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Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)

Honouring of obligations and commitments by the Republic of Moldova

Information Note by of the co-rapporteurs on their visit to Chisinau (15 to 17 June 2026)

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1. Introduction

1. We paid a visit to Chisinau from 15 to 17 June 2026. This was the first visit after the recent parliamentary elections which took place in the Republic of Moldova on 25 September 2025. Following the elections, the country took over the presidency of the Council of Europe from November 2025 to May 2026. As is customary, the Monitoring Committee does not debate or publish reports and statements during an election period in, or during the Council of Europe Presidency of, a country under a monitoring procedure.

2. The implementation of far-reaching reforms, guided by the country's accession negotiations with the European Union, have continued unabated since our last visit. While some of the concerns outlined in this and previous information notes remain to be addressed, progress has overall been remarkable. The main areas of attention during our visit were: the ongoing reform of the judiciary; the fight against corruption; and the draft law on the organisation and functioning of the Parliament of Moldova, which is key to strengthening parliamentary oversight and inclusive law-making procedures. Lastly, we focussed on the announced administrative territorial reform that has been a source of political debate. Important points of attention in the context of the monitoring procedure are the relations between Chisinau and the autonomous region of Gagauzia, and the Transnistrian settlement process. It was not possible to treat these two issues extensively during this visit and we will return to the country later this year with the intention of visiting Tiraspol and Comrat.

3. During our visit we met with, *inter alia*: the Speaker of the Parliament; the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration and Chief Negotiator of the Republic of Moldova on the Transnistrian issue; the Minister of Justice; the Chairperson and members of the Supreme Council of the Magistracy and the Superior Council of the Prosecutors; representatives of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office; the Chairperson of the Committee on legal affairs, appointments and immunities of the Moldovan Parliament; the leadership of the Congress of Local Authorities of the Republic of Moldova (CALM); the Chairperson and members of the Moldovan delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly; the leadership of all political factions in the Moldovan parliament; as well as representatives of civil society organisations and of the diplomatic community. The programme of our visit is attached to this note in Appendix.

4. We would like to thank the Moldovan parliament and Moldovan delegation to the Assembly for the excellent programme and hospitality, and the Head of the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau and his staff for the support given to our delegation. In addition, we would like to express our gratitude to the Ambassadors of Latvia and Spain for hosting an excellent working dinner with the international community in Chisinau.

2. Recent developments and relations between Chisinau and Comrat

5. On 25 September 2025 parliamentary elections were held in the Republic of Moldova. These elections took place under complicated conditions caused by the ongoing war in Ukraine and unprecedented interference by the Russian Federation in the election process, including through illicit financing of parties and political groupings as well as cyber-attacks and widespread disinformation campaigns. The last elections in this election cycle will be the local elections that are scheduled to take place in the autumn of 2027.

6. The 2025 parliamentary elections were observed by an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) of which the Parliamentary Assembly was a part.[1] The IEOM welcomed the competitive nature of these elections in which contestants were able to campaign freely with fundamental freedoms generally well respected. Regrettably, the campaign period was marred by misinformation and vote buying campaigns, mostly orchestrated by the Russian Federation.

7. The elections took place in a very polarised political environment that was, and to some extent still is, characterised by deep divisions between the ruling party and the opposition regarding the country's geopolitical orientation. The Central Election Commission (CEC) registered 4 electoral blocs, 15 political parties, and 4 independent candidates, from a wide political spectrum. At the same time, the IEOM noted that some registration decisions had been overly formalistic or unduly burdensome on (especially new) parties. Two political parties were deregistered by the Courts shortly before election day because of campaign financing violations. The IEOM noted that their last moment deregistration limited these parties' possibilities to appeal the decision and seek legal remedy, in contravention to international standards.

8. According to the IEOM, the legal framework provides a sound basis for conducting democratic elections. Following the Presidential elections, the electoral code was amended to, *inter alia*, provide clearer definitions of electoral corruption and stipulating tougher penalties for transgression. In addition, it improved the regulation of campaign financing, addressing most, albeit not all, Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. However, changes were often made at the last moment, without extended consultations.

[1] See Doc. 16296 Observation of the parliamentary elections in Republic of Moldova.

While these amendments served the clearly legitimate aim of addressing abuses and vulnerabilities, the IEOM noted that "the frequent changes to the law, including shortly before these elections, undermined effective implementation, legal certainty and the stability of electoral legislation".

9. As outlined in detail in our previous information note, the Republic of Moldova has a very sizable and electorally active diaspora. The number of countries in which postal voting took place increased from 6 to 10. Given the decisive impact of the diaspora vote on the outcome of elections in the Republic of Moldova, the conduct of the diaspora vote remains domestically a very sensitive, and politically controversial issue. The PACE election observation report notes that several interlocutors raised concerns regarding both the number and the geographical distribution of polling stations abroad. The high turnout of the diaspora voters underlines the continued demand for proper mechanism to conduct the diaspora vote and as noted in the report: "further expansion – whether by additional sites or more flexible modalities – remains warranted".

10. These elections were won by the incumbent governing party PAS with 50, 2% of the votes, giving them 55[2] of the 101 seats in the Moldovan parliament. Turnout was a high 52,24%. In total 17% of the votes were cast abroad, mostly in western Europe, thus underlining the importance of diaspora voting mechanisms. Four other political parties and blocs passed the 5% legal threshold: the Patriotic Bloc with 24.2% of the votes or 26 seats; Alternativa with 7.96% or 8 seats; Our Party with 6.2% or 6 seats and Democracy at Home with 5.62%, or 6 seats.

