

# **Hybrid Threats in the EaP Area: Building a Common Response**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Four non-governmental organisations from Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Ukraine conducted a joint study assessing hybrid threats that the EaP countries are currently facing. The project aimed to study the hybrid threats which affect Eastern Partnership states and elaborate recommendations to actively engage civil society in countering them.

The project envisaged the creation of a team of experts from Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Ukraine, which would travel to the capital cities of the mentioned states and meet all relevant stakeholders from government, parliament and civil society. The meetings resulted in the collection of all necessary information, opinions and ideas on the state of institutional and legal measures taken in the countries on countering existing hybrid threats.

The team of experts also undertook desk research based on accessible open sources and interviews conducted with different stakeholders, among them government officials, experts and civil society organizations. The research and study visits provided the ground for four country reviews to be written by the experts. Their reports have been integrated *mutatis mutandis* into the present policy paper, followed by a comparative analysis of threats and institutional responses, similarities and distinctions in the policies of the four mentioned countries. The paper also explores the role and areas of potential engagement of civil society.

To effectively counter the hybrid threats, a joining of efforts of official bodies and non-state actors is required. It also needs reinforced international cooperation on a government and civil society level. The paper recommends the governments establish active cooperation among and with the EU countries with the aim of analyzing, exchanging knowledge and countering jointly, where appropriate, hybrid threats. The cooperation should target the development of an appropriate legal environment and adequate institutional capacity. Civil society itself should become more organized and consolidated.

The paper advises the EaP CSF to conduct work on consolidating the efforts of civil society in the direction of strengthening the resilience of EaP countries, especially in countering attacks aiming to discredit and weaken the Europeanisation of the mentioned countries. It was advised that the EaP CSF contribute to facilitating the capacity building of civil society organizations so as to help them to actively engage in countering hybrid threats.

Despite the existing differences between EaP partner states as regards their foreign policy priorities and geopolitical orientation or trade arrangement, all of them seek closer cooperation with the European Union, peaceful co-existence, and the chance to develop efficient economic ties within the wider region. Continuation of Europeanisation and interaction with EU institutions, supporting democratic transformation, economic and regulatory convergence, social cohesion and human capital development, institutional and state build up, has become irreversible thanks to the success of the EaP.

The sources of the new hybrid threats predominantly aim at discrediting and weakening the motivation of the EaP partner states to further integrate with the EU. Indeed, EaP partner states understand the importance of this cooperation and are interested in countering, jointly where possible, any adverse action or attempt to disengage them from that process.

Based on the results of the study, we propose a set of recommendations for the governments of EaP states, EU and NATO institutions and their member states.

**For Governments, EU and NATO**

<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Hybrid threats that the EaP countries face are largely similar, but to a certain extent differ by source and intensity.	Create permanent cooperation platforms. The EaP CSDP panel could serve as a good place for such meetings and involve well-experienced and better-organized EU and NATO bodies and analytical centres.
New achievements cause technological advancement in hybrid warfare tools too.	EU, NATO, member states should involve sharing and transfer of knowledge about new achievements and technological advancements, which could potentially be used for conducting hybrid warfare.
There are objective limitations to the depth of cooperation on security among EaP countries.	It is necessary to introduce differentiation at the multilateral level of EaP using various configurations.
None of the states have and is important to develop a legal basis for regulating an institutional and civil response to hybrid threats.	Governments should agree on common definitions of the hybrid threats, classify and divide tasks, introduce criminal and administrative responsibility for the damages caused by hybrid actions.
Communication strategies implemented by some of EaP governments lack of communication on wider hybrid threats, so that vulnerable groups lack proper knowledge and readiness.	There is clearly a need for EaP countries to adopt wider communication strategies aimed at developing resilience towards all type of hybrid threats.
All EaP states lack critical infrastructure protection measures.	Specific regulations should be adopted to legally oblige state owned and private companies - owners of critical infrastructure, to provide adequate level of security.
All EaP countries lack a strategic vision on how to reconcile media freedom with the necessary steps and actions to counter hybrid threats.	Efficient approaches should be developed in all countries, through wider consultations between them, based on similar principles, and proposing similar mechanisms.
Resilience of the countries bases on a politically stable society with democratic institutions, impartial and efficient courts, transparent laws, governments, and efficient economic policies addressing poverty and inequalities.	Respective long-term strategy to resist the hybrid threats in EaP states should include such objectives as consistent transformation, reform and development.

<b>For Civil Society/NGO</b>	
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Engagement and participation of the civil society is crucial for the success of the country in countering hybrid threats.	The government should engage civil society as a fully-fledged partner when and where the principles of the state security allow.
There is not enough experts' capacity in EaP states able to deal efficiently with all components of the hybrid warfare.	State and governments should encourage the development of expert capacity, which would contribute to identifying and countering hybrid threats.
Civil society organisations are motivated to work with the wider public and vulnerable groups at different levels.	Wider networks of experts and NGOs should be registered with the relevant institutions and the tasks related to the communication activities outsourced as much as possible.
In some countries, there is a practice of functioning non-official "security-communities", which unite all types of expert and NGO representatives working in the security field.	Civil society groups should become more organized and consolidated. Establishment of NGO clubs and coalitions, which work together on concrete directions of hybrid warfare prevention, should be encouraged.
An umbrella organisation will be needed to unite and coordinate capacity-building efforts.	The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) could be successfully used as an organizational hub for trainings and capacity development programs. The empowerment of NGOs and civil society in general will play a crucial role in increasing resilience of the EaP states in countering hybrid threats.
The EaP CSF needs a special work plan to set a clear priority for activities and events dedicated to reducing hybrid threats, development of resilience of the EaPs.	The work plan on should be based on a mid-term strategy and envisage interaction between civil society organizations and their governments with EU intuitions, NATO and international organizations.
Civil societies throughout the EaP need to establish closer cooperation on sharing experience, producing joint research and analyses, discussing national policies and organizing joint actions to counter hybrid threats in their countries.	Cooperation of civil society organisations in the fields related to the countering hybrid threats should become an issue for the CSF working groups as well as of the working groups of the national platforms.
Civil society organizations need to address the issues of peace building more intensively. Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict should deserve special attention.	There is a need of a general analysis of hybrid and subversive tactics used by both sides with the aim of changing the confrontational climate between the countries towards a climate favourable for negotiation of a solution.



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## INTRODUCTION

On May 7, 2019, the Eastern Partnership celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The Eastern Partnership Initiative was founded through a joint declaration adopted by the European Union and six Eastern European states at the Prague Summit in 2009. The main aim was to create appropriate conditions for political association and economic integration between the partners. It was supposed to strengthen stability and multilateral cooperation in the region, deepen ties between the countries, facilitate reform, and quicken the social cohesion and economic development of the region. The aim of the EaP is very peaceful, not directed against anybody, enforcing not only cooperation between the Eastern European states and the EU, but further encouraging intraregional trade and cooperation.

On May 14, at a high-level conference in Brussels dedicated to ten years of the Eastern Partnership, Federica Mogherini noted that the EaP is not a geopolitical project and reaffirmed Brussels's intentions not to use it to create a "geopolitical competition", first of all with Moscow. Indeed, Moscow never shared this view and considered the progress and success of the EaP as a challenge to its dominance in the area "of Russia's legitimate interests", as stated by its presidents on numerous occasions. As James Nixey said, "It (Russia) believes it has a natural right to retain some form of control over the countries on its border that have historically formed part of a Russian cordon sanitaire."<sup>1</sup>

Russia's approach towards the Eastern European states stands as the exercising of a limited sovereignty by the latter, keeping the rest under her own control. The Eastern Partnership, with its aims of strengthening the sovereignty and independence, economic development and social cohesion, political consolidation and resilience of the eastern neighbourhood, "hinders" Russia's long term plans and although not designed as a geopolitical project, this still has an impact on regional geopolitics.

To attract and keep the countries of Eastern Europe within its orbit, in 2014 Russia established the Eurasian Economic Union, and two Eastern Partnership countries- Belarus and Armenia, are involved in the Customs Union, which per-se blocks their possible advancement towards the EU internal market through the establishment of a DCFTA. Their political association with the EU is also becoming problematic due to their participation in the Russia-controlled security cooperation initiative - CSTO. Despite these institutional barriers, both countries, together with other EaP countries, work to actively develop and deepen their relations with the EU, trying to follow the transformational path recommended and supported by the EU, to Europeanise their legislation and institutional set-up. The ongoing use of soft power tools by EU and Russia in the region is certainly bearing success for the EU, but many facts prove that the latter is ready to employ all other means (including hard power) to subject and bring under its own influence the Eastern European states standing in their way to Europeanisation.

Along with exercising direct military pressure on Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova by supporting separatism and occupying parts of their territories, hybrid tactics have become an important tool for trying to stop the advancement of the mentioned countries towards the EU, which in practice is directed against democratic transformation and the wide integration of the mentioned countries into international society.

Hybrid tactics contain cyber and other non-traditional means of warfare. War situations in the 1990s in the Western Balkans, and especially Abkhazia and Transnistria, became polygons for

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<sup>1</sup> See: James Nixey. *It is impractical and immoral to abandon the post-Soviet states to Moscow*. "The Russia Question: Sovereignty and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia". Chatham House. 8 December 2016. Available from: [www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/russia-question-sovereignty-and-legitimacy-post-soviet-eurasia](http://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/russia-question-sovereignty-and-legitimacy-post-soviet-eurasia)

formulating and testing hybrid warfare tactics. In these conflicts, the Russian security structures used various methods, from presenting disguised troops as rebels and implementing their military plans through separatist forces in other countries, to sowing panic by spreading rumours and disinformation and disseminating hate and alienation between artificially opposed camps. All this “worked” quite efficiently. However, today, better and more efficient methods for damaging the opponent have appeared and been established:

- targeted cyber-attacks (both for gathering classified information as well as damaging critical infrastructure);
- the industry of spreading fake messages and disinformation in which (in Russia’s case) scientific-research centres are also involved;
- planting influential agents in the political circles of opponents, the NGO sector and the media;
- using economic and energy influence for political purposes,
- and much more.

Hybrid threats arise when the aggressor uses means beyond the traditional military warfare to destabilize an opponent<sup>2</sup> and they are difficult to identify, especially when the result does not follow immediately. It is also complicated to precisely establish who conducted the attack and what specific purpose it served. At this stage, only Russia uses a systemic approach to conduct hybrid warfare, simultaneously bringing together various tactical means and using them in synergy to reach a single (military) goal. At the contemplation stage, we can assume that a military victory over the opponents would not be the sole motivation for using hybrid tactics. We can see that different elements of such actions are applied with various aims – to weaken the adversary state economically or politically and to influence its population or public opinion and as a result change its orientation and make it easier to manipulate politically. In a broad sense, we can say that hybrid threats can arise in any area where there are vulnerabilities that the aggressor can use to undermine the stability of the opponent. For example, the hybrid attack against Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova is definitely being used to weaken their European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations and to force them to change their foreign policy priorities. This can be achieved in situations when these states fail, show lack of performance, or their population is “disillusioned” about western values.

While the EU only recently started recognising the reality of having an adversary use hybrid tactics against it, the Russian Federation has for a long time been applying the mentioned method towards its neighbourhood, especially those countries with strong European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Obviously, the three associated states face stronger pressure than other EaP countries, but this study attempted to find and reveal those threats and attacks that other EaP partner states are also subjected to, even without having an apparent confrontation with Russia. The hybrid tactics have also become a type of preventive tool used to stop the drifting of certain countries towards the EU or the West in general, preventing them from exercising full independence and sovereign decision-making as regards their foreign policies.

This is to say that there may be many other sources of hybrid threats in the EaP area. Among them are the threats coming from radicalized religious movements, which have already become international actors and may act against states through subversive activities or direct terrorist threats. These groups may also be actively involved in undermining democratic ideals or the western orientation of said countries.

Notwithstanding the fact that some EaP countries are in better relations with the Russian Federation, they are all to a different extent subjected to Russian hybrid attacks at least with the

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<sup>2</sup> Food-for-thought paper “Countering Hybrid Threats”, Working document of the European External Action Service, EEAS (2015) 731

aim of detaining and preventing their further approximation to the EU. The propaganda, and especially disinformation directed towards downgrading the EU's image in the former Soviet space and in EaP countries in particular, attempts to affect Europeanisation and the positive development of relations between the mentioned states and the EU.

EaP countries may and should find ways to cooperate to counter such threats that hinder their common interests. It is becoming especially important for civil society organizations to support their governments in this regard; to monitor their work and efforts to counter negative influence; and to advise on the measures necessary to strengthen the resilience of society. Another important endeavour is for civil society organizations to exchange knowledge and experience and unite efforts with other EaP countries. Common work and action by civil society organizations in all EaP countries can strengthen positions and the motivation of their governments to effectively address and respond to the existing hybrid threats.

Raising the resilience of societies in the Eastern Neighbourhood, including towards hybrid threats, has become a legitimate concern and strategy for the EU, a fact well-articulated in the EU Global Security Strategy 2016. While the EU is developing its own approach and forging an institutional response to the rise in hybrid threats to itself, it is important that the EU's partners in the neighbourhood well develop their own strategies and create stronger cooperation in the field with the relevant EU structures and EU Member states. In 2018, the EU initiated a study to define the vulnerabilities in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, which will be based on the responses to questionnaires sent to the governments of the mentioned countries. This particular study fully resonates with the approach taken by the EU and may serve to contribute (or add) to the knowledge of such issues by exposing the views of civil society from the mentioned states.

This paper is the result of a joint study conducted by experts from the EaP states. The aim of the study was to:

- identify hybrid threats to the stability of the EaP states;
- evaluate the institutional readiness of the states to counter those threats;
- find similarities and differences between the types of hybrid threats the EaP countries face;
- elaborate recommendations for the states and civil societies to further strengthen and create joint actions aiming to minimize the impact of hybrid threats and attacks on the stability and resilience of their countries and societies and on their European aspirations and willingness to continue deepening cooperation with the EU.

