

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF STRATEGIC ANALYSIS AND SECURITY POLICY

SECURITY NEXUS

NO. 2 (APRIL – JUNE 2026)

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Editorial

This edition of Security Nexus is published at a time when the Republic of Moldova stands at the convergence point of several decisive processes: advancing its European integration path, facing the persistent pressure of hybrid threats, strengthening institutional capacity, and adapting to an increasingly unpredictable regional security environment. The articles featured in this issue are united by a common idea: security must be understood as a multidimensional process, built at the intersection of reforms, public trust, response capacity, strategic communication, and international cooperation.

The unanimous approval of all 27 EU Member States to formally open the first negotiation cluster for the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine conveys an important political message: the enlargement of the European Union remains a strategic project, and both countries are regarded as part of the future European architecture. For Chişinău, this moment represents a diplomatic confirmation and marks the transition to a stage where European aspirations must be supported by effective implementation, institutional coherence, and tangible results.

The European integration, thus becomes an exercise in security. The Republic of Moldova must demonstrate not only that it adopts reforms, but also that it can function effectively in a hostile environment marked by external interference, cyberattacks, disinformation, energy-related pressures, and attempts at destabilization. In this context, Chapter 31 on Foreign, Security and Defence Policy acquires particular significance: closer integration with the European Union also entails assuming a clearer role within the European security framework.

The same logic is reflected in the analysis of the Republic of Moldova's response to hybrid threats associated with the 2025 parliamentary elections. The electoral scrutiny tested the capacity of state institutions, the resilience of the information space, and the level of public trust. Faced with a pressure system that combined disinformation, illicit financing, cyber pressure, online manipulation, energy coercion, and identity-based divisions, the state's response became more effective through an integrated approach: encompassing the legal framework, law enforcement, cybersecurity protection, cooperation with online platforms, public warning mechanisms, strategic communication, and crisis management.

One of the key lessons is that strategic communication must be treated as an operational security instrument and integrated into institutional readiness, crisis management, and the protection of democratic processes. In an environment where information manipulation spreads rapidly, institutions must explain risks in advance, communicate in a way that is accessible to citizens, and reach communities before hostile narratives gain social influence. The final link in public communication remains critical: the identification of risks must be followed by clear, timely, and credible messages capable of strengthening citizens' trust.

This edition highlights another important topic: drones as a test of the state. When drones violate national airspace or when their debris land near critical infrastructure, they do not merely test military capabilities.

They test the entire institutional chain: monitoring, coordination, public warning mechanisms, crisis communication, cooperation with partners, and the ability to transform each incident into an operational lesson. For the Republic of Moldova, the lesson is clear: modern threats are fast, inexpensive, flexible, and often ambiguous, while the response must be integrated, anticipatorily, and effectively communicated.

Ukraine's experience in the counter-drone domain demonstrates how profoundly the nature of security is changing. Under the conditions of war, Ukraine has been compelled to learn how to build a layered, adaptable, and cost-effective defence system. This expertise, acquired at an enormous cost, has become relevant not only for Ukraine but for Europe as a whole. For countries situated in the vicinity of the war, including the Republic of Moldova, the question is not whether these lessons are useful, but how quickly they can be integrated into policies, procedures, and real operational capabilities.

Taken together, the articles in this issue demonstrate that Europe is being reconfigured through security and resilience. The European Political Community Summit in Yerevan, the strengthening of EU - Armenia relations, Moldova's progress under Chapter 31, Ukraine's lessons in countering drone threats, and the Republic of Moldova's response to hybrid threats are all part of the same broader discussion: how democracies defend themselves when confronted with threats that transcend the traditional boundary between war and peace.

For the Republic of Moldova, the next phase is one of strategic maturation. The unanimous approval of all 27 EU Member States opens an important political door, but success will ultimately depend on the country's internal capacity to deliver reforms and implement commitments. Drones, cyberattacks, disinformation, energy-related pressures, and electoral interference will continue to test the resilience of the state. The response must be more coherent, more agile, and more closely connected to the needs and expectations of citizens.

This is the central theme that Security Nexus invites its readers to reflect upon: security is increasingly becoming a shared responsibility of specialized institutions, the state, and society as a whole. It is built through the interdependence between reforms and trust, between the European integration process and the capacity for democratic defence. The Republic of Moldova is advancing towards the European Union through a challenging environment, and this experience has the potential to transform the country from a beneficiary of European support into a contributor to Europe's growing body of resilience lessons.

Dr Elena Mârzac

Editor-in-Chief

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Regional and International Perspectives on Security

OPINION



Armenia Voted, Russia Lost. What this victory means for the EU and how it impacts Moldova?

✎ **Laurențiu Pleșca**¹

On June 7, Armenia went to the polls in an election that Moscow had meticulously prepared to win. It lost. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his pro-European party, Civil Contract, secured a third consecutive mandate, with nearly half the vote and a comfortable majority in parliament. The Kremlin-backed opposition was left far behind. For a country of under three million people, landlocked, surrounded by Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkey, and Russia, and with no convenient allies, this is no ordinary result. It is a statement.

The election stakes went far beyond the parties and personalities on the ballot. In essence, Armenians had to choose between two geopolitical trajectories: a return to the Russia-centered order that defined most of the country's post-Soviet history, or the continuation of the course set in motion by the 2018 Velvet Revolution, meaning reduced strategic dependence on Moscow, peace with its neighbors, and a closer relationship with Europe. They chose the latter, and not by a narrow margin.

What Moscow attempted, and what it got

Rarely has there been an election in the post-Soviet space in which Russia deployed its entire arsenal so transparently. The Kremlin bet on the Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan and his alliance, Strong Armenia, flooded the public space with disinformation and, in the weeks before the vote, methodically cut off imports of Armenian products: flowers, fruit, vegetables, fish, cognac, and even Jermuk mineral water, pulled from sale under the pretext of “sanitary non-compliance”². In parallel, the leaders of the Eurasian Economic Union demanded that Yerevan choose, by referendum, between the Moscow-led bloc and the European Union, while Vladimir Putin personally issued a warning, comparing Armenia's path to that of Ukraine before the war³. The European Commission called things by their name: “economic coercion”⁴.

Yet none of this made the electorate falter. According to the final results, Civil Contract won 49.81% of the vote and 61 seats in the new 105-seat legislature.

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² Lista restricțiilor impuse de Rosselhoznadzor și Rospotrebnadzor în săptămânile dinaintea scrutinului: flori (22 mai), legume și fructe proaspete (30 mai), apa minerală Jermuk (29 mai), pește, coniac și vin. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/06/03/from-cognac-to-apricots-these-armenian-products-are-now-off-limits-in-russia-a92912>

³ Avertismentul lui Vladimir Putin privind „scenariul ucrainean” a fost formulat la summitul Uniunii Economice Eurasiatice de la Astana. <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2026/06/02/putin-issues-ukrainian-scenario-warning-as-russia-ramps-up-pressure-on-armenia-before-elections>

⁴ Comisia Europeană a calificat restricțiile comerciale rusești drept „coerciție economică”, acuzând Moscova că transformă relațiile comerciale în instrument de presiune politică. <https://www.nbcnews.com/world/europe/armenians-polls-russian-pressure-aimed-preventing-drift-west-rcna348838>

Karapetyan's Strong Armenia stopped at 23.29% (28 seats), former president Robert Kocharyan's Armenia Bloc at 9.94% (11 seats), and Gagik Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia cleared the threshold by a hair, with 4% (5 seats)⁵. All three opposition forces that entered parliament had advocated, in one form or another, for repairing the relationship with Russia. Together, they do not amount to even two-thirds of the ruling party's score.

The turning point has a date: autumn of 2023

It would nevertheless be a mistake to think that Armenians suddenly fell in love with Brussels. What actually happened is that they stopped believing in Moscow. For decades, Russian influence in Armenia rested on a simple bargain: Yerevan accepted economic dependence and strategic alignment in exchange for security guarantees. The loss of Nagorno-Karabakh in the autumn of 2023 shattered that logic. The region collapsed in a matter of days, and Russia, the "protector" bound to Armenia by treaty and by a military presence on the ground, stood idly keeping hands in their pockets⁶.

Regardless, Moscow retains considerable economic, political, and informational levers in Armenia, from energy and infrastructure to media networks, and it will use them to preserve its position and rebuild its influence. The opening created by the election is real, but not irreversible.

The ball passes to Brussels

That is precisely why the strategic question now shifts from Yerevan to its partners. Pashinyan has won a mandate to carry forward reconciliation with Azerbaijan, the opening of the border with Turkey, and rapprochement with the European Union. The United States, which has invested serious diplomatic and economic capital in the region's stability and connectivity, can support this trajectory.

But it is the EU that holds the most comprehensive toolkit for consolidating the opening that the vote has confirmed: economic integration, mobility, investment, institutional cooperation.

And the instruments already exist: the visa liberalization dialogue, the €270 million Resilience and Growth Plan, the Strategic Agenda agreed with Yerevan, and the Global Gateway strategy, which aims to mobilize up to €2.5 billion in digital, energy, and transport connectivity⁷. It is implementation that is needed, and not new policies. What is missing is speed and political will. A vote does not keep anyone warm for long if nothing concrete follows: visible progress on visas, investment, and connectivity is the only tangible proof that the European path delivers real benefits. What is equally important, Brussels should avoid the trap of forcing Armenia into a zero-sum choice between Russia and Europe. The goal is not to wrench the country out of one orbit in order to lock it into another, but to strengthen its resilience, broaden its strategic options, and support its sovereignty.



Source: facebook/Sahina/Pop

⁵ Rezultatele finale ale Comisiei Electorale Centrale a Armeniei, după numărarea voturilor din toate cele 2.005 secții: Contractul Civil – 49,81% (727.160 voturi), Armenia Puternică – 23,29%, Blocul Armenia – 9,94%, Armenia Prosperă – 4,00%.

<https://www.commonspace.eu/index.php/live-blog/live-blog-pashinyans-civil-contract-party-win-armenian-elections>

⁶ Elene Kintsurashvili, Laurențiu Pleșca, „Armenia Chose Continuity Over Ties to Russia”, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 8 iunie 2026. <https://www.gmfus.org/news/armenia-chose-continuity-over-ties-russia>

⁷ Planul de Reziliență și Creștere (270 milioane euro, 2024-2027) și pachetul Global Gateway de până la 2,5 miliarde euro sunt confirmate în pagina oficială a Consiliului UE dedicată relațiilor cu Armenia. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/armenia/>

What does this victory mean for EU and how it impacts Moldova?

For Moldova, the Armenian result is more than a flattering parallel. It confirms that the operations playbook that Chisinau faced in its own recent elections, opposition financing, disinformation, energy and trade blackmail, can be defeated even in a country far more dependent on Russia, and it strips Moscow of the argument that Moldovan resilience was an exception made possible by proximity to the EU. Every failed Kremlin operation raises the cost of the next one and buys Chisinau breathing room ahead of its own electoral tests.

The lesson is even broader for the European security: the competition with Russia is no longer decided only on the battlefield in Ukraine, but also at ballot boxes from Chisinau to Yerevan. Each election that withstands this pressure shrinks the gray zone of contested influence on the EU's eastern flank, consolidates the corridor through the Black Sea and the South Caucasus that links Europe to Central Asia while bypassing Russia, and shows that the cheapest form of European defence is making small democracies too resilient to capture.

OPINION



Yerevan, 4–5 May 2026: Why the European Political Community Summit Is Not Just About Armenia

✎ **Laurențiu Pleșca**

Located at 2,500 kilometers from Brussels, in the capital of a former Soviet republic that until recently was considered firmly within Moscow's orbit, the South Caucasus hosted, on 4–5 May 2026, the most intensive concentration of European diplomacy the region has ever witnessed. The eighth meeting of the European Political Community brought together nearly 50 heads of state and government in Yerevan and was immediately followed by the first-ever bilateral summit between the European Union and Armenia. On the margins of these two events, the Coordination Group for the Republic of Moldova convened at the leaders' level, while President Macron simultaneously made a state visit. For a country that typically did not feature in the headlines of the Western European media, except when a conflict with Azerbaijan erupted, this was an unprecedented moment. The fact that all of these developments took place simultaneously, in the same location, was no coincidence of scheduling.