11. This outcome gives PAS a comfortable governing, but not constitutional, majority. Regrettably the political environment and climate in the parliament remains tense and polarised with the opposition often following obstructionist strategies. The opposition parties themselves are also fragmented. On 14 April 2026, the National Alternative Movement (MAN) of Chisinau mayor Ion Ceban withdrew from the Alternativa Bloc citing actions and strategies of the Bloc that contradict the European Integration path of Moldova as desired by Moldovan society. For procedural reasons the members of MAN continue to be legally part of the Alternativa faction in parliament.

12. Despite this highly polarised and contentious political climate, and also because of it, an inclusive and transparent law-making process, based on consultations with all the stakeholders involved, remains essential for the robustness and irreversibility of the reform process in the country. This is especially true for the drafting of a new law on the functioning of the parliament which will define the parliamentary working and law-making procedures for years to come. At the same time, despite the very polarised climate, important reforms continue to take place as planned within the framework of the accession process, which is to be welcomed.

13. On 3 July 2026, in a surprise development, Prime Minister Alexandru Munteanu resigned from his post. He refrained from giving any formal reasons for his resignation, only saying that he "could no longer carry out his mandate in accordance with his principles and convictions".[3] However, a number of observers have suggested that his decision could be related to tensions within the ruling majority over planned fiscal reforms that were supported by him, as well as to a series of corruption and nepotism scandals that had come to light within the ruling majority.[4] On 22 July 2026, the Moldovan parliament elected Vasile Tofan as new Prime Minister and approved his new government, which is largely identical to the previous one.

14. Relations between Comrat and Chișinău remain tense, with opposition parties accusing the authorities of unnecessarily raising tensions. These tensions also make relations between Chisinau and this region vulnerable to malicious foreign interference with especially the Russian Federation playing a particularly destructive role in exploiting and deepening divisions between Comrat and Chișinău. Recently, the relations have been dominated by a series of developments regarding the foreseen regional elections for the People's Assembly of Gagauzia (PAG) and the Bashkan (governor) of Gagauzia.

15. On 16 December 2025, the People's Assembly of Gagauzia (PAG) called for PAG elections to be held on 22 March 2026 and appointed the Gagauz Central Election Commission to organise them. This appointment was challenged before the Constitutional Court by the State Chancellery in Comrat on the grounds that the appointments should have been made to a Central Election Council and not to the Commission. This has created a set of legal problems since the PAG could not repeat the appointment process because its tenure had expired, nor can new elections be organised if the appointments are declared illegal, which indeed happened on 20 January 2026. As a result, the elections for the PAG were cancelled by the Gagauz Central Election Commission/Council.

[2] 8 seats fewer from the previous parliamentary convocation.
[3] Moldova's Prime Minister Munteanu steps down, Reuters, 3 July 2026.
[4] Moldova: Prime Minister's sudden resignation triggers a reputational crisis for the pro-Western camp, Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), 7 July 2026.

16. In order to resolve the crisis, a working group between the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and the People's Assembly of the Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) of Gagauzia resumed working. Nevertheless, on 11 March 2026, the Ministry of Justice challenged before the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova a series of provisions of Law No. 344 of 1994 on the Special legal status of the ATU of Gagauzia, notably articles about appointments to and the composition of the Central Electoral Commission of Gagauzia, as well as the appointment of heads of the regional Directorate of Internal Affairs and the regional Intelligence Service. On 17 March, the PAG called for new elections to be held on 21 June 2026. This decision was subsequently annulled by the Moldovan South Court of Appeals.

17. On 22 April, the PAG adopted a statement in which they asserted that the decisions of the Moldovan authorities ran counter to the law on the autonomous status of Gagauzia. At the time of writing, the issue of elections in Gagauzia has not been resolved and some aspects are still before the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova.

18. On 28 May 2025, the Central Court of Appeal upheld the first instance ruling in the case involving the governor of the ATU of Gagauzia, Evghenia Guţul, and the former secretary of the Şor Party, Svetlana Popan. The Appeal Court rejected as unfounded the appeal filed by the defendants' lawyers against the ruling of the Chișinău Court, issued on 5 August 2025, under which the two women were sentenced to seven and six years in prison respectively and obliged to pay more than 56.4 million lei. As a result, Ms Guţul remains sentenced to serve seven years in prison for the illegal financing of the former Şor Party related case, while Svetlana Popan remains sentenced to six years in prison. Ms Guţul's' lawyer announced that the decision will be challenged before the Supreme Court of Justice.

19. On 6 July 2026, the People's Assembly of Gagauzia elected Valentin Gaidarji as its new chairperson and set 15 November 2026 as the date for the new PAG election. It also agreed to submit certain provisions of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova governing the conduct of regional elections to the Constitutional Court for review. The following day, the Constitutional Court decided to combine this appeal with a similar one from the central authorities in Chișinău. On 9 July, the Constitutional Court declared the PAG's appeal inadmissible and found several legal provisions to be unconstitutional. These included the right of the People's Assembly of Gagauzia to appoint the Central Electoral Council of Gagauzia, and the requirement for the regional authorities to consent to police appointments. The speaker of the PAG decried this as an infringement on the autonomy of Gagauzia.

20. On 31 July 2026, following our visit, the Moldovan Parliament passed several amendments to the Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova in first reading, in order to regulate elections for the Bashkan and the People's Assembly in Gagauzia. Among other changes, these amendments introduced a proportional closed-list system for the People's Assembly, similar to that used for local and regional councils in the rest of the country. This new system will only come into effect after the forthcoming elections. The amendments also stipulate that the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova will oversee the organisation and conduct of the Gagauzian elections and appoint the chair of the Gagauzian Central Electoral Council (GCEC). The other GCEC seats will be allocated as follows: two nominees from the People's Assembly; two from the Comrat Court of Law; and one from each party represented in Parliament. As expected, the opposition and PAG have criticised these amendments, which were scheduled to be adopted at an extraordinary session of parliament at the end of August. The amendments also stipulate that regional elections in Gagauzia should take place on the second or third Sunday in November. This confirms 15 November as the date for the next PAG and Bashkan elections.