To conduct the study, a team of experts from four EaP countries travelled to the capitals of Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, there meeting and interviewing competent representatives of the government, parliament and civil society. The opinions and findings of experts from Azerbaijan and Moldova were also analysed and reflected in the recommendations.

The paper's structure reflects the aims and findings of the study and proposes to the reader country overviews, comparative analysis, conclusions and recommendations for governments and civil societies.



# COUNTRY OVERVIEW

## Armenia

The geopolitical and historical contexts of Armenia predetermine the foreign policy of the country to be multi-vectored. Some of the major aspects of the mentioned context include the world-spread diaspora, the fact that Armenia is a landlocked country in a frozen conflict with Azerbaijan and the fact it has a closed border with Turkey. In this respect, the developments that have been seen in and around Armenia during the past several years are extremely important in terms of evaluating the existing and potential hybrid threats.

The Republic of Armenia is a country with a small market and complicated geopolitical location. In 2013, Armenia became a member of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), giving it direct market access to Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus with a population of 175 million and combined GDP of 2.2 trillion USD<sup>3</sup>. This led to Armenia's rejecting the pre-negotiated Association Agreement (AA) with the EU that, together with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), would have granted the country access to the European Market.

Armenia's economy is vulnerable to the economic conditions of Russia and other member states of the EEU, taking into account the level of trade and volume of remittances from Russia, as well as the large number of Armenian labour migrants in Russia and significant presence of Russian capital in Armenia. In 2017, Armenia signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU, negotiated on the basis of Association Agreement, and aimed at having a framework agreement between Armenia and the EU compatible with Armenia's obligations in the EEU.

In the security dimension, Armenia is a member of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and is hosting a Russian military base, as well as being involved in the NATO Partnership for Peace program, a program of practical bilateral cooperation between individual Euro-Atlantic partner countries and NATO<sup>4</sup>.

Armenia's internal and external challenges are intertwined and serve as effective ground for hybrid threats that stem from three main directions: political, economic and security. All three directions are subject to hybrid threats from different internal and external actors.

In 2018, the Velvet Revolution took place in Armenia, reshaping the country in many dimensions, opening prospects for development and thus bringing new challenges for the country, including the risk of hybrid threats. The former regime that had ruled the country for two decades and which still has significant economic and financial resources, is currently one of the hybrid threat centers that actively uses media to spread disinformation and play on stereotypes within society.

### *Political and security vulnerabilities*

While identifying and describing the political vulnerabilities of Armenia, it is important to understand the general context of Armenia's geopolitical situation, which creates both internal and external threats and shapes the country's security and foreign policy. Due to the geographic location of Armenia, the geopolitical situation in the region and its historical background, it has to

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<sup>3</sup> Armenia - Market Overview, 2019. [online] Available at: [www.export.gov/article?id=Armenia-market-overview](http://www.export.gov/article?id=Armenia-market-overview) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>4</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Partnership for Peace programme, 2017. [online] Available at: [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_50349.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

constantly adapt to changing realities and strive to be engaged in different regional cooperation formats to decrease the economic and security threats.

The regional order and instability forms a significant part of the security threats the country faces and shapes internal sentiments among society as well as the external policy of the country. In other words, the ongoing war over Nagorno-Karabagh, although stopped by ceasefire, exacerbates the sense of security within society, consequently increasing the vulnerability and sensitivity towards security. Obviously, the conflict with Azerbaijan is one of the main sources of hybrid threats for Armenia both in terms of threats produced by the ongoing confrontation itself and in terms of perception of the conflict as a threat. The issue of the Armenian Genocide constitutes another segment of external threat. Within Armenian society, Turkey's denial of the Genocide is perceived as a security risk.

From a state policy perspective, Armenia is widely dependent on Russian military assistance with its membership of CSTO, hosting a Russian military base, etc. Instability in the region also impacts Armenia economically. With two closed borders, an extensive number of Armenian migrants in Russia, as well as the Georgia-Russia conflict which affects the major trade route between Armenia and Russia, Armenia is vulnerable to any fluctuations in the region. Thus, in order to secure itself from all the above-mentioned threats and challenges, Armenia has adopted a multi vector foreign policy by entering the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, signing the CEPA with the EU, and participating in NATO activities so as to be fully or partly integrated in regional processes, and counterbalancing threats. The above-mentioned political context depicts the main directions of vulnerabilities that might be effective ground for hybrid threats, such as external security threat, internal political fluctuations and the conflicting interests of foreign powers. This is exacerbated by the advancement of technologies and IT in general, and the intensive flow of information that is used by various actors through media, and fake civic and political entities. Conflicting interests, information flow and technologies together create effective ground for disinformation and propaganda.

With the advancement of technologies, internet and social media, everyone that has access to the internet can be “media”, or at least pretend to be. In the current reality and environment, every person who is politically and socially active can have up to 5000 friends on Facebook or can create a public account that garners a large amount of followers, who have an opportunity to share their views. Often, it is difficult to understand whether it is fake news or information posted by these activists or experts since the author may not convey the message and hidden agenda explicitly. In a country with a population of 2965.1 thousand, an activist or analyst with 5000 followers or Facebook friends might be quite influential. Facebook is the most popular platform in Armenia and is popular among 83% of the population, followed by Odnoklassniki (28%) and Vkontakte (7%)<sup>5</sup>. According to experts, since the Velvet Revolution, the number of social media users circulating the same kind of narratives or controversial topics both of internal and external interest, such as the association of the Armenian Government with the Open Society Foundation and George Soros, and the latter's support for the revolution, has increased<sup>6</sup>. The whole “Soros Foundation” episode is strongly connected with the classic manipulative narrative that opposes “traditional values” with “European values”, something widely used in many post-Soviet countries. Usually, these types of narratives are in contradiction to family values, such as LGBT and gender narratives that undermine the human rights perception among the public in general. This means that the perception of human rights in society is easily distorted and manipulated by contradicting the concept with so called “national values”. This tactic is usually applied to mobilize society against Pashinyan's government, with the propaganda that the new government is “against” the Armenian

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<sup>5</sup> Մեդիա նախաձեռնությունների կենտրոն, 2019. Մեդիա սպառումը Հայաստանում

<sup>6</sup> Expert Interview, Yerevan, Armenia, July 11-12, 2019

identity and values<sup>7</sup>. However, the propaganda narratives are not constrained only to “anti-Europe” or “anti-West” sentiments. There are certain types of controversial topics where the general public either lacks proper information and can be easily manipulated, or topics that conflict with the national identity and values and can be easily manipulated. Among these topics are vaccination or Gardasil,<sup>8</sup> the Istanbul Convention, the Karabakh War and all topics that can be perceived as a threat to national identity. These specified topics that are widely used for misinformation can be categorized into several groups.

The first group consists of topics that society does not possess knowledge or information of and with which they can be manipulated by the introduction of unverified academic articles. Even though the government and officials can officially deny this information, society has already been made skeptical, which also affects the government’s reputation and the trust society has in it. This was the case with the vaccination or Gardasil case that is constantly touched upon by the fakes or anti-Pashinyan government groups as an indication of the “unprofessional” or “weak” government.

The second type of misinformation category includes topics that society is vulnerable to in terms of its values and identity and lacks proper information about, or when the quality of public discourse is either absent or comes late. This was the case with the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, which was signed by the previous government and had to be ratified by the new government. The manipulation of this topic was largely supported by existing strong national values within society and sensitivity towards any conceived “threat” that might undermine those values.

The third category includes misinformation targeting topics that society is highly vulnerable to and which can be manipulated by providing information under the guise of confidential information. For instance, anti-Pashinyan groups mainly affiliated with the former regime keep spreading news that the new government does not have the NK conflict under control and that Pashinyan’s “mission” is to betray Armenian interests in the NK resolution process. This kind of information is usually depicted as “insider” information to raise its reliability and trustfulness.

Some experts state that such information is often produced as a replication from Russian media or produced with the support of the previous regime who want to discredit the new government and divide society. After the revolution, the number of fake accounts in social media drastically increased. These “users” became the main players in social media in terms of spreading intolerance, misinformation and hate speech<sup>9</sup>. The main targets are politicians or political forces, both ruling party and the opposition. The current situation in social media, particularly Facebook, deepens separation and fosters intolerance among the public. Fake users work as a tool to manipulate and shape public opinion, especially with regards to topics where society is vulnerable and can be easily manipulated due to a lack of information.<sup>10</sup>

After the Velvet Revolution in 2018, traditional media was also affected by the ongoing changes. Currently, the media sphere is free from government control. Pashinyan’s government does not own large media resources, only “Haykakan Zhamanak” (Armenian Time) newspaper and some electronic media outlets. The Public Television of Armenia, which is the main traditional media outlet in Armenia with nation-wide coverage, was the main propaganda tool of the former government for years. Currently, it is free from government pressure to provide the public with information delegated from the top, however it is still suffering the inertia seen in much of the

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<sup>7</sup> Pambukchyan, A. 2018. Propaganda and Human Rights Discourse in Armenia. [online] Available at: [www.evnreport.com/politics/propaganda-and-human-rights-discourse-in-armenia](http://www.evnreport.com/politics/propaganda-and-human-rights-discourse-in-armenia) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>8</sup> See: Addressing the HPV Vaccine Hysteria. Available at: [www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/addressing-the-hpv-vaccine-hysteria](http://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/addressing-the-hpv-vaccine-hysteria)

<sup>9</sup> Expert Interview, Yerevan, Armenia, July 11-12, 2019

<sup>10</sup> Analytical Center on Globalization and Regional Cooperation, 2019. Findings of Mass Media Monitoring in Armenia. [online] Available at: [www.eesri.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019-04\\_Armenia-Media-Monitoring-2-ACGRC\\_PB-ENG.pdf](http://www.eesri.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019-04_Armenia-Media-Monitoring-2-ACGRC_PB-ENG.pdf) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

media sphere since the revolution. The potential of being a public channel and serving the public is still underutilized. Media was largely used and influenced by the previous governments, who filled the demand for information with fake and manipulative news. For instance, former MPs from the Republican Party founded Qariak Media, which includes a TV channel (Armnews), radio station (107 FM), online media (Tert.am) and a social media platform (Blognews)<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, the second President of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, who was arrested in relation with the March 1<sup>st</sup> post-election shootings, owns the TV5 channel which extensively works against Pashinyan's government.

Following the revolution, the new Government of Armenia adhered to the principles of freedom of press, radio, television and other means of information defined by the Constitution of Armenia<sup>12</sup>. This is mainly related to the fact that the new government abides by the principles of the revolution and that Prime Minister Pashinyan was a journalist for years and has professional sensitivity towards this issue. However, as experts have noted, the media sector in Armenia still lacks transparency and the existing regulations do not require the media to disclose their owners or identify the sources that fund particular media outlets. In other words, the financial transparency of media companies should be assured without violating the freedom of press and other means of information guaranteed by the Constitution of Armenia. It should also be mentioned that some experts have highlighted that this request should come from the media companies not the government<sup>13</sup>.

The experts noted during study trips to Ukraine and Moldova that the societies there are vulnerable to Russian media, since they have a high ethnic Russian and Russian speaking population, often living compactly in some regions. In contrast to Ukraine or Moldova, Armenia has a population of 2965.1 thousand, where 98.1% are Armenians and minorities include Russians, Yezidis, Kurds, Assyrians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Jews and others (Government of Armenia)<sup>14</sup>. However, this does not mean that Armenia is safe from Russian media propaganda. The Russian influence in Armenia compared to Ukraine, Moldova or Georgia is different. From the soft influence perspective, though most of the population in Armenia is Armenian speaking, knowledge of Russian is widespread. Further, the Russian media presence is quite extensive. There are three Russian channels that have a license to broadcast in Armenia: First Channel, RTR Planeta and Kultura. In addition to this, the internet TV companies offer a high number of Russian channels in their packages. Thus, for a significant part of Armenian society, Russian media is one of the main sources of information that has an influence in forming their view of the world and geopolitical developments, such as Russia and the West, the ongoing crisis in Syria, Ukraine, developments in the European Union, etc. On top of this, the Armenian media often uses Russian media sources when covering international news.<sup>15</sup>

Russian influence in Armenia is even more explicit through hard means, such as the acquisition of essential sectors of the economy and through the security alliance<sup>16</sup>. From a security perspective, Russia applies its hard power over the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict in several directions,

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<sup>11</sup> Sayadyan, L. 2019. The Media in Armenia One Year after the “Velvet Revolution”. European Journalists Network. [online] Available at: [www.europeanjournalists.net/?p=642](http://www.europeanjournalists.net/?p=642) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>12</sup> Constitution of Republic of Armenia. [online]. Available at: [www.president.am/en/constitution-2015/](http://www.president.am/en/constitution-2015/) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>13</sup> Sayadyan, L. 2019. The Media in Armenia One Year after the “Velvet Revolution”. European Journalists Network. [online] Available at: [www.europeanjournalists.net/?p=642](http://www.europeanjournalists.net/?p=642) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>14</sup> The Government of Republic of Armenia, 2019. Demographics. [online] Available at: [www.gov.am/en/demographics/](http://www.gov.am/en/demographics/) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>15</sup> Vardanyan, G. Armenia in Russia's Zone of Influence. CHAI KHANA. [online] Available at: [www.chai-khana.org/en/armenia-in-russias-zone-of-influence](http://www.chai-khana.org/en/armenia-in-russias-zone-of-influence) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>16</sup> Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe, Kyiv 2018. [online] Available at: [www.prismua.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/DRI\\_CEE\\_2018.pdf](http://www.prismua.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/DRI_CEE_2018.pdf) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

intensifying Armenia's military dependency on Russia. Russia is the main arms supplier to Armenia and is its main security partner; further, it is one of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group on the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and it has a military base in Armenia as a part of the CSTO military alliance, of which Armenia is a member<sup>17</sup>. All the mentioned directions together put Russia as Armenia's main security guarantor and strategic partner.

