

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE ON STRATEGIC ANALYSIS AND SECURITY POLICY

# SECURITY NEXUS

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# CONTENTS

## REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY

The Security Solution for the Republic of Moldova in a Turbulent World **(Iulian Chifu)**..... 3

When Rules No Longer Hold: The Decline of Multilateralism and What It Means for the Republic of Moldova **(Laurențiu Pleșca)**..... 8

The Munich Conference 2026: Reconfiguring Transatlantic Relations in a Fragmented World **(Laurențiu Pleșca)**..... 10

The Impact of the War in Iran on the Republic of Moldova **(Laurențiu Pleșca)**..... 12

## SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

The Republic of Moldova in the New Geopolitical Order: Democratic Resilience and Security Risks **(Natalia Albu)**..... 15

## PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS

The Republic of Moldova’s Democratic Resilience Plan: Protecting Elections in an Era of Hybrid Threats **(Sanda Sandu)**..... 21

## SECURITY NEXUS (INTERDEPENDENCIES)

The January 31 Power Outage in the Republic of Moldova: Crisis Management and the Challenge of Energy Resilience **(Sanda Sandu)**..... 24

Blackout 2026: Old Vulnerabilities, Delayed Solutions **(PISA Team)**..... 27

## **EU & THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

The Development of the European Union's Security and Defence Dimension and Its Implications for the Security of the Republic of Moldova <b>(Sanda Sandu)</b> .....	31
Interview with Cristina Gherasimov, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration.....	38
EUBAM in the Republic of Moldova: Two Decades of Border Modernisation and Security <b>(PISA Team)</b> .....	41

## **APPLIED STUDIES AND BEST PRACTICES**

The 2025 Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Moldova: A Democratic Stress Test under Hybrid Pressure <b>(Elena Mârzac, Rodica PaŃa)</b> .....	44
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## **INFORMATION SECURITY AND DISINFORMATION**

The Exploitation of Maia Sandu's Statement: Union as a Theme of Information Manipulation <b>(Elena Mârzac, Rodica PaŃa)</b> .....	47
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## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

The Concept of Cognitive Warfare <b>(PISA Team)</b> .....	51
---	----

## **RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING**

The Republic of Moldova in Cognitive Warfare: Between Hybrid Aggression and Democratic Resilience <b>(Rodica PaŃa)</b> .....	51
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# Editorial

## SECURITY NEXUS – THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF SECURITY IN A CONNECTED WORLD

In a world marked by strategic volatility, geopolitical competition, technological transformations, and increasingly complex vulnerabilities, security can no longer be analysed in a fragmented manner. International dynamics, regional developments, and national realities exist in a constant relationship of interdependence, with effects emerging at one level rapidly spreading to others. In this context, understanding security requires an integrated, interdisciplinary approach that is closely connected to the current realities of the strategic environment.

The launch of the journal **Security Nexus** responds to this need and marks an important moment for the analytical landscape in the Republic of Moldova. Security Nexus is the first journal dedicated to security issues in the Republic of Moldova, conceived as a platform for strategic reflection, rigorous analysis, and dialogue among experts, practitioners, decision-makers, and partners interested in developments in the fields of security and defence. The emergence of this publication reflects both the maturation of the strategic debate at the national level and the increasingly clear need for high-quality analytical products capable of connecting local expertise to the major themes of the regional and international agenda.

The journal is published under the auspices of the Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives (PISA), an organization that in recent years has strengthened its position in the field of expertise, analysis, and dialogue on security and defence in the Republic of Moldova.

Through its work, PISA contributes to the promotion of a strategic culture grounded in knowledge, professionalism, cooperation, and a strong orientation toward relevant public policies. In this regard, Security Nexus builds on the expertise developed within PISA and transforms it into an editorial platform dedicated to understanding changes in the security environment, assessing emerging risks, and offering analytical perspectives relevant for both the public and institutional spheres.

The title of the journal reflects the idea that defines its identity. The concept of a “nexus” refers to connection, intersection, and interdependence. In the field of security, it describes the structural links between geopolitical, economic, energy, informational, and societal processes that shape the stability of states. Energy security influences economic security; informational vulnerabilities affect social cohesion and democratic resilience; and regional geopolitical developments produce direct consequences for national security. Understanding these relationships is essential for relevant strategic analysis and for the development of coherent public policies.

The first issue of the journal is structured around a central theme: the interdependence between international, regional, and national security. The choice of this theme reflects one of the defining characteristics of the contemporary strategic environment: no level of security can any longer be understood in isolation.

Global transformations, the decisions of major actors, the reconfiguration of alliances, regional crises, and new forms of confrontation directly influence the ability of states to protect their institutions, citizens, and strategic interests.

For the Republic of Moldova, this reality is particularly relevant. Its geopolitical positioning, the proximity of the war in Ukraine, hybrid pressures, energy vulnerabilities, informational interference, and the European integration path all connect national security closely to external developments. At the same time, the quality of the domestic response depends on the resilience of institutions, the capacity for strategic foresight, effective public communication, and cooperation with international partners. From this perspective, the security of the Republic of Moldova must be analysed in correlation with the transformations of the regional and international environment.

Security Nexus embraces precisely this mission: to provide a platform for analysis that connects global trends to regional challenges and to their implications for the Republic of Moldova. Through its regular sections dedicated to regional and international perspectives, security sector reform, public policy, information security, applied studies, and conceptual clarifications, the journal promotes a multidimensional approach suited to the complexity of today's strategic environment.

Through the contributions brought together in this first edition, the journal provides a framework for understanding how these developments affect the security, resilience, and strategic orientation of the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, the publication reaffirms the importance of expertise, critical reflection, and professional dialogue in a field where decisions must be grounded in knowledge, rigorous assessment, and a deep understanding of risks.

The journal is addressed to a specialized and diverse audience, including security experts and analysts, political and institutional decision-makers, practitioners from security and defence institutions, international partners, diplomats, as well as all individuals professionally or civically interested in security-related issues. This audience is united by a shared need for credible information, strategic analysis, and a contextualized understanding of security risks and challenges, as well as by the necessity of modernizing the security sector.

Through Security Nexus, PISA further expands its contribution to the development of strategic thinking in the Republic of Moldova and provides a new instrument for connecting national expertise to relevant debates in the region and at the international level. The journal aims to become a reference point for security analysis, a space for well-argued ideas, and an expression of the growing maturity of national expertise in the field of security and defence.

In a time of uncertainty, interconnected risks, and accelerated transformations, understanding security as a system of relationships and interdependencies has become a strategic necessity. This is the perspective that Security Nexus advances from its very first issue: an integrated vision of security, relevant for the present and essential for the future.

**Dr. Elena Mârzac,**

*Editor-in-chief*

**Dr. Rodica Panța,**

*Deputy Editor-in-Chief*

# Regional and International Security Perspectives

ARTICLE



## The Republic of Moldova's security solution in a turbulent world

 *Julian Chifu*<sup>1</sup>

As a minor player, the Republic of Moldova faces multiple internal challenges, threats, risks, and vulnerabilities, like any other state, but with the peculiarities of a post-Soviet state, with Russian troops formally left on its territory, with separatism and autonomies used as tools to undermine statehood, with disputed identities – including Soviet Moldovanism as a pseudo-historical tool of Russia's information warfare – and with a limited level of societal cohesion. On top of all the current problems, chronic or acute, there is the great turbulence of the moment caused by various forms of revisionism regarding the world order, amplified by regional wars and turmoil in supply chains and energy deliveries. In a turbulent world, the relentless search for the best security solutions is a constant and undeniable concern and the responsibility of state authorities.

### **Global and regional trends impacting the security of the Republic of Moldova**

The world is globalized, with or without the consent of a growing number of citizens who contest the formulas for integration, the costs, and especially the effects of the process on their own lives. But fighting against globalization in an era of instant communication, equally rapid money transfers, and the free movement of people and goods unparalleled in history is like opposing the force of gravity. However, the world based on rules and liberal democracy, free trade agreements, and the role of international institutions is being challenged by numerous actors from revisionist positions.

Thus, in the case of the United States, documents such as the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy have outlined a set of principles, priorities, and hierarchies that prioritize power politics and great power politics, coupled with harsh and pure realism, rather than the proclaimed formula of principled realism. When it comes to President Donald Trump's statements, his response to Marjorie Taylor Greene, who reproached him for caring about the world and not America, was that the president defends America's interests, which are everywhere in the world. The priorities include defending ourselves and "our hemisphere" – the Monroe Doctrine with the Trump amendment – but also maintaining favorable balances in all regions. So the idea of the primacy of the major players is dead; it is America First, not Russia/China First, and spheres of influence are only granted to America, not to others. So, the Concert of Power with the major players or spheres of influence are no longer relevant, even if respect for the powerful persists, not for those who are right.

When it comes to the Board of Peace model, things are even clearer: the single-person proposal avoids vetoes and blockages by Russia and China in the UN Security Council, shifting the weight exclusively to what Donald Trump wants as a person, not as US president, in a formula of explicit American unipolar hegemony. If we add to this the statements regarding Iran and the action

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to eliminate the leaders of authoritarian states that support terrorism or drug trafficking, and even violate the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, we have a level of relativisation of the rules that other officials subsequently struggle to bring into line with international law and the treaties to which America is also a party.

At the CPC Congress and the biannual conference, China proposed its own project and social contract: leaders must be authoritarian, able to lead, promise, and deliver. China proposes a model in which it ensures peace, stability, and a level of prosperity in exchange for the renunciation of individual freedoms and rights that lead to turbulence in the international system. Moreover, some of those who follow the rules, who are well-oriented and score highly on the rule-following scale, can gain access to a higher level of decision-making and well-being if they are willing to pursue and ostracize their loved ones.

Russia is also important for the Republic of Moldova, with its revisionist model of power politics that aims to rebuild the Soviet Union and play a role equal to that played during the bipolar era, i.e., veto power on global affairs, as it is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, veto power on European security affairs, in the context of the expulsion of the United States from Europe, and a self-appointed right to defend Russians, Russian speakers, and compatriots as a tool for interference and aggression in the post-Soviet space.

With the propaganda component elevated to the status of a right to interethnic communication in Russian and the pro-Russian and pro-Putin content of the discourse projected in each country.

Interference and the tendency to place its own people at the head of independent, former union states.

In the case of the European Union, it is the only actor that continues to protect the world based on rights, democracy, and free trade areas. A paradigm that has recently been expanded, even in a period of war, through a new generation of agreements with the United Kingdom, Canada, MERCOSUR, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam, and by including all of the world's democracies, even the most distant ones, in its own projects. So, a conservative of the liberal democratic system and international law, of traditional multilateralism.

The world tends to evolve simultaneously out of inertia and expressed will, with the model of rules that still subsist, given that revisionists also have the ambition to claim that they respect international law, but at the same time try to impose their own version of the world of tomorrow that is coming.



The result is all the more difficult to predict as technology catches up and becomes a multiplier of advantages and tools, but also of vulnerabilities and security problems at the same time. All these developments, as well as the relativisation of the reasons for the use of force and the outbreak of war, create new challenges for states, especially for small states or minor powers.

## Implications for the foreign, security, and defense policy of the Republic of Moldova

War has returned as a foreign policy tool, serving the excessive ambitions of individuals who wish to remain in power indefinitely. Revisionism has become the norm, accepted even by European states that support a rules-based world and adaptation, rather than the destruction of the entire system of international institutions and rules. Otherwise, revisionist criticism of inefficiency and increased inertia and blockages in the context of a fast-paced world must also be taken into account, as must the debates and differences in interpretation and understanding of the rules governing transatlantic relations, by eliminating ideological themes and components on both sides – conservative and progressive – and maintaining the core and basic rules that all democratic actors have shared for 80 years, since the end of World War II.

War has reappeared on the list of threats to a small state - the prospect of Ukraine falling and Russian troops reaching the border of the Republic of Moldova, engulfing separatist Transnistria and imposing state leadership in Chişinău. Then there are the components of conventional warfare at the lower level, the fall of drones that can result in human casualties, material losses, fires, and insecurity. Special operations by Russian services could follow as an element of aggression, ranging from kidnappings and killings to internal interference of any kind, without respect for the sovereignty of the state, undermining its institutions and powers.

Entering the hybrid spectrum, we move from anonymous, under-the-radar threats without direct violence to espionage, subversion, vote buying, interference in structures and supply chains, undermining critical infrastructure, conditioning and constraints in policies and options, going as far as persistent cognitive-information warfare, applied by Moscow on all channels of influence, under the guise of protecting



minorities, in fact maintaining Russification and societal division, based on principles of identity and domination.

All of these undermine the state of the Republic of Moldova and call for solid and energetic responses and countermeasures through defense and deterrence and, sometimes, through proactive measures and preventive actions.



## Alternative strategic options as a security solution for the Republic of Moldova

For small states and minor powers, there are not many options for response, and they require careful study and a security solution appropriate to the option chosen:

**By ourselves** would be the first option, which would require a self-sufficient formula for existence that is easily questioned or pressured due to the size of the state and the lack of sufficient instruments to defend and deter. Switzerland, located in the middle of Europe, surrounded by NATO and EU states, with direct partnership and security cooperation relations with neighboring states, has the most fantastic security investment and still does not boast that it is capable of coping on its own.

**In the wake of a major player.** A great power with which you can arrange, in a transactional and self-interested manner, support in its wake in exchange for security guarantees. The asymmetry of the players - a great power and a small state - can give rise to elements of generosity and recognition, but also to those of domination, coercion, and direct subordination, combined with plunder and resource extraction. Pro-Russians and hope in a dominant Russia are an option present in society.

## The alliance of middle powers and multilateralism.

This is the EU (and NATO) option, which combines the previous option: joining a club where you are part of the decision-making process, you have to align yourself with the rules and share the costs. It is an acceptable option, sometimes even welcome, even if the level of security guarantees is not so high, but it is much more stable.

**The big brother.** In times of trouble and in complex concrete conditions, rallying in any form to a brother as such, Romania's option, can be a security solution granted not so much by the limited power of the other, but by its ability to relate and find solutions, and especially by the blood ties that dominate the emotional elements and selfless support for the younger brother, the Republic of Moldova. But this option, like the previous ones, must be prepared in advance, chosen from among multiple options with pros and cons, and played out in a formula of majority support from politicians and society.



# THE STRATEGIC RELEVANCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY

The Republic of Moldova stands as both a frontline target and a critical early warning signal for Europe.

*Elena Mârzac*

1. Strategic position on Ukraine's south-western flank	2. Pressure point at the EU–NATO frontier
Through Romania, the Republic of Moldova is directly connected to the EU and NATO space. This places Moldova at the frontline of resilience for the European security order, rather than merely representing an internal vulnerability.	The Republic of Moldova is located in close proximity to the Odesa region and the north-western Black Sea area. Its stability is essential for regional access, rear-area security, and the wider operational environment surrounding southern Ukraine.
3. Transnistria as a permanent instrument of coercion	4. Transit corridor, access, and regional influence
The presence of Russian military forces in Transnistria, combined with the existence of a separatist region, provides Moscow with a sustained lever for intimidation, disruption, and escalation management within the internationally recognised borders of the Republic of Moldova.	The Republic of Moldova matters as it is situated within a corridor linking the Black Sea region, south-western Ukraine, Romania, and the Lower Danube area. Influence exercised in this space directly affects regional mobility and connectivity.
5. A low-cost testing ground for hybrid operations	6. A frontline test case for European
For Russia, the Republic of Moldova provides a favourable environment for testing and refining scalable methods, including electoral interference, disinformation, financial penetration, cyber disruption, and identity manipulation.	The Republic of Moldova illustrates how hybrid pressure operates in practice: the spillover effects of war, disinformation, energy coercion, and electoral interference occur simultaneously.
7. Democracy under pressure	8. Democratic resilience has endured
In the Republic of Moldova, geopolitics directly shapes political behaviour, public anxiety, and institutional resilience.	Despite sustained pressure, the Republic of Moldova has maintained political stability, conducted credible elections, and preserved its strategic direction.
9. Energy as a tool of pressure	10. Fragmented information space
Dependence on Russian gas and electricity supplied from Transnistria has turned geopolitics into a direct instrument of pressure on the population, affecting prices, livelihoods, and the risk of disruption.	Citizens of the Republic of Moldova operate within different media environments. This makes manipulation and influence easier, narratives more adaptable, and social fragmentation more pronounced.
11. An early warning signal for Europe	
What is being used against the Republic of Moldova today can be adapted for use in other states tomorrow. Moldova is therefore not only a target, but also an early warning case of how hybrid pressure can be organised against democratic states under strategic stress.	

