

INFORMATION THREATS FACING THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND HOW THEY IMPACT DEMOCRATIC EXERCISES

2024 Situational picture
2025 Outlook



Content

| | |
|--|-----------|
| ARGUMENT | 3 |
| FIMI OBJECTIVES | 5 |
| THE FIMI ECOSYSTEM..... | 7 |
| IMPACT ON THE COMMUNICATION AND SECURITY STRATEGIC PILLARS | 13 |
| HYBRID AND INFORMATIONAL THREATS IN THE 2024 ELECTORAL CONTEXT | 18 |
| VULNERABLE SCENARIOS ESTABLISHED FOR DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN 2025 | 28 |
| STRATCOM MEASURES TO RESPOND TO THE 2025 CHALLENGES..... | 32 |



ARGUMENT

The public debates around the main pillar-themes of achieving national security in the context of the October 2024 elections have demonstrated the need to encourage a more sustained presence of positive - productive and clarifying - messages in all forms. This desideratum consists of two main, equally important goals:

- Firstly, it is about **facilitating citizens' access to correct and complete information** related to the established democratic desiderata, the political decisions aimed at achieving them, and the administrative initiatives and their impact on the lives of citizens. This dimension is achieved through the *Strategic Communication activity (STRATCOM)*, a multi-institutional process, with broad involvement both at the state level and at the level of its partners from civil society, the media, and local communities.
- Secondly, it is about **the obligation to ensure a secure information environment, by reducing the impact of foreign information manipulation actions and interference (FIMI)¹** on the population. This dimension is ensured through *synergistic multi-institutional actions at the level of the state apparatus aimed at permanent monitoring of the information environment, reporting manipulative behaviours, identifying actors involved in such activities as well as proposing and implementing legal actions* directed at reducing the negative effects that disinformation and manipulation campaigns have on the population.

To ensure the proper implementation of these two lines of activities, monitoring is guided by a set of **information narratives² subsumed under the five pillars of strategic communication anchored in national security objectives³**.

These narratives that underlie the analysis of the information environment in the Republic of Moldova - synthetic statements of ideas that positively or negatively characterise each pillar of national security in particular - were selected from the materials produced at the CCSCD level and adjusted with the points of view selected from the reactions of the other CCSCD Council member institutions. Once the lists of priority narratives (equal sets of positive and negative narratives to be followed) were established, their relevance was tested by comparing them with the public discussion, popular interests, the identified objectives of foreign actors and their multipliers/support points in Moldova.

¹**Foreign information manipulation actions and interference**- intentional efforts coordinated by foreign entities, such as governments, their agencies or non-state actors, to manipulate or influence public opinion, information or narratives in another country in order to achieve their own strategic, political or ideological objectives and which are likely to cause harm to national security and interests defined by normative acts (Law No. 242 of 31.07. 2023).

²**Information narrative**- the sublimated definition of a generic statement aimed at delivering a certain message, idea or specific behaviour to the information consumer.

³**Pillars of strategic communication**-European Integration, Social Cohesion, Economic Resilience, Bolstering the Defence Sector, Strengthening National Security in the European Context (Concept of Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, Information Manipulation Actions and Foreign Interference for the Years 2024-2028, Approved by PD No. 416 of 22.12.2023).



At the end of this process, two distinct sets of narratives were obtained, one positive and one negative, whose evolution is continuously monitored to propose strategic guidelines for institutional adjustment that would lead to better information of the population.

This Report aims:

- to contextualise how democracy, democratic institutions and processes have been attacked, and
- to detail what foreign information manipulation and interference narratives will most likely be employed during the next period, until the 2025 elections.

This prediction is based on the results of an analysis of malign actors' actions during 2024 (especially since the end of May, in the period immediately preceding the EPC summit), adjusted to their interests of disrupting the smooth running of democracy in the Republic of Moldova.



FIMI OBJECTIVES

One of the Centre's tasks is to identify hostile objectives promoted by foreign and domestic state actors to undermine democracy in Moldova. Following the analysis of the online communication environment⁴, **five major objectives of information manipulation and foreign interference (FIMI)** were identified:

I. Impeding Moldova's economic stability.

The belief that EU policies will worsen the country's financial situation, along with the manipulative promotion of these regarding the extraordinary aid traditionally provided by Russia and the fact that a hypothetical cultural-social rapprochement between the two peoples constitutes the only foundation for external economic cooperation that would not turn Moldova into a colony, were strongly supported, especially during the months preceding the presidential elections and the European referendum. The attempt to compromise any efforts to create and consolidate the country's economic resilience by manipulatively interpreting information in such a way as to create social opposition to political decisions (such as the case of the transport and storage hubs to be built, portrayed as a step towards the militarisation of Moldova) had an impact on the electoral decisions expressed by citizens in areas where major investments, including European funds, were made.

II. Promoting cultural and religious division.

To promote cultural and religious division in society, malign actors exploit the confrontation between the Metropolitanate of Moldova under the Moscow Patriarchate and the Metropolitanate of Bessarabia under the Romanian Orthodox Church. A real disinformation campaign according to which European integration threatens Orthodox Christianity in Moldova, aiming to close churches and ban Orthodoxy, is being carried out with the support of a part of the clergy, materially motivated directly by foreign actors. Malign actors accuse the pro-democratic and pro-European political class in Chisinau of promoting an environment of contempt and division in society (they allegedly intend to divide Moldovan society by labelling their supporters as "patriots" and "heroes" and their opponents as "traitors" and "agents"). The pro-democratic tendencies of the substantial Moldovan diaspora are labelled as non-Moldovan, "the other Moldova" - the only one that the ruling political class respects.

III. Undermining the legitimacy of the pro-democratic political class and the ongoing processes of rapprochement with the European Union.

Attempts are made to induce the perception of a corrupt party incapable of managing the country (the reshuffle is presented either as evidence of discretionary appointments or as a process that shows a lack of competence within the ruling party), but which seeks to maintain power at all costs,

⁴Exclusively online media, traditional media websites, as well as public channels, pages and profiles on the main social media platforms relevant in Moldova - Facebook, Telegram, YouTube - were considered and analysed.



including by resorting to repressive measures and transforming the state into a police state (the president is portrayed as an autocrat who has directly subordinated the state's law enforcement institutions). Rapprochement with the European Union is presented as a President's selfish project, from which only she and her close associates will benefit, while the rest of the population will be burdened (increased cost of living), deprived of values (land will be sold to foreigners, agricultural production will rot) while their health will be endangered (Moldova will be transformed into an organ bank for the West).

IV. Attacking the pro-European foreign policy and efforts to bolster the national defence of the Republic of Moldova.

This line of attack focuses on exploiting the potential threat of the Russian invasion of Ukraine extending to the territory of the Republic of Moldova, with the aim of undermining pro-European foreign policy and efforts to strengthen national defence. Beyond sustained campaigns of anti-EU manipulation and propaganda, there have been organised attempts to destabilise democratic processes through vote buying, false bomb alerts, and other subversive activities. As for bolstering the country's defence, efforts to modernise the army, equip it with cutting-edge technology integrated with that used by the state's partners are labelled as attempts to militarise the country, which will inevitably lead to a conflict with Russia. Constitutional neutrality is unilaterally presented as the only guarantor of peace, the illegal presence (and in disagreement with this neutrality) of Russian forces on the territory of the Transnistrian region being either ignored or promoted as a factor of regional stability.

