



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.

Romania and Moldova

# **THE HYBRID WAR LAUNCHED BY RUSSIA AGAINST THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

STUDY

# Imprint

## Publisher

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Romania and Moldova  
8-10 Vasile Conta Street  
020953 Bucharest, Romania

 [freiheit.org/romania-and-republic-moldova](https://freiheit.org/romania-and-republic-moldova)

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## Date

September 2025

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# Contents

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Preface.....	3
Executive Summary .....	4
1. Russia's actions through political actors in the Republic of Moldova .....	5
2. Russian disinformation narratives promoted in Moldovan society .....	7
3. Gazprom's energy-related pressure on the Moldovan authorities .....	9
4. Moscow's encouragement of territorial separatism in the Republic of Moldova .....	11
5. Russia's use of embargoes to provoke economic crises .....	13
6. The capacity of the Moldovan authorities to withstand the hybrid war .....	15
Conclusions .....	18

# Abbreviations

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POB	Public Opinion Barometer
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
SCCDC	Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation Center
EEC	European Energy Community
FSB	Federal Security Service
GPI	General Police Inspectorate
MAN	National Alternative Movement
MGRES	Cuciurgan Power Plant
MMZ	Moldovan Metallurgical Plant of Râbnîța
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OCCRP	Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project
UN	United Nations Organisation
APO	Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office
PCRM	Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova
PDCM	Party of Development and Consolidation of Moldova
EaP	Eastern Partnership
PSRM	Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova
RMN	transnistrian moldovan republic
MSSR	Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic
SIS	Security and Intelligence Service
NSS	National Security Strategy
USA	United States of America
EU	European Union
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

# Preface

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The European Union is paying increasing attention to hybrid threats posed by both state and non-state actors. No European country has remained untouched by subversive attacks in recent years. Russia's aggressive war, which began in Moldova (1992), continued in Georgia (2008), and culminated in Ukraine (2014 and 2022), aims to bring neighbouring states under its control.

While the West has by large responded with unity in support of Ukraine, the autocratic offensive undermines the international order established by the UN Charter (1945), fuelling global chaos and eroding trust in democracy. Autocrats and authoritarian regimes such as China and Russia strategically exploit the mechanisms of globalization to consolidate their power, while simultaneously resisting any liberalization of the public sphere. Across Europe, national-populist leaders (Orbán, Duda, Babiš, Fico) foster Euroscepticism and undermine EU cohesion, while the rise of extremism in the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, and France, together with sovereigntist rhetoric in Romania, increase European fragmentation.

Such division plays into the hands of China, Russia, and reduce the EU's influence on the world stage. Russia aims to secure recognition of

its control over Ukraine and former Soviet territories, while preserving its ability to intervene in other regions. China, meanwhile, is expanding its influence through trade, puppet regimes, and multilateral groupings (BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization). Both countries use geopolitical blackmail, conventional and hybrid warfare, cyber attacks, and global propaganda campaigns.

New data about undercover operations, sabotage, and attacks on critical infrastructure, including cyber attacks on certain EU and NATO states, emerges daily. There is increasing pressure to protect democratic institutions and electoral systems. In this context, it is essential to strengthen resilience not only in physical and cyber security, but also by providing accurate public information. In the context of geopolitical power struggles, traditional and social media have emerged as critical instruments for shaping public opinion and influencing populations.

This study analyzes Russia's subversive activities targeting the Republic of Moldova, designed to obstruct its transition from the Moscow-dominated post-Soviet sphere toward integration into the European democratic order.

# Executive Summary

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Hybrid threats, a form of non-conventional warfare, have only recently begun to attract significant attention in applied research. The media began to focus on these threats during the events in Ukraine in 2014, before the Russian Federation annexed Crimea. This was followed by escalating conflicts in Donetsk and Luhansk, which the Kremlin fueled militarily and ideologically, leading to major human and material losses.

In the Republic of Moldova, initial efforts to provide information about these threats came from academia and the media, but these were sporadic and lacked institutional support. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 intensified official communications about hybrid attacks, with authorities warning of attempts of subversion and external manipulation. However, the responses were sometimes limited in scope, and certain initiatives were communicated in a manner that provoked controversy and mixed reactions.

The establishment of the Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation Center (SCCDC) marked an important step

towards coordinating Moldova's efforts in this area. Nevertheless, its impact has been undermined by credibility and public perception issues. For such an institution to play a meaningful role in strengthening a country's informational resilience it must be apolitical, transparent, and backed by recognised professionals.

This study investigates the Russian Federation's hybrid actions against the Republic of Moldova and the responses of Moldovan authorities, evaluating their impact across key dimensions: political influence, economic and energy dependence, information manipulation, and the fostering of internal divisions through the separatist Transnistrian enclave.

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# 1. Russia's actions through political actors in the Republic of Moldova

In the Republic of Moldova, Russia's plans aim to maintain and secure full influence over the decision-making centres of power in Chişinău. There are two distinct stages in the Kremlin's plan to maintain and expand its influence that have led to the creation of a "clientelist infrastructure".

The first stage began after the end of the war in Transnistria in 1992. The climax of this period was in November 2003, when President Vladimir Voronin initialled, but did not sign the Kozak Memorandum - a plan to settle the Transnistrian conflict through federalisation, which would have meant that the Republic of Moldova consented to be part of the Russian Federation's geopolitical sphere of influence. It should be noted that the Kozak Memorandum was written, coordinated, edited, conceived and drafted by Moldovan communist MP, Mark Tkaciuc and former Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Vladislav Surkov (Dudaev).

The second period spans the years 2009–2025, during which the Russian Federation's influence over political decisions taken in Chişinău has partially diminished but has not disappeared completely; instead, it has taken on new forms and patterns. For a short period, between 2019 and 2020, when the pro-Russian leader Igor Dodon returned to power, Russia regained influence, but lost it again as the Socialist leader's image waned. Russia's military intervention in Ukraine has brought Chişinău closer to Brussels and has opened the prospect of accession to the European Union.

Russia's plan to take control of the political processes in the Republic of Moldova is outlined in a document developed in 2022 by a group of political consultants from the Analytical

Centre "Alfa-grup", which has close ties to the FSB (Federal Security Service). This document presents a detailed analysis of the political situation in the Republic of Moldova from an electoral perspective.<sup>1</sup> According to this plan, as publicly outlined, Russia will support a broad mobilisation of its actors to seize the political initiative in the 2025 parliamentary election, testing its arsenal and capabilities in the 2024 presidential election.