Informal Format, Formal Message

The European Political Community was conceived in 2022, at the initiative of Emmanuel Macron⁸, as a deliberately informal format: no treaties, no permanent secretariat, and no mandatory final communiqué. At the time of its launch, sceptics dismissed it as a *“talking club without muscle”*.

Four years and seven summits later, the format has proven valuable precisely because it does not produce binding documents. It provides maximum visibility for political consensus that might not emerge through formal EU procedures and creates space for bilateral meetings that, taken together, often carry greater significance than any joint declaration. The true value of the format became evident through three overlapping layers in Yerevan. The first, the gathering of 47–48 European leaders in a country that, until 2020, was a full member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization. Secondly, the presence of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney as a special guest - the first participation of a non-European

⁸ Comunitatea Politică Europeană a fost lansată la 6 octombrie 2022, la Praga, la inițiativa președintelui francez Emmanuel Macron, ca răspuns la invazia rusă a Ucrainei. Vezi: Consiliul European, „Meeting of the European Political Community, 6 October 2022”, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2022/10/06/>



Source: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/meetings/international-summit/2026/05/04/epc/>

country in a European Political Community summit. Third, the explicit choice of the theme, “Building Together the Future: Unity and Stability in Europe”, formulated with intended lack of specificity to encompass everything that cannot easily be addressed directly, from Ukraine and Moldova to the crisis in the Middle East and Russian hybrid threats.

Armenia, or How a Geopolitical Orbit Changes

For the host country, the summit was not merely an exercise in protocol but a foundational political act. In April 2025, the Armenian Parliament adopted legislation authorizing the government to initiate the process of accession to the European Union⁹. In July 2025, Prime Minister Pashinyan met with Presidents Costa and von der Leyen to accelerate the development of the partnership¹⁰. In August 2025, under U.S. mediation at the White House, Armenia and Azerbaijan initiated a historic peace treaty, bringing decades of conflict to an end, at least on paper¹¹. In April 2026, the Council of the European Union approved the creation of the European Union Partnership Mission in Armenia (EUPM Armenia), a civilian operational instrument under the framework of the

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), designed to support Yerevan in addressing information manipulation, cyberattacks, and illicit financial flows¹². And just two days later, on 4 - 5 May, the first-ever bilateral EU - Armenia Summit took place.

On paper, the EU - Armenia Summit confirmed figures that had already been announced: a €270 million Resilience and Growth Plan for the period 2024 - 2027, as well as potential investments of up to €2.5 billion under the Global Gateway strategy, the European Union's response to China's Belt and Road Initiative¹³. These are modest sums when measured against Armenia's actual modernization needs, yet they carry considerable symbolic weight. It is the first time that Brussels has engaged with Yerevan using the diplomatic framework it normally reserves for partners such as China, India, and the United States, and, within the Eastern Neighbourhood, only for Moldova, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. The difference is not financial. It is a matter of status. For Moscow, the signal is a difficult one to digest.

⁹ Legea privind lansarea procesului de aderare a Republicii Armenia la UE a fost adoptată de Adunarea Națională la 26 martie 2025 (cu 64 de voturi „pentru”) și promulgată de președintele Vahagn Khachatryan la 4 aprilie 2025, dată la care a intrat în vigoare. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/armenia-adopts-law-launch-eu-accession-process-2025-04-04/>

¹⁰ Întâlnirea trilaterală a avut loc la Bruxelles pe 14 iulie 2025, prilej cu care Ursula von der Leyen a salutat adoptarea Legii privind integrarea europeană de către Armenia. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/armenia/>

¹¹ „Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity” (TRIPP). <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/01/joint-statement-on-the-publication-of-the-u-s-armenia-implementation-framework-for-the-trump-route-for-international-peace-and-prosperity-tripp>

¹² Decizia Consiliului (PESC) 2026/894 din 21 aprilie 2026 stabilește EUPM Armenia, cu un mandat inițial de doi ani.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/press/press-releases/2026/04/21/armenia-eu-establishes-a-new-civilian-mission-to-contribute-strengthening-the-country-s-resilience/>

¹³ Cifrele sunt confirmate în pagina oficială a summitului UE-Armenia. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/armenia/>

In April, Foreign Minister Lavrov publicly commented on Armenia's decision to host the European Political Community Summit, expressing hope that it would be "*understood and accepted with respect*"¹⁴, a diplomatic formulation that, in reality, suggests precisely the opposite. The situation on the ground is that Pashinyan is pursuing a strategy he describes as "*diversification*": maintaining functional relations with Russia while visibly shifting the centre of gravity of Armenia's foreign policy towards the West. In this regard, the European Political Community Summit in Yerevan serves as the public declaration of that strategic shift.

The Republic of Moldova: The Broader Strategic Context

For Bucharest and Chişinău, however, the primary agenda is not Armenia. Maia Sandu and Nicușor Dan travelled together to Yerevan, a gesture that was immediately photographed and shared across social media, an exercise in political messaging that confirms that, regardless of political changes in Bucharest, Moldova's European integration path remains a priority issue for the Romanian Presidency.

In Yerevan, the two presidents participated in another meeting of the Coordination Group for the Republic of Moldova, an informal multilateral mechanism launched in 2024 through a joint initiative of Romania and France¹⁵, building upon and continuing the tradition of the Moldova Support Platform established in 2022.

What does the Coordination Group actually do? It does not allocate funds directly, nor does it produce executive decisions. What it does is coordinate. And in a case such as Moldova's one, where international support is fragmented among bilateral partnerships, institutional donors, and specialized agencies, the mere coherence of the message and timelines matters enormously.

Three Events, One Geopolitical Message

Viewed separately, the three events in Yerevan appear unrelated: a broad political gathering, a bilateral summit with a small country in the South Caucasus, and an informal meeting focused on Moldova. Viewed together, however, they convey a coherent message: Europe is slowly but consistently redrawing the map of political belonging on the continent.

Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine - three former Soviet republics facing significant economic and demographic challenges, are now anchored within a common framework of support, energy security, civilian assistance, and diplomatic instruments. Some of these mechanisms are formalized, others remain informal. All of them are converging.

This message does not automatically translate into accession. None of the three countries is likely to become an EU member within the next five years. Yet geopolitical logic pre-dates treaties: those who choose whom they sit down with at the table ultimately shape whom they will share their future with. And in Yerevan, the table was both very large and highly visible.

For Romania, the stakes are twofold: ensuring the continuity of European support for the Republic of Moldova, a dossier in which Bucharest has invested years of diplomatic capital - moreover enhancing the visibility of its own regional role, from the Vertical Gas Corridor to countering the hybrid warfare. The fact that the President Nicușor Dan travelled to Yerevan on the same aircraft as Maia Sandu was not a logistical coincidence but a political statement. The next European Political Community Summit will take place in Ireland in November 2026. Until then, what was built in Yerevan must be consolidated. Ultimately, in European diplomacy, consolidation is measured not by communiqués, but by continuity.

¹⁴ Declarația lui Serghei Lavrov a fost făcută în aprilie 2026, ministrul rus de externe făcând trimitere la respectul pe care Moscova l-ar acorda aliaților din CSI și OTSC. <https://www.rador.ro/2026/04/15/declaratii-ale-ministrului-rus-de-externe-serghei-lavrov-despre-relatiile-internationale/>

¹⁵ Grupul de Coordonare (Core Group) pentru Republica Moldova a fost lansat în 2024 la inițiativa comună a Franței și României, ca mecanism multilateral informal de susținere a securității și rezilienței Chişinăului. <https://www.moldpres.md/rom/politica/mecanismul-de-sprrijin-pentru-republica-moldova-initiat-de-romania-si-franta-va-fi-discutat-de-liderii-europeni-in-armenia>



Security Nexus (Strategic Interdependencies)

ARTICOL



Moldova's Hybrid-Threat Response Toolbox Before and After the 2025 Parliamentary Elections

✎ *Elena Mârzac¹⁶, Sanda Sandu¹⁷*

Moldova's response to hybrid threats highlights the central role of the information space, where strategic communication, institutional preparedness and public trust become essential instruments of national resilience. The most effective tools were not stand-alone debunking measures, but linked instruments that combine law, law enforcement, cyber protection, platform cooperation, strategic communication, crisis management and public warning.

The 2025 parliamentary elections functioned as an electoral stress test: hybrid actors attempted to connect disinformation, illicit finance, cyber pressure, social-media manipulation, energy coercion and identity cleavages into one complex operating system. Moldova's response was therefore strongest where it also became systemic.

Since the 2025 elections, Moldova's practical response has moved from emergency disruption toward institutional learning and consolidation. The main change is not one new tool, but a more coherent architecture: strategic communication, crisis-management coordination, cyber resilience, electoral-law review, sanctions, platform engagement, public warning and external security partnerships.

Practical response of the Republic of Moldova to hybrid threats before and after the 2025 parliamentary elections

For the Republic of Moldova, hybrid threats are not an abstract security category. They operate through the everyday spaces where citizens form trust: the media environment, social networks, elections, energy security, local communities and perceptions of state competence. The 2025 parliamentary elections showed that the information space has become the main theatre where hostile actors tried to convert social grievances into distrust of institutions and doubt about Moldova's European direction. These developments confirm that the informational dimension has become an essential element of hybrid confrontations, with direct effects on democratic resilience and state security.

Before the elections, the response focused on prevention and disruption. The state tightened the legal framework against electoral corruption through Law No. 100/2025, increased enforcement against vote-buying and illicit financing networks, protected electoral digital infrastructure through a risk-based cyber framework, and worked with EU services and major platforms to test responses to digital hybrid threats.

¹⁶ Co-founder and director of the Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives. PhD in Political Science, researcher, and author specializing in strategic communication, security sector reform, the role of civil society, and the "Women, Peace and Security" Agenda.

¹⁷ Co-founder of the Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives and program manager at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, she has over 8 years of experience in civil society and international organizations. A Wikimedia Fellow on Human Rights, she is an expert in anti-corruption, integrity, and security sector governance, having published studies on information security and the coordination of foreign assistance.

This was complemented by public warnings, police campaigns, fact-checking, media monitoring and strategic communication activities aimed at increasing public awareness of manipulation tactics.

After the elections, the response entered a second phase: institutional consolidation. On 27 November 2025, Moldova and the EU agreed to deepen the cooperation on countering hybrid threats and boosting cybersecurity capabilities, explicitly building on Moldova's lessons learned. The EUPM Moldova mandate, extended until 2027, remained a key advisory instrument on crisis management, cybersecurity and FIMI. In parallel, the EU extended restrictive measures against actors destabilizing Moldova until April 2027, increasing the political and financial costs for hostile networks¹⁸.

At the national level, the National Crisis Management Centre offers an important mechanism for moving from fragmented reaction to integrated crisis management. Its functions include national situational awareness, strategic forecasting, crisis communication, 24/7 contact points in public authorities and a register of lessons identified after crisis situations. This is highly relevant for hybrid threats, because cyber incidents, energy disruptions, disinformation and public-order pressure often reinforce each other.

The post-election phase also exposed remaining gaps. ODIHR's final report confirmed the scale of foreign interference, disinformation, illicit financing and cyberattacks, while noting weaknesses in inter-agency coordination and in direct, fact-based communication to citizens through official channels. The Venice Commission's 2026 opinion on Law No. 100/2025 recognized the exceptional context and the need to combat electoral corruption but also stressed that future reforms should protect legal certainty, proportionality and public trust.

Moldova's response to hybrid threats was also supported by the consolidation of its national security legal framework. Law No. 249/2025 can be framed as a structural instrument that strengthens the state's capacity to identify, assess and coordinate responses to complex security risks, including hybrid, informational, cyber and external interference threats. Unlike electoral or criminal-law measures, its relevance lies in providing a broader strategic and institutional basis for whole-of-government security planning and resilience¹⁹.



