



# **INFORMATIONAL THREATS FACING THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND THEIR IMPACT ON DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES**

**2025 Overview**

**Outlook for 2026**

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## Executive Summary

The 2025 annual report of the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation (CSCCD) highlights a qualitative transformation of the information environment in the Republic of Moldova and, in parallel, the institutional maturation of the Centre as an institution for analysis and strategic coordination.

The year 2025 marks the transition to **an integrated, persistent, and adaptive system of foreign information interference**. Hostile actors operated through a coherent architecture in which messages were generated, adapted, concealed, and amplified through a multilayered ecosystem, ranging from official vectors and affiliated media to proxy networks, digital infrastructures, and mechanisms of external validation. This coordination delivered not only volume and speed, but above all strategic consistency and a cumulative effect on public perceptions.

Against this backdrop, CSCCD evolved from a predominantly analytical function toward a consolidated role as a hub of operational knowledge and a provider of STRATCOM options for decision-makers and partners. **The Center systematically mapped influence ecosystems, identified recurring patterns of action (TTPs), and integrated analysis across six main influence vectors, thereby providing a structured and replicable understanding of the FIMI phenomenon.** This approach made it possible to move from describing incidents to anticipating dynamics and shaping tailored responses.

A defining feature of 2025 was the **clarification of the strategic objectives of hostile information operations**. These operations focused on eroding economic resilience, fragmenting social cohesion, delegitimizing democratic institutions, undermining the country's European path, and redefining sovereignty in ways incompatible with European integration. In the electoral context, these directions were operationalized through coherent scenarios, from "Economic and Energy Crisis" to "Hostility toward the EU," "Ukraine," and "Regions and Minorities," all integrated into a sustained strategy of division, delegitimization, and discrediting.

The report also highlights **the growing sophistication of the influence infrastructure**. Extensive networks of websites, inauthentic accounts, mobile applications, and digital platforms were used for the distribution and "information laundering" of narratives, including through micro-segmentation techniques and algorithmic amplification. A relevant element was the systematic use of external validation, whereby narratives were placed in seemingly Western sources and later reintroduced into the domestic information space as "independent confirmations."

Operationally, one of the report's main findings is the **continuous nature of information pressure**. FIMI did not aim exclusively at influencing the vote, but at progressively degrading trust in institutions, democratic processes, and external partnerships. The intended effect was long-lasting: **the normalization of distrust and the laying of the groundwork for contesting future democratic decisions.**

The impact analysis shows that **the information attack was cumulative and cross-sectoral**, simultaneously targeting European integration, social cohesion, economic

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resilience, and perceptions of security. The same themes were constantly recycled and adapted **in order to turn the country’s strategic direction into a source of political conflict and to weaken society’s capacity to sustain reform.**

For 2026, **the report anticipates a shift in emphasis: from visible campaigns to sustained pressure on the state-citizen relationship.** The main stake will be the erosion of public trust in the state’s capacity to deliver, explain, and protect, alongside the reinforcement of the perception that European integration is costly or impossible. Messages are expected to be repackaged in more moderate frames—pragmatism, balance, peace—aimed at reaching broader segments of the population.

In this context, the report underlines the **need for an integrated STRATCOM approach** based on institutional coordination, communication focused on meaning and concrete results, the use of credible local actors, and the rapid connection of analysis to operational decision-making.

Key elements that define 2025 and the beginning of 2026 are

- the shift from fragmented propaganda to an integrated system of influence;
- continuous information pressure rather than isolated campaigns;
- the move from influencing the vote to eroding systemic trust;
- the professionalization and scaling of amplification infrastructure; and
- CSCCD’s role as a producer of operational knowledge, not merely descriptive analysis.

Overall, the report demonstrates that the Republic of Moldova is not confronted with isolated information incidents, but with a coherent adversarial ecosystem, and that an effective response depends on the ability of the state and its partners to act with the same degree of integration and anticipation.

## General Context

The year 2025 **confirmed an integrated, coordinated, and adaptive model of foreign information interference in the Republic of Moldova**. The activity of hostile actors sought to shape a persistently volatile information environment characterized by constant pressure, narrative synchronization, and the systematic exploitation of social, economic, and security vulnerabilities. Elections served to amplify pre-existing trends rather than act as their starting point..

**The FIMI ecosystem** operated through an integrated mechanism in which messages were generated at the official or para-official level, picked up by affiliated media outlets and networks, localized through proxy networks, and amplified through digital mechanisms and online communities. This architecture enabled narrative coherence, rapid adaptation, and scalability, including through information laundering techniques and audience micro-segmentation based on linguistic, regional, and diaspora criteria.

From a security-environment perspective, **2025 was marked by the overlap between information pressure and regional developments generated by the war in Ukraine, recurring energy crises, and uncertainty surrounding the European security architecture**. These contexts were systematically exploited to activate narratives of insecurity, fear of war, and distrust in the state's capacity to manage crises.

**The most relevant actors** included, on the one hand, the official and para-official core of the Russian Federation and, on the other, an extended ecosystem of affiliated media infrastructures, local proxy networks—political, socio-cultural, media-related, and influence-based—as well as digital mechanisms for micro-targeting and amplification. These actors operated in coordination, including through major social platforms and opaque networks, especially Telegram, but also via external infrastructures such as STORM-1516 or “Pravda”-type networks used for external validation and content re-importation into the information space.

**The main developments** observed in 2025 indicate greater coherence among vectors of action, more sophisticated amplification techniques, and a clear focus on cumulative effects. The shift from reactive campaigns to continuous information pressure is evident, as is the use of real crises as narrative entry points and the consolidation of stable influence infrastructures capable of rapidly reactivating recurring themes.

Analysis of the online communication environment in the information spaces of the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation shows that **FIMI objectives became clearer, more stable, and more closely aligned across different actors in the ecosystem**. In 2025, these objectives were integrated into a coherent strategic logic aimed at progressively eroding the state's capacity to function effectively and legitimately in relation to its own citizens.

**The first major objective** of FIMI was to compromise the state's economic resilience and to promote the idea that the pro-European orientation directly aggravates the country's financial condition. Economic integration with the European Union, external loans, Western financial support, energy policies, and the management of strategic assets were systematically reframed to induce the perception of an economy in decline, dependent on

external support, and unable to generate viable domestic solutions. At the same time, the Russian Federation was projected as the only partner capable of offering cheap resources, export markets, and social stability. **This line of attack aimed above all to turn economic fear into a geopolitical argument against the state's European direction.**

**The second major objective** was to fragment society by exploiting identity-based, linguistic, and religious differences. Themes related to language, Soviet memory, history textbooks, the defense of Orthodoxy, traditional values, the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, the Transnistrian region, and the diaspora were used to intensify oppositions between tradition and modernization, centre and periphery, and competing forms of identity affiliation. In this logic, **malign actors sought to weaken internal cohesion and to re-anchor segments of the population within a symbolic and cultural framework favorable to the Russian Federation.**

**The third major objective** was to delegitimize the pro-democratic political class and to discredit rapprochement with the European Union. The government was portrayed as corrupt, repressive, incompetent, and controlled from abroad, while key state institutions were described as instruments for preserving power and eliminating the opposition. At the same time, European integration was described as a process of political, economic, and cultural control, benefiting only a narrow elite and its external partners. **This line of attack simultaneously sought to erode trust in the political leadership and discredit the European project as a strategic option.**

**The fourth major objective** was to undermine the pro-European foreign policy and efforts to strengthen national defense. Closer ties with the European Union, cooperation with NATO, military modernization, and security partnerships were portrayed as steps toward militarization, abandonment of neutrality, and the involvement of the Republic of Moldova in a regional conflict. **The “Ukraine” scenario was used to create the impression of an inevitable trajectory toward war, associating the pro-Western vector with insecurity and the loss of peace.**

**The fifth major objective** directly targeted the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova by redefining it in terms incompatible with European integration. Narratives about a “state captured by Brussels,” economic colonization, external control over institutions, and the marginalization of regions were used to construct the perception that the country is losing decision-making autonomy. Within this framing, sovereignty was no longer presented as the freedom to choose a strategic direction, but as the obligation to reject the West and return to a privileged relationship with the Russian Federation. **This objective functioned as a point of convergence for all the other lines of attack.**

The cumulative analysis shows that these objectives were supported by **two cross-cutting directions**. The first was the degradation of trust in the state's democratic architecture. The aim went beyond influencing voting choices and sought to weaken confidence in electoral institutions, rule-of-law institutions, independent media, and international cooperation, while also preparing the ground for contesting subsequent democratic decisions. The second was the normalization of the Russian Federation as a political, economic, and security alternative, consistently presented as the implicit solution once the pro-European direction had been publicly discredited.

In 2025, FIMI in the Republic of Moldova operated as an integrated system rather than a series of isolated incidents. Its main effect was not merely to influence specific electoral processes, but to gradually erode trust, cohesion, and the state’s ability to sustain its strategic direction in the medium and long term..

