

Hybrid warfare and disinformation: how Moldova counters Russian propaganda

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On 2 July 2025, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF), with the support from the Transition Promotion Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, organised the event ‘Hybrid warfare and disinformation: how Moldova counters Russian propaganda’. Timed just ahead of the first EU-Moldova summit on 4 July, the panel brought together EU stakeholders, Moldovan civil society, think tanks, and policymakers to address the growing threat of Russian hybrid warfare and disinformation. The discussion served as a platform to explore strategies for strengthening Moldova’s democratic resilience and advancing its European integration. The outcomes will inform the EaP CSF’s policy and advocacy efforts and will be shared with the EaP CSF Moldovan National Platform and other stakeholders. This event built on key milestones for the Republic of Moldova. In June 2024, the country held its first Intergovernmental Conference with the EU, officially launching accession negotiations. That same year, presidential elections and a constitutional referendum reaffirmed Moldova’s commitment to EU membership. Yet, these democratic advances were met with significant challenges, including unprecedented interference aimed at destabilisation. With parliamentary elections approaching in September 2025, Moldova remains vulnerable to ongoing Russian efforts, underscoring the urgency of collective action and sustained international support.

Russian disinformation and interference

The Republic of Moldova is currently the target of an intensified Russian hybrid war, with disinformation serving as a central tool. Disinformation campaigns, which have grown increasingly sophisticated in methods, target not only domestic audiences but also the Moldovan diaspora, exploiting fears and emotions around topics such as EU integration, LGBT rights, energy security, and militarisation of society. There have been various estimates suggesting that

Russia may have directed as much as 1% of the GDP of the Republic of Moldova towards influence operations over the past year. While the exact figure remains uncertain, the scale of “investment” is widely regarded as significant. Russia’s operations have become more openly aggressive, with less focus on maintaining plausible deniability and a greater readiness to directly shape public discourse. During the presidential elections and EU referendum of 2024, Russian disinformation networks, previously focused largely on Ukrainian audiences, rapidly shifted their attention towards Moldova. Social media platforms such as Telegram, Facebook, and TikTok acted as coordinated amplifiers of the Kremlin narratives, building and reinforcing echo chambers through repeated claims, such as the “corrupt Moldovan leadership” and “EU puppet masters”, and creating the illusion of widespread public agreement.

These platforms, in particular TikTok, have become “lawless battlegrounds” with AI-generated content and influencers spreading Russian propaganda. Although pro-democratic forces won the recent elections in Moldova, a large part of the population remains susceptible to pro-Kremlin messaging, which is amplified by Russia’s extensive investment in election interference. Civil society organisations have also become direct targets, facing smear campaigns that have contributed to drive public trust to a record low of 20%; Moldovan civil society plays a key role in strengthening Moldova’s ability to boost security resilience addressing disinformation and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) with expertise and independent analysis. The recent attacks on independent media and civil society organisations risk undermining their operations and shrinking civic space. In this context, some donor organisations, such as the Soros Foundation Moldova have adjusted their post-referendum strategies to prioritise social cohesion. Their efforts focus on strengthening public institutions, engaging local communities, and supporting independent media to counter disinformation and highlight the benefits of EU integration. This includes initiatives aimed at building the capacity of public servants and journalists. Recognising that public trust depends on institutions delivering tangible results, donors are working to enhance institutional performance and responsiveness.

Election monitoring

Election monitoring is essential to safeguarding democratic processes by promoting transparency, integrity, and compliance with democratic standards. The European Parliament’s Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG) plays a role in this effort by overseeing election observation missions that provide comprehensive assessments of the political and legal context, media landscape, and electoral procedures. The Republic of Moldova has faced unprecedented levels of electoral interference. According to EEAS latest report on foreign information manipulation, Moldova was one of the most targeted countries in 2024 with

45 confirmed incidents and 300,000 votes illicitly influenced. In response, the Moldovan authorities have implemented significant reforms, including amendments to the Criminal Code, the initiation of over 9,000 anti-corruption cases, and the vetting of judicial officials. These efforts align with OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and are strongly supported by the European Parliament. The justice reform has emerged as a cornerstone of Moldova's strategy to strengthen democratic institutions, combat external manipulation, and create conditions conducive to investment and broader governance reforms. Continued support for transparent and credible election monitoring will be essential to ensuring that these reforms translate into long-term democratic resilience, helping Moldova protect its electoral processes from interference, and restore public trust in democratic institutions.

EU support to Moldova

The European Union plays a key role in supporting Moldova's democratic resilience and reform agenda. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Republic of Moldova has accelerated its reform agenda, leading to the official opening of accession negotiations in June 2024. Through mechanisms such as the Foreign Policy Instrument and the European Partnership Mission, the Republic of Moldova has engaged in productive collaboration with the EU on combating disinformation and enhancing strategic communication. This partnership was further strengthened with the signing of the EU-Moldova Security and Defence Partnership in 2024, aimed at bolstering the country's overall resilience and jointly addressing shared security challenges. The Republic of Moldova is also the recipient of the EU's largest financial support package since its independence: under the Reform and Growth Facility for 2025–2027, the EU has committed up to €1.9 billion to support economic reforms and the Growth Plan. Additionally, the European Parliament leads mediation efforts through the Jean Monnet Dialogue and capacity-building initiatives in areas such as EU accession oversight and civic outreach in minority languages.

The EU has also supported Moldova through the East StratCom Task Force, which focuses on analysing and exposing Russian disinformation and foreign information manipulation, supporting independent media in the region, and communicating EU policies to local audiences.

Infrastructure and energy security have become key fronts in Moldova's resilience against hybrid threats. Significant EU investment has enabled the country, once fully dependent on Russian energy, to diversify its energy sources and begin importing gas and electricity from European markets. While these efforts mark important progress, continued vulnerabilities in disinformation and electoral integrity pose serious risks to Moldova's democratic development and require sustained attention.

Policy Recommendations

Safeguard Electoral Integrity

- Strengthen the legal framework and ensure adequate funding for the Central Electoral Commission.
- Increase electoral transparency through oversight, digital safeguards, and monitoring.

Counter Disinformation and Strengthen Strategic Communication

- Build strategic communication capacity across Moldovan public institutions, media, and civil society.
- Reinforce counter-disinformation efforts through targeted interventions and citizen outreach on the benefits of EU integration. It is especially important to reach out not only to the like-minded but also to people who are more skeptical about the EU.
- Develop joint platforms between NGOs and tech companies to detect and debunk disinformation.
- Enhance regulation of social media platforms, including monitoring AI-generated content and foreign influence operations targeting elections.

Support Independent Media and Journalism

- Increase funding and professional development for independent journalists and investigative journalists.
- Establish support mechanisms to retain reporters in rural and under-resourced media environments.

Advance European Integration and Democratic Resilience

- Combine legal reforms with institutional commitment and civil society empowerment.
- Invest in civic education, public awareness campaigns, and community outreach, especially in regions with lower pro-EU engagement, such as Gagauzia.
- Deepen cooperation among public institutions, civil society, and democratically minded peers from the Eastern Partnership countries to address shared security challenges.

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