## STRATEGIC CONCLUSION

The Republic of Moldova should be understood not only as a vulnerable state, but also as a strategic case with important lessons for Europe and the future of European security.

## When rules no longer apply: the decline of multilateralism and what it means for the Republic of Moldova

 *Laurențiu Pleșca<sup>2</sup>*

For three decades, the world's states have resolved disputes at the negotiating table, within international organizations with common rules, based on international law. The system was not perfect, but it offered something essential: predictability. Today, after the Russian Federation's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, this system is visibly faltering. Large states are no longer patient with the cumbersome procedures of multilateral institutions and prefer to resolve their problems through direct agreements, in bilateral formats or in small, selective groups. This change has profound consequences for small states, including the Republic of Moldova, and cannot be ignored.

### What is actually happening to the multilateral order?

Traditional international organizations were built on the premise that states accept a common set of rules and that disputes are resolved through dialogue. This premise is no longer universally valid. Russia uses its veto power in the UN Security Council to block any resolution condemning it for its aggression in Ukraine. The OSCE has been virtually paralyzed in managing conflicts in Eastern Europe. The Council of Europe expelled Russia in 2022, confirming that these institutions can no longer function as spaces for real mediation in major conflicts.

The most recent and perhaps most relevant example of this trend is the so-called Board of Peace, an initiative launched by the Trump administration in September 2025 as part of a peace plan for Gaza. On the surface, it appears to be a mechanism for international coordination. In reality, it is a body chaired personally by the President of the United States, with no time limit, unilateral veto power, and a charter that makes no mention of Gaza, leaving open the possibility of extending its mandate to any other global conflict. The United States' major Western allies, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Norway, have refused to participate in this format. Some of them directly raised concerns that such a body could undermine the role of the UN and concentrate too much power in the hands of a single national leader<sup>3</sup>. Beyond the specific context of the Middle East, the Board of Peace is a clear illustration of a broader trend: the United States no longer feels the need to operate exclusively through the multilateral institutions it helped build after 1945.



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[3] Kohut A., Maślanka L., Matusiak M., Rodkiewicz W., Trump's Board of Peace: an alternative to the UN?, Centrul pentru Studii Estice OSW, ianuarie 2026.

<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2026-01-22/trumps-board-peace-alternative-to-un>



## **The dilemma of the Eastern flank states: the US or Europe?**

This reconfiguration creates real tension for Eastern European NATO and EU member states, with Romania being a relevant example. Romania is an ally of the United States within NATO, hosts American military bases, has received consistent support for the modernization of its army, and has been a bilateral strategic partner of Washington since 1997. At the same time, Romania is a member of the European Union, an active participant in European integration processes, and one of the most vocal supporters of EU enlargement to the East.

In the current context, in which the US administration is sending increasingly transactional signals to its allies, and some analysts are openly talking about pressure on Europe to choose between its own interests and Washington's preferences, the states on the Eastern flank are feeling this tension<sup>4</sup>. The 2026 Munich Security Conference report describes Europe as being in a reactive mode, forced to maintain a balance between its dependence on the US for military deterrence and the need to build its own strategic autonomy<sup>5</sup>.

However, this dilemma is to a great extent false. Romania does not have to choose between Washington and Brussels. The strategic partnership with the United States and full membership of the European Union are not opposing options, but complementary components of the same project for security and prosperity. The partial withdrawal of US troops from Romania, announced at the end of 2025, does not mean abandoning the alliance, but, as described by the Atlantic Council

experts, a transition to co-ownership of defense, in which Europe takes on more responsibility without losing its transatlantic anchor<sup>6</sup>. That is precisely why Romania must be more active, more visible, and more articulate in both directions, rather than retreating into the position of an indecisive observer. That is why Nicușor Dan, President of Romania, participated in Washington, D.C., at the inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace on February 19, 2026, as an observer to this new format.

## **What does this mean for the Republic of Moldova?**

The Republic of Moldova is observing these developments from the position of a state that is neither a NATO nor the EU member country yet, but which aspires to European integration and depends on regional stability. The lesson that Moldova can draw from the trends described above is clear and unambiguous.

First, the traditional multilateral formats will not resolve the Transnistrian issue. The 5+2 negotiation format, which included the OSCE, Russia, Ukraine, the EU, and the US, is practically inoperable. Russia no longer participates constructively in any negotiation format, and the OSCE does not have the necessary tools to compel it to do so. In a world where the Board of Peace can be created in a few months and claim a global mandate, while the UN stagnates, Moldova cannot anchor its security in the hope of a multilateral agreement that will not come in this form.

[4] Jones B., Trump's Board of Peace and the multilateral order, Brookings Institution, februarie 2026.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/trumps-board-of-peace-and-the-multilateral-order/>

[5] Conferința de securitate de la München: Raportul de securitate de la München 2026, secțiunea Europa.

<https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report/2026/europe/>

[6] Atlantic Council, Ce înseamnă retragerea SUA din România pentru apărarea europeană?, octombrie 2025.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react/what-does-the-us-drawdown-in-romania-me>

Secondly, Moldova must understand the Romanian lesson: the strategic partnership with the US and European integration are not mutually exclusive, but mutually reinforcing. The process of accession to the European Union, officially launched in 2022, is not a substitute for the transatlantic relationship, but a framework that makes Moldova a more credible and attractive partner for all Western actors, including Washington. The more consistent the internal reforms are, the stronger the link with Euro-Atlantic structures becomes.

Thirdly, Moldova needs internal resilience as the foundation for any foreign policy strategy. In a world where agreements are built between partners who trust each other and demonstrate real institutional capacity, social cohesion, functional institutions, and a society resistant to disinformation are concrete strategic assets, not abstract desiderata. A fragile state will always remain a second-rate partner, no matter how much money it receives and how many friends it claims to have.

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## OPINION



### The Munich Conference 2026. Reshaping transatlantic relations in a fragmented world

*Laurențiu Pleșca*

The 62nd edition of the Munich Security Conference, held between February 13 and 15, 2026, bore an uncomfortable title: "Under Demolition." This was not a random choice. The Munich Security Report, published annually in preparation for the conference, chose this framework to describe a reality that more and more leaders are aware of, but few are willing to state bluntly: the international order built after World War II is no longer functioning as it was designed to. And this year's meetings in Munich confirmed this.

#### A warm speech, a tough message

The most anticipated moment of the conference was the speech by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio. After Vice President JD Vance's fiery tirade at the previous edition, Rubio's tone seemed almost comforting. He spoke about shared values, the historical transatlantic bond, and the West as a common civilizational project.

Beyond the tone, Marco Rubio called on Europe to "save the West," but made it clear that the United States would no longer accept being the only one to bear the financial burden of this project.

The commitment to NATO continues, but with explicit conditions: more money for defense, a military industry of its own, rapid decision-making capacity, and strategic unity.

#### Do we still have international order?

The words that resonated most loudly in Munich did not come from Washington, but from Berlin. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz explicitly stated what diplomacy used to avoid: the rules-based international order, in which the West spoke with one voice under American leadership, no longer exists. In its place has returned the politics of great powers, with its harsh and unpredictable rules. Merz's warning was direct: Europe's freedom is no longer a given, but something that must be consciously defended every day<sup>7</sup>.

Countries such as Germany, which for years treated NATO as an insurance policy that should never be used, now find themselves facing concrete expectations. Poland and the Baltic states, which understood the threat earlier, have invested heavily in defense and are now asking the rest of Europe to do the same. But the major Western European economies are still hesitating between security rhetoric and budgetary reality.

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[7] Euronews, Munich Security Conference 2026, șase citate esențiale, februarie 2026. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/02/15/munich-security-conference-six-quotes-to-take-away-from-the-worlds-biggest-security-confer>

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen went even further. She called for the activation of Article 42(7) of the EU Treaty, the Union's mutual defense clause, often overshadowed by NATO's Article 5. The message was clear: the EU cannot and must not wait for someone else to guarantee its security. Common defense within the Union is not an option, but an obligation assumed by treaty<sup>8</sup>.

### **NATO: cost sharing or the illusion of protection**

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte tried to maintain balance. He confirmed that no one in Europe is talking about replacing the American nuclear umbrella, but he also emphasized just as emphatically that Europe cannot defend itself without US help. His conclusion, however, was uncomfortably pragmatic: NATO will be led more by Europeans, and costs will be shared fairly, not just in words.

European defense investments have increased significantly since 2022. Several member states have committed to a target of 5% of GDP by 2035. The European SAFE<sup>9</sup> program has launched substantial investments in the defense industry. However, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky himself pointed out in Munich, the pace of these changes remains insufficient given the urgency of a continent with an active war on its borders.

### **Two visions of the West, one reality**

The central tension at Munich 2026 was not between East and West, but within the West itself. On the one hand, an America that is redefining itself and placing value on measurable contributions, no longer offering security on credit. On the other hand, a Europe that still oscillates between the instinct for strategic autonomy and structural dependence on the American umbrella. The Munich Security Report 2026 describes this tension in no uncertain terms: actors who still believe in the international order are reorganizing, seeking to limit the effects of "demolition" policies and testing new approaches that do not depend on Washington's leadership. This is a paradigm shift, not a passing crisis. And small states, especially those in Russia's immediate neighborhood, such as the Republic of Moldova, feel this change more acutely than anyone else<sup>10</sup>.

### **What Munich meant for the Republic of Moldova**

The Republic of Moldova was not absent from Munich. President Maia Sandu attended and held bilateral meetings with Marco Rubio and Mark Rutte. This is not just a matter of protocol. These direct contacts with security decision-making centers are essential for a state under constant hybrid pressure from Russia and which does not yet benefit from the formal protection of NATO or the European Union.



[8] EUROMIL, MSC 2026, trei zile de recalibrare. <https://euromil.org/under-destruction-munich-security-conference-2026-three-days-of-reckoning-recalibration-and-open-questions/>

[9] Security Action for Europe

[10] Munich Security Report 2026: Under Destruction, rezumat executiv, februarie 2026 <https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report/2026/executive-summary/>

The central message delivered in Munich by the country's president, Maia Sandu, is that the Republic of Moldova is on the front line of Russia's hybrid war and that its stability contributes directly to European security. In this context, integration into the European Union is presented as a tool for strengthening security, not just as a political objective. In other words, EU accession is not just about standards and reforms, but about definitively anchoring Moldova in a space of institutional, economic, and strategic protection<sup>11</sup>.


The message sent from Munich to countries such as Moldova is that external support no longer comes unconditionally. In the world that is taking shape, a small state on the periphery of the Union does not have the luxury of waiting to be defended by others. It must be an argument for its own support.

Specifically, this means three things. First, real investment in our own defense and security capabilities, not for the sake of militarization, but to demonstrate that the state can withstand hybrid pressures without relying solely on external support. Second, accelerating the process of accession to the European Union, which remains, at this point, the only institutional framework that offers real long-term protection, beyond diplomatic statements. Thirdly, strengthening internal cohesion: functional institutions, resistance to disinformation, civic trust. An internally fragmented state will always remain vulnerable, no matter how many security conferences its leaders allow themselves to attend.

## OPINION



### The impact of the war in Iran on the Republic of Moldova

 *Laurențiu Pleșca*

On February 28, 2026, the world woke up to a new strategic reality. In a military operation unprecedented in the last two decades, the United States and Israel simultaneously struck Iran's military and nuclear centers, culminating in the elimination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. What initially appeared to be a swift action aimed at decapitating the regime in Tehran turned, in just a few days, into a regional conflict with global effects: missiles and drones, reopened fronts, energy markets in shock, and blocked trade routes. We are no longer talking about a military episode in the Middle East, but about a turning point that is reconfiguring the balance of power, energy security, and economic stability, including in Eastern Europe, and the Republic of

Moldova is not isolated from these shock waves. For decades, Iran financed the proxy network that destabilized the region, from Hamas to Hezbollah and militias in Iraq and Yemen. After the Hamas attack in October 2023, Israel systematically weakened these groups, and direct exchanges of blows with Iran in 2024 and the brief war in June 2025 escalated tensions step by step. The turning point came in early 2026, when the Iranian regime massacred thousands of protesters in the largest demonstrations since the 1979 revolution, fueled by economic collapse and the collapse of the national currency. Washington demanded that Tehran stop enriching uranium, limit its nuclear program, and cease support for proxies in the war with Israel. Iran refused.

[11] Președinta Republicii Moldova, Maia Sandu, s-a întâlnit la Munchen cu secretarul de stat Marco Rubio la inițiativa SUA, februarie 2026.

<https://agerpres.ro/politic-extern/2026/02/17/presedinta-republicii-moldova-maia-sandu-s-a-intalnit-la-munchen>

US President Donald Trump's State of the Union address on February 24 accused Iran of resuming its military nuclear program, and four days later we saw that war had begun in earnest. The price paid by civilians on both sides is devastating: at least 555 people were killed in Iran in attacks on more than 130 cities, including approximately 180 children in an Israeli bombing of a girls' school in Minab, while in Israel 11 people were killed by Iranian missiles, and in Lebanon, the Emirates, Kuwait, and Bahrain, dozens more victims are added to the death toll every day<sup>12</sup>.

### What does this mean for the Republic of Moldova?

The short answer: a lot, on several levels simultaneously. The long answer deserves to be detailed, because in Chişinău there seems to be an illusion that what happens thousands of kilometers away does not concern us.

The first and most immediate impact comes through energy. The conflict is unfolding around the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied gas passes.

Maritime traffic through the strait has virtually collapsed, the price of Brent crude oil has jumped above \$80 per barrel, and the price of gas in Europe has risen by 20 percent in a single day<sup>13</sup>.

Moldova imports all of its gas and over 70 percent of its electricity. Energo.com secured supplies for this winter at around 38.5 euros per megawatt-hour, but the contracts were calculated in a market context that no longer exists. A sustained increase in global prices could undo all these efforts, and the new tariffs approved by ANRE on March 1 may already be insufficient. If energy becomes more expensive, so do transportation, food, and everything else related to daily life. In a country that has seen gas prices rise by 600 percent in 2022, already pays the highest tariffs in Europe, and where energy poverty affects a significant part of the population, every extra percentage point counts enormously. A new wave of energy price increase would directly undermine citizens' confidence in the country's European course, which is exactly the narrative that pro-Russian forces have been exploiting for years: "Look what the EU has brought you".



FOTO: [www.flightradar.com](http://www.flightradar.com)

[12] US-Israeli strike on girls' school kills at least 85 students, Iran's judiciary says. <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20260228-us-israeli-strike-on-iranian-school-kills-more-than-50-students-state-media-says>

[13] Oil prices surge to cross \$80 after US-Iran conflict engulfs Middle East and Strait of Hormuz. <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/oil-prices-surge-to-cross-80-after-us-iran-conflict-engulfs-middle-east-and-strait-of-hormuz-233642824.html?guccounter=1>;

Oil Prices Surge as Hormuz Disruptions Threaten Global Supply. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-03-02/oil-prices-could-rise-further-on-hormuz-delays-analysts-say>

The second level is geopolitical. The conflict redirects the attention of the West, both the United States and the European Union, to the Gulf just when Moldova needs constant support on its path to the EU and in the face of Russian pressure. Every US dollar and every euro spent on military operations in the Middle East is a dollar and a euro that does not go towards strengthening Eastern Europe's energy security, towards financial support for reforms, or towards countering the Kremlin's hybrid interference in the Republic of Moldova. This year, Chisinau must advance on the chapters of negotiations for EU accession, manage the complicated relationship with Transnistria in the context of the Moldovagaz-Gazprom contract expiring in October, and maintain social cohesion in a society exhausted by successive crises. All this becomes more difficult when Western partners have their eyes elsewhere.