## Actors, Ecosystems, and Influence Infrastructures

The Center **mapped the infrastructure**, channels, and methods through which malign actors operated in the information space of the Republic of Moldova during 2025. The analyzed data show that **the FIMI ecosystem** does not function through isolated actions, but through an integrated mechanism in which the message flows from the official communication core to affiliated media infrastructures, is then localized and adapted through proxy networks, and is ultimately amplified, micro-segmented, and recycled via social networks.

The six **threat vectors** are defined according to the nature of the channel that generates manipulative messages, and during the period under review they operated mainly along the following lines:

- i. **The official communication vector** set the narrative frame and legitimized the main themes, for example through statements by Russian officials concerning “the militarization of the country” or “external control over the Republic of Moldova.”
- ii. **The state-affiliated media vector** transformed these themes into content carrying an air of legitimacy, such as broadcasts and articles amplifying the energy crisis or anti-EU narratives.
- iii. **Proxy networks** localized and disguised messages through seemingly independent sources, including pseudo-experts, articles in marginal Western outlets, and cultural or educational events with ideological subtext.
- iv. **Amplification mechanisms** ensured distribution and emotional impact through digital platforms, for example Telegram campaigns, hashtags such as #EnergyCollapse, and viral content about “people freezing.”
- v. **The external validation vector**—information laundering—indirectly validated narratives through reimportation from external sources, such as obscure Western publications or Pravda/STORM-1516-type ecosystems.
- vi. Finally, **the infrastructure vector** ensured direct delivery and the circumvention of controls through dedicated applications and platforms distributed directly to users’ devices.

Official communications by the Russian state provide the general narrative frame and validate the main lines of attack. State-funded media operations multiply and normalize these messages, presenting them as apparently legitimate news, commentary, or investigations. Proxy networks translate, localize, and insert content into the Moldovan

information space through intermediaries, seemingly autonomous structures, and local vectors. Social networks ensure rapid dissemination, emotional amplification, adaptation to specific audiences, and the continuous recycling of content. One relevant pattern of 2025 is the difference in persistence between the components: official state communications and state-funded media operations appear more selectively, especially when a strategic frame needs to be established or a line of attack legitimated. In contrast, proxy networks and the strategic exploitation of social media appear throughout most of the year, indicating that intermediary and amplification infrastructures have become the most stable and flexible components of the ecosystem.

### The official communication vector

Official **state communications represent the strategic guidance core of the FIMI** ecosystem. Unlike other components, they are not used daily to saturate the information space. Rather, they intervene selectively at key moments in order to set the interpretive framing of sensitive topics and confer political legitimacy on narratives that are subsequently amplified through affiliated media, proxy networks, and social media.

In the cases documented for 2025, this component appears especially in January, February, April, June, August, and November, which shows that it is used primarily at stages when the **general narrative framework must be established**, a strategic theme reactivated, a signal of support sent to specific actors or regions, or a new wave of information attacks legitimized.

**At the beginning** of the year, official communication was used mainly to manage political and symbolic responsibility in relation to the energy crisis in the Transnistrian region. In January, the Embassy of the Russian Federation issued statements shifting responsibility for gas-supply problems onto the Moldovan authorities, thus attempting to protect Moscow's image and avoid associating the Russian Federation with the deterioration of the energy situation. In parallel, the embassy combined its diplomatic role with cultural, religious, and political activities in cooperation with pro-Russian diaspora leaders, church representatives, and pro-Russian local leaders, indicating that the official message was connected from the outset to local support infrastructures.

**In February**, this component acquired a clearer function of legitimizing Russian influence in the Republic of Moldova. Through the ambassador's statements, the Russian Federation attempted to present its own involvement as natural and justified, using the example of the Russian multiethnic state to attract minorities and audiences nostalgic for ties with Russia. During the same period, official communication also promoted the theme of the "Great Patriotic War" as a symbol of historical and cultural unity, showing that the official communication vector operates not only on geopolitical or diplomatic subjects, but also on the historical and identity issues.

**In April**, official communications were used for a direct attack on the European path. Statements by Russian political leaders were exploited to denigrate European integration and attack the authorities in Chişinău. At this stage, the official component functioned as the source authorizing the anti-EU narrative: the message was no longer limited to cultural protection or the transfer of responsibility, but became one of open confrontation with the strategic orientation of the Republic of Moldova.

**In June**, official communication shifted more clearly towards identity and regional issues. Russian officials explicitly promoted the idea that Russian speakers, including those in the Republic of Moldova, are part of the “Russian world” and need the protection of the Russian Federation as members of a broader cultural community. At the same time, the ambassador’s visits to Gagauzia, in connection with his alleged public support for the governor in the context of judicial proceedings, conveyed the message that Moscow supports local administrations and actors who oppose the central authorities. Thus, the official component not only formulates narratives, but also politically marks territories and target groups, reassuring them that they are part of an external protection field provided by the Russian Federation.

**In August**, the official message adopted a more aggressive and directly politicized form. Statements by Sergei Shoigu regarding the “division” and “Romanianization” of the Republic of Moldova, alongside economic collapse and external control, demonstrate that the Russian official actor was leveraged to consolidate multiple lines of attack within a single frame: economic degradation, loss of sovereignty, identity threat, and Western control. This highlights an important function of official communication: to condense and validate in a single formula narrative already circulating in other segments of the ecosystem so that they gain strategic weight.

**In November**, through Ambassador Ozerov’s visits to Taraclia, the “Lomonosov” Library, and his contacts with pro-Russian political actors, official communication sought to expand Russian cultural and political influence in the region. At the same time, the theme of closing the Russian Centre was kept active through petition campaigns and repeated debates, showing that the official actor also contributes to the long-term maintenance of symbolic subjects capable of periodically reactivating narratives about Russophobia, the suppression of Russian culture, and the hostility of the Moldovan authorities.

Overall, the documented cases show that this component performs four **main functions in the influence chain**:

- **a narrative-setting function:** official communications define the basic theme later taken up by the rest of the ecosystem, such as Chişinău’s guilt for the energy crisis, the need to protect Russian speakers, the thesis of external control, or “Romanianization”;
- **a legitimization function:** the message acquires the appearance of an institutional position, which increases its penetration and makes it easier for affiliated media, proxy networks, and local pro-Russian actors to adopt it;
- **a political signaling and indirect mobilization function:** ambassadors’ visits, statements by senior officials, and memorial or cultural themes signal to local and regional actors which topics should be promoted and which groups should be activated;
- **a symbolic protection role:** through this component, the Russian Federation positions itself as defender of the Russian language, traditions, Soviet memory, autonomous regions, and pro-Russian actors under legal or political pressure.

**The techniques, tactics, and procedures** associated with this component remain relatively constant:

- shifting responsibility to Chişinău for crises caused or aggravated by Moscow;
- victimizing Russian-speaking communities and pro-Russian actors;
- instrumentalizing historical memory and Soviet symbols, while linking cultural identity to geopolitical loyalty to the Russian Federation;
- using public diplomacy as a mechanism of pressure and signaling, synchronized with already sensitive domestic subjects in the Republic of Moldova, through the exploitation of domestic vulnerabilities.

Accordingly, official state communications do not primarily serve to generate volume; rather, they serve a **strategic framing** function. They provide the “authorized version” of reality, which the FIMI ecosystem then takes up, translates, adapts, and amplifies. For this very reason, this component should be understood as the starting point of influence, not merely one of its manifestations.

### The state-affiliated media vector

State-funded media operations are the link through which the political messages of the Russian Federation are transformed into **media content with an appearance of legitimacy, broad circulation, and propagandistic utility**.

In the cases documented for 2025, this component appears not only in the narrow form of the “official Russian press,” but also through a wider set of **sources and vectors** institutionally, financially, or operationally connected to **the Russian information infrastructure**:

- official press and the manipulation networks associated with it;
- pro-Russian media figures with large audiences;
- state-supported forums and information platforms;
- auxiliary channels with demonstrated links to sanctioned Russian media giants.

**At the beginning of the year**, this component was used mainly to reactivate Soviet memory and introduce, in media format, the idea that rapprochement between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation is “natural,” historical, and moral. Case records indicate the promotion of messages about the 80th anniversary of the “Great Patriotic War,” while thematic reports show that the topic was integrated into a coordinated narrative campaign in which Soviet symbols, “Victory Day,” and “Russian-Moldovan brotherhood” were used as narrative ammunition against the authorities in Chişinău and against the European trajectory. At this stage, media sources affiliated with the Russian state turned historical memory into recurrent and emotional political content.

**In April and May**, this component became more visible through the coverage and amplification of events in Moscow. The participation of pro-Russian leaders from the Republic of Moldova in events organized in the Russian Federation, including around May 9, was significant not only politically but also in media terms: the Russian information space used these appearances to validate them as legitimate actors, integrate them into a shared symbolic framework, and demonstrate that there are “patriotic” forces in the Republic of Moldova recognized and supported by the Russian Federation. In these cases, media

affiliated with the Russian state did not merely report on the event, but actively conferred status and legitimacy upon local pro-Russian actors.

