

Post-Election Geopolitical Alignments of Georgia and Moldova

The outcomes of the recent elections in Moldova and Georgia underscore that both sustaining and shifting foreign policy agendas often demand unconventional strategies. In Moldova, the incumbent pro-Western President Maia Sandu secured a narrow victory in the second round on 3 November, largely thanks to the diaspora, thereby preserving the country's current foreign policy direction.

Conversely, in Georgia, the ruling Georgian Dream party achieved a highly contentious victory on 26 October, allegedly through human interference in electronic voting processes and other questionable methods. In response to these allegations, the EU and the US [suggested](#) an international investigation, which Tbilisi dismissed as foreign meddling. Consequently, Georgia's future remains uncertain, a scenario Russia and other autocratic regimes could exploit. These elections in two EU candidate countries have resulted in what can be described as “opposite continuities.”

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Maia Sandu's re-election is significant as she defeated her rival, former prosecutor Alexandr Stoianoglo, who was labeled Russia's “trojan horse.” Sandu's victory reinforces the EU's strong confidence in Moldova's progress, particularly in light of Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine. In contrast, the continuity in Georgia carries negative implications. With the oligarchic regime likely to stay in power, Georgia's foreign policy could further deteriorate in its relations with the West, especially the EU. Although the Georgian Dream claims to pursue EU membership, its actions—such as labeling civil society organizations as “foreign agents” and fostering rising intolerance toward the LGBTQ community—will make it increasingly difficult to promote this narrative internationally.



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Elections Without Geopolitical Surprises

The elections in Moldova and Georgia did not trigger major geopolitical shifts. In Moldova, President Maia Sandu was re-elected after two rounds of voting. While she [secured](#) 55.35% of the total vote (around 930,139 votes), her Socialists-backed opponent, Alexandr Stoianoglo, won 51.34% (694,422 votes) within Moldova, compared to Sandu's 48.6% in the country. Sandu gained about 30,000 more votes in the runoff than in the first round, totaling 660,226 votes domestically. The diaspora played a crucial role in her second-round victory, with nearly 272,000 votes cast for her, an increase from the 243,605 diaspora votes she [received](#) in 2020. However, this strong diaspora support comes at the cost of her perceived legitimacy at home, where Stoianoglo outpaced her by about 30,000 votes. Even considering potential influences from the Shor group and voters in the Transnistrian region, the results were tight, reflecting significant geopolitical polarization. This internal division was further fueled by Moldova's alignment with EU sanctions against Russia, [adhering](#) to about 80% of the measures following Russia's aggression.

While Moldova managed to walk on the tight-rope more or less successfully, the same cannot be said about Georgia. The outcome of Georgia's parliamentary elections, deciding the fate of future government, was largely predictable, given the entrenched power of the oligarchic regime since 2012. In the months leading up to the general elections, the opposition rallied in mass anti-government protests against the controversial "foreign agents' law." Despite the absence of a unified opposition movement, 17 opposition groups coordinated their efforts by [signing](#) the "Georgian Charter," spearheaded by Georgia's President Salome Zourabichvili. This platform helped to align their strategies, bolstered by the President's vocal opposition against the government. Her leader-

ship also fostered greater unity among opposition forces, reducing the usual personality-driven competition.

However, these efforts were insufficient to overcome the ruling party's election preparation. The Georgian Dream successfully conducted the "war vs. peace" campaign, which appeared to beat the "EU vs. Russia" campaign driven by the opposition groups. The Georgian Dream leveraged administrative resources, personal data, and "ID rental" tactics to secure a favorable election outcome. While winning the capital and foreign vote, unlike Moldova, Georgian opposition parties were outmaneuvered, outvoted, and outrigged in the smaller towns and rural areas. Ultimately, only four other political parties crossed the 5% threshold, with the Georgian Dream claiming a disputed [54% vote](#), compared to 38% for the four pro-EU opposition groups. The ruling party ignored warnings from the [European Parliament](#) and other EU institutions about the deterioration of democracy, [risking](#) Georgia's EU candidate status and potential accession talks; it managed to secure a total grip over the state institutions and, eventually, the election outcome. The election results have deepened political polarization in Georgia, likely further exacerbated by ongoing protests and the pro-EU opposition's boycott of the elected legislature.

The European Side of the Coin

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The EU and Russia have influenced the electoral dynamics in Moldova and Georgia, albeit in fundamentally different ways. In Moldova, EU political support and promised financial aid enabled Maia Sandu to regain voter backing. Despite the country's geopolitical polarization, with EU support ranging from 50% to 60%, a clear majority within

Moldova and the diaspora consistently vote for a pro-EU president, opposing any candidate perceived as aligned with Russian interests. Sandu's opponent, despite advocating for a "balanced foreign policy," could not escape voter suspicions of harboring a hidden pro-Russian agenda.

The EU's support for Sandu was underscored by the visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to Chisinau where she announced a financial package of EUR [1.8 billion](#) over three years. Though controversial under Moldova's national electoral laws prohibiting meetings with foreign actors during the campaign, this move was seen by the EU as a necessary step. The EU perceived no viable alternatives, given Moldova's political situation is deeply connected to broader security challenges in Ukraine where Russian aggression shows no signs of abating.

Although Georgia enjoys strong EU support, with over 80% of the population favoring EU integration, the ruling party continues to serve the personal interests of the politician-turned-oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, often at the expense of national interests. Political polarization and a fragmented opposition mobilized the pro-EU voters to challenge the oligarchic regime which increasingly clashed with the EU's enlargement policies and is susceptible to Russia's hybrid interference strategies. The EU was banking on a shift in public opinion toward the four opposition forces that gained parliamentary seats, viewing them as key allies in advancing its reform agenda.