The third tier, and perhaps the most counterintuitive, also contains potentially good news. Since the start of the invasion in 2022, Iran has been Russia's most important supplier of drones in its war against Ukraine. Thousands of Shahed-136 drones have been delivered to Moscow and used systematically to bomb Ukraine's civilian infrastructure, cities, and energy networks. President Zelensky has stated that Russia has used over 57,000 Iranian Shahed drones during the war<sup>14</sup>. Now, Iran needs every drone for its own conflict. Every Shahed launched towards Tel Aviv or an American base in Bahrain is a drone that no longer reaches Russia and no longer strikes a block in Kiev or a power plant in Kharkiv. Iran has also supplied Russia with artillery ammunition, components for new generations of drones, and technical assistance. If Iran is caught up in a large-scale war that consumes all its industrial defense resources, this flow will inevitably diminish.

Last but not least, the strategic partnership treaty signed by Moscow and Tehran in May 2025<sup>15</sup> does not contain a mutual defense clause. Russia has offered Iran nothing concrete, either in the 12-day war in June 2025 or now. An Iran that feels betrayed by its strategic partner will be less motivated to continue fueling the Russian war machine.

For Moldova, any improvement in the situation in Ukraine is a direct improvement in its own security. Moldova has experienced firsthand the consequences of the Russian war: energy crisis, rampant inflation, refugee pressure, hybrid interference in democratic processes. A Russian front that is losing intensity means less pressure on Chisinau, less room for maneuver for the Kremlin's hybrid instruments, and a more solid perspective on the European path. Of course, these benefits are gradual and uncertain, while higher energy bills are immediate and certain. That is why the lesson of this conflict for Chişinău is a single one, repeated by every crisis in recent years and ignored every time: energy independence is not a technical project for the future, but an emergency for the present. The Vulcăneşti-Chişinău electricity interconnection line, the diversification of gas sources through Romania, the Neptun Deep project in the Black Sea, and real integration into the European energy market can no longer be postponed. The Middle East seems far away, but every explosion in Tehran sends shock waves all the way to Chişinău.

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[14] Ukraine's air defense expertise 'irreplaceable,' Zelensky says. <https://kyivindependent.com/ukraines-air-defense-expertise-irreplaceable-zelensky-says-as-war-escalates-in-middle-east/>

[15] New Russia-Iran Treaty Reveals the Limits of Their Partnership. <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/01/russia-iran-strategic-agreement>; Iranian Parliament Approves 20-Year Strategic Pact With Russia. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-03-02/oil-prices-could-rise-further-on-hormuz-delays-analysts-say>

# Security Sector Reform

## ARTICLE

### Republic of Moldova in the Emerging Geopolitical Order: Democratic Resilience and Security Challenges

 **Natalia Albu**<sup>16</sup>

#### Strategic Context: Global Order Reconfiguration and Implications on the Security of the Republic of Moldova

In 2026, the international order is entering a phase of accelerated reconfiguration, in which power and decision-making speed increasingly outweigh procedure and multilateral consensus. The discussions held at the World Economic Forum in Davos (WEF, 19–23 January 2026), conducted under the expectation of openness to dialogue (“a spirit of dialogue”), and the Munich Security Conference (MSC, 13–15 February 2026), shaped by hopes of revitalizing multilateralism in the face of mounting security challenges, may be interpreted as episodes of strategic signaling. Both events highlighted the need to define a concrete security agenda and to

reposition key actors, with direct implications for the security of the European Union and Ukraine and, indirectly, for the Republic of Moldova.

The Global Risks Report (2026) confirms that the multilateral system is facing mounting pressure: declining trust, reduced transparency and respect for the rule of law, together with intensifying protectionism, are undermining established international relations, trade and investment, and increasing the propensity for conflict<sup>17</sup>. From the perspective of small states such as the Republic of Moldova, the report highlights that, in a world already weakened by growing rivalries<sup>18</sup>, unstable supply chains and protracted conflicts with risks of regional spillover such confrontations generate deliberate and far-reaching consequences, further exacerbating state fragility and vulnerabilities.

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<https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2026/digest/>

[18] Note: According to the Global Risks Report 2026, geoeconomic confrontation ranks among the leading risks in the global risk landscape, with respondents identifying it as the primary risk over the two-year horizon (through 2028).

In this context, rules remain important, yet they are increasingly negotiated through leverage<sup>19</sup>: energy, infrastructure, market access, technology and security. For small states such as the Republic of Moldova, this means that structural vulnerabilities (energy dependence, demographic decline, trade dependencies, internal polarization) can be rapidly converted in political pressure. Furthermore, the Munich Security Conference (2026) underscored the need to move beyond *strategic ambiguity*, signaling a shift in emphasis from reliance on traditional alliances towards the development of resilient defense mechanisms - either autonomous or regionally interconnected - in order to navigate an era of intense, competitive and often disruptive geopolitics<sup>20</sup>. For the Republic of Moldova, this is particularly relevant insofar as alliances imply active cooperation and foreign policy engagement, both bilaterally and multilaterally, with the actors that shape the international order (in line with the logic of hegemonic power theory<sup>21</sup>), not to compromise sovereignty or national interests, but rather to strengthen the country's democratic path and its capacity to contribute to regional stability.

Thus, the implications of the evolving international order and security context reverberate directly across the regional security environment. From a power perspective, the *rules of the game* are shifting: this is not merely a change in rhetoric, but a transformation of underlying mechanisms.

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[19] Note: The logic of leverage reflects the regional context, which confirms a shift towards a dynamic of instrumentalized interdependence ("weaponized interdependence"), whereby economic and infrastructure dependencies are converted into mechanisms of coercion.

[20] Munich 2026: The End of Strategic Ambiguity. <https://behorizon.org/munich-2026-the-end-of-strategic-ambiguity/>

[21] A se vedea: Burmester I. EU and Russian Hegemony in the 'Shared Neighbourhood'. Between Coercion, Prescription, and Co-optation. The European Union in International Affairs, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, p. 35-67



PHOTO: [www.wikipedia.org/](http://www.wikipedia.org/)

The negotiations failure among major power actors in attempts to halt the war in Ukraine, developments concerning Greenland, as well as the weaponization of energy as a geopolitical tool, point to an almost brutal reconfiguration unfolding against the backdrop of mounting internal and external pressures on Europe. Consequently, the security and role of the Republic of Moldova are closely intertwined with regional developments and the dynamics of European security. Ukraine's resilience remains a critical factor for regional peace and stability.

For small states such as the Republic of Moldova, the stakes extend beyond mere adaptation to the new context; they concern strategic survival. Diplomacy no longer functions solely as protocol, but increasingly as an instrument for safeguarding sovereignty, internal stability and the country's development trajectory. This means that for the Republic of Moldova - as a neutral state - security does not equate to isolation, but rather to the consolidation of partnerships through credible action and the fulfilment of undertaken commitments, particularly those related to the European Union accession process. ***Credibility, in this regard, is measured by resilience.***

### **The Transformation of the Democratic Profile: From a "Transitional Regime" to a "Resilient" Democracy**

In the new strategic context, the credibility of a small state derives from the extent to which it can withstand external pressure: energy resilience, functional institutions, social cohesion, continuity of governance and the capacity to manage multiple crises.

The parliamentary elections of September 2025 demonstrated the Republic of Moldova's resilience in the face of multiple hybrid attacks<sup>22</sup>, confirming that not only pro-democratic rhetoric matters, but the effective preservation of democracy itself.

The Republic of Moldova withstood one of the most extensive attempts at interference and destabilization associated with an electoral cycle, marked by allegations of disinformation, vote-buying, cyberattacks and efforts to incite tensions. Consequently, an increasing number of analyses and headlines concerning the Republic of Moldova have employed the phrase "democracy under siege", underscoring the systemic nature of hybrid pressures targeting democratic processes. The Republic of Moldova has thus emerged as a success story with symbolic significance: a country moving beyond the label of "the poorest in Europe" and taking concrete steps towards alignment with the European Union<sup>23</sup>.

Until recently, the Republic of Moldova was classified by several international indicators as a hybrid regime. In 2021, however, the Democracy Index Report (Economist Intelligence Unit) recorded on

[22] A se vedea: Democrația sub asediu. Provocări la adresa securității naționale și contracararea amenințărilor hibride în Republica Moldova. Studiu. Chișinău, 2025. <https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Studiu.-Democrația-sub-asediu.pdf>

[23] Democracy under Siege in Moldova: How Russia Exploits Divisions and Europe Risks Strategic Losses. The Hague Research Institute, September 2025. <https://hagueresearch.org/democracy-under-siege-in-moldova-how-russia-exploits-divisions-and-europe-risks-strategic-losses>

improvement, with the Republic of Moldova moving from a hybrid regime to a flawed democracy<sup>24</sup>. In the subsequent years, this classification has to a great extent, been maintained. However, the 2024 assessment indicates that, although the aggregate democracy score remains relatively stable (6.04 out of 10), the undisputed intervention of a foreign power in an attempt to influence the outcome led to downgrades across several related indicators.

A convergent assessment is also provided by Freedom House. In 2021, the Republic of Moldova received a score of 3.11 (on a scale of 1–7, where 1 represents the highest level of democratic progress) and was classified as a transitional government / hybrid regime, against the backdrop of corruption and oligarchic influence, the consequences of the banking fraud, the lack of control over the territory on the left bank of the Dniester, and the effects of the pandemic. In the 2023 reporting cycle, the score remained broadly similar (3.14), in the context of intensified hybrid instruments targeting the the political environment<sup>25</sup>. If we examine what distinguishes 2025 from 2024 or even 2021 in the electoral landscape of the Republic of Moldova, it is not only the evolution of democracy-related indicators that is relevant, but also the increased sophistications of Russian efforts to influence the elections<sup>26</sup>.

Beyond these indicators, in order to obtain a clearer picture of the correlation between democracy and security, it is useful to consider additional parameters: state fragility, the Corruption Perceptions Index, the rule of law, as well as human security indicators, including dimensions associated with the Women, Peace and Security agenda. As “the democracy shapes the way we live, the way we are able to express our ideas, and the way governments respond to

our needs. Where it thrives, people enjoy greater freedom, dignity and security”<sup>27</sup>.

In this context, it may be noted that, beyond the phrase “democracy under siege”, a more nuanced perception has increasingly emerged following the elections: the Republic of Moldova is viewed as a fragile laboratory, yet one with a resilient democracy capable of withstanding pressure and attempts at interference<sup>28</sup>. At the same time, European institutions treated the elections as a test of democratic resilience and security, issuing official statements of appreciation in the aftermath of the vote.

Returning to the parliamentary elections of September 2025, the decisive victory of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) may be interpreted as a political mandate to accelerate the European path. This outcome further expands the European Union’s scope for action: it increases the likelihood of firmer conditionality in areas such as justice, economy and energy, on the grounds that a “democratic mandate” exists for structural reforms. In parallel, discussions on a two-speed Europe may generate expectations of differentiated integration for candidate states that deliver tangible reform progress. At the same time, the Russian Federation continues to deploy hybrid instruments aimed at slowing reforms, eroding internal cohesion and diminishing the attractiveness of the European option.



[24] Note: According to the Democracy Index, published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, states are classified into four regime types: full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime and authoritarian regime.

[25] What's wrong with representative democracy? Democracy Index 2024, p. 62.

<https://static.poder360.com.br/2025/03/the-economist-democracia-.pdf>

[26] Evaluarea implicării Federației Ruse în procesele electorale din Republica Moldova în 2024-2025.

<https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Scenarii%20de%20influen%C8%9B%C4%83%202024-2025.pdf>

[27] Democracy index, 2024. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/democracy-index-eiu?mapSelect=~MDA>

[28] Parmentier F. La Moldavie, laboratoire de la double résilience démocratique, 7 October 2025.

<https://www.telos-eu.com/fr/politique-francaise-et-internationale/la-moldavie-laboratoire-de-la-double-resilience-de.html>

## Democracy and Security: A Double Requirement and the Risk Portfolio

From a security perspective, democracy entails a dual imperative. On the one hand, democracy requires resilience in the face of external threats – whether it were a pandemic, or hostile actions that endanger sovereignty – compelling the state to strengthen its national security instruments, which in times of crisis are not always politically popular. On the other hand, democracy presupposes the capacity to maintain societal cohesion and institutional functionality despite existing fragmentation, so that the democratic regime remains viable and supported by a critical mass of citizens. Both dimensions, however, require the preservation and consolidation of trust in state institutions and governance. In this context, identifying the risks and threats that fuel pressure on democracy and, consequently, affect the national security of the Republic of Moldova is essential.

In general, the conceptual framework concerning dangers, risks and threats to the national security of the Republic of Moldova is reflected in several strategic documents, which underline the importance of early identification of the source of a threat.

In this regard, the National Security Strategy (2023) clarified the status of the Russian Federation as the primary source of threat, enabling the Republic of Moldova to adjust its defense and security policies more effectively. With respect to risk, the Law on National Security (2024) defines it as a “level of exposure to certain threats, dangers, incidents, emergencies or crises, determined by the combination of the likelihood of their occurrence and the impact of their consequences”<sup>29</sup>.

In order to operationalize this definition, it is necessary to identify the principal risk factors affecting national security:

- Cognitive risk (polarization, distrust, narrative capture): the primary target of hybrid pressure is not merely an institution or the governing authorities, but trust in governance itself (for example, trust in elections, in the judiciary, and in external partnerships).
- Risk of spillover from the war-affected neighbourhood, generating “proximity-based” security risks: cross-border pressures, risks to critical infrastructure, disinformation flows and amplified social tensions.
- Risk to critical infrastructure, particularly in the cyber domain: attacks may be “deniable” and difficult to attribute, yet their societal impact is immediate. Moreover, in the event of incidents, emergency services may be deliberately targeted by disruptions intended to reduce response capacity and hinder effective crisis management.
- Risk of social cohesion fragmentation: internal cleavages act as vulnerability multipliers, and any shock whether energy-related, economic or informational can be instrumentalized to obstruct decision-making, erode legitimacy and generate instability.
- Structural risk associated with the unsolved conflict on the left bank of the Dniester: this provides a framework for gradual pressure and may transform existing vulnerabilities into operational threats.



[29] Law on the National Security of the Republic of Moldova, No. LP249/2025 of 10 July 2025, adopted by Parliament. Published on 4 September 2025 in the Official Gazette, Nos. 463–466, Article 627

- **Risk of a compound crisis:** the most dangerous configuration lies in convergence. An energy shock may be reinforced by information operations, economic pressure and a cyber incident, with the objective of forcing political decisions or triggering shifts in a strategic direction. A relevant example is the episode recorded this winter, when, under severe weather conditions, the power outage caused by vulnerabilities in the Ukrainian system and a malfunction on the Vulcănești line within a regional context already strained by the war in the neighbourhood, generated cascading effects, ranging from economic and social pressures to informational

vulnerabilities, particularly where institutional communication was delayed or uncoordinated. In such situations, the space for disinformation and polarization expands, while the costs of recovery and restoring public trust may become significantly higher.

Overall, the risk factors outlined above highlight their dynamic nature, further amplified by the use of hybrid instruments. In certain contexts, risks can be rapidly converted into threats; conversely, through appropriate response measures, their impact can be mitigated, reducing them to latent vulnerabilities.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a reconfiguring international order, small states safeguard their interests not only through diplomatic positioning, but also through internal resilience and the capacity to reduce the leverage that others may exercise over them. In this context, security entails reducing dependencies, expanding strategic options and strengthening the ability to absorb shocks.