Source: https://omni.fm/parlamentul-republica-moldova-din-13-iunie-2025/#google_vignette

¹⁸ EEAS, EU-Moldova Joint Statement following the 4th High-Level Political and Security Dialogue, 27 November 2025. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-moldova-joint-statement-following-4th-high-level-political-and-security-dialogue_en; Council of the European Union, "Moldova: Council extends the mandate of the EU civilian mission for two years," 21 May 2025. <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/>; Council of the European Union, "Republic of Moldova: EU restrictive measures extended until April 2027," 21 April 2026. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/04/21/republic-of-moldova-eu-restrictive-measures-extended-until-april-2027/>

¹⁹ Legea nr. 249/2025 privind securitatea națională a Republicii Moldova. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=148851&lang=ro.

The key lesson is that strategic communication must be treated as an operational security instrument, not as a final layer of public relations.

In Moldova's case, resilience depends on the ability of institutions to explain risks early, coordinate messages, pre-bunk false narratives, connect cyber and information monitoring, and communicate in a way that reaches citizens before hostile narratives become socially dominant.

The Republic of Moldova continues to face a high level of exposure to foreign interference and hybrid threats; however, the experience gained in recent years highlights the capacity of a democratic system to consolidate its resilience mechanisms and limit the effectiveness of external influence activities.

Recent developments demonstrate that strengthening institutional capacities, developing security instruments, and respecting the principles of the rule of law can contribute to increasing the operational and political costs for hostile external actors, while simultaneously maintaining the legitimacy of democratic processes and public trust in state institutions.



Mapping table: hybrid threats and response instruments

Hybrid-threat type	Response instruments used
Systemic hybrid threats / national security risks	Law No. 249/2025 / national security legal framework - provides a broader legal and institutional basis for assessing, coordinating and responding to complex threats affecting state security, democratic resilience and national interests.
Disinformation / FIMI	STRATCOM Center under Law 242/2023; communicator training; inter-agency FIMI workshops; 2024 EC–Moldova readiness exercise; temporary escalation mechanism with major platforms; 2025 digital hybrid-threat stress test; post-election EU–Moldova follow-up. Pre-2025, Moldova adopted a whole-of-society concept for strategic communication and counter-disinformation. In June 2025, Moldova ran a digital hybrid-threat simulation with Google, Meta, TikTok, civil society, fact-checkers and the media. Post-2025, EU–Moldova cooperation was deepened on counter-hybrid and cyber capabilities ²⁰ .
Cyberattacks on government and electoral infrastructure	Governmental CERT counter-measures; cybersecurity framework for the CEC State Automated Information System; risk-based mitigation framework; EU Cybersecurity Reserve access; EUPM strategic advice; UK cyber-capability support; public crisis signaling via official channels. ODIHR noted that more than 1,000 cyberattacks were reported in 2025 and that SAISE (cyber protection of the CEC's SAISE electoral information system) is protected under the STISC cybersecurity framework ²¹ .
Illicit financing / vote-buying	Law No. 100/2025; broader anti-corruption and campaign-finance rules; CNA investigations; police searches; party-financing controls; EU and UK sanctions frameworks. ODIHR found that proactive law-enforcement efforts had a mitigating and deterring effect, while the Venice Commission described Law No. 100/2025 as a comprehensive response to electoral corruption and related threats ²² .
Social-media manipulation / coordinated inauthentic behaviour	Temporary escalation to platforms; EU/platform/CSO exchanges; TikTok Election Centre; Google Threat Analysis Group action; reporting channels for authorities; fact-checking partnerships; independent monitoring by EDMO/BROD and CSOs. Platform responsiveness improved in some areas but remained uneven, especially regarding Telegram ²³ .

²⁰ Concept on strategic communication and countering disinformation, information manipulation and foreign interference. https://old.cancelaria.gov.md/sites/default/files/4th_report_final_ccpr_republic_of_moldova.pdf; European Commission, Election readiness exercise with Moldovan authorities and online platforms. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-services-and-moldovan-authorities-hold-election-readiness-exercise-online-platforms>; EEAS, EU-Moldova Joint Statement following the 4th High-Level Political and Security Dialogue, 27 November 2025. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-moldova-joint-statement-following-4th-high-level-political-and-security-dialogue_en

²¹ OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Moldova Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025, Final Report. https://odihhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/02/MLD%20Parliamentary%202025%20Final%20Report_18.02.2025_ENG.pdf; Republic of Moldova statement on cyber threats, OEWG, 2 December 2024. https://rponunymfa.gov.md/sites/rponunymfa.gov.md/files/02.12.2024_Statement%20Republic%20of%20Moldova%20cyber%20OEWGthreats.pdf; Council of the EU, Republic of Moldova: Council appoints new Head of Mission for EUPM Moldova, 22 April 2026. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/04/22/republic-of-moldova-council-appoints-new-head-of-mission-for-european-union-partnership-mission/>

²² Venice Commission, Opinion on Law No. 100/2025, CDL-AD(2026)007. <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD%282026%29007-e>; OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Moldova Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025, Final Report. https://odihhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/02/MLD%20Parliamentary%202025%20Final%20Report_18.02.2025_ENG.pdf; Council of the EU, Republic of Moldova: EU restrictive measures extended until April 2027, 21 April 2026. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/04/21/republic-of-moldova-eu-restrictive-measures-extended-until-april-2027/>

²³ Election readiness exercise with Moldovan authorities and online platforms. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-services-and-moldovan-authorities-hold-election-readiness-exercise-online-platforms>; OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Moldova Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025, Final Report. https://odihhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/02/MLD%20Parliamentary%202025%20Final%20Report_18.02.2025_ENG.pdf; TikTok Newsroom, Protecting the integrity of TikTok during the parliamentary elections in Moldova. <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/ro-md/protecting-the-integrity-of-tiktok-during-the-parliamentary-elections-in-moldova>; Google, Details on how we are supporting Moldova's election in 2025. <https://blog.google/company-news/inside-google/around-the-globe/google-europe/details-on-how-were-supporting-moldovas-election-in-2025/>

AI-generated and manipulated content	Platform labelling requirements; monitoring by authorities and ODIHR observers; warnings issued by national leaders and institutions; fact-checking and pre-bunking by ministries and civil society. ODIHR recorded AI-generated videos, troll farms and automated bots during the campaign. STRATCOM analysis highlights AI-assisted content, deepfakes and coordinated amplification as recurring techniques ²⁴ .
Protests, astroturfing and mass-unrest scenarios	SIS intelligence alerts; police and prosecutorial operations; searches and detentions; disruption of training, logistics and mobilization networks; Carabinieri protection of public events; sanctions against destabilizing actors. These instruments target the bridge between information manipulation and offline destabilization ²⁵ .
Phishing, Telegram apps, fraud and data-harvesting	Public warning campaigns; police monitoring; self-initiated cases; legal deterrence; official guidance; cyber hygiene measures for high-risk users. MAI warned that the Telegram-linked TAITO app collected IDs, phone numbers and facial video while promising payment for protests or recruitment ²⁶ .
Electoral fraud and polling-day sabotage	Law No. 100/2025; CEC procedures; manual paper-protocol validation; anti-corruption reporting through 112; the national campaign “Nu te juca cu votul, că vei pierde totul”; observer vigilance; community outreach. The campaign linked electoral corruption to information pressure and manipulation ²⁷ .
Energy coercion and critical-infrastructure pressure	Energy state of emergency; diversification of supply; crisis communication; coordination through energy and crisis-management institutions; emergency procurement and demand-management tools. In March 2026, Moldova approved a 60-day energy emergency after Russian attacks in Ukraine disabled the Isaccea–Vulcănești line; the emergency was lifted in April after risks were managed ²⁸ .

²⁴ OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Moldova Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025, Final Report.

https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/02/MLD%20Parliamentary%202025%20Final%20Report_18.02.2025_ENG.pdf; STRATCOM Moldova, Information threats facing the Republic of Moldova and their impact on democratic exercises. https://stratcom.md/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/ENG-Raportul-1.-Amenintari-cu-care-se-confurnta-Republic-aMoldova-si-modul-cum-acestea-se-rasfring-asupra-exercitiilor-democratice.ro_en.pdf

²⁵ Council of the EU, Republic of Moldova: EU restrictive measures extended until April 2027, 21 April 2026.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/04/21/republic-of-moldova-eu-restrictive-measures-extended-until-april-2027/>; Ministry of Internal Affairs, Warning on the TAITO application. <https://mai.gov.md/ro/node/9796>; General Inspectorate of Police, National campaign 'Nu te juca cu votul, că vei pierde totul'. <https://politia.md/ro/noutati/inspectoratul-general-al-politiei-lanseaza-campania-nationala-nu-te-juca-cu-votul-ca-vei>

²⁶ Google, Details on how we are supporting Moldova's election in 2025. <https://blog.google/company-news/inside-google/around-the-globe/google-europe/details-on-how-were-supporting-moldovas-election-in-2025/>; Ministry of Internal Affairs, Warning on the TAITO application. <https://mai.gov.md/ro/node/9796>

²⁷ OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Moldova Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025, Final Report.

https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/02/MLD%20Parliamentary%202025%20Final%20Report_18.02.2025_ENG.pdf; General Inspectorate of Police, National campaign 'Nu te juca cu votul, că vei pierde totul'. <https://politia.md/ro/noutati/inspectoratul-general-al-politiei-lanseaza-campania-nationala-nu-te-juca-cu-votul-ca-vei>; European Commission, Stress test on potential digital hybrid threats to election integrity. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-services-and-moldovan-authorities-conduct-stress-test-potential-digital-hybrid-threats>

²⁸ Reuters, Moldovan parliament backs energy state of emergency after power line put out of action, 24 March 2026.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/moldovan-parliament-backs-energy-state-emergency-after-power-line-put-out-action-2026-03-24/>; Reuters, Moldova parliament votes to end energy state of emergency, 24 April 2026. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/moldova-parliament-votes-end-energy-state-emergency-2026-04-24/>

Airspace violations and drone spillover incidents	Temporary airspace closure; aviation-safety measures; diplomatic attribution; public warnings; coordination with security and aviation authorities. In November 2025, Moldova reported repeated Russian drone incursions and temporarily closed its airspace for over an hour ²⁹ .
Crisis coordination and lessons learned	National Crisis Management Centre; 24/7 contact points in public authorities; crisis-management preparedness coordinators; integrated national situational picture; warning system; strategic forecasting; register of lessons identified after crises. This creates a standing mechanism for whole-of-government and whole-of-society resilience ³⁰ .



Post-election consolidation: November 2025 to present

EU-Moldova security dialogue: On 27 November 2025, Moldova and the EU held the 4th High-Level Political and Security Dialogue and agreed to step up cooperation to counter hybrid threats and boost cyber-security capabilities, building on lessons learned from Moldova's experience³¹.

EUPM Moldova as a permanent advisory instrument: EUPM Moldova remains

central for strategic advice in crisis management, hybrid threats, cybersecurity and FIMI. In April 2026, the Council appointed Kirsten Joppe as Head of Mission; the mandate continues until 31 May 2027³².

EU sanctions as deterrence: In April 2026, the EU extended restrictive measures until 29 April 2027 against actors destabilizing Moldova.

²⁹ Reuters, Moldova says Russian drones entered its airspace again, posing aviation threat, 29 November 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/moldova-says-russian-drones-entered-its-airspace-again-posing-aviation-threat-2025-11-29/>

³⁰ Government Decision No. 579/2025 on the functioning of the National Crisis Management Centre. <https://cnmc.gov.md/en/government-decision-no-579-09072025-functioning-national-crisis-management-centre>

EEAS, EU-Moldova Joint Statement following the 4th High-Level Political and Security Dialogue, 27 November 2025. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-moldova-joint-statement-following-4th-high-level-political-and-security-dialogue_en

³¹ EEAS, EU-Moldova Joint Statement following the 4th High-Level Political and Security Dialogue, 27 November 2025.