V. Targeting the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova.

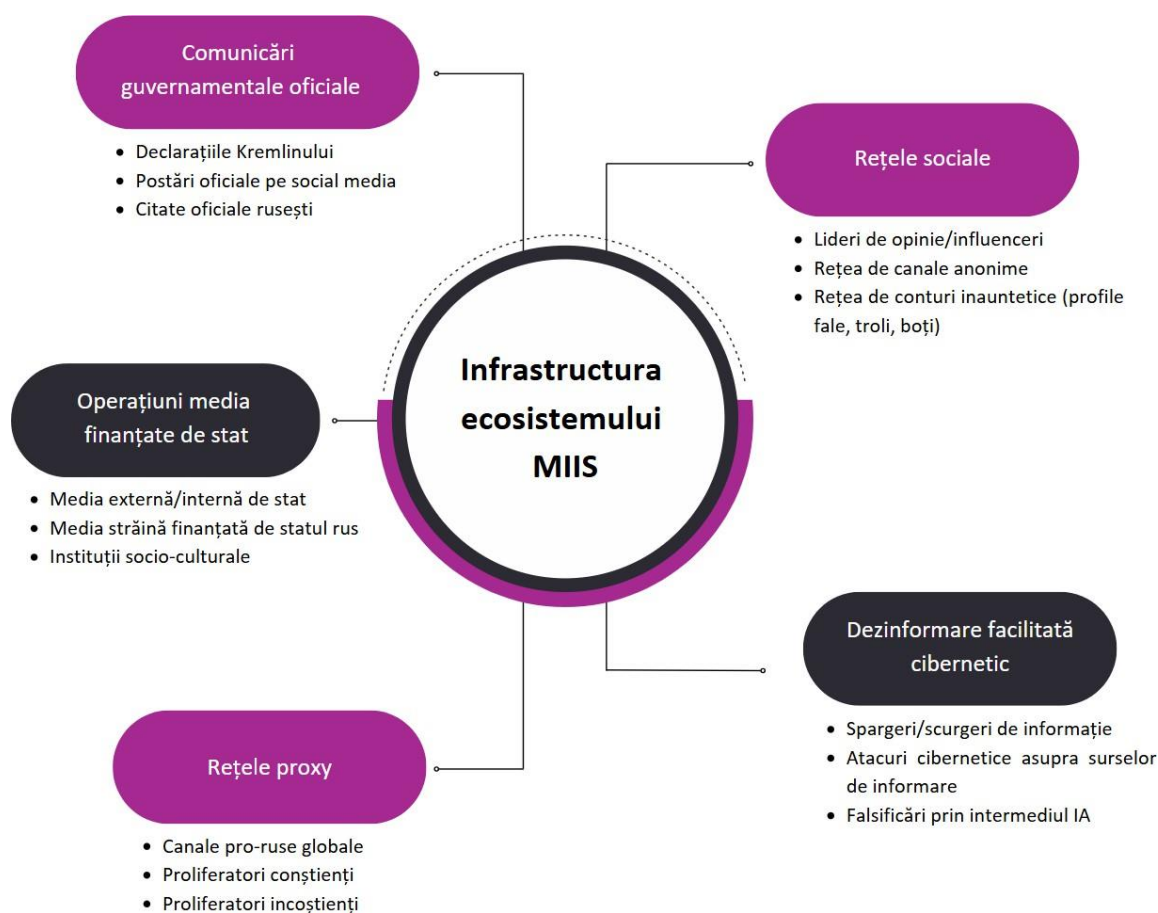
Moldova's sovereignty is targeted through the dissemination of messages that capitalise on historical grievances, nationalist sentiments, and anti-Western rhetoric, positioning Russia as the country's only legitimate ally. Pro-Russian narratives portray the West as a destabilising force, using the premise of "protecting" Moldova from Western interference to reinforce the image of Russia as the only legitimate ally. Sovereignty is depicted as at risk of being lost due to the country's rapprochement with the European Union, media sympathetic to Russian influence portraying EU alignment as a threat to national identity and stability. Such tactics capitalise on scepticism among a segment of the population toward the government's pro-Western orientation, fuelled by historical ties with Russia and ongoing political instability. This strategy aims to create divisions, undermine Moldova's sovereignty, and influence public opinion towards pro-Russian sentiments, thus weakening efforts to consolidate independence and sovereignty.



THE FIMI ECOSYSTEM

The Centre has mapped the infrastructure, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) used by non-democratic actors to achieve hostile objectives. Further the Report describes **FIMI ecosystem tools**.

The malign actor possesses a comprehensive information manipulation infrastructure, operating through multiple interconnected channels to disseminate and amplify strategic narratives. This sophisticated ecosystem operates through **five distinct** but coordinated **vectors**:



Official government communications -Kremlin statements -Official social media posts -Official Russian quotes

Social networks -Opinion leaders/influencers -Anonymous channel network -Inauthentic account network (fake profiles, trolls, bots)

FIMI ECOSYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE

State-funded media operations -State-owned foreign/domestic media -Russian state-funded foreign media - Social-cultural institutions

Cyber-facilitated disinformation -Information breaches/leaks -Cyberattacks on information sources -AI-mediated forgeries

Proxy networks -Global pro-Russian channels -Knowing proliferators -Unknowing proliferators



Official state communications

Direct messages conveyed through government institutions, officials and diplomatic channels.

In 2024, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued 76 official statements regarding the Republic of Moldova, and within the weekly press briefings, the Republic of Moldova benefits from a dedicated column. The speeches are marked by aggressive and accusatory rhetoric, with the main objective of delegitimising the pro-European leadership and the European path of the Republic of Moldova.

The Russian Foreign Ministry Statements Accuse Moldovan Authorities of falsifying electoral processes, discrimination against the Russian-speaking population, ceding sovereignty to the West, erosion of national identity and excessive militarisation. In addition, there is a constant use of persuasive techniques such as negative historical comparisons, selective statistics, rhetorical questions and emotional appeals to historical memory - that mystified and truncated history, intensively promoted during the period when the Republic of Moldova was Sovietised.

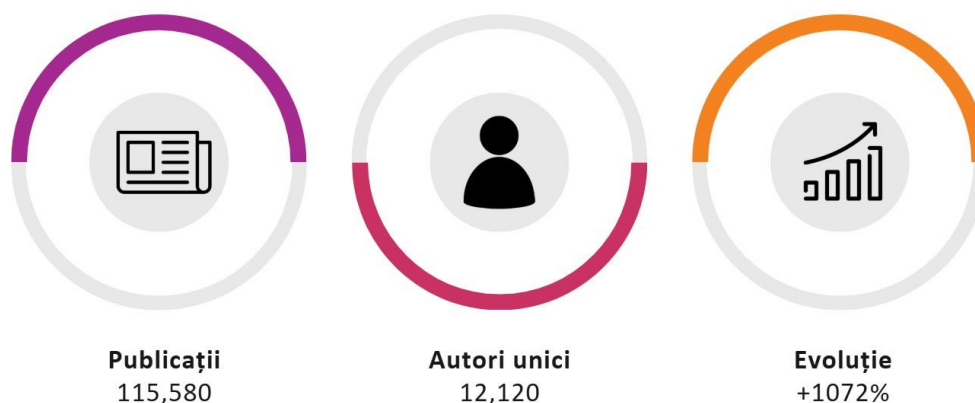
Through these strategies, the Russian Foreign Ministry seeks to portray a Moldova "captured" by Western interests and undergoing a process of "economic colonisation" and "denationalisation." Russia is thus presented as a protector of the traditional values and "true" interests of the Moldovan people. This narrative aims to undermine confidence in the country's pro-European direction and to position Russia as a legitimate and favourable alternative to the Republic of Moldova.

State-funded media operations

In 2024, the information analysis on mentions of the Republic of Moldova in the media space of the Russian Federation highlighted a significant evolution in influence communication. On the monitored platforms - news sites, forums, blogs, X (formerly Twitter) and other online media -

Mentions in Russian media in 2024: Publications 115,580 Single authors 12,120 Evolution +1072%

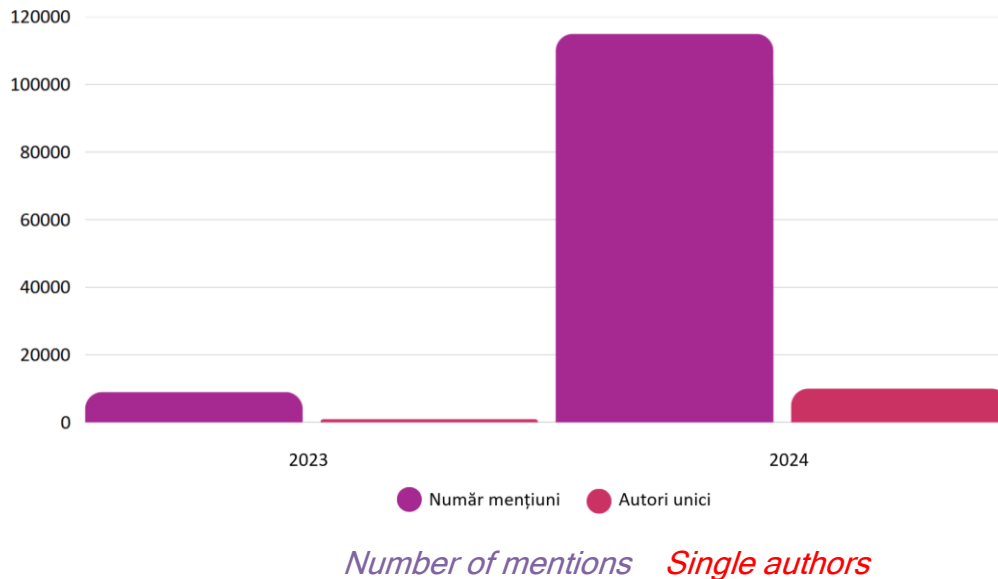
Mențiuni în mass-media din Rusia în 2024



a total of 115,580 mentions were recorded, representing a dramatic increase of 1072% compared to the 9,858 mentions in 2023. 12,120 single authors were also identified, which highlights the scale and diversity of sources involved in the dissemination of these messages.



This substantial increase indicates not only an intensification of the Republic of Moldova's presence in Russian public discourse, but also an evolution in the communication and propaganda strategies used by the entities involved. The 2024 articles and posts presented the Republic of Moldova in a predominantly negative light, contributing to the creation of a narrative framework designed to undermine public trust in Moldovan institutions and policies.



This information influence operation has been mainly contributed by Russian media entities, whether state-owned or Kremlin-aligned. These media organisations have adopted a strategy of amplifying official messages, using social media and other digital platforms to ensure a wide and rapid dissemination of information. Thus, one can observe a coordination of efforts meant to legitimise state narratives and exert constant informational pressure on the Republic of Moldova.