Within the international security system, diplomacy increasingly becomes an instrument of strategic survival. For the Republic of Moldova, this implies coherently aligning foreign policy with security, energy policy with security, and good governance with security.

In the context of the hybrid instruments deployed by the Russian Federation against the Republic of Moldova, European integration assumes an even more pronounced security dimension. Conversely, the hybrid dimension is becoming a mainstream priority rather than a niche concern limited to the security community. For example, the fact that disinformation is increasingly recognized as a major risk including at the global level justifies firmer policies aimed at strengthening societal resilience (such as media literacy), protecting electoral processes, and enhancing digital security and institutional response capacity.

Although it remains vulnerable to hybrid pressure, the Republic of Moldova is increasingly perceived not only as a target, but also as a partner in countering such threats. Through the practical experience it has accumulated in identifying, managing and disrupting operations that other European democracies may also encounter, the country is emerging as a relevant source of expertise and applied lessons for its partners.

Finally, in the current context, time itself becomes a strategic resource. In times of crisis, “windows of response” narrow: delayed decisions carry higher costs, and recovery becomes more difficult. For a small state, the capacity for anticipation, rapid communication and interinstitutional coordination matters almost as much as material resources. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, this logic is further reinforced by the politically assumed horizon for negotiations on accession to the European Union (2028), making the speed of implementation, predictability and decision-making coherence integral components of national security, rather than merely elements of the reform agenda.

# Public Policies Analysis

FOTO: [www.freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com)

OPINION



## Moldova's Democratic Resilience Plan: Safeguarding Elections in an Era of Hybrid Threats

*Sanda Sandu*<sup>30</sup>

The experience of the Republic of Moldova demonstrates that democratic resilience requires continuous adaptation to evolving threats. Strengthening institutional capacity and safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process will remain essential for maintaining democratic stability and ensuring the country's continued progress toward European integration.

The adoption of the Democratic Resilience Strengthening Plan of the Republic of Moldova for the period 2026–2027 marks an important step in the country's efforts to protect democratic institutions from external interference and hybrid threats. Approved by the Supreme Security Council of the Republic of Moldova and developed on the basis of lessons learned from recent electoral cycles, the plan sets out concrete measures to strengthen cybersecurity, prevent illicit political financing, and reinforce information security<sup>31</sup>. Its implementation reflects the growing recognition both among Moldovan authorities and international partners that democratic resilience has become an essential component of national security. On 28 September 2025, the Republic of Moldova held parliamentary elections in a context marked by a large-scale hybrid

interference campaign, widely attributed to the Russian Federation. This represented one of the most significant such actions targeting the country and the broader region<sup>32</sup>. Despite persistent attempts to undermine the electoral process through illegal financial support, disinformation operations, cyberattacks, bomb threats, coordinated protests, and efforts to disrupt state institutions the elections were successfully conducted, demonstrating the resilience of Moldova's democratic institutions<sup>33</sup>.

External interference took multiple forms, including disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, and the illegal financing of electoral campaigns. The elections in the Republic of Moldova were described by international observers as being subject to coordinated external influence operations aimed at destabilizing democratic institutions and undermining public trust<sup>34</sup>. Moldova's pro-European political orientation and its status as a candidate country for accession to the European Union increased its exposure to such hybrid threats. The European Union granted the Republic of Moldova candidate status in 2022 and has since intensified cooperation aimed at strengthening governance, democratic institutions, and resilience in the field of security.

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[31] Consiliul Național de Securitate a aprobat Planul de consolidare a rezilienței democratice pentru următorii doi ani.

<https://presedinte.md/rom/presa/consiliul-national-de-securitate-a-aprobat-planul-de-consolidare-a-rezilientei-democratice-pentru-urmatorii-doi-ani>

[32] Moldova: country election risk assessment (cera).

<https://alliance4europe.eu/report/moldova-country-election-risk-assessment-cera>

[33] Countering Hybrid Threats. Lessons from Eastern Europe.

<https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/countering-hybrid-threats>

[34] Elections in Moldova. <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/moldova>

The Democratic Resilience Plan directly addresses these vulnerabilities by strengthening media independence, improving transparency regarding media ownership, and promoting civic education and media literacy. These measures aim to counter disinformation and strengthen public trust in democratic institutions. Independent media and informed citizens play a crucial role in maintaining democratic stability, particularly during electoral periods. European public policy experts emphasize that resilience requires robust media regulation, transparent information environments, and effective mechanisms for protection against manipulation.

Cybersecurity represents another central pillar of the resilience strategy of the Republic of Moldova. The plan includes measures aimed at strengthening cybersecurity infrastructure, conducting independent audits of electoral systems, and improving institutional coordination in responding to cyber threats<sup>35</sup>. These measures reflect the growing importance of cybersecurity for safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process. The Republic of Moldova has faced cyber incidents and attempts at digital interference, highlighting the need for stronger institutional defence mechanisms. International organizations specializing in electoral integrity have identified cyberattacks, digital disinformation, and the illegal financing of campaigns as major threats to democratic processes in Moldova. Financial transparency plays a crucial role in protecting democratic processes. The resilience plan includes measures aimed at improving financial monitoring, strengthening anti-money laundering mechanisms, and regulating digital assets such as cryptocurrencies.

These reforms seek to prevent the manipulation of elections and political parties through illicit financial flows. Electoral processes in the Republic of Moldova have been affected by vote-buying schemes and opaque political financing linked to external actors, highlighting the importance of financial oversight in safeguarding democracy. The resilience plan is aligned with broader European efforts to strengthen democratic resilience<sup>36</sup>. The European Union has established a number of initiatives aimed at countering disinformation, protecting the integrity of electoral processes, and enhancing resilience against external manipulation.



These initiatives include instruments for detecting disinformation campaigns, improving information sharing, and strengthening institutional preparedness.

In addition, the European Union has deployed in the Republic of Moldova a civilian mission designed to strengthen crisis management capacities and to counter hybrid threats, including cyber and information attacks.

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[35] How the EU Rewrote its Cyber Diplomacy Playbook in Moldova's 2025 Elections.

<https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2026/01/31/how-the-eu-rewrote-its-cyber-diplomacy-playbook-in-moldovas-2025-elections>

[36] The new European Centre for Democratic Resilience starts its work.

[https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/new-european-centre-democratic-resilience-starts-its-work-2026-02-24\\_e](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/new-european-centre-democratic-resilience-starts-its-work-2026-02-24_e)

At the same time, the resilience plan of the Republic of Moldova reflects the evolution of the country's security environment and its strategic orientation toward European integration. The country's status as a candidate for accession to the European Union has reinforced the importance of democratic reforms and institutional resilience.

European officials have emphasized the importance of strengthening democratic institutions and safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process as essential elements of Moldova's accession process.

Ultimately, the Democratic Resilience Strengthening Plan represents a proactive effort to protect the democratic system of the Republic of Moldova. By addressing vulnerabilities related to cybersecurity, financial transparency, media integrity, and institutional coordination, the plan provides a structured framework for safeguarding elections and democratic governance. Its effectiveness will depend on sustained political commitment, institutional capacity, and continued cooperation with European and international partners.

The experience of the Republic of Moldova demonstrates that democratic resilience requires continuous adaptation to evolving threats. Strengthening institutional capacity and safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process will remain essential for maintaining democratic stability and ensuring the country's continued progress toward European integration.



# Security Nexus (Interdependente)

OPINION



## January 31 Blackout: Crisis Management and the Challenge of Energy Resilience

*Sanda Sandu*

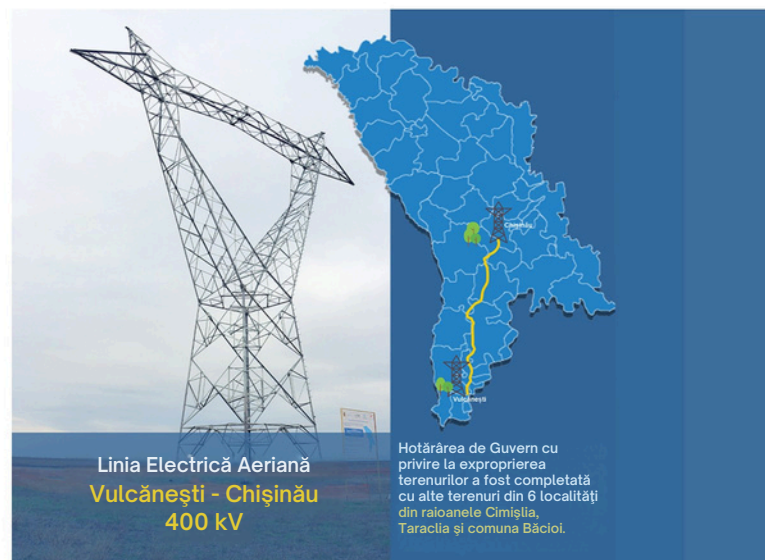
On January 31, the Republic of Moldova experienced a major electricity blackout that affected approximately 60–70 percent of its territory and exposed critical vulnerabilities in its energy infrastructure. The outage, which lasted more than three hours in most regions, disrupted transport, communications, public services, and economic activity<sup>37</sup>. The blackout was triggered by a disturbance in the regional electricity system originating in Ukraine, which activated automatic protection mechanisms and disconnected Moldova from its primary electricity import route. The incident tested Moldova's crisis management capacity and highlighted the urgency of completing strategic infrastructure projects designed to strengthen energy resilience.

### Causes of the blackout and systemic vulnerability

Moldova's electricity system relies heavily on imports, particularly from Romania, through transmission infrastructure interconnected with neighboring countries. Moldova became synchronized with the continental European electricity network in 2022<sup>38</sup> through the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E), which allowed electricity imports from European partners while maintaining physical infrastructure connections across the region<sup>39</sup>.

On January 31, instability in Ukraine's power system triggered automatic safety protocols, disconnecting the 400-kilovolt transmission line supplying Moldova with imported electricity<sup>40</sup>.

Dorin Junghietu stated that the initial trigger of the failure was a weather factor, which affected an old line in the network. The trigger was a weather factor. During the previous day there were gusts of wind, and on the morning of January 31, a conductor broke on one of the phases. The line is over 50 years old, all the cooling and heating cycles are damaging, plus the weight from the frost, and the weakest point gave way", explained the minister.



[37] Ministerul energiei al Republicii Moldova. <https://energie.gov.md/ro>

[38] Energie electrică. <https://www.energie.gov.md/ro/content/energie-electrica>  
<https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2026/01/31/how-the-eu-rewrote-its-cyber-diplomacy-playbook-in-moldovas-2025-elections>

[39] ENTSO-E increased by 500 MW the commercial capacity between the continental power system and those of Moldova and Ukraine. <https://www.energie.gov.md/en/content/entso-e-increased-500-mw-commercial-capacity-between-continental-power-system-and-those>

[40] Blackoutul și falșii patrioți din politica moldovenească. <https://www.dw.com/ro/blackoutul-%C8%99i-fal%C8%99ii-patrio%C8%9Bi-din-politica-moldoveneasc%C4%83/a-75746548>

This transmission route normally supplies more than half of Moldova's electricity demand, which makes it central to national energy stability<sup>41</sup>. Automatic protection mechanisms disconnected the line to prevent damage to grid infrastructure and avoid cascading failures across interconnected networks.

The blackout affected essential services nationwide<sup>42</sup>. Traffic lights stopped functioning, public transport was disrupted, and commercial activity temporarily ceased. Border crossing procedures shifted to manual control due to electricity loss. Telecommunications and internet connectivity were partially disrupted in several regions. These disruptions demonstrated the dependence of public administration, transport systems, and economic activity on stable electricity supply.

#### **Government and technical response**

Moldovan authorities and technical operators responded immediately to stabilise the electricity system. Moldelectrica coordinated technical restoration procedures, including grid stabilization, frequency balancing, and gradual reconnection to external supply sources<sup>43</sup>. Restoring grid stability required synchronization with neighboring transmission systems to ensure safe reconnection. The coordination of the responses was ensured by the Ministry of Energy and the newly created National Centre on Crisis Management<sup>44</sup>.

Romania provided emergency assistance<sup>45</sup> through cross-border electricity

interconnections. Romanian transmission system operator Transelectrica coordinated electricity flows to support Moldova's grid stabilization and restoration process. These interconnections had undergone rehabilitation and testing in recent years as part of Moldova's infrastructure resilience planning.

Government institutions coordinated technical and administrative crisis response measures. The Ministry of Energy provided public briefings explaining the technical causes of the blackout and outlining restoration progress. This communication helped maintain public awareness and ensured transparency during the emergency.

#### **Infrastructure gaps and delayed strategic projects**

The blackout intensified scrutiny of Moldova's delayed Vulcănești–Chișinău transmission line. This project is designed to connect Moldova's electricity grid directly to Romania and the European electricity network while bypassing routes vulnerable to regional disruptions<sup>46</sup>. Energy Minister Dorin Junghietu explained that construction delays resulted from adverse weather conditions and logistical challenges involving equipment delivery for electrical substations<sup>47</sup>.

#### **Evaluation of crisis management and long-term implications**

Moldova's response to the blackout demonstrated improved crisis management capacity, although challenges persisted.

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[41] Key electricity sector data 2024. <https://www.energy-community.org/contracting-parties/Moldova.html>

[42] Actualizare privind situația în domeniul energetic, evoluția condițiilor meteo și starea drumurilor (31.01, ora 15:00). <https://www.cnmc.gov.md/ro/comunicate-de-presa/actualizare-privind-situatia-domeniul-energetic-evolutia-conditiilor-meteo-si>

[43] De ce linia Vulcănești-Chișinău nu este încă funcțională, în pofida prognozelor? Explicația ministrului Energiei. <https://newsmaker.md/ro/de-ce-linia-vulcanesti-chisinau-nu-este-inca-functionala-in-pofida-prognozelor-explicatia-ministrului-energiei>

[44] Comunicate de presă. <https://www.cnmc.gov.md/ro> and [Government Approves Establishment of National Crisis Management Center for Enhanced Citizen Protection](https://www.government.gov.md/ro).

[45] Blackout în Republica Moldova. Ajutor din România și Ucraina pentru restabilirea alimentării cu energie. <https://newsweek.ro/international/blackout-in-republica-moldova-ajutor-din-romania-si-ucraina-pentru-restabilirea-alimentarii-cu-energie>

[46] Moldova Power System Development Project. <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P160829>

[47] De ce linia Vulcănești-Chișinău nu este încă funcțională, în pofida prognozelor? Explicația ministrului Energiei. <https://newsmaker.md/ro/de-ce-linia-vulcanesti-chisinau-nu-este-inca-functionala-in-pofida-prognozelor-explicatia-ministrului-energiei>

Authorities restored electricity within hours, coordinated with regional partners, and implemented technical stabilisation procedures. These actions limited the blackout's duration and reduced economic impact.

The blackout also highlighted structural vulnerabilities related to incomplete infrastructure projects and dependence on limited transmission routes.

Moldova continues to invest in infrastructure modernization and regional interconnections to improve grid resilience.

## CONCLUSION

The January 31 blackout represented a major test of Moldova's electricity system and crisis response institutions. The incident exposed infrastructure limitations while demonstrating progress in technical coordination and emergency response. Moldova's authorities restored electricity efficiently and managed the crisis through cooperation with regional partners.

The blackout highlighted the importance of completing infrastructure projects such as the Vulcănești–Chișinău line and strengthening integration with European electricity networks. Continued infrastructure investment and regional cooperation remain essential for improving Moldova's long-term energy resilience and ensuring reliable electricity supply.