Broadly speaking, Russia's main allies ahead of the upcoming elections in Moldova are as follows:

A) Actors conventionally labelled "pro-Russian": The main party is the PSRM (socialists), which promotes military and political "neutrality", thus blocking the unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria, preserving Russia's "privileged" role in negotiations regarding the status of the separatist region, and freezing the relations with NATO and the EU. The second is the PCRM (the communists), a party that played a significant role in government in the period between 2001 and 2009.

B) Actors unconventionally labelled "pro-Russian": The main actors of this type are groups affiliated with Ilan Şor, which include oligarchic and criminal elements. The difference between these actors and traditional pro-Russian parties is that they deliberately flout the regulatory framework, promoting "hard-line" pro-Moscow messages. Politically, they operate by leveraging the image and networks of the Şor Party, and after it was outlawed (on 19 June 2023)<sup>2</sup>, this group splintered into several small factions gathered under the image of the "Victorie–Pobeda" bloc. The bloc was launched by Ilan Şor in Moscow and comprises two parties already well known to the public: The "Şansa" Party and the "Renaştere" Party,

1 Доклад-анализ (по ситуации в Республике Молдова июль 2022г с учетом открытой информации и косвенных признаков). / <https://toaz.info/doc-view-3>

2 Decision No 10 of 19 June 2023 on the check o the constitutionality of the "Şor" Political Party. / <https://www.constcourt.md/ccdocview.php?ti p=hotariri&docid=828&l=ro>

as well as two lesser known parties: The Alternative and Salvation Force of Moldova and the "Victory" Party. Overall, the members of this group openly and categorically promote Russian narratives in the most aggressive way possible;

C) Centrist, flexible parties that adopt pro-accession topics but have an unconvincing foreign policy, advocate for "permanent neutrality" and for negotiating with the EU from a position of "sovereignty." Their aim is to fracture the pro-EU vote and create confusion, with the potential to join pro-Russian coalitions after 2025. Chameleon-like behaviour mimics "centrism" and "balance," spinning narratives about neutrality and non-involvement in the East-West conflict. Example: PDCM (Ion Chicu). At the beginning of 2025, several such formations came together in the "Alternativa" bloc (MAN – Ion Ceban, PDCM, Common Action Party – "Civic Congress" – Mark Tkaciuk) alongside Alexandru Stoianoglo (presidential candidate in 2024).

The parties and politicians affiliated with Russia have used specific tools and technologies to finance the above-mentioned positions, maintaining a sound electoral base built through electoral corruption and vote buying, grants to local authorities with stolen money, and politically charged hostilities. Essentially, these schemes involve remuneration of activists, using illegal funding channels based in Tiraspol, and last but not least, creating the illusion of endless support from Russia. Illegal funds help to maintain an aggressive "anti-Western" and "anti-democratic" discourse. Disinformation and manipulation of public opinion, political corruption of candidates, and voter corruption are all part of the same structure of subversion.

All these tactics were used by the "Şor group" during the 2023 election campaigns, specifically in the elections for the position of governor (bascan) of the Găgăuzia Autonomous Territorial Unit on 30 April, and in the general

local elections held on 5 November. Subsequently, the "Şor group", through political corruption, established their own voter network (called the "Şor network"). This operation, which was revealed by journalistic investigations,<sup>3</sup> aimed at exerting substantial influence over the citizens' vote in the presidential elections and the referendum held in autumn 2024.

The PSRM ceased to be the main tool of the Kremlin in Moldova after its electoral defeats in 2020–2021.

In the 2024 elections, the pro-Russian parties sought to undermine the referendum on EU accession and, since they did not have a candidate who could compete with Maia Sandu, to position their political actors (the pro-Russian parties and politicians) as advantageously as possible in the context of the 2025 parliamentary elections. Of the 11 candidates registered for the presidential race, only two had pro-European and pro-Western messages (Maia Sandu and Octavian Țicu). The other candidates promoted, either consciously or unconsciously, messages and electoral narratives favourable to Moscow – sovereignty based on national interest, neutrality, peace, and the preservation of traditional values.<sup>4</sup> Of these, three candidates were affiliated – directly or indirectly – with the "Şor group" – former prosecutor Victoria Furtună, former communist Prime Minister, Vasile Tarlev, and former governor of the separatist region, Găgăuzia, Irina Vlah.

Mathematically, the pro-Russian political camp in the Republic of Moldova was defeated in the 2024 elections – the referendum passed, making European integration a constitutional provision, and the pro-European candidate, Maia Sandu, won her second mandate over Alexandru Stoianoglo. However, the referendum only narrowly passed, by a margin of only 10,000 votes,<sup>5</sup> and its result strongly polarised the Moldovan society. It was more difficult than expected

3 In the Service of Moscow. Three Months Among Şor's "Slaves". Undercover Investigation by ZdG. 11 October 2024. / <https://www.zdg.md/investigatii/ancheta/video-in-slujba-moscovei-trei-luni-printre-robii-lui-sor-investigatie-zdg-sub-acoperire/>;

How the referendum was rigged. Şor's network, on Stoianoglo's side. In the Service of Moscow (II): a new undercover investigation by zdg. 31 October 2024. / <https://www.zdg.md/investigatii/ancheta/video-cum-a-fost-fraudat-referendumul-reteaua-lui-sor-de-parte-a-lui-stoianoglo-in-slujba-moscovei-ii-o-noua-investigatie-zdg-sub-acoperire/>

4 2024 Presidential Elections in the Republic of Moldova. / [https://alegeri.md/w/Alegeri\\_preziden%C8%9Biale\\_din\\_2024\\_%C3%AFn\\_Republica\\_Moldova](https://alegeri.md/w/Alegeri_preziden%C8%9Biale_din_2024_%C3%AFn_Republica_Moldova)

5 Republican Constitutional Referendum 2024. / <https://pyt12024.cec.md/cec-template-referendum-results.html>



for Maia Sandu to win the presidential elections, as she lost the vote within the Republic of Moldova but won thanks to the votes of citizens in the diaspora.<sup>6</sup>

These clarifications regarding the results of the 2024 elections in the Republic of Moldova give the Russian Federation room for interpretation and action

in the context of the 2025 parliamentary elections. Russian propaganda and pro-Russian political actors will launch informational attacks against the legitimacy of the referendum to undermine it in the eyes of citizens and to resume the narrative of a “balanced”, neutral, and “independent” foreign policy.