### *Economic vulnerabilities*

From the perspective of economic vulnerability, there are two main areas that should be highlighted: economic activity and migration trends. Armenia is a small market economy with limited access to the international market. The main economic drivers are mining, agriculture, tourism and IT. Over the last two decades, the interconnection between business and politics has grown significantly, resulting in corruption, clientelism and nepotism. Only a small circle of the country's political-economic elite has been benefiting from the large-scale economic activity. In addition to this, the interconnections between the political leadership of Armenia and the Russian elite, and the political dependency of previous authorities, have resulted in the increased economic presence of Russia, particularly in the spheres of strategic importance: energy, mining, telecommunication, transport, etc. Energy resources in Armenia are quite limited. Only 35% of domestic demand for energy can be met in Armenia. Since it does not have any natural reserves of gas or oil, it is highly dependent on energy imports. Natural gas is imported from Russia and is controlled by Gazprom Armenia, a 100% subsidiary of Russian Gazprom<sup>18,19</sup>.

Another important dimension that needs to be mentioned in this context is migration. Elaborating on migration trends in Armenia, it is important to note that the migration flow from Armenia is higher than to Armenia, and the main destination is the Russian Federation. By the year 2015, the number of Armenian migrants in Russia was estimated at 363,000. 70-75% of long-term migrants and 96% of short-term migrants reside in Russia<sup>20,21</sup>. According to the Central Bank of Armenia, by the year 2015, the total amount of remittances to Armenia was 1,208.5 million US dollars, which is about 11.5% of the GDP. The main country that Armenia gets its remittances from is Russia<sup>22</sup>. It should be mentioned though that according to some experts, following the Velvet Revolution, the migration trends have changed and in the first quarter of 2019, for the first time in a long time, the number of people entering the country was higher than the number of people leaving.

Considering the geographic location of Armenia, which makes it a transition zone for foreigners to Europe and the Schengen Zone, particularly the fact of its relative proximity to Romania and Bulgaria, Armenia is usually used as a transit zone by citizens from Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Africa.

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<sup>17</sup> Giragosian, R. 2017. Armenian-Russian Relations: Diminishing Returns. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. [online] Available at: [www.ge.boell.org/en/2017/10/16/armenian-russian-relations-diminishing-returns](http://www.ge.boell.org/en/2017/10/16/armenian-russian-relations-diminishing-returns) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>18</sup> Armenia Investment Map, 2018. EV Consulting. [online] Available at: [www.evconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ArmlInvestmentMap2018.pdf](http://www.evconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ArmlInvestmentMap2018.pdf) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>19</sup> Armenia - Energy Sector, 2019. [online] Available at: [www.export.gov/article?id=Armenia-energy-sector](http://www.export.gov/article?id=Armenia-energy-sector) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>20</sup> RA Government, 2017. 2017-2021 Strategy For Migration Policy Of The Republic Of Armenia [online] Available at: [www.eapmigrationpanel.org/sites/default/files/migration\\_strategy\\_2017-2021\\_english.pdf](http://www.eapmigrationpanel.org/sites/default/files/migration_strategy_2017-2021_english.pdf) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>21</sup> Ամփոփ, Միգրացիան Հայաստանում չընդհատվող արտագաղթ՝ միեւնույն հիմնավորմամբ, 2018. [online] Available at: [www.ampop.am/migration-in-armenia/](http://www.ampop.am/migration-in-armenia/) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>22</sup> RA Government, 2017. 2017-2021 Strategy For Migration Policy Of The Republic Of Armenia [online] Available at: [www.eapmigrationpanel.org/sites/default/files/migration\\_strategy\\_2017-2021\\_english.pdf](http://www.eapmigrationpanel.org/sites/default/files/migration_strategy_2017-2021_english.pdf) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

The country's geographic location as such creates risks of refugee and smuggling networks<sup>23</sup>. According to the data, in 2016, there were criminal cases for 27 persons for illegally crossing the border of Armenia. That same year, 1849 violations of the Law on Migration were recorded and 242 deportation cases. Currently, more than 40 countries can travel to Armenia without a visa, which is a precondition for tourism development<sup>24</sup>. However, as one of the experts mentioned, Armenia is vulnerable to illegal migrants due to the risk of an attack on critical infrastructure or any other action that might result in damage. In this kind of scenario, it would be difficult to identify whether an attack was staged by a specific country, since a non-state actor would be conducting subversive activity.

### *Information and cyber security*

The National Security Strategy (NSS) of Armenia was adopted in 2007. This document is a state policy that aims to describe and frame Armenia's strategy of state, civic and individual security. It was developed based on the needs and priorities of the time, with more emphasis on Armenia's multi-vector foreign policy and complicated geopolitical location<sup>25</sup>. It does not specify hybrid threats in general and for Armenia in particular and has only one provision on information propaganda and the importance of countering disinformation<sup>26</sup>. Nowadays, the threats have been changed and transformed. In this regard, the National Security Council is now in charge of developing a new NSS in line with current developments, geopolitical realities and security threats<sup>27</sup>.

With the rise of internet coverage in Armenia, society is vulnerable to cyber-attacks, information loss and security breaches. Armenia thus adopted two important documents: The Information Security Concept in 2009 and the Concept of Information Security and Information Policy in 2017. As a part of this concept, the Information and Public Relations Centre of Staff was established, which was mainly about countering Azerbaijani propaganda<sup>28</sup>. This institution aimed at ensuring Strategic Communication within the government; however, it was mainly confined to the fight against Azerbaijani propaganda and cyber threats. In addition to this, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Armenia has a Twitter team that works with the embassies and their staff to coordinate with foreign diplomats, politicians and public figures in said fight. These cases of coordination of information somehow illustrate strategic communication within the government, but it only counterbalances Azerbaijani propaganda without encompassing the fight against wider misinformation and fake news<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> International Organization for Migration, Review of Migration Management in the Republic of Armenia, 2008. [online] Available at: [www.un.am/up/library/Review%20of%20Migration%20Management%20in%20RA\\_eng.pdf](http://www.un.am/up/library/Review%20of%20Migration%20Management%20in%20RA_eng.pdf) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>24</sup> RA Government, 2017. 2017-2021 Strategy For Migration Policy Of The Republic Of Armenia. [online] Available at: [www.eapmigrationpanel.org/sites/default/files/migration\\_strategy\\_2017-2021\\_english.pdf](http://www.eapmigrationpanel.org/sites/default/files/migration_strategy_2017-2021_english.pdf) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>25</sup> Tatikyan, S. 2019. On the Elaboration of Armenia's New National Security Strategy. EVN Report. [online] Available at: [www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/on-the-elaboration-of-armenia-s-new-national-security-strategy](http://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/on-the-elaboration-of-armenia-s-new-national-security-strategy) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>26</sup> Republic of Armenia, National Security Strategy, 2007. [online] Available at: [www.mfa.am/filemanager/Statics/Doctrineeng.pdf](http://www.mfa.am/filemanager/Statics/Doctrineeng.pdf) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>27</sup> Հայաստանի Հանրապետության Տեղեկատվական Անվտանգության Հայեցակարգ, 2009. [online] Available at: [www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docID=52559](http://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docID=52559) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>28</sup> Martirosyan, S. 2017. Armenia, Azerbaijan and the War on Information. EVN Report. [online] Available at: [www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/armenia-azerbaijan-and-the-war-on-information](http://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/armenia-azerbaijan-and-the-war-on-information) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>29</sup> Martirosyan, S. 2017. Armenia, Azerbaijan and the War on Information. EVN Report. [online] Available at: [www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/armenia-azerbaijan-and-the-war-on-information](http://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/armenia-azerbaijan-and-the-war-on-information) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

In order to meet increasing challenges and threats of disinformation, the NSS adopted the Concept of Information Security and Information Policy in 2017. Another domain that was important to cover with the rise of IT and internet was cyber security, which is about both civic and military security. In the wake of cyber threats, in 2009, separate units were established in the RA Police and Investigative Committee that dealt with cyber-crimes. The unit within the Police handles cyber-crime cases at the initial stage before the Investigative Committee launches an official investigation. There is no separate institution or body covering the cyber sphere in Armenia<sup>30,31</sup>. The institution that deals with the cyber security of state institutions, such as the executive, legislative bodies and Central Bank, is the National Security Service of Armenia. The private sector, including the companies that provide water and electricity, are responsible for ensuring their own security and thus are vulnerable to cyber-attacks.<sup>32</sup>

In the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) 2018, Armenia is ranked 79 out of 175. Taking into account the developed IT sector in Armenia and constant threats of cyber-attacks from Azerbaijan, experts say this rank is quite low for Armenia. Ukraine is ranked 54, Moldova 53 and Georgia 18.<sup>33</sup> In 2014, elaboration of a Cyber Security Strategy was initiated and a final version was published in 2017. Another important step forward in tackling cyber security issues is the establishment of the Digital Armenia Foundation, which includes elaboration of the Digital Strategy of Armenia. However, as several experts note, Armenia still lacks a comprehensive governmental approach and strategy towards these issues and the current legislation lacks regulations and standards to address cyber threats<sup>34</sup>.

### **Civil Society.**

After becoming independent in 1991, civil society started to develop in Armenia with significant support from the international community. This society was perceived as a conglomerate of actors that shaped public discourse and perspectives on political, social, economic, human rights and other areas of life. It has thus accumulated vast experience and developed a flexibility which allows the development and popularization of media literacy, critical thinking, peace building related activities, the increasing resilience of society, etc. Both before the 2018 revolution and after, civil society actors remain the major carriers of alternative expertise and play the role of monitors and evaluators of the activities of the authorities. Civil society, both institutional and non-formal, has played a crucial role in mobilization that resulted in a change of power, and the younger generation, the main driving force of the Velvet Revolution, has to some extent been brought up on various educational activities targeting human rights, democratic governance, civic activism, critical thinking and media literacy and other important topics. In light of the above-mentioned, civil society can be perceived as one of the most important actors to oppose and confront hybrid

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<sup>30</sup> Թևիկյան, Ա. 2019. Տեղեկատվական անվտանգություն. Հայեցակարգային մոտեցումների արդիականացման հիմնախնդիրը և կարգավորման միջոցները. [online] Available at: [www.orbeli.am/hy/post/231/2019-06-12/Տեղեկատվական+անվտանգություն](http://www.orbeli.am/hy/post/231/2019-06-12/Տեղեկատվական+անվտանգություն) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>31</sup> Nerzetyan, A. 2018. Information Security or Cybersecurity? Armenia at a Juncture Again. EVN Report. [online] Available at: [www.evnreport.com/economy/information-security-or-cybersecurity-armenia-at-a-juncture-again](http://www.evnreport.com/economy/information-security-or-cybersecurity-armenia-at-a-juncture-again) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>32</sup> Council of Europe, Armenia. [online] Available at: [www.coe.int/en/web/octopus/country-wiki/-/asset\\_publisher/hFPA5fbKjyCJ/content/armenia/pop\\_up?inheritRedirect=false](http://www.coe.int/en/web/octopus/country-wiki/-/asset_publisher/hFPA5fbKjyCJ/content/armenia/pop_up?inheritRedirect=false) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

<sup>33</sup> International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) 2017. [online] Available at: [Accessed on 22 October 2019] [www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Documents/draft-18-00706\\_Global-Cybersecurity-Index-EV5\\_print\\_2.pdf](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Documents/draft-18-00706_Global-Cybersecurity-Index-EV5_print_2.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Nerzetyan, A. 2018. Information Security or Cybersecurity? Armenia at a Juncture Again. EVN Report. [online] Available at: [www.evnreport.com/economy/information-security-or-cybersecurity-armenia-at-a-juncture-again](http://www.evnreport.com/economy/information-security-or-cybersecurity-armenia-at-a-juncture-again) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

threats, particularly those expressed through disinformation and which attempt to marginalize constitutional values. Particularly after the Velvet Revolution, the tendency to imitate civil society is being illustrated by representatives of the former regime, which targets society by spreading disinformation and playing on stereotypes existent within society. Similar imitative processes are seen in the media sector, where propaganda and disinformation as introduced as news reporting. New kinds of civil society organizations have started to emerge in recent years with propaganda agendas. For example, the “International Humanitarian Development” NGO is led by the heads of the HASAK political party, famous for its pro-Russian orientation and targets local NGOs or initiatives who work in the sphere of human rights, peace building or the promotion of democracy. Other centres that are actively engaged in propaganda and manipulation are the “Luys” Information and Analytical Centre, Yerevan Geopolitical Club, and the "For Restoration of Sovereignty" Initiative, amongst others.<sup>35</sup>

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In light of the above-mentioned, there are several important steps and actions that should be undertaken and/or supported by various actors, including the Armenian government, civil society, and international organizations (particularly the EU). These activities should mainly focus on preventive measures aimed at neutralizing hybrid threats and preventing them from destabilizing the situation. Primarily, these steps and measures should target society and should play an educational and awareness raising role. Secondly, they should address the issue of ensuring that communication mechanisms between the major stakeholders, as well as between the decision makers and society, are in place. Thirdly, communication between Armenian actors in all relevant parties, be that through integration formats or with conflicting sides, should be directed at generating a united positive outcome.

- A Security Strategy that addresses internal and external hybrid threats;
- A strategy to counter communication gaps between government and society;
- Institutional reforms to address current challenges in information flow and technologies;
- Promotion of reforms in both formal and non-formal education to address the challenges of misinformation and propaganda, specifically through teaching media literacy and critical thinking;
- Undertaking joint measures with Azerbaijani and Turkish counterparts (civil society organizations, experts, and academia) to address the issues of disinformation, dissemination of hate speech and development of the image of “enemy”;
- Strengthening the internal regulatory basis within media;
- Use of popular culture to familiarize society with democratic values, human rights, etc.

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<sup>35</sup> Union of Informed Citizens, Groups Spreading Disinformation about US “Biological Weapons” Laboratories in Armenia and Their Motives, 2017. [online] Available at: [www.uic.am/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Report-english.pdf](http://www.uic.am/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Report-english.pdf) [Accessed on 22 October 2019]

# Georgia

## Recent Historical Context

Georgia is a country of the EaP area which continuously suffers from hybrid attacks, mainly from its neighbouring Russia. Russia has been conducting both a linear and non-linear war against the Georgian state since its early days of independence. The most evident examples of such an aggressive action against the country were taken in relation to the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia. Military confrontation resulting in the loss of de facto control of the regions by the central government of Georgia was used by the Russian Federation in 1991-1994 and in 2008. In the first phase, Georgia lost de facto control over part of the mentioned territories. In the second, following the August War of 2008, Russia occupied and recognized the independence of both former Georgian autonomies.