21. In a key development that we warmly welcome, on 15 June 2026 the European Council agreed, in the light of the considerable progress made, to open the first negotiating cluster on the so-called fundamentals with the Republic of Moldova as well as with Ukraine.

3. Parliamentary oversight

22. As mentioned above, the highly polarised and contentious political climate is affecting parliamentary oversight and is hindering inclusive lawmaking procedures. A key mechanism to ensure an inclusive and transparent process on a structural basis are parliamentary rules of procedure. The current parliamentary rules are considered increasingly outdated, especially in the context of the ongoing EU ascension process. In order to update the rules and to address the sometimes obstructionist strategies by different stakeholders, the ruling majority has tabled a new draft Law on the Organisation and Functioning of Parliament. While the draft law touches on many aspects of the functioning of the parliament, its scope seemingly goes beyond parliamentary rules of procedure in their strictest sense.

23. Opposition parties have expressed concern over a number of provisions in the law, as have some other stakeholders. They include proposals that would have given Parliament the right to suspend or terminate the

activity of a mayor or council on the request of the State Chancellery and provisions that stipulate that after the initial formation of the parliamentary convocation, new parliamentary factions can only be formed at the opening of each parliamentary session. The same is the case for changes to the parliamentary bodies and delegations.[5] This would hinder members whose faction is disbanded in the event of a party be declared unconstitutional from joining another faction.

24. The opposition parties also have decried provisions that would require the opposition "to address, actively, constructively and in a balanced manner, all issues faced by citizens and, at the same time, to propose alternative solutions that are acceptable in light of the State's economic and financial capacities". They argue that this would place an arbitrary constraint on the opposition to freely execute its tasks and formulate its strategies. The draft law reportedly also introduces the concept of a simplified examination procedure that would allow the adoption of acts without going through the normal adoption procedure and examination by parliamentary bodies. In addition, the draft law would limit the possibility to submit proposals for a candidate for Prime Minister to the ruling majority only.

25. Irrespective of the merits of these concerns, it is clear that a law that sets the rules of the parliamentary functioning of a country should be perceived as impartial and providing a level playing field to all the stakeholders concerned. Therefore, it should be welcomed that the authorities have decided to consider adoption of the new rules of procedure only after the Venice Commission has issued its opinion on the draft law that has been requested by the authorities. The adoption of this opinion by the Venice Commission is scheduled to take place during its October plenary. We have urged the authorities to address any concerns and recommendations contained in this opinion and intend to return to this issue during our next visit which is planned for this autumn.

26. The 2025 enlargement report for the Republic of Moldova of the European Commission also expressed concern that political polarisation is affecting the functioning of parliament, noting that in 2024 not one plenary session had been dedicated to opposition sponsored bills, in contravention of the parliamentary rules of procedure. In addition, the Commission report expressed concern that no effective parliamentary oversight mechanism exists for the Commission for Exceptional Situations. Of the 323 laws adopted in 2024, 94 were based on consensus between the majority and the opposition. The latter submitted 44 draft laws of which 6 were adopted. The number of draft laws debated under urgent procedure[6] is still very high, hindering an inclusive process.

4. Judiciary and fight against corruption

27. The reform of the judiciary and the efforts to strengthen its integrity have continued following the elections. By the end of 2025, nearly 60% of all judges covered by the vetting procedure had been assessed. Of these 202 judges, 72 passed the assessment, 39 failed, 69 resigned, and 22 cases were pending. The assessment of prosecutors has been slower: by the end of 2025, of the 158 prosecutors evaluated, 19 passed, 5 failed, 27 resigned, and 107 cases were pending.

28. The Moldovan authorities have tabled a series of amendments to certain normative acts with a view to strengthening the mechanism for the evaluation of judges' performances. In the explanatory memorandum, the authorities have underscored the need to accelerate the process of evaluating judges' performances, which is carried out by the Judicial Selection and Evaluation Board (CSEJ) of the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM). That is especially important as the authorities wish to extend the integrity checks to all judges' positions to ensure that all judges are held to the same integrity standards (which eventually should increase the efficiency of the appointment process for the higher-level functions). These amendments have been sent by the authorities to the Venice Commission for an opinion.

29. With regard to the fight against corruption, a number of new legislative initiatives have taken place.

30. The authorities originally planned a reform of the anti-corruption structures that would merge the Anticorruption Prosecution Office (PA) and the Prosecution Office for Combatting Organised Crime and Special Cases (PCCOCS) into a single specialised Prosecution Office for Anticorruption and Combatting Organised Crime (PACCO). The Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova requested an opinion of the Venice Commission on the draft law establishing PACCO. The Venice Commission adopted this

[5] In effect, this means only every six months.
[6] 65 draft laws, of which 44 were adopted.

opinion,[7] drafted jointly with the Council of Europe's Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law, in December 2025.

31. The conclusions of the Venice Commission and DGI on this draft law were overall negative, as were the reactions from a large part of the Moldovan stakeholders. The opinion questioned the necessity for the reform, noting that the deficiencies in the anti-corruption structures identified by the authorities appear rooted in insufficient resources and suboptimal coordination between the Anticorruption Prosecution Office and the National Anti-corruption Centre (NAC) rather than the organisational structure within the Prosecutors Office. In addition, instead of a merger of the two prosecutors' offices, the draft law proposed to liquidate the PA and PCCOCS to transfer their prosecutors to territorial offices, at the same time launching a completely new competitive process for appointments to PACCO. Many stakeholders warned that this could lead, *inter alia* to operational disruption and staffing imbalances that could negatively affect the current cases being dealt with by the two prosecutors' offices. Also, they noted that the financial justification for this proposal was lacking. Stakeholders criticised the drafting process as rushed and insufficiently evidenced.