An important aspect of this equation is also the fact that Russia leverages its considerable financial resources, including to purchase advertising space in international and local media outlets. This strategy extends even to publications with a European audience or those that enjoy a certain credibility among the Moldovan public. Through this approach, besides expanding its access to a wider audience, Moscow manages to spread disinformation in the form of seemingly legitimate content, complicating efforts to identify and combat it. Publications such as EU Reporter and EU Today played a significant role in a well-coordinated disinformation campaign. These platforms published sponsored articles and materials that actively advanced anti-European and pro-Russian narratives, amplifying false allegations of violations in the electoral process. The disseminated messages sought to undermine confidence in the integrity of the elections and the democratic process, while promoting a perspective favourable to Russia and criticising the pro-European orientation of the Republic of Moldova⁵.

Development of proxy networks.

It consists of cultivating and using local third-party sources that align with and amplify the Kremlin's messages. Russian disinformation campaigns use willing intermediaries, such as bloggers, journalists, and opinion leaders, who either ideologically share the narratives promoted by Russia or have been influenced or complicit with Russian intelligence agencies. This strategy facilitates the infiltration of disinformation into the local media space, increasing its credibility and impact.

⁵ <https://dfrlab.org/2024/12/11/pro-kremlin-narratives-moldova-vote/>



- **Pro-Russian state actors:**

Parties and politicians, some of whom have legally restricted activities due to previous unconstitutional actions, contribute to the dissemination of pro-Russian messages, amplifying efforts to influence public opinion.

"Pobeda-Victorie political bloc - a reference actor in the pro-Russian political landscape of Moldova, founded by the Shor Party (designated unconstitutional), Renaștere, Șansă, „Forța de Alternativă și de Salvare a Moldovei” and Victorie Party. This political bloc plays an important role in shaping public discourse and promoting pro-Russian narratives at the political level.

- **Actors in the religious area**

Key figures among the clergy, especially those affiliated with the Metropolitanate of Chisinau and all Moldova, play a significant role in the pro-Russian influence network by spreading calls to the state to stop what is perceived as "moral torture against the Church", thus contributing to the validation and amplification of pro-Russian narratives.

- **Non-State actors**

This category comprises media organisations, including those that have migrated to social media in response to legal sanctions applied by state bodies because of violations of the norms in force.

Strategic exploitation of social networks:

Social media platforms are actively used to disseminate disinformation and influence public perceptions in the Republic of Moldova. This activity is based on the use of fake profiles, which work in coordinated groups to amplify narratives favourable to pro-Russian political actors, creating the illusion of broad public support. Fake profiles infiltrate public and private groups on Facebook, Telegram channels or other platforms, influencing discussions through comments, sharing fake news and creating posts that amplify social or political polarisation and controversy.

On platforms such as Facebook and Telegram, accounts managed by bots have been identified that automate activities such as posts, likes, comments, and content sharing, making them appear active and authentic.

There are also social media channels without direct attribution or transparency regarding the identity of the administrators, which introduce themselves as representing communities with general interests, such as life advice or world news. However, these channels constantly integrate manipulative anti-Western messages, emphasising the loss of freedoms and dignity due to the rapprochement with the West.

Although a predilection for the Telegram platform (less regulated in terms of published content) has been observed, we do not rule out that over the next year we will see a multiplication of these manipulation channels on other platforms, such as Facebook and TikTok⁶.

The malign actor resorted to a complex arsenal of **tactics, techniques and procedures** to support and promote its narratives.

⁶There are consistent suspicions that Russia transferred knowledge related to the manipulation of public opinion via TikTok to a candidate in the Romanian presidential elections. The linguistic identity between the two countries may generate a lesson learned for the next elections in Moldova based on the Romanian example.



| TTP (Tactics / Techniques / Procedures) | Brief Description | Practical example |
|--|---|--|
| Creating and spreading false narratives. | It involves the generation, amplification, or adaptation of untrue, distorted, or out-of-context information intended to influence public perception and cause confusion. | Fake articles on obscure websites, massively distributed on social media to generate fears or anti-Western sentiments. Coordination of information manipulation campaigns and foreign interference by initiating networks of similar Telegram accounts. Disguised as communities of interest and where issues of local/regional interest are discussed, a network has been created throughout the country through which manipulative or false messages are spread uniformly and rapidly. |
| Adapting information manipulation to specific demographic groups | Narratives are contextualised, alternated according to political developments to ensure their impact, while messages transmitted on social media are coordinated and uniform. | Among vulnerable ethnic, religious, and rural community groups, viral videos and emotionally charged images are promoted with the purpose of generating strong negative reactions. |
| Development and use of troll and bot networks | Networks of automated accounts (bots) and human trolls, used to manipulate public discussions and generate a large volume of partisan content online | Farms of inauthentic accounts that invade the comments section of the public pages of various media institutions, public figures, etc. Coordinated attacks by trolls on social networks, hashtags that go viral through bot activity Ex: #nuacum, #freeMoldova |
| Social media influence operations | Coordinating posts, comments, and private messages to steer users' opinions, misinform them, or reinforce their already formed distorted beliefs in the desired direction. | Thematic groups on Facebook/Telegram that constantly promote the same pro-Kremlin or anti-EU/NATO themes; Facebook sponsored ads that seek to discredit democratic institutions (Central Electoral Commission, Presidency) and administrative institutions (Police, Carabinieri). |
| Cross-platform posts | Coordinated dissemination of content across various platforms to maximise impact, increase visibility and influence public perceptions | Re-posting on Facebook messages against the CEC initially disseminated by political actors on Telegram and taking over the content on TikTok. |
| Exploitation of social divisions | Identifying sensitive topics (ethnicity, religion, political orientation, social orientation, etc.) and amplifying radical discourse to accentuate polarisation and create division in society. | Messages that accentuate conflicts between ethnic groups, fuelling hostilities and mimicking support for one of the sides. Tendential appeals from church representatives promoting the narrative regarding "moral torture against the Church" |
| Leaks and selective disclosures of information | Obtaining (through hacking or internal sources) and publishing real documents, but which are presented partially or taken out of context to manipulate perceptions of the public. | Publishing truncated internal institutional communications to suggest corruption or conspiracies. |
| Influence through the traditional media | Use of controlled official media channels (TV, radio, press) or | Russian state-run stations with coverage in the Republic of Moldova, local TV stations with |



| TTP (Tactics / Techniques / Procedures) | Brief Description | Practical example |
|---|---|--|
| | front platforms (pseudo-media) to disseminate propaganda, key messages and interpretations that support the narrative line of Russia. | opaque funding, which constantly promote pro-Kremlin messages, online news agencies, TV stations with opaque funding (MD24), which constantly promote pro-Kremlin messages. |
| Co-opting trusted sources (journalists, opinion leaders, etc.) | Approaching, recruiting or influencing prominent individuals (journalists, experts, influencers) to advance pro-Russian views, disguised as "objective analyses" or "exclusive interviews". | "Arranged" interviews with pro-Kremlin people who present the political situation in a way convenient to Russian interests. |
| Creating or funding front-line/front organisations and initiatives | Establishment of NGOs, research institutes, lobby groups or think tanks that further convenient narratives, claiming objectivity or independence. | NGOs with a hidden agenda, e.g. EVRAZIA which, in fact, supports pro-Kremlin theses and influences public discourse in favour of Russia. Opening, through a political consulting firm, of web pages that covertly promoted the negative vote in the European referendum (website nuacum.eu). |
| Cyberattacks (hacking) aimed at disinformation | Launching cyberattacks to obtain confidential data, which is subsequently used in disinformation campaigns, blackmail or to disrupt critical communications, energy infrastructures etc. | Hacking the servers of public institutions, the media and selectively publishing information to discredit. |
| Using AI to generate manipulative content. Creation and dissemination of cheapfakes/deepfakes | <p>The use of Artificial Intelligence-based technologies (including advanced language models) to create large quantities of texts, posts, comments or even automated responses, intended to mislead, influence online discussions and appear to come from various human sources.</p> <p>Generating (through AI) video or audio media content that alters the speech or image of a public figure (deepfake) or using simpler techniques (cheapfake), with the purpose of disinformation, compromising someone's reputation or fuelling false narratives in the public space.</p> | <p>Creating an impressive volume of pro-Kremlin messages on forums and social networks, apparently written by real users, but in fact AI-generated (advanced chatbots).</p> <p>Fake accounts impersonating President Maia Sandu, through which pamphlets with a humorous tone are currently being disseminated, which ridicule her and are intended to discredit her through personal attacks.</p> |



IMPACT ON THE COMMUNICATION AND SECURITY STRATEGIC PILLARS

The analysis of how the national security pillars are attacked through FIMI highlights the following aspects of public interest:

Pillar 1. European integration.

Given the political context of Moldova, with a sharp polarisation of society between the pro-Western electorate (supporter of democracy, concerned about the rights and civil liberties on which the democratic system is built, which explains its option as the only way to preserve the country's sovereignty and independence) and the pro-Russian electorate (willing to give up rights and freedoms in exchange for guaranteeing security, with reduced access to democratic benefits, which explains its option as the only way to preserve the country's sovereignty and independence), attacking the European Integration pillar is the matter in which malign actors invest the most effort.