Along with the kinetic war methods, hybrid attacks have been extensively used against the country since the beginning of the conflict in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

We can present the mentioned tactics as follows:

Subversive propaganda among the Abkhaz and Ossetian population describing Georgian leadership as fascist and as having plans to oppress non-Georgian ethnicities in the regions;

- Arming and providing political, psychological and financial support to separatist and secessionist groups in the mentioned regions;<sup>36</sup>
- Training and preparing armed groups of secessionist and separatist forces;<sup>37</sup>
- Providing logistical support, advice, bases and strategically important information, including intelligence, to the adversary (separatist forces) during the armed confrontation;
- Financing numerous mercenaries – citizens of the Russian Federation, and supporting their penetration into the rebelling region.

By applying multiple hybrid tactics, Russia, without formal engagement, conducted what was essentially a proxy war against the sovereign country of Georgia. After the ceasefire and formal termination of the armed confrontation in the mentioned regions in 1994, Russia continued using means of influence, including subversive actions, to weaken and keep Georgia in its orbit.

Among such actions, were:

- Penetration into Georgian state institutions, especial military, security and law enforcement structures;
- Establishment of a wide network of the agents, gathering information and influencing public opinion;
- Attempts to damage the international image of the country by claiming that Georgia supported terrorist groups moving back and forward from Russia to the Pankisi (Georgian Chechen speaking) region.

After the Rose Revolution, when the country started fully discharging from Russian influence and actively moving towards the EU and NATO, Russia started more actively using hybrid tools to weaken the country, such as causing an artificial energy crisis in the winter of 2006 by intentionally blowing up the only gas pipeline supplying the country in the winter time. The reparation of the

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<sup>36</sup> Conclusion of the Parliamentary Temporary Commission on Investigation of the Military Aggression and other Acts of Russia Against the Territorial Integrity of Georgia. Conclusion. P.64 Available at: [www.parliament.ge/files/1329\\_22127\\_506571\\_Conclusion\\_E.pdf](http://www.parliament.ge/files/1329_22127_506571_Conclusion_E.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> See: *Russia was prepared for Georgian aggression – Putin*. RT 8 August 2012. [online] Available at: [www.rt.com/russia/putin-ossetia-war-plan-168/](http://www.rt.com/russia/putin-ossetia-war-plan-168/)

damaged pipe took around two weeks, while the population suffered from a severe deficit of the electricity and gas needed to heat its households.

Later, in April 2008, the Russian Federation intensified preparations for the war in Abkhazia. Denouncing the CIS Council decision of 19 January 1996 "On Measures to Regulate the Conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia", it established "direct legal links"<sup>38</sup> with the two breakaway regions. Russian directed its propaganda mainly to the internal market, portraying Georgia as a traitor and "...as a tiresome and aggressive Western stooge".<sup>39</sup> Russian soldiers, unlawfully deployed in Abkhazia, worked on reparation of the railway,<sup>40</sup> which was later, in August 2008, used to transport Russian military equipment to support incursion into Georgia proper.

The hybrid tool that Russia started using, first in the breakaway regions and soon after with other citizens of Georgia, especially addressing ethnic minorities, was mass "passportization" – the granting of Russian citizenship, with possibilities to easily travel and work in Russia, exercising a soft influence on the vulnerable part of the population. However, the "passportization" also brought upon Georgia another important danger as the Russian Foreign Policy Concept and the military doctrine were thus able to justify intervention with the purpose of "protecting its own citizens". The military aggression against Georgia in 2008 proved the real intension of the Russian government in this regards, when "Russia's President, Dmitry Medvedev, [said] that he must protect Russian citizens there."<sup>41</sup>

## New Threats

The August War of 2008 had important implications on Georgia, its relations with Russia and its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. On one hand, the economy of the country suffered due to the serious damage caused to the infrastructure. It also significantly reduced investment inflow. The security environment became even more fragile than it was before the war, as Russia stationed additional occupational forces in the breakaway regions of the country. Despite the promise of Georgia's becoming a NATO member, received at the Bucharest Summit (2008), it has become evident that the continuous presence of the occupational force on the territory of the country, and Russia's permanent threats "not to tolerate an extension of the Alliance" into its neighbourhood, has made the issue a "mission impossible".

On the other hand, Georgia has received unprecedented financial assistance from the international community, which helped the country to maintain economic stability during the following years. The Russian aggression triggered the acceleration of the establishment of the Eastern Partnership<sup>42</sup> and negotiation (since 2010) and signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in June 2014. Georgia cut diplomatic relations with Russia in 2008 and Russia lost practically all soft influence with the country. This is to say that the embargo on Georgian wine, mineral waters and other agricultural products reduced significantly Georgia's dependence on the Russian market. Only after

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<sup>38</sup>Key Events Ahead of Russian-Georgian Conflict. *Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty*. September 26, 2008 [online] Available at: [www.rferl.org/a/Key\\_Events\\_Russian\\_Georgian\\_Conflict/1291860.html](http://www.rferl.org/a/Key_Events_Russian_Georgian_Conflict/1291860.html)

Also see: Russia Moves to Legalize Ties with Abkhazia, Ossetia. *Civil.Ge*. 16 Apr. '08. available at: [www.old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17638](http://www.old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17638)

<sup>39</sup> Georgia and Russia: War erupts in Georgia. *The Economist*. 8<sup>th</sup> August 2008 [Online], available at: [www.economist.com/node/11909324/all-comments](http://www.economist.com/node/11909324/all-comments)

<sup>40</sup> Key Events Ahead of Russian-Georgian Conflict. *Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty*. September 26, 2008 [online] Available at: [www.rferl.org/a/Key\\_Events\\_Russian\\_Georgian\\_Conflict/1291860.html](http://www.rferl.org/a/Key_Events_Russian_Georgian_Conflict/1291860.html)

<sup>41</sup> Georgia and Russia: War erupts in Georgia. *The Economist*. 8<sup>th</sup> August 2008 [Online], available at: [www.economist.com/node/11909324/all-comments](http://www.economist.com/node/11909324/all-comments)

<sup>42</sup> Extraordinary European Council of First September 2008. *Presidency Conclusions*. Brussels, 6 October 2008. p.3 [www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/102749.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/102749.pdf)

2012, on starting dialogue for normalization, did the Russian authorities lift the embargo and the sides start trading again. Trade turnover gradually recovered and Russia became Georgia's second largest trade partner country (11% of total Georgian trade) in 2017-2018. As the relations normalized, the transport routes fully opened and air connections were re-established, Georgia lifted visa requirements for Russian citizens, and Russia on its side softened entry conditions. Russian tourism has grown significantly since, and Russians are in first place among foreign visitors to the country. Yet all the mentioned apparently positive developments have been accompanied with newly emerging threats. Russia clearly never abandoned its plans to re-establish dominance over the South Caucasian region, and Georgia is considered key to its success.

Actual threats, qualified as hybrid, that Georgia faces are the following:

**Economic dependence and connections** with the Russian economy as a threatening factor. Just the recent months have proven the well-articulated opinion from different experts and politicians that Russia might again raise the economic dependence of Georgia on the Russian market. In particular, after certain protests expressed by opposition groups in Georgia against the participation and presiding of a Russian Duma deputy at an international gathering held in Georgian parliament, the Russian President issued an ordinance to stop air flight from Russia to Georgia.<sup>43</sup> The Russian government also made a "recommendation" to Russian touristic companies not to sell tours to Georgia. The mentioned "attack" occurred in the middle of the tourist season and substantially reduced Russian tourist inflow into Georgia, resulting in considerable damage to the industry in particular and economy as a whole.

**Cyber-attacks** have been seen during and since the August 2008 War. In particular, during the war, official Georgian websites were massively stalled due to a cyber-attack. The Georgian government was deprived of the possibility to spread objective official information on what was going on, while Russian sites distributed false information damaging the country's image and misinforming international society. It took a few days for the Georgian government to reestablish its communication with the public, which it did thanks to its western partners.

Later, in 2011, another big cyber-attack against Georgia occurred. The attack was not against any particular ministry, but the attackers identified that news related portals had vulnerabilities and inserted malicious codes into them, affecting users' computers. The hackers were then able to fully control their computers, get access to their documents, and search for specific words in them, such as 'military', 'NATO', 'US', 'embassy', 'president', etc. The webpages affected were those with political news and context, so the attackers targeted a specific audience interested in politics, logically assuming that they would have more interesting files in their computers than the general population. The victims of this attack came from both the government and private sectors. Georgia initiated a counter cyber-attack, which helped to reveal the precise the location, found to be (according to information from a competent source) the capital of the Russian Federation. More cases recently have been detected, resulting in damage to electronic banking infrastructure, hacking of accounts of private physical and legal persons, and downgrading the trust in banks in general. The latest attack against the Georgian internet space took place on October 15-17, 2019. Several thousand sites (private and official) collapsed for two days. The addresses of such attackers were unidentifiable and in many cases one cannot accuse Russia or any other country, but neither can one exclude them, and there were cases when the attacks were found to be coming from abroad. Fortunately, no cyber-attacks have been detected that are directed at other critical infrastructure – military or civilian (energy, transport), something which has happened in Ukraine several times. Yet, such vulnerabilities exist and should be taken into account.

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<sup>43</sup> See: Putin's Ban On Direct Russia-Georgia Flights Comes Into Force. Radio Free Europe. July 08, 2019. Available from: [www.rferl.org/a/putin-ban-on-direct-russia-georgia-flights-comes-into-force/30042902.html](http://www.rferl.org/a/putin-ban-on-direct-russia-georgia-flights-comes-into-force/30042902.html)

**The Russian “passportization”** policy involving Georgian citizens started few years before the 2008 war. The process continued after and continues today, being especially popular among ethnic minorities and those living in minority-populated regions. The Russian passports allow them to travel, stay and work in Russia, while supporting their families living in Georgia. Georgian legislation does not recognize double citizenship and Russian citizenship, once obtained, causes a legal consequence with the respective citizen losing their Georgian citizenship. As such, the ethnic minorities, which, as a rule, are less attached to the issues of Georgian citizenship, are in many cases choosing the Russian one. In other cases, they have both passports, so violating the law. It is obvious that in such a conflict, any provocation in the regions with ethnic minorities can be used by Russia as a *casus belli* and justification for intervention.

**Propaganda and disinformation.** According to the State Security Service of Georgia, in 2018 “...disinformation was a widespread tool used by foreign forces, which with fake news and falsified facts and history, attempted to polarize the population, imposing false perceptions and fear, and influence important processes via manipulation of public opinion.”<sup>44</sup>

During the last few years, due to further liberalization of the media space in Georgia, the number of printed editions (newspapers) and internet outlets have become an active source of anti-western propaganda. **Deploying not necessarily pro-Russian content, but definitely anti-western messages, they became** better suited to influencing public opinion in full harmony with the Russian media. Anti-western Russian and Georgian sources have secured a wide reach, through satellite and cable TV networks. A report by Georgian NGO IDFI names several internet-media outlets spreading “Russian messages” such as Georgia & World,<sup>45</sup> Saqinform,<sup>46</sup> Iverioni<sup>47</sup>, reportiori.ge and marshalpress.ge. TV companies like DRO and Obieqtivi are also considered by the same report as media outlets resonating Russian propaganda (web-based media and radio), as is Sputnik Georgia, which is an affiliate of a Russian media outlet bearing same name.

All the mentioned media outlets attempt to influence wider public opinion, interpreting international and domestic facts and occurrences in the way Moscow sees it, from the war in Syria and Brexit, to EU-Georgia or EU-NATO relations. The mentioned sources attempt to seed deep scepticism and disbelief in Georgia’s European future and directly or indirectly push the public opinion toward the belief that a political choice in favour of Russia has no alternative for the country. A number of reports by independent Georgian sources indicate direct links with Russian state or private sources, including the financing of the majority of pro-Russian and anti-Western media outlets. The impact of this on public attitudes has as yet been weakly explored, but in Georgia the pro-Russian voice and direct support to Russian policies is becoming more apparent and transparent, which (among others) logically may be a result of increasing activities by the mentioned outlets. According to the Media Development Fund “...in 2018, a total 2,392 anti-Western comments were detected in 18 monitored media outlets, up by 21.6% as compared to the corresponding indicator of the previous year (1,967)”<sup>48</sup>. As we see, there is an upward trend in spreading anti-Western propaganda messages, which can have a very dramatic impact on stability in the country.

**Supporting anti-liberalism.** As democracy-building is a main priority and a condition for progressing toward the EU and NATO, supporting anti-liberalism has become a serious tool for undermining Georgia’s western moves. There is increasing activity being seen among anti-liberal groups: “Georgian Power”, “Georgian March“, “Resistance Zneoba” (Ethics), “Georgian Idea”, “Alt

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<sup>44</sup> See at: [www.ssg.gov.ge/uploads/ანგარიშები/ანგარიში%202018.pdf](http://www.ssg.gov.ge/uploads/ანგარიშები/ანგარიში%202018.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> [www.geworld.ge/en/](http://www.geworld.ge/en/)

<sup>46</sup> [www.ru.saqinform.ge/](http://www.ru.saqinform.ge/)

<sup>47</sup> [www.iverioni.com.ge/](http://www.iverioni.com.ge/)

<sup>48</sup> MDF (2019), Anti-Western Propaganda 2018. Available at: [www.mdfgeorgia.ge/geo/view-library/89](http://www.mdfgeorgia.ge/geo/view-library/89)

Info”, “Cardu”. Some of these groups focus on anti-LGBT and anti-immigration rhetoric; others on abortion. There have been cases of attacks on liberal media outlets. Some of the mentioned organizations try to promote the involvement of the Church in political life. They also advocate and fight liberal economic and market reforms, and demand and agitate for direct links and *rapprochement* with Russia. There are frequent attacks on the George Soros Foundation. Anti-federal discourse involves both ultra-left and ultra-right/conservative groups.