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-moldova-joint-statement-following-4th-high-level-political-and-security-dialogue_en

³² Council of the EU, Republic of Moldova: Council appoints new Head of Mission for EUPM Moldova, 22 April 2026.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/04/22/republic-of-moldova-council-appoints-new-head-of-mission-for-european-union-partnership-mission/>

The framework applies to 23 individuals and 5 entities, using asset freezes, travel bans and restrictions on making funds available³³.

National Crisis Management Centre: Government Decision No. 579/2025 operationalizes the Centre's role in preparedness, situation awareness, warning, crisis communication, strategic forecasting and the register of lessons identified. Public authorities are required to designate 24/7 contact points and crisis-management preparedness coordinators³⁴.

Legal learning after Law No. 100/2025: The Venice Commission's March 2026 opinion confirms the relevance of the law as a response to electoral corruption and related threats, while highlighting the need for legal certainty, proportionality and early, transparent reform processes³⁵.

Electoral and cyber lessons: ODIHR's final report identifies hybrid attacks, illicit funding, disinformation and cybersecurity incidents as originating from the Russian Federation, while stressing the need for better inter-agency coordination and more direct fact-based public communication³⁶.

Critical infrastructure and energy resilience: The March-April 2026 energy emergency demonstrated that hybrid threats extend beyond information operations: attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure directly affected Moldova's energy supply and required emergency state measures, public communication and continuity planning³⁷.

Patterns and remaining gaps

- Integration is the main pattern: Moldova moved from reactive, single-issue responses toward a connected toolbox in which legal reform, law enforcement, cyber defence, platform cooperation, crisis management and strategic communication increasingly support one another.
- The main improvements were visible before and during the election. Among the essential elements of the institutional response are the mechanisms for cooperation with online platforms developed in 2024, the consolidation of resilience against digital hybrid threats highlighted during the 2025 elections, the improvement of anti-corruption legislation, the countering actions carried out by law enforcement agencies, and the intensification of public communication and warning measures.
- The main post-election shift is institutional learning: EU-Moldova security cooperation, EUPM advisory support, CNMC coordination functions, sanctions, legal review and STRATCOM analysis can help transform ad hoc response into standing capabilities.
- The key gap remains the "last-mile" information problem: citizens must receive timely, clear and trusted information from official sources before hostile narratives become dominant. ODIHR found that public-facing fact-based counter-messaging and inter-agency coordination still require improvement³⁸.

³³ Council of the EU, Republic of Moldova: EU restrictive measures extended until April 2027, 21 April 2026.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/04/21/republic-of-moldova-eu-restrictive-measures-extended-until-april-2027/>

³⁴ Government Decision No. 579/2025 on the functioning of the National Crisis Management Centre. <https://cnmc.gov.md/en/government-decision-no-579-09072025-functioning-national-crisis-management-centre>

³⁵ Venice Commission, Opinion on Law No. 100/2025, CDL-AD(2026)007. <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD%282026%29007-e>

³⁶ OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Moldova Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025, Final Report.

https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/02/MLD%20Parliamentary%202025%20Final%20Report_1_8.02.2025_ENG.pdf

³⁷ Reuters, Moldovan parliament backs energy state of emergency after power line put out of action, 24 March 2026.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/moldovan-parliament-backs-energy-state-emergency-after-power-line-put-out-action-2026-03-24/>; Reuters, Moldova parliament votes to end energy state of emergency, 24 April 2026.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/moldova-parliament-votes-end-energy-state-emergency-2026-04-24/>

³⁸ OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Moldova Parliamentary Elections, 28 September 2025, Final Report.

https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/02/MLD%20Parliamentary%202025%20Final%20Report_1_8.02.2025_ENG.pdf

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

- To create a permanent election-information operations cell: Link STRATCOM, SIS, CEC, MAI/Police, CERT, CNMC and government communicators, with a shared escalation log, single public lead channel and clear rules for platform requests.
- To move from debunking to routine pre-bunking: Issue weekly public bulletins on expected narratives, scams, phishing tools, AI-generated content formats and manipulated visuals before they reach scale.
- To institutionalize platform protocols beyond election periods: Maintain platform contact points permanently and develop a Telegram-specific contingency approach, since closed ecosystems are harder to regulate and monitor.
- To standardize citizen-facing crisis communication products: Develop one-minute videos, SMS-ready alerts, Telegram/WhatsApp explainers, local-language infographics and short materials for local authorities, schools, libraries and community media.
- To connect crisis management with strategic communication: Use CNMC situational awareness and lessons-learned functions to ensure that cyber, energy, public-order and information incidents are communicated coherently to citizens.
- To strengthen transparency and democratic safeguards: Future legal reforms should be adopted earlier, based on consultation, with clear proportionality and judicial-review safeguards, in line with ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations.
- To publish a declassified post-election lessons-learned review: Moldova should document what worked, what failed and what must become permanent capability, so the experience can inform both national planning and European resilience debates.



Photo: <https://www.magnific.com/>

Why Ukraine's Counter-Drone Expertise Has Become Critical in the War with Iran

✎ *Laurențiu Pleșca*

Three and a half years after the first Shahed drone crashed into a Ukrainian city, the same weapon is now crossing the night skies over Dubai, Riyadh, and Doha. The Iranian-designed kamikaze drone - a plywood and composite-material airframe roughly the size of a small car, loaded with explosives and programmed to strike its target - has become the common red thread linking two wars that appear on the map to be separated by thousands of kilometers: the war in Ukraine and the war with Iran, launched on 28 February 2026 with the US-Israeli strikes against Tehran³⁹.

This technological overlap has produced a role reversal that no one planned, yet everyone has come to recognize: the country that spent four years persistently requesting Patriot batteries from Brussels and Washington became, in the spring of 2026, the provider of counter-drone expertise sought by nearly twenty Gulf states, including the United States. The fact that Ukraine is now exporting military know-how precisely at a moment when it is under pressure to accept a disadvantageous ceasefire with Russia is no coincidence of timing.

The Shahed Problem and the Logic of Air Defence

In the early days of the war with Iran, Tehran launched not only ballistic missiles against Israel, U.S. bases, and the Arab Gulf states, but also hundreds of Shahed drones. The Pentagon rapidly identified this second category of threat as the most difficult to manage. During a closed-door briefing on Capitol Hill in the first week of the conflict, the U.S. Secretary of Defence and the

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff acknowledged to lawmakers that inexpensive, low-flying drones, capable of saturating and overwhelming air defence systems, had proven to be a greater challenge than was initially anticipated⁴⁰.

The reason lies in basic arithmetic. A Shahed drone costs tens of thousands of dollars, with estimates ranging between \$30,000 and \$50,000, and even higher for more sophisticated variants. By contrast, an interceptor missile from a Patriot system, such as a PAC-3, costs several million dollars. When an adversary launches hundreds of drones in a single night, the equation becomes unsustainable, not because the defence fails to hit its targets, but because it succeeds, as every successful interception depletes an expensive arsenal that is difficult to replenish. Iran's objective was not necessarily to destroy, but to exhaust. In military terms, exhausting an air defence system through the use of low-cost munitions against multi-million-dollar interceptors constitutes a victory for the attacker, even when the drone itself is shot down.



Source: <https://www.gettyimages.com/>

Ukraine, or the Lessons of Defence Learned the Hard Way in War

This is precisely the challenge Ukraine has faced since the autumn of 2022, when Russia began launching large numbers of Iranian-designed Shahed drones against Ukrainian cities and energy infrastructure.

³⁹ Războiul din Iran a început la 28 februarie 2026, când Statele Unite și Israel au lansat atacuri aeriene asupra Iranului; Teheranul a răspuns cu sute de drone și rachete balistice asupra Israelului, a bazelor americane și a statelor arabe aliate. Operațiunea americană „Epic Fury” s-a încheiat la 5 mai 2026. Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/event/2026-Iran-war>

⁴⁰ Într-un briefing cu ușile închise pe Capitol Hill, în prima săptămână de război, secretarul american al Apărării, Pete Hegseth, și șeful Statului Major Întrunit, generalul Dan Caine, au recunoscut că dronele Shahed s-au dovedit o problemă mai mare decât se anticipase. CNN, „Ukraine's counter-drone expertise has been hard won”, 7 martie 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/03/07/world/ukraine-counter-drone-expertise-middle-east-intl-cmd>

With only around ten Patriot systems deployed across its entire territory - a negligible number compared to the tens of thousands of drones used throughout the war, Kyiv had no alternative: it was forced to build a low-cost defence system.

The result is a layered defence network in which each level addresses the threats that evade the previous one: detection radars, electronic warfare systems, mobile teams equipped with heavy machine guns, helicopters and transport aircraft reconfigured with rapid-fire gun mounts, man-portable surface-to-air missiles, and, most importantly, low-cost interceptor drones designed specifically to hunt other drones. Shortly after the outbreak of the war with Iran, an adviser to President Zelenskyy stated that Ukraine intercepts around 90% of Russian Shahed drones and that more than ten Ukrainian companies are producing counter-drone systems⁴¹.

The names of these companies are already telling. Wild Hornets manufactures the Sting interceptor, a drone costing approximately \$1,300, produced in more than 10,000 units per month and capable of bringing down a Shahed drone the size of a small car. The Fourth Law produces the Zerov-8 interceptor, which uses artificial intelligence to detect targets more quickly and at greater distances than a human operator⁴². The Merops system, developed with U.S. support but tested under real combat conditions in Ukraine, costs between \$14,000 and \$15,000 per unit, which could fall to between \$3,000 and \$5,000 in the case of large-scale orders 3.000 sau 5.000 în cazul comenzilor mari⁴³.

For the first time, the arithmetic is reversed: the interceptor becomes less expensive than the drone it is designed to destroy.

The War with Iran: Ukraine's Showcase

This is where the role reversal becomes apparent. Under the pressure of sustained Iranian drone barrages, the Gulf states discovered that their advanced Western air-defence systems (Patriot, PAC-3) were insufficient against the sheer volume of incoming drones. And so, they turned to Kyiv. At the request of several Gulf states, President Zelenskyy deployed more than 200 Ukrainian drone experts, while Ukrainian specialists took part in intercepting Iranian drones in several countries across the Middle East⁴⁴.

This was followed by a series of agreements that Ukrainian diplomacy dubbed "Drone Deals". At the end of March, Zelenskyy announced ten-year strategic partnerships with Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, describing them as "historic", and proposed a direct exchange: low-cost Ukrainian interceptor drones in return for the expensive air-defence missiles that Gulf states possess in abundance, along with diesel fuel supplies for the Ukrainian military and agricultural sector. This was followed in April by agreements with Germany, Norway, and the Netherlands, and subsequently with Lithuania and Azerbaijan. In early May, Zelenskyy also offered a "Drone Deal" to Bahrain. By mid-May, nearly twenty countries were engaged in discussions with Kyiv at various stages, with four agreements already signed⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Declarația aparține lui Alexander Kamyshin, consilier al președintelui Zelenski pe probleme strategice, citat în același material CNN din 7 martie 2026.

⁴² NPR, „Ukraine's fast-growing defense tech sector takes center stage in Iran war”, 20 aprilie 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/04/20/nx-s1-5788603/ukraines-fast-growing-defense-tech-sector-takes-center-stage-in-iran-war>

⁴³ The War Zone, „Cheap Interceptor Drones Proven In Ukraine Protected U.S. Troops Against Iranian Shaheds”, 16 aprilie 2026, <https://www.twz.com/land/cheap-interceptor-drones-proven-in-ukraine-protected-u-s-troops-against-iranian-shaheds/>; vezi și TIME, „Iran War Creates New Demand for Ukraine's Drone Defense”, 15 martie 2026, <https://time.com/article/2026/03/15/iran-war-ukraine-drones/>

⁴⁴ Idem, NPR, 20 aprilie 2026. Specialiștii ucraineni detașați au contribuit la doborârea de drone iraniene în mai multe state din Orientul Mijlociu

⁴⁵ France 24, „Zelensky hails 'historic' defence agreements with Gulf states”, 30 martie 2026, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20260330-zelensky-hails-historic-defence-agreements-with-gulf-states>

⁴⁶ The Defense Post, „Zelensky Offers Bahrain Drone Deal in Latest Gulf Trip”, 5 mai 2026, <https://thedefensepost.com/2026/05/05/ukraine-bahrain-drone-deal-offer/>; și „20 countries interested in drone deals with Ukraine, says Zelensky”, Gulf Today / AFP, 11 mai 2026, <https://www.gulftoday.ae/news/2026/05/11/20-countries-interested-in-drone-deals-with-ukraine-says-zelensky>

The most telling example is the trajectory of the United States. In the early days of the war, the Trump administration publicly rejected the offer of cooperation, with the U.S. President stating that Washington “knows more about drones than anyone else”. A few weeks later, however, the U.S. military was deploying approximately 10,000 Merops interceptor drones to the Middle East to protect its forces from Shahed attacks, and by mid-May the U.S. Department of State and the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington had already drafted a memorandum for a cooperation agreement on drone production⁴⁷. The distance between “we know more about drones than anyone else” and a bilateral memorandum was covered in less than three months.

