵. What is more, in one of its judgements, the European Court of

⁹⁰[Final Report](#). Observation Mission of the General Local Elections and New. Parliamentary Elections of 20 October 2019, p.39.

⁹¹ [Ibidem](#).

⁹² [Ibidem](#), p. 82.

⁹³ [Report No 3](#) Promo-LEX Observation Mission of the Presidential Election in the Republic of Moldova of 1 November 2020, p. 13-14.

⁹⁴[Final Report](#). Promo-LEX Observation Mission for the General Local Elections and New Parliamentary Elections of 20 October 2019, p.43.

Human Rights found that this method had the 'legitimate objective to ensure the right to an efficient, well-organised representation, to increase the accountability of those who run for elections and to limit the elections to credible candidates, avoiding at the same time the unjustified spending of public funds'⁹⁶.

Having analysed the results of the first round of the presidential election of 1 November 2020, of the parliamentary elections of 24 February 2019 and of the general local elections (election of the Mayor General of Chisinau), we found the following:

Table 3

2020 Presidential Elections ⁹⁷	2019 Parliamentary Elections ⁹⁸	2019 General Local Elections ⁹⁹
Out of 8 electoral contestants: - 2 electoral contestants obtained at least 1% of VVC (Dorin Chirtoaca – 1.20% and Tudor Deliu – 1.37%); - 1 electoral contestant obtained 2% of VVC (Octavian Ticu – 2.01%); - 1 electoral contestant obtained at least 3% of VVC (Andrei Nastase – 3.26%).	Out of 15 electoral contestants: - 8 electoral contestants obtained less than 1% of VVC; - 1 electoral contestant obtained more than 1% of VVC; - 1 electoral contestant obtained more than 2% of VVC; - 1 electoral contestant obtained more than 3% of VVC.	Out of 18 electoral contestants: - 9 electoral contestants obtained less than 1% of VVC; - 1 electoral contestant obtained more than 1% of VVC; - 2 electoral contestants obtained more than 2% of VVC; - 1 electoral contestant obtained more than 3% of VVC; - 1 electoral contestant obtained more than 4% of VVC.

Taking as a starting point the fact that, as a tool, election deposits help filter out potential candidates and don't allow for people with minimum chances to be voted for and who are willing to candidate only in pursuit of free advertising of themselves by making it to the ballot¹⁰⁰, as well as considering the case law of the European Court for Human Rights, according to which by applying the election deposit doesn't infringe on Article 3 of the Protocol No 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights, i.e. on the right to free elections, we suggest *implementing election deposit as an alternative to signature collection requirement for nomination and registration of candidates on the ballot*.

The experience of other states corroborates the usefulness and effectiveness of this tool thanks to its advantages: it ensures one's right to efficient representation, it is easy to apply when movement restrictions are imposed, candidates' chances depend exclusively on their financial capacity, it does not demand the time and efforts that signature collection and validation does.

To decide on the size of the election deposit for presidential elections in Moldova, the international practices (presidential elections) was analysed, with a focus on five indicators:

Table 4

	Population ¹⁰¹	GDP/mln \$ ¹⁰²	GDP per capita/\$ ¹⁰³	Deposit/\$	No of candidates at the last elections
Cyprus	1,212,578	24,948.94	27,858	2,425	2
France	65,273,511	2,715,518.27	40,494	2,425	11
Armenia	2,963,243	13,672.80	4,622	660	8
Austria	9,006,398	445,075.39	50,138	4,365	6
Bosnia and	3,280,819	20,164.19	6,108	12,367	16

⁹⁵ [Code](#) of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, Guidelines on Elections, the Venice Commission, p. 18.

⁹⁶ [Information Note](#) on the case of Sukhovetsky v. Ukraine, March 2006.

⁹⁷ [Results](#) of the second round of the presidential election of 1 November 2020, [alegeri.md](#).

⁹⁸ [Results](#) of the 2019 parliamentary elections, for the national constituency, [alegeri.md](#).

⁹⁹ [Results](#) of the 2019 general local elections, elections for Mayor General of Chisinau, [alegeri.md](#).

¹⁰⁰ [Monetary deposit](#) – a condition for the registration of candidates in elections.

¹⁰¹ [Worldometers](#), World Population, 2021.

¹⁰² World Bank, [GDP](#) 2019.

¹⁰³ World Bank, [GDP](#) per capita 2019.