It is an easy topic for malign actors (multiple opportunities to raise it, due to the agenda of the ruling party and the president), it is simple for them to create an enemy (the European Union, a concept that is seen by the majority as elitist - just as PAS is described - difficult to understand, and which has the advantage of not being quick to counter-react), and it is easy for them to know which vulnerabilities to exploit (social - fear of family breakdown; economic - economic insecurity generated by competition with an advanced and little-understood economy; political - anti-Western elites fear losing the advantages given by a hybrid system, still permeable to corruption, the population hopes that preserving a corrupt system will mean social peace; security - Russia's promise not to leave Moldova prey to the West).

The three main narratives monitored, namely:

- *"The West is the enemy of the Republic of Moldova";*
- *"The EU is dividing the country";*
- *"Rapprochement with the EU generates increased economic and social costs."*

were among the main ones promoted by malign actors in the period under review and the recorded trends indicate that they will continue to be among the main targets in the following period. It is worth noting that the analysis carried out indicated that, practically, **malign actors have sought to link any communication topic to one or more of these disinformation narratives.**



Pillar 2. Social cohesion.

Social cohesion is - probably - the most important dimension of National Security, the number one priority in terms of consolidation. As seen in the period under review and especially during the presidential elections and the European referendum, the lack of social cohesion and the feeling that not all citizens are viewed and treated equally facilitates voter corruption (the overwhelming majority of those who accepted money in exchange for voting come from the Gagauzia Autonomous Territorial Unit and the north of the country, where the main language spoken is Russian). Linguistic affinities have always been a dividing factor in Moldovan society, and the efforts of democratic forces have, unfortunately, sometimes been directed towards eliminating linguistic plurality instead of embracing it and using multilingualism and multiculturalism as an advantage. Malign internal or external actors portray this trend as a real pogrom against pro-Russians.

The fact that, at times, official communication was made exclusively in Romanian gave malign actors the opportunity to manipulate the intentions of the democratic political class (the hostile narrative *"Pro-European parties divide society"* has often been promoted to accuse an alleged preferential treatment that the political class applies to Romanian speakers). The fact that during the period between the 1st and 2nd rounds of the presidential elections the role of the diaspora was extensively detailed by the independent media facilitated the wide spread of this manipulative narrative regarding the existence of an irreconcilable rift in society. The possibility of formulating any message in an extremely simple binary way, of the "us versus them" type, offers malign actors a safe and quick way to reach the minds of the population.

"Russia is Moldova's historical friend" constitutes another hostile narrative, under which a significant body of manipulative messages identified and analysed in the review period, especially around the elections, is subsumed. The presence of a common cultural, historical, and social heritage with the ex-Soviet space, in particular with Russia, remaining even after Moldova gained independence, is easily exploited by malign actors (according to a plan devised by Russia, and tested by it in many former republics).

Allegations that the EU is imposing policies on Moldova that run counter to its national values, such as LGBT education programs in schools and restrictions on the right to freely practice the Orthodox religion, are used to frame the West as a threat to traditional Moldovan values. In contrast, the hostile narrative that claims that *"Russia is the protector of traditional values"* is strongly supported both through informational manipulation of the population and through more strategic actions, such as the training courses that Moldovan priests undergo in Russia.



Pillar 3. Economic resilience.

Reaching an optimal level of Economic Resilience of the Republic of Moldova, an essential goal for achieving national security, can be undermined by malign actors under the influence of the Russian Federation by promoting disinformation narratives designed to destabilise the Moldovan economy and strengthen dependence on Russia.

The hostile narrative "**The West wants to make us dependent**", suggests that economic and trade relations with Western states, especially the European Union, will transform the Republic of Moldova into their economic satellite. The messages subsumed under this narrative present Moldova's integration into international economic structures as a trap that will undermine the country's economic autonomy and make it vulnerable to Western dictates. This discourse contributes to the erosion of the population's confidence in the benefits of a diversified economy established on solid international foundations.

Messages that support the hostile narrative "**Our produce will rot in the fields. Loss of traditional markets.**" target fears about the impact of a pro-European economic orientation on Moldova's agricultural sector. By claiming that Moldova will lose traditional markets, especially those in Russia, this narrative glosses over the economic risks of structural changes and deepens the fear that Moldova will not be able to export its agricultural products and protect its local producers. This message reduces confidence in the economy's adaptation to new international requirements and discourages the foreign investments required to modernise the agricultural sector.

Finally, the narrative "**Moldova needs Russian help**" promotes economic dependence on Russia, stating that only through close economic relations with Moscow can Moldova survive and prosper. This ideology appeals to the country's historical and economic traditions, presenting Russia as an indispensable partner for Moldova's economic stability. In fact, this vision keeps Moldova in a state of underdevelopment, dependence, and economic vulnerability.

Therefore, these narratives play a part in undermining the Economic Resilience of the Republic of Moldova, reinforcing the narrative of an isolated economic future dependent on Russia, instead of supporting a diversification of markets and balanced economic integration with Western states.

Pillar 4. Bolstering defence.

Bolstering the National Defence of the Republic of Moldova is one of the pillars essential to ensuring national security, but this objective can be easily undermined by malign actors, especially those under the influence of the Russian Federation. Pro-Russian propaganda intensively uses three disinformation narratives that specifically target the process of modernisation and integration of the Moldovan army into international defence structures.



The first narrative, **"Army modernisation turns the country into a target"**, suggests that efforts to modernise the Moldovan armed forces would attract an external threat, especially from Russia, creating a state of insecurity. This amplifies fear and opposes resistance to the need to reform the army, providing a pretext to combat these reforms. Based on the natural fear of war (a part of the population still remembers the recent conflict of 1992), malign actors associate efforts to consolidate critical infrastructure (the example of the transport hub in Ungheni, the port of Giurgiulesti) with alleged actions to militarise the country that will only upset the regional security balance and expose Moldova to Russia's reaction.

The second narrative, **"Integration with Western armies is harmful"**, emphasises the dangers of partnerships with NATO or other Western forces, describing them as incompatible with the sovereignty and national security of the Republic of Moldova. This discourse focuses on the idea that, by aligning with Western standards, Moldova would become a target for international conflicts, including through its involvement in disputes between East and West, especially in the context of Russian aggression.

Finally, the narrative **"Transnistrian region and the territorial issue"** exploits the unresolved conflict in the Transnistrian region by suggesting that any move to strengthen national defence would escalate tensions with Russia, which maintains a military presence in the region. This argument targets public concerns about open conflict and perpetuates vulnerability feelings.

These narratives and the messages that support them are intended to hinder any progress in the field of defence and prevent the integration of the Republic of Moldova into international strategic alliances, having a direct impact on national security.

Pillar 5. National resilience in a regional security context.

The efforts of the current democratic political class to reduce and even eliminate the possibility of the country slipping into an insecurity climate are seen by pro-Russian malign actors as a real risk of losing influence over Moldova. A strong region (in which EU/NATO and non-EU/NATO states join forces to consolidate their own sovereignty and independence) does not suit Russia's interests.

"Closer ties to the West make Moldova vulnerable", the main narrative designed to prevent Moldova from strengthening its position in the region, exploits the fear that the country's pro-Western orientation would irreversibly attract conflicts with Russia and increase vulnerability to external aggression. This discourse depicts Moldova's integration into Western structures as a "challenge" to regional stability and a reason for the country's economic and political isolation, thus encouraging a pro-Russian reorientation as a means of "protection" against external dangers.

"Increasing permeability to regional crisis" addresses the fear that involvement in resolving crises in the region would expose the Republic of Moldova to conflicts and instability.



It suggests that by getting involved in regional issues, Moldova would become vulnerable to the escalation of conflicts in the neighbourhood, especially in the context of Russian aggression in Ukraine and other states of the former Soviet space. By amplifying this idea, an attempt is made to generate a climate of uncertainty, in which the strengthening of national security is seen as an additional risk.

Finally, the information manipulation related to "**Neutrality of the Republic of Moldova**" topic claims that neutrality is key to protecting its security, suggesting that any attempt at alliance with external forces would escalate conflicts and jeopardise regional balance. This discourse uses the country's neutrality history and traditions to counter any attempt at rapprochement with international alliances that could strengthen national security.

These narratives are intended to undermine efforts to secure the Republic of Moldova in the face of regional and international challenges, hindering its integration into defence structures that would contribute to national stability.



HYBRID AND INFORMATIONAL THREATS IN THE 2024 ELECTORAL CONTEXT

I. FIMI campaign elements

A Centre's priority for 2024 resided in the analysis and assessment of Russian influence and hybrid threats against the Republic of Moldova in the context of electoral elections. Assessing and identifying risks and threats to the sovereign nature of the decision-making process relevant to electoral exercises is essential for the defence of democratic processes. The central elements of the FIMI campaign are listed below:

Disinformation and propaganda:

Russia is influencing Moldova through disinformation campaigns that undermine pro-European parties and promote pro-Russian sentiments. In the electoral context, an intensification of disinformation campaigns, an active involvement of the most diverse actors and the use of a whole arsenal of disinformation narratives are observed. The aim is to discredit democratic institutions and candidates favourable to integration into the European Union, in particular.