More Than a Drone Deal

Being examined in isolation, the phenomenon may appear to be a simple commercial success story. However, being seen in context, it reveals three important realities. The first concerns Kyiv’s position. Counter-drone expertise has provided Zelenskyy with valuable diplomatic capital at a time when Ukraine faces difficulties on the battlefield and growing Western pressure to accept a ceasefire with Russia on unfavourable terms. A country that has something tangible to offer approaches negotiations differently from one that merely receives assistance.

The second concerns the nature of the adversary. The war in Ukraine and the war with Iran are connected not only by the type of weapon involved. According to reports in the Western press, Russia has allegedly provided Tehran with intelligence on the positions of U.S. forces and is reportedly preparing to supply Iran with thousands of advanced drones⁴⁸. The Iranian-made Shahed found its way to Moscow, while Russian intelligence and technology are now flowing back toward Tehran.

The two theatres of operation are feeding into one another, and those who learn to defend themselves in one are, in reality, preparing for the other. The third concerns Europe and NATO’s eastern flank. The Ukrainian lesson: a layered, low-cost, and scalable defence system, is relevant not only to the Gulf states. Romania, on whose territory drone fragments have repeatedly fallen during Russian attacks on Ukrainian Danube ports, has a direct interest in ensuring that this expertise is absorbed in time, rather than after drones begin appearing over its own cities.

A Single War

Being regarded separately, the two conflicts appear to belong to different worlds: one, a ground invasion in Eastern Europe; the other, an aerial campaign in the Middle East. However being examined through the lens of the Shahed drone, they are technologically the same war: fought with the same low-cost weapon and driven by the same logic of overwhelming and exhausting air-defence systems. Ukraine did not choose to become the world’s laboratory for counter-drone defence. It paid the heavy toll for this expertise through destroyed power plants, nights spent in shelters, and civilian lives lost. Yet by the spring of 2026, it had transformed that experience into a genuine strategic asset. The question that remains is not whether the Ukrainian lesson is valuable, the war with Iran has already demonstrated that it is; but whether Europe, and Romania within it, will learn it before, rather than after, they would need it.

⁴⁷ Kyiv Post, „US, Ukraine Draft Drone Defense Deal After Iran War”, 13 mai 2026, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/75968>, citand relatarea NBC News privind memorandumul redactat de Departamentul de Stat împreună cu ambasada Ucrainei la Washington.

⁴⁸ Idem, Kyiv Post, 13 mai 2026, care relatează și informațiile privind intenția Moscovei de a furniza Iranului drone avansate și de a instrui forțele iraniene.





When Drones Test the State: Lessons for the Security of the Republic of Moldova



Sanda Sandu

Recent drone-related incidents in the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and the Baltic region demonstrate that Russia's war against Ukraine is producing direct effects on neighbouring states and creating tangible risks for airspace security, civilian populations, critical infrastructure, and public confidence in the state's ability to respond. The Shahed/Geran-type drone that crossed the Republic of Moldova on 13 May⁴⁹, and the Russian drone that crashed into a residential building in Galați on 29 May⁵⁰ and the explosion of a Ukrainian maritime drone in the Port of Constanța on 5 June⁵¹ are part of the same strategic picture. We are confronted with a threat that is inexpensive, mobile, difficult to anticipate, and increasingly frequent. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, the incident of 13 May is important to analyse through the trajectory of the drone. According to the Ministry of Defence, the aircraft entered the Moldovan airspace from the direction of Mohyliv-Podilskyi, was observed over the municipality of Bălți, then detected in the areas of Lăpușna and Cărpineni, and subsequently reappeared on radar in Cahul district before disappearing near Giurgiulești.

This incident is significant both because the drone traversed a substantial portion of the country's airspace and because of the timing of the event. The 135th Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe was held in Chișinău, Republic of Moldova, on 14–15 May⁵². The member states agreed to establish an Enlarged Partial Agreement for a special tribunal on the crime of aggression committed by Russia against Ukraine, also referred to as the Special Tribunal for Ukraine.

Romania, for its part, received a stark reminder that the threat is no longer abstract. On 29 May, a Russian Geran-2 drone, the Russian equivalent of the Iranian-designed Shahed, struck a residential apartment building in Galați, injuring two people. The Ministry of National Defence in Bucharest stated that the drone's entire payload detonated upon impact. The fact that the incident occurred in a NATO and EU member state does not diminish Russia's responsibility; rather, it highlights the practical challenges of defending against drones. They may be detected, but they cannot always be neutralized without creating risks for civilians, particularly when operating over densely populated urban areas.

On 5 June, another incident highlighted a different dimension of the problem. A Ukrainian maritime drone exploded in the Port of Constanța, near the oil terminal, after Ukraine reported that it had lost control of the vessel due to Russian electronic jamming. Reuters and the Associated Press reported that Romanian authorities carried out precautionary evacuations in parts of the port and surrounding areas, while other Ukrainian maritime drones detonated either in the vicinity or offshore⁵³. This episode is significant because it demonstrates that electronic jamming, GPS spoofing, and electronic warfare do not produce solely military effects on the battlefield; they can also divert autonomous systems toward civilian and commercial infrastructure in third countries.

⁴⁹ Radio Moldova. „O nouă dronă a fost detectată în spațiul aerian al Republicii Moldova”, 13 mai 2026. Disponibil la:

<https://radiomoldova.md/p/76426/o-noua-drona-a-fost-detectata-in-spatiul-aerian-al-republicii-moldova>

⁵⁰ Reuters. „Apartment building hit by drone in Romania's Galați close to Ukraine border”, 29 mai 2026. Disponibil la:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/apartment-building-hit-by-drone-romania-galati-close-ukraine-border-radio-says-2026-05-29/>

⁵¹ Reuters. „Drone explodes in Romanian port as Ukraine blames Russia for jamming it”, 5 iunie 2026. Disponibil la:

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/marine-drone-self-detonates-romanian-black-sea-port-defence-ministry-says-2026-06-05/>
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cm/may-2026>

⁵² Reuters. „Drone explodes in Romanian port as Ukraine blames Russia for jamming it”, 5 iunie 2026. Disponibil la:

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/marine-drone-self-detonates-romanian-black-sea-port-defence-ministry-says-2026-06-05/>

⁵³ Associated Press. „A Ukrainian maritime drone explodes at a Romanian Black Sea port. No injuries reported”, 5 iunie 2026. Disponibil la:

<https://apnews.com/article/drone-romania-black-sea-explosion-ukraine-defc53b2383a67475230c8349a47d7c6>

The common lesson is straightforward: radars are necessary, but they are not sufficient. For the Republic of Moldova, modernizing defence cannot be limited to the acquisition of sensors or surveillance capabilities alone. What is required is a complete chain: detection, identification, decision-making, public warning, neutralization capabilities, response teams, and clear communication procedures. A drone detected on radar but impossible to stop remains a vulnerability. A drone brought down without proper coordination over a populated area can become an additional hazard. True defensive capability lies in integrating technology with procedures, institutional responsibilities, and regional cooperation.

From this perspective, President Maia Sandu's statements regarding the need to produce interceptor drones in the Republic of Moldova are strategically significant. In the Raport podcast hosted by Nicolae Chicu, the Head of State stated that Moldova must strengthen its counter-drone system and electronic jamming capabilities, including through the production of drones capable of intercepting and bringing down aircraft that violate national airspace. She also highlighted the need to amend the legislation to allow public-private partnerships and foreign investment in the defence industry, as well as the opportunity to learn from Ukraine's experience. This is the right direction, but it must be rapidly transformed into an industrial and defence policy rather than remaining merely a public declaration of intent.

For Moldova, cooperation with Ukraine is strategic and important. Ukraine today possesses some of the most advanced practical experience in the world in the field of drones, interceptor systems, electronic jamming, and rapid adaptation to emerging threats.

Moldova cannot replicate these capabilities overnight, but it can adopt lessons learned, technologies, training models, and institutional practices. At the same time, the cooperation with Romania and European partners should include data sharing, early warning mechanisms,

joint exercises, protocols for cross-border incidents, and support for the protection of critical infrastructure. The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) has already suggested that NATO may need to explore air-defence arrangements with Ukraine and Moldova in order to better protect its own Eastern flank. Lithuania's model demonstrates that protection against drones is not solely a military matter. On 20 May, Vilnius and areas near the Belarussian border were placed on alert due to a drone threat; residents received warnings to seek shelter, the airport was temporarily closed, rail transport was suspended, and schools and kindergartens were instructed to move children to shelters.

The Republic of Moldova must build the same type of civilian preparedness, adapted to its own realities. Citizens need to know what to do if they notice a drone, which official channels to follow, where to seek shelter, which institutions to contact, and what behaviours to avoid. Civil preparedness means reducing panic through clear rules and procedures.

Unfortunately, drone-related incidents are not going to disappear. On the contrary, they are likely to become more frequent, more ambiguous, and more difficult to manage. Drones that violate national airspace test the state itself. If Moldova treats these episodes as isolated accidents, its vulnerability will increase. If, however, it transforms them into a catalyst for reform, technological development, defence modernisation, and public resilience, then each incident will contribute to building a state that is safer and better prepared to protect its citizens.

EU & the Republic of Moldova

Photo: <https://www.magnific.com/>

OPINION

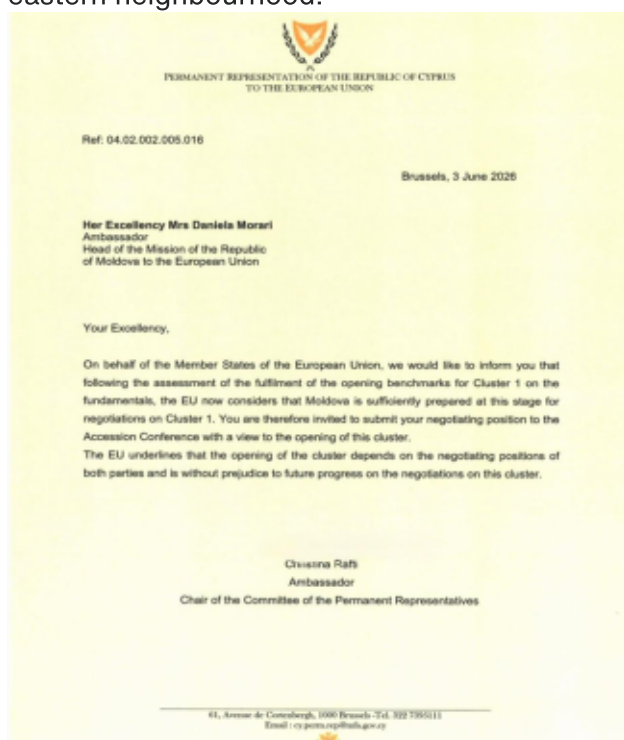


27 Yes Votes: The Formal Opening of the First EU Accession Negotiation Cluster for the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine



Sanda Sandu

The formal opening of the first accession negotiation cluster for the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine represents a significant achievement for both nations and provides a model of strategic clarity for the EU's entire eastern neighbourhood.



