

PRESS RELEASE

## Maia Sandu and Michael Otto to receive the 2025 Reinhard Mohn Prize

The 2025 Reinhard Mohn Prize dedicated to the topic “Strengthen democracy!” is being awarded to the President of the Republic of Moldova Maia Sandu and entrepreneur and philanthropist Michael Otto. In bestowing the prize, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is recognizing both recipients’ commitment to defending democracy and making it sustainable. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier is expected to attend the award ceremony, which will be held on Thursday, February 20, 2025 at Gütersloh Theater.

Gütersloh – December 2, 2024. Moldovan President Maia Sandu and German entrepreneur and philanthropist Michael Otto are the recipients of the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s 2025 Reinhard Mohn Prize. According to the award citation, the two recipients have impressively demonstrated how today’s much-challenged liberal democracy can be protected, promoted and developed further through commitment and courageous leadership. Thanks to their values and actions, both recipients exemplify the theme of the Reinhard Mohn Prize: “Strengthen democracy!” While Maia Sandu fights for freedom and self-determination in the political arena, Michael Otto has dedicated himself to promoting the democratic idea and its sustainability in business and civil society. The award ceremony for the prize will take place at 11 am on Thursday, February 20, 2025 at Gütersloh Theater. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier is expected to attend as guest of honor.

### **A committed European and an entrepreneur dedicated to multiple causes**

Maia Sandu has been president of the Republic of Moldova since the end of 2020. She is the first woman to lead the country bordering Ukraine and Romania. She was elected to a second term of office at the beginning of November. During the election campaign and voting process, massive attempts by Russia to prevent her re-election through manipulation, interference and the spread of disinformation were documented. Sandu has actively promoted Moldova’s sovereignty and EU-orientation for years, and she applied for the country’s accession to the EU following the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022. In a public referendum in October 2024, the people of Moldova confirmed their desire to join the EU.

Michael Otto was chairman of the Executive Board of the Otto Group from 1981 to 2007 and has served as chairman of its Supervisory Board since then. The Hamburg-based entrepreneur was an early advocate of environmental protection, development aid and social and educational projects. He has established several foundations, including the environmental foundation bearing his name and the Stiftung KlimaWirtschaft – German CEO Alliance for Climate and Economy. As patron and chairman of the Board of Trustees of Haus Rissen in Hamburg, he is committed to taking a contemporary approach to democracy education. He established the Michael Otto Foundation for Sustainability at the end of 2023, a further

example of his desire to strengthen an open society and protect democracy while developing it further.

### Prize awarded to “two exceptional figures”

“Maintaining, developing and strengthening democracy was one of the key concerns Reinhard Mohn and I had when we established the Bertelsmann Stiftung,” says Liz Mohn, founder and honorary member of the Bertelsmann Stiftung Board of Trustees. “I am very pleased that, by awarding the Reinhard Mohn Prize to Maia Sandu and Michael Otto, we are honoring two exceptional figures who have made outstanding contributions to preserving and further developing democracy.”

“Liberal democracy is under more pressure worldwide than at any time since the end of the Cold War,” adds Daniela Schwarzer, chairwoman of the Bertelsmann Stiftung Executive Board. “It is being challenged both externally by wars and authoritarian regimes and internally by populist forces and diminishing confidence in governments’ ability to take action. With the Reinhard Mohn Prize ‘Strengthen democracy!’ and this year’s topic of the same name, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is re-affirming its commitment to revitalizing the democratic idea and making it fit for the future. Our two prizewinners are excellent matches for this commitment: Both are helping promote democracy’s resilience – Maia Sandu in the political arena, Michael Otto in civil society and the business world.”

#### Additional information:

The Reinhard Mohn Prize is given in memory of the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s founder, Reinhard Mohn († October 2009). It is awarded to internationally renowned individuals who have played a key role in developing forward-looking solutions to social and political challenges. Past recipients include Joachim Gauck, Rita Süßmuth and Kofi Annan. The theme for the current prize is “Strengthen democracy!” More information on the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s 2024/2025 topic of the same name is available from: [Strengthen democracy!](#)

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#### **About the Bertelsmann Stiftung: Inspiring people. Shaping the future.**

The Bertelsmann Stiftung is committed to enabling social participation for everyone – politically, economically and culturally. Our programs include Education and the Next Generation, Democracy and Social Cohesion, Digitalization and the Common Good, Europe’s Future, Health, and Sustainable Social Market Economies. In our work, we focus on people, since only they can change the world and make it better. We share knowledge, promote expertise and develop solutions. A nonprofit foundation, the Bertelsmann Stiftung was established in 1977 by Reinhard Mohn.

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