As for the growing dynamics of disinformation activities, it has been identified both internally by specialised structures in the Republic of Moldova⁷ and externally by the partner states of the Republic of Moldova⁸. It is worth noting that most of this disinformation targets Russian speakers (93% at the beginning of Oct. 2024).

Regarding the actors involved, we are dealing with a vast diversity: from Russian officials⁹ ¹⁰, to propagandists of the Kremlin regime and schemes attracting international celebrities to promote messages discrediting President Maia Sandu¹¹ and using the Russian diplomatic mission in Chisinau¹², and even to local political actors.

The disinformation narratives identified in the electoral context were diverse:

- **Loss of sovereignty:** Russian propaganda claims that Moldova has lost its sovereignty, being controlled by the West, and suggests that the country is being "dragged" by the West into the conflict in Ukraine¹³.
- **Fuelling fears about EU integration:** Disinformation campaigns claim that EU integration will drag Moldova into war, affect the country's market for

⁷<https://sis.md/ro/content/comunicat-3>

⁸<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-britain-canada-accuse-russia-plot-influence-moldova-election-2024-06-13/>

⁹<https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/zaharova-a-comparat-utilizarea-limbii-romane-in-moldova-cu-un-genocid-de-tip-nazist-isw-the-purpose-of-rhetoric-would-be-the-justification-of-a-future-Russian-aggression-22373392>

¹⁰<https://hotnews.ro/serghei-lavrov-guvernul-de-la-chisinau-condus-de-cetateni-romni-pur-si-simplu-calca-pe-urmele-regime-in-kiev-wants-to-annex-moldova-to-romniardqu-14177>

¹¹<https://www.npr.org/2024/02/27/1234114383/cameo-is-being-used-for-political-propaganda-by-tricking-the-stars-involved>

¹²https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOEh8GLiey8&ab_channel=Canal5Moldova

¹³ [Moldavskaya Politika](https://t.me/MoldovaPolitics/21100), <https://t.me/MoldovaPolitics/21100>



exporters and will force the promotion of messages supporting sexual minorities in schools and public institutions¹⁴.

- **Misrepresentation of the EU accession impact:** According to Russian/pro-Russian propaganda, EU accession will lead to militarisation or loss of neutrality, and the rights of ethnic minorities will suffer¹⁵.
- **Misinformation about energy:** The narratives of the "Victoria/Pobeda" bloc, headed from Moscow by Ilan Shor, suggest that EU integration will lead to increased energy tariffs and the loss of cheaper energy sources from Russia.
- **Promoting the Eurasian Economic Union:** Flyers distributed in Moldova contain manipulative information about the so-called benefits of the Eurasian Economic Union and the alleged disadvantages of Moldova's accession to the EU¹⁶.
- **Allegations of vote fraud:** There are allegations of possible voter fraud, such as the case where a blogger claimed that the Central Election Commission registered him for postal voting using false data¹⁷.
- **Accusations of censorship and media control:** The "Victoria/Pobeda" bloc accuses the government of censoring opposition voices and closing independent media channels, claiming that the state press only spreads lies about the benefits of European integration¹⁸.
- **Instrumentalisation of migrants:** Fake letters were distributed, allegedly from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, claiming that the government was taking measures to attract migrants from the Middle East and to impose religious practices in the workplace, which the ministry denied¹⁹.
- **Homophobia:** Some politicians in Chişinău use homophobia as a strategy, spreading false information about imposing LGBT rights as a condition for EU integration, even though the EU does not impose such conditions on member or candidate countries²⁰.

Material support for pro-Russian political parties:

Financial and logistical support from Russia for pro-Russian political parties to distort election results and deepen social divisions.

¹⁴Igor Dodon, <https://t.me/igordodon/7819>

¹⁵Romania_RU, https://t.me/romania_ru/45084

¹⁶The Guard Newspaper, <https://t.me/zdgmd/18059>

¹⁷Blogger ValKo, <https://t.me/valkomd/1694>

¹⁸Renaissance Party, https://t.me/partidul_renastere/6072

¹⁹StopFals.md, <https://stopfals.md/>

²⁰TVR Moldova, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CA1MM4hKk4M&ab_channel=TVRMOLDOVA



Cyberattacks:

Cyber implications for interfering in Moldovan elections through attacks targeting critical infrastructures, such as voter databases, media outlets, and election-related communication systems²¹.

Internal political instability:

- **Polarisation:** The political scene in Moldova is strongly divided between pro-European and pro-Russian factions, which increases the risk of social incidents and degenerating protests, disruption of democratic processes (blocking/attempting to block decision-makers in parliament and ministries buildings, etc.) or violent confrontations, including those orchestrated by Russia, as attempted in 2023²².

Transnistrian Region and Gagauzia ATU:

- **Transnistrian region:** Representatives of the self-proclaimed regime in Tiraspol tried to prevent the voting from taking place in good conditions at the polling stations organised on the left bank of the Nistru River.
- **Gagauzia ATU:** The Gagauzia Autonomous Territorial Unit is another area where pro-Russian sentiment is strongly fuelled and cultivated. Given the influence that Ilan Shor has here, there was a significant risk of electoral interference and voter manipulation to distort the results of the elections and referendum.

Economic and social vulnerabilities:

- **Economic instability:** Discontent over gas and energy prices is being used by pro-Russian and anti-democratic politicians, both inside and outside the country, to influence the electorate.
- **Migration and the diaspora vote:** Domestic political actors have challenged the diaspora vote (a traditionally pro-European one) and have created logistical problems in ensuring a fair and secure voting process for the diaspora.

Challenges to democratic processes:

- **Electoral fraud and manipulation:** Moldova has faced problems related to electoral fraud, including vote buying, manipulation of voter lists, and pressure on public sector employees to vote for certain candidates.

²¹ Europa Libera, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/atacuri-cybernetice-republica-moldova-insitutii-ale-state/33020207.html>

²² <https://www.dw.com/ro/plan-rusesc-cu-luare-de-ostatici-%C8%99i-atacarea-institu%C8%99Bilor-de-stat-din-moldova/a-64688773>



Media manipulation and information warfare:

- **Media controlled by oligarchs:** Biased coverage of the electoral competition, in which media sources favour certain political parties or candidates, further complicating the electoral process.
- **Biased coverage by independent media** of the electoral competition, including the promotion of social divisions by presenting the electorate with anti-EU views as inferior to those with pro-Western views. The tendency of these media to exaggerate the influence that Russia has on Moldovan society in general, and on state institution officials in particular, is also a factor that plays in favour of Russia's interests in the Republic of Moldova.

Foreign information manipulation:

Russian media, which is widely consumed in Moldova, plays a significant role in shaping public opinion, especially in rural areas and among Russian-speaking populations. This poses a challenge to independent and balanced reporting and contributes to the spread of disinformation during elections.

II. Key findings regarding FIMI in the 2024 electoral context

As a result of the actions to identify, monitor and counter Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) in the electoral context, the following was found out.

After the implementation of measures to analyse data and information extracted in the process of monitoring the campaigns carried out by anti-democratic / pro-Russian actors, as well as the way in which topics of maximum interest to the population were covered in the legitimate press, it became clear that **steps to destabilise Moldova through FIMI-type actions are circumscribed by a multi-scenario, flexible and continuously evaluated and adapted strategy.**

Regarding the European referendum - seen as a weak point in the policy of the ruling party and the presidency, with the potential to be attacked through manipulations to project negatively on the president and influence the voting option - at the level of July 2024 - two scenarios are most favoured by opponents:

A. The referendum fails: positive vote of the majority of participants, although the percentage of 33.3% of the electorate is not met. Political and non-political actors involved in undermining the European efforts of the Republic of Moldova have intensively promoted campaigns to distort the effects of the rapprochement with the EU (unrealistic requests from Brussels, dictatorial impositions, increasing costs/higher cost of living, exodus of young Moldovans) and to denigrate the ruling party and the president (presented as being disinterested in the wishes of the people and oriented only towards personal gain, enslaved to Western elites). The manipulative messages consequently called for a boycott of the referendum due to its "lack of relevance for Moldovans".



It was noted that this scenario was most favoured by opponents of the Republic of Moldova's rapprochement with the European Union until the beginning of August 2024. However, upon the introduction and promotion of the favourite candidate in the public information space, the appearance in the information space of opinion surveys indicating the intention to participate in the vote and the preference of a substantial part of voters for the referendum provisions (and, most likely, due to the results of their own analyses regarding the impact of the boycott campaign on society), it was noticed that the manipulative actors' efforts had been redirected towards convincing those who would go to the polls to vote against. Thus, another scenario was implemented.

B. The referendum passed with very close results: a small percentage of voters but above the threshold of 33.3%, a positive vote of the majority of them. Analysis of the information environment in Moldova showed that manipulative messages were quickly adapted to aim at increasing the dissatisfaction of the general population with Moldova's inclusion on the European path. A significant percentage increase in messages in Romanian (initially, messages in Russian were preferred) shows that the opponents of the country's democratic consolidation counted on mobilising a negative vote in the referendum at the level of disadvantaged social categories (rural population, with low-income, involved in agriculture) throughout the country.