The opening of the first cluster is scheduled for 15 June in Luxembourg, during an intergovernmental conference - a step that would mark the transition from the political status of candidate country to a genuine, structured, and verifiable accession negotiation process⁵⁴.

For the Republic of Moldova, this stage should be viewed as an opportunity to anchor reforms, raise living standards, and strengthen the resilience of the state. The accession process is important precisely because it does not allow for merely declarative transformations. The first cluster, entitled "Fundamentals", covers areas such as the rule of law, justice, public administration, democratic institutions, and financial control. This cluster is opened first and closed last, as it determines the quality and credibility of the entire accession process⁵⁵. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, this means advancing judicial reform, strengthening anti-corruption efforts, and ensuring effective oversight of the use of public funds. Until now, progress on the accession file had been largely blocked by Hungary, which used its veto power in relation to Ukraine, citing concerns regarding the rights of the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia. Although the Republic of Moldova was not the direct target of these objections, its accession path was politically linked to that of Ukraine, and Chişinău consequently bore the effects of a deadlock generated within a bilateral Ukrainian-Hungarian dispute. This impasse was widely perceived as a brake on the launch of substantive negotiations, despite the fact that both countries were granted candidate status in 2022 and that accession negotiations were formally opened in 2024⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Jacopo Barigazzi, Veronika Melkozerova, „Ukraine and Moldova on course to start formal EU membership talks in June”. În: Politico, 2026. Disponibil la: <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-moldova-formal-eu-membership-talks-june>

⁵⁵ Rikard Jozwiak, „Ukraine, Moldova To Start EU Accession Talks After Minority Rights Breakthrough”. În: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 4 iunie 2026. Disponibil la: <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-moldova-to-start-eu-accession-talks-after-breakthrough-minority-rights/33772673.html>

⁵⁶ Council of the European Union. Moldova. Disponibil la: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/moldova/>

The political change in Budapest, however, has altered the European equation. Following the elections, the government led by Péter Magyar adopted a less confrontational stance toward Kyiv and signalled its willingness to allow the opening of the first negotiation cluster, subject to an agreement on the rights of the Hungarian minority. Reuters reported that Hungary and Ukraine had reached an agreement regarding the linguistic, cultural, and educational rights of ethnic Hungarians, a development that could unlock Budapest's support for the first stage of the accession negotiations⁵⁷. The new Hungarian government secured the release of €16.4 billion in previously frozen European funds and facilitated the flow of €90 billion in support to Ukraine.

European integration depends both on domestic reforms and on the ability to capitalize on political windows of opportunity within the European Union. The Republic of Moldova must demonstrate that it can deliver reforms rapidly and effectively for the benefit of its citizens. For citizens, the significance of the accession negotiations must be explained in concrete terms. Accession means better rules for the economy, safer investment conditions, a more predictable justice system, more efficient public services, and higher standards in education, infrastructure, energy, and agriculture.

In its 2025 Enlargement Package, the European Commission concluded that Moldova had met the conditions for opening the “Fundamentals”, “External Relations”, and “Internal Market” clusters, while also stressing the need to accelerate the pace of reforms⁵⁸. The security dimension is equally important. A state with weak institutions is more vulnerable to corruption, propaganda, illicit political financing, energy pressure, and hybrid operations. For this reason, negotiations with the European Union should be viewed as an integral part of the national security strategy.

In a region shaped by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, domestic reforms and

national development become forms of defence and instruments for strengthening resilience.

For the Government of the Republic of Moldova, the opening of the negotiations marks the beginning of a continuous test. The priority is to establish a clear administrative architecture for the negotiation process through high-level political coordination, the allocation of responsibilities across ministries, public transparency, the involvement of Parliament, consultation with the business community, and, critically, the participation of civil society. The European integration process cannot be left solely to technocrats. It must become the primary method for reforming the state, and every negotiated chapter must be translated into tangible and visible benefits for citizens.

The date of 15 June will become a major political milestone for the Republic of Moldova, particularly because of the discipline and sustained effort it requires. EU accession negotiations represent an opportunity for Moldova to transform its geopolitical vulnerability into a project of national consolidation. They have the potential to deliver higher living standards, more effective institutions, and contribute to a more democratic and resilient regional environment.



⁵⁷ Reuters. Hungary PM Magyar ready to meet Ukraine's Zelenskiy in post-Orban reset, 2 iunie 2026. Disponibil la:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-pm-magyar-ready-meet-ukraines-zelenskiy-post-orban-reset-2026-06-02/>

⁵⁸ European Council on Foreign Relations. Accelerate the accessions: Why faster is better in EU enlargement policy, 18 decembrie 2025. Disponibil la:

<https://ecfr.eu/publication/accelerate-the-accessions-why-faster-is-better-in-eu-enlargement-policy/>

European Integration Through the Security Lens: Advancing the Republic of Moldova's Progress on Chapter 31

✎ Rodica Panța⁵⁹

Chapter 31 “Foreign, Security and Defence Policy”, a constituent part of Cluster 6 “External Relations”, represents one of the most sensitive and relevant dimensions of the Republic of Moldova’s accession process to the European Union (EU).



The Republic of Moldova’s progress on Chapter 31 within the European Commission’s enlargement packages confirms the steady consolidation of the country’s European and strategic profile. Throughout all three years of assessment under the enlargement process, Chapter 31 has been among the best-performing chapters in terms of achieved results. In 2023 and 2024, the Republic of Moldova was assessed as being between a moderate and good level of preparedness for

This chapter reflects both the level of strategic convergence between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union and the state’s capacity to gradually integrate into the European architecture of foreign, security, and defence policy.



accession⁶⁰, while in 2025 it advanced to the rating of “good level of preparedness”, which is one step below the highest level awarded by the European Commission. This positive assessment reflects the intensification of political dialogue between Chișinău and Brussels in the field of foreign and security policy, as well as the functionality of the institutional framework necessary for the Republic of Moldova’s participation in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

⁵⁹ Coordonatoare cercetare în cadrul Platformei Platformei pentru Inițiative de Securitate și Apărare. Doctor în științe politice și Decanul Facultății Relații Internaționale, Limbi Străine și Jurnalism, ULIM.

⁶⁰ Moldova Report 2025. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/23fa6af0-89b3-4532-a3d9-d1638727d14c_en?filename=moldova-report-2025.pdf&prefLang=ro, p. 98-100

The results achieved by the Republic of Moldova on Chapter 31 are based on several structural factors that have strengthened cooperation with the European Union in the field of security and defence. The first element is the existence of a consolidated foundation for Moldova – EU cooperation, built over the past two decades. Some dimensions of this cooperation were already reflected in the 2005 Moldova – EU Action Plan, while the bilateral relationship was later deepened through the signing of the Moldova – EU Agreement on the participation of the Republic of Moldova in European Union crisis management operations in 2012 and the Moldova – EU Agreement on security procedures for the exchange of classified information in 2017. These developments created the necessary conditions for the Republic of Moldova's gradual rapprochement with European security and defence mechanisms.

One of the most relevant indicators of strategic convergence is the level of alignment with the declarations and restrictive measures adopted by the European Union. The increase in the alignment rate from approximately 64% in 2022 to over 90% during 2024–2025 demonstrates the increasingly advanced synchronization between the Republic of Moldova's foreign policy and EU positions on major regional and international issues. At present, the Republic of Moldova is aligned with 38 out of the 41 restrictive measures regimes of the European Union, including 5 out of the 6 regimes adopted against the Russian Federation. This development reflects the Republic of Moldova's coherent and consistent position with regard to two priority directions: alignment with the EU's foreign and security policy and the strengthening of national resilience against hybrid threats.

At the same time, the specific nature of Chapter 31 facilitates the Republic of Moldova's pace of advancement in the European harmonization process. Compared to other negotiation chapters, the legislative dimension of Chapter 31 involves a smaller volume of EU legal acts requiring transposition into national legislation. At present, the priority remains the legal framework related to the protection and management of classified information.

The Intelligence and Security Service and the Ministry of Justice have planned the transposition of the primary legal acts by the end of 2026, to be followed by the adoption of secondary legislation. A distinct stage in the deepening of cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union was marked by the signing of the Security and Defence Partnership in May 2024, with the Republic of Moldova becoming the first country to conclude such an agreement with the EU. The significance of this partnership reflects the recognition of the Republic of Moldova's role within the regional security architecture and the strengthening of the strategic relationship between Chişinău and Brussels⁶². At the operational level, this rapprochement is reflected through the expansion of cooperation within the framework of the CSDP, the Republic of Moldova's participation in international missions such as EUFOR Althea and EUTM Somalia, and the deepening of cooperation within the EU-Republic of Moldova Strategic Partnership⁶³. At the same time, the European Peace Facility has become one of the main mechanisms supporting the strengthening of national defence capabilities. The assistance provided to the Republic of Moldova through this instrument, estimated at approximately EUR 197 million for the period 2021–2025⁶⁴.

⁶¹ CAPITOLUL 31: „POLITICA EXTERNĂ, DE SECURITATE ŞI APĂRARE”.

https://old.gov.md/sites/default/files/partea_narativa_cap._31_politica_externa_de_securitate_si_aparare_0.pdf

⁶² PARTENERIAT DE SECURITATE ŞI APĂRARE ÎNTRE REPUBLICA MOLDOVA ŞI UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ.

<https://www.eas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/PARTENERIAT%20DE%20SECURITATE%20%C8%98I%20AP%C4%82RARE.pdf>

⁶³ Contribuţie la misiunile UE // R. Moldova detaşează doi ofiţeri în Bosnia şi Herţegovina şi unul în Somalia. <https://deschide.md/articole/contributie-la-misiunile-ue-r-moldova-detaseaza-doi-ofiteri-in-bosnia-si-herțegovina-si-unul-in-somalia>

⁶⁴ Sprijin strategic european pentru securitatea Republicii Moldova. <https://mai.gov.md/ro/node/9611>

highlights the growing importance of the Republic of Moldova within European security and defence policies. European support contributes to the modernization of the state's institutional and operational capacities, the development of interoperability, and the strengthening of response capacities in the face of hybrid threats and regional security risks.

The Republic of Moldova's plans for the coming years are largely built on the basis of the consistent recommendations formulated by the European Commission during the 2023–2025 period. One of the central priorities concerns the alignment with and implementation of EU restrictive measures, as well as the prevention of sanctions circumvention. The national mechanism for implementing EU sanctions operates through the decisions of the Interinstitutional Supervisory Council⁶⁵, while the authorities aim to extend, by 2027, the coverage of all sanction regimes with which the Republic of Moldova has aligned itself. At present, 25 out of the 38 regimes are already covered through the corresponding decisions. Another priority direction is the strengthening of resilience against hybrid threats. In this regard, the authorities are focusing their efforts on strengthening the specialized institutions established in recent years for the prevention and countering of hybrid threats, particularly the National Crisis Management Centre, the Cybersecurity Agency, and the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation. These institutions contribute to the development of national response mechanisms in the areas of cybersecurity, protection of the information space, and crisis management. Recent developments also reflect the transformation of the Republic of Moldova's security paradigm. The National Defence Strategy adopted in December 2024 defines European integration as a strategic element for strengthening national security and resilience,

promoting the Republic of Moldova's closer integration into the European security and defence architecture⁶⁶. Within Cluster 6 "External Relations", one of the most sensitive dimensions remains the Transnistrian issue, which directly affects the security of the Republic of Moldova, the process of strengthening state resilience, and the pace of European integration. The documents related to the National Action Plan for the implementation of Chapter 31 include measures aimed at maintaining dialogue within negotiation formats, strengthening confidence-building measures, and gradually integrating the Transnistrian region into the legal and economic space of the Republic of Moldova^{67,68}. During the hearings organized on 28 April 2026 by the Parliamentary Commission for European Integration regarding the implementation of Cluster 6 "External Relations", it was noted that, at the current stage, no delays had been registered in the implementation of the planned actions. At the same time, representatives of the responsible institutions highlighted that one of the priority directions under Chapter 31 concerns the modernization of the classified information management system and the deepening of interoperability with European structures. The Republic of Moldova aims to continue contributing to regional and European security within the limits of its available resources. Overall, the developments related to Chapter 31 confirm the deepening of the Republic of Moldova's European integration, the strengthening of its convergence with the European Union's foreign and security policy, and the gradual affirmation of the state as part of the European architecture of security, resilience, and strategic cooperation.