A clearer concrete media source is the pro-Russian journalist Diana Panchenko, who has a large audience on YouTube. Her involvement does not consist simply of expressing an opinion, but of producing joint broadcasts with malign sources from the Republic of Moldova, thereby increasing their visibility in the Russian and post-Soviet space. Operationally, Panchenko functions as a media transfer vector: she takes local actors with limited relevance and integrates them into a much larger audience circuit, providing them with visibility, validation, and the potential to be perceived as relevant and legitimate by Russian-speaking audiences in Moldova and across the broader post-Soviet space.

Another relevant example is the BloKnot network, primarily active in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation, operating through the site [bloknot-moldova\[.\]ru](http://bloknot-moldova[.]ru) and associated Telegram and Instagram accounts. The network is used to distribute and localize pro-Russian content in the Moldovan information space, providing an additional channel through which Kremlin-aligned messages can be packaged in media format and circulated beyond official sources. Available data indicate that BloKnot belongs to a Russian media infrastructure linked to OOO “BloKnot Online,” with Oleg Paholkov listed in the Roskomnadzor registry as director. The reviewed materials show that he is not merely a business actor, but a figure with a political and media profile integrated into the Russian system: he has led a party faction in the Volgograd Regional Duma, was elected to the State Duma, and is associated with the editing of the federal party newspaper ‘Spravedlivaya Rossiya.’ He is also listed as founder of several companies, including entities directly linked to the development of the BloKnot network. These elements suggest that the network should be regarded not as a simple regional portal, but as part of a Russian media infrastructure connecting business interests, media influence, and political proximity. Its relevance to the FIMI ecosystem lies in the fact that it functions as a media source affiliated with the Russian information space, used to amplify pro-Kremlin narratives and extend them into Moldova through dedicated sites and social media accounts.

**In June**, the state-funded media component became visible through the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, organized through the Roscongress infrastructure. The participation of pro-Russian opinion leaders from the Republic of Moldova in this forum is treated as an instrument of influence rather than simple attendance at an event. Here the source is not merely a media outlet or publication, but a state-sponsored media-political platform that produces content, images, statements, and symbolic association. Its role consists in presenting the Russian Federation as a vital economic partner in contrast to the EU and in creating the impression that there is a legitimate political constituency in the Republic of Moldova willing to rebuild relations with Moscow on energy, logistical, and economic matters. During the same period, reports also note the use of the Russian Orthodox Church and its messengers to extend media content into the religious and values dimension.

**Also in June and July**, the Russian Embassy in the Republic of Moldova emerged more clearly as a source of media-worthy content. Formally it is a diplomatic actor, but in practice the embassy’s messages and visits are converted into media content and redistributed as evidence of the “real support” provided by Russia. Reports show that the embassy promotes

the concept of the Eurasian system, its advantages for the Republic of Moldova, and “friendly and advantageous” relations with Russia grounded in shared history and memory. In this sense, the embassy functions not only as an official source but also as a generator of material for the state-affiliated media operation.

**In the second half of the year**, state-funded media operations became more aggressive and more electorally oriented. Narratives about the elections, the governor’s criminal case, institutional control, and the militarization of the Republic of Moldova were supported by reports, statements, and communiqués from Russian state institutions, including the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and structures in Belarus, and then converted into widely circulating media content. In this phase, these sources not only amplify but also set the stage for electoral contestation by promoting the idea that the opposition is being eliminated, the diaspora in the Russian Federation faces discrimination in electoral matters, and the EU exerts control over electoral and judicial decisions in the Republic of Moldova.

**In autumn**, the state-funded media component was also used for personalized attacks on the leadership of the Republic of Moldova. The register explicitly notes that the official Russian press and the manipulation networks connected to it systematically denigrated the external actions of the President of the Republic of Moldova, including visits to Brussels, Rome, and London. These sources went beyond political criticism and employ techniques of scandalization and moral-compromise aimed at turning foreign visits and Western support into reputational vulnerabilities. In this context, Russian state-affiliated media serve as instruments for personal discrediting and for diminishing the external political capital of the leadership in Chişinău.

Overall, the **sources** falling within this component are not homogeneous, but they can be grouped **operationally as follows**:

- **official Russian media and manipulation networks** that adopt and normalize the strategic message;
- **pro-Russian media figures with large audiences**, such as Diana Panchenko, used for the transfer of visibility and legitimacy;
- **state-sponsored media-political platforms and events**, such as Roscongress and the St. Petersburg Economic Forum, used to legitimize rapprochement with Russia;
- **mobile and digital media infrastructures** connected to Russia Today and used for direct penetration into households;
- **external channels affiliated with Russian ideas and used for laundering**, such as publications in Italy or Greece that serve to reimport anti-EU and anti-government narratives.

### Proxy networks

The development of proxy networks represents the component through which **messages favorable to the Russian Federation are removed from the register of direct propaganda and reintroduced into the information space of the Republic of Moldova** through sources, organizations, persons, and platforms that appear autonomous, local, or international. While the official message provides the strategic direction, and Russian state-funded media provide volume and media legitimacy, proxy networks conceal the origin of the message, localize it, and make it easier for domestic audiences to accept.

In 2025, this **component** was one of **the most constant across the entire FIMI ecosystem**. Unlike official communications, which appear at more clearly defined moments, the proxy infrastructure functions almost continuously. It is used to introduce new themes, validate existing narratives, create the appearance of international support and of social, civic, religious, or academic legitimacy that is later amplified through media and social networks.

**At the beginning of the year**, the proxy component operated especially through international publications, offline activities, and humanitarian/fundraising actions. In January, articles from magazines and external sources were exploited to reinforce anti-EU and anti-government narratives, including the theme of Moldova’s neutrality, which was later taken up in the domestic pro-Russian space. In parallel, humanitarian-aid collections were organized for the Transnistrian region and Gagauzia in order to create the image that “people are helping while the government is absent.” During the same period, the idea of international support for a so-called “humanitarian” gas solution for the Transnistrian region was orchestrated, while protests organized in the region were leveraged to convey the message that what Tiraspol is experiencing will soon be experienced by the entire Republic of Moldova. In this phase, the proxy network was used to make the influence effort appear more human and relatable, victimize regions, and introduce pro-Russian positions through sources that do not formally appear Russian.

**In February**, a subtler tactic appeared along cultural and identity lines. The event “All-Russian Mărțișor-2025,” promoted in the Russian Federation, is a clear example of “cultural appropriation”: the Mărțișor tradition, organically associated with the Moldovan and Romanian space, is extracted and reframed within a Russian setting to suggest that the Russian Federation shares and protects the same traditions as the Republic of Moldova. In this case, the proxy source is not an explicitly political actor, but a cultural platform used to create a sense of symbolic proximity and reduce the perceived identity gap between Moldovan audiences and the Russian space.

**In March**, proxy networks became significantly more visible and active in the physical realm. Educational events for youth, visits to veterans, exhibitions in schools in Gagauzia and in Russian-language schools, concerts, flower-laying ceremonies, and other manifestations dedicated to the “Great Patriotic War” were organized. In this logic, schools, veterans, local groups, and communities in the territory were used as vectors legitimizing a historical and identity agenda favorable to the Russian Federation. More explicit forms of political and media proxy activity also emerged in March. Interviews for RT in English were used to lend additional legitimacy to hostile messages. Articles in Turkish-language media were used to present the governor’s detention as a violation of democracy and to suggest Turkish support for Gagauzia. “Honest Conversation”-type meetings created the impression of a group of experts and journalists, including international ones, validating the same messages while being affiliated with the Russian Federation.

**In April**, the proxy component took on a clearer form of externally imported legitimacy. Politicians affiliated with the Russian Federation gave interviews to foreign media—such as the Călin Georgescu–Tucker Carlson interview—to legitimize pro-Russian positions and attack the pro-European vector. At the same time, malign sources used unknown or marginal pseudo-experts to promote false theses about the Moldovan economy. Proxy

actors also used out-of-context statements by Turkey's foreign minister to suggest that Ankara sided with the governor and Gagauzia in the context of the governor's conviction. At this point, the proxy mechanism functioned through three categories of sources: foreign media, pseudo-experts, and manipulative reinterpretations of statements by foreign officials.

**In May**, the role of proxy networks was to create reusable media moments and visuals. Public events, flash mobs, marches, the distribution of historical materials, and joint meetings between representatives of Russian diplomacy and local pro-Russian leaders were organized. These sources mattered not only because of the messages delivered on the spot, but also because they generated images, recordings, and "occasions" that could later be transformed into content for pro-Russian channels. The systematic involvement of young people in various training programs in the country and in the Russian Federation, aimed at promoting Russian cultural values, was also observed. In this way, education was instrumentalized to build the future proxy network.