The analysis of manipulation campaigns during the week before the election date (week of October 14 - 20, 2024) indicated that at the level of malign actors, the scenario in which the referendum would pass was the most credible, which is why they moved on to manipulating the population in order to obtain a high score of negative votes - over 40% against - **in order to challenge its representativeness and validity**. The aggressive campaign against the CEC, the large amount of illicit money invested to determine people to vote NO, and the linking of almost all Moldovan public disinformation topics with the narrative "the EU is dictatorial" - all this indicates that Russia expected the referendum to pass with a very close threshold, but with an even closer result.

Subsequent developments have shown that this estimate regarding the strategy of malign actors was correct.

As expected, the referendum's close results favoured the materialisation of the pro-Russian political actors' intention to contest the outcome and qualify it as illegitimate. The manipulative campaign **discrediting the diaspora option** (by endorsing the idea that only Moldovans from Moldova should have the right to decide the future of the country) and **deepening social divisions** ("they live in prosperity in the West, while we struggle with daily life in the country because of the politicians in power") was effectively conducted through media channels and social media platforms aligned with the pro-Russian agenda. The way in which the society exponents (opinion-makers, activists, independent media) framed the role played by the diaspora in maintaining the European/democratic path of the country contributed to deepening these divisions. Praising the pro-democratic option of the diaspora while the contribution of pro-democracy voters in the country was most often ignored or presented by numerically assigning options per region supported the image of "two Moldovas - one good and the other bad". This unbalanced approach fuelled the perception of the existence of "two Moldovas" - a progressive one, represented by the diaspora, and a traditional one, represented by those who remained in the country.

The effect of this polarisation was amplified by the problematic treatment of the Russian-speaking community in the independent media. The tendency to automatically associate this community with



anti-European or pro-Russian positions added to its marginalisation and to the deepening of existing linguistic and cultural divisions. Through this oversimplification, the complexity of social reality was ignored, which served, albeit unintentionally, the interests of actors who seek to fragment Moldovan society.

Looking ahead, there are clear indications that these manipulation and disinformation tactics will be continued and refined in the run-up to the 2025 parliamentary elections. Given the relative success of the polarisation strategy and the demonstrated effectiveness of narratives that exploit social divisions, it is expected that hostile actors will intensify these efforts. The increased stakes of the parliamentary elections, which will determine the ability of the Republic of Moldova to continue its European path and democratic reforms, will likely motivate an even more aggressive information manipulation campaign. It is crucial that the lessons learned from recent experience are applied in developing effective mechanisms to counter these threats, with a particular focus on strengthening social cohesion and the informational resilience of society.

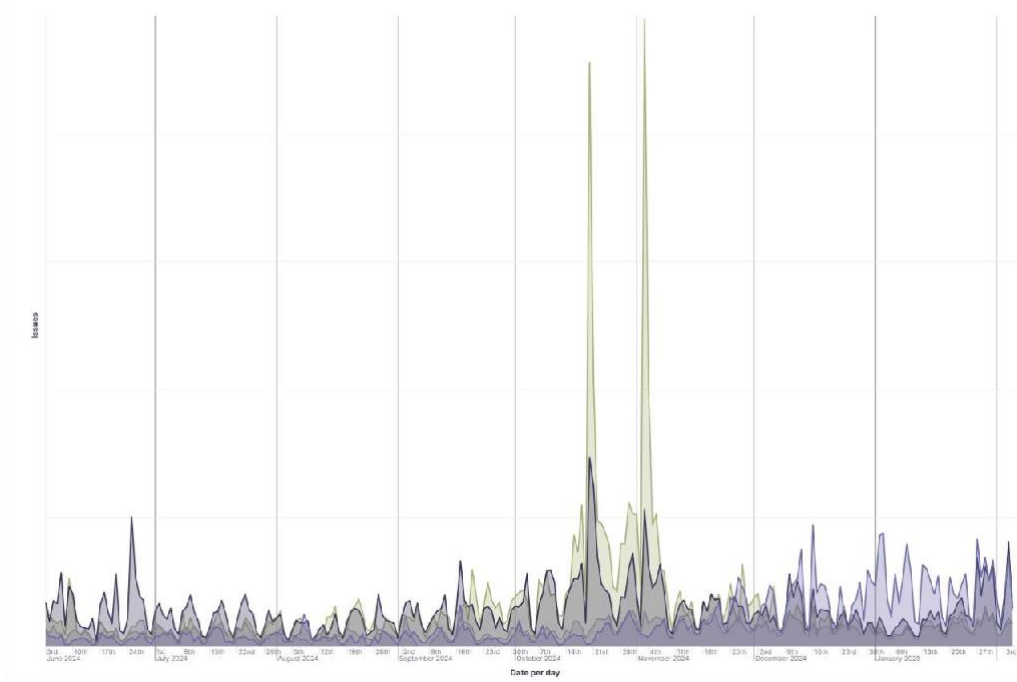
The 2025 parliamentary elections will take place in a different and unpredictable geopolitical and informational context. There is a major risk that platforms - Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube - will no longer actively cooperate with authorities and fact-checking organisations, and measures to moderate false or manipulative content risk being significantly reduced. This scenario will create a regulatory vacuum that could be exploited by hostile actors to amplify manipulative content, destabilise public opinion and influence the electoral outcome, by further polarising society and undermining public trust in the democratic process.

III. The evolution of the way in which malign actors cover topics of public interest

Analysing the evolution of how topics of interest in society have been covered with information online and on social media allows for the assessment of the impact of both malign and positive actors.

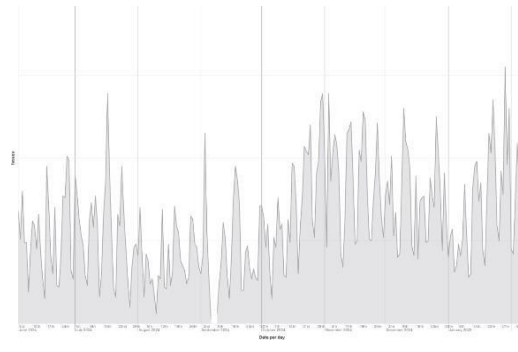
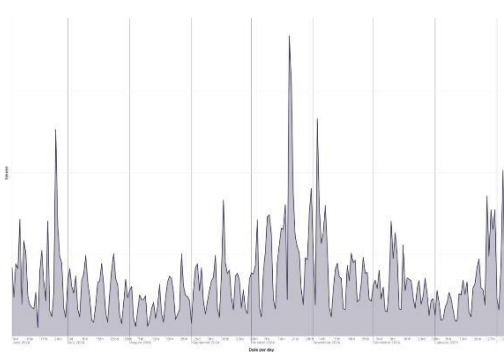
Anti-democratic/pro-Russian actors rarely invent debate topics or choose to communicate about topics that arouse marginal interest in society. Most often (if not always) they exploit the legitimate interest of the population to achieve their own hidden goals, intoxicating it with false assumptions that resonate with some pre-existing beliefs.

As we can see in the chart below, the main topics of interest for the population of the Republic of Moldova are reflected in the information narratives promoted both by malign actors, through actions of disinformation and information manipulation, and by positive and neutral actors, through articles posted and messages distributed on social networks.



- *Elections in Moldova*
- *Bolstering the Defence Sector and National Security in a Regional Context*
- *European Integration*
- *Economic Resilience and Energy Security*

Except for the electoral period, when naturally the communication on the topic of elections and voting exceeded any other topic in intensity, the analysis of the Moldovan information space shows a concern for the country's European path constantly reflected in the public debate (with a peak around the referendum to start the EU accession process), as well as interest in topics related to the country's security (at the bottom of the graph, with the lowest intensity among the four topics, but almost linear).