32. The Venice Commission and DGI, while underscoring the importance of strengthening the Republic of Moldova's response to corruption and organised crime, therefore considered that the draft, in its current form should not be adopted. During our visit, we were informed that the authorities therefore have decided to no longer pursue the merger of the two prosecutors' offices.

33. In addition, the authorities adopted a reform of the anti-corruption structures in order to provide them with clearly defined mandates. Following the reform, the National Anti-Corruption Centre is now responsible for major bank fraud and money laundering, as well as embezzlement of European funds. The Anti-Corruption Prosecutors Office is the sole institution responsible for investigating high-level corruption cases. The Prosecution Office for Combatting Organised Crime and Special Cases concentrates on terrorism, systemic criminal organizations. Exceptionally grave offenses, minor cases and cases of torture have been delegated to the regional prosecutors' offices. To allow the NAC to execute its new and expanded tasks, its human and financial resources have been enlarged.

34. As part of their efforts to strengthen the independence and integrity of the judiciary the authorities have implemented a gradual and stage vetting of judges and prosecutors. The first stage concerns candidates for the Superior Council of Magistracy and the High Prosecutorial Council. The second stage extends the vetting to the Supreme Court Judges and appeals court judges as well as judges in managerial positions. In 2023, this vetting procedure was again extended to cover most of the ordinary judges' and prosecutors' positions. As outlined in previous information notes, these vetting mechanisms have been subject to several Venice Commission opinions. As part of the ongoing EU accession process, the authorities have drafted a package of new legislative amendments on integrity checks and the evaluation of judges. The Minister of Justice requested an opinion of the Venice Commission on these amendments. This opinion,[8] drafted jointly with the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) of the Council of Europe, was adopted during the plenary of the Venice commission on 12 and 13 June 2026, just before our visit took place.

35. The opinion notes that these amendments effectively transform the ordinary performance evaluation process into a form of extraordinary integrity vetting, which is an exceptional measure requiring strong contextual justification, necessity, proportionality, and robust procedural safeguards. The authorities are encouraged to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the current situation and justify why less intrusive alternatives would not suffice before proceeding with such substantial reforms. The opinion cautions against the potential risks of high resignation rates, capacity challenges, and a lack of clarity in legal consequences and procedural protections for judges subjected to this process.

36. The opinion therefore recommends that the authorities, *inter alia*, make it explicit in the law that the external vetting commission's reports are advisory and open to substantive review by the ordinary evaluation body (CSEJ), strengthen the institutional capacity of CSEJ, and allow for broader qualitative assessments of judicial performance. The opinion also recommends that clear legal consequences for failed integrity checks are established and that the temporary character of the exceptional vetting be clearly established. In addition,

[7] CDL-AD(2025)054, Republic of Moldova – Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and the Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) of the Council of Europe on the draft law on the Prosecution Office for Anticorruption and Combatting Organised Crime, European Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe (Venice Commission), 15 December 2025.

[8] CDL-AD(2026)013, Republic of Moldova – Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) of the Council of Europe on the draft legislative amendments on the integrity checks and the evaluation of judges, European Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe (Venice Commission), 16 June 2026.

it calls upon the authorities to include the procedural safeguards from the current vetting framework, as well as measures to prevent the repeated vetting of the same judges.

37. On 11 March 2026, the Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament requested a Venice Commission opinion on the amendments to the laws concerning the procedure for appointing international members to the judicial and prosecutorial evaluation commissions. This opinion,[9] drafted jointly with the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) of the Council of Europe, was adopted during the plenary meeting of the Venice Commission on 12 and 13 June 2026.

38. The amendments covered by the opinion govern the appointment process for international members of judicial and prosecutorial evaluation commissions and mechanisms to respond to concerns about the risk of parliamentary deadlock in the appointment process, which could delay or undermine the functioning of these commissions. The amendments propose that, if a three-fifth parliamentary majority cannot be reached for appointments, the threshold be lowered to an absolute majority. While this mechanism aims to prevent vacancies and support timely evaluations, in its opinion, the Venice Commission expressed concern about the lawmaking process behind the adoption of these amendments, especially the lack of meaningful consultation of public, opposition and other stakeholders; the lack of transparency; and the use an accelerated legislative process which bypassed standard deliberations and debate.

39. While, according to the opinion, the anti-deadlock mechanism is not problematic per se, especially given the urgency and temporary nature of the current reform, the proposed method for reducing the majority threshold lacks adequate safeguards. Specifically, the immediate switch to the lower threshold after a single unsuccessful vote, without any interval for negotiation or consensus-building, risks undermining political inclusiveness and the principles of democratic governance. The Venice Commission reiterated, in that respect, the importance of broad consensus and an inclusive decision-making process.

40. Currently the national members in the Republic of Moldova's evaluation commissions are considered under a one-by-one approval process where candidates for membership in evaluation commissions are considered and voted on individually, rather than as part of a group or a list. Under this approach, each candidate – often nominated by a parliamentary faction – is examined separately by the relevant parliamentary committee, which then provides a report on each candidate. The parliament debates and votes on each candidate's appointment individually, requiring the specified majority for their approval. If a candidate proposed by the opposition or majority does not meet the eligibility criteria or fails to gain the necessary majority, only their nomination is affected; others on the proposed list may still be approved and appointed. This ensures that even if consensus cannot be reached on certain candidates, it does not block the consensual approval of all nominees. In contrast, for international members, the current procedure involves submitting a list of candidates as a group, and the parliament votes to appoint all of them simultaneously. If the required majority is not reached, the anti-deadlock mechanism is triggered for the entire group, potentially lowering the threshold for all nominees at once.