**In June**, the proxy infrastructure diversified further. Structures appeared that used alleged social and humanitarian assistance to justify intervention and support the narrative of economic collapse. At the same time, a group positioning itself as a "pro-Russian intellectual club" was created, promoting the concept of a "Moldovan Vector" for the defense of sovereignty and traditional values. Meanwhile, pro-Russian leaders in the Republic of Moldova synchronized the theme of war more clearly with messages from the Russian Federation, and even sports were instrumentalized as a field for targeting pro-European and undecided audiences through incidents such as the "Caras" case and the kickboxing competition controversy. Here the proxy operated through ideological clubs, social causes, vulnerable local media, and ancillary issues such as sports.

**In July**, the proxy network entered a more sophisticated and digitalized phase. English-language sites presenting themselves as neutral analyses or investigations about the Republic of Moldova were identified; these were later cited by internal malign sources and local opportunists. During the same period, undercover socio-political polls were reactivated by entities from the Russian Federation that attempted to present themselves as research centers from Romania. Online petitions appeared on Russian platforms such as moldovavote.ru, used to claim that the diaspora in the Russian Federation was asking international institutions to guarantee voting rights. The involvement of international political figures and influencers was also circulated in order to present sovereignty as a global and viable movement. At this stage, the proxy network was used to simulate expertise, public opinion, and civic engagement.

**In August**, more clearly profiled sources and projects appeared. The organization "I Love My City" launched the "Defend the Faith" project, which presented itself as a legal-assistance initiative for parishes and clergy of the Metropolis of Moldova, but also functioned as an instrument for reinforcing the perception that the Church was under attack by the state. In parallel, malign sources leveraged international organizations such as Switzerland's Solidaritätsnetz International and foreign lawyers such as Gonzalo Boye and William Julie, including through appeals to the United Nations, in order to internationalize the governor's case and create the impression of serious rights violations. At the same time, anti-NATO, anti-Romanian-language, and anti-PAS protests, as well as posters related to LGBT themes, supplied material and pretexts for continued online polarization. Here the proxy used local

NGOs, foreign lawyers, external organizations, and issue-based protests as sources of legitimacy.

**In September**, this component moved more clearly toward the electoral terrain and toward recruitment. International press and social networks were used to launch information about the Republic of Moldova and lend credibility to hostile messages. The slogan “vote for anyone except PAS” was promoted not in order to support one specific actor, but to aggregate a protest vote. At the same time, the Evrazia project used advertising on Facebook and Instagram to target young people in the Republic of Moldova and attract them to courses and training programs in the country or abroad. In this case, Evrazia was not just an image-building project, but a platform for training and recruiting future pro-Russian leaders or amplifiers.

**In October**, the religious channel became even more prominent. The Telegram channel “MOLDOVA ALBA | White Moldova,” presented as part of an alleged church network, redistributed messages from the malign channel “Mega-Vatnik – Vladimir Bukarsky’s channel” under the cover of religious holidays such as the Protection of the Mother of God. At the same time, Evrazia projects continued to target young people, while supposed religious networks presenting themselves as sources of dioceses of the Metropolis of Moldova disseminated pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives, including through the promotion of sources sanctioned in the Republic of Moldova. This is a clear example of the proxy operating through religious or pseudo-religious channels, imitated institutional identities, and networks claiming spiritual legitimacy.

**In November**, the proxy component was used to normalize political collaboration with the Russian Federation. A relevant example is that, after a meeting with the Russian ambassador, pro-Russian forces announced support for the creation of an unofficial friendship group between the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and the State Duma. Here the proxy is used to generate contexts and events that present relations with Moscow as something natural and legitimate, even when proxy actors themselves may not be fully aware of the broader impact of their involvement.

**In December**, external sources and channels appeared again. Greek media carried materials about the alleged purchase by the Republic of Moldova of Russian gas through Turkey, ahead of the president’s visit to Greece, with the aim of reputational damage. At the same time, pro-Russian opinion leaders such as Alexei Petrovici were given external platforms and exposure at meetings of Russians in Armenia in order to gradually transform them from local actors into “protectors of Russians” with international legitimacy. In parallel, round tables and social issues such as teachers’ demands were leveraged by pro-Russian and sovereignist actors to promote “neutrality” and channel social dissatisfaction into anti-EU and anti-government messages.

Viewed as a whole, the proxy networks of 2025 include several concrete types of sources::

- external publications and media, such as international magazines, Turkish-language press, Greek press, English-language sites, and interviews in foreign media, used to provide external legitimacy and reimport the message into the Republic of Moldova;

- local NGOs, projects, and initiatives such as “I Love My City,” “Defend the Faith,” and the “Moldovan Vector” club, used to give the message a civic, legal, cultural, or identity packaging;
- foreign lawyers, organizations, and international actors such as Solidaritätsnetz International, Gonzalo Boye, and William Julie, used to internationalize cases and create the appearance of serious rights violations;
- opaque digital platforms such as moldovavote.ru, sites that mimic neutral analysis, and undercover polls used to simulate public opinion and civic participation;
- religious networks and pseudo-church channels such as MOLDOVA ALBA and networks claiming to represent dioceses of the Metropolis of Moldova, used to camouflage propaganda under a religious identity;
- long-term recruitment and influence projects such as Evrazia and associated platforms, used to target young people and train new pro-Russian amplifiers;
- political actors and local leaders, including pro-Russian leaders, the governor, and regional vectors, used to root messages in local contexts and give them the appearance of authentic internal political support.

Accordingly, **the development of proxy networks is one of the essential links in the FIMI ecosystem**. It does not merely transport the message; it transforms, camouflages, and adapts it. Through these networks, Russian influence no longer appears as direct interference, but as the expression of civic, religious, cultural, academic, or international concerns. This capacity for concealment explains why the proxy component is one of the **most persistent and dangerous** in the functioning of the influence machinery. It is also important to note that in many situations proxy actors do not necessarily act with full awareness of the role they are playing in advancing the interests of the Russian Federation, sometimes being influenced by cultural, linguistic, or ideological proximity that makes them exploitable within such networks.

### Amplification mechanisms

**The strategic exploitation of social networks** is the component through which hostile messages are transformed into a daily, emotional, repetitive, and seemingly organic flow. If the official source sets the direction and media and proxy networks provide content and an appearance of legitimacy, social networks ensure speed of dissemination, adaptation to distinct audience segments, and artificial amplification.

In 2025, this component was one of the most persistent and flexible within the FIMI ecosystem. Between May and September 2025 alone, 1,347 inauthentic TikTok accounts, 155 coordinated X/Twitter accounts, and Evrazia networks with at least 300 accounts on Facebook and TikTok were identified. On election day Facebook was also exploited intensively through paid advertising and coordinated accounts.

**At the beginning of the year**, the exploitation of social networks manifested through information oversaturation, audience fragmentation, and rapid adaptation to the energy crisis. In February, malign sources distributed on Telegram, Facebook, and other social channels multiple and contradictory messages about the sources and procedures through which the Transnistrian region was supposed to receive gas, using out-of-context statements and amplifying the messages of the self-proclaimed leader on the left bank of the Nistru in order to induce confusion and divert attention from EU and Chișinău support.

At the same time, caricatures and visual content dehumanizing decision-makers intensified, while the public was pushed toward geopolitical and identity cleavages through the artificial opposition between “Moldovanism” and “Romanianization,” and between “tradition” and “the EU.”

**In March and April**, social networks were increasingly used for geographic and socio-economic segmentation, targeting the population in Gagauzia, the Transnistrian region, Russian-speaking communities, and economically vulnerable groups. Facebook and Telegram excessively promoted topics related to the Russian language, religion, Soviet history, LGBT themes, the cost of living, social assistance, and alleged regional discrimination. During the same period, the use of visual materials and decontextualized economic statistics intensified, along with websites mimicking official platforms in order to promise aid and collect data from vulnerable citizens. Social networks no longer functioned merely as spaces for distribution, but also as instruments for profiling, testing public reactions, and collecting data.

**In May and June**, this component entered a more active phase of mobilization and training. The Russian NGO “Evrazia,” connected to the Șor operation, used Facebook and TikTok to influence public opinion in the Republic of Moldova. The “Electoral Technologies Hackathon” trained participants aged 18 to 35 in techniques of manipulation, political agitation, and mobilization, while the “Info-Lider” program aimed at producing and distributing anti-PAS and anti-Sandu video materials on Facebook and TikTok, with participants being paid for this activity. At this stage, social networks became an infrastructure for organizing, recruiting, and paying content amplifiers.

**In July and August**, the strategic exploitation of social networks pursued the objectives of division, discrediting, delegitimization, and promotion more clearly than before. Messages about poverty, tariffs, lack of prospects, repression of the opposition, favoritism toward the diaspora in the West, the marginalization of regions, and the alleged uselessness of the EU were pushed simultaneously. The adversary exploited the idea of a divided country in which citizens are not treated equally, the diaspora is “favored,” the opposition is persecuted, and institutions serve external interests. In parallel, the same infrastructure promoted Russia and “its partners” as a protective and fair alternative using simple, emotional language that was easy to redistribute.