Brussels is sympathetic to Georgian opposition parties, seeing them as vital partners for addressing critical issues such as justice, elections, and human rights. This approach also supports the ongoing efforts of civil society organizations, which have come under pressure from the recently [passed](#) "law on transparency of foreign influence" (or "foreign agents law"). The EU's conditionality for unfreezing Georgia's candidate status reflects

the opposition's grievances and raises expectations among both the EU and the Georgian public for a pro-EU agenda led by the opposition figures. Over the past decade, however, the EU's influence has been insufficient to prevent Ivanishvili from solidifying his informal control over the state institutions.

Overt and Covert Russian Meddling

Russian interference in the Moldovan elections has taken a distinct approach compared to its actions in Georgia. Since the first round of presidential elections on 20 October, alongside a referendum on embedding European integration into the Constitution, Russia has actively sought to disrupt the process. It has done so through pro-Russian proxies like the political group led by Ilan Shor, who was convicted in absentia for his role in the 2010–2014 bank fraud that drained 15% of Moldova's GDP. Exploiting the fact that nearly a third of Moldovans live in absolute poverty, Shor's Victory Bloc used special payments to virtual accounts targeting vulnerable populations to draw in voters.

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In September and October, Moldovan authorities reported that USD 39 million was [transferred](#) through the Western-sanctioned Promsviazьbank to 138,000 individuals, many of whom likely voted NO in the referendum. The referendum narrowly passed with 50.4% of the vote, representing just 25% of the total electorate. In the second round of the presidential election,

Russia escalated its tactics by orchestrating the transport of Moldovans living in Russia to vote abroad, with flights reported to Istanbul, Minsk, and Baku. Inside Moldova, polling stations for Transnistrian residents saw heavy traffic. Additionally, cyberattacks on voter registration systems, bomb threats at polling stations in the UK and Germany, and widespread disinformation highlighted the extensive use of malign foreign interference to undermine the election and its results.

In Georgia, Russian interference took a subtler approach, primarily reinforcing the Eurosceptic messaging of the ruling Georgian Dream party. This fueled opposition claims that the government was “pro-Russian.” The Georgian government’s discussions about “rebuilding bridges” with Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) opened the door for Russia to offer its mediation services. Additionally, Tbilisi’s “apology diplomacy” concerning the 2008 Russian military invasion under Mikhail Saakashvili’s government further solidified perceptions of the ruling party’s pivot toward Moscow. This narrative allowed Russia to portray Georgia as returning to its sphere of influence, with the contested victory of the Georgian Dream seen as confirmation. Russia further embraced and supported the Georgian Dream’s narrative of a necessity to confront Western encroachment on Georgia’s sovereignty and protect Georgia’s Christian values from immoral European influence.

One clear instance of covert Russian interference was the Hungarian leaders’ quick legitimization of the Georgian election results, particularly [Viktor Orbán](#). His post-election visit to Tbilisi seemed like a calculated move to prevent public unrest over allegations of electoral fraud. This underscores how Russia leverages its allies, such as Hungary, to influence EU candidate states indirectly. While a visit from a Russian official would have likely sparked mass protests

and radicalization, Orbán’s presence was less inflammatory and strategically beneficial for the Georgian government. Despite EU statements clarifying that Hungary’s endorsement did not reflect Brussels’ stance, Orbán’s validation helped secure a muted reaction from nearly half of the EU, which refrained from signing up to the joint letter from 13 EU Member State ministers criticizing the election outcome.

Additionally, Azerbaijan and Türkiye’s rapid acknowledgment of the election results highlighted the geopolitical prioritization of “stability” over “democratic diligence,” especially given Georgia’s critical role as a transit route for Caspian energy supplies to Europe. Georgia’s minority populated regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti (Armenian minority) and Kvemo Kartli (Azerbaijani minority) were more susceptible to Russian propaganda and Georgian Dream’s intimidation campaign. It is, therefore, no surprise that these regions voted heavily in favor of the Georgian Dream, like Gagauzia and Transnistria in Moldova. Domestically, the Georgian-speaking population was already exposed to anti-EU narratives propagated by the ruling party, its affiliated media, and political allies. Rather than introducing new propaganda, Russia amplified existing Georgian domestic narratives to further its “informational war” against the EU.

What Next?

Moldova has successfully avoided a scenario in which a candidate portrayed as pro-Russian replaces a pro-Western president and embraces a more ambiguous stance toward Russia. However, the country still faces significant challenges related to geopolitical polarization. Re-elected President Maia Sandu must now work to unify a divided public by promoting a reconciliation agenda that reduces vulnerabilities Russia could exploit in the 2025 parliamentary elections. If Sandu prioritizes

political loyalty over competence in her government, she risks missing a critical opportunity to bolster her legitimacy and restore confidence in Moldova's pro-EU trajectory which was shaken by the controversial referendum results. Her approach to implementing reforms should be carefully balanced to avoid the kind of backlash that led to the rise of Ivanishvili in Georgia following Saakashvili's heavy-handed governance.

Georgia's path forward is fraught with more uncertainty. The country faces the threat of deepening

its political crisis if ongoing protests fail to yield concrete outcomes, such as the peaceful calling of new elections. The EU's delayed and hesitant response to the disputed election results, particularly after Hungary's endorsement of the Georgian Dream, has left Georgia vulnerable. This hesitancy allows Russia greater freedom to exploit Georgia's internal instability. If the EU and the West fail to provide consistent support, Georgia's democratic institutions will likely erode further under the strain of an oligarchic regime consolidating power ■