41. In its opinion, the Venice Commission recommended to extend this "one-by-one" approval process to international members as well. This change would allow the parliament to secure qualified majorities for some individual candidates (even if consensus isn't possible for all), thereby limiting the need to resort to the anti-deadlock mechanism and increasing the likelihood of broader agreement and inclusivity in appointments.

42. In addition, the opinion recommends introducing a meaningful interval between the qualified majority vote and the absolute majority vote to give the parliamentary majority and the opposition a genuine chance to negotiate and seek consensus before moving to the lower threshold.

43. The vetting is continuing and aims to be concluded by the end of 2026. Some interlocutors did not consider this deadline realistic, but all stakeholders stressed the need for it to be finalised as soon as possible as the ongoing processes were crating tension and uncertainty within the judiciary which was affecting motivation and the overall efficiency of the judicial system.

44. In response to the reports of extensive voter corruption during the presidential elections, the Moldovan parliament adopted Law No. 100/2025, which amends 13 legal acts with a stated objective to reinforce electoral integrity, regulate party activity, counter external interference and strengthen investigative tools and data protection mechanisms in the context of elections.

[9] CDL-AD(2026)014, Republic of Moldova – Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) of the Council of Europe on Amendments to Laws No. 65/2023 and 252/2023 regarding appointment to judicial and prosecutorial evaluation commissions, European Commission for Democracy through Law of the Council of Europe (Venice Commission), 16 June 2026.

45. The authorities requested the opinion of the Venice Commission on these amendments and it was adopted at 146th Plenary Session of the Venice Commission in March 2026.

46. In the view of the Venice Commission, while the authorities have framed the reform as a response to complex hybrid threats (such as foreign financing, disinformation, illicit party structures) parts of the package were introduced late and without broad opposition support, despite their impact on the electoral framework. This and the frequent, late-stage electoral amendments raised concerns about the principle of stability of electoral legislation before the parliamentary elections in September 2025.

47. The amended provisions now criminalise promises as well as offers for vote buying, including in kind, and increase penalties for such acts. The law introduces aggravated sentences vote buying is done by foreign states, organisations or entities and extends liability to legal persons. While the Venice Commission recognises the legitimate aim of these amendments, it considered that key terms, including "foreign organisations", require precise definitions. In addition, penalties must remain calibrated to intent, scale and impact to avoid penalising normal and lawful political persuasion.

48. Other provisions target corrupt mobilisation of public meetings and pre-campaign activities. In this context, the Venice Commission notes that the broad bans on political advertising outside the official period and on third-party campaigning risk disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression and association. The Venice Commission therefore urged the authorities to tailor these provisions more narrowly and to make explicit exceptions for legitimate political discourse and civil engagement.

49. This legislative package also included amendments to the Electoral Code that aim to strengthen transparency of donations and preserve the functioning of electoral bodies via fallback appointments. However, the Venice Commission found that extending the ineligibility to make donations to those subject to "final findings", which are administrative acts, rather than only those subject to a final court judgment, is not in line with best practice and European standards.

50. The regulation of political actors has been significantly tightened. In line with the Venice Commission's position outlined in its *amicus curiae* to the Constitutional Tribunal (see below), the "successor party" criteria can be considered objective on the condition that they are applied holistically, cross the board, and with reasoned justification. At the same time the Venice Commission warned that dissolution of a party must remain a last resort decision and confined to truly exceptional circumstances. Reinforced safeguards should be introduced, and the dissolution process should be suspended pending appeals before the court. The new requirement to submit detailed party membership registers to state bodies raises serious privacy and freedom-of-association concerns and should be reconsidered or strictly minimised, with less intrusive sanctions for non-compliance and more realistic update cycles. The timelines for the consideration of registration of presumptive successor parties are open-ended and should be capped to avoid undue delays that could effectively disenfranchise the party in question, especially if in the end the courts were to decide it should not be considered as a successor party.

51. With regard to extremism, the package combines broader definitions and expedited suspension and liquidation powers with an expanded preventive role for the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS). While the Venice Commission recognises the need to counter hostile interference, it urges the authorities to adopt precise legal definitions that include clear intent requirements and that set a necessarily high threshold in relation to the charges of incitement to violence or concrete harm. Again, the Commission reiterated that suspension and dissolution should be strictly last-resort measures taken under effective judicial review with the possibility for suspensive appeals. It warned of the possibility of a chilling effect on media and civil society, as well as the possibility of stigmatisation, and has expressed concern about the SIS's non-independent status in this respect. With regard to data protection, prohibitions on mass identity-document copying needs clearer statutory definitions to ensure foreseeability. Telephone numbers should be excluded from signature lists in order to mitigate profiling risks. At the same time, the Venice Commission welcomed that the data authority's new power to suspend processing is balanced by an expedited court review. It considered that accelerated criminal procedures and expanded special investigative techniques are appropriate for time-sensitive offences but require vigilant, case-by-case application to preserve defence rights and proportionality, with flexibility in scheduling and close monitoring of fair-trial impacts.

52. In conclusion, in the view of the Venice Commission, the legislative package largely aligns with European standards if applied impartially and proportionately. Yet the cumulative expansion of preventive and coercive powers in core areas of pluralism necessitates tighter legal definitions, last-resort thresholds, and robust, effective judicial control. Key recommendations include clarifying extremism-related concepts and intent thresholds; ensuring last-resort, reviewable suspension/dissolution of organisations and parties with suspensive appeals; applying holistic tests and reinforced safeguards for successor-party determination;

reconsidering or minimising membership-data obligations; safeguarding fair-trial rights in accelerated procedures; and instituting periodic independent evaluations to detect unintended impacts on pluralism and fundamental rights.