**Radicalization and terrorism.** This threat basically originates from the radical Islamic groups, in particular ISIS (or other jihadist movements), which over the years of its expansion has been actively promoting ideas of radical Islam, especially in remote areas of the country populated by religious minorities – the Pankisi region, Upper Adjara, Marneuli, Dmanisi. Around 50 Georgian citizens were identified as ISIS fighters<sup>49</sup> in 2015-2017. Some sources claim the number was higher. Georgians (parents of those young people from Pankisi Gorge) strongly believe that foreign citizens were recruiting young people for ISIS; official bodies deny this and state that the recruitment was taking place only from abroad.<sup>50</sup> The propaganda videos made and posted online called on young Georgian men to join ISIS.<sup>51</sup> Later, in 2018, former ISIS Georgian fighters threatened the Georgian government with revenge for killing an ISIS fighter during an antiterrorist operation in Tbilisi in November 2017. With the new developments in Syria (the Turkish incursion into Kurdish-controlled areas) a new danger is seen in the former ISIS fighters escaping massively from prisons and it may reach Georgia too.

**Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN)** safety and non-proliferation is also a matter of concern for Georgian authorities and citizens. Despite intensive measures taken to minimize the threat, it increased after occupation and the de-facto secession of wide territories in Ukraine, with nuclear power plants and other CBRN sources left with no or minimal control. The proliferation of such dangerous materials from territories not controlled by the Georgian government, as well other neighbouring regions, especially conflict areas, is a real danger, especially if this is used as a tool in the hybrid warfare.

## **Vulnerabilities**

Hybrid attacks are efficient when targeting vulnerabilities. In this regards, it is important to produce in-depth analysis of vulnerabilities in the state. To date, no complex study has been conducted by the State to detect the vulnerabilities. The only source of such information at this moment is a survey that the Georgian government recently produced (as confirmed by a competent official) in response to the questionnaire submitted by the EEAS to partner countries. Naturally, the questionnaire is protected and the study team did not have access to the results. The most recent study which can be referenced here was produced by non-governmental research organizations led by the Ukrainian PRISM, published in 2018. According to the study,<sup>52</sup> certain population groups are especially vulnerable to the Kremlin propaganda:

- people aged 50 and over (because of the experience of living in the USSR);
- ethnic minorities (feeling isolated and marginalized);
- those with a lack of knowledge of Georgian (which makes them an easy target for Russian TV propaganda);

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<sup>49</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/world/isis-returning-fighters/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/world/isis-returning-fighters/)

<sup>50</sup> M. Mamon, *A Remote Region of Georgia Loses its Children to ISIS*, The Intercept, July 9 2015, 6:00 p.m. Available from: [www.theintercept.com/2015/07/09/mujahedeensvalley/](http://www.theintercept.com/2015/07/09/mujahedeensvalley/)

<sup>51</sup> See: [www.georgiatoday.ge/news/2056/ISIS-Threatens-Georgian-Muslims](http://www.georgiatoday.ge/news/2056/ISIS-Threatens-Georgian-Muslims)

<sup>52</sup> See: [www.prismua.org/en/dri-cee/](http://www.prismua.org/en/dri-cee/)

- the rural population, which sees in Russia a market for agricultural goods, but also for possible employment;
- families, whose members work in Russia and send remittances regularly to their relatives in Georgia.

Other vulnerabilities lay in the **economic** sphere. The Georgian economy is highly dependent on imports and is exposed to a high trade deficit. One of important sources to cover this financial imbalance is foreign private transfers. Private transfers/remittances by Georgian citizens from abroad roughly amount to USD 2 billion a year, of which around 25% originates from Russia. A sharp decrease in such transfers, if the Russian government decides to create problems for the employment of Georgians there, can affect not only families dependent of said remittances, but the Georgian economy as a whole. **Increased trade** turnover can also be considered as a vulnerability, as the Russian government frequently uses trade as a political means to pressure other countries. It can, at any time, for political aims, cease trade in goods or services, ban any product from entering the Russian market (as happened with Georgia in 2006 and later with Moldova and some EU member states) causing important damage to a small state. **High numbers of tourists** and visitors from Russia has become an important source of income for the hotel and services sector. Again, Russia frequently threatens to cut transport connections with Georgia and affect the country's tourism in this way. The weak performance of **financial institutions** and the **volatility of the Georgia currency**, also a potential victim of speculative attacks, is also a matter of concern. Unemployment, poverty and social hardship creates favourable conditions for subversive actions, including propaganda projects, and externally provoked and fuelled instabilities. Among vulnerabilities, we could also mention the rising **polarization within the Georgian political spectrum**. Lack of national consensus, including on security issues, is an important weakness, as is incomplete democratic reforms and **lack of trust in Court**, Parliament and other state institutions; incomplete reform of the SSR; and lack of transparency and accountability of the governmental and especially local institutions. Weak decentralization and the level of **trust in the local authorities** is also a negative factor reducing society's resilience to hybrid threats.

### *Building Resilience – Institutional response*

Meetings with state and governmental institutions, agencies and services led us to conclude that there is an obvious lack of legal basis for countering hybrid threats in Georgia. The government is just now developing a draft strategy on countering said threats, which is being submitted to the parliamentary committees for their consideration. Only after its approval will real work be seen on changes in the criminal and administrative codes and other branches of legislation. It is necessary to legally empower institutions with very concrete competencies for coordination of different areas of action to counter hybrid threats. The strategy should give clear qualification to the notion of hybrid threat, tactics or warfare, and define all consecutive steps and measures to counter them. It should also define necessary changes in laws and institutional setup, and define the coordination and division of competencies among institutions.

At present, the Georgian institution charged with dealing with different components of what we call hybrid threats is the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It coordinates internal security issues (terrorism, critical infrastructure protection, cyber-crimes affecting private and business structures) and coordinates the development of the strategy cooperation of different institutions, setting up working groups, etc. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for strategic communications – development of the Annual Action Plans (under the Communication Strategy) and delivery of nationwide activities to build up informational resilience in the country. It coordinates the work of

other ministries and provides for their involvement in the realization of the Annual Communication Action Plans. The MFA also cooperates with the relevant structures of partner countries, like EU StratCom East, NATO StratCom, the EU Hybrid Centre of Excellence, EU Hybrid Cell, and other national structures in partner countries. Important functions are carried out by the State Security Service, which conducts its own work in the fight against terrorism, the cyber-security of state institutions, and preventing subversive activities by penetrated groups. Overall supervision of threats to state security is carried out by the Ministry of Defence, which analyses and seeks to prevent hybrid threats directly linked to the efficiency and resilience of the country's defence system, including the cyber security of its services. Indeed, the overall political coordination of all the elements treated by the mentioned agencies is still not secured. It is expected that the newly established State Security Council under the Prime Minister will conduct political guidance and supervision of the work on countering hybrid threats in Georgia.



## Republic of Moldova.

### *Recent historical context.*

Since the proclamation of its independence 28 years ago, the Republic of Moldova is one of the post-Soviet countries affected by the aggression Kremlin leads. Through proxy groups and then through open military intervention, Moscow has undermined the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova on an important part of its territory – the Transnistrian region. By stimulating an artificial conflict between the central authorities and the political representatives of the region, which degenerated into an armed conflict in 1992, Moscow put the Republic of Moldova in its area of influence. Moreover, Moscow did so by imposing itself as a guarantor of the ceasefire in the military phase of the conflict, started by its own representatives undercover<sup>53</sup>. This threat of resumption of the war created an accessible tool that Kremlin could use to keep any government in Chisinau blackmailed.

Like in Georgia, in 1991-1992, as well as later, Moscow tested various hybrid war instruments in Transnistria:

- misinformation;
- manipulation of public opinion;
- integration of agents of influence with the political class;
- development of economic dependencies;
- making local politicians fully dependent on the Kremlin for political support;
- limiting free expression and pollution of the information space with xenophobic messages about the majority population of the Republic of Moldova;
- spreading rumours, such as the alleged nationalism of the Chisinau Administration or threats to the national identity of the population in the region<sup>54</sup>;
- Romanian-phobia, which has always been one of the basic pillars of this propaganda.

Since the 1990s, financial support for separatism has been a regular move utilized by Moscow. Without the financial subsidies and the free gas delivered to the region controlled by separatists, the unconstitutional regime in Transnistria would be unable to survive even a few months<sup>55</sup>. In addition to the direct impact that was envisaged, the region was also used to undermine Moldovan state institutions and to weaken the rule of law. Being recognized as a grey zone, Transnistria became a constant source of smuggling from and through the territory that is under Russian military occupation<sup>56</sup>. From the illegal import of food and industrial products in small quantities for shops and markets in the areas bordering the Republic of Moldova, all the way to obscure schemes of magnitude, such as the purchase of electricity through “tick” companies<sup>57</sup>. The export of weapons and ammunition in the 1990s<sup>58</sup>, the smuggling of counterfeit cigarettes to the European market over the recent years<sup>59</sup>, the creation of cheap gas-based bitcoin mining farms a year ago<sup>60</sup> –

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<sup>53</sup> [www.ape.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/TRN\\_2018-03-22\\_ENG\\_2.pdf](http://www.ape.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/TRN_2018-03-22_ENG_2.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> [www.ape.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/TRN\\_2018-03-22\\_ENG\\_2.pdf](http://www.ape.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/TRN_2018-03-22_ENG_2.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> [www.viitorul.org/files/Policy%20Paper%202017%20-%20Impunitate%20si%20intelegeri%20rentiere%20sectorul%20energetic%20ENG%20II.pdf](http://www.viitorul.org/files/Policy%20Paper%202017%20-%20Impunitate%20si%20intelegeri%20rentiere%20sectorul%20energetic%20ENG%20II.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> [www.anticoruptie.md/en/investigations/economic/ukraine-moldova-transnistria-golden-triangle-of-smuggling](http://www.anticoruptie.md/en/investigations/economic/ukraine-moldova-transnistria-golden-triangle-of-smuggling)

<sup>57</sup> [www.anticoruptie.md/en/investigations/economic/energy-independence-of-ukraine-and-moldova-after-association-with-the-eu](http://www.anticoruptie.md/en/investigations/economic/energy-independence-of-ukraine-and-moldova-after-association-with-the-eu)

<sup>58</sup> [www.huffpost.com/entry/transnistria-a-country-that-doesnt-exist\\_b\\_2421694](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/transnistria-a-country-that-doesnt-exist_b_2421694)

<sup>59</sup> [www.adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/Tigari-contrabanda-transnistria-valoare-19-milioane-lei-descoperite-peretii-dubli-unui-autocamion-1\\_5da9632b892c0bb0c6afd5/index.html](http://www.adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/Tigari-contrabanda-transnistria-valoare-19-milioane-lei-descoperite-peretii-dubli-unui-autocamion-1_5da9632b892c0bb0c6afd5/index.html)

<sup>60</sup> [www.linx.crji.org/en\\_US/2018/08/30/moldova-sponsorul-separatistilor-transnistreni/](http://www.linx.crji.org/en_US/2018/08/30/moldova-sponsorul-separatistilor-transnistreni/)

all of these mean huge flows of illicit money and a high level of corruption. Of course, these would not have been possible without a corrupt political class and officials in the government at Chisinau and at the local level; but these criminal flows contributed even more to the corruption of the Moldovan administration.

Transnistria is certainly not the only and not even the most important tool the Kremlin used to build and strengthen its influence. In fact, these tools are numerous. We will briefly outline some of them.

### *Main vulnerabilities.*

**Energy dependence.** The Republic of Moldova is 100% dependent on gas imports from the Russian Federation. The imports are made by the MoldovaGaz Company, which is controlled by GazProm. The Russian Federation has always used the security of supply and the gas prices to blackmail Moldovan governments to give in, including with regard to its home and foreign policy. Since its establishment, MoldovaGaz has been used to corrupt the governing parties in the Republic of Moldova. By giving control over the operational management of the company to the ruling party (through the Ministry of Economy), Moscow actually corrupted them. For the past 20 years Moldovan politicians have exploited MoldovaGaz as a resource to enrich and stimulate party members. The company's lack of transparency in procurement allowed the directing of money towards the interests of the politicians who controlled the Ministry of Economy. The possibility of employing party members in the company's subsidiaries was regarded as a tool to encourage them. Instead, GazProm received total impunity – exaggerated tariffs and gas delivery contracts at prices and conditions unfavourable to the Republic of Moldova. All because corrupt politicians have drawn personal or party benefits. No real progress has been made toward interconnection with the European gas market in the past 20 years, for the same reasons<sup>61</sup>.

The situation is not much better as regards electricity. In the last 5 years, Chisinau has purchased 80% of the energy from the separatist region, from a power station controlled by Russian state-owned company Inter RAO. This way, Moldovan consumers are forced to finance separatism on their own territory<sup>62</sup>. Not at all surprising – despite the many promises, not even small progress has been made toward electricity interconnection with the EU in the last 25 years. Although other options and financial possibilities existed, the corrupt political class in Chisinau blocked everything. In essence, energy dependence is more about corruption.

