DISINFORMATION MONITOR ON SOCIAL MEDIA

ASSESSMENT PERIOD
FEBRUARY, 1ST – 28, 2025

Fundația Soros Moldova

PISA
Platforma pentru Inițiative
de Securitate și Apărare

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Assessment Period: February 1 – 28, 2025

Executive Summary

The disinformation landscape in Moldova during February 2025 was characterized by intensifying campaigns aimed at exploiting economic insecurity, geopolitical uncertainty, and national identity divisions. Strategic disinformation efforts focused primarily on Moldova's energy crisis and the perceived failures of the government. Telegram remained the epicenter of inauthentic coordination, while Facebook facilitated amplification to a wider audience. TikTok and YouTube were instrumental in shaping perceptions among younger demographics through visually compelling, ideologically charged content. This report presents an analysis of the evolving disinformation trends, emotional mechanisms, and the operational strategies of state and proxy actors.

Main insights for February 2025

Escalation of energy security disinformation:

• The narrative portraying the energy crisis as a consequence of EU policies intensified, fueling public distrust in European partnerships.

• Russia was presented as the only viable energy partner, furthering dependency narratives.

Targeting national sovereignty through security threats:

• NATO was framed as an instigator of regional instability, with claims that Moldova was being coerced into military alliances.

• Pro-Russian narratives accused Western actors of undermining Moldova's sovereignty and escalating military tensions.

Social Media as an instrument of polarization:

• Telegram served as the core platform for disseminating coordinated disinformation.

• Facebook functioned as a key amplifier, particularly in narratives related to government corruption and energy insecurity.

• TikTok and YouTube played a critical role in ideological shaping, especially among youth, emphasizing anti-Western and nostalgic pro-Russian rhetoric.

Emotional Triggers Driving Public Engagement:

• Fear and distrust remained dominant, shaping discourse around governance failures and external threats.

• Nostalgia and pride were leveraged to bolster narratives advocating for Moldova's alignment with Russia's sphere of influence.

Emotional Analysis in Disinformation Narratives

EMOTION	FREQUENCY	KEY NARRATIVES
Fear	50%	Energy shortages, NATO aggression, economic collapse
Distrust	30%	Government corruption, EU exploitation
Anger	10%	Election fraud, Western interference
Nostalgia	5%	Election fraud, Western interference
Pride	5%	Russia as a stabilizing force

• **Fear and distrust** were systematically employed to degrade public confidence in Moldova's governance and international alliances.
• **Nostalgia and pride** functioned as ideological reinforcements, deepening **pro-Russian** sentiment among targeted demographics.

State and Proxy Actor Activity Levels

ACTOR	ACTIVITY LEVEL	TACTICS USED
Russia	High	State-controlled media, Telegram campaigns
Belarus	Moderate	Regional disinformation amplification
Local pro-Russian groups	High	Social media manipulation, anti-government propaganda
Troll Farms	Moderate	Automated content proliferation

• **Russia sustained its role as the dominant disinformation actor,** deploying state media networks and coordinated campaigns.
• **Proxy groups and troll farms** functioned as force multipliers, ensuring widespread penetration of misleading content.

Cluster-Specific Analysis

Cluster 1: Security and Defense
Disinformation in this cluster centered on the portrayal of NATO as an aggressor, allegedly seeking to involve Moldova in military conflicts. Narratives suggested that Western alliances would erode Moldova's sovereignty and provoke regional instability. Telegram and Facebook were the primary dissemination platforms, with Telegram used for coordinated discussions and Facebook amplifying content to broader audiences

Cluster 2: EU and US Decadence
This cluster framed Western values as morally and socially corrupt, portraying European integration as a threat to Moldova's cultural identity. TikTok and Instagram were the primary platforms for disseminating visually compelling content, often using side-by-side comparisons of Western and traditional Moldovan values to instill distrust in EU policies.

Cluster 3: Moldovan Government
Narratives in this cluster depicted Moldova's government as ineffective and controlled by Western interests. Telegram groups were particularly active in spreading claims that government officials were corrupt and deliberately mismanaging economic and security policies. Facebook further amplified these claims through widespread engagement with politically charged content.

Cluster 4: Russophobia
Russian-aligned disinformation sources positioned Moldova as an anti-Russian state manipulated by Western actors. Narratives suggested that Moldova's leaders were intentionally fueling anti-Russian sentiment to justify distancing from Russia. Telegram played a key role in organizing discussions that framed Russia as a victim of Western aggression, while Facebook facilitated wider outreach.

Cluster 5: "Ruskii Mir" (Russian World)

This cluster emphasized Moldova's historical and cultural ties to Russia, arguing that severing those ties would lead to economic and societal collapse. Facebook and YouTube were primary platforms for distributing nostalgic content, often invoking historical imagery and messages reinforcing the idea that Moldova's prosperity is linked to Russia.

Cluster 6: Energy and Gas Crisis

Narratives in this cluster blamed the EU for Moldova's energy struggles, while Russia was portrayed as a reliable partner. The disinformation claimed that Moldova's leadership was deliberately avoiding negotiations with Russia to secure lower energy costs. Telegram and Facebook were the main platforms for spreading these narratives, with Telegram leading in closed-group discussions and Facebook ensuring public visibility.

Overview of the Top 10 Narratives

Narrative	Impact	Key Platforms	Primary Emotion	Target Audience
Moldova's energy crisis is the result of EU policies	High	Facebook, Telegram	Fear, Distrust	General public, economically vulnerable groups
NATO is preparing Moldova for war	High	Telegram, Facebook	Fear, Distrust	Politically active citizens
Government corruption is worsening economic instability	High	Telegram, Instagram	Distrust, Anger	General population, political skeptics
Immigrants threaten Moldovan culture	Low	TikTok, Facebook	Fear, Anger	Young adults, conservative groups
Russia is under attack from Western elites	Moderate	Telegram, Facebook	Pride, Distrust	Russian-speaking communities
Moldova's leadership is controlled by Western elites	High	Telegram, Facebook	Anger, Distrust	General population, political skeptics
The EU is failing and Moldova should align with Russia	Moderate	YouTube, Facebook	Nostalgia, Pride	Older generations, rural audiences
Ukraine negotiations prove the West is losing	Moderate	Telegram, Facebook	Pride, Distrust	Pro-Russian communities
Pro-European leaders are betraying national interests	High	Telegram, Facebook	Anger, Distrust	General population, political skeptics
Moldova's sovereignty is at risk due to NATO and the EU	High	Facebook, Telegram	Fear, Distrust	General public

The disinformation campaigns of February 2025 exhibited an intensified focus on energy security, geopolitical sovereignty, and economic stability, leveraging public anxieties to weaken trust in Moldova's European trajectory. Telegram and Facebook maintained dominance as the primary platforms for disseminating and amplifying false narratives. Fear-driven messaging was particularly effective in eroding institutional trust and fomenting social division.

The energy crisis was strategically framed to present Moldova as victimized by EU policies, reinforcing Russia's image as a stable alternative. Meanwhile, NATO was portrayed as a destabilizing force, with claims that Moldova was being coerced into military entanglements. These narratives sought to shift public sentiment away from European integration and toward alignment with Russian geopolitical priorities.

The **sustained role of Russian-affiliated actors, local proxies, and troll farms** underscores the high level of coordination in disinformation operations. The targeted use of emotional triggers, particularly fear and distrust, ensures persistent engagement and virality across social media networks.