53. At the request of the President of the Constitutional Court, the Venice Commission provided an *amicus curiae* on recent amendments to the Law on Political Parties regarding the possible dissolution or limitations of the activities of "successor" parties of political parties declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court.

54. This brief was adopted at the Venice Commission's 146th Plenary meeting in March 2026. As a result of credible reports of vote buying, illicit financing and foreign as well criminal interference in the elections process during the 2024 and 2025 elections, the authorities adopted the above-mentioned Law No. 100/2025. This law was challenged before the Constitutional Court, which subsequently requested an *amicus curiae* brief from the Venice Commission on the question of whether the statutory criteria for identifying successor parties are objective; whether dissolution and precautionary limitations are justified; and whether procedural safeguards foreseen in the law are sufficient to prevent arbitrariness.

55. In the View of the Venice Commission, the amendments foresee multi-factor criteria, such as continuity of leadership, ideology, structures, activities, financing, resources, alongside clearly defined time limits, that are objective and foreseeable, provided that courts apply these multi-factor tests holistically and contextually and treat the above-mentioned factors as indicative rather than determinative; and give well-reasoned decisions.

56. The Venice Commission noted that restrictions on party activity must pursue legitimate aims such as protecting national security, democratic order and the rights of others. This had become more pertinent in the Republic of Moldova against the backdrop of foreign interference and covert actors aided by illicit financing. However, the Venice Commission warned that dissolution as the sole, automatic consequence of "successor" status risks disproportionality and that dissolution of parties should remain a strictly last-resort measure, with lesser sanctions available and carefully weighed. While precautionary limitations are not per se incompatible with the ECHR, given their potentially irreversible effects on participation in imminent elections, they should be confined to narrowly defined and truly exceptional circumstances, supported by strict necessity criteria outlined in a reasoned judicial decision. While the legal framework provides for accelerated decision-making and appeal mechanisms for precautionary measures, the Venice Commission called for strengthening adversarial hearing rights across all proceedings. It considered that the burden and standard of proof for establishing successor status rest with the authorities, and dissolution should as a rule be suspended during the appeal process with very limited exceptions and only when duly justified by the court.

57. As noted in the EU enlargement report for the Republic of Moldova: "The cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the implementation of its judgements needs to be improved. The Republic of Moldova reportedly still needs to nominate a Government Agent to the ECtHR During the reporting period, the ECtHR delivered 33 judgements against the Republic of Moldova. The Court found breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights relating mainly to respect for private and family life, the right to adequate investigation of ill treatment or of domestic violence, the lack of an effective remedy, as well as the discriminatory attitude of the authorities based on gender and disability. Currently, there are 29 cases under enhanced supervision by the Committee of Ministers related to right to a fair trial and cases of inadequate investigation of ill treatment. The Republic of Moldova needs to address systematic and structural issues raised by the Court, notably in the areas of detention conditions, and procedural rights.

58. On 8 April 2026, GRECO published its compliance report for the Republic of Moldova in the framework of the Fifth Evaluation Round that focusses on preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive functions) and law enforcement agencies. The report notes that in in recent years, the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated a strong commitment to combating corruption and strengthening integrity within its central government and law enforcement agencies, as part of its ongoing European integration efforts.

59. The compliance report, adopted in March 2026, concluded that out of the 25 recommendations in the evaluation report, seven have been fully implemented, 12 are only partially implemented and 6 are not implemented. The recommendations implemented include the introduction of new legal requirements for appointing key government officials; improvements in transparency, especially regarding access to public information; and the extension of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office's powers to investigate senior executives, such as the President and government ministers. Furthermore, significant efforts have been made to strengthen the Moldovan National Integrity Authority's capacity to oversee asset declarations and integrity controls. In law enforcement, the Republic of Moldova has taken important measures to promote gender diversity. The representation of women at both the staff and managerial levels in the Police and Border Police has risen, aided by targeted policies and focused training. Both agencies have also made tangible progress in

ensuring public access to information, proactively publishing registers on donations, and providing regular training on integrity issues. Notably, new mechanisms have been established to allow confidential ethical counselling and to protect whistleblowers, although practical usage of these channels remains very limited.

60. However, a number of key reforms remain incomplete, and twelve recommendations are only partly addressed. For top executive officials, the Republic of Moldova has yet to implement comprehensive integrity checks, improve the management of conflicts of interest, and ensure effective supervision of post-employment activities to prevent undue influence or corruption risks. While codes of conduct and new digital oversight tools are in development, several are not yet operational or fully adopted. Within the police forces, there is ongoing reliance on acting managerial appointments rather than merit-based competitive selection, and there is no dedicated code of ethics tailored to the specific challenges faced by police and border agencies. Although salaries have seen notable increases, entry-level pay still lags behind the national average, raising concerns about the attractiveness and retention of new recruits. Regulation of outside activities for law enforcement officers is also not yet fully developed or supervised.

61. Several recommendations have seen little or no real implementation, especially those addressing lobbying transparency, conflict of interest registers, and effective enforcement of post-employment restrictions in both government and police sectors. The compliance report therefore urges authorities to accelerate legislative and policy reforms, build effective operational mechanisms, and provide sufficient resources to anti-corruption bodies. Consistent political will and international engagement will be essential to close remaining gaps. While tangible improvements are evident, continued vigilance and support are required, especially in consolidating reforms at the highest echelons of power and within law enforcement. Continued dialogue, monitoring, and international cooperation will play a pivotal role in helping the Republic of Moldova achieve, and sustain, higher standards of integrity and public trust in government and policing. GRECO has requested an update within 18 months, reflecting the urgency for the Republic of Moldova to complete these critical reforms.