**Media influence.** One fact: the most watched TV station in the Republic of Moldova since its independence, without any interruption, was and is the Russian first state television station (“Pervyi Kanal”, formerly ORT and Ostankino). Even during the 1992 war, most Moldovans received information from Russian television news. It is no wonder that Russian military aggression is still not recognized by a large part of the population. The fact that over 95% of the population of the Republic of Moldova understands Russian has always facilitated the high popularity of the Russian media and hence the influence<sup>63</sup>. The secret is pretty simple. Being a very small market with low purchasing power, the Republic of Moldova cannot ensure the existence of quality television channels. Moldova cannot afford to produce or purchase TV entertainment products competitively. In contrast, local television stations, which directly or indirectly belong to politicians, were always given the right to directly broadcast part of the content of the main Russian television stations on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Movies, TV series, entertainment shows, and also news, political shows, etc. were retransmitted; these were very competitive and

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<sup>61</sup> [www.watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Studiu-Moldovagaz-09-2019\\_compressed-1-1.pdf](http://www.watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Studiu-Moldovagaz-09-2019_compressed-1-1.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> [www.linx.crji.org/en\\_US/2018/08/30/moldova-sponsorul-separatistilor-transnistreni/](http://www.linx.crji.org/en_US/2018/08/30/moldova-sponsorul-separatistilor-transnistreni/)

<sup>63</sup> [watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Study-WatchdogMD-on-Russian-propaganda.pdf](http://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Study-WatchdogMD-on-Russian-propaganda.pdf)

gathered large audiences. The television station owners, however, paid modest amounts to the Russian stations, and sold ad time on the domestic market. They were allowed to insert news programs and other shows that they were exploiting for their own political interests. This has been the case since the 1990s. It is sufficient to follow the course of the retransmission right of the Pervyi Kanal station: in the late 1990s, it was under the control of the family of ex-President Lucinschi, in the 2000s it was transferred to the control of the entourage of President Voronin (more precisely of Vlad Plahotniuc), when he came to power. After the Communists left office in 2009, Pervyi Kanal remained under Plahotniuc's control, but started being used in the interest of his own party – the Democratic Party. Following the regime change in the summer of 2019, the right to broadcast Pervyi Kanal in the Republic of Moldova has been transferred to a television controlled by the Socialist President Igor Dodon<sup>64</sup>. He also holds the right of retransmission on two other Russian stations. Nobody has ever paid a market price for the right to broadcast Russian channels. This is also the manner in which the Kremlin has corrupted politicians in Chisinau – by offering them tools of influence on the media market, which are so necessary in the internal political struggle, while forcing them to retransmit all these years the propaganda produced for the internal market in Russia.

**Political dependence and interference in the elections.** Russian propaganda obviously generated similar effects to those inside Russian Federation – Putin’s high popularity and strong adherence to Kremlin's strategic narratives<sup>65</sup>. Some politicians in Chisinau did not hesitate, over time, to exploit this situation for their personal gain. Thus, they sought to win the political support of the Kremlin and thus win more votes in the Moldovan elections. This phenomenon has been called “influence by invitation”<sup>66</sup>. That is to say, the initiative to involve Moscow in the political campaigns in the Republic of Moldova was carried out at the initiative of some Moldovan political leaders. Taking this into consideration, the Kremlin interfered with varying intensity and through different instruments in all parliamentary and presidential elections that took place in Moldova after Vladimir Putin come to power in Moscow. Some electoral contenders benefitted in the short term, but they have also become very vulnerable and dependent on Russia’s continuous support<sup>67</sup>. The most relevant case is that of the current President of the Republic of Moldova and his political party, which are practically the products of Vladimir Putin. The political crisis from 2019 has shown that Igor Dodon and the Socialist Party are unable to make decisions that would be contrary to Moscow’s interests<sup>68</sup>. And the latter do not align with the national issues of the Republic of Moldova – strengthening its independence and sovereignty, integration with the EU, etc. Essentially, these important actors in domestic policy act more like Kremlin representatives and will work to keep the Republic of Moldova in the gray zone, without strong institutions, without rule of law and far from the EU.

**Other vulnerabilities.** In addition to the above mentioned, the Kremlin has many other tools that it uses to keep the Republic of Moldova in its area of influence and to sabotage its European integration efforts. The Orthodox Church, a branch of the Russian Patriarchate, is one of those tools. Organized crime networks are also such a tool. Moldovan groups are strongly integrated into the criminal hierarchies of the post-Soviet space, dominated by the Russian mafia. Facilitation of inter-ethnic tensions has been a constant in the Kremlin’s propaganda efforts in the Republic of Moldova. The population of the autonomy of Gagauz is the main target of those tensions. And the results show. The dependence of the business environment on the Russian retail market has been continuously exploited, especially in the case of agricultural products. However, the subject is

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<sup>64</sup> [www.media-azi.md/en/stiri/bc-accent-tv-wants-become-%E2%80%98primul-canal-moldova%E2%80%99](http://www.media-azi.md/en/stiri/bc-accent-tv-wants-become-%E2%80%98primul-canal-moldova%E2%80%99)

<sup>65</sup> [watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Study-WatchdogMD-on-Russian-propaganda.pdf](http://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Study-WatchdogMD-on-Russian-propaganda.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> [watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Why-is-Russian-meddling-Modova-2019-elections.pdf](http://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Why-is-Russian-meddling-Modova-2019-elections.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> [www.rise.md/english/russian-linked-offshore-helps-fund-socialist-campaigns/](http://www.rise.md/english/russian-linked-offshore-helps-fund-socialist-campaigns/)

<sup>68</sup> [www.balkaninsight.com/2019/06/04/diplomatic-intervention-breaks-moldovas-political-deadlock/](http://www.balkaninsight.com/2019/06/04/diplomatic-intervention-breaks-moldovas-political-deadlock/)

socially and politically sensitive. Thus, the introduction of embargoes or their removal for certain companies (every time affiliated with pro-Russian politicians, or separatist leaders from Transnistria) has had a political and economic impact. Even though the Republic of Moldova is no longer so dependent on the Russian market – over 60% of exports are currently to the EU –, the Kremlin still manages to use access to the Russian market. Thus, small groups of business people are given access on favorable terms, while being forced to fund pro-Russian politicians at home. Or businessmen (relatives) close to President Dodon open profitable businesses in Russia and receive government contracts. Without having the devastating effects of the past, access control on the Russian market is now an indirect financing tool for the activity of Kremlin-controlled politicians in the Republic of Moldova.

In addition to the above, corruption can be exploited much more widely. The dignitaries and officials of the Republic of Moldova are often so corrupt that the sale of state secrets or other sensitive information is not something surprising. For a bigger bribe, Moldovan courts can make unimaginable decisions. This is evidenced by their involvement in the laundering of at least USD 22 billion from the Russian Federation through the “Moldovan Laundromat” scheme<sup>69</sup>. Money that is in the Western world’s banking system can also be used to finance subversive Kremlin actions in the EU and the US. This is a case that shows how the Republic of Moldova, through its vulnerabilities, spreads insecurity through the EU countries as well. Without serious cases having existed, we are also aware of the country's extremely poor protection against cyber-attacks. Likewise, the presence of all kinds of obscure or Russian controlled companies in the management of critical infrastructure – airport, bus stations, electricity, gas supply – makes the Republic of Moldova extremely vulnerable in the event of a more advanced phase of hybrid attack. The use of the online environment for the purposes of promoting propaganda has visibly intensified and social networks tools have been especially used during electoral periods over the past years<sup>70</sup>.

### ***Building resilience - institutional response, opportunities and obstacles.***

The Republic of Moldova has never undertaken systemic actions to combat hybrid threats. Only scattered actions existed in the past: in 2005 – against the destabilization attempt during elections<sup>71</sup>, in 2014 – by detaining and expelling several alleged saboteurs from Russian special services<sup>72</sup>. In 2018, the Parliament approved a law prohibiting retransmission of political or military news and broadcasts from the Russian Federation. Even the impact of this law is quite insignificant. However, the reduction of propaganda in retransmitted content is offset by it being inserted into local news and broadcasts<sup>73</sup>. And the propaganda inserted in Russian entertainment shows is increasing every year. In 2018, the National Information Security Strategy was also approved<sup>74</sup>. This includes priorities to increase the capacity to respond to cyber-attacks and misinformation, but they are rather vague, the strategy is superficial and does not even define a clear source of hybrid threats.

With the government changes in 2019, new opportunities have appeared to increase resilience, but so did new obstacles. The high level of corruption and the degradation of the rule of law under the

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<sup>69</sup> [watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Russian-laundromat-Eng-2.pdf](http://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Russian-laundromat-Eng-2.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> More details on the vulnerabilities of the Republic of Moldova on hybrid challenges can be found in the study conducted by Chatham House experts [www.chathamhouse.org/publication/civil-society-under-russias-threat-building-resilience-ukraine-belarus-and-moldova](http://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/civil-society-under-russias-threat-building-resilience-ukraine-belarus-and-moldova)

<sup>71</sup> [www.moldova.org/en/president-voronin-claims-russia-influenced-election-returns-in-moldova-6471-eng/](http://www.moldova.org/en/president-voronin-claims-russia-influenced-election-returns-in-moldova-6471-eng/)

<sup>72</sup> [www.realitatea.md/scandal-la-kremlin--cei-5-cetateni-ai-rusiei-si-ucrainei--retinuti-de-sis-si-procuratura--expulzati\\_11950.html](http://www.realitatea.md/scandal-la-kremlin--cei-5-cetateni-ai-rusiei-si-ucrainei--retinuti-de-sis-si-procuratura--expulzati_11950.html)

<sup>73</sup> [watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Study-WatchdogMD-on-Russian-propaganda.pdf](http://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Study-WatchdogMD-on-Russian-propaganda.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> [www.rm.coe.int/3-moldova-strategy/168097eceb](http://www.rm.coe.int/3-moldova-strategy/168097eceb)

former self-declared and false pro-European government has conditioned the formation of a totally unusual parliamentary majority. The pro-EU parties in the ACUM (NOW) bloc formed a government with the Socialist Party, which is very much supported by and highly dependent on the Kremlin. Under such circumstances, the existence of a Prime Minister and Ministers with clear pro-European aspirations, aware of the toxicity of the subversive actions of Putin's regime in Moldova, is an opportunity in itself. The governing agreement includes clear provisions that the implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU continues, but that the foreign policy becomes “balanced”. Topics and policies that could potentially annoy Russia are taboo for the new government. On the other side, President of the country Igor Dodon and his party refuse to acknowledge any negative impact of the Kremlin on the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the legal reinforcement of the President's role in security issues sometimes weakens the country before subversive actions. In the current political context, we cannot expect that the government will be able to take on sharp policies to combat hybrid challenges coming from the Russian Federation. At the same time, the Kremlin is increasing its media influence and the capabilities of influencing the internal and external policy of the Republic of Moldova through President Dodon and his entourage.

It is very important to understand the above context if we want to develop functional solutions to increase resilience against hybrid challenges in the Republic of Moldova.

As a result of this presence, but also of the intense propaganda in the print media, on the radio and, for the past 10 years online, the Kremlin has managed to capture a large part of the citizens of Republic of Moldova in its area of influence, as described below<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> [watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Study-WatchdogMD-on-Russian-propaganda.pdf](https://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Study-WatchdogMD-on-Russian-propaganda.pdf)



## Ukraine

Ukraine is one of the countries of the Eastern Partnership against which a hybrid war is being waged by Russia. Russia employed elements of a hybrid war prior to the occupation of Crimea and East Donbass in 2014. These elements became the factor that pushed the loyalty of part of the population in these regions toward Russia and led to the adoption of its propaganda. Russia used old Soviet phobias, which it promoted in Ukraine with the help of controlled media, politicians and opinion leaders. In particular, the fears of some citizens about joining NATO, about total Ukrainization and about a ban on speaking Russian were played upon. One of the methods of this hybrid propaganda was hyperbolization and maximum escalation in relation to these issues, so strengthening the negative context. Despite the fact that Ukraine is faced with the fact of actual military aggression and the seizure of part of the territory, actual clashes continue with the use of various types of weapons, the factor of the active use and deployment of a hybrid war against Ukraine from Russia remains as serious.

Russia switched to aggressive media tactics of hybrid war during the events at Maidan. The Russian media accused the protesters of wanting to carry out a coup. During the Maidan event, the labelling of protesters as fascists who wanted to seize power was actively planted, although people with varying political views were there protesting Viktor Yanukovich. Russian journalists searched for right-wing-minded people among the protesters, and in their news reports claimed that everyone at Maidan supported such views, despite the fact that in reality, there were very few right-wing radicals there and they did not influence the decisions of other protesters.

Another propaganda technique that was actively used by Russian media was the myth that European countries and the United States set up Maidan to start a deliberate confrontation between Russia and Ukraine. As evidence of this, for example, they used Deputy US Secretary of State Victoria Nuland's visit to Maidan. There, she handed out cookies and food to the protestors, and Russian media and propagandists were quick to use this story to show the direct relationship and "dependence" of Maidan on the US and the EU.

Another rumour was spread that Maidan was an anti-Russian protest. The propaganda suggested that only residents of Western Ukraine attended the protest, i.e., those who had a historically dislike of everything Russian and who spoke exclusively Ukrainian and wanted to ban the Russian language and Russian culture in Ukraine.

In Crimea, Russia has already used other hybrid warfare techniques, expanding the existing ones and adding new ones. The Russian soldiers, on capturing Crimea, were without identification marks and for the first few weeks Russia did not publicly confirm its involvement.

It actively used pro-Russian Crimean residents, among whom were many former military personnel and their family members. These military retirees had served either in the USSR army or in the Russian army, which was represented by the Black Sea Fleet, and on leaving service had in Crimea. As such, they kept in touch with former colleagues and the army, and during the capture of Crimea became a serious aid to the Russian army. Acting as civilians, they blocked access to the zone, preventing access for Ukrainian military units and units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Russia also used "Cossacks" transferred from its territories in Kuban. The same "Cossacks", following the capture of Crimea, participated in the capture of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

## New threats

The threats qualified as hybrid that Ukraine faces are as follows:

**Various tactics of economic hybrid warfare.** After the Crimea annexation and triggering the war in eastern Ukraine, Russian's economic attacks became regular. In 2014, Russia abolished a preferential regime to selected imported goods from Ukraine and imposed higher customs duties on them. In 2015, Russia denounced the Free Trade Agreement with Ukraine and applied the MFN<sup>76</sup> regime, which also led to an increase in custom duties for Ukraine.

In particular, the construction of the "Crimean Bridge" by Russia led to a monopoly on transit through the Kerch Strait being established. Russia has limited access to the Ukrainian ports of the Sea of Azov and yet applies armed pressure via its fleet to limit any Ukrainian economic activity in those waters, such as fishing.