⁶⁵ Republica Moldova își consolidează mecanismul de implementare a sancțiunilor internaționale, cu sprijinul Uniunii Europene.

<https://gov.md/index.php/ro/comunicate-de-presa-cancelaria-de-stat/republica-moldova-isi-consolideaza-mecanismul-de>

⁶⁶ Hotărâre Nr. 319 din 26-12-2024 pentru aprobarea Strategiei naționale de apărare a Republicii Moldova pentru anii 2024–2034.

https://www.army.md/img/userfiles/file/strategii/sna_2024-2034.pdf

⁶⁷ Contribuția GL 31 pentru Planul național de acțiuni privind realizarea criteriilor de aderare a Republicii Moldova la Uniunea Europeană și privind implementarea Acordului de Asociere RM – UE pentru anii 2023 – 2027.

https://mfa.gov.md/sites/default/files/cap_31_politica_externa_de_securitate_si_aparare_pna_2023-2027.pdf

⁶⁸ Eliminarea graduală a discrepanțelor fiscale și legislative dintre cele două maluri ale Nistrului va fi propusă spre examinare Parlamentului.

<https://www.zdg.md/stiri/eliminarea-graduala-a-discrepanțelor-fiscale-si-legislative-dintre-cele-doua-maluri-ale-nistrului-va-fi-propusa-spre-examinare-parlamentului/>

OPINION



The Digital Services Act and the Republic of Moldova: Implications for Information Security and Democratic Resilience

Rodica Panța

In recent years, the digital space has become one of the principal arenas of geopolitical competition, while information security has emerged as a structural component of both national and regional security. In this context, the European Union adopted the Digital Services Act (DSA), a regulatory framework that redefines the relationship between digital platforms, users, and public authorities. The Digital Services Regulation⁶⁹ introduces a comprehensive framework for holding online platforms accountable, based on transparency, the management of systemic risks, user protection, and the mitigation of illegal and manipulative content.

Beyond the technical dimension of regulating digital services, the DSA reflects a profound shift in the way European security is conceptualized. Online platforms are increasingly viewed as actors with a direct impact on democratic stability, electoral processes, societal security, and the resilience of states, extending far beyond their traditional role as commercial infrastructures and channels of digital communication⁷⁰.



For the Republic of Moldova, the relevance of the DSA extends well beyond the mere legislative alignment with the EU acquis. In the context of its candidate-country status and persistent information vulnerabilities, the Regulation has direct implications for democratic security and national resilience. Moldova's information environment is continuously affected by external influence operations, coordinated disinformation campaigns, and the artificial amplification of social polarization through digital networks. During electoral periods, energy crises, and in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, digital platforms have been used to disseminate conspiratorial narratives related to energy security, military mobilization, and Moldova's cooperation with NATO and the European Union. Within this framework, one of the DSA's most significant contributions is its recognition of online platforms as critical infrastructures of the contemporary public sphere.

For the Republic of Moldova, these provisions are of particular importance, as platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram have become the primary sources of information for a large share of the population. The high level of social media usage increases the exposure of the digital space to manipulation campaigns and coordinated information operations⁷¹.

⁶⁹ Regulamentul (UE) 2022/2065 al Parlamentului European și al Consiliului din 19 octombrie 2022 privind o piață unică pentru serviciile digitale și de modificare a Directivei 2000/31/CE (Regulamentul privind serviciile digitale) (Text cu relevanță pentru SEE).

⁷⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065&qid=1666939055704>

RAPORT PRIVIND EVALUAREA TRANSPUNERII REGULAMENTULUI UNIUNII EUROPENE PRIVIND SERVICIILE DIGITALE (DSA).

<https://consecn.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/DSA-Assesment-1.pdf>

⁷¹ Rețelele sociale au devenit principala sursă de informare pentru consumatorii din R. Moldova. ZdG, printre cele mai notorii instituții media.

<https://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-diverse/studiu-retelele-sociale-au-devenit-principala-sursa-de-informare-pentru-consumatorii-din-r-moldova-zdg-printre-cele-mai-notorii-institutii-media/>

An important feature of the DSA is its extraterritorial effect. The Regulation applies to providers of digital services that offer services to users within the European Union, regardless of where those providers are established. In practice, this approach extends European digital security standards to candidate countries as well, including the Republic of Moldova, particularly with regard to global platforms operating simultaneously in both the EU and Moldovan information spaces. For the Republic of Moldova, this creates a strategic opportunity. Even before the full transposition of the European framework into national legislation, the standards applied to major platforms within the European Union can influence how those platforms respond to information-related risks in the region. However, this opportunity depends on the ability of national authorities to communicate effectively with European institutions, document systemic risks, and submit well-substantiated notifications regarding coordinated campaigns, illegal content, and information manipulation activities.

At the institutional level, the Republic of Moldova is in a phase of adaptation to the new European requirements. The current regulatory framework governing the digital environment remains fragmented across audiovisual legislation, electronic communications, data protection rules, and other sector-specific legal acts. The authorities are currently working on the development of a draft law inspired by the Digital Services Act⁷², while the National Agency for Regulation in Electronic Communications (ARCOM)⁷³ is envisaged as the institution that would perform the role of national Digital Services Coordinator and serve as the primary point of contact in relations with relevant stakeholders. This development gradually expands ARCOM's role within the national architecture of digital regulation and information security.

The institution is evolving beyond its traditional responsibilities in the field of electronic communications toward a more complex profile that includes coordinating notification mechanisms, cooperating with European structures, and participating in the management of risks associated with online platforms⁷⁴. From a security perspective, strengthening ARCOM's capacities can contribute to the development of a more coherent response to digital manipulation and hybrid threats. At the same time, the enforcement of the DSA presents significant challenges. Some of its provisions fall directly within the competences of the European Commission, particularly with regard to the supervision of very large online platforms. The Republic of Moldova will therefore need to avoid a purely formal application of the Regulation and instead develop effective mechanisms for implementation, cooperation, and oversight.

At the same time, the enforcement of the DSA presents significant challenges. Some of its provisions fall directly within the competences of the European Commission, particularly with regard to the supervision of very large online platforms. The Republic of Moldova will therefore need to avoid a purely formal application of the Regulation and instead develop effective mechanisms for implementation, cooperation, and oversight.

Institutional capacities related to algorithmic analysis, digital auditing, systemic risk assessment, and the identification of coordinated information operations remain limited and require sustained investment in expertise, infrastructure, and interinstitutional cooperation.

The effective implementation of the DSA cannot be reduced to the adoption of a law or the designation of a coordinating authority.

⁷² Lege privind serviciile digitale.

⁷³ Despre Agenție. https://www.anrceti.md/informatie_sumara

⁷⁴ State Secretary for Digitalization, Michelle Iliev: "Regulation does not mean censorship. Rules exist to protect users". Available at: <https://media-azi.md/secretara-de-stat-pentru-digitalizare-michelle-iliev-reglementarea-nu-inseamna-cenzura-regulile-exista-pentru-a-proteja-utilizatorii/>

Manipulation campaigns exploit emotional vulnerabilities, social polarization, institutional distrust, and differing levels of media literacy. From this perspective, information security must be understood as a broader process that encompasses digital education, responsible public communication, cooperation with civil society, the involvement of the academic community, and the development of critical thinking skills among citizens.

Democratic resilience cannot be built solely through rules imposed on digital platforms, but also through society's ability to identify manipulation techniques, assess information sources, and understand how algorithms can shape exposure to content. In this regard, the DSA should be complemented by media literacy programmes, public information campaigns, and support mechanisms for independent media outlets and organizations that monitor the information environment.

From a regional perspective, the case of the Republic of Moldova is also relevant to external audiences. Moldova stands at the intersection of the European integration process and the information confrontation generated by Russia's war against Ukraine, as well as the broader geopolitical competition for influence in Eastern Europe. The implementation of the DSA may become an important test of the European Union's ability to project digital security standards and models of democratic resilience beyond the borders of the Union itself. At the same time, the Republic of Moldova can offer the European Union valuable experience regarding the implementation of digital governance norms in an environment exposed to hybrid

pressures, social vulnerabilities, and cross-border influence operations.

This experience can contribute to the development of a more nuanced European approach that is better attuned to the realities of candidate countries and to the need for technical, financial, and institutional support in strengthening digital resilience. The Digital Services Act reflects the transformation of the digital space into an essential dimension of contemporary European security. For the Republic of Moldova, the implementation of the DSA has direct implications for information security, democratic resilience, and the European integration process. The Regulation provides a framework for holding online platforms accountable, but its strategic value ultimately depends on the state's ability to develop competent institutions, effective cooperation mechanisms, and a public culture oriented toward transparency, critical thinking, and resilience.

The transposition of the DSA should be accompanied by the strengthening of ARCOM, the development of technical expertise, enhanced cooperation with European institutions, support for media literacy, and the establishment of credible monitoring and reporting mechanisms. In this way, the DSA can become more than a legislative harmonisation exercise; it can serve as a tool for democratic consolidation and for strengthening the security of the national information environment.

Photo: <https://www.magnific.com/>



Why Orbán's Fall Does Not Automatically Open Moldova's European Door: Is Bulgaria a New Trojan Horse in Europe?

Laurențiu Pleșca

Within the span of a single week in April 2026, two elections reshaped the political landscape along the European Union's Eastern frontier. On 12 April, Péter Magyar's Tisza Party secured a landslide victory in Hungary, bringing an end to Viktor Orbán's sixteen years in power⁷⁵. Seven days later, in Sofia, the party of former President Rumen Radev won the parliamentary elections with an absolute majority, an outcome rarely seen in the recent history of a country accustomed to fragile governments and eight rounds of elections over the past five years. Both results have direct implications for a dossier that, formally, did not appear on either ballot paper:

the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union.

The conclusion, however, is counterintuitive. The most dramatic change: the departure of Orbán, removes an obstacle without resolving the underlying problem. The subtler change: the rise of Radev, introduces a new variable that is far more difficult to interpret. To understand why, it is necessary to distinguish between three issues that are often conflated in public debate: what it means when a veto disappears, what "accelerated" accession actually means, and what constitutes a realistic timetable.

Photo: <https://www.magnific.com/>



Budapest: The End of a Veto, Not the End of the Problem

For years, Orbán's government represented the most disciplined and effective source of obstruction within the European Union: a systematic and strategic use of the veto, sustained by an ambiguous relationship with

Moscow and reinforced by energy dependence. His departure removes this instrument of blockage, and the effect is far from merely symbolic. The new majority in Budapest has pledged to restore relations with Brussels, secure the release of frozen European funds, and return to stronger standards regarding the rule of law.

⁷⁵ Conform rezultatelor oficiale, partidul Tisza al lui Péter Magyar a obținut la 12 aprilie 2026 o victorie de proporții, cu aproximativ 138 din cele 199 de mandate ale Adunării Naționale, încheind cei șaisprezece ani de guvernare ai lui Viktor Orbán. Vezi „2026 Hungarian parliamentary election”, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Hungarian_parliamentary_election; și CNN, 13 aprilie 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/04/12/world/live-news/hungary-election-orban-magyar>

Yet removing a veto does not automatically create political will in the other twenty-six capitals. This is where an often-overlooked nuance becomes relevant: Tisza is a pro-European political force, but not one that advocates rapid enlargement at any cost. Several analysts have observed that the new government in Budapest has retained elements of its predecessor's rhetoric, including a cautious approach toward Ukraine's accession to the European Union⁷⁶. In other words, automatic obstruction may disappear, but skepticism does not. The door is no longer locked, yet no one will open it on behalf of Chișinău.

