

Moldova

TRANSITIONAL OR HYBRID REGIME

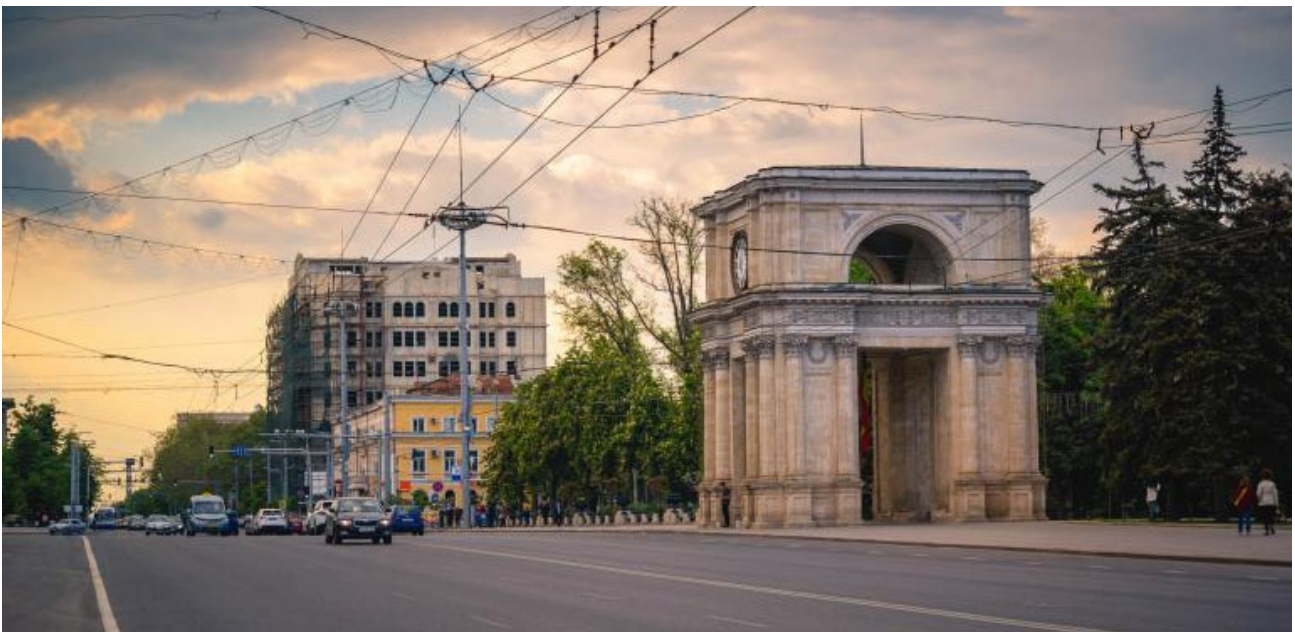
36
/100

Democracy Percentage	35.71 /100
Democracy Score	3.14 /7

LAST YEAR'S DEMOCRACY PERCENTAGE & STATUS**35 /100 Transitional or Hybrid Regime**

The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest.

The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The Democracy Percentage, introduced in 2020, is a translation of the Democracy Score to the 0-100 scale, where 0 equals least democratic and 100 equals most democratic. See the methodology.



Author

Denis Cenușa

Score changes in 2023

- **National Democratic Governance rating improved from 2.50 to 2.75** to reflect the stability of the national political situation and maintenance of basic democratic institutions despite security crises throughout the year.

As a result, **Moldova's Democracy Score improved from 3.11 to 3.14.**

Executive Summary

In 2022, Moldova showed a high degree of resilience against a multitude of crises caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the weaponization of energy by Russia. With the help of external partners, the authorities worked to address the refugee crisis, and received assistance to improve border management and ease pressures in the energy field. The external financial aid was key to financing a social mechanism set up by the government to cover some of citizens' energy costs based on vulnerability criteria.