5. Territorial Administrative Reform

62. On 8 April 2026, the Moldovan authorities presented their plans for a local public administration reform. The aim of this reform is, *inter alia*, to increase the efficiency of local government by promoting the amalgamation of local authorities. The plan noted that local government is excessively fragmented in the Republic of Moldova with more than 87% (or more than 776) of all local administrative units (“mayoralties”) having less than 300 inhabitants and only 53 having more than 5000 inhabitants. This fragmentation undermines the efficiency of governance and efficient provision of services including access to water and sewage treatment.

63. The new reform, which is being developed under the aegis of the Secretary General of the government, proposes, *inter alia*, to set a minimum size for local administrative units of 3000 citizens. In addition, it hopes to reduce the number of districts from the current 32 to 10. It aims to achieve this mostly through voluntary amalgamation, driven by considerable financial incentives for those localities that volunteer. The authorities have indicated they wished to implement this reform in a very speedy manner so it is concluded at least one year before the next parliamentary elections.[10]

64. Any amalgamation of local units not only affects local elections and representation but can potentially also affect national elections and representation. It is therefore important that such a reform is developed in close consultation with the relevant political forces and social stakeholders and adopted on the basis of the widest possible consensus between them.

65. During our visit, we met with a large delegation of Congress of Local Authorities of the Republic of Moldova (CALM) representatives. The representatives agreed that amalgamation was necessary. However, with regard to the drafting of the reform and the commencement of the voluntary amalgamation process prior to the adoption of the reform, all representatives raised concerns about the lack of consultation with the relevant local authorities and the hasty implementation, which did not allow sufficient time for local authorities to prepare or find and negotiate with potential amalgamation partners. The fact that the local authorities which did not immediately participate in the voluntary amalgamation process would not qualify for financial incentives was considered by many as undue pressure and, by some, as outright blackmail. It was clear from the discussions that the local authorities need more time to discuss and prepare for what is, in essence, an existential reform that must be drafted and implemented in close consultation with them. Therefore, it is to be welcomed that, on

[10] Based on the general Venice Commission guideline of stability of electoral legislation one year before an election takes place.

29 July 2026, the Moldovan parliament agreed to suspend the voluntary amalgamation process until after the 2027 local elections, by which time the overall administrative reform plan should also have been adopted.[11]

66. In October 2025, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (the Congress) adopted its monitoring report on the application of the European Charter of Local Self Government by the Republic of Moldova.

67. The Congress assessed the Republic of Moldova's compliance with the European Charter of Local Self Government during a monitoring visit on 4–6 March 2025. It describes a country that has moved forward in key areas yet still faces structural constraints that parliament and government will need to tackle decisively to realise the full promise of decentralisation and local democracy.

68. On the positive side, the rapporteurs note marked progress since the last monitoring visit in 2019. Political dialogue between the central authorities and local authorities has improved; measures to enhance fiscal decentralisation have been adopted; conditions of office for elected officials have been strengthened; and local authorities have greater access to investment funding. The Government has committed itself to developing territorial reforms to overcome fragmentation notably via voluntary amalgamation as a first step. Since 2020, this reform agenda has been accompanied by a package of fiscal measures that have increased the share of personal income tax transferred to local authorities and removed caps on certain local taxes while redirecting key revenues to local budgets. Administrative supervision has also become more balanced and proportional, even if the cumulative oversight burden remains significant for smaller administrations.

69. At the same time, the report raises concerns about persistent structural and functional weaknesses that limit local authorities' ability to deliver for their communities, especially in rural areas. The territorial map remains highly fragmented, with many units too small to sustain full-service mandates, and the role of districts has become uncertain following the recentralisation of social services. Competences overlap or are unclear across levels, and local authorities lack the discretion to act on matters not explicitly assigned elsewhere, which undermines subsidiarity and responsiveness. Human resource constraints are acute: municipalities struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff, provide training and career paths, or compete on salaries, particularly outside major urban centres. Supervision now better adheres to legality, but the involvement of multiple oversight bodies continues to generate an excessive reporting burden for authorities that often lack legal and administrative capacity.

70. Finance remains the system's pressure point. Despite recent gains, local authorities' financial autonomy is still limited, with resources often insufficient to meet assigned responsibilities. Local authorities remain highly dependent on State transfers and subsidies, which constrains local choice. Their own revenues are modest – only about a tenth of all municipal income – while grants and subsidies account for a very large share of subnational revenue. Most State transfers remain earmarked, leaving little room for local policy discretion. A further brake on local fiscal capacity is the incomplete delimitation of municipal land, which prevents modern valuation and fair taxation, resulting in missed revenue for local budgets.

71. Against this backdrop, the Congress invites national authorities to continue the reform agenda and to deepen it in several aspects. Firstly, the authorities should address territorial fragmentation, including at district level, through voluntary amalgamation and related instruments, in close dialogue with local stakeholders. This should aim to provide local authorities with the scale and capacity to exercise their competences effectively. Secondly, they should revise and clarify local competences, both own and delegated, to eliminate overlaps, uphold subsidiarity, and give local authorities greater discretion to adapt tasks to local conditions, including through inter-municipal cooperation where appropriate. Thirdly, they should consult local administrations in line with legal requirements, by establishing a structured, institutionalised mechanism that guarantees timely, regular and meaningful dialogue on all matters that directly concern local authorities. Fourthly, the authorities should strengthen managerial capacity by granting more freedom and flexibility in human resources management so municipalities can recruit and retain high-quality staff and invest in training.