## OPINION



## Blackout 2026: Why Does the Energy System of the Republic of Moldova Remain Vulnerable?

 *Echipa PISA*

On 31 January 2026, the Republic of Moldova experienced a large-scale electricity blackout that left a significant portion of the country without power and exposed the vulnerabilities of the national energy system. According to statements by the Minister of Energy, Dorin Junghietu, the incident was caused by several factors, including existing vulnerabilities in the Ukrainian power system, which remains under constant strain, as well as a technical failure on the Vulcănești – Cuciurgan Thermal Power Plant (MGRES) transmission line<sup>48</sup>. Both government representatives and several experts compared the incident with a similar event that occurred in November 2022, noting that on this occasion the Republic of Moldova was better prepared and managed the crisis more effectively. While it is not disputed that the restoration of the power system's functionality was achieved within a shorter timeframe, it is nevertheless important to assess the broader structural context. This article therefore offers a brief retrospective analysis of the measures undertaken over the past three years to reduce existing vulnerabilities and prevent the recurrence of large-scale electricity outages.

With regard to the development of new local flexible electricity generation capacities, the situation has remained, to a large extent, similar to that of 2022. The elimination of this vulnerability has been delayed for a prolonged period due to a variety of factors—technical, economic, financial, environmental, and others. A key factor has also been the continued accessibility of a major energy source, namely the Moldavskaya GRES (MGRES).

However, this facility - controlled by the Russian Federation - has sustained Moldova's energy dependence and left the door open to various forms of hybrid pressure from Moscow targeting the country's energy security. This situation prompted the authorities in Chișinău to act more decisively.

An important first step was the launch, in December 2022, of a tender for the construction of two combined heat and power plants (CHPs) with a total electrical capacity of 55 MW and a thermal capacity of 43 Gcal/h<sup>49</sup>. Nevertheless, following multiple extensions and relaunches, this initiative remains, to date, still at the tender stage.

[48] Junghietu: Linia Vulcănești-Chișinău ar fi redus impactul avariei energetice din 31 ianuarie.

<https://radiomoldova.md/p/68903/junghietu-linia-vulcanesti-chisinau-ar-fi-redus-impactul-avariei-energetice-din-31-ianuarie>

[49] Lansarea licitației internaționale pentru construcția unor noi centrale de cogenerare de înaltă eficiență pentru Termoelectrica S.A. <https://ucipe.gov.md/ro/media/lansarea-licitatiei-internationale-pentru-construcția-unor-noi-centrale-de-cogenerare-de>

On 1 January 2025, Chişinău ceased procuring electricity from the Moldavskaya GRES (MGRES). However, this measure was not preceded by the development of flexible local electricity generation sources capable of ensuring at least the base load of the national power system. Only on 16 January 2025 did the Commission for Emergency Situations request the activation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, seeking emergency support for the installation, at Termoelectrica S.A., of a 125 MW gas turbine, as well as ten additional turbines of 10 MW each intended for deployment at Termoelectrica, Inc. and CET-Nord, Inc<sup>50</sup>. Unfortunately, this belated initiative has, to date, failed to produce tangible results.

On the other hand, the Government reports notable progress in the area of installed capacity from renewable energy sources (RES), which over the past three years has increased significantly - from 347 MW at the end of 2022 to approximately 1,000 MW at present<sup>51</sup>. However, in the absence of adequate energy storage capacities, these intermittent sources cannot decisively contribute to ensuring the stability of the national power system. On the contrary, without flexible generation or electricity storage capacities, the expansion of RES-based generation may further amplify the fragility of the system.

With regard to interconnections, the situation appears somewhat improved, yet it remains far from optimal. The synchronization of the national power system with the continental ENTSO-E network in March 2022 can be assessed positively; however, this step was achieved largely due to developments in Ukraine rather than through Moldova's own progress.

The Republic of Moldova is still not a full member of ENTSO-E, as it has yet to meet a number of fundamental technical requirements. These include demonstrated technical stability of the power system—such as simulations of operation under both normal and contingency conditions (N-1)—as well as sufficient balancing capacities. One of the conditions imposed by ENTSO-E on its members concerns adequate interconnection with the electricity systems of neighbouring ENTSO-E member states. A specific characteristic of Moldova's national power system is the imbalance in both the number and capacity of its interconnections with neighbouring systems. Of the five overhead transmission line interconnections with Romania, four are 110 kV lines with predominantly local impact. From the perspective of energy security and effective integration with neighbouring systems, transmission lines with capacities of 400 kV and 330 kV are of strategic importance. The only 400 kV line connecting Moldova with the Romanian power system crosses the territory of Ukraine multiple times, including the major electricity node at the Moldavskaya GRES (MGRES). At the same time, the new 400 kV Vulcăneşti - Chişinău transmission line had not been commissioned by the end of 2025.



[50] Decizia CSE: Activarea Mecanismului de Protecție Civilă al UE și generatoare IGSU pentru asigurarea securității energetice. <https://mai.gov.md/ro/node/9466>

[51] Countering Hybrid Threats. Lessons from Eastern Europe. <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/countering-hybrid-threats>

Some progress has been recorded in the implementation of two additional 400 kV overhead transmission lines (OHL) Bălți - Suceava and Strășeni - Gutinaș. The construction of these lines would fundamentally change the current situation. However, considering the experience with the construction of the first 400 kV Vulcănești-Chișinău transmission line, it is reasonable to assume that several more years may pass before these new lines become operational.

Nevertheless, in the area of interconnections, a new development has emerged that marks a positive evolution compared to 2022 and contributed to mitigating the impact of the large-scale blackout of 31 January 2026. This refers to the reactivation of four 110 kV radial transmission lines, which made it possible to connect the western districts of the country, in island mode, to the electricity system of Romania. Despite this progress, radial interconnections remain local and limited solutions and cannot be considered evidence of improved resilience of the power system as a whole.

At the same time, the flexibility of the system has not been strengthened in recent years; on the contrary, it has become even more fragile as the role of the Moldavskaya GRES (MGRES) within the national power system has diminished, without the commissioning of alternative flexible generation sources. At present, both the base load and the operational flexibility of the system continue to depend on electricity imports, particularly from Romania. Given that Moldova currently relies on a single major interconnection with Romania, the national power system will remain vulnerable.

Progress in the field of battery energy storage systems (BESS) has also remained modest. According to statements by representatives of the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Moldova, by the end of 2026, private sector investments are expected to bring into operation BESS capacities of up to 200 MWh.

A tender is currently underway for large eligible<sup>52</sup> producers, who will be required to install energy storage capacities (a minimum of 44 MWh) alongside new renewable energy sources (RES) - particularly wind generation. However, these initiatives largely reflect future intentions and played no role in preventing the incident of 31 January 2026. Moreover, the new storage capacities planned for installation are of the Grid-Following (GFL) type, which operate by following the technical parameters of an already functioning grid. In the event of a grid collapse, such systems disconnect, meaning they cannot serve as a reliable solution for large-scale shocks affecting the national power supply system.



FOTO: [www.freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com)

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[52] Ministry of Energy holds first public consultations on the tender for granting large eligible producer status for wind projects with storage capacity.

<https://energie.gov.md/en/content/ministry-energy-holds-first-public-consultations-tender-granting-large-eligible-producer>



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be argued that the incident of 31 January 2026 could not have been entirely avoided, as the national power system lacked sufficient capacities to minimize its scale. Compared to 2022, the national electricity system has not decisively strengthened its resilience and has remained equally sensitive to external shocks. The commissioning of the new 400 kV Vulcănești-Chișinău transmission line will generate a number of technical advantages; however, it will not fully eliminate the vulnerability stemming from the existence of only a single major interconnection with the electricity system of Romania.

In the context of the systematic attacks carried out by the Russian Federation against the energy infrastructure of Ukraine, the risk of similar incidents occurring again will not disappear entirely. Given that the construction of new flexible local generation capacities remains stalled, and that the development of additional major interconnections with Romania will require considerable time,

the fastest option for increasing the resilience of the national power system to future external shocks would be the installation of a Grid-Forming (GFM) BESS storage system, capable of generating voltage and frequency reference for the grid.

The national electricity system is relatively small in scale and could be supported by an optimal BESS-Grid-Forming (GFM) capacity of approximately 400 MWh. Such a solution, implemented in tandem with the new 400 kV Vulcănești-Chișinău transmission line, would provide several important advantages. In the event of external shocks, it could help prevent the immediate collapse of the system; in the case of major disturbances, it could contribute to stabilizing the grid; in the event of another large-scale blackout, it would enable a rapid system restart; and, when necessary, it could function as a virtual synchronous generator. At the same time, this represents a technically feasible solution that requires a shorter implementation timeframe and can be achieved at acceptable costs.

# EU & Republic of Moldova

PHOTO [www.freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com)

## ARTICLE



### The Development of the European Union's Security and Defence Dimension and Its Implications for the Security of the Republic of Moldova

*Sanda Sandu*

#### Introduction and Relevance of the Subject

The accelerated transformations of the European security environment, driven by the war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, intensifying global strategic competition, and growing uncertainties surrounding the transatlantic security architecture, have prompted the European Union (EU) to strengthen its defence dimension and evolve from a predominantly economic actor into a strategic actor with a direct role in security. This evolution carries direct implications for the EU's neighbouring states, particularly the Republic of Moldova, which faces hybrid security risks originating from the Russian Federation as well as significant structural vulnerabilities.

In this context, European security and the national security of the Republic of Moldova are becoming increasingly interdependent. The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova explicitly recognizes the European Union as a key actor in ensuring national security, while European integration is regarded as a strategic instrument

for strengthening the state's resilience. The consolidation of the EU's defence dimension offers the Republic of Moldova both opportunities and challenges, requiring the adaptation of national policies and the acceleration of reforms in the fields of security and defence.

#### Problem Statement

The central issue examined is the transformation of the European Union into a more robust actor in the field of security and defence and the implications of this transformation for the Republic of Moldova. This evolution is driven by the deterioration of the European security environment, the weakening of the rules-based international order, and the growing necessity for Europe to assume greater responsibility for its own security, as well as for the security of Ukraine.

The Munich Security Conference 2026<sup>53</sup> and the World Economic Forum 2026<sup>54</sup> in Davos clearly highlighted this trend. European leaders emphasized the need to strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy<sup>55</sup>, increase defence investments.

[53] Munich Security Report 2026. <https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report/2026/>

[54] Global Risks Report 2026. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2026/>

[55] Extins și consolidat: deschiderea unui nou capitol pentru parteneriatele UE în domeniul apărării, comunicat de presă. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/es/press-room/202602061PR33902/expanded-and-enhanced-opening-a-new-chapter-for-eu-defence-partnerships>

and develop an independent capacity to respond to external threats<sup>56</sup>.

For the Republic of Moldova, this evolution is of critical importance, as its security is directly influenced by regional stability, the capacity of the European Union to counter hybrid threats, and the degree of Moldova's integration into the European Union, as well as the support it receives within European security structures.

### **Overview: The Evolution of the EU's Defence Dimension**

The European Union has gradually evolved from an economic community into a strategic actor with a role in security and defence. This evolution accelerated after 2014, following the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, and became a strategic priority after the large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Today, the EU is developing concrete instruments in the field of defence, including: the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP); the European Defence Fund; the European Peace Facility; initiatives aimed at military mobility and interoperability; the strengthening of the European defence industry.

In 2009, with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Union introduced a mutual defence clause, set out in Article 42(7)<sup>57</sup>. This provision stipulates that, if a Member State becomes the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States are obliged to provide aid and assistance by all means at their disposal.

European Parliament<sup>58</sup> highlighted the need for closer cooperation between

the EU and NATO, reaffirming NATO as the cornerstone of collective defence while calling for a stronger EU defence pillar that would allow the Union to act autonomously when necessary. Members of the European Parliament have emphasized the importance of interoperable military capabilities across Europe, as well as joint procurement, industrial cooperation, standardization, and alignment with NATO planning in order to avoid duplication and enhance overall readiness.

At the Munich Security Conference 2026, the President of the European Commission emphasized that the EU's mutual defence clause must be "activated and treated as a real obligation," highlighting the Union's growing role as a guarantor of collective security<sup>59</sup>. This development reflects a fundamental shift: the European Union is no longer solely an economic actor but increasingly one with a significant security role.

This transformation also has direct implications for partner states. The strengthening of the EU's defence dimension includes the expansion of cooperation with candidate countries and strategic partners. Instruments such as the European Peace Facility, EU civilian and military missions, as well as training and capacity-building programmes, are designed to support the resilience and defence capabilities of partners vulnerable to external pressure.

For the Republic of Moldova, this evolution creates concrete opportunities: access to support for the modernization of the armed forces, the strengthening of cyber defence, increased institutional interoperability, and gradual integration into the European security architecture.

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[56] Discurs al președintei Comisiei Europene privind consolidarea dimensiunii de apărare a UE (Speech 26/414), 2026. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/da/speech\\_26\\_414](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/da/speech_26_414)

[57] Tratatul privind Uniunea Europeană (versiune consolidată), articolul 42 - Politica de securitate și apărare comună. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu\\_2008/art\\_42/oj/eng](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu_2008/art_42/oj/eng)

[58] UE are nevoie de parteneri de securitate noi și mai mulți.

<https://www.eppgroup.eu/ro/zona-presei/ue-are-nevoie-de-parteneri-de-securitate-noi-si-mai-multi>

[59] UE ar trebui să dea substanță pactului de apărare reciprocă, afirmă Ursula von der Leyen.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/eu-should-bring-life-mutual-defence-pact-von-der-leyen-says-2026-02-14/>

At the same time, it also entails increased responsibilities, including the acceleration of reforms, greater investment in the security sector, and a deeper level of cooperation with the European Union. One of the main conclusions of the Munich Security Conference 2026 was the need for Europe to strengthen its independent defence capacity, in the context of uncertainties regarding the commitment of the United States and the intensification of global threats<sup>60</sup>.

In parallel, the World Economic Forum 2026 in Davos highlighted the increase in European defence spending and the growing role of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, in transforming the security landscape.

### **The EU as a Security Actor in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova**

The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova<sup>61</sup> explicitly recognizes the European Union as a central actor in ensuring the country's security, stability, and resilience.



The document defines European integration not merely as a foreign policy objective, but as a strategic instrument for guaranteeing national security, strengthening sovereignty, and protecting the constitutional order in the face of external threats, particularly those originating from the Russian Federation.

This approach reflects a fundamental shift in the strategic thinking of the Republic of Moldova. In the context of the war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the systematic use of hybrid instruments to destabilize states in its neighbourhood, the security of Moldova can no longer be guaranteed exclusively through internal means or through the formal status of neutrality. Instead, Moldova's security is becoming inseparably linked to European security and to the capacity of the European Union to act as a provider of security<sup>62</sup>.

In this context, the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union represents a viable pathway for ensuring its long-term security. European integration provides Moldova with access to a collective security framework based on political solidarity, institutional support, strategic cooperation, and mechanisms of indirect deterrence against external aggression.

This reality becomes even more relevant in the context of the profound uncertainty surrounding the evolution of the war in Ukraine and the future configuration of the regional security architecture. The outcome of negotiations concerning Ukraine will directly influence the security environment of the Republic of Moldova, including its level of vulnerability to military, hybrid, and political pressure from the Russian Federation. In the event of a security arrangement that fails to include robust guarantees for states in Russia's neighbourhood, the Republic of Moldova

[60] NATO va deveni mai orientată spre leadership european, afirmă secretarul general Mark Rutte.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/nato-will-become-more-european-led-nato-chief-rutte-says-2026-02-13>

[61] Strategia de securitate națională a Republicii Moldova.

[https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=141253&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=141253&lang=ro)

[62] Strategic Compass on Security and Defence.

[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en)

will remain exposed to significant risks<sup>63</sup>.

At the same time, uncertainty regarding the future role of the United States in ensuring European security represents a critical factor. Trends discussed during the Munich Security Conference 2026 and the World Economic Forum 2026 in Davos indicate a possible redistribution of security responsibilities, whereby European states will need to assume a greater role in guaranteeing the security of the continent. This development implies that the Republic of Moldova must strengthen its security relations with the European Union and with European states that possess significant military and political capabilities.