The government advanced certain reforms, such as in the rule of law with the adoption of a pre-vetting mechanism, and in the electoral field with the development of novelties like online voting. However, Telegram conversations leaked in November 2022 involving Justice Minister Sergiu Litvinenco and other senior officials revealed that executive appointments in some legal institutions, including the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, had likely been orchestrated. ¹ This case was followed by an investigation into the leaks but not into possible wrongdoing in the appointment process. ²

This episode cast a negative light on the political independence of public institutions and the integrity of current reforms. The government argued that in order to improve the quality of decision-making, apart from speeding up the digitalization of public services, state institutions required higher caliber personnel and to stanch the outflow of employees from the public sector. The central authorities were under the pressure of an even more acute shortage of competent specialists since Moldova (along with Ukraine) obtained European Union (EU) candidacy status on June 23, 2022. ³ Consequently, the government has prioritized procurement policies to meet the need

for specialists with knowledge of European integration in sectoral policies, such as energy, agriculture, and transport.

Relations among President Maia Sandu, her ruling Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), and the main opposition forces—the Bloc of Communists and Socialists and the Shor Party—were complicated during the year by allegations of corruption and criminal investigations, and evidence of collaboration or closeness with Russia. The geopolitical incompatibility and questionable integrity of some opposition forces outside Parliament (such as Platform for Truth and Dignity) prevented PAS from engaging with them in substantive political dialogue. At the same time, cooperation with civil society organizations (CSOs) on certain reforms (such as pre-investigation and the electoral code) was largely constructive although also accompanied by criticism of the government’s restrictions on public protests. The authorities also managed to devote attention to the promotion of human and social rights, including gender equality, LGBT+ issues, and labor rights, despite criticism from conservative elements in the opposition and the Russian Orthodox Church.

The appointment of new heads of anticorruption agencies and other law enforcement institutions continued to improve the integrity of Moldova’s anticorruption efforts. In February, Parliament voted for Iulian Rusu, a lawyer and active member of CSOs, as the new director of the Anti-Corruption Center. Elsewhere, there were missteps. Following a supposedly competitive process, Veronica Drăgălin, a US federal prosecutor originally from Moldova, was appointed head of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office in June, ⁴ but there is evidence this contest was allegedly orchestrated by members of the government. ⁵ And in the same period, Alexandru Musteață—a former civil society actor, adviser to the current executive, and a member of the Central Election Commission—was chosen to lead the Security and Information Service, although his professional experience is unrelated to the security field.

By choosing individuals from CSOs and the diaspora, the government intended to create barriers against informal groups coordinated from abroad by forces under investigation for high political corruption—namely, the oligarchs and former politicians Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Shor—and to boost the state’s anticorruption efforts. After the new appointments, anticorruption agencies targeted current and former opposition representatives (Igor Dodon and Zinaida Greceanîi of the Party of Socialists; and Ilan Shor and Marina Tauber of the Shor Party) who have been political

rivals of PAS and President Sandu. In fact, there were allegations that the ruling party had attempted to exert political influence over anticorruption institutions in order to intimidate the opposition.

With no success in extraditing fugitive oligarchs and kleptocrats (including Shor, Plahotniuc, Veaceslav Platon, and Gheorghe Cavaliuc ⁶), the Moldovan government welcomed the US decision to introduce individual sanctions on Shor and Plahotniuc for their undermining of democratic institutions and facilitating Russia's malign influence in Moldova. Aside from Shor, who is coordinating his Shor Party from Israel to increase public pressure on the government, there has also been a resurgence by Plahotniuc in Moldovan public life since the fugitive oligarch expressed his will to return to power and replace the PAS. ⁷ Plahotniuc's comeback may be a strategy to help roll back US sanctions that threaten his assets around the world.