**Cyber-attacks** remain a serious threat. In 2017, Ukraine suffered its largest hacker attack on industrial facilities and government institutions (Petya. A virus). On an ongoing basis, through Russian "troll factories", the Ukrainian army, Ukrainian politicians, and Ukrainian political processes are being discredited. The messages sent to the population question the efficiency and existence of the Ukrainian state. The situation is complicated by the fact that over the past year, these "troll factories" have begun to support certain Ukrainian politicians, muddying understanding as to whether these are internal political confrontations or elements of a hybrid attack.

**Propaganda and disinformation.** One of the main and most-used elements of hybrid warfare. It can be divided into several types of use, according to target audience and task:

Used inside Russia:

- Discredits Ukraine in the eyes of Russian citizens, reducing its legitimacy, thus explaining and justifying, in the eyes of those citizens, why Crimea was conquered and why Russia supports the separatists in East Donbass.
- The presence in the media of the image of an "external enemy" allows it to distract Russian citizens from problematic issues within the country and to transfer the degree of discontent from the Russian government to the abstract Ukrainian government.
- The broadcasting via the internet and satellites of Russian propaganda against Ukraine outside of Russia to create a negative image of Ukraine in foreign states and societies, in order to justify and explain why Russia carries out its aggression against Ukraine.

Used inside Ukraine:

- Multifaceted and multi-stage elements of misinformation. The terms "peace" and "for peace against war" are used. Concepts are replaced and emphasis is changed. The media and politicians who use terms about "peace" mean by it the adoption of the conditions of Russia, the surrender of the interests of Ukraine, the acceptance of all the requirements of Russia, both in domestic politics and in foreign policy. Such a hybrid term "peace" means recognition that Crimea is Russian, that the separatist territories of the "DPR" and "LPR" have a special legal status within Ukraine. In addition, it is precisely after such a virtual defeat of Ukraine that Russia will cease to attack Ukraine and "peace" will ensue.

The war between Ukraine and Russia is called the "war of the oligarchs, on which they earn money." In parallel with various techniques, they introduced an opinion that Ukraine will not be able to win the war against Russia because of its economic backwardness. Over the past six months on the internet, on [YouTube](#), a comparison of the infrastructure of Ukraine and Russia,

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<sup>76</sup> Most Favored Nation treatment granted to all WTO member states

the quality of automobiles, and the state of railway transport have become actively popularized. All these comparisons are never in favor of Ukraine but instead emphasize Russia's capabilities and strength.

- Media deception is a factor that has become a serious element in the last few years - with Ukrainian media positioning themselves exclusively as Ukrainian, but actually working to push Russian propaganda in the country. Former Ukrainian pro-Russian politicians and businessmen finance them. The main media groups in this direction are Newsone, 112, and ZIK TV channels, the actual owner of which is the Ukrainian MP Viktor Medvedchuk. The godparents of Medvedchuk's children are Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev.

It is worth mentioning the work of internet media separately. In Ukraine, this is Страна.ua, funded by MP Sergei Levochkin, as well as the Russian propaganda resource Украина.ру, which is located in Moscow, but writes about Ukraine. One of their features is the active use of Google algorithms. Type any question about Ukraine in the Russian-language segment of Google, and the sites Ukraine.ru and Strana.ru will be the first to appear.

Used outside of Ukraine:

- The propaganda is designed for both residents and potential voters of European countries and the USA. A classic example of such propaganda is Russia Today (RT). For misinformation, Western politicians, experts, and opinion leaders use not only classical means of propaganda as the media, but also statements. For many years, Russia has tried in the eyes of Western society to form a version that the disaster of the MN-17 flight is the fault of Ukraine. For this, representatives of Western media and experts who are ready to support this version and manipulate the facts are also involved.

**Work with politicians and celebrities of Europe and the USA.** With the help of European politicians and political parties, Russia creates and promotes its messages about Ukraine and the territories occupied by Russia. Thus, the Italian Minister of Internal Affairs Matteo Salvini in an interview with The Washington Post on July 19, 2018, recognized the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation as legal and called the Revolution of Dignity “fake”. In the same vein, messages are heard among some European politicians regarding the recognition of Crimea as Russian, “its move from Ukraine,” “Ukraine’s inability to get back Crimea.”

A similar legalization of the capture of Crimea comes with the help of famous actors and musicians who come to Crimea and claim that it was always Russian and that there was no capture of Crimea. As exemplified we can take the famous French actor Gerard Depardieu and the USA film director Oliver Stone, who shot a whole propaganda film about Ukraine, Putin, the capture of Donbass and Crimea.<sup>77</sup>

**Increased use of political divisions and polarization of society.** For the first time since 2014, after the last presidential election, there has been a serious political polarization of society. The opponents are seriously discredited by the teams of both ex-President Petro Poroshenko and current President Vladimir Zelensky. Russia is playing along with this, using part of its media activity in favour of Zelensky. Concerning Zelensky, there were positive references<sup>78</sup> in the Russian media<sup>79</sup> that

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<sup>77</sup> See: [www.globalresearch.ca/ukraine-on-fire-oliver-stone-documentary-blames-u-s-for-ukraine-maidan-uprisings/5561673](http://www.globalresearch.ca/ukraine-on-fire-oliver-stone-documentary-blames-u-s-for-ukraine-maidan-uprisings/5561673)

<sup>78</sup> Захарова: при Зеленском в украинской политике нет противоречий между заявлениями и делами. ТАСС. 29. Sept. Online. Available at: [www.tass.ru/politika/6942488](http://www.tass.ru/politika/6942488)

<sup>79</sup> Отношение россиян к Украине рекордно потеплело в "посткрымский" период. *МК.PY*. Nov 5, 2019. /Online/ Available at: [www.mk.ru/social/2019/10/15/otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-ukraine-rekordno-poteplelo-v-postkrymskiy-period.html](http://www.mk.ru/social/2019/10/15/otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-ukraine-rekordno-poteplelo-v-postkrymskiy-period.html)

many citizens who voted against him perceived as evidence of his pro-Russian standing and Russia's loyalty to him.

### *How to counter the hybrid threat*

Despite the fact that since 2014 Ukraine has managed to form and use certain mechanisms to counter hybrid threats, their effectiveness is still low impact.

There is a lack of legal mechanisms to limit a particular hybrid threat within the country. For example, with legal restriction of the work of obviously pro-Russian media, but with Ukrainian owners and working in Ukraine.

The lack of a final reform of Security Sector Integrity, such as the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Defence, is also an issue impacting the ability to combat the hybrid threat. Their reform, and increasing the efficiency of functioning, would allow for the creation of a unified coordination model to counter the hybrid threat.

The lack of a media strategy to counter hybrid threats as such, a strategy that should be implemented regardless of the political situation. This also affects the owners of large and influential media, which for various reasons do not always oppose the manifestations of hybrid warfare. Public television or media projects supported by grants are unable to solve these problems effectively.

### *Hybrid threats in EaP area. Looking for a common response*

Are the EU's Eastern Partners good partners to each other? For the aims of our study, we mean countries with compatible security concerns and objectives, able to support each other and form alliances. The answer is not unclear and certainly not free from ambiguity. For obvious reasons we cannot expect Armenia and Azerbaijan to consider each other in such terms. Belarus and Armenia are members of the security alliance (CSTO) with Russia, which is an explicit security adversary to Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova have full compliance of foreign policy objectives, sources of threats and challenges, but have no mechanisms for closer consultations on security issues. Azerbaijan can be considered a country which tries to balance between several regional actors and the EU and it has a close security partnership with Georgia too. At the same time, Georgia has excellent relations with Armenia. Armenia and Azerbaijan consider themselves as being in a state of war with each other. Both have excellent relations with all other EaP countries, but their positioning in the international arena is frequently very different. This is explained by the two main factors influencing their behaviour on the international stage – Russian Influences<sup>80</sup> and relations towards conflicts in the region. On many occasions, Belarus also supports Russia in its actions, but at the same time tries to keep good relations with all other EaPs.

Despite being involved in a geopolitical competition between two main actors – the “collective West” and Russia, the majority of EaP states maintain and develop among themselves good relations and cooperation. This fact inspires objective optimism in the usefulness and possible success of the Eastern Partnership. However, for Russia, good relations and cooperation between EaP countries can be tolerated only if such cooperation drives them away from the EU and the West in general. Russian hard power used against the Eastern European states always pursued (not exclusively) this aim – to prevent European and Euro-Atlantic powers from “penetrating” its area of “legitimate interests” be it the separation of Transnistria, occupation of territories in Georgia, or

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<sup>80</sup> In many cases, Armenia is not supportive towards the UN Resolutions on Abkhazia because of both factors – Russian demand and its positioning towards the issue of the territorial integrity principle

the occupation of Crimea or the Donbass or Lugansk provinces. Confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorny Karabakh also plays in favour of Russia's mentioned objectives. While Russia applied use of force and the threat of force towards three of the EaP states – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, it continues using hybrid tactics against all of them, even the countries which apparently are considered strategic partners to Russia.

All presented country reviews (results of a desk and empirical study) prove that the hybrid tactics Russia uses against the EaP states are tailored in a way to serve different objectives in different countries, but also have similarities as some tactics are repeatedly used against all of them.



# GENERAL ANALYSES

## *Threat Comparison in the EaP area*

**Cyber-attacks** are frequently used against Georgia and Ukraine, countries in an actual war with Russia. The aim is to destabilize critical infrastructure, to shake the defence capability, and to cause distortions in economic and social activities.

**Subversive propaganda** is especially frequently used against Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. The messages most often emitted by Russian TV and social media portray the mentioned countries as weak, unable to provide basic services to their population, unable to defend themselves against external threats, vulnerable economically and socially, dependent on the Russian market, etc. The same messages reach other EaP countries, which are “warned” about the “lack of sustainability and stability” of their EaP partners. This stimulates pessimism about their relations and cooperation with neighbours. Interestingly, Russia uses the same messages against Belarus, also trying to convince its population of the impossibility of that nation surviving without Russia’s support.

**Anti-Western propaganda** is used to discredit the EU and other Western partners’ efforts and assistance to the EaP countries. Firstly, the EU and West are portrayed as geopolitical animals, which are trying to “swallow” and subdue traditionally different Eastern European states. Their assistance imposes western liberalism, values that are not natural for them and which distance them from the Russian orbit. Such propaganda affects the population in all EaP states, twists their views and understanding of European world values and downgrades trust in the EU.

**Disinformation** is widely used to influence public opinion in all EaP countries. Misinterpretation and corruption of real facts, intensions and news are well-organized tools of the war against said countries, serving to create a false reality, to spread untruths and to prevent the population in target countries from developing correct perceptions and making the right decisions. All EaP states suffer from daily disinformation. In many cases, this disinformation creates a bad and incorrect image of the neighbouring country and its intensions, and reduces the openness towards each other and the concept of developing fruitful cooperation. Disinformation is frequently used to incorrectly display the situation in conflict areas, adding to raising tensions, fuelling hate and reducing chances for reconciliation.

**Supporting Anti-Liberal Groups** is a relatively new trend in hybrid warfare. This is especially well traceable in Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia. Anti-liberal groups frequently present themselves as the defenders of traditional values, patriots and nationalists, in reality having as a main objective to discredit western values and create and impose on public opinion that western values are incompatible with national traditions and that rapprochement with the West will erode the nation. This kind of the action is frequently used against the governments, threatening them with public discontent and resurgence if they continue a policy on rapprochement with the West. On other occasions, they attack liberal/western-minded parties or groups in the country. Such anti-liberal groups almost never protest or act against Russian interests, and are largely supported from that country.

**Radicalization.** Not only Russia deploys hybrid tactics in the EaP area, but other actors do so too, particularly groups such as radical Islam which are supported from abroad. ISIS, and other radical organizations, tried in the past and are still actively trying to increase their number of followers in Azerbaijan and Georgia. They are also proliferating anti-western sentiments and are targeting vulnerable groups – Muslim minorities, the young generation and the poor – with propaganda, money, threats and other methods to generate followers and supporters. Naturally, such movements can cause significant damage to the stability of states.

**Corrupting and bribing.** The majority of EaP states are vulnerable to this type of hybrid threat, but an especially important loss was seen in Moldova recently, whose corruption and allegiance to Russian government officials saw many anti-western steps and decisions taken, resulting in economic and political damage to the country. Ukrainian anti-western and anti-statehood propaganda also in many cases results from corrupted media representatives. The Armenian revolution, which intends to orient the country towards European values, is also strongly attacked by corrupted politicians who, in many cases, receive support (including financial) from the abroad.

**Intervention in the political process.** Various tools and methods are used to influence political processes in the EaP states. In Ukraine the fact that political activists are financed and supported from abroad, namely from Russia, is common knowledge. Intervention in the electoral process is also well known, as happened in Ukraine and, especially effectively, in the Moldovan parliamentary and presidential elections. The methods are different and include cyber-attacks, information theft from certain sites, financing pro-Russian parties and groups, influencing the population, financing and influencing supporters, etc.

**Supporting pro-Russian/anti-western mass media and NGOs.** In practically all EaP states, especially Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, are internet or printed editions of news and analytical materials displaying and spreading the Russian official point of view on what happens inside and outside the country. They treat many themes - history, politics, and international relations and so on, and try to influence public opinion by providing “alternative views”. Numerous “independent” NGOs, created and financially supported by Russia do the same, with conferences, workshops, outreaches (lectures and seminars in regions and rural areas), public diplomacy, etc. There are fewer such groups and media outlets in Armenia, as there is no such need to fight the official view regarding Russia, but anti-government groups and parties, maintaining their own NGOs and media outlets, do practically same by criticizing the West and EU values.

**Other active measures** that are used against all EaP countries involve the participation of agents of influence working with vulnerable groups, capturing their trust and through false expectations increasing their support to Russia’s policy in the region. Other methods, including easing procedures for obtaining the Russian citizenship (passportization), are equally employed in all EaP states, but not all of them see (or recognize) this as a threat to their stability or independence.