In this context, the support of key European states - such as Romania, Poland, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom - is essential for ensuring the security of the Republic of Moldova. These countries represent pillars of European security and can contribute to strengthening Moldova's defence capabilities, deterring external threats, and facilitating its integration into European security mechanisms.

European integration must therefore be treated as an absolute national security priority. The Republic of Moldova should obtain, in 2026, clear and concrete confirmations regarding the political commitment of the European Union to its

integration, including the establishment of a predictable timeline for the accession process. Such confirmations would send a strong strategic signal both to Moldovan society and to external actors, demonstrating that the Republic of Moldova is irreversibly part of the European space. Securing clear political commitments from the EU Member States regarding the integration of both the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine would contribute to strengthening deterrence and reducing the risk of destabilizing actions by the Russian Federation.

In parallel with the process of European integration, the Republic of Moldova should initiate in-depth discussions with its European partners on the creation of concrete mechanisms to ensure its security. These mechanisms may include bilateral agreements on security and defence cooperation, military modernization programmes, joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and support for the development of defence capabilities.

At the same time, the Republic of Moldova must strengthen its national and democratic resilience, including by reinforcing state institutions, combating disinformation, protecting democratic processes, and enhancing social cohesion. Societal resilience represents an essential component of national security, as it reduces vulnerability to external influence and destabilization<sup>64</sup>.



[63] The European Parliament demands solid guarantees for Ukraine in the future peace agreement, 24 Februarie 2026.

<https://ipn.md/en/the-european-parliament-demands-solid-guarantees-for-ukraine-in-the-future-peace-agreement/>

[64] European Union, Resolution by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on the opening of negotiation clusters for Ukraine and Moldova within the European Union accession negotiation process, as adopted on 30 October 2025:

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=OJ:C\\_202601113](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=OJ:C_202601113)

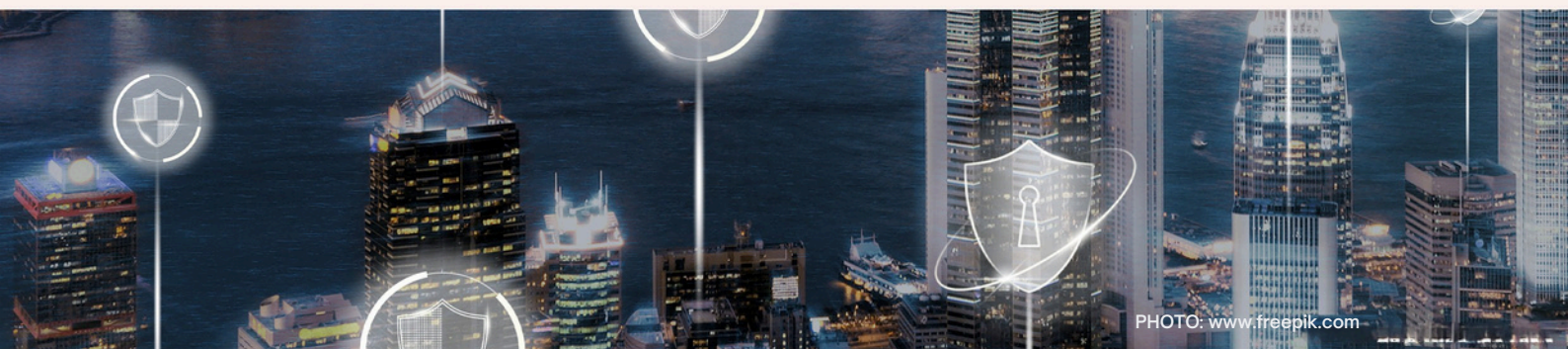
Another critical element is strengthening the relationship between the state and society in the field of security. Public authorities must develop effective strategic communication and increase public awareness of security risks and of the importance of European integration for the country's future. The future security of the Republic of Moldova will depend decisively on its capacity to advance

rapidly along the path of European integration, to strengthen its internal capabilities, and to build solid strategic partnerships with the European Union and its Member States. In the current geopolitical context, European integration is not merely a strategic option, but an existential necessity for ensuring the security and survival of the state<sup>65</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SECURITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The strengthening of the defence dimension of the European Union represents one of the most significant transformations of the European security architecture in recent decades. The EU is evolving into a strategic actor capable of contributing directly to regional and global security. A key recommendation and priority is the modernization of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova.

The military must be transformed into a modern, professional institution capable of contributing to deterrence against threats and to the protection of the state's sovereignty. This process requires investment in modern equipment, training, interoperability with European partners, and the development of territorial defence capabilities.



[65] Strategia militară a Republicii Moldova pentru anii 2025-2035.

[https://gov.md/sites/default/files/media/documents/sedinte-de-guvern/2025-10/NU-277-MA-2025\\_0.pdf](https://gov.md/sites/default/files/media/documents/sedinte-de-guvern/2025-10/NU-277-MA-2025_0.pdf)



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

The current transformations in the security and defence dimension of the European Union create both opportunities and strategic obligations for the Republic of Moldova. In order to capitalize on this favourable context and reduce existing vulnerabilities, Moldova must adopt a multidimensional approach that includes strategic, institutional, operational, and societal measures.

### 1. Strengthening the Integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Security Architecture

European integration must be treated not merely as a political or economic objective, but as a fundamental pillar of national security. In this regard, the authorities of the Republic of Moldova should accelerate the implementation of reforms required within the accession process to the European Union, particularly in the areas of the rule of law, security and defence, anti-corruption, and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

An important strategic objective is the gradual alignment with the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the European Union, including through active participation in EU civilian missions, training programmes, and joint exercises. Such participation will enable the Republic of Moldova to strengthen its institutional capacities, modernize its security structures, and benefit from the transfer of European expertise and best practices.

At the same time, the Republic of Moldova should capitalize on its status as an EU candidate country and on the ongoing technical accession negotiations in order

to access European instruments aimed at strengthening security. These include the European Peace Facility, the European Defence Fund, as well as programmes dedicated to cybersecurity and countering hybrid threats. An important aspect of advancing the European integration process is progress under Chapter 31<sup>66</sup> - Foreign, Security and Defence Policy within the framework of the technical negotiations for accession to the European Union. The European Commission's report of November 2025<sup>67</sup> notes that the political dialogue between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova in the field of foreign and security policy continued throughout the past year, while the institutional framework necessary for Moldova's participation in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has already been largely consolidated.

Integration into the European security ecosystem will contribute to strengthening deterrence capacity, enhancing institutional resilience, and reducing vulnerabilities that can be exploited by hostile external actors.

### 2. Modernization and Reform of the National Security and Defence Sector

In order to align with the new European security realities, the Republic of Moldova must accelerate the modernization of its security and defence sector. This includes reforming key institutions such as the Ministry of Defence, the Security and Intelligence Service of the Republic of Moldova, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and other relevant structures, with the aim of increasing their efficiency, professionalism, and interoperability.

At the same time, the Republic of Moldova should invest in the modernization of its security infrastructure, including in areas such as secure communications, border surveillance, cybersecurity, and the

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[66] Partea narativă - Capitolul 31: Politica externă, de securitate și apărare, document oficial de poziție.

[https://old.gov.md/sites/default/files/partea\\_narativa\\_cap\\_31\\_politica\\_externa\\_de\\_securitate\\_si\\_aparare\\_1.pdf](https://old.gov.md/sites/default/files/partea_narativa_cap_31_politica_externa_de_securitate_si_aparare_1.pdf)

[67] Raportul privind Republica Moldova 2025 - Pachetul de extindere.

[https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/23fa6af0-89b3-4532-a3d9-d1638727d14c\\_en?f](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/23fa6af0-89b3-4532-a3d9-d1638727d14c_en?f)

protection of critical infrastructure. In this regard, cooperation with the European Union and its Member States is essential for the transfer of technology and expertise.

Security sector reform must also include strengthening democratic and civilian oversight over security institutions, in line with European standards, in order to ensure transparency, accountability, and public trust.

### **3. Strengthening National Resilience to Hybrid Threats**

Hybrid threats - including disinformation, cyberattacks, political interference, and economic pressure represent one of the most significant challenges to the security of the Republic of Moldova. In this context, the development of an integrated strategy to counter these threats is essential.

Public authorities should develop advanced capacities for identifying, monitoring, and countering disinformation campaigns, including through cooperation with specialized European structures such as the European External Action Service and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats.

At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen cybersecurity by developing a modern legislative framework, establishing specialized structures for responding to cyber incidents, and investing in secure digital infrastructure. Cooperation with the European Union in this field is essential in order to align with European standards and to gain access to mechanisms for support and coordination.

The security of the Republic of Moldova can no longer be analysed in isolation but must be understood within the broader context of European security. The strengthening of the defence dimension of the European Union provides Moldova with unprecedented opportunities to enhance its national security.



## INTERVIU



**CRISTINA  
GHERASIMOV**

-

Viceprim-Ministră  
pentru Integrare Europeană  
a Republicii Moldova



### 1. To what extent has European integration become, in the current regional context, the main pillar for strengthening the national security of the Republic of Moldova?

In the current regional context, European integration has become the main pillar for strengthening the national security of the Republic of Moldova precisely because the very understanding of security has undergone a profound transformation. Today, security is no longer defined solely by its “hard” dimension such as military defence or the protection of airspace but, above all, by the capacity of the state to survive and function as a democracy.

National security begins with strong institutions, an independent judiciary, the fight against corruption, respect for fundamental rights, and citizens’ trust that the state acts in the public interest. The war of aggression launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, combined with unprecedented hybrid attacks directed against the Republic of Moldova from interference in democratic processes and large-scale disinformation campaigns to cyberattacks and attempts at destabilization, has demonstrated just how vulnerable Moldova has been precisely because these foundations have remained weak since independence.

European integration provides, first and foremost, a framework for strengthening institutions, reinforcing the rule of law, and enhancing democratic resilience. In this sense, it can be argued that in the new regional context, European integration is no longer merely a development project, but a national security project.

We should also recall the incidents in which drones and missile fragments flew over or fell on the territory of the Republic of Moldova - events that could have resulted in serious tragedies. These episodes are the outcome of more than three decades during which there were not only no meaningful investments in the defence sector, but even the equipment and capabilities that the country once possessed were neglected or in some cases sold off. Unfortunately, we are now witnessing the consequences, particularly with regard to the protection of our airspace. Even though we have managed to endure so far, in the medium and long term we cannot defend our democracy and sovereignty without a solid strategic anchor such as integration into the European Union.



FOTO: [www.freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com)



Moreover, in February, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, called for strengthening the EU's mutual defence clause, which will further reinforce the security of the Republic of Moldova once it becomes a member of the European Union.

Even prior to accession, the Republic of Moldova is already benefiting from concrete support. Between 2021 and 2025, the European Union allocated €197 million through the European Peace Facility (EPF) for the modernization and enhancement of the operational effectiveness of Moldova's armed forces.

On 21 May 2024, the EU and the Republic of Moldova signed a Security and Defence Partnership the first of its kind concluded by the EU with a partner country. This partnership strengthens cooperation in key areas such as countering hybrid threats, cybersecurity, combating disinformation, and developing institutional capacities. It also opens the possibility for Moldova to access new instruments and initiatives in the field of security and defence, which are typically available only to EU Member States and close partners of the Union.

At the same time, the European Union is strengthening its own security dimension. The "Readiness 2030" plan aims to increase Europe's capacity to defend itself autonomously by the end of the decade, with a particular focus on counter-drone defence and the security of the Eastern flank issues that are directly relevant for the Republic of Moldova.

## 2. Which reforms in the security sector are considered essential for strengthening the credibility of the Republic of Moldova as a candidate state in the accession negotiations with the European Union?

First and foremost, the fight against corruption remains essential. The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova explicitly identifies corruption as one of the main threats facing the country. Without credible, independent institutions capable of investigating and sanctioning corruption, any progress in the field of security risks is being undermined.

At the same time, progress must continue in the areas of border security and migration management. In this regard, in December 2025 the National Integrated State Border Management Programme for 2026-2030 was adopted. The programme aims to modernize the infrastructure and technologies used at border crossing points, establish a unified and digitalized system for information exchange among relevant authorities, and develop mechanisms for operational cooperation with the European Union and neighbouring states.





FOTO: [www.freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com)



The Republic of Moldova is also expected to continue aligning with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) an area where the country is already making significant progress, with a 92 percent alignment rate with the sanctions imposed by the European Union. At the same time, it is essential to further strengthen resilience to hybrid threats. The European Commission has emphasized the importance of countering foreign information manipulation and disinformation, particularly in rural areas and in more vulnerable regions.

In the area of cybersecurity, the Republic of Moldova has already made significant progress through the establishment of the Cybersecurity Agency and the advancement of the alignment of the national framework with European standards on the security of networks and information systems. These efforts are in line with the requirements of the NIS

Directive and the NIS2 Directive, with a particular focus on cyber risk management and the protection of essential entities and services.

Nevertheless, further efforts are needed in this field to strengthen capacities for the prevention of and response to cyber incidents, including by reinforcing risk management mechanisms, improving information sharing, and developing institutional response capabilities. At the same time, it is necessary to continue aligning the legal framework with the EU acquis on the prevention and combating of organized crime, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, and money laundering.



FOTO: [www.freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com)



## EUBAM in the Republic of Moldova: Two Decades of Border Modernization and Security

*Echipa PISA*

At the end of 2025, the conclusion of the mandate of the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) provided an excellent opportunity to assess the effectiveness of this strategic partnership. Launched in 2005 at the initiative of the authorities in Chişinău and Kyiv, EUBAM was conceived as a civilian technical assistance mission, without executive powers, focused on institutional support, operational advice, and the transfer of European best practices in the field of border management.

In a fragile geopolitical context, marked by the Transnistrian conflict and recurrent external pressures, the mission aimed not only to strengthen the border control, but also to align the Republic of Moldova with European Union standards in the areas of security and cross-border trade. One of EUBAM's most tangible achievements was the impetus it provided to the modernization of border infrastructure and the reform of operational procedures. The implementation of the Integrated Border Management (IBM) principles - a model promoted at EU level - triggered a paradigm shift, from fragmented and often redundant control mechanisms to a coordinated, inter-institutional approach.

In this regard, concrete projects such as the Palanca border crossing point (with a European investment of €4.5 million and an additional €1.68 million contributed by the Republic of Moldova)<sup>68</sup>, illustrate the convergence between technical assistance and local political will.

EUBAM's contribution to combating cross-border crime materialized through the strengthening of operational capacities and the facilitation of cooperation between the authorities of Moldova and Ukraine. In an environment marked by corruption and criminal pressures, the mission promoted European standards of control and prevention. Through joint operations and data exchange, networks with regional impact were dismantled.

The case of Operation "Megara" (2011)<sup>69</sup>, during which over 61 million contraband cigarettes (approximately €12 million) were confiscated, remains a significant benchmark, both in terms of scale and demonstrative effect. The success of this action proved the added value of international partnerships: without the rapid exchange of information and the joint involvement of agencies from several states, a seizure of such magnitude would have been improbable. However, the adaptability of transnationally interconnected criminal networks consistently placed pressure on the capacities of frontline institutions.

[68] EU support: The new border crossing point at Palanca was launched into operation.

<https://www.undp.org/ukraine/press-releases/eu-support-new-border-crossing-point-palanca-was-launched-operation#:~:text=31%20December%202018%C2%A0%C2%A0%E2%80%93%C2%A0Jointly%20operated%20by,the%20United%20Nations%20Development%20Programme>

[69] Activity Report of the Head of EUBAM, Mr Udo Burkholder, to the OSCE Permanent Council, 1 December 2011. <https://www.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/a/5/85581.pdf#:~:text=This%20year%2C%20EUBAM%20investigation%20experts,made%20in%20Europe%20in%202011>

Moreover, Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022 generated new challenges, including the intensification of arms trafficking and the exploitation of vulnerable population flows. These developments tested the limits of the control systems built over the previous decade, exposing the fragility of the gains achieved and confirming the need for the continuous adaptation of security mechanisms.