**On Telegram**, the social component was used primarily for **the rapid distribution of narratives toward communities already ideologically predisposed**. A relevant example is the channel “MOLDOVA ALBA | White Moldova,” presented as part of a church-source network, which redistributes the malign content of “Mega-Vatnik – Vladimir Bukarsky’s channel” and camouflages it in a religious and historical register. In the same logic, local networks such as bloknot-moldova and other channels that appear to be Moldovan are used as nodes for redistributing and synchronizing Russian messages. **Telegram is useful within the ecosystem because of its very high propagation speed, coordination between channels, and the relative absence of moderation frictions.**

**On Facebook and Instagram**, the main role is the **targeting of specific audiences and the linking of propaganda to issues of everyday life**. The register indicates the use of advertising to promote Evrazia projects to young people, the distribution of anti-NATO, anti-Romanian-language, and anti-PAS posters, and the exploitation of frustrations related to

compensation schemes, utility bills, and public services. In autumn and winter, campaigns appeared that targeted poor villages, young families, citizens disappointed by the lack of public services, and religious audiences. Facebook and Instagram are therefore used not only for amplification, but also for **micro-adaptation of messages according to age, geography, identity, and social vulnerability**.

**On TikTok**, the central function is **emotional virality**. Only 8 percent of the identified inauthentic TikTok accounts generated audiences of approximately 2 million followers and more than 42 million interactions, confirming the platform's capacity to rapidly transform a marginal message into a major topic of public interest. The register indicates the intensification of satire, AI-generated video materials, and content that combines ridicule with explicit manipulation, including content related to alleged attacks on Chişinău or the entry of foreign troops into the country. TikTok is used above all for **visual shock, aggressive humor, radical simplification, and the targeting of young and undecided audiences**.

**On X/Twitter**, the main role is somewhat different: not so much to convince the Moldovan public directly, but to create an alleged external consensus and then reimport it into the Moldovan space. The pseudo-investigations published by restmedia[.]io were distributed by around 700 X accounts with more than 12 million followers, accumulating more than 2.3 million interactions. This type of operation serves to plant narratives in a space presented as "international," after which they are taken up by local actors and presented as confirmed "from abroad." X thus becomes a key platform for **transnational amplification, information laundering, and the production of an appearance of international consensus**.

**The social component became even more visible through the use of AI, deepfakes, satire, and the recycling of older content.** The register signals the intensification of AI-generated videos on TikTok, the reintroduction of older statements by pro-European deputies into new contexts, the use of jokes to ridicule legitimate security concerns regarding the Russian Federation, and the amplification of messages about Russophobia, militarization, and political repression. **Reports confirm this trend by referring to "Matryoshka"-type operations that use generative AI to create deepfakes, false interviews, and counterfeit pages intended to undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions.**

Overall, the strategic **exploitation of social networks performed five main functions in 2025:**

- amplification, through the simultaneous promotion of the same messages on multiple platforms;
- segmentation, by adapting those messages to distinct audiences;
- mobilization, through recruitment, training, and remuneration;
- concealment, through the use of channels that present themselves as local, religious, or civic;
- preparation for delegitimization, through the anticipatory spread of theses about electoral fraud, external control, the exclusion of certain regions, and political repression.

Accordingly, the strategic exploitation of social networks did not serve merely to redistribute content in 2025, but functioned as **the central operational infrastructure of the FIMI ecosystem**. This is where the message is accelerated, broken down by audience, emotionalized, recycled, and inserted into the user's daily routine. It is precisely the combination of speed, volume, segmentation, and opacity that explains why the social component became one of the most important links in the influence machinery.

### The external validation vector

**In December**, the media component took on a more sophisticated dimension through the use of external publications to reimport narratives favorable to Moscow. The case of *Il Giornale d'Italia* is relevant precisely because it is not presented in the register as Russian media per se, but as an external source used to promote the message that anti-corruption efforts in the Republic of Moldova are in fact political repression. In such cases, the state-funded Russian media operation works indirectly: it produces or influences the placement of a message outside the Republic of Moldova and then reintroduces it into the domestic circuit as an "external confirmation." This is an information-laundering mechanism that complements, rather than replaces, the state-media component.

Within the proxy networks, the external validation component appears repeatedly. **In January**, articles from magazines and external sources were used to reinforce anti-EU and anti-government narratives.

**In March**, Turkish-language press articles were used to present the detention of the governor as a violation of democracy and to suggest Turkish support for Gagauzia.

**In April**, politicians affiliated with the Russian Federation gave interviews to foreign media, while statements by foreign officials were taken out of context to suggest external backing for pro-Russian positions.

**In August**, international organizations such as Solidaritätsnetz International from Switzerland and foreign lawyers such as Gonzalo Boye and William Julie were used to internationalize the governor's case and create the impression of serious rights violations.

**In December**, Greek media carried materials about the alleged purchase by the Republic of Moldova of Russian gas through Turkey, while pro-Russian opinion leaders were offered external platforms and exposure at meetings of Russians in Armenia in order to gradually transform them from local actors into "protectors of Russians" with international legitimacy.

The same logic is visible on X/Twitter, where the pseudo-investigations of *restmedia[.]io* were distributed by about 700 accounts with more than 12 million followers and more than 2.3 million interactions. This type of operation serves to plant narratives in a space presented as "international," after which local actors take them up and present them as externally confirmed. X thus becomes a key platform for transnational amplification, information laundering, and the appearance of international consensus.

Accordingly, the external validation vector serves to indirectly validate hostile narratives, obscure their origins, **and reintroduce them into the Republic of Moldova as apparently independent international confirmations**.

## The infrastructure vector

Another important case concerns **the MD24 and HaiTV applications and platforms**, which sit at the intersection of state-affiliated media and digital propaganda infrastructure. MD24 has direct links to Russia Today, one of the main media giants of the Russian Federation, which is under international sanctions, while HaiTV continues the same line of effort by bringing propagandistic content directly onto citizens' phones through distribution on Google and Apple platforms. In this case, the source is not a traditional newsroom, but a mobile media infrastructure connected to a Russian state-media actor, used to circumvent restrictions on television propaganda and maintain direct access to domestic audiences in the Republic of Moldova.

In the second half of the year, **opaque digital influence tools increased significantly**. Russia sought to circumvent propaganda-limiting measures through mobile applications such as HaiTV, which continued the efforts of MD24, a platform previously linked to Russia Today. These applications, promoted also via paid advertising on Google and META, served to deliver content directly into citizens' homes, bypassing the traditional, sanctioned television framework. In December, the Russian social app MAX was promoted as a "high-quality" alternative to Western platforms, with the aim of moving users into a less transparent and harder-to-counter information environment.

**Within proxy networks**, opaque digital platforms such as moldovavote.ru also appeared within the proxy networks. These were used to claim that the diaspora in the Russian Federation was asking international institutions to ensure the right to vote. The same category includes websites presenting themselves as neutral analyses or investigations about the Republic of Moldova, as well as sites imitating official platforms in order to promise aid and collect data from vulnerable citizens. These instruments have not only a content role, but also an infrastructural one: they simulate civic participation, collect data, create an appearance of authentic mobilization, and shift user interaction into less transparent spaces.

**Local networks** such as bloknot-moldova and other channels that appear Moldovan are also used as nodes for the redistribution and synchronization of Russian messages. From this perspective, they do not function only as media or social-media sources, but as persistent infrastructures for distribution and coordination.

Accordingly, the infrastructure vector ensures the direct delivery of content, the redundancy of the ecosystem, and the circumvention of controls. It allows **continued access to audiences even when traditional channels are restricted**, while moving users into information spaces that are less transparent and more difficult to counter.

## Hybrid and Informational Threats in the 2025 Electoral Context

### FIMI campaign elements

In 2025, the Centre’s analysis highlighted a sustained campaign of information manipulation and foreign interference aimed at shaping the information environment in advance of the parliamentary elections. Malign actors sought to influence electoral choices by activating fear, distrust, polarization, and the delegitimization of democratic institutions. In the first part of the year, the campaign was structured around dominant vulnerabilities—especially the energy and economic crisis and hostility toward the European Union. In the second half of the year, these themes were consolidated into four main directions: “Economic and Energy Crisis” (cost-of-living pressure), Hostility toward the EU, Ukraine, and Regions and Minorities.

- **Scenario I, “Economic and Energy Crisis,”** constructed the image of a state in permanent crisis, unable to manage resources and protect the population. Themes such as poverty, social inequity, and financial insecurity were accentuated and associated with the idea of a state dependent on external support and lacking internal solutions.
- **Scenario II, “Hostility toward the EU,”** promoted the perception of a loss of sovereignty. The authorities were portrayed as subordinate to Western partners, while the diaspora in the EU was depicted as a factor of disproportionate electoral influence. At the same time, European values were presented as incompatible with identity and social cohesion.
- **Scenario III, “Ukraine,”** was used to induce insecurity by suggesting the risk of the Republic of Moldova becoming involved in the conflict and compromising its neutrality. Messages associated cooperation with the EU and the United States with escalating security risks.
- **Scenario IV, “Regions and Minorities,”** pursued internal fragmentation by portraying the central authorities as hostile to regions and ethnic communities, especially Gagauzia, the diaspora in the Russian Federation, and residents of the Transnistrian region.