Despite the myriad crises, the protest mood in Moldovan society remained relatively low apart from demonstrations organized by the Shor Party in the capital Chişinău and protests in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (ATUG). The executive of ATUG, Irina Vlah, underlined that Moldova needs unity, and Gagauzia will not become a source of instability. ⁸ She also condemned statements by the central authorities characterizing the autonomy as a threat. ⁹ Unlike the short-lived protests in Gagauzia, the Shor Party demonstrations were more consequential and long-lasting. The latter used money from unknown sources to finance the antigovernment protests, transporting people from rural areas (including pensioners and socially vulnerable people) and motivating them with payments.

While managing the humanitarian, energy, and security crises, provoked or escalated by the Russian war in Ukraine, the government attempted to adopt structural reforms and counter risks of destabilization from the spread of malign narratives in the public space. To counter threats related to the war propaganda, Parliament passed a law banning the use of the letters V and Z as symbols, as well as the black-and-orange-striped St. George ribbon. ¹⁰ Moldovan authorities perceive these images as promoting the Russian war narrative against Ukraine. The statute came into force in July and includes fines of up to MDL 9,000 (\$465) for individuals and MDL 18,000 (\$930) for legal entities. ¹¹ This action was followed by changes in media legislation that increased the powers of the media regulator to combat disinformation. ¹² Although not specifically mentioned, the law was tightened to better combat propaganda spread by Russian state-controlled mass media.

Due to the decrease in gas supply from Russia, and Moldova's dependence on electricity produced by gas from Transnistria, the energy crisis that started in 2021 intensified during the year, putting pressure on the government to find solutions to inflation, energy poverty, and other mounting socioeconomic problems. Although the EU, Romania, and other external partners offered help to the government, the opposition and other forces tried to capitalize on the consequences of the energy crisis. Gas prices multiplied by seven fold, ¹³ and electricity tariffs for consumers soared by as much as 33 percent, ¹⁴ further weakening the purchasing power of a population experiencing an inflation rate of over 30 percent in 2022. ¹⁵ Pro-Russian and kleptocratic forces fed the flames of public discontent with the government's handling of the energy crisis, and highlighted their own penchant for negotiating better gas prices with Russia. Members of the Shor Party, together with the Communists and the Socialists, opened separate channels of negotiations with Russia on the price of gas ¹⁶ and other sensitive areas of bilateral relations (including the 2022 trade restrictions on Moldovan agri-food ¹⁷). To avoid harming its relations with Western partners, the government unilaterally refused to enter into political dialogue with Russia. ¹⁸ Moldova also condemned Russian aggression and supported Ukraine.

Due to the government's explicit focus on EU membership, the European integration process facilitated increased political attention towards Moldova and financial resources from the EU. In the short term, EU candidate status helps the government reassure the population that the country is headed in the right direction. The unprecedented close ties with Western partners has had a stabilizing effect on Moldova amid the ongoing geopolitical crisis in the region caused by Russia's war on Ukraine.

At-A-Glance

In Moldova, the national government devoted its attention in 2022 to structural reforms and the resolution of ongoing crises caused or exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The process of reforming electoral legislation began with some new features, such as consideration of online voting. The civic sector functioned effectively, engaging in constructive dialogue with the government while also holding it accountable for deviations or committed abuses. Improvements were made to media legislation to introduce stricter regulations against disinformation. On the

other hand, these changes have created potential risks for arbitrary decisions by political factions in the future. Preparations began to develop a new concept of public administration aimed at improving the direction and efficiency of local finances. The judiciary underwent several important reforms, including implementation of the pre-vetting mechanism aimed at targeting corruption among the ranks of judges and prosecutors. This mechanism requires further adjustments to enhance its efficiency based on recommendations from the Venice Commission. A series of criminal investigations were initiated against alleged political corruption involving prominent current and former politicians.

National Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the democratic character of the governmental system; and the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches.