One of the most significant and enduring effects of the EUBAM mission on the Republic of Moldova has been the process of institutional professional training in the field of border security. The mission's intervention extended beyond the transfer of technical expertise, aiming instead at structural transformation in line with European standards. The continuous training of thousands of officers - including the 18 sessions organized in 2024 for over 530 participants - sought not only to enhance operational capacities, but also to cultivate an institutional culture oriented toward prevention, risk analysis, and professional conduct<sup>70</sup>.

The reforms supported by EUBAM generated a structural transformation of the border security system, through the reorganization of the Border Guard Service<sup>71</sup> and the establishment, in 2012, of a Border Police compatible with EU standards. The mission made an essential contribution to the development of the legal framework, the enhancement of mobile capacities, and the consolidation of inter-agency cooperation. These advances proved decisive in the EU's assessments related to visa liberalization, achieved in 2014, serving as an indirect validation of the effectiveness of EUBAM's intervention in institutional modernization.

The acquisition of the visa-free travel regime in 2014 can thus, also be viewed as an indirect confirmation of the mission's impact in the institutional domain.

Beyond its operational dimension, EUBAM functioned as a genuine catalyst for international cooperation in the field of border security. Through the mission, the Republic of Moldova was integrated into an institutional framework for dialogue and joint action with Ukraine, the Member States of the European Union, and relevant international organizations.



FOTO: <https://eubam.org/ro/where-we-work/>

[70] Annual Report 1 December 2023- 30 November 2024.

<https://eubam.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EUBAM-Engleza-web.pdf>

[71] Legea Nr. 304 din 26-12-2012 pentru modificarea și completarea unor acte legislative.

[https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=3640&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=3640&lang=ro)

A concrete outcome of this cooperation was the implementation of the PAIES system - an electronic real-time customs data exchange mechanism between Moldova and Ukraine. This represented a significant step forward in monitoring transportation of goods and detecting customs fraud, reducing the structural vulnerabilities of the common border. In the case of the Transnistrian region, where political tensions render the enforcement of conventional control mechanisms impossible, EUBAM provided a neutral technical platform that facilitated pragmatic cooperation measures.

The reopening in 2012 of freight rail traffic on the Odesa–Chişinău route, via the Transnistrian segment, represents an example of indirect intervention with strategic impact: this initiative not only revitalized trade in the area, but also reduced incentives for illicit activities and introduced a minimum degree of operational transparency in an otherwise opaque space. Following the conclusion of EUBAM in 2025, the sustainability of the reforms remains uncertain. The mission consolidated the institutional capacities and introduced modern control practices that continue to be applied in Moldova and Ukraine. However, these advances remain vulnerable: the persistent corruption, the absence of robust integrity

and oversight mechanisms, and the unresolved conflict in Transnistria constrain the full implementation of reforms. Lacking an executive mandate, EUBAM depended on political cooperation, and its effectiveness was contingent upon the willingness of national authorities to assume responsibility and ensure continuity of the reform process.

EUBAM represented a model of EU strategic partnership in the field of border security, demonstrating that technical assistance can accelerate alignment with European standards. Over the course of 20 years, the mission reduced vulnerabilities to smuggling, professionalized institutions, and promoted cross-border cooperation. However, systemic challenges such as corruption and the Transnistrian conflict persist. Looking ahead, the deepening of reforms, sustained political support from the EU, and the development of new operational instruments will be essential to preserve and consolidate the progress achieved. The legacy of EUBAM indicates that security along Europe's eastern borders is most effectively strengthened through long-term partnerships, sustainable reforms, and shared commitment between the European Union and beneficiary states.




FOTO: <https://eubam.org/ro/where-we-work/>

# Applied Studies and Best Practices

## OPINION

### Parliamentary Elections 2025 in the Republic of Moldova: A Democratic Stress Test under Hybrid Pressure

 Elena Mârzac<sup>72</sup>, Rodica Panța<sup>73</sup>

The parliamentary elections of 28 September 2025 functioned for the Republic of Moldova as a democratic stress test in the strict sense: not an isolated electoral episode, but a moment in which politics, the economy, information, and security overlapped within a single operational field. The international assessments<sup>74</sup> confirmed the competitive nature of the elections, but also highlighted that the process was marked by external interference, illicit financing, cyberattacks and disinformation, precisely the combination that defines a modern hybrid campaign.

The most important democratic lesson of the 2025 cycle is that the main target is not necessarily the “result” of the vote, but the trust. Hostile actors do not need to convince a majority; it is enough for them to generate sufficient confusion and cynicism to erode the legitimacy of institutions, fracture social cohesion, and block political decision-making. In practical terms, this means that defending democracy is not limited to

the proper administration of polling stations, but also includes the state’s capacity to communicate rapidly, demonstrate traceability, sanction violations, and to maintain measures that are proportional and open to challenge. Prior to the election, several assessments described the Moldovan electoral environment as being exposed to the full spectrum of FIMI (Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference): adaptive, cross-platform operations built on rapid distribution infrastructures and algorithmic amplification.



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[74] Election observation mission Republic of Moldova - Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025. <https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/election-observation/election-observation-statements/moldova/statements-16/5347-2025-parliamentary-eng/file>

The Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab)<sup>75</sup> analysis for 2025 emphasized this systemic risk: not merely “false narratives,” but coordinated ecosystems combining content, channels, and incentives. In this context, international media coverage has shown how technological developments including artificial intelligence—reduce the cost of producing disinformation while increasing the cost of verification, thereby shifting the initial advantage toward hostile actors. Such actors can generate volume, ambiguity, and fabricated “evidence” faster than a state operating through institutional procedures can respond.

From the perspective of a technical analysis, 2025 can be understood as a test along three axes. The first is the time axis: institutions are constrained by procedures, while digital platforms operate in minutes and hostile networks in hours. The second is the coordination axis: without established inter-institutional routines linking security, justice, electoral authorities, and public communication—the response becomes fragmented, and such fragmentation is easily exploited. The third is the legitimacy axis: in a context of hybrid pressure, the democratic risk is twofold if authorities fail to act, they lose the initiative; if they act disproportionately, they risk fueling narratives of abuse and delegitimization<sup>76</sup>.

Against this background, what matters in Moldova’s case is not the idea of a single “solution,” but the fact that the response has begun to be institutionalized and gradually integrated. A significant milestone was the strengthening of the legal

framework and the security architecture through Law No. 249/2025<sup>77</sup> on national security, which reflects a more modern approach to risks (including hybrid ones) and explicitly anchors state action in democratic criteria of legality, necessity, and proportionality<sup>78</sup>. According to the logic of democratic resilience, this law is important not for its rhetoric, but for its governance effect: it creates a basis for coordination, planning, and accountability, reducing the space in which each institution operates separately. At the same time, Moldova has increasingly treated strategic communication as an instrument of democratic security, not merely of image building. The practical lesson, also reflected in your attached material, is that a communication vacuum instantly becomes ground for rumors and conspiracy theories, and during an electoral campaign it turns into a critical vulnerability: if institutions respond late, the adversary sets the narrative, and any later correction reaches the public with much weaker impact. As a result, the focus has begun to shift from late debunking to pre-bunking and rapid message coordination, precisely in order to reduce the speed advantage of the hostile actor.

Another structural lesson of the 2025 cycle is that the “money trace” must be connected to the “narrative tracing”. Opaque funding (including forms that are difficult to trace) is the accelerator that makes manipulation scalable: it can pay for content, can support amplification networks, can fuel orchestrated mobilizations, and can create the appearance of public support.

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[75] Risk assessment: Moldova's electoral environment in 2025.

<https://dfrlab.org/2025/09/09/risk-assessment-moldovas-electoral-environment-in-2025>

[76] Moldova's election faces AI-driven disinformation from Russia.

<https://apnews.com/article/moldova-election-europe-disinformation-russia-461e9a1c9558ae140c5b7539a5c89fd4>

[77] Legea Nr. 249 din 10-07-2025 privind securitatea națională a Republicii Moldova.

[https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=150559&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=150559&lang=ro)

[78] Ibidem



For this reason, a credible response cannot rely on communication alone; it must include enforcement mechanisms, traceability, and sanctions. International observers explicitly pointed to the dimension of illicit financing in the context of the elections, confirming that this component is not peripheral, but central to democratic integrity<sup>79</sup>.

Regarding the cyber component, the lesson is subtler, but equally important: even attacks that do not “bring down” systems can achieve their strategic objective if they generate distrust. For this reason, cyber resilience must be understood in tandem with public communication: logging, backups, and procedures, but also the capacity to inform rapidly and factually, before rumors become the dominant explanation. In a saturated informational environment, institutional silence is interpreted as evidence.

A distinctive element of the Moldovan response is the level of external support, focused on hybrid resilience, not only on statements. The extension of the EUPM Moldova mandate until 31 May 2027 and the emphasis on strategic advice are relevant precisely because they allow institutions to build capacities between electoral cycles — which is, in fact, where resilience is built<sup>80</sup>.

## Why Resilience Worked (Key Lessons):

### **Vigilant Institutions and an Active Rule of Law.**

A determining factor was the more coherent institutional response to interference: strengthening the legal framework and using democratic oversight tools to limit illicit financing, to document violations, and maintain a robust electoral administration. Observers noted both the consolidation of the legal framework and the severity of the risks (opaque financing, FIMI, cyber), which makes the lesson one of governance: not only better rules, but enforcement, coordination, and the capacity to produce evidence.

### **Civil Society, Media, and Voters More “Inoculated” Against Manipulation.**

Resilience cannot be improvised in the last week of a campaign. In 2025, part of the population was more difficult to instrumentalize, precisely because of a repeated exposure to manipulation attempts, generated social antibodies (critical thinking, verification, healthy skepticism), while civic actors and the media acted as transparency multipliers. This lesson is in line with the findings of observation missions that monitored the information environment and campaign financing, including in their post-electoral reports.

### **Exposure and Neutralization of Adversarial Tactics (Evidence-Based Response).**

Another practical lesson is that interference becomes less effective when it is rapidly exposed and documented (financial flows, amplification networks, coordinated operations). In this regard, the DFRLab analysis treated FIMI as a systemic risk and emphasized its adaptive and cross-platform dynamics - a useful diagnosis for moving from ad hoc reactions to stable procedures and partnerships.

[79] Election observation mission Republic of Moldova - Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025. <https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/election-observation/election-observation-statements/moldova/statements-16/5347-2025-parliamentary-eng>

[80] Moldova: Council extends the mandate of the EU civilian mission for two years. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/05/21/moldova-council-extends-the-mandate-of-the-eu-civilian-mission-for-two-years/>

International Support and Solidarity. Finally, external partnerships had a dual effect: they provided capacities (technical assistance, expertise, cooperation on resilience) and strengthened legitimacy (a coherent external political message after the elections). The EU statement following the elections framed the outcome as an expression of public support for the European future, which reduces the space for narratives of isolation and fatalism.

The major lesson of the 2025 elections is that foreign interference remains a persistent threat, but it can be countered through a combination of institutional speed, interinstitutional coordination, transparency, and societal mobilization - provided that the response remains anchored in democratic standards (legality, necessity, proportionality) and is strengthened between electoral cycles, not only during the campaign.




FOTO: <https://www.freepik.com/>

# Information Security and Disinformation

OPINION



## The Exploitation of Maia Sandu's Statement: Unification Framed as an Information Manipulation Tool

 Elena Mârzac, Rodica Pașă

In January 2026, an interview given by Maia Sandu to the British podcast *The Rest Is Politics*<sup>81</sup> brought the issue of reunification with Romania back into the spotlight, at a time when the Republic of Moldova remains under geopolitical and hybrid pressure. Her message operated on two deliberate levels: on a personal level, she stated that she would vote “YES” if a referendum were held; at an institutional level, she emphasized that there is currently no social majority in favour of unification, and therefore the issue cannot

be treated as an immediate policy agenda. Instead, the realistic objective supported by a majority remains the European integration, viewed as an anchor of stability and democratic security. The statement was explicitly linked to the regional context and to the difficulty faced by a small state in protecting its democracy under pressure from Russia. Following public reactions, Sandu issued clarifications<sup>82</sup>, reaffirming that her response had been an honest answer to a question, while the strategic direction remains unchanged: strengthening the state and securing the “belonging to the free world” through the European path<sup>83</sup>.

[81] Holding the Line Between Democracy and Putin | President of Moldova, Maia Sandu.

<https://youtu.be/bYQlvaHHvlg?si=S9kz-n83F9Svuj1x>

[82] Maia Sandu, despre un referendum privind unirea Republicii Moldova cu România:

Cel puțin conform sondajelor, nu există sprijin majoritar. <https://www.mediafax.ro/externe/maia-sandu-despre-un-referendum-privind-unirea-republicii-moldova-cu-romania-cel-putin-conform-sondajelor-nu-exista-sprijin-majoritar-23674982>

[83] Președinta Maia Sandu, clarificări privind un eventual referendum de unire cu România: „Este esențial ca Republica Moldova să fie parte a lumii libere”. <https://www.moldpres.md/rom/politica/presedinta-maia-sandu-clarificari-la-apce-privind-un-eventual-referendum-de-reunificare-cu-romania-este-esential-ca-republica-moldova-sa-fie-parte-a-lumii-libere>



President Maia Sandu's statement that, if it were a referendum to be held, she would vote in favour of reunification with Romania was swiftly absorbed into the national security register not as an "identity issue" in the classical sense, but as a hypothesis of strategic protection within a regional environment dominated by the Russian Federation's war and hybrid pressure exerted on the Republic of Moldova. In the interpretation presented in the public sphere (including in recent commentary), the argument advanced was that it is becoming increasingly difficult for a small state to remain a sovereign democracy under sustained pressure, while Romania as a member state of the European Union and NATO appears as a security anchor<sup>84 85 86</sup>.

In the public domain, this positioning has been framed as a two-step security solution: 1) the realistic option remains European integration, politically reaffirmed in 2024–2025; 2) the extraordinary option reunification is treated as a contingency plan, democratically conditioned, should the context deteriorate. This dual anchoring ("there is no majority for unification at present, but there is a majority for the

European Union") also functions as a risk management mechanism: it keeps the issue within a democratic framework and reduces the space for narrative escalation<sup>87</sup>.

The substantive relevance of the issue does not consist in whether reunification is likely in the short term, but in how it is employed as a security argument: reducing Moldova's structural vulnerabilities (energy, infrastructure, connectivity) and strengthening institutional resilience within a hybrid pressure ecosystem.

The main challenge is that framing this theme in security terms creates space for disinformation and FIMI<sup>88</sup>. The "unification" topic can easily turn from a legitimate political debate into a triad of toxic narratives such as 1. "loss of statehood", 2. "hidden agenda" or "inevitable conflict", all aimed at eroding trust and deepening divisions across linguistic and territorial lines.

[84] Kyiv Post: <https://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/69717>; Reacții ale politicianilor români la declarațiile Maiei Sandu despre unirea R.Moldova cu România. Reacții ale politicianilor români la declarațiile Maiei Sandu despre unirea R.Moldova cu România; Moldovan president backs unification with Romania.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2026/01/15/moldovan-president-backs-unification-with-romania\\_6749469\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2026/01/15/moldovan-president-backs-unification-with-romania_6749469_4.html)

[85] Kyiv Post: <https://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/69717>

Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-moldovas-plans-merge-with-romania-would-destroy-its-statehood-2026-01-20/>

Выступление и ответы на вопросы СМИ Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации

<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/cn/2073858/>

[86] FALS: Adunarea națională „Moldova Europeană” - o formă ascunsă de „rezolvare a problemei” unirii R. Moldova cu România.

