



PRESS RELEASE

Reinhard Mohn Prize awarded to Maia Sandu and Michael Otto

The Bertelsmann Stiftung today awarded the 2025 Reinhard Mohn Prize to the President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu, and to entrepreneur and philanthropist Michael Otto.

In keeping with the title of this year's prize – “Strengthen democracy!” – it presented the award in recognition of both recipients' commitment to democratic values and a free society.

The presentation speeches were given by Germany's Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Liz Mohn, honorary member of the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Board of Trustees and the foundation's global representative.

Gütersloh – February 20, 2025. During an award ceremony held today, Maia Sandu and Michael Otto were presented with the Bertelsmann Stiftung's 2025 Reinhard Mohn Prize. At Gütersloh Theater, before an audience of some 500 guests from politics, business, culture, civil society and the media, Germany's Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier gave the presentation speech for Maia Sandu and Liz Mohn the presentation speech for Michael Otto. The two award winners will share the prize money totaling €200,000 euros and will donate it to non-profit projects and initiatives. The Bertelsmann Stiftung broadcast the ceremony via livestream.

“In a crisis-torn world, democracy faces enormous challenges,” said Liz Mohn. “Maintaining, developing and strengthening democracy was one of the key concerns my husband and I had when we established the Bertelsmann Stiftung. That is why we want to send a strong signal on its behalf by awarding the Reinhard Mohn Prize to Maia Sandu and Michael Otto.”

“Democracy needs people who are committed to it every day”

“Democracy needs people who are committed to preserving it, protecting it and ensuring its future every day,” said Hannes Ametsreiter, chairman and CEO of the Bertelsmann Stiftung. “Maia Sandu and Michael Otto embody this commitment and willingness to get involved. They are role models whose example we should follow. Both are worthy recipients of the Reinhard Mohn Prize.”

Maia Sandu: “Democracy thrives when people stand up for it, even in the face of adversity. In Moldova, we have chosen the path of democracy, freedom, and European integration, despite immense challenges and external pressures. The recent elections and referendum showed the resilience of our people and their unwavering commitment to a future in the European family. This award is not just for me—it belongs to the people of Moldova, who have chosen democracy over fear, truth over disinformation, and progress over stagnation.”

Michael Otto: “Democracy thrives on diversity, just as democracy alone can create diversity: diversity of opinions, of voices and of solutions and the possibilities for realizing them. It is the only way to obtain the best solutions for the future. That is why we must all do our utmost to preserve and strengthen liberal democracy.”

“If democracy is to remain strong, it must actively renew itself – through more participation, more transparency and new forms of involvement,” said Daniela Schwarzer, member of the Bertelsmann Stiftung Executive Board responsible for the areas Democracy and Europe. “It must strike a balance between solidarity, security and the ability to take action, and develop a positive vision for the future together with its citizens. This requires determination and the courage to reform.”

Committed European, 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 2024. 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 EU integration for years, and the country formally applied for EU membership following the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022. In a national 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 as well as Stiftung KlimaWirtschaft. 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 contribution to strengthening an open society and protecting democracy while developing it further.

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 Reinhard Mohn Prize 2025 is endowed with €200,000. Its theme of “Strengthening Democracy!” is also the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s theme for 2024/2025. More information is available on the [Reinhard Mohn Prize](#) website and on the website [Strengthen democracy!](#)

Photos and press information are available here:

<https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/rmp2025>

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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. For more information, please visit: www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de