2.75
/7.00

- In 2022, Moldova’s ruling Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) adopted a wave of new legislation without substantial opposition due to its absolute majority of 63 seats in Parliament. Draft bills coming from the opposition factions—the Socialists and the Shor Party (32 and 6 seats, respectively)—were usually excluded from the law-making process. Civil society organizations (CSOs) confirmed that the ruling party failed to respect the legislative requirement to prioritize the inclusion of opposition proposals on the parliamentary agenda. Opposition forces have resorted to boycotting parliamentary sessions as a form of political protest, due partly to the ruling party’s efforts to undermine their legislative role.
- During the country’s “state of emergency,” prolonged several times during the year over the energy crisis and the security situation, both the government and Parliament often ignored transparency procedures. The ruling party’s majority voted five ¹⁹ times in favor of the state of emergency, which lasted 60 days on average. In most cases, the opposition did not support the state of emergency, arguing that the government had all the tools to govern under a normal regime.
- The government carried out controversial reforms in the education sector designed to consolidate the country’s university system, which had been delayed since 2014. ²¹ ²² ²³ Final decisions on the so-called university reform were released in June–July, leading to the absorption of 22 higher education

institutions by 4 public universities and the merger of 2 others. ²⁴ The university reform provoked small protests from specialized unions against the absorption of the Agrarian University by the Technical University.

Representatives of the liquidated universities and research institutions argued that the reform was rushed and criticized its lack of transparency and comprehensive cost-benefit assessment. ²⁵

- The ruling party tried to ensure political discipline within the decision-making process by undertaking government reshuffles. Prime Minister Natalia Gavriliță's government changed several ministers and heads of agencies to update the ranks, improve efficiency, and sustain the political line of the government. Among those who resigned were Agriculture Minister Viorel Gherciu and Environment Minister Iuliana Catarangiu. The latter resigned in September following intra-governmental contradictions over forestry sector policies; ²⁶ in short, Catarangiu was reluctant to seize upon logging as a solution to the energy crisis. However, the exercise in reshuffling did not bring the desired outcomes, and already by June, PM Gavriliță acknowledged that there had been higher expectations for the government. ²⁷

Electoral Process 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines national executive and legislative elections, the electoral framework, the functioning of multiparty systems, and popular participation in the political process.

4.00
/7.00

- Moldova will hold presidential elections in 2024 and legislative elections in 2025. In response to crises facing the government, the opposition's second-largest force in Parliament, Shor Party (six seats), organized large Sunday protests in September–October with individuals mainly from rural areas (estimates between 9,000 and 50,000) calling for early presidential and parliamentary elections. In October, surveys showed that a majority of the population would support early legislative elections (60.2 percent). ²⁸
- The parliamentary majority approved a new electoral code in two readings, on July 28 and December 1. ²⁹ The new law tightens rules for party financing, presidential candidate registration, and voting procedures. ³⁰ The opposition refused to vote because its objections to the legislation remained unaddressed. On October 18, ³¹ seven extra-parliamentary opposition parties sent a letter to the Venice Commission laying out objections to the bill, noting the risk of

politicizing the Central Election Commission (CEC), voting rights of Moldovans abroad, and the risk of canceling political parties without court approval. ³² Meanwhile, some civil society representatives supported the new electoral code, facilitating public consultations on the bill and formulating recommendations to improve it. ³³ ³⁴ The Venice Commission also recommended several changes to the draft law, but the parliamentary majority did not consider many of these ³⁵ during the final reading and adoption of the new code. ³⁶

- On June 27, the CEC approved the concept for the Electronic Voting Information System (e-Votare) ³⁷ and transmitted it to the government and Parliament. The CEC established an interdisciplinary working group to write and pilot the electronic voting system, which is proposed as an alternative way to vote for the next cycles of presidential and parliamentary elections. The working group consists of representatives from the CEC, Electronic Governance Agency, Information Technology and Cyber Security Service, Public Services Agency, Information and Security Service, National Personal Data Protection Center, and the Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections. The working group aims to organize tenders to buy software and technical infrastructure necessary to build, audit, and test the e-voting system. These actions correspond with the CEC's Strategic Action Plan for 2022–23. ³⁸

Civil Society 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses the organizational capacity and financial sustainability of the civic sector; the legal and political environment in which it operates; the functioning of trade unions; interest group participation in the policy process; and the threat posed by antidemocratic extremist groups.