## 2. Russian disinformation narratives promoted in Moldovan society

Emphasis-shifting disinformation, fake news, deepfakes, and propaganda are currently Russia's most popular tools of media subversion.

The Republic of Moldova is fertile ground for Russian propaganda, as there is a direct link between propaganda and disinformation, and people in poor societies are more easily impressed and manipulated.

The Russian media has traditionally dominated the informational space of the Republic of Moldova. According to sociological data, television channels continue to be the main source of information. Although its influence has been slowly declining in recent years, according to the Public Opinion Barometer (POB) television is the “most important source of information” for 49% of the population, with social media (39%) and online news platforms (30%) ranking second and third.<sup>7</sup> This explains why the main television channels from the Russian Federation were rebroadcast in the Republic of Moldova, such as: Pervii Kanal, RTR, NTV, REN TV or STS. Russian television channels rebroadcast in the Republic of Moldova featured manipulative and propagandistic content.

Russian media actively participates in disinformation by blocking the coverage of topics relevant to the pro-EU course and prioritising narratives prepared by the Kremlin. Propagandistic narratives are manifold and varied, but in general, they are anti-

Western, with their key message directed against the European path.

Overall, Russian narratives are: anti-Western (EU, NATO, and the USA); anti-Romanian; against the pro-European government in Chişinău; on socio-economic topics; relating to energy issues; concerning the military and defence sector; referring to separatism, and about traditional values.

Common examples of Russian narratives are the following:

- “Integration into the EU will affect state sovereignty”;
- “European integration means giving up neutrality”;
- “European integration is equivalent to joining NATO”;
- “European integration means uniting with Romania”;
- “EU and NATO promote Russophobia”;
- “European integration will lead to the EU imposing the LGBTQI agenda”.

At the same time, alongside the constantly widespread narratives, Russia promotes persistently context-specific narratives in the Republic of Moldova, related to the main topics of Russian propaganda against the state.

- “The war in Ukraine is a bilateral Russian-Ukrainian conflict that does not concern the Republic of Moldova”;

6 Elections for the position of President of the Republic of Moldova, round II. / <https://pvt2024.cec.md/cec-presidential-results-tour2.html>

7 Public Opinion Barometer. September – October 2024. Chişinău, 2024. Pag.106-107. / <https://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Raport-final-BOP-2024.pdf>

- "The pro-European government in Chisinau is involving the Republic of Moldova in the war waged by the West against Russia";
- "The EU/West wants to draw the Republic of Moldova into war";
- "Blinken's visit is intended to prepare the Republic of Moldova for involvement in the war in Ukraine, which would transform the conflict from a local one into a regional one".

Also in the context of the war in Ukraine, Russia is promoting narratives aimed at reducing public support for the reforms initiated by the government in the military and defence sectors. Some of the most common Russian narratives are:

- "The Republic of Moldova is being militarised by conducting military exercises with NATO soldiers";
- "The government is militarising the Republic of Moldova to draw it into the war in Ukraine";
- "The joint military exercises between the Republic of Moldova and Romania will soon lead to the annexation of the Republic of Moldova by Romania";
- "European integration will lead to the collapse of Moldova's economy";
- "Moldovan farmers' products will not have access to the EU market";
- "European integration means selling Moldovan land to foreigners";
- "After the Republic of Moldova joins the EU, local taxes will rise";
- "The EU makes Moldova's accession conditional on the legalisation of same-sex marriage";
- "The EU is on the brink of collapse".

Specifically regarding the constitutional referendum on the European integration of the Republic of Moldova, a report prepared by Expert Forum highlights the following disinformation narratives promoted by Russia:<sup>8</sup>

- "The referendum is organised in violation of legal and democratic rules";
- "The referendum is a scheme to rig the presidential elections/a populist and hypocritical act";
- "It is Maia Sandu's referendum";
- "A pro vote is a vote for Maia Sandu".

Retrospectively, we note that Russian propaganda, through political actors within Moldova, was on the point of invalidating the referendum. No doubt, the number of supporters of European integration in Moldovan society is higher than the 50 per cent of the population who voted in the referendum, as polls clearly show. For example, according to the POB, in recent years, the highest share of voters against European integration has been 33 per cent.<sup>9</sup> The widespread disinformation campaign launched by the Kremlin's strategists against the European Union, in the context of the governing party's failure to effectively promote pro-EU messages, led the centrist electorate in the Republic of Moldova to vote more "against" than "in favour" of European integration.

The above list of narratives is by no means an exhaustive one. After the referendum and presidential elections, Russia's disinformation narratives were adapted to the post-election context.

Another topic related to Russian propaganda narratives is the interpretation of the causes and effects of the energy crisis on the population. Separatist leaders play a key role in fuelling these narratives. For example, in December 2024, Vadim Krasnoselski, the so-called president of the self-proclaimed Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (PMR), blamed the government in Chişinău for the energy crisis, claiming that "Transnistrian citizens are being deprived of natural gas because of the Republic of Moldova." Russia can supply gas at any time, as it has done so far, but Chişinău has hostile intentions and is responsible for depriving the region of energy resources". The same false narratives were adopted

8 The Republican Constitutional Referendum of 20 October 2024. The evolution of disinformation narratives. / <https://expertforum.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Referendumul-din-20-octombrie-2024.pdf>

9 Public Opinion Barometer. September – October 2024. Chişinău, 2024. Pag. 112. / <https://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Raport-final-BOP-2024.pdf>

and promoted by leaders of the pro-Russian parties – PSRM, led by Igor Dodon,<sup>10</sup> and by parties affiliated with the “Şor group”.<sup>11</sup>

The main channels for spreading fake news and manipulative messages are, in particular, Telegram and

TikTok, which are true “networks of lies”. In addition to Telegram and TikTok, there are also active campaigns on Facebook, in both conventional and online media, as well as on TV and radio.

### 3. Gazprom's energy-related pressure on the Moldovan authorities

The energy system of the Republic of Moldova has long depended almost entirely on the infrastructure built during the former USSR, a legacy that has lasted until recently. Market liberalisation has kept two monopolists in place: Energocom (a 100% state-owned company) and Moldovagaz, in which the Republic of Moldova is a minority shareholder and Gazprom holds the majority share. Electricity and gas tariffs have kept Chişinău in a symbiotic relationship with the Cuciurgan Power Plant (MGRES) from the left bank of Nistru River, as the high-voltage lines are connected to the integrated system around it. Even if the right bank buys electricity on the European market, the supply is still delivered via MGRES (until the direct interconnections with Romania are completed).