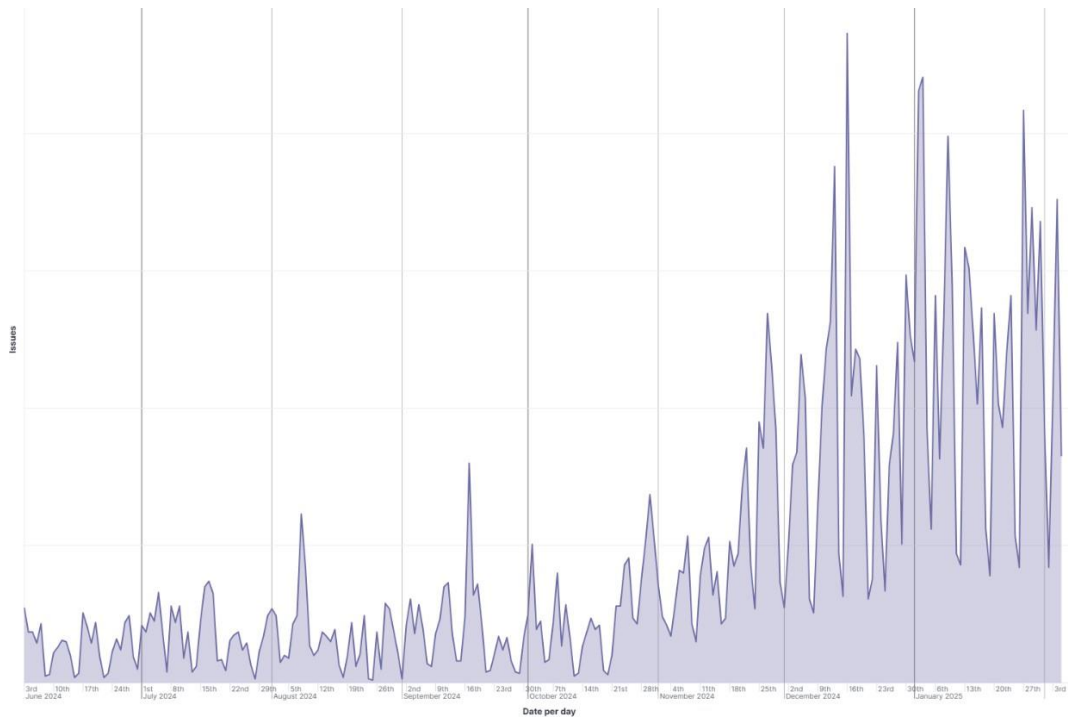


European Integration

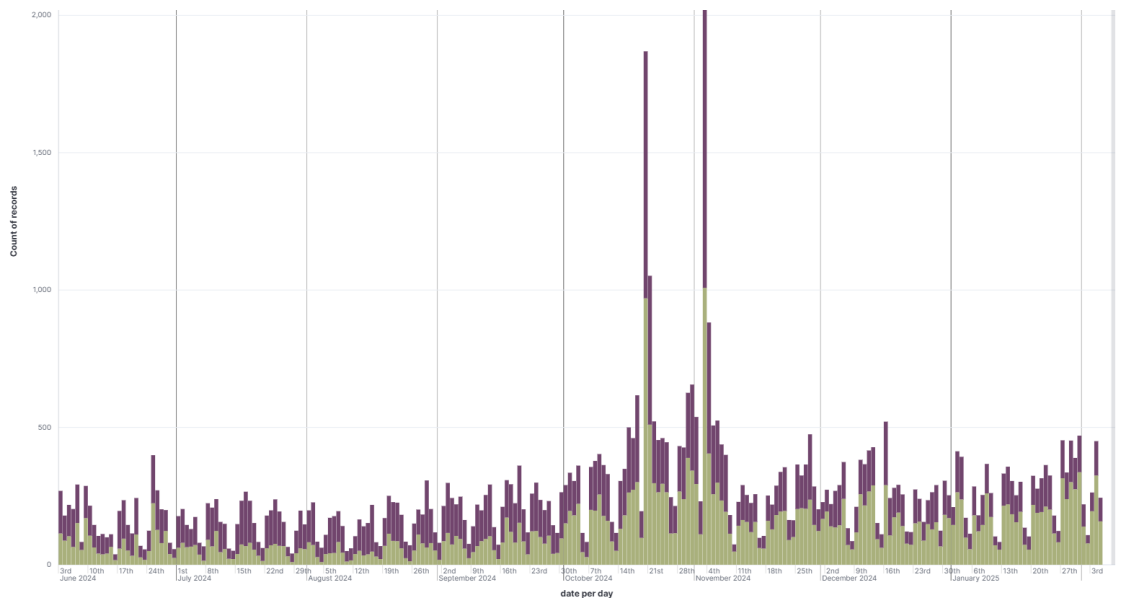
Bolstering the Defence Sector and Security of the Country in Regional Context*

**graphs are not with a scale, they are only meant to indicate the evolution of interest in the topic.*

By far the greatest interest in society is aroused by the country's Economic Resilience and Energy Security, which, as shown in Graph 4, is on a steep rise while nearing the cold season.



When it comes to the distribution of efforts by malign and positive actors to cover topics of interest in society (Graph 5, below), although there is a slight increase in productivity on the part of the former, the analysis of data extracted between June 1, 2024 - February 1, 2025 shows that productive actors (especially independent media outlets or those that have an equidistance policy that respects deontological standards) published and distributed a consistent number of materials.



- Positive actors
- Malign actors

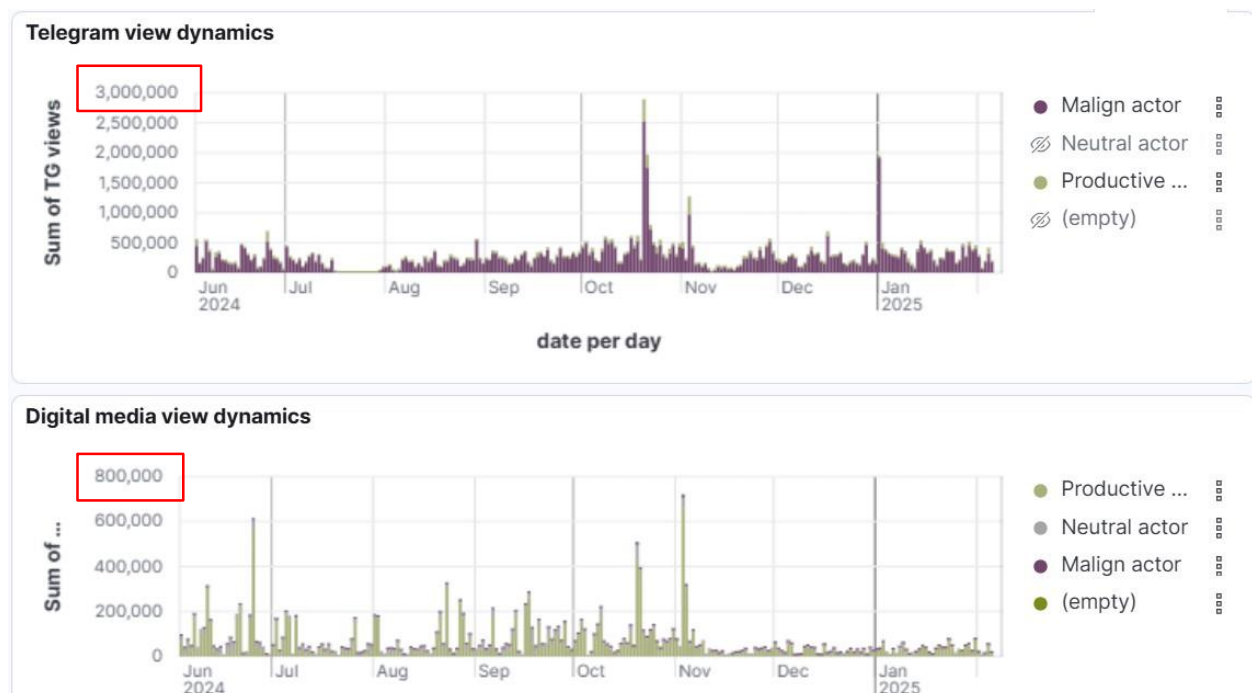
The problem arises when we analyse the impact that these published materials have had on perceptions in society. While productive actors had a stronger impact on online media



(webpages of publications that demonstrate equidistance and independence; other online channels such as independent blogs), malign actors clearly imposed themselves on social media platforms. As we can see from Graphs 6 and 7 below, measured in absolute numbers, the impact of positive actors is almost 4 times lower than that of malign actors. This fact can be explained by indicating both objective and subjective causes.

When it comes to objective causes, it is important to remember that the action of manipulating public opinion is concerted, strategised and very well-planned as regards its implementation. External state actors (politicians, state-run press in the Russian Federation, the Russian Orthodox Church) direct ideologically aligned domestic support points/actors following a complex plan that includes studying audiences and constantly assessing their vulnerabilities. Messages are constructed to overlap and fuel strong emotions already existing at the society level.

As for subjective causes, they are related to the lack of practice of the independent press to adjust their message so that it reaches all types of audience. Following a recent but long history of “demonisation” suffered by this part of the press from successive governments since 1992 till 2019-2020, the independent press still displays an “us vs. you” guerrilla mentality. Many of the published materials are written with the intention of correctly informing the population that is affirmedly pro-democratic, without considering an important social demographic: the population that does not have formed firm convictions on any side of the political axis, being exposed to disinformation messages which it cannot counter in the absence of adequate media education.



Summarised, the views that malign actors recorded for their messages during the review period are clearly superior to those of productive or neutral actors. As we can see in the table below, their dominance on the social platforms Telegram and Tik-Tok, where regulation is almost non-existent, is only partially counterbalanced by the good performance of positive and neutral actors on digital media.