72. Equally important, resources should be in line with the mandate of local authorities. Parliament and government should ensure that local authorities receive adequate financial resources commensurate with their legal responsibilities. They should increase and diversify local fiscal capacity and complete the delimitation and re-evaluation of municipal land to underpin modern property taxation and fair local revenues. Streamlining is also needed: simplifying and standardising reporting requirements would reduce bureaucratic overload and free scarce administrative capacity for service delivery. Finally, compensation should be brought into line with

[11] Local authorities that before 30 August 2026 agreed to a voluntary amalgamation would be allowed to continue the merger.

responsibility, especially for mayors, so that remuneration no longer undermines the attraction and retention of capable local leaders.

73. To anchor citizen participation in local democracy, the Congress also encourages the Republic of Moldova to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207), which would complement institutional reforms with a clear legal guarantee of residents' voice in local decision making. Taken together, these steps would align the Republic of Moldova's local governance with the Charter's standards and reinforce the foundations needed to implement national reforms and EU obligations effectively at the local level.

Appendix

Programme of the fact-finding visit to Chisinau
(14-17 June 2026)

Co-rapporteurs: Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA, Latvia, Group of the European People's Party
Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES, Spain, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

Secretariat: Mr Bas KLEIN, Deputy Head of Secretariat, Monitoring Committee

Main topics

- Recent political developments and ongoing reforms
- Fight against corruption and Judicial reforms
- Parliamentary Oversight / New rules of procedure for the Moldovan Parliament
- Local Public Administration Reform
- Transnistrian settlement process

Sunday, 14 June 2026

20:00 Informal working dinner with the Head of Council of Europe Office

Monday, 15 June 2026

09.00-10.00 Civil society/expert roundtable on recent political developments and parliamentary oversight (including) reform of the parliamentary rules of procedure

- **Promo-Lex**

10.00-11.00 Civil Society/expert roundtable on Local Public Administration Reform (including the developments with regard to Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region)

- SKAT, Ma implic Project
- GIZ
- SDC funded PADEM Project "Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy in Moldova"
- UNDP
- ADEPT
- IPRE
- PromoLEX
- OSCE

11.00 Departure for the Parliament

11.15 -12.00 Meeting with **H.E. Mr Igor GROSU**, Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova

12.05-12.50 Meeting with **Ms Veronica ROȘCA**, Chair of the Legal Committee on Appointments and Immunities of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and Committee members

13.00-14.30 **Working lunch** with the members of the Moldovan delegation to PACE

14.30 *Departure for the Parliament*

14.45-15.30 Joint meeting with **the representatives of the leadership of the Parliamentary Faction of the "Party of Action and Solidarity":**

- **Mr Ion GROZA,** Chairperson of the delegation of the Republic of Moldova to PACE
- **Ms Natalia DAVIDOVICI,** member of the delegation of the Republic of Moldova to PACE
- **Mr Andrian CHEPTONAR**, member of the delegation of the Republic of Moldova to PACE
- **Ms. Ersilia QATRAWI,** member of the Parliamentary Faction of the "Party of Action and Solidarity"
- **Mr Igor TALMAZAN**, member of the Parliamentary Faction of the "Party of Action and Solidarity"

15.45-16.30 Joint meeting with **the representatives of parliamentary opposition factions**:

- **Mr Igor DODON**, Chair of the Parliamentary Faction of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova and Faction members
- **Mr. Grigore NOVAC**, member of the Faction of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova
- **Ms Diana CARAMAN**, Chair of the Parliamentary Faction of the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova and Faction members
- **Mr Constantin STARÎȘ**, member of the Parliamentary Faction of the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova

16.40-17.40 Joint meeting with **the representatives of parliamentary opposition factions**:

- **Ms Angela CUTASEVICI** and **Mr Ion CHICU**, representatives of the Parliamentary Faction of “Alternativa” Bloc and Faction members
- **Mr Vasile COSTIUC**, Chair of the Parliamentary Faction of “Democracy at home” and Faction members

Tuesday, 16 June 2026

09.00-10.30 Civil Society/expert roundtable on the fight against corruption, including in the field of elections

- Institute for European Policy and Reforms (IPRE),
- Centre for Analysis and Prevention of Corruption (CAPC)

10.45 *Departure for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

11.00-11.45 Meeting with **Mr Mihai POPȘOI**, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova

11.50 *Departure for the Constitutional Court*

12.00-12.45 Meeting with **Ms Domnica MANOLE**, President of the Constitutional Court and members of the Constitutional Court

13.00-14.15 *Lunch time*

14.15 *Departure for the Parliament*

14.30-15.15 Meeting with the **representatives of the Superior Council of Magistracy and the Superior Council of Prosecutors**

15.20-16.05 Meeting with the **representatives of the leadership of the Congress of Local Authorities of the Republic of Moldova (CALM)**

16.15-17.00 Meeting with **Mr Valeriu CHIVERI**, Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration, Chief negotiator from the Republic of Moldova on the Transnistrian issue

19.00 Dinner with the international community hosted by the Ambassador of Latvia and the Charge d'Affaires of Spain

Wednesday, 17 June 2026

10.15 *Departure for the Parliament*

10.30-11.15 Meeting with **the representatives of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office**

12.05 *Departure for the Ministry of Justice*

12.10-12.50 Meeting with **Mr Vladislav COJUHARI**, Minister of Justice of the Republic of Moldova

12.50 *Departure for the Government*

13.10-13.50 Meeting with **H.E. Mr Alexandru MUNTEANU**, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova

(*) Meetings organised by the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau and/or Secretariat in Strasbourg.