Thus, despite the government's official narrative about achieving energy independence through large-scale natural gas purchases from the European market, the Republic of Moldova has continued to buy electricity at preferential price from MGRES, in order to avoid a sudden disconnection of residential and industrial consumers on the right bank. This arrangement granted

significant one-sided privileges, as well as political and commercial concessions to the oligarchs on the left bank of the Nistru River.

Until 2009, political discussions about the Republic of Moldova's energy independence virtually did not exist. Things began to change after its 2010 accession to the European Energy Community (EEC) in 2010, which obliged Chişinău to take on new commitments, including the implementation of the Third Energy Package. However, in 2011, the government in Chişinău requested a ten-year postponement of the deadline for meeting the obligations set by the EEC. Even after the expiry of this period, the Republic of Moldova continued to import natural gas from the Russian conglomerate Gazprom, the majority shareholder of Moldovagaz, the national natural gas supplier for the country's consumers.

As a rule, the Republic of Moldova imported around 3 billion m<sup>3</sup> annually from Russian sources, with one third of this volume consumed on the right bank and two thirds supplied to the Transnistrian region. Official data

10 The current government is primarily responsible for the energy crisis and must leave. 30 December 2024. / <https://socialistii.md/actuala-guvernare-este-principalul-vinovat-de-criza-energetica-si-trebuie-sa-plece/>

Declaration of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova. 28 December 2024. / <https://socialistii.md/deklaracija-partii-socialistov-respubliki-moldova-3/>

Dodon wants Moldova to acknowledge the debt claimed by Gazprom. 24 January 2025. / <https://agora.md/2025/01/24/dodon-vrea-ca-moldova-sa-recunoasca-datoria-pretinsa-de-gazprom>

11 Ilan Şor has called for the dismissal of the Government of the Republic of Moldova. 3 January 2025. / <https://partidulsor.com/news/ilan-sor-a-solicitat-demiterea-guvernului-moldovei.html>

Шор: более 50% долга Молдавии “Газпрому” накоплена, когда Санду была министром. 9 января 2025. / <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/22840551>

Bolea: “The authorities caused the crisis in order to carry out their fraudulent schemes”. 16 January 2025. / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4ITTA6TROW>

12 Gazprom owns 50% of the shares, the Republic of Moldova owns 35.33%, Tiraspoltransgaz owns 13.44%, and the remaining shareholders each own less than 5%.

show that in 2021, the Republic of Moldova imported approximately 3.2 billion m<sup>3</sup> of natural gas from Russia, with 1.2 billion m<sup>3</sup> consumed on the right bank and 2 billion m<sup>3</sup> on the left bank of the Nistru River.<sup>13</sup> Under the contract signed on 29 October 2021, Russia committed, from 1 November 2021, to supply the Republic of Moldova with 3.3 billion m<sup>3</sup> of natural gas annually over the next five years, of which 1.24 billion m<sup>3</sup> were to be supplied annually to the right bank of the Nistru River, and 2.06 billion m<sup>3</sup> – to the Transnistrian region.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that the Transnistrian region imports twice as much natural gas as the rest of the Republic of Moldova is explained by industrial consumption. As long as the regime does not pay for its gas consumption, while its energy-intensive industry exports on a massive scale products whose value is derived entirely from cheap energy, the region is in a privileged position, and maintaining the status quo is the only desirable policy.

Tiraspol has not paid for natural gas for over 30 years, and utility tariffs in the region have remained very low, including for large energy-intensive companies, which have a huge impact in the functioning of the economy of the Transnistrian region. Traditionally, the government in Chisinau purchased 70%-90% of the electricity used on the right bank from MGRES, the rest being purchased from Ukraine and from other additional sources (such as green energy).

Overall, this arrangement has secured a privileged role for the regime in Tiraspol has obtained certain advantages that were interdependent with Tiraspol's interests. The dependence of the Republic of Moldova on Russian energy has thus become a geopolitical leverage, as Russia has used access to natural gas to

obtain various political concessions from Chişinău.

Ukraine's decision to stop the transit of Russian gas to Europe from 1 January 2025 has triggered a new crisis in Chişinău. The gas supplied to Transnistria was transported via the pipelines transiting Ukraine, including via the "Sudja" gas pipeline, which entered Moldova at Alexeevka and Grebeniki. Another traditional route is the main pipeline towards the Balkans (Shebelinka–Dnipro–Kriviy Rih–Ismail); since the launch of the "Turkish Stream" in 2019, this pipeline has enabled reverse purchases, entering through the Orlovka point.

Under the contract signed on 29 October 2021, Gazprom has the possibility to supply Russian natural gas to Transnistria via the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline, which operates in reverse. Chişinău has stated repeatedly that it will not oppose the transport of Russian natural gas to the left bank of Nistru River. Even so, the Russian company (or rather, the Kremlin) has made this gas supply route conditional on the Republic of Moldova recognising and paying a USD 709 million debt that it claims from the Moldovan state, a debt that is not recognised by the government in Chisinau.<sup>15</sup> Moscow has chosen to supply natural gas to the left bank of Nistru River through a Hungarian trader, funded by a company from Dubai, which the so-called administration from Tiraspol claims is a Russian loan.

If Russia was truly concerned about the fate of population in the Transnistrian region, many of whom hold Russian citizenship, Moscow would have had no trouble continuing to supply natural gas to the left bank of Nistru River, only via a different route.

13 Information about natural gas imports. p.1. / [https://www.moldovagaz.md/pic/uploaded/docs/Raspuns\\_nota\\_analitica\\_lexecon\\_v2.pdf](https://www.moldovagaz.md/pic/uploaded/docs/Raspuns_nota_analitica_lexecon_v2.pdf)

14 The Ministry of Infrastructure made public the text of the protocol signed with Gazprom (DOC). 1 November 2021. / <https://trm.md/ro/economic/ministerul-infrastructurii-a-facut-public-textul-protocolului-semnat-cu-gazprom>

15 Following an external audit, the Republic of Moldova does not accept Moldovagaz's historical debts. 6 September 2023. / <https://energie.gov.md/ro/content/urma-auditului-extern-republica-moldova-nu-accepta-datoriile-istorice-ale-moldovagaz>

## 4. Moscow's encouragement of territorial separatism in the Republic of Moldova

Article 3, point (1) of the Constitution provides that “the territory of the Republic of Moldova is inalienable”.<sup>16</sup> Even so, the Republic of Moldova continues to be territorially divided, and its constitutional provisions remain rather a *de jure* goal than a reality, achievable only if and when the constitutional authorities are able to exercise full control over the internationally recognised territory. The seeds of separatism in Moldova were sown during the USSR's collapse, when in Găgăuzia, Comrat (19 August 1990), and in Tiraspol, Transnistria (2 September 1990) two separatist entities were declared, both announcing they would not submit to the republican authorities from Chişinău, but instead follow orders from Moscow.