These scenarios were operationalized through the **3DP strategy-division, delegitimization, discrediting, and promotion** - materialized in recurrent messages about a “state captured by Brussels,” “elections falsified through the diaspora,” “abandoned neutrality,” or “the Russian Federation as guarantor of stability.” **The manipulation narratives identified** in the 2025 electoral context remained relatively stable, but became more coherent and better synchronized with political and social events:

- **The economic and energy crisis** remained the dominant scenario, used to promote the idea that the pro-European orientation produces price increases, debt, poverty, and the loss of control over resources. In January, this scenario accounted for 70 percent of all monitored hostile messages and remained dominant afterward even as its share declined with the activation of additional themes.

- **Hostility toward the EU** evolved from a discourse focused on “economic dependence” into a more aggressive discourse portraying the European Union as an actor of political, social, and cultural colonization, responsible for corruption, censorship, external control, and the destruction of traditional values. In the first half of the year, attacks related to “traditional values” and the Western diaspora increasingly converged within the same anti-EU scenario.
- **The subject of Ukraine** was instrumentalized to induce fear of war and the idea that the Republic of Moldova was following the “Ukrainian scenario”: militarization, abandonment of neutrality, involvement in conflict, and subordination to the West.
- **Regions and minorities** were used as instruments of fragmentation: Gagauzia was portrayed as a victim of political repression, the diaspora in the Russian Federation as electorally discriminated against, and residents of the Transnistrian region as excluded or left without protection. In the first part of the year, these messages circulated through separate Gagauzia/Transnistria scenarios and later merged into a broader scenario exploiting minorities from a regional perspective.

The campaign was **supported by a complex, multilayered digital infrastructure** based on proxy-site networks, pseudo-media platforms, mobile applications, and inauthentic accounts. Networks such as Pravda Network—with at least 129 sites in more than 50 languages—and Blocknot Network—with 119 active sites in Moldova, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation—were used for distribution and information laundering. The CopyCop sub-network, comprising 258 domains registered mainly in July and August 2025, amplified content through artificial multiplication and the use of AI.

The infrastructure also included **integrated operational components** such as MD24, HaiTV, and “Traitors,” which were technically and functionally connected and enabled the distribution of Romanian- and Russian-language content through mobile applications and major platforms. On social media, the scale of amplification was significant: 1,347 inauthentic TikTok accounts, of which 8 percent generated about 42 million interactions; 155 X accounts with more than 6 million interactions; and on election day more than 150 inauthentic accounts and pieces of content on Facebook, including 26 advertisements that accumulated at least 1.3 million interactions.

**Information laundering through external platforms also played an important role.** The case of restmedia[.]jo illustrates the mechanism: content was published on obscure platforms, amplified by around 700 X accounts with more than 12.2 million followers, and later reintroduced into the Moldovan information space as an “external” source. In this way, the infrastructure not only distributed content, but also artificially endowed it with legitimacy.

The campaign was complemented **by mechanisms of mobilization and organizational support.** The Info-Lider program associated with the Evrazia network involved the production and distribution of anti-PAS and anti-Sandu content in exchange for payments of up to 5,000 lei per month. In parallel, initiatives such as “For Fair Elections” were used to produce manipulative polls meant to contest the legitimacy of the vote. The

antipasmoldova[.]com network combined elements of pseudo-civic activism with financial incentives for promoting anti-European messages.

Overall, **the FIMI campaign of 2025 functioned as an integrated system combining the production, legitimization, distribution, and monetization of influence, moving beyond the logic of classical propaganda.**

### Key findings regarding FIMI in the 2025 electoral context

Analysis of FIMI activities shows a **persistent, adaptive, and multi-scenario model** characterized by the continuous adjustment of messages and channels according to internal and external developments. Information pressure was continuous rather than episodic and was aimed at shaping the environment of perception ahead of the vote.

**At the beginning of the year**, the economic and energy scenario dominated and was used as an entry point for related themes such as the loss of sovereignty or dependence on the Russian Federation. In February and March, the campaign diversified and outlined a stable narrative triad: cost of living, external control, and war. This association made it possible to connect economic difficulties with geopolitical and security themes.

**In the following months**, messages became more anchored in concrete issues such as pensions, wages, or infrastructure, while anti-EU discourse radicalized. In parallel, regional themes were integrated into a coherent narrative about a state perceived as unfair and hostile to its own citizens. By mid-year, there was a visible trend toward the merging of scenarios, indicating a transition from a dispersed phase to one of strategic consolidation.

**In the second half of the year**, the campaign stabilized around the four dominant scenarios, activated through the logic of 3DP. Malign actors systematically used emotions such as fear, anger, and frustration, correlated with relevant events—the energy crisis, military cooperation, political cases, or the organization of elections.

An essential finding is that FIMI was supported by a coordinated and professionalized infrastructure, including proxy media networks, inauthentic accounts, false experts, mobile applications, and AI technologies. Networks such as Pravda, Blocknot, CopyCop, and Evrazia indicate the functioning of an integrated ecosystem rather than isolated actions.

In electoral terms, **the main objective** was not merely to influence the vote, but **to degrade trust in the democratic architecture - the Central Electoral Commission, rule-of-law institutions, the press, and the electoral process.** Even in the absence of a decisive impact on the outcome, the desired effects targeted the normalization of distrust and the maintenance of an environment favorable to contesting future democratic processes.

### Evolution in the reflection of topics of public interest by malign actors

Throughout 2025, malign actors did not introduce entirely new themes; instead, they exploited existing topics by reinterpreting them through a conflictual and anti-institutional lens. At the beginning of the year, coverage was dominated by the economic and energy dimension, which concentrated around 70 percent of hostile messages, distributed mainly in Russian.

At this stage, economic problems were presented as proof of the failure of the pro-European orientation and of the incapacity of the state. Later, in February and March, coverage became more diversified, and economic themes were systematically linked with external control and the war in Ukraine, forming a stable narrative core.

During the same period, messages became more credible and better adapted to the audience. For example, the theme of “selling the country” was reformulated into specific criticism concerning the administration of strategic assets such as the airport or the port of Giurgiulești, thus facilitating audience expansion.

In parallel, regional subjects were integrated into a coherent narrative about marginalization and discrimination, with emphasis on Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region. The mid-year assessment confirmed the convergence of these themes and the need to integrate them into broader scenarios.

In the second half of the year, the framing stabilized around the four dominant axes, and malign actors continued to follow the legitimate public agenda, selecting those events most capable of generating negative emotions and distrust. The role of this framing was not descriptive but active: it fixed topics within a conflictual frame favorable to the delegitimization of institutions and the polarization of society.

## Impact on the Strategic Pillars of Communication and Security

This chapter examines how hostile narratives targeted, throughout 2025, the central pillars of strategic communication and security: European integration, social cohesion, economic resilience, defense capacity, and security in the regional context. The analysis is based exclusively on weekly operational synopses read in chronological order, which makes it possible to observe both recurrent themes and the way in which they were adapted depending on context.

From this perspective, the information attack was not fragmented but cumulative. The same themes were repeatedly revisited, reformulated, and redistributed in order to affect simultaneously the strategic orientation of the Republic of Moldova, trust among social groups, and the population’s perception of security, defense capability, and the economic viability of the state. In the first part of the year, the economic and energy dimension dominated, but it was gradually connected to themes concerning identity, religion, the status of minority communities, external dependence, militarization, and regional security risks.

### Pillar 1 – European integration

Throughout 2025, the pillar of European integration was attacked through a set of narratives designed to transform rapprochement with the European Union from a modernization project into a source of external control, social costs, and strategic vulnerability.

**In the January and February synopses**, the EU is presented as an actor dictating the policies of the Republic of Moldova, interfering in internal affairs, favoring certain political forces, and imposing reforms that run contrary to citizens' interests. The messages insist that Brussels conditions financial support, affects state neutrality, and pushes the country into a logic of geopolitical confrontation.

Later, **in March to May**, the anti-EU narrative expanded beyond the political and economic dimension and acquired a more pronounced identity and moral component. European integration became associated with “foreign values,” pressure on the Church, the promotion of LGBT themes, the rewriting of history, and the dismantling of traditional norms. At this stage, the EU was no longer portrayed solely as a source of interference, but as an actor supposedly changing the cultural and symbolic foundations of society. This made anti-European discourse more effective among conservative, religious, and change-skeptical segments.

At the same time, European financial support was constantly reinterpreted as an instrument of subordination. Grants, loans, and investments were presented not as mechanisms supporting reform, but as forms of indebtedness and dependence. A recurrent idea was that external assistance does not produce real development, but merely covers debts, feeds corruption, and enables a ruling elite detached from the interests of the population to remain in power. In this way, the exploited vulnerability was the gap between the high expectations associated with European integration and the slow, uneven, or difficult-to-perceive rhythm of concrete benefits.