4.75
/7.00

- An LGBT+ “Solidarity” March took place in the capital on June 19 under a large contingent of police and special forces personnel following a slew of verbal threats. ³⁹ This unprecedented level of protection for march participants reportedly cost around MDL 4 million (\$205,000). ⁴⁰ Chişinău mayor Ion Ceban was adamantly opposed to the march and politicized the issue by suggesting such an event should be held on government premises. ⁴¹ The Russian Orthodox Church in Moldova demanded that authorities prohibit the LGBT+ demonstration since, in the church's view, it would represent an “insult to religious cults, but also to society.” ⁴² Parliamentarian Radu Marian (PAS) stated

that LGBT+ persons, like all citizens, have a constitutional right to protest peacefully. **43**

- The federal government demonstrated an inclusive approach towards the LGBT+ community by appointing for the first time in the country's history an openly gay person, Viorel Ursu, who is also a member of the diaspora, as Moldova's ambassador to the United States. **44**
- The Shor Party organized the largest political protests in 2022 but was itself surrounded by cases of political corruption and illegal financing. Following occasional protests in the summer, the party organized weekly Sunday protests in September–October, where media and law enforcement reported that the party had allegedly paid protesters to participate. Meanwhile, the party accused Western embassies of failing to react to police abuses against its protesters, hinting at double standards. **45** CSOs adopted two separate declarations related to the Shor Party protests: one stressed that the police used disproportionate and abusive measures against demonstrators; **46** another condemned the party's actions on October 26 that violated the law by erecting tents in front of the Prosecutor General's Office, perceived as a destabilizing element. Some CSOs encouraged the protesters and condemned authorities' efforts to hinder the demonstrations, urging local administrations and police to collaborate to guarantee peaceful protests. **47** PM Gavriliță justified the police actions as proportionate and lawful, **48** contradicting assessments by CSO experts.
- In the first half of 2022, a series of antigovernment protests took place in the Gagauz Autonomy against the high price of energy **49** and in favor of resuming relations with Russia. The Gagauz leadership accused the ruling party of intimidating protesters by sending in special forces and portraying protesters as a source of instability. **50**
- Throughout the year, the Party of Socialists organized protests in several regions over negative socioeconomic conditions, the alleged return to "state capture," **51** and governance through the "state of emergency" regime. Protesters demanded the removal of the government and early presidential and parliamentary elections. **52**
- Media organizations represented by the Association of Independent Journalists (API) stood in solidarity with outlets and journalists whose rights were violated during the year. **53** However, they refrained from criticizing the government's decision to shut down six television channels that either broadcast Russian TV content or were associated with the opposition political parties in Parliament.

Independent Media 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines the current state of press freedom, including libel laws, harassment of journalists, and editorial independence; the operation of a financially viable and independent private press; and the functioning of the public media.