These entities emerged as a response by the Soviet Union's central authorities to the MSSR's (Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic) attempts to break away from their control, most notably through the adoption of the Declaration of Sovereignty on 23 June 1990. The conflict between the union center and republican governments led to numerous political and even military confrontations throughout the former USSR. Both separatist movements have shaped the process of state formation and development in the Republic of Moldova, despite their different developments.

The first confrontation, which emerged on 2 September 1990, resulted in the creation of an enclave that received military and political support and remained under Moscow's direct patronage, which prevented it from subordinating to the constitutional authorities from Chişinău. During the second confrontation, which concerned several districts with Gagauz populations, the conflict remained latent

and was ultimately solved by granting territorial autonomy. This was recognised by granting special status to localities with Gagauz populations within three southern districts (Comrat, Ceadîr-Lunga, and Vulcăneşti). These districts returned under the constitutional control of the Republic of Moldova following the adoption of the Law on the Special Legal Status of Găgăuzia (Gagauz-Yeri) on 23 December 1994.<sup>18</sup>

In the 1990s, Moscow used separatism as its main tool to exert pressure on Chişinău. Russia's purpose has been (and remains) to impose political control over the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova through the Transnistrian region. The legal tool Moscow sought to use in gaining control over the entire territory was to define the Transnistrian region's status within the Republic of Moldova. From the very outset of the process of settling the Transnistrian problem, pursuant to the Moldovan-Russian agreement of 21 July 1992,<sup>19</sup> Moscow's strategy was as follows: 1) the Transnistrian conflict is an internal matter of the Republic of Moldova; 2) Chişinău and Tiraspol are opposing parties; 3) Russia is the mediator and guarantor of the negotiation process.

Starting in the mid-1990s and for the next decade, the problem of the region's status as part of the Republic of Moldova was at the forefront of efforts to solve the conflict. Two stages can be distinguished in this regulatory process: 1) 1996-2000 – the “common state” model; and 2) 2001-2003 – the model of a project with multiple federal subjects. Through the so-called “common state”, based on the memorandum of 8 May 1997,<sup>20</sup> Tiraspol sought to secure as many

16 Constitution of the Republic of Moldova. 29.07.1994. / [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=145723&lang=ro#](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=145723&lang=ro#)

17 Declaration of Sovereignty of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. 23.06.1990. / [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=89438&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=89438&lang=ro)

18 Law No 344 of 23.12.1994 on the Special Legal Status of Găgăuzia (Gagauz-Yeri). / [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=136220&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=136220&lang=ro)

19 Соглашение о принципах мирного урегулирования вооруженного конфликта в Приднестровском регионе Республики Молдова. 21 июля 1992 г. / Arhiva Biroului politici de reintegrare. / <https://gov.md/ro/content/arhiva-actelor-semnate-cadrul-procesului-de-reglementare>

20 Совместное заявление Президентов Российской Федерации и Украины в связи с подписанием Меморандума об основах нормализации отношений между Республикой Молдова и Приднестровьем. 8 мая 1997 г. / Arhiva Biroului politici de reintegrare. / <https://gov.md/ro/content/arhiva-actelor-semnate-cadrul-procesului-de-reglementare>



elements of external co-sovereignty as possible from Chişinău for the Transnistrian region. The federal model is associated with the active efforts of the President Vladimir Voronin to solve the conflict, using Moscow's pressures to support a reintegration process controlled by Chişinău.

In the autumn of 2003, Voronin preferred that the Republic of Moldova negotiate directly with Russia to solve this problem, disregarding the international regulatory mechanism and believing his loyalty to Moscow would be rewarded with a solution that meets Chişinău's interests in dismantling the separatist regime on the left bank of Nistru River. Thus, in a very short period of time, a plan to solve the conflict was drawn up, known as the "Kozak Memorandum".<sup>21</sup> The project aimed to transform the unitary state, in line with the 1994 Constitution, into an asymmetric federation, comprising three entities: two federal subjects (the Transnistrian region and Găgăuzia ATU) and one federal territory (the rest of the territory of the Republic of Moldova) – called the "Federative Republic of Moldova". The model proposed in this memorandum contained several dangerous shortcomings that undermined the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Moldova.

The authorities in Chişinău refused to accept the model approved by President Putin, triggering angry reactions and leading to significant economic and political sanctions by Moscow. However, these measures only reinforced the search for alternatives, namely orientation toward the European Union with which, at the beginning of 2005, the Republic of Moldova signed an Action Plan<sup>22</sup> that laid the foundations for significant economic, social, and political reforms.

After talks resumed in the official "5+2" format in 2012, and following the adoption of certain "small steps" policies in relations between Chişinău and Tiraspol, the Republic of Moldova agreed to discuss the settlement

of existing problems on both banks in the future, using thematic blocks.<sup>23</sup> The issue of the political status of the Transnistrian region was included within the third block. The separatist region developed outside the political and electoral processes of the Republic of Moldova. However, Moldovan citizens from the left bank of Nistru River did have the right to vote at polling stations designated for the Transnistrian region.

Given that the Republic of Moldova was preparing to sign an Association Agreement with the EU, and in light of the events in Ukraine in 2014, Kremlin strategists chose to reignite Gagauz separatism in the south of the Republic of Moldova, an issue to which Moscow had paid little attention for nearly two decades. At the beginning of 2014, the Russian ambassador to the Republic of Moldova, Farid Muhametsin, announced that the Russian Embassy would pay special attention to Găgăuzia and Taraclia.<sup>24</sup>

Although the three districts with dense Gagauz populations returned in 1995 to the constitutional framework of the Republic of Moldova, being administratively organised as Găgăuzia ATU, certain conflicts have since arisen between Chişinău and Comrat, with the relationship between the central authorities and the regional autonomy remaining contentious.