Herzegovina					
Bulgaria	6,948,445	68,558.82	9,828	1,550 ¹⁰⁴	23 ¹⁰⁵
Kyrgyzstan	6,524,195	8,454.62	1,309	12,000	11
Lithuania	2,722,289	55,064	19,602	8,815	9
Turkey	84,339,067	761,425.50	9,126	19,569	6
Ukraine	43,733,762	153,781.07	3,659	90,000	44
South Korea	51,269,185	1,646,739.22	31,846	452,737	15
Moldova	4,033,963	11,968.71	4,503	4,000 ¹⁰⁶	8

The table data shows some nuanced approaches used by the states concerned, which cannot be easily explained by a causal relationship between the stated indicators. For instance, in Austria the GDP/capita is eight times higher than in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the value of the deposit is three times lower. Or South Korea, where the value of the deposit is three times higher than the amount of the deposits of the other 10 analysed states.

Thus, to estimate the size of an election deposit for the Presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova, we used the average of two indicators: GDP/capita and deposit value in 10 states. Formula used for calculation: GDP/capita Moldova x average deposit/average GDP/capita. South Korea was not included in the calculations. We thus estimated the value of deposit for the Presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova at about USD 4,000 (about MDL 70,000). Note that the proposed size of deposit for the Republic of Moldova is comparable with the country's GDP/capita. The table data reveal that for EU states, the deposit size is lower than the respective economic indicator, and in the case of non-EU states the situation is opposite — the deposit size is higher.

Regarding the proposed size of the election deposit (about MDL 70,000), we need to take into account that a political party that obtained about 1% of the votes will accumulate this amount in about one year and a half as a contender running for the Presidential Election of 1 November 2020¹⁰⁷. Moreover, we remind that according to Article 69, paragraph (3) of the Electoral Code, public broadcasters offer free airtime to electoral competitors during the campaign.

The possibility to return the deposit is another important aspect. According to data from Table 1, in 9 of the 11 cases the deposit for Presidential elections may be returned. For the Republic of Moldova, we also recommend the option to return the deposit if the candidate meets the following conditions:

- accumulates at least 8% of VVC;
- withdraws its candidacy in the manner prescribed by the law;
- ensures financial transparency of electoral competitors' revenues and expenses.

The value (threshold) of 8% was established by identifying the average 'percentage thresholds for reimbursement' set by the law of the states concerned in Tables 1 and 4 for Presidential elections.

The candidate is to transfer the election deposit to the bank account of CEC/State Treasury, in national currency, which is to be reimbursed under the same conditions within 5 working days from the date CEC published the final results. If the *aforementioned* conditions are not observed, the deposit is transferred to the state budget.

The size of the election deposit for parliamentary and local elections will depend on the required number of signatures. Thus, for instance, if we take as a starting point the values estimated for

¹⁰⁴ The value of election deposit for an independent candidate is \$62.

¹⁰⁵ Of the 23 registered candidates, 12 were independent candidates.

¹⁰⁶ Value of election deposit calculated on the basis of 10 states, without South Korea.

¹⁰⁷ [CEC Decision No 4580](#) of 19.01.2021 establishing the monthly amount of state budget subsidies for political parties in 2021, according to their performances at the Parliamentary Election of 24 February 2019, General Local Elections of 20 October 2019 and Presidential Election of 1 November 2020.

presidential elections, the election deposit to be made by an independent candidate for the parliamentary elections would amount to about USD 535 (about MDL 9,300) and to about USD 4,000 (about MDL 70,000) for a political party/electoral bloc (according to the size of the deposit in presidential elections). The election deposit for the elective position of Mayor General of Chisinau municipality would be USD 2,650 (about MDL 46,115), for the elective position of Mayor of Balti municipality – USD 1,500 (about MDL 26,100). The reimbursement of election deposit would follow the same conditions.

According to some experts¹⁰⁸, the size of the election deposit proposed by this study for the presidential and parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova – i.e. USD 4,000 (about MDL 70,000) and USD 2,650 (about MDL 46,115) for the elective position of Mayor General of Chisinau municipality – is small. They suggested increasing the deposit for the *aforementioned* positions because it is one that could be afforded by a large number of candidates – less intentioned to fight for the elective office, while being keen to benefit from the competitors¹⁰⁹’ advantages and become visible.

Thus, if MPs converge on the same view, a political opportunity coefficient, which the Parliament would establish, could be added to this calculation¹¹⁰.

Besides negative social and economic impacts, the COVID-19 pandemic also affected the democratic procedures meant to support solely political rights (the right to vote and to stand as a candidate). In this context, the states must respond to challenges adequately and immediately. One of the challenges in the electoral process of the Republic of Moldova is collecting signatures in the middle of the pandemic.

The international experience in the field shows that public authorities must be able to adapt to new risks and amend the legal framework within the boundaries of relevant international standards in pursuit of minimising the risks for elections in the middle of a pandemic, and of improving the electoral process.