Main reach metrics

| category | Telegram views | digital media views | YouTube views | Instagram likes | TikTok views | Facebook reactions |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| (empty) | - | - | - | - | 421,959 | - |
| Malign actor | 63,402,824 | 295,309 | 1,939,153 | 159,721 | 3,743,889 | 24,333 |
| Neutral actor | 12,448,274 | 2,549,920 | 288,248 | 218,731 | 1,237,529 | 6,991 |
| Productive actor | 7,244,521 | 13,875,064 | 2,337,759 | 516,544 | 2,000,660 | 81,539 |



VULNERABLE SCENARIOS ESTABLISHED FOR DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN 2025

The 2025 parliamentary elections are exposed to a series of informational risks and external influence strategies, meant to undermine the European path of the Republic of Moldova and destabilise the democratic process. The analysis of the adversary's objectives reveals a complex strategy, which combines electoral manipulation with sophisticated operations to influence public opinion.

The main purpose is the weakening of the country's European path and the consolidation of a government favourable to Russia.

To achieve this goal, pro-Russian actors will use a wide range of hybrid warfare tactics involving:

- economic constraints including in the energy sector, trade and asset management;
- military presence in the Transnistrian region;
- support for separatists in the Transnistrian region and leaders in the Gagauzia Autonomous Territorial Unit;
- exploitation of corruption networks linking business, politics and organised crime;
- targeted cyberattacks;
- direct interference in elections through voter bribery and intimidation.

In the current landscape, elections are no longer just about voting, but about shaping public perception before the polls, so that voters' choices are already guided by an artificially constructed reality. Russia's tactic consists of both attracting support for candidates favourable to Russian interests and building a mental frame in which the electorate perceives the pro-European path as dangerous, unsustainable, or imposed from outside. This approach involves:

- **A mix of disinformation and economic/social realities** – use of objective problems (high prices, economic crises) to create the perception that they are the exclusive result of pro-European orientation.
- **Undermining the credibility of democratic institutions** - presenting the electoral process as being fraudulent, externally controlled, or incapable of reflecting the real will of citizens.
- **Exploiting social divisions** – fuelling tensions on topics such as traditional values, national sovereignty or ethnicity to polarise society and weaken national cohesion.
- **Building an inevitability framework** – promoting the idea that a rapprochement with Russia is the logical and inevitable solution, and any other direction will lead to economic collapse and social instability.

In this context, several vulnerable scenarios are emerging that can be exploited by pro-Russian actors to shape public perception and determine a "guided" choice at the polls.



Scenario 1: Fear of poverty and energy dependence.

Citizens are worried about rising prices, bills that are becoming difficult to pay, and the idea that they will not be able to get through the winter without external support and that the prices of consumer goods will continue to rise. This fear is systematically fuelled by propaganda, which suggests that joining the EU will lead to even more economic sacrifices, while Russia is presented as a benevolent partner, the “only real solution” for stability (price stabilisation and reduction of the cost of living).

- **The objective of influencing public opinion:** Erosion of trust in pro-European governance by convincing the electorate that the West “imposed” an unsustainable energy transition on Moldova.
- **The promoted narrative:** “The West has impoverished you and made you dependent on expensive energy, while Russia is a reliable partner that can offer you stability and affordable prices.”

Scenario 2: Confrontation of traditional/liberal values.

Religion and traditional values are deeply rooted in the national culture. Russia will use this aspect to generate an artificial conflict between “traditional/conservative Moldova” and “European Moldova”, depicting the EU as a threat to faith and family, portraying it as a threat to cultural identity.

- **The opponent's objective:** Deepening societal divisions (ruptures between conservative and progressive segments of society) so that the debate is no longer about economy or security, but about “the survival of the Moldovan identity”.
- **The promoted narrative:** “The West wants to destroy the traditional family and impose libertine ideology. Moldova must defend its faith and values.”

Scenario 3: Fuelling separatist tendencies (Gagauzia ATU).

The Gagauzia ATU and the Transnistrian region are areas where Russian influence is strong. Any message that amplifies their status as “victims of Chisinau” is a step towards division and instability.

- **The opponent's objective:** Challenging the legitimacy of central authorities and weakening them by encouraging regions to demand more autonomy or even separation.
- **The promoted narrative:** “Chisinau wants to destroy Gagauz autonomy. The only real protection comes from Moscow.”



Scenario 4: Demonising the EU and turning it into the "enemy of Moldova".

European integration is a complex process with long-term benefits. Russian propaganda will try to turn this journey into a threat, insisting on the initial costs and the "price" of accession.

- **The opponent's objective:** Increasing scepticism and hostile attitude towards the EU and making the idea of integration as unattractive as possible.
- **The promoted narrative:** "The EU wants to control us, puts us in debt to control our decisions, and wishes to take our lands and resources. Moldovans will become tenants in their own country."

Scenario 5: Hostility towards the diaspora.

The diaspora is one of the most powerful segments of the pro-European electorate. To limit its influence, opponents will try to discredit it and reduce its access to the electoral process.

- **The opponent's objective:** Fuelling a division between Moldovans from the country and those from the diaspora, to reduce their electoral participation.
- **The promoted narrative:** "The diaspora has no right to decide for those living in Moldova."

Scenario 6: Manipulating the topic of peace negotiations in Ukraine.

If the war in Ukraine reaches a negotiation phase, pro-Russian/anti-Western actors will use this moment to promote the idea that Moldova should adopt a "pragmatic" position and abandon support for Ukraine. Rallying public opinion in favour of the idea that peace must be achieved by any means, including the cession of territories by Ukraine, will also be an important part of the Kremlin's manipulation campaign.

- **The opponent's objective:** Under the pretext of "neutrality" and "peace", the justification for rapprochement with Russia as the only solution for Moldova's security.
- **The promoted narrative:** "Moldova must distance itself from Ukraine and ensure its peace through an agreement with Russia."

The expectation is that in 2025, Russia will apply combined tactics and methods of manipulating public opinion to undermine the European path of the Republic of Moldova and favour pro-Russian candidates. The co-optation of the Orthodox Church will intensify to spread anti-EU narratives, promoting the idea that European integration threatens traditional values and national identity. Independent media and civil society will constitute direct targets of information attacks to be discredited through disinformation campaigns and coordinated attacks meant to erode public trust in them. Russia will continue to delegitimise the diaspora vote, promoting the idea that Moldovans residing abroad should not decide the future of the country and seeking to reduce their access to the ballot box. In parallel, pro-Russian actors will promote a climate of fear, amplifying narratives about a possible military conflict, an imminent economic crisis and the loss of Moldova's sovereignty under Western influence. The electoral authority will be



systematically attacked, through accusations of fraud and attempts to compromise the electoral process, while electoral corruption will be used to mobilise pro-Russian voters, including through organised transportation and vote buying. Micro-targeting and exploitation of social vulnerabilities will be used, with messages adapted to different categories of voters.

Moreover, through these tactics, Russia will influence the elections and will try to redefine collective perceptions before the elections, reinforcing a climate of uncertainty, mistrust and social division. The stakes of this process are both the electoral competition and reshaping of political and social reality, so that Moldova's European path is perceived as unsustainable, risky and imposed from outside, and rapprochement with Russia is accepted as the only viable alternative. In this context, the battle is not just for votes, but for the perceptions and beliefs of citizens, for their ability to define their future freely, without constraints imposed by manipulation and disinformation.



STRATCOM MEASURES TO RESPOND TO THE 2025 CHALLENGES

The FIMI assessment shows that information threats will dominate the security agenda in the coming period, with the stakes being to thwart Moldova's development and modernisation process through strengthening cooperative relations with democratic partners.

The following measures can help reduce and eliminate the negative effects of information manipulation and foreign interference.

I. Consolidation through a broad coalition of all democratic forces in Moldova: political parties and movements, mass media and civil society with democratic views, progressive academia, representatives of the clergy concerned about the well-being of the people. Ensuring, in this format, the maintenance of the country's democratic trajectory.

II. Transparent communication and as directly as possible, in the online space, on social networks and in direct meetings, by explaining the democratic processes and reforms, the accession agenda, the benefits that the country's entry on the accession path will bring to all citizens. Clarifying all concerns, specifying information that still does not reach all categories of citizens is essential. Raising awareness among the population about the malign foreign interests of keeping the country on the brink of poverty, in order to be able to control it.

III. Legislative consolidation in the most inclusive and transparent way possible, both in electoral mechanisms and in those concerning the organisation and financing of political parties. Ensuring a healthy communication environment, in which every citizen has direct access to useful and pertinent information, in their native language.

IV. Continuation of research activity to identify the actors behind FIMI operations, their networks and activity and engagement parameters, identifying emerging narratives and analysing the use of AI and inauthentic behavior, with a focus on fake social media profiles and deep fake videos purporting to feature political leaders.

V. Strategic communication which will focus on primary and secondary audiences²³, raising awareness among the Moldovan public and international partners about the risks and threats, highlighting national activities to counter them. Communicating research results, with a focus on pro-Russian narratives, actors behind FIMI activity and pro-Russian approaches in social media used to manipulate Moldovan public opinion.

²³Primary audience includes Moldovan voters in general, especially young, undecided and rural population, as well as Moldovan diaspora and hesitant voters. Secondary audiences: including general regional population (Eastern European countries, especially Ukraine and Romania) and international population from the US, EU and NATO member states (through international news).

CENTRUL PENTRU
COMUNICARE STRATEGICĂ
ȘI COMBATERE A DEZINFORMĂRII