Moscow has repeatedly harnessed the Chişinău government's inability to manage the Gagauz problem. The People's Assembly of Găgăuzia ATU has decided to hold two local referendums at the same time – one legislative and one consultative. On 2 February 2014, a referendum was held in the autonomous region, with a turnout of about 70% of residents. Of those who voted, 98.9% supported Găgăuzia's right to separate from the Republic of Moldova if the latter were to lose its statehood. In the consultative referendum, 98.47% voted that the Republic of Moldova should join the Russia–Belarus–Kazakhstan Customs Union, while

21 Меморандум об основных принципах государственного устройства объединенного государства. 12-14 ноября 2003 г. / Anatol Țăranu, Mihai Gribincea, *Conflictul transnistrean. Culegere de documente și materiale*. Volumul III (2003-2006). Chişinău, 2013. p.129-140.

22 Plan No 402 din 22.02.2005 EU-Moldova Action Plan./ [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=116837&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=116837&lang=ro)

23 Повестка дня официального переговорного процесса. 18 апреля 2012 г. / <https://gov.md/ro/content/arhiva-actelor-semnate-cadrul-procesului-de-reglementare>

24 Посольство России в 2014 году обратит особое внимание на Гагаузию и Тараклию. 2 января 2014. / <https://point.md/ru/novosti/obschestvo/posolstvo-rossii-v-2014-godu-obratit-osoboe-vnimanie-na-gagauziyu-i-tarakliyu/>

only 2.8% voted for integration into the European Union.<sup>25</sup>

The Moldovan authorities declared the referendum illegal, but no action was taken against its organisers. Although the results of the 2 February 2014 plebiscite were not recognised, Moscow made extensive use of the event to strengthen its presence in the region and to encourage radical groups to challenge the central authorities. At the same time, the referendum became a key component of the Comrat local authorities' policy of ideologically repositioning themselves within the structure of the Gagauz autonomy, interpreting the plebiscite results as "postponed independence". Subsequently, to provide the referendum with a legal basis, on 14 April 2017, the People's Assembly of Comrat decided to declare the day of 2 February the "National Unity Day" in the Gagauz autonomy.<sup>26</sup>

Obviously, the referendum of 2 February 2014 was a clear demonstration of Moscow's influence over the Găgăuzia ATU, and a result of a manipulation and disinformation campaign, in which calls for separation from the Republic of Moldova were stoked in the context of stimulating Gagauz nationalism with extremist overtones.

Russia's influence in Găgăuzia ATU is a key element in Moscow's geopolitical strategy against Moldova's European course. For example, in the referendum on Moldova's European integration held on 20 October 2024, nearly 95% of voters in Găgăuzia ATU voted against the European course, with only 5% in favour.<sup>27</sup>

After 2023, Moscow strengthened its influence in the Gagauz autonomy by taking political control through the criminal group led by the fugitive oligarch Ilan Șor, following the election of Irina Guțul, previously unknown in the region, as bascan (governor). Russia leverages every available channels to support candidates or political parties favourable to a pro-Russian, anti-European course in the Republic of Moldova, including in Găgăuzia ATU.

In the first two decades after the Republic of Moldova gained its independence, Transnistrian separatism was Russia's main instrument of influence for attacking its state sovereignty. However, once Chișinău oriented itself geopolitically toward a Western development path, Gagauz separatism gained greater strategic importance for Moscow.

## 5. Russia's use of embargoes to provoke economic crises

Securing the status of EU candidate and initiating negotiations for the accession to the EU represent the greatest achievement of Maia Sandu's government since independence, while Russia continues to be consistent in its objective to claim the entire former Soviet space as part of its vital interests, leaving no room for alternative models of integration. The economic relationship between Moldova and Russia is disproportionate, because a large share of Moldova's

exports go to the Russian Federation, while Moldova was not a significant export market for Russia.

Because of this, Russia has used its economic leverage against Moldova on several occasions. This is a strategy Russia used not only in relation to Moldova. Since 2002, almost all post-Soviet states (and others) that have had divergences with Russia have been "punished" by Moscow, which has blocked certain

25 ЦИК Гагаузии обнародовал окончательные итоги референдума о будущей судьбе автономии. 5 февраля 2014. / <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/940951>

26 Постановление Об учреждении 2 февраля Днем народного единства. 14 апреля 2017 г. / <https://halktoplushu.md/archives/911>

27 Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova. Republican Constitutional Referendum 2024. / <https://pvt12024.cec.md/cec-template-referendum-results.html>

goods from entering the Russian market.<sup>28</sup> Russia has imposed politically-motivated embargoes on specific imported goods invoking concerns about quality, rather than taking into account the economic criteria determined by the mechanism of market relations. For example, in 2006, Russia blocked Moldovan wine imports on the Russian market, an embargo that had a severe impact on Moldova's wine industry, forcing it to reorient its exports toward the European market.

The extension of economic leverage – from wine products to agri-food products – was predicted prior to the signing and ratification of the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union. Chişinău expected Moscow to impose new blockades and embargoes on Moldovan agri-food products, invoking their poor quality. Immediately after the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova ratified the Association Agreement on 7 July 2014, Russian Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, held discussions in Gorki with his deputies on “possible protective measures” against Moldovan products in response to the Association Agreement of the Republic of Moldova with the EU.<sup>29</sup>

Even before the “Medvedev episode” in Gorki on 5 July 2014, Russian phytosanitary authorities had already banned imports of processed meat from Moldova, invoking quality defects. On 18 July 2014, the Russian consumer protection agency “Rospotrebnadzor” temporarily banned the import of Moldovan canned vegetables and fruits into the Russian Federation, a decision that entered into force on 21 July. Moscow's

aim was to destabilise the economy of the Republic of Moldova and to show that the country's strong reliance on the agri-food sector would not allow it to meet the European Union requirements.

Moscow's 2013-2014 plan to bankrupt the economy of the Republic of Moldova through economic leverages, failed. The Republic of Moldova managed to withstand Russian pressures with the support of the European Union, which opened its market to Moldovan agri-food products. This has contributed significantly to the decrease in the share of the Russian market for Moldovan exports, with Russia's share dropping to 3.4% according to the latest statistics.<sup>30</sup> By comparison, according to the same data, exports to the EU account for 67.8%.