3.00
/7.00

- In 2022, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled in the case over NIT television's connection with the Communist Party—the first time a politically affiliated TV outlet in Moldova had its license revoked for a lack of pluralism. Filed in May 2012 (*NIT SRL v. Republic of Moldova*, case no. 28470/12 **54**), the court ruled 13 to 2 in favor of the state, finding that Moldova did not violate statutes on freedom of expression and property protection against NIT. Between 2009 and 2012, NIT was the only voice of the opposition. According to the judgment, Moldovan authorities interceded in a proportional way “necessary in a democratic society” by protecting “pluralism and the rights of others, on the one hand, and the need to protect the applicant company's right to freedom of expression on the other hand.” **55**
- Modifications to the mass media legislation, known as the “anti-disinformation law,” came into force in June, introducing definitions for “disinformation” and “informational security.” **56** According to the new law, when domestic TV channels buy media products abroad, they are obliged to purchase at least 50 percent from the EU and countries that have signed the European Convention on Transfrontier Television (which excludes Russia). The law also requires the use of content produced in the EU for other types of media services. All television programs that spread hate, disinformation, war propaganda, content of terrorist acts, and so forth, are prohibited.
- Additionally, media providers must not disseminate information that justifies war crimes, crimes against humanity, or military aggression, regardless of the origin of the content. The Audiovisual Council is also explicitly obliged to implement measures derived from the law on the state of emergency, siege, and war (no. 212/2004). This new law introduces tougher penalties of up to three months license suspension and up to MDL 100,000 (\$5,100) in fines. More powers are given to the Information Security Service (SIS), which can order a suspension of online transmission. CSOs raised objections to the SIS's increased powers, which are seen as insufficiently regulated and likely to restrict freedom of expression.

57 Critics noted the wide margin in the statute allowing for arbitrary decisions by state authorities, creating future possibilities for abuses. The law was criticized by the opposition as an attempt to introduce “censorship,” risking the creation of a “political tool” for repressing information. **58**

- On October 25, media associations published a joint statement decrying the verbal and physical abuse against three journalists (from TV8 and Center for Investigative Journalism) committed during protests organized by the Shore Party on October 23. **59** Protesters and party members characterized the targeted media outlets as progovernment. Other CSOs joined in requesting an investigation of the aggression.
- On December 16, on the grounds of fighting disinformation and securing the national information space, the Commission for Emergency Situation closed down six television channels: Pervyi, RTR, Accent TV, NTV, TV6, and Orhei TV. **60** Four of the six channels broadcast content from Russian TV channels. Orhei TV was affiliated with the Shore Party while other channels shared positions of the Socialists and Communists, the three largest opposition parties in Parliament. The president of the National Broadcasting Council, Liliana Vițu, justified the decision by claiming the TV stations did not comply with media legislation, saying the channels had used “manipulation by omission” **61** in excluding coverage of Russian aggression against Ukraine. According to Vițu, some of the channels were carrying out an information attack against Ukraine. This decision was supported by the ruling party but criticized by the opposition, who accused the ruling party of “political censorship.”
- The closure of the six channels triggered a reaction from Ombudsman Cezar Panico, who requested a revised decision and initiated documentation of the government’s reasoning used to shut down the channels. In his opinion, the decision did not ensure a proportional balance between guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression and property rights against the invoked need for information security. **62**

Local Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the decentralization of power; the responsibilities, election, and capacity of local governmental bodies; and the transparency and accountability of local authorities.

2.50
/7.00

- In June, the EU added reform of local public administration to its conditions for pre-accession negotiations with Moldova. ⁶³ The 2016–20 strategy on the decentralization of public administration ⁶⁴ was extended until 2022, and work on a new reform strategy started in the second half of the year.
- In August, President Maia Sandu (PAS) announced that the government and Parliament had discussed a new concept of transferring powers from the second-tier public administrations (rayons, or districts) to lower-level entities. However, she opposed the idea of dismantling the current rayons completely since they are enshrined in the constitution. ⁶⁵ The expert community advocated in favor of the “municipalization” of rayons by transferring the powers of rayon councils to cities that represent the centers of the 32 rayons.
- In September, after approximately five years of being inactive, the government reactivated the Joint Commission for Decentralization in a new composition. The commission has equal representation of central and local authorities delegated by local associations. The government aims to use the commission to discuss public administration reform. ⁶⁶
- In October, problems facing Moldovan local public administration were discussed at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. Here, opposition representatives spoke about the pressures they face for not being affiliated with the government. ⁶⁷
- Representatives of the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova reported that the investigation against Alexandru Botnari, mayor of the Hîncești municipality, was being carried out with abuses that resembled acts of intimidation committed in previous governments. ⁶⁸ ⁶⁹ The criminal investigation against Botnari involves the alleged fraudulent transfer of several plots of land, accusations he denies and considers politically motivated.
- In December, after the ruling party adopted the new electoral code, the Gagauz People’s Assembly decried the law for not giving the Gagauz Autonomy a representation quota in the Moldovan legislature. Gagauz politicians demand 5 mandates in the 101-seat unicameral Parliament. ⁷⁰ Furthermore, the autonomy’s assembly objected to the limited powers of Gagauzia in electoral matters. ⁷¹ Assembly representatives warned that they could even boycott the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections. ⁷²
- Animosity grew between Chișinău mayor Ion Ceban and representatives of the ruling party. Antagonisms arose over energy policies, ⁷³ public transportation, ⁷⁴ freedom of association (for LGBT+ persons ⁷⁵), among other issues.