In general, we can state that at least the four studied EaP states suffer from hybrid threats and attacks on a permanent basis. In three of them, the main source of such attacks is explicitly named as Russian (services or their local proxies). In Armenia, direct Russian intervention is less obvious or is articulated as being seen within the conservative, traditionalist groups or political adversaries of Pashinyan’s government who are thought to be the most damaging actors. Indeed, the links of such groups to Russia may be traced.

The majority of above-mentioned tactics are directed to weaken or even stop Europeanization and European Integration in the region. The hybrid tactics in all the mentioned countries are causing important damage to their democratic transformation and to the advancement of their relations with the EU.

At the same time, all EaP states, regardless of the trade or security arrangements they have with Russia, are interested in applying European reforms to their domestic policies and transforming their societies towards fully functioned democracies and market economies.

Therefore, the hybrid threats damage their foreign policy and domestic reform priorities in the same way for everybody. It would thus be logical to look for a common response that would allow them to counteract and secure themselves from such attacks.

**Artificial Intelligence** emerges as a powerful tool, allowing the creation of computer trolls and new generation viruses for more effective cyber-attacks and spreading of propaganda messages. New and better surveillance satellite systems can be used to spy on individuals, official structures or private companies, and these will further develop and be more intensively used in hybrid warfare. No individual EaP country will be able to keep up with, counter or contain these growing threats. Only involvement in the wider EU/NATO cooperation programs and networks may build up and keep their resilience at a satisfactory level.

### *Common Vulnerabilities and Institutional response*

It is obvious that all four countries that have been studied (to some extent a further two as well) have many similar vulnerabilities – high level of poverty and unemployment which forces citizens of said countries to look for work in Russia, and the resulting familial dependence on the remittances made by those workers. The Soviet past is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the elder generation. These countries have a less professional and less developed media, and have channels which lack quality broadcasting, making them less competitive against Russian TV broadcasts. Among other vulnerabilities, a corrupt civil service (Georgia being the least affected by this at present but having had such a problem in the past), low developed legislation and lack of institutional capacity to protect critical infrastructure from cyber-attacks so as to effectively coordinate work on countering hybrid threats, can be mentioned. In addition, all the studied countries have a high dependency on the Russian market and the resulting economic ties, which are frequently used by the latter as leverage for political blackmailing (as has been seen in Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and even Armenia). Russian investments and their high share in the country's capital stock is also a vulnerability for EaP countries.

None of the mentioned countries are ready to respond to hybrid threats. In all, there is no legislative basis which can clearly define the administrative tasks of the institutions or criminal responsibility for causing damage to the country or citizens as a result of using hybrid tactics. Georgia, Ukraine and Armenia are just now adopting a respective strategy, which should then be expanded into a set of laws and administrative acts to create a unified institutional response to the hybrid threats. Moldova lacks behind even in this regard.

All the mentioned countries have started engaging in consultations with the European Union, mainly in the framework of the EaP CSDP panel. Some of them have received and responded to the questionnaires, to which the EEAS should further proceed with to elaborate a cooperation plan for increasing resilience of the neighbouring partner states.

### *Civil Society Action*

Civil society in all EaP states is active and motivated to play a role in many directions. Security is one of the themes that civil society organizations actively deal with and in each of the mentioned countries, there are specialized NGOs analysing and dealing professionally with issues of SSR, conflicts, occupation, international security, etc. Hybrid tactics and threats have become a matter of interest for such NGOs. But not only, as many NGOs and individual experts working on media freedom, information technologies, human rights, economic policies, and energy security have also become more closely engaged in analysing and looking for engagement in countering the hybrid threats.

It is unclear how many organizations in each country deals with issues related to hybrid threats, but it is well observable that the majority of them work in the area of countering disinformation and propaganda. There are also spontaneous attempts and initiatives to unite the efforts of

national NGOs and create coalitions to share experience and to strengthen action. Recently, 22 Georgian organizations conducted joint research and developed recommendations for the government and international community on countering the propaganda and disinformation. Among the organizations' aims is fighting disinformation, checking political messages and news to detect a false nature, identifying "trolls" and false accounts in social media, and analysing vulnerabilities and potential threats such as MDF, IDFI, GRASS, and Liberal academy. Well-known Ukrainian NGOs (Ukrainian Prism, Centre for Global Studies, StopFake, and Euromaidan Press, among others) also try to unite efforts and develop common visions and approaches to counter hybrid threats in the country and region wide. The recent (2018) study led by Ukrainian Prism, 'Disinformation Resilience in Eastern Europe',<sup>81</sup> was achieved through contributions from NGOs and experts from the whole region. Other types of NGO specialize in IT security, cyber-threats in particular. Such NGOs are active in Ukraine and Georgia and less ostensibly in Armenia and Moldova, where mainly freelancer experts are working in the above mentioned areas.

NGOs and experts working on conflicts deal with hybrid threat issues to a large extent. They not only conduct studies and analysis of hybrid tactics used in the conflict affected territories, but also work to counter the malign propaganda and disinformation, to neutralize and repair the damage (to some extent) caused by the mentioned hybrid interventions via confidence-building measures, provision of correct information and peace-building efforts. Of course, their actions have a limited area of application in terms of territorial coverage or content.

In all the mentioned countries, civil society organizations have also limited cooperation with the governmental institutions, which may be explained by weakness. Civil society organizations in Georgia try to contribute to government actions, especially with outreach events and seminars, providing the local groups (of all kinds) with objective information on European and Euro-Atlantic integration and on the democratic reform agenda that the countries are trying to implement. This contributes to the resilience of wider society against propaganda and disinformation. Yet, experts and NGOs cannot effectively work against other hybrid threats, which requires a different level of professional and technical capacity or access to information. These are areas like cyber security, protection of critical infrastructure, espionage, detection of active measures taken by the adversary, even in CBRN or activities of paramilitary and subversive groups. In all mentioned areas, civil society can only be effective when working together with the government, as a complementary and supportive actor. Indeed, such a cooperation needs the development of a high level of trust between civil society organizations and relevant state institutions, which can be achieved only with the total depolarization of such institutions. In all EaP countries, the depolarization of law enforcement institutions is still not a resolved issue and as such can also be considered as a vulnerability.

Hybrid threats have never been a subject of discussion within the working groups of the EaP CSF. Yet exactly this large coalition of EaP-based NGOs (especially considering them together with national platforms, bilateral CSPs) have the best potential to develop strong partnership and interaction in the mentioned field. CSF also boasts advanced possibilities and is well positioned to communicate the issues to governments, the EU and other international actors.

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<sup>81</sup> Damarad V., Yeliseyev A. *Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe*. Ukrainian Prism and EAST Center. Kiev. 2018. Available at: [www.prismua.org/en/dri-cee/](http://www.prismua.org/en/dri-cee/)

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## For Governments, EU and NATO

1. Hybrid threats that the EaP countries face are largely similar, but to a certain extent differ by source and intensity. Governments can cooperate in areas where the type and origin of the threat is similar, such as anti-western propaganda or disinformation, the threat of radicalization and terrorism, or protection of critical infrastructure. In the mentioned areas, governments could even create permanent cooperation platforms. Such platforms could be organized on a bilateral or/and multilateral basis. The EaP CSDP panel could serve as a good place for such meetings and involve well-experienced and better-organized EU and NATO bodies and analytical centres, like the EU Hybrid Cell within the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (INTCEN), East StratCom Task Force, NATO Cooperative Cyber Security Centre of Excellence (NCCSCE), The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE), etc.
2. Cooperation with the EU, NATO and their member states on systemic issues of countering hybrid threats should involve sharing and transfer of knowledge so as to raise awareness about new achievements and technological advancements which could potentially be used for conducting such warfare.
3. Taking into account geopolitical realities and limitations to the depth of cooperation on security issues among EaP partner countries, it is also possible that in some cases it is necessary to introduce a certain differentiation at the multilateral level. There can be various multilateral configurations among EaP countries in terms of jointly addressing hybrid threats based on their interests and priorities. For example, the fight against disinformation or having a joint cyber security set of activities may unite several EaP countries. In other cases, three associated states may desire to deepen dialogue and exchange in themes that may not be relevant for non-associated partners. Exchange of positive and negative experience in addressing hybrid threats among all or some of the EaP countries can be a good thing. In such cases, some EaP countries should be given a possibility to meet in a separate format and discuss with the EU necessary measures.
4. It is important to develop a legal basis for regulating an institutional and civil response to hybrid threats. State and governmental bodies should agree on common definitions and terms for what they call and use in their practice as hybrid threats, classify and divide tasks for countering them, without leaving gaps or overlaps of functions. None of the countries in question has achieved such a clarity. The regulations should also explicitly define criminal and administrative responsibilities for subversive actions of external or internal origin. Therefore, the response should be legally correct.
5. Communication to the wider population of the truth about hybrid threats and hybrid warfare elements already deployed in the country by adversaries is of primary importance. Governments should develop widespread plans for information policies. At present, some EaP states have developed and are implementing “EU/NATO communication strategies,” which mainly include activities directed to strengthen knowledge on European and Euro-Atlantic integration and create an informational resilience among the wider population. Indeed, there is a lack of communication on other components of hybrid threats, so that vulnerable groups are left facing them without proper knowledge and readiness. There is clearly a need for EaP countries to adopt wider communication strategies aimed at developing resilience towards all the hybrid threats.

6. Specific regulations should be adopted and measures proposed to legally oblige state owned and private companies controlling critical infrastructure (telecommunications, energy/electricity installations, banks, hospitals, big logistical centres and transport networks) to provide an adequate level of security (cyber, anti-terrorist, etc.). The best way would be the adoption of respective EU directives.
7. Understanding the specific nature of national security, clear rules should be established which define the area for engagement of non-state actors as well as rational limitations on the opening of themes and access to official information for NGOs.
8. All EaP countries lack a strategic vision on how to reconcile media freedom with the necessary steps and actions to counter hybrid threats. Such a strategy can be developed in all countries, based on wider consultations between them and based on similar principles and proposing similar mechanisms.
9. Resilience of the countries is based on a variety of factors – a politically stable society with well protected human rights, strong democratic institutions, impartial and efficient courts, transparent laws, accountable and trustworthy governments, and efficient economic policies addressing poverty and inequalities. Regrettably, none of the EaP states performs satisfactorily enough in all the mentioned spheres. Therefore, the main long-term strategy to overcome the hybrid threats is to continue transformation, reform and development.
10. In the short and medium run, development of an effective conventional defence is very important to counter external threats. At the same time, development of the right cyber security strategy protecting all important and vulnerable sectors – defence, financial and critical infrastructure, banks, private companies and even Facebook and other social media domains – is also of utmost importance. Everywhere in the EaP, an efficient information and communication strategy is needed with the aim of supporting and consolidating positive public attitudes towards democratic building and European integration, overcoming international polarization and concentrating on common national objectives.
11. The education and youth policy should also take into account the existing and potential hybrid threats. While social media has become accessible for youth from a very early age, their analytical abilities and knowledge may not be adequately developed. As such, youth is one of the most vulnerable categories of people that can effectively be targeted with propaganda, disinformation or other forms of hybrid tactic. It is important to mobilize all efforts in order to teach the necessary skills in schools and universities that will help youth to distinguish false information from true, to protect young people from subversive influences. It is also important to build up and deepen trust between generations (e.g. teachers and students), so that they can discuss openly any suspicious news, information or situation affecting their attitudes. Such discussions should also be encouraged at an international level, in university and school student exchange programs between EaP and EU member states.

## For/On Civil Society

12. The government should clearly commit and show its obligations to transparency and engage civil society as a fully-fledged partner, when possible and where the principles of the state security allow. It should also be ready and committed (also legally and politically) to allow and facilitate monitoring of the relevant (hybrid defence) policy by civil society.
13. State and governments should encourage the development of expert capacity in the country, which would contribute to identifying and countering hybrid threats, cooperating with state institutions.
14. Civil society should be encouraged and supported in its attempts to work with the wider public at different levels - schools and youth, the epistemic community, NGOs, vulnerable groups (ethnic minorities, poor, elderly), students, teachers, workers, business representatives and local governments in the regions. Wider networks of experts and NGOs should be registered with the relevant institutions and the tasks related to the communication activities outsourced as much as possible. This is important as trust from civil society and the effect of communication efforts will be obviously higher than trust in official bodies.
15. Civil society groups should become more organized and consolidated. In some countries, there is a practice of establishing non-official security-communities which unite all types of expert and NGO representatives working in the security field. This practice can also encourage the establishment of NGO clubs and coalitions which work together on concrete directions of hybrid warfare prevention.
16. There should be a needs analysis and needs assessment in civil society which defines the knowledge gaps so as to develop a capacity-building program. This program should aim at training NGOs and national experts in the fields of hybrid threats.
17. The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) could be successfully used as an organizational hub for trainings and capacity development programs. The empowerment of NGOs and civil society in general will play a crucial role in increasing the resilience of the EaP states in countering hybrid threats.
18. The EaP CSF needs a special work plan to set a clear priority for activities and events dedicated to reducing hybrid threats, and to contribute to the development of resilience of the EaP partner states towards such threats. The work plan should be based on a mid-term strategy and envisage interaction between civil society organizations and their governments with EU institutions, NATO and international organizations.
19. Civil societies throughout the EaP need to establish closer cooperation on sharing experience, producing joint research and analyses, discussing national policies and organizing joint actions to counter hybrid threats in their countries.
20. Civil society organizations need to more intensively address the issues of peace-building. Special emphasis should be put on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, on looking for solutions to overcome mutual mistrust and raising the readiness for finding compromises and long-lasting solutions acceptable to both sides. In this regard, a general analysis is needed of hybrid and subversive tactics used by both official sides with the aim of changing the confrontational climate between the countries towards a climate favourable for negotiation toward a solution.
21. In this regard, it is important to encourage the united efforts of civil society in promoting communication and confidence building among various professional and groups (particularly, media representatives and HR organizations) in such activities as addressing issues of hate speech, war rhetoric in media, stereotypes caused by the conflict. Supporting joint activities aiming at building better and more unbiased knowledge about each other is a very important task as well.