The restrictive decisions taken by Russia against the Republic of Moldova in 2013-2014 had a negative impact on bilateral relations between the two countries, which have not recovered since. For example, in April 2024, the decision of Rosselkhoz nadzor to allow companies from the Găgăuzia ATU to export fruits and vegetables to Russia was largely covered in the Găgăuzia,<sup>31</sup> which was interpreted as a victory of Comrat in its relation with Chişinău.<sup>32</sup> This is despite statistical data from the Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization showing that companies in the Găgăuzia ATU export nearly half of their products to the European Union, and only 2% to Russia.<sup>33</sup>

28 Ограничения на ввоз в Россию продукции в 2002-2014 годах. Справочная информация. 23 июля 2014. / <https://tass.ru/spravochnaya-informaciya/687096>

29 Медведев потребовал принять решение по защите рынка РФ в связи с ассоциацией Молдавии с ЕС. 7 июля 2014. / <http://itar-tass.com/ekonomika/1301861>

30 International trade in goods of the Republic of Moldova in November 2024 and in January-November 2024. 15 January 2025. / [https://statistica.gov.md/ro/comertul-international-cu-marfuri-al-republicii-moldova-in-luna-noiembrie-2024-s-9539\\_61599.html](https://statistica.gov.md/ro/comertul-international-cu-marfuri-al-republicii-moldova-in-luna-noiembrie-2024-s-9539_61599.html)

31 Россия открыла свой рынок для сельхозпродукции из Гагаузии. 12 апреля 2024. / <https://apkgagauzii.md/ru/news/rossiya-otkryla-svoy-rynok-dlya-selkhozproduksii-iz-gagauzii/>

32 Кишинев разрешил фермерам Гагаузии работать на российский рынок. 21 мая 2024. / <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2024/05/21/kishinev-razreshil-fermeram-gagauzii-rabotat-na-rossiyskiy-rynok>

33 EU – the destination for companies from the Gagauz region. Not Russia. 2 December 2024. / <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1157892265698127&set=a.434041171416577>



## 6. The capacity of the Moldovan authorities to withstand the hybrid war

The challenges to national security in a complex regional security environment urgently required a new strategic vision and the development of a conceptual approach regarding state security. Thus, on 15 December 2023, in order to face the new security realities, the Parliament adopted the National Security Strategy (NSS) of the Republic of Moldova,<sup>34</sup> which entered into force in January 2024. The NSS is a necessary and timely document in the current geopolitical context, which outlines explicitly the risks and threats to the Republic of Moldova.

Unlike previous strategies, the new NSS contains two new significant, even revolutionary, aspects in Moldova's approach to national security. Its structure is logical, covering general provisions, security objectives and principles, the security environment, threats, risks and vulnerabilities, methods and lines of action in various security areas, and final provisions. However, some parts of the document remain vague, particularly in its treatment of hybrid threats and the measures to counter them. Given that the leadership of the Republic of Moldova asserts, not without reason, that the country is engaged in a hybrid war with Russia, hybrid threats should have been addressed in the National Security Strategy, in accordance with their impact on the national security of the Republic of Moldova.

Effectively countering the Russian Federation's hybrid activities against the Republic of Moldova requires the expansion and refinement of the legal

framework, thereby enhancing the instruments available to state institutions. In addition to developing a robust legislative framework, the state's institutional capacity must also be reinforced to better counter threats to national security of the Republic of Moldova. On 31 July 2023, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova decided to establish the Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation Center (SCCDC).<sup>35</sup> One of its main objectives declared at the time of its establishment was "to provide the necessary informational and analytical support to authorities and public institutions, as well as to other legal entities under public law, in the process of identifying, preventing, and combating disinformation, information manipulation, and foreign interference". Another obligation (Article 10, letter b) is "to ensure the transparency of its own activity" (Article 10, letter a).

A year and a half after the SCCDC was established, we note that its work is not known by the society, and the institution was not effective in the public space in preventing and combating disinformation. The SCCDC does not have a website, and it did not create an institutional account on Facebook or other social media platforms. Although it was anticipated in early 2024 that the SCCDC would become operational within a few months,<sup>36</sup> it is currently unclear how functional the institution is or what outcomes it has achieved. Some investigative media outlets have produced journalistic materials attempting to assess the results of SCCDC's work a year and a half after its founding.<sup>37</sup>

34 Decision No 391 of 15.12.2023 approving the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova. / [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=141253&lang=ro#](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=141253&lang=ro#)

35 Law No 242 of 31 July 2023 on the Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation Center and amending certain regulatory documents. / [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=138661&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=138661&lang=ro)

36 Petru Macovei on the work of Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation Center: It is important to support the state's strategic institutions by ensuring the security of the information space. TVR Moldova, 27 February 2024. / <https://tvrmdova.md/article/775ac38d1659881c/petru-macovei-despre-business-ul-centrului-de-comunicare-strategica-si-combatere-a-dezinformatiei-este-important-sa-ajutam-institutiile-strategice-ale-statului-asigurand-securitatea-spatiului-informational.html>

37 The age of fakes: why disinformation is a threat to national security, and how the authorities (do not) fight this phenomenon. The "Patriot" case and the mysteries surrounding the centre's activities. 27 January 2025. / <https://www.zdg.md/video/video-era-falsurilor-de-ce-dezinformatia-este-un-pericol-pentru-securitatea-statului-si-cum-autoritatile-nu-lupta-cu-acest-fenomen-cazul-patriot-si-misterele-din-jurul-activitat/>

In fact, the SCCDC should operate in two main areas: (1) inter-institutional communication between the state's strategic institutions and (2) combating disinformation within the national information space. These directions reflect directly the two general objectives of the Concept of Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, Information Manipulation Actions, and Foreign Interference for 2024-2028, adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova on 22 December 2023.<sup>38</sup> Under the concept approved on 22 December 2023, the channels for communicating about SCCDC's activity should include traditional media, social networks, direct communication, and innovative channels, targeting citizens of the Republic of Moldova, civil society, the media, public officials, the academia, the business environment, and professional associations.

So far, these SCCDC activities are not noticeable in the society. SCCDC continues to be largely unknown to the public, and its lack of progress has been strongly criticised by leaders of both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition.

In contrast to the SCCDC, the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS) has recently shown much greater activity. Contrary to this institution's past practice, the SIS has been present and visible in the public space recently, through initiatives taken by its head, such as press conferences and published reports, including those addressing cases of hybrid interference by the Russian Federation in political and electoral processes of the Republic of Moldova.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the SIS has blocked several platforms and sources of online content that were manipulating and promoting Russian disinformation narratives.

Despite these efforts to counter various forms of hybrid warfare, the outcomes achieved in 2023-2024

are modest when compared to the mobilisation for the European integration referendum on 20 October 2024, during which Russian propaganda and disinformation had a significant impact.