**During the summer and early autumn**, the attack on the pillar of European integration became harsher and more explicit. It was claimed that the Republic of Moldova was being turned into a “colony,” that strategic decisions were no longer taken in Chişinău but in Brussels, Bucharest, Paris, or Washington, and that rapprochement with the EU amounted to a progressive loss of control over the economy, energy, justice, media, and foreign policy. During the same period, integration was systematically linked to militarization, rapprochement with NATO, and the danger of drawing the Republic of Moldova into a wider regional conflict.

**In the last months of the year**, the synopses show a shift toward the idea that the accession process is fundamentally a false promise. The argument insisted that the EU has no real intention of integrating the Republic of Moldova, that reforms are demanded without guarantees, and that the country would bear economic, social, and identity costs without receiving security or prosperity in return. Thus, the pillar of European integration was attacked through the combination of four axes: external control, economic degradation, identity distortion, and regional insecurity.

The intended strategic impact is clear: eroding confidence in the state’s pro-European direction, turning European integration into a conflictual and defensive issue, and weakening the perception that the EU provides a framework of stability, reform, and protection. **The operational synopses show that the adversary seeks not merely to criticize particular European policies, but to compromise the very idea that the future of the Republic of Moldova can be built in association with the West.**

## Pillar 2 – Social cohesion

The pillar of social cohesion was attacked by converting internal differences within society into persistent lines of fracture. Operational synopses clearly show that language, cultural affiliation, religion, attitudes toward the past, ties to the diaspora, the status of Gagauzia, and relations with the Transnistrian region were systematically used to divide the population into antagonistic groups. This was not simply a matter of exploiting pre-existing tensions, but of amplifying them through repetitive discourse that consistently pits “the elite” against “the people,” “the center” against “the periphery,” “tradition” against “the West,” and “the overlooked majority” against “politically favored groups.”

**In the first months of the year**, the focus was on the Russian-speaking community, Russian-language speakers, Gagauzia, and residents of the transnistrian region. Malign sources promoted the idea that these groups are marginalized, discriminated against, or collectively suspected, portraying the state as hostile toward its own communities. Messages concerning the Russian language, the closure of cultural centers, language education, interpretations of history, and Soviet symbols were used to construct a sense of systemic identity-based injustice.

**Throughout the spring**, social cohesion was increasingly affected through themes related to traditional values, religion, and family. Topics concerning LGBT issues, the church, education, school textbooks, and alleged attempts by the authorities to alter the moral norms of society were repeatedly activated. These issues were not treated in isolation but integrated into a broader narrative: the pro-European government is portrayed as disconnected from the values of the majority, protecting foreign agendas, and in conflict with the population’s religious and cultural sensitivities. In this way, differences of opinion are radicalized and transformed into moral oppositions that are difficult to reconcile.

**The theme of the diaspora** also played an important role in social fragmentation. In several synopses, the diaspora appears either as a privileged group favored politically or as an actor disconnected from the realities of the population inside the country. In parallel, citizens who remained in the country were portrayed as abandoned, impoverished, and lacking representation. This opposition was used to fuel resentment and create the perception that there are “two Moldovas”: one connected to the West and another that bears the real costs of governance.

Equally important was the **exploitation of territorial differences**. The synopses show a recurrent use of subjects concerning Gagauzia, the city of Bălți, villages, rural areas, the Transnistrian region, and districts perceived as neglected. Messages insist that the central

authorities discriminate against politically inconvenient territories, distribute resources unequally, and treat different communities selectively. In this way, economic dissatisfaction is transformed into regional dissatisfaction, while administrative vulnerabilities are reframed as deliberate exclusion.

**By autumn**, the attack on social cohesion had taken on an even more complex form, with overlapping themes about poverty, pensions, education, children, rural schools, linguistic identity, the Church, ethnicity, autonomy, and relations between the centre and local communities. The intended result was to erode the sense of belonging to a common project and weaken mutual trust between citizens and institutions, between the majority and minorities, and between regional populations and the central authorities.

Accordingly, the pillar of social cohesion was attacked through three main mechanisms: identity segmentation, selective victimization, and conflictual moralization. The strategic aim was not only to intensify tensions in the public sphere, but **to weaken society's ability to react in solidarity in times of crisis and reduce the willingness of different groups to support the same strategic direction.**

### Pillar 3 – Economic resilience

Economic resilience was one of the most persistent targets throughout the year. In the first phase, the attack focused on prices, tariffs, compensation, and the direct effects of the energy crisis. Rising utility bills, uncertainty regarding gas supplies, and the cost of living were presented as evidence that the state can no longer protect the population and that the current strategic orientation leads directly to impoverishment.

**At the beginning of the year**, the focus is on energy, tariffs, gas, compensation schemes, and dependence on external sources. Malign sources repeatedly claim that price increases are due to pro-European policies, that the abandonment of Russian gas was irrational, and that energy diversification has brought only higher costs. In parallel, the Russian Federation is presented as a natural, cheap, and stable source of gas and electricity, while any difficulties in the energy sector are attributed to the deliberate severing of this relationship by the government.

As the year advanced, **the energy theme** was increasingly linked to debt, loans, the IMF, the EBRD, Energocom, Moldovagaz, intermediaries, non-transparent procurement, and external control over infrastructure. In this frame, not only prices were contested, but the very idea that the state has a coherent strategy for energy security. The impression promoted was that of a state held captive by opaque contracts, foreign creditors, and outside political interests, while citizens bear the costs through bills, price increases, and insecurity.

**Agriculture and exports** represent another key target of adversarial messaging. Synopses from spring, summer, and autumn indicate a constant use of subjects related to drought, the cost of inputs, market access, the loss of exports to the Russian Federation and the CIS, the difficulties faced by farmers, and dependence on Western markets. The underlying message was that the Moldovan economy had been artificially decoupled from traditional

markets and pushed in an unprofitable direction, thereby explaining bankruptcies, migration, factory closures, and the collapse of villages. Within this narrative, the European market was not presented as a development alternative, but as an inaccessible, bureaucratic space incapable of absorbing Moldovan production under favorable conditions.

**From summer onward**, discourse about economic resilience became broader still, **integrating inflation, wages, pensions, migration, poverty, demography, public services, and strategic assets**. Malign sources insisted that living standards had collapsed, that young people were leaving en masse, that villages were disappearing, that the state survives on loans, and that essential resources are being handed over to external interests. The port of Giurgiulești, energy infrastructure, the gas-transit system, and other assets were frequently invoked to support the idea that the Republic of Moldova is losing the material basis of its economic sovereignty.

A central element of the attack is the construction of an imaginary dependence on Russia. This is framed not merely as economic nostalgia, but as a practical solution to current problems: cheaper gas, market access for agricultural products, predictable trade relations, stability for the Transnistrian region, protection for industrial sectors, and reduced costs for the population. In contrast, the West is associated with loans, conditionalities, market losses, austerity, rising prices, and deindustrialization. In this way, economic resilience is undermined not only through fear, but also by presenting a false alternative that is simple to understand and emotionally compelling.

The strategic impact on this pillar is significant. Through the constant repetition of these themes, operational synopses indicate that malign actors sought to weaken public confidence in the state's ability to manage the economy, to directly link the pro-European orientation with material insecurity, and to normalize the idea that prosperity and stability are impossible without closer alignment with the Russian Federation. In this way, economic fear becomes not merely a reaction to real difficulties, but a tool for the strategic reshaping of public perceptions.

#### **Pillar 4 – Defense capacity**

Throughout 2025, the pillar of defense capacity was targeted through a sustained effort to turn necessary modernization measures into reasons for distrust and rejection. The operational synopses indicate that modernization of the defense sector, international cooperation, and the strengthening of security institutions were systematically presented as signs of dangerous militarization and of the loss of neutrality.

**In the first part of the year**, dominant themes directly **linked external support and cooperation with Western partners** to the idea of involving the Republic of Moldova in a conflict. Messages were promoted suggesting that any support for building defense capacities was in fact a step toward participation in war. In this frame, military exercises, training programs, or modernization projects were presented as preparations for escalation rather than as measures of prevention and deterrence.

Over the spring and summer, these themes were reinforced through the constant association between European integration, **NATO, and the risk of war**. The narratives did not rely on technical arguments, but on deliberate simplifications: rapprochement with the West was equated with the loss of neutrality, while strengthening defense was presented as a direct provocation toward the Russian Federation. At the same time, institutions in the defense and security field were described as externally controlled or as acting against the interests of citizens.

A recurring element was the activation of **fear related to mobilization and direct involvement in conflict**. The synopses indicate the use of messages suggesting the possibility of forced recruitment, the deployment of citizens to the front, or the transformation of national territory into a space of confrontation. These themes were amplified especially in moments of regional tension and synchronized with developments in Ukraine and statements by official or proxy actors.

**Toward the end of the year**, the discourse became more integrated and more aggressive by linking defense themes to economic and social themes. Defense expenditures were presented as being in direct competition with pensions, salaries, or public services, while the very idea of security was reframed as a burden on the population rather than a form of protection.