The collection of signatures in support of candidates and referenda in Moldova was a matter of interest for observation missions and stakeholders even before the pandemic. However, it is particularly now that the challenges can and must be turned into opportunities to review the legal framework, to improve and simplify the procedures. This study proved that, technically speaking, alternative mechanisms could be implemented in optimal time. It is therefore necessary for the Parliament to also reckon the importance and relevance of the issue at stake.

On the one hand, according to international good practices, implementing a mixed signature collection mechanism (in person and online) is possible. On the other hand, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova could consider applying the election deposit mechanism at the candidate nomination and registration stage, as an alternative tool, to ensure sanitary security during the pandemic. We believe that potential candidates should be allowed to choose between the aforementioned mechanisms, but without requiring both signature collection and the electoral deposit together.

¹⁰⁸ According to opinions expressed by a number of people in the preliminary discussions on the policy document.

¹⁰⁹ Using the free air time provided by public broadcasters to electoral contestants; participating in electoral debates held by local/regional/national media services providers etc.

¹¹⁰ For instance, if the political opportunity coefficient is two (2), then the size of the deposit in presidential elections would be USD 8000 (USD 4000 * 2). Or another amount, depending on the rate prescribed by the Parliament.

Recommendations

To address the problem of signature collection as a potential source of infection of citizens and to streamline candidate nomination, we propose:

- streamlining the signature collection mechanism;
- implementing the election deposit mechanism.

As regards reforming the signature collection mechanism, we recommend:

The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova to

1. Amend Articles 46-49 of the Electoral Code to legalize the mechanism supporting also the online collection of signatures in support to candidate in elections.
2. Amend Articles 165-168 and 192-195 of the Electoral Code in light of the mechanism supporting the collection of signatures on holding republican and local referenda.
3. Amend Articles 85 and 137 of the Electoral Code to provide for fair conditions for candidates in local and parliamentary elections by making the collection of signatures mandatory for candidates nominated by parties, other socio-political organizations and electoral blocs as well.
4. Remove 'The signature collecting list shall contain only signatures of supporters who live in the same settlement' from Article 47(3) of the Electoral Code.
5. Amend Article 47(5) of the Electoral Code as follows: 'Voters can sign in support of more candidates in one electoral race'.
6. Amend Article 46(1) of the Electoral Code by extending the candidate nomination period in local elections.
7. Amend Article 138 of the Electoral Code by harmonising it with the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, which stipulates that 'The law should not require collection of the signatures of more than 1% of voters in the constituency concerned'.

The Central Electoral Commission to

1. Amend the Regulation on the Filling Out, Submission and Checking of Signature Collecting Lists by regulating the online signature collection mechanism (technical description of the mechanism; linking of the digital and paper-based mechanisms; signature collection period; mandatory data to be introduced in the petition sheet; submission and checking of signature lists collected using both methods etc.).
2. Amend Item 43 of the Regulation on the Filling Out, Submission and Checking of Signature Collecting Lists by making adjustments to the conditions under which collected signatures and signature lists may be annulled in compliance with the Electoral Code, without trespassing on the latter.
3. Amend the Regulation on the Peculiarities of Nomination and Registration of the Candidates for the Presidential Election in Moldova, the Regulation on the Peculiarities of Nomination and Registration of Candidates to the Position of Member of Parliament of Moldova, the Regulation on the Peculiarities of Nomination and Registration of the Candidates in Local Elections, by providing for the collection of signatures in digital form.
4. Develop a system that allows for the online collection of signatures and for their validation without violating the confidentiality of personal data.
5. Draw up the Regulation on 'Candidate Nominating Petitions' Application, which should describe what information the application operates with, and develop a simple procedure to challenge the results generated by this application.

As regards implementing the election deposit mechanism, we recommend:

The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova to

1. Supplement the Electoral Code with explicit rules on the election deposit: election deposit size by elective office, conditions and deadlines for placing the deposit, conditions and deadlines for deposit reimbursement.
2. Amend Article 49(1)(b) of the Electoral Code by replacing 'signature collecting list containing the required number of signatures in support of independent candidates' with 'the document that confirms that the election deposit was placed'.

The Central Electoral Commission to

1. Draw up a Regulation detailing unambiguously the election deposit placement mechanism.

Abbreviations

CEC – Central Election Commission
NEPHC – National Extraordinary Public Health Commission
EU – European Union
NBM – National Bank of Moldova
MHLSP – Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection
OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
USA – United States of America
ECI – European Citizens’ Initiative
OM – Observation mission
IG – initiative group
VVC – votes validly cast
GDP – gross domestic product
PP – political party
IC – independent candidate
ID – identity
m – million
EUR – euro
USD – United States dollar
UAH – Ukrainian hryvnia
CZK – Czech koruna