[https://stopfals.md/ro/article/fals-adunarea-nationala-moldova-europeana-o-forma-ascunsa-de-rezolvare-a-problemei-unirii-r-moldova-cu-romania-180763?fbclid=IwAR3LA6we70\\_51fVhcJ-aZfauoDWcSQLkhsR7UHN8YmPeHreXWFB1ojW7OL4](https://stopfals.md/ro/article/fals-adunarea-nationala-moldova-europeana-o-forma-ascunsa-de-rezolvare-a-problemei-unirii-r-moldova-cu-romania-180763?fbclid=IwAR3LA6we70_51fVhcJ-aZfauoDWcSQLkhsR7UHN8YmPeHreXWFB1ojW7OL4)

[87] Russia says Moldova's plans to merge with Romania would destroy its statehood.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-moldovas-plans-merge-with-romania-would-destroy-its-statehood-2026-01-20/>

[88] OPINION: Moldova and Romania: Reunification Has Already Begun. <https://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/69717>

This identity-sensitive issue, with strong geopolitical implications, has all the features of a FIMI object. It fuels polarization, triggers emotional responses (fear and resentment), fragments audiences along linguistic lines, and allows hostile actors to recast the topic into delegitimizing narratives such as “betrayal”, “loss of statehood”, “annexation” or “war”. Moscow’s reaction followed a predictable pattern.

Around the issue of “unification” - and particularly in relation to Maia Sandu’s statements - FIMI operations activated a relatively stable set of narratives designed to transform a political or strategic discussion into a crisis of legitimacy and cohesion. The first and the most frequent is an existential narrative: “unification means the destruction of Moldovan statehood.” Within this propaganda framing, any reference to Romania is recast as the “annulment” of the state, the “disappearance” of Moldova, or an “externally imposed project”, with the aim of generating fear and justifying defensive reactions, including interference.

This messaging was further amplified through official Russian reactions, which framed the discussion in terms of threatened “statehood.” Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov publicly described the idea of reunification as “destructive for Moldovan statehood”, attempting to shift the debate from a democratic register into one of existential alarm<sup>89</sup>.

Maia Sandu’s statement quickly reactivated other false narratives about

reunification, already circulating in the FIMI ecosystem. First, suspicions were revived that the pro-EU government had a “hidden agenda” and was pushing for reunification “quietly” through non-transparent administrative steps, without a popular vote - a pattern illustrated by the falsehood that the Assembly “European Moldova” would have been a disguised form of “resolving” the reunification. Secondly, the emotional narrative of delegitimization was rekindled “Sandu is selling out the country / Romania is annexing Moldova”, built on the lexicon of betrayal and identity fear, used for polarization. Finally, the security scare tactic returned, according to which unification would inevitably lead to conflict or the loss of autonomy (especially in Gagauzia), intended to induce fatalism and civic demobilization.

This is where the practical stakes for strategic communication come into play: not “how to convince people about reunification”, but how to manage the risk of propaganda exploitation. In operational terms, there are three risk vectors: 1) the narrative of “cancelled statehood” – any discussion about Romania is presented as proof that “the Moldovan state is disappearing”, justifying interference and mobilizing Russian-speaking/regional segments. 2) the narrative of a “hidden agenda” – Sandu / PAS are “actually” concerned with the reunification, and European integration is a “pretext”, eroding confidence in the government; 3) the “inevitable conflict” narrative – unification would “provoke war” or “trigger Transnistria / Gagauzia”, fuelling fear and civic demobilization.



The management of these risks was evident in the president's subsequent clarifications: the message was repositioned from "unification as an agenda" to "democratic security as an objective", with the EU as a realistic path, in a context where decisions of this kind are only possible democratically and only if there is public support. It is worth noting that the "solution" presented in some analyses is not reunification as a political act, but gradual integration as a mechanism for reducing vulnerabilities - especially in energy and infrastructure - and as a form of "security" through European anchoring. From the perspective of resilience to FIMI, this approach only works if it is communicated with discipline: concrete projects (interconnections, investments, services) are harder to falsify than slogans, and communication based on deliverables reduces the scope for manipulation.

In practice, from the perspective of strategic communication for managing the issue, the following would be necessary: a) a single message: the EU is the national objective, and reunification is not on the agenda without a majority and without democratic procedures; b) pre-bunking for predictable narratives used in the past ("cancelled statehood", "betrayal", "inevitable war"); c) segmentation by audience (including Russian speakers), with an emphasis on verifiable benefits and guarantees of rights; d) coordination between Chişinău and Bucharest to avoid exploitable dissonance.

We could conclude that the topic of unification was presented by the country's president, and later by some actors, as a possible security option by anchoring the Republic of Moldova in a space of Euro-Atlantic stability, but in practice it quickly became material for FIMI operations. Instead of remaining a legitimate political debate, the topic was instrumentalized through polarizing and delegitimizing narratives, which shows how easily national identity issues can be turned into weapons of information warfare.



# Resources and Recommended Readings

## The Republic of Moldova in the Cognitive Warfare: Between Hybrid Aggression and Democratic Resilience

 Rodica Panța

At the end of 2025, the volume *Cognitive Informational Warfare in the Romania - Republic of Moldova - Ukraine Trilateral*, coordinated by Iulian Chifu, Elena Mârzac, and Vira Kostantinova, was published in Bucharest. The work represents a significant contribution to the analysis of cognitive-informational warfare as a central instrument of Russian hybrid aggression against European democracies. The book demonstrates that information warfare is not a secondary phenomenon, but a component of full-spectrum warfare, used to influence perceptions, electoral behavior, and decision-making processes while avoiding direct military escalation. By combining a theoretical framework with in-depth case studies, the volume examines disinformation, emotional manipulation, character attacks, and the distortion of history as strategic tools. The trilateral approach Romania, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine enables the identification of both common patterns of Russian informational aggression and their adaptation to different national contexts.

[94] A. B. Dahl, *Command Dysfunction: Minding the Cognitive War*.

<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA360756.pdf>

[90] Președinta Maia Sandu, clarificări privind un eventual referendum de unire cu România: „Este esențial ca Republica Moldova să fie parte a lumii libere”.

<https://www.moldpres.md/rom/politica/presedinta-maia-sandu-clarificari-la-apce-privind-un-eventual-referendum-de-reunificare-cu-romania-este-esential-ca-republica-moldova-sa-fie-parte-a-lumii-libere>

[91] OPINION: Moldova and Romania: Reunification Has Already Begun.

<https://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/69717>

[92] *Cognitive Warfare: Strengthening and Defending the Mind*.

<https://www.act.nato.int/article/cognitive-warfare-strengthening-and-defending-the-mind/>

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

— The Concept of **Cognitive Warfare** —

 Echipa PISA

Cognitive warfare represents an emerging form of non-kinetic conflict aimed at influencing, degrading, or controlling the cognitive processes of individuals and communities - namely perception, interpretation of information, decision-making, and behavior - in order to obtain a tactical or strategic advantage, without the direct use of military force. From NATO's perspective, cognitive warfare redefines the human mind as an operational domain, resulting from the convergence of psychological, informational, and cyber operations, amplified by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and cognitive sciences<sup>90</sup>. At the same time, cognitive warfare constitutes the most advanced form of manipulation to date, intended to secure a tactical or strategic advantage<sup>91</sup>.

The concept began to be used in the 1990s, particularly within military and strategic analysis communities in the United States, in the context of reflections on information operations and their impact on decision-making processes. One of the earliest systematic conceptualizations is associated with work on command dysfunctions and the disruption of the Observation-Oriented-Decision-Action (OODA) loop<sup>92</sup>. Subsequently, the term was revisited and expanded, and since 2017 it has been used explicitly in American strategic literature to describe the manipulation of an adversary's - or its population's - mechanisms of cognition. The institutionalization of the concept at the Allied level took place between 2020 and 2021, when NATO, through Allied Command Transformation (ACT) and the NATO

Innovation Hub, initiated the formal conceptualization process, organizing the first scientific meeting dedicated to cognitive warfare in 2021, within the framework of implementing the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC) and the Warfare Development Imperative (WDI) on Cognitive Superiority. The stated objective was to secure the initiative through a better and shared understanding of the cognitive dimension, while NATO syntheses emphasize the integration of cyber, informational, psychological, and social engineering capabilities to generate confusion, false representations, and uncertainty.

From an operational perspective, cognitive warfare employs convergent methods designed to undermine trust, social cohesion, and governance through disinformation and media manipulation, the exploitation of cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities, the delegitimization of state institutions, the manipulation of public morale, and the disruption of decision-making processes<sup>93</sup>. At its core, cognitive warfare seeks to erode the trust capital that underpins the functioning of democratic societies - trust in institutions, in electoral processes, in alliances, and in leadership. The target is not merely public opinion, but the collective capacity to generate meaning, consensus, and action. Unlike the classical disinformation, which operates predominantly at the level of content, cognitive warfare seeks to alter the architecture through which reality is interpreted, the criteria of credibility, emotional responses, and decision-making mechanisms. In this context, the individual becomes simultaneously the target, the vector, and the instrument of conflict, while the effects are cumulative and long-term.

Ultimately, cognitive warfare raises major normative and strategic challenges, as it blurs the distinction between peace and conflict, and between legitimate action and aggression. The absence of clear legal frameworks governing the cognitive aggression complicates attribution of responsibility, deterrence, and the formulation of effective collective responses, thereby emphasizing the need to integrate the cognitive dimension into the contemporary international security architecture.

In particular, the case of the Republic of Moldova is presented as a testing ground for influence techniques, with broader relevance for other democratic states. Through its analytical rigor and practical relevance, the volume establishes itself as a reference work for researchers, policymakers, journalists, and civil society actors concerned with security, elections, and democratic resilience in the context of contemporary hybrid threats.

Indeed, the Republic of Moldova represents a relevant case of cognitive warfare, conducted through a combination of external and internal actors. The principal external state actor is the Russian Federation, which, since 1991, has sought to maintain the Republic of Moldova within its sphere of influence, including through sustained informational pressure. This pressure is amplified by local non-state actors, political parties, media institutions, and pro-Kremlin opinion leaders who operate as internal vectors of external messaging. The methods employed include disinformation, propaganda, and psychological influence, aimed at inducing fear, confusion, and mistrust through false narratives concerning security, neutrality, or cooperation with Western partners. The impact is reflected in social polarization, the erosion of trust in institutions, and the increased vulnerability of electoral processes, ultimately affecting the state's capacity to consolidate its security.

In recent years, the authorities of the Republic of Moldova have begun to respond systematically to this threat by combining legislative, institutional, and strategic communication measures.

[93] First NATO scientific meeting on Cognitive Warfare Bordeaux (France) - 21 June 2021. <https://innovationhub-act.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Cognitive-Warfare-Symposium-ENSC-March-2022-Publication.pdf>



The regulation of the audiovisual space, the adoption of the Law on Information Security (2022), the intensification of monitoring of influence campaigns, and the establishment of the Centre for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation (2023) constitute some key steps in strengthening the informational resilience. Cooperation with the EU and NATO, alongside investments in media literacy, complements this gradual response, which reflects a clear recognition of cognitive warfare as a threat to national security and democratic resilience, even though the process remains ongoing.

The cognitive warfare has become an undeniable reality of the twenty-first century, and the case of the Republic of Moldova illustrates both the dangers and the response mechanisms associated with this phenomenon. A hostile actor can exploit a state's historical, social, and informational vulnerabilities in order to impose its own narrative, transforming falsehood into a formidable geopolitical weapon. The Republic of Moldova was a target of a systematic campaign of disinformation and propaganda unfolded with the aim of undermining public trust in the country's pro-European trajectory. The methods employed ranging from sensationalist fake news to the manipulation of fears and prejudices have had a significant impact: a partially divided society, characterized by reflexes of mistrust, with segments of citizens living in a media-constructed parallel reality. This, in its turn, has endangered national security both directly by fueling orchestrated internal

tensions and protests and indirectly, by slowing down reforms and weakening defense capacities.

Raising awareness constitutes the essential prerequisite for any form of societal and democratic resilience. A society that fails to recognize that it is the target of cognitive warfare remains vulnerable not so much due to a lack of resources, but because of its inability to identify the true nature of the threat. The cognitive warfare is effective precisely because it is invisible, gradual, and often mistaken for pluralism of opinion or freedom of expression. Denial or underestimation of the phenomenon does not neutralize it; on the contrary, it allows it to shape perceptions and construct alternative realities.

The cognitive warfare cannot be countered exclusively through security instruments or isolated legal regulations. Genuine effectiveness arises only when monitoring and counterintelligence efforts are complemented by a clear legal framework, functional institutions, and good governance policies aimed at reducing internal vulnerabilities. Phenomena such as corruption, poverty, social inequalities, and the lack of institutional transparency constitute fertile ground for propaganda and disinformation. In this regard, strengthening the rule of law and public trust in institutions becomes an integral component of national security. Equally important is the educational dimension: media literacy, civic education, and strategic public communication are not complementary measures, but central pillars of cognitive resilience.

[93] First NATO scientific meeting on Cognitive Warfare Bordeaux (France) - 21 June 2021.

<https://innovationhub-act.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Cognitive-Warfare-Symposium-ENSC-March-2022-Publication.pdf>

[94] A. B. Dahl, Command Dysfunction: Minding the Cognitive War. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA360756.pdf>

[95] C. Pripoae-Șerbănescu. Războiul cognitiv - dincolo de manevre, dominație și informații - o confruntare pentru viitorul imaginat. <https://gmr.mapn.ro/webroot/fileslib/upload/files/arhiva%20GMR/2023%20gmr/Proceedings%202023/PRIPOAE-SERBANESCU.pdf>  
**QUARTERLY REVIEW OF STRATEGIC ANALYSIS AND SECURITY POLICY**

[96] I. Chifu, E. Mârzac, V. Kostantinova. Cognitive Informational Warfare in the Romania - Republic of Moldova - Ukraine Trilateral. București: RAO, 2025. ISBN 978-630-352-079-7

The cognitive warfare is built over time, through repetition, adaptation, and the accumulation of effects, and countering it cannot yield immediate results. Restoring public trust, dismantling toxic narratives, and rebuilding a healthy information space require sustained efforts and coherent policies applied consistently. In this context, the Republic of Moldova is undergoing a process of structural transformation. As younger generations more digitally literate and more exposed to diverse sources of information become predominant, the capacity of disinformation to manipulate may decrease. However, this demographic advantage must be leveraged through appropriate educational and cultural policies; otherwise, the risk of manipulation reconfiguring itself in new forms would remain high.

The case of the Republic of Moldova highlights a paradox of relevance to security studies, although small and structurally vulnerable, the country has demonstrated a significant degree of democratic resilience. Despite systematic campaigns of disinformation and propaganda conducted by the Russian Federation and its network of local non-state actors, the majority of Moldovan citizens continue to support a pro-democratic and pro-European trajectory, as confirmed by the results of the 2025 elections. This reality demonstrates that propaganda, however aggressive, is not omnipotent, and that direct experience, the collective memory, and societal aspirations can counteract false narratives.

IULIAN CHIFU  
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## COGNITIVE INFORMATIONAL WARFARE

in the  
Romania-Republic of Moldova-Ukraine  
trilateral



Ultimately, the cognitive warfare remains “a weapon in a geopolitical battle waged between human minds,” and the victory in this confrontation is not determined solely by institutional or technological capabilities. It depends on a society’s ability to safeguard its critical thinking, maintain social cohesion, and build a consensus around truth, democratic values, and the long-term national interest.



The Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives (PISA) is a non-governmental organisation that supports civil society engagement in the oversight of the security sector and fosters dialogue between citizens, non-governmental organisations, and relevant public institutions.

PISA contributes to strengthening the democratic resilience of the Republic of Moldova by providing independent expertise and promoting good governance in the security and defence sector.

## SECURITY NEXUS

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