Minister of Infrastructure and Regional Development Andrei Spanu (PAS) urged for a pro-European mayor in Chişinău, someone who could replace Ceban and potentially reduce corruption schemes in the capital. **76**

Judicial Framework and Independence 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses constitutional and human rights protections, judicial independence, the status of ethnic minority rights, guarantees of equality before the law, treatment of suspects and prisoners, and compliance with judicial decisions.

2.75
/7.00

- The government initiated several important reforms in the justice sector in 2022, which are reflected in the National Action Plan for the pre-accession dialogue with the EU. **77** The reforms address these issues, among others: 1) review powers and composition of the Supreme Court of Justice, resulting in a reduced number of judges and evaluation of remaining judges by submitting to a Pre-Vetting Commission or leaving office; **78** 2) establish noncriminal civil confiscation of assets in accordance with ECHR ; 3) review powers of anticorruption institutions; and 4) create an external evaluation mechanism for judges and prosecutors. **79**
- In June 2022, as a result of the contest organized by a pre-selection committee of international experts, **80** Veronica Drăgălin, a US federal prosecutor, was named Chief Prosecutor of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office with a mandate beginning August 1. Drăgălin has pointed out that her objective is to fight high-level corruption, such as cases of bank fraud from 2014–15. **81** However, Telegram conversations leaked in November involving Justice Minister Sergiu Litvinenco and other senior officials revealed the high probability that Drăgălin's appointment was falsified. After initiating an investigation for "illegal interception," **82** the Prosecutor's Office for Combatting Organized Crime and Special Cases (PCCOCS) refrained from continuing the case and passed it on to the General Prosecutor's Office. Law enforcement agencies have shown reluctance to verify high-level politicians who, according to leaked information, are involved in the alleged falsification of appointment contests in state institutions and other forms of political interference.
- In January 2022, lawyers for the suspended general prosecutor Alexandr Stoianoglo filed two complaints against Moldova: one on the prohibition of his free movement and arbitrary detention; and another on his suspension as

general prosecutor by the Superior Council of Prosecutors on October 5, 2021.

⁸³ Stoianoglo's defense characterizes the criminal investigation as political persecution. As the case went to the ECtHR, President Sandu delayed finalization of Stoianoglo's suspension until the court renders its final decision. On September 22, Moldova submitted its argumentation to the ECtHR, despite the negative evaluation of Stoianoglo published by the Superior Council of Prosecutors in May. ⁸⁴ ⁸⁵ The Moldovan state argued that the charges of limitation of freedom of movement and the preventive measure of house arrest in this case were based on "reasonable suspicions" of alleged crimes by Stoianoglo. ⁸⁶ ⁸⁷

- On March 10, the assessment of judges and prosecutors who make up self-governance bodies—namely, the Supreme Council of the Judiciary and Superior Council of Prosecutors—came into force through the constitution of the Pre-Vetting Commission that began its work in June. ⁸⁸ The Socialists faction in Parliament boycotted the approval of the commission and asked the Constitutional Court to verify whether it conforms to the constitution. ⁸⁹ ⁹⁰ ⁹¹
- On certain occasions, Justice Minister Sergiu Litvinenco publicly criticized judicial decisions on corruption investigations pertaining to the opposition. Such statements raised concerns since they resembled attempts to exert political and public pressure on courts that were common in previous governments. Litvinenco rejected the accusations of his "politicizing" justice, ⁹² arguing that the tightening of anticorruption policies should in fact lead to more efficient justice.