Generally speaking, without referring strictly to the case of the Republic of Moldova, there are two main methods to fight disinformation and Russian propaganda: sanctions and education. The first method involves sanctioning, in accordance with the law, individuals and institutions that engage in manipulation or disinformation. The authorities have suspended/revoked licences of TV channels funded through illicit means, blocked certain Telegram accounts and websites, and requested Meta to remove networks of fake accounts, groups, and pages spreading disinformation. However, these measures continue to be insufficient as long as perpetrators are not held accountable and contain some level of danger for free speech from a liberal point of view.

The second method – education – is a long-term solution that requires a fundamentally new approach from state institutions, including introducing media literacy courses from an early age to better prepare future generations.

The shortcomings of such communication with the society became particularly evident during the electoral period for both the referendum and the presidential elections. In addition, the governing party chose not to engage in dialogue with other pro-European political parties in order to consolidate the right-wing electorate. This is clear from the way PAS handled the "Pact for Europe," which was signed in May 2024<sup>40</sup> by more than 10 opposition parties with a pro-European agenda, but has not become an effective document for uniting the pro-European political segment. The lack of consensus between the right-wing parties could put

38 Decision No 416 of 22 December 2023 approving the Concept of strategic communication and countering disinformation, information manipulation actions, and foreign interference for 2024-2028. / [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=141254&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=141254&lang=ro)

39 External Interference in the Electoral Processes of the Republic of Moldova. SIS Report. / [https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Raport\\_SIS\\_Public\\_Interferenta\\_in\\_procesul\\_electoral.pdf](https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Raport_SIS_Public_Interferenta_in_procesul_electoral.pdf)

Assessment of the Russian Federation's Involvement in the Electoral Processes in the Republic of Moldova for 2024-2025. SIS Report. / <https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Scenarii%20de%20influen%C8%9B%C4%83%202024-2025.pdf>

Results of a Complex Operation Conducted by the SIS in the Context of Hybrid War. SIS Report. / [https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Raport%20SIS\\_0.pdf](https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Raport%20SIS_0.pdf)

40 The Pact for Europe. An agreement on the European Integration of the Republic of Moldova. 26 May 2024. / <https://alegeri.md/images/c/c0/Pactul-pentru-europa-2024.pdf>

the European course of the Republic of Moldova at risk, as, following the parliamentary elections in 2025, it may not be possible to form a pro-European coalition in the future Parliament.

The “Șor Network” has expanded its activities through corruption and by exploiting poverty and the lack of information among certain social categories of Moldovan citizens, despite searches and detentions carried out by the Anticorruption Prosecutor’s Office (APO), the General Police Inspectorate (GPI), and the SIS against individuals suspected of political corruption.

Chișinău authorities have been criticised for their handling of the territorial separatism problem. The Moldovan authorities have strengthened their institutional capacity to address territorial separatism by passing the so-called anti-separatism law at the beginning of 2023, which in fact, consists of amendments to the Criminal Code.<sup>41</sup> The adoption of this law has provided separatist leaders in Tiraspol with an opportunity to cause a stir, labelling it as “repressive measures against Transnistrians” and an “act of aggression” that threatens efforts to solve the Transnistrian conflict. In a statement by the so-called ministry of foreign affairs of the so-called RMN,<sup>42</sup> it was misleadingly claimed that virtually any resident of the Transnistrian region could now face criminal prosecution by the Republic of Moldova. Undeniably, strengthening the legal provisions against separatist actions has been a positive development.

The inconsistencies in the authorities’ actions weaken the resilience of the energy sector against Russian hybrid attacks. Energy has been the Republic of Moldova’s main vulnerability in its relationship with

Russia. After 2009, Chișinău sought to reduce Russian control by diversifying the energy sources, including investing in sources of renewable energy and developing interconnections with Romania, which were initiated in 2013, such as the Iași-Ungheni-Chișinău gas pipeline, which became fully operational in October 2021.

The strategic importance of this pipeline became clear in autumn 2022 to winter 2023, when Moscow reduced gas supplies to the right bank of the Nistru River in an attempt to provoke a crisis; the government responded by sourcing gas on the European market. Although the right bank has stopped purchasing gas from Gazprom entirely, the contract remains in force until 1 January 2025, and all Russian gas has gone entirely to the Transnistrian region. Prioritising lower electricity prices, the authorities have continued relying on the inherited Soviet-era power system, which remains technically regulated by Transnistria: out of seven 330 kV lines with Ukraine, four are connected to the Cuciurgan Power Station, two have endpoints in the Transnistrian region, and only Dnestrovsk (Ukraine) – Bălți bypasses Transnistria. Although works to interconnect with Romania’s system began in 2017, the Isaccea-Vulcănești-Chișinău line, also delayed in part by non-transparent tenders, is expected to be completed by the end of 2025. Until then, the Republic of Moldova remains energy-dependent on the Tiraspol regime, which is controlled by Moscow.

41 Law No 9 of 02.02.2023 amending some regulatory acts. /[https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=135630&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=135630&lang=ro)

42 Заявление МИД ПМР в связи с принятием в соседней Молдове репрессивных норм против приднестровцев. 2 февраля 2023. / <https://mid.gospmr.org/ru/node/9344>

# Conclusions

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1. The Russian Federation, under Vladimir Putin's leadership, has sought to reclaim its superpower status lost with the fall of the Soviet Union by waging an unconventional war against the West, using subversive means. Russia's main target for restoring its influence remains the post-Soviet space, where Moscow has launched both conventional military and unconventional hybrid wars.
2. After 2009, Moldova's shift toward the European Union triggered a series of hybrid actions from Moscow, which became systematic from 2013 onward. Some argue that coercion against Moldova began as early as 2006 with the embargo imposed on Moldovan wines. The Kremlin has steadily escalated its hybrid activities against Chişinău, deploying all available levels of influence over Moldova.
3. Russia's hybrid actions against the Republic of Moldova have been based on three main pillars: pro-Russian political actors and influencers within Moldova, manipulation and disinformation of the

Moldovan society, and the exploitation and political corruption of entire segments of the population. Moscow's tactics encompass a wide range of tools - from inciting political outrage and economic grievances, to fueling territorial separatism, orchestrating disinformation campaigns and maintaining energy dependencies.

4. Moldovan authorities have undertaken efforts, particularly after 2021, to counter Russian hybrid attacks. So far, with support from the EU, the USA, Romania, and other development partners, the Republic of Moldova has managed to stay on the course of European integration and has even made progress towards EU accession by skillfully seizing geopolitical opportunities. However, shortcomings and underperformance in certain areas by the current pro-European government have prevented the establishment of conditions that would make Moldova's European course irreversible, which continues to be at risk with each election.





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