The intended strategic impact is to delegitimize the role of security institutions, to undermine public support for defense modernization, and to instill a persistent perception that any strengthening of this sector increases, rather than reduces, risks for citizens. In STRATCOM terms, the objective is not merely to contest specific policies, but to **inhibit the societal reflex of self-defense**.

## Pillar 5 – Security in the regional context

The pillar of security in the regional context was attacked by transforming regional uncertainty into a generalized sense of inevitability and vulnerability. Narratives promoted the idea that proximity to Ukraine and cooperation with Western partners would turn the country into a target, and that security depends exclusively on avoiding any involvement or clear positioning. Within this frame, neutrality was reinterpreted not as a foreign-policy instrument, but as an obligation of passivity.

**In the first part of the year**, the focus is placed on the idea of conflict expansion and on the risk of the Republic of Moldova becoming the next area of instability. Messages suggest that proximity to Ukraine and cooperation with Western partners would turn the country into a target, while security is portrayed as depending exclusively on avoiding any form of involvement or clear positioning. Within this framework, neutrality is reinterpreted not as a foreign policy instrument, but as an obligation of passivity.

**Throughout the year**, the Transnistrian region was used as a central point of narrative pressure. The synopses indicate an alternation between escalation scenarios and messages about rapid resolution, both having the same effect: generating uncertainty and

eroding trust in the state's ability to manage the issue. At the same time, any discussion of regional security was reformulated as a risk of internal destabilization.

**Toward the end of the year**, these themes were integrated into a broader discourse about the impossibility of ensuring long-term security. The idea was promoted that the Republic of Moldova lacks real guarantees, that external partners will not intervene in times of crisis, and that the state is exposed to risks it cannot control. In this way, the perception of insecurity becomes structural rather than merely conjunctural.

Another constant element was the construction of an image of inevitable dependence on the Russian Federation for the maintenance of regional stability. Narratives suggested that the security balance can be preserved only through privileged relations with Moscow, and that any rapprochement with the EU or Western partners would destabilize the region. Security was thus presented not as the result of institutional consolidation and international cooperation, but as the effect of accommodating Russian interests.

The strategic impact sought was to weaken trust in external partnerships, discourage the pro-European orientation, and consolidate the perception that security can be obtained only through strategic concessions. In FIMI operational logic, this pillar is essential because it anchors all the other themes in a **general sense of vulnerability and lack of control**.

## 2026 Outlook and Recommendations

### Operational outlook for 2026

The developments anticipated for 2026 indicate a clear transition by hostile actors from visible election-focused interventions to a strategy of continuous pressure on both the European Union accession process and the state-citizen relationship.

In the absence of immediate electoral opportunities, the focus will shift to preparing the ground for the 2027–2029 cycles by testing and refining the influence infrastructure. Information pressure will target the state–citizen relationship directly by eroding public confidence in the state's ability to deliver, explain, and protect. Any administrative vulnerability will be exploited in order to build the perception of an incapable and incoherent state.

**The central objective of these operations will be to consolidate the narrative frame according to which the Republic of Moldova's accession to the EU is either impossible or undesirable.** This objective will be supported through the systematic exploitation of **three sensitive points**:

- i. **Internal reform and negotiation processes** (negotiation chapters and domestic reforms). Any procedural difficulty, delay, or administrative dysfunction will be amplified to create the perception of a state incapable of delivering and managing the integration process.

Institutional and hybrid tools are expected to be used to generate administrative overload and a perception of chaos, alongside narratives about governmental incompetence and simulated reforms.

- ii. **External perceptions and the risk of political blockage**, especially in EU member states (external vetoes). Hostile actors will attempt to position the Republic of Moldova as a problematic, unstable, or costly candidate by using themes such as corruption, economic fragility, external dependencies, or security risks. This direction will target external audiences in order to influence decision-makers, while simultaneously targeting domestic audiences in order to induce the perception that integration is being blocked from outside.
- iii. **Fragmentation of domestic support for European integration** (lack of broad consensus). Identity polarization, Soviet nostalgia, and cultural attachments will continue to be exploited in order to erode public support. Narratives will alternate between presenting the European Union as weak, declining, or hostile to traditional values, and implicitly promoting the Russian Federation as a stable and legitimate alternative.

**Security will remain one of the most sensitive themes**, used to trigger anxieties related to war and instability. Topics connected to neutrality, external cooperation, defense strengthening, and the Transnistrian region will be exploited in order to block rational debate and amplify fear. At the same time, perceptions of vulnerability on the right bank and narratives of victimization in the Transnistrian region will both be reinforced.

Operationally, the influence ecosystem will continue to function in an integrated way through the combination of official vectors, affiliated media, proxy networks, amplification mechanisms, external validation, and digital infrastructures. The share of actors who do not openly identify as anti-European is expected to grow, promoting seemingly moderate and pragmatic positions aimed at reaching a wider audience.

Overall, the **main risk in 2026** is not only the emergence of individual hostile campaigns, but the accumulation of a state of fragmentation, cynicism, and social fatigue in which any real crisis can quickly be transformed into a crisis of trust and legitimacy, with direct consequences for stability and public support for reforms.

## Recommendations

An effective response in 2026 requires a shift from a predominantly reactive logic toward one structured around resilience-building, through an integrated approach at the informational, institutional, and societal levels. The priority is not only to counter specific narratives case by case, but to reduce the vulnerabilities that make them possible.

**a) On the informational level**, it is necessary to **strengthen anticipation and early-intervention capacity**. This requires the development of functional mechanisms for rapid information exchange among institutions, media, and civil society, as well as the integration of analysis into decision-making processes. Communication must become predictive, coherent, and focused on meaning, not only on reaction. Maintaining strategic alignment

among relevant actors is essential, without affecting editorial independence or the autonomy of civil society.

**- Strengthening institutional coordination around critical vulnerabilities.**

The institutional response must be calibrated to the main vulnerabilities exploited by the adversary. Message coherence among institutions becomes especially important on subjects such as reforms, European integration, security, and the Transnistrian region. Lack of synchronization or divergent interpretations will be directly exploited to reinforce narratives about chaos and incompetence. Strategic communication discipline and a clear mechanism for rapid alignment are necessary.

**- Moving from defensive to meaningful communication.**

Countering falsehoods is not sufficient. Communication must constantly explain the connection between reforms, social protection, and citizen security. Vulnerabilities related to reforms should be addressed by clarifying their pace, rationale, and concrete benefits, so that costs cannot be perceived in isolation from the gains.

**- Strengthening the early-warning mechanism and integrated response.**

Monitoring must be directly connected to operational decision-making. Identified vulnerabilities—reforms, external perceptions, and polarization—must be tracked through clear escalation indicators. The response must be anticipatory rather than reactive, and the interval between identification and intervention must be significantly reduced.

**b) At the institutional level, the focus should be on creating an environment favorable to functional democratic communication. This involves:**

- increasing the accountability of digital platforms;
- supporting independent media and strengthening the domestic media market;
- developing media-literacy infrastructure.

At the same time, transparency of public processes and constant communication of progress, especially regarding European integration, are essential for maintaining trust.

**- Managing external perceptions as a dimension of internal security.**

Vulnerabilities linked to external vetoes require a proactive approach toward external audiences. Coordinated communication is needed to strengthen the image of the Republic of Moldova as a stable, predictable state relevant to regional security. Narratives about a “problematic candidate” must be countered through results, consistency, and an active presence in both the domestic and European information spaces.

**- Protecting the information space through coherent enforcement of the law.**

Regulatory and sanctioning measures against FIMI infrastructures must be applied consistently and explained publicly. Legal firmness must be combined with transparency and predictability in institutional actions.

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**c) On the societal level, intervention must directly target the sources of vulnerability.**

An approach is needed that goes beyond the strictly informational dimension and includes social cohesion, institutional trust, and civic participation. Communication initiatives must be complemented by policies that deliver tangible results and by systematic efforts to reconnect the state with the citizen. Strengthening civic identity, valuing democratic experience, and building bridges among different social segments become central components of resilience.

**- Systematic investment in societal resilience.**

In the medium term, reducing vulnerabilities cannot be achieved through communication alone. Critical-thinking education, media literacy, youth engagement, and the activation of vulnerable communities must be treated as the part of democratic security infrastructure. Reforms, European integration, and social protection must be presented as components of the same process of increasing society's capacity to withstand external pressures.

**- Treating social cohesion as a security objective.**

The vulnerability stemming from the lack of broad consensus requires treating social cohesion as a strategic priority. Polarization must be countered by adapting messages at the local level and engaging credible actors from communities. National communication should be complemented by regional and linguistic anchoring to reduce the distance between state and citizens.

The implementation of these directions requires a whole-of-society approach in which state institutions, independent media, and civil society act in coordination on the basis of common objectives and a shared understanding of risks. In this framework, CSCCD strengthens its role as an analytical hub and facilitator of strategic coordination, helping transform response capacity into a durable system of democratic defense.

Overall, the effectiveness of the response in 2026 will depend on the ability to maintain coherence between analysis, communication, and action, as well as on the transition from crisis management to the systematic construction of resilience.