Corruption 1.00-7.00 pts

Looks at public perceptions of corruption, the business interests of top policymakers, laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest, and the efficacy of anticorruption initiatives.

2.25
/ 7.00

- State anticorruption agencies launched several investigations against the Shor Party for alleged illegal financing activities. In October, the Anti-Corruption Center, Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, and Security and Information Service carried out 55 searches of the residences and vehicles of regional leaders of the Shor Party, with 24 party members arrested for allegedly facilitating illegal financing. ⁹³ Police identified and seized up to MDL 3.5 million (\$188,000) ⁹⁴ of

illegal funds of unknown origin, which the Shor Party intended to use for staging weekly antigovernment protests. On February 2, the prosecution began additional raids on residences of 13 former members of the Communist Party faction, seizing assets worth approximately MDL 6.9 million (\$356,000) on charges of illicit enrichment. **95**

- In May, prosecutors with assistance from anticorruption agencies arrested former President Igor Dodon on charges of passive corruption, illegal financing of a political party by a criminal organization, treason against the state, and illicit enrichment. Prosecutors found evidence of transactions worth €700,000, and €73,000 in cash in the possession of Dodon's brother-in-law, Petru Merineanu. **96** Anticorruption agencies have seized assets worth MDL 2.1 million (\$100,000). **97** Dodon was released and placed under house arrest on May 26, a decision that has since been extended. **98**
- In May, Parliament removed immunity for Shor Party members Ilan Shor and Marina Tauber at the request of acting Prosecutor General Dumitru Robu in order to start the investigation on embezzlement and money laundering allegations. **99** In July, Tauber's immunity was lifted on an additional charge of accepting illegal financing from a criminal group. **100 101**
- On October 26, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) adopted individual sanctions against Shor Party leader Ilan Shor. The sanctions were also applied to 8 other individuals and 12 entities, including the Shor Party itself, with a goal to counter malign influence by Russia and systemic corruption in Moldova. **102** With its decision, OFAC noted its intention to highlight how corruption undermines the rule of law in Moldova.

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Footnotes

- 1 Cybernews, “Government of Moldova shaken by big hack-and-leak operation,” 16.11.2022, <https://cybernews.com/news/government-moldova-hack-leak-operation/>
- 2 Radio Free Europe Moldova, “Pe urmele „Moldova Leaks”. Cum decurge ancheta privind scurgerile din telefoanele demnitarilor” [In the footsteps of “Moldova Leaks”. How is the investigation into leaks from dignitaries’ phones going], 28.12.2022, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/pe-urmele-moldova-leaks-cum-decurge-...>
- 3 EU Neighbors East, “European Council: Ukraine and Moldova granted EU candidate status”, 23.6.2022, <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/european-council-ukraine-a...>
- 4 Veronica Drăgălin comes from the diaspora, her mother is Elena Drăgălin, founder of the Moldovan-American Convention, who was involved actively in the support of Maia Sandu and PAS during the 2020 presidential elections and the 2019 and 2021 parliamentary elections.
- 5 Radio Free Europe Moldova, “Pe urmele „Moldova Leaks”. Cum decurge ancheta privind scurgerile din telefoanele demnitarilor” [In the footsteps of “Moldova Leaks”. How is the investigation into leaks from dignitaries’ phones going], 28.12.2022, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/pe-urmele-moldova-leaks-cum-decurge-...>

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

62/100 **Partly Free**

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