Sofia: Neither a New Orbán, Nor an Advocate

With regards to Sofia, the picture is more complex. Bulgaria joined the euro area on 1 January 2006, deepening its integration into the European Union's economic core. A few months later, Rumen Radev, the former president who had resigned from office in order to run, won the parliamentary elections with an exceptionally strong result⁷⁷. His rhetoric, however, has been more cautious regarding military support for Ukraine and more open to pragmatic relations with Russia. While Radev condemned the 2022 invasion, he opposed the delivery of military assistance to Kyiv and criticized the ten-year security and defence agreement signed between Bulgaria and Ukraine⁷⁸.

The comparison with Orbán, widely circulated immediately after the elections, is nevertheless exaggerated. Bulgaria remains dependent on European funding, including for its rearmament efforts, and lacks the political infrastructure that the Hungarian leader built over sixteen years of control over the state. More importantly for Chișinău, Sofia has never

opposed the Republic of Moldova's European aspirations, and the new leadership has not articulated any explicitly hostile position toward Moldova's EU accession. The net effect is therefore not a direct blockage, but something subtler: an additional voice at the table of caution. Bulgaria is unlikely to act as a brake, but neither is it likely to become an active advocate. Time will show, at key moments for Europe's future, whether this new Radev-led Bulgaria acts primarily in Bulgaria's interests or emerges as a new Trojan horse for Russian influence in Europe.

Why "Accelerated" Enlargement Worries European Capitals

The third source of confusion in the debate concerns the word "accelerated." Accelerated accession does not mean 2030; it implies a timeline closer to 2027 or 2028. Yet there is a vast difference between opening negotiation clusters—a step for which a technical consensus already exists—and full membership by 2027, an outcome that several European capitals continue to reject categorically. This reluctance is not directed at the Republic of Moldova itself. Countries such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands do not oppose Moldova's integration; rather, they insist on respecting the established procedural steps. The German Chancellor, for example, has described both 2027 and 2028 as unrealistic target dates for Ukraine's accession⁷⁹. The arguments are threefold, and they reinforce one another. The first is the principle of merit-based accession: political acceleration could weaken the incentive for genuine reforms, particularly

⁷⁶ Mai mulți analiști au observat că Tisza păstrează unele continuități de discurs cu Fidesz, între care prudența față de aderarea Ucrainei la UE și respingerea pactului european privind migrația și azilul. Vezi „2026 Hungarian parliamentary election”, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Hungarian_parliamentary_election

⁷⁷ Bulgaria a adoptat moneda euro la 1 ianuarie 2026. La 19 aprilie 2026, formațiunea Bulgaria Progresistă, fondată de fostul președinte Rumen Radev, a câștigat alegerile parlamentare cu aproape 45% din voturi și o majoritate absolută de mandate. Vezi Euronews, 20 aprilie 2026, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/04/19/bulgaria-exit-polls-former-president-rumen-radev-set-to-win-parliamentary-vote>; și Credendo, <https://credendo.com/en/knowledge-hub/bulgarias-political-reset-radevs-victory-signals-new-era-stability-and-reform>

⁷⁸ Radev a condamnat invazia rusă din 2022, dar s-a opus furnizării de sprijin militar Ucrainei și a criticat pactul de apărare pe zece ani încheiat de Bulgaria cu Ucraina în martie 2026. Vezi Al Jazeera, 20 aprilie 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/4/20/bulgarias-former-president-radev-wins-election-all-you-need-to-know>

⁷⁹ Cancelarul german Friedrich Merz a calificat aderarea Ucrainei la 1 ianuarie 2027 drept exclusivă și a apreciat că nici 2028 nu este un termen realist, invocând necesitatea îndeplinirii criteriilor de la Copenhaga. Vezi Euronews, 27 aprilie 2026, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/04/27/merz-suggests-ukraines-eu-membership-may-depend-on-territorial-concessions>; și Kyiv Post, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/69011>

in the areas of judicial reform and anti-corruption efforts. The second relates to the European Union's internal politics. At a time of electoral fatigue and the rise of populist parties, many governments are reluctant to explain to their own voters why exceptions should be made to established accession procedures. The third is structural. Enlargement must proceed in parallel with the Union's own internal reforms, ranging from budgetary arrangements to its capacity to make decisions within a larger membership framework. None of these challenges can be resolved simply through a change of government in Budapest or Sofia.

Ukraine and Moldova Pairing: The Uncontrollable Variable

There is a convenient assumption underlying almost all official timelines: that Moldova's accession track progresses on parallel rails to the war in Ukraine, without the two ever intersecting. A closer examination suggests otherwise. The Republic of Moldova obtained candidate-country status in record time in 2022, largely in the wake of Ukraine's resistance, and since then the two accession files have advanced in tandem. Once the war enters a negotiation phase, whether through a ceasefire or a broader framework agreement, Ukraine's accession process becomes part of the final political package. In such a context, Moldova may emerge either as a beneficiary or as collateral damage of the resulting arrangement. Three scenarios are beginning to take shape. In the first, accession serves as a form of compensation. If Ukraine is compelled to accept territorial concessions or neutrality commitments, accelerated European integration may become part of the political trade-off.

Moldova could either advance on the same wave of momentum or be left behind as political attention becomes focused exclusively on Kyiv. The second scenario involves a forced decoupling. If the settlement package includes a clause delaying Ukraine's accession as a concession to Moscow, Chișinău could paradoxically be advanced more rapidly as a symbolic counterbalance.⁸⁰ This is precisely the scenario that the Baltic states and Poland, the most consistent supporters of Ukraine, reject, as it would legitimize the notion that Russia can influence the European trajectory of sovereign states. The third scenario, and arguably the most likely, is a prolonged freeze. Rather than ending through a clear peace treaty, the war gradually evolves into a low-intensity conflict. In that case, the central question for the European Union becomes whether it is prepared to admit a candidate country with an active conflict on its territory. The answer would immediately affect Moldova as well, given its own unresolved conflict in the Transnistrian region.

The 2028–2030 Timeline: Possible, but Narrow

Against this backdrop, how realistic does the scenario of signing an accession treaty between 2028 and 2030 remain? From a technical perspective, it is possible. Politically, however, it represents a narrow window of opportunity, exposed to pressures from multiple directions simultaneously. The technical opening of the negotiation clusters: three in December 2025 and the remaining three in March 2026, was a useful procedural mechanism that allowed the process to move forward without waiting for formal political unblocking⁸⁰.

⁸⁰ Republica Moldova a depus cererea de aderare la 3 martie 2022 și a primit statutul de țară candidată în iunie 2022; negocierile au fost deschise oficial la 25 iunie 2024. Deschiderea tehnică a celor șase cluster a avut loc în două etape, trei în decembrie 2025 și ultimele trei la 17 martie 2026.

Deschiderea și închiderea oficială a fiecărui cluster necesită unanimitatea celor 27 de state membre. Vezi Consiliul UE, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/moldova/>; și Agence Europe, 18 martie 2026, <https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/13830/18/ukraine-and-moldova-have-technically-opened-their-six-clusters-of-eu-accession-negotiation-chapters>

⁸¹ Comitetul Parlamentar de Asociere UE-Republica Moldova, reunit la Bruxelles la 5 mai 2026, a adoptat o declarație comună prin care solicită Consiliului deschiderea oficială a tuturor celor șase cluster, începând cu „Fundamentele” în timpul Președinției cipriote a Consiliului, iar celelalte cinci până la finalul lui 2026; documentul reia ținta Chișinăului de a fi pregătit pentru aderare în 2030. Vezi <https://2eu.brussels/en/news/eu-moldova-committee-calls-for-formal-opening-of-all-accession-clusters-by-the-end-of-2026>

However, moving from these informal arrangements to the official opening of all six negotiation clusters by the end of 2026, as called for in the joint declaration adopted in Brussels, would represent an unprecedented compression of the accession timetable. For comparison, Croatia required approximately six years between the opening of its first chapter and the opening of its last. Moreover, every opening and every closing of a negotiation cluster requires the unanimous approval of all twenty-seven member states, meaning that the possibility of a veto remains present at every stage of the process.

The timeline does not end with the signing of an accession treaty. Ratification by the parliaments of all member-states can take between eighteen and twenty-four months and may be delayed by domestic political crises in capitals located thousands of kilometers from Chişinău. Moreover, the most difficult chapters have not yet been fully addressed. The Fundamentals cluster, which covers justice and the rule of law, is typically opened first and closed last. The agriculture cluster entails politically sensitive adjustments for an economy with a large agricultural sector relative to its GDP. Meanwhile, the external relations cluster inevitably brings the Transnistrian issue back into focus, a question for which no broadly accepted solution has been approved. There is also a cost to acceleration that is often overlooked in the debate in Chişinău. Accomplishing in two years what other countries required six years to achieve would mean adopting reforms without sufficient consultation, overburdening institutions, and creating a genuine risk of implementation existing only on paper, a problem that the European Commission is well equipped to detect and regularly highlights in its annual reports.

The paradox is that excessive haste may produce precisely the type of regression that everyone seeks to avoid. Realistically, 2030 remains attainable only if everything proceeds smoothly at the same time.

Yet “everything proceeding smoothly at the same time” is precisely what has not occurred in any previous rounds of EU enlargement.

What Still Depends on Chişinău.

Of all the variables that will determine the pace of this process - the political changes in Budapest and Sofia, the trajectory of the war, and the balance of power within the Council - only one remains entirely in Chişinău's hands: the rhythm and credibility of domestic reforms. The completion of twenty-four milestones under the Growth Plan represents one of the strongest performances among candidate countries. Yet the most difficult phase still lies ahead. In the short term, the next real test is not a political declaration, but rather a sequence of two key moments: first, the Council's decision on the official opening of the first negotiation cluster, expected toward the end of June. The second is the European Commission's country report, expected in the autumn of 2026. If the report confirms progress across all negotiation clusters, the official opening of the remaining clusters by the end of the year becomes a plausible scenario. If, however, it identifies shortcomings in areas such as the rule of law, the timetable is likely to be extended. Equally important is an issue that does not depend on Brussels: honest communication with the Moldovan public about what harmonization actually entails, which sectors stand to benefit, which may face short-term costs, which subsidies may disappear, and which new regulations will be introduced.

Accession is not an event; it is a process. Orbán's departure has removed a visible obstacle, but it has left untouched the less spectacular and far more difficult challenges that remain. The European future of the Republic of Moldova will not ultimately be decided in Budapest or Sofia. It will continue to be determined, above all, in Chişinău.

⁸² Preşedintele român Nicuşor Dan a declarat la 4 mai 2026, la reuniunea Comunităţii Politice Europene de la Erevan, că un răspuns privind deschiderea oficială a negocierilor cu primul cluster este aşteptat spre finalul lunii iunie 2026. Vezi Moldova 1, <https://moldova1.md/p/75298>

Risk and impact assessment

ARTICLE



Ecological Security in the Climate Crisis Era: Strategies, Frameworks, and Policy Implications: The Case of Moldova and the Dniester River Basin

 *Luminita DIACONU*⁸³

The twenty-first century has compelled a fundamental reconceptualization of security. Traditional paradigms, grounded in geopolitical rivalry, military deterrence, and territorial defence, are structurally ill-equipped to address the systemic erosion of ecological systems upon which human societies depend. Climate change now functions as an active destabilizing force: a threat multiplier that amplifies poverty, intensifies resource competition, undermines governance capacity, and accelerates state fragility across the world's most vulnerable regions.

Nowhere is this convergence more consequential than in Eastern Europe's EU neighbourhood, where ecological stress intersects with unresolved conflicts, fragile institutions, and deepening geopolitical volatility.

This article examines that intersection through the Republic of Moldova and the Dniester River Basin, a transboundary freshwater system shared with Ukraine, supplying drinking water to over 70% of Moldova's population, and facing accelerating climate-driven deterioration. The Dniester functions as a stress test for ecological governance, bilateral diplomacy, and the integration of climate risk into European security architecture.

Moldova's situation is emblematic of broader regional dynamics: an EU candidate state contending simultaneously with chronic soil degradation, recurrent drought, energy insecurity, and the unresolved Transnistrian conflict: all compounded by proximity to active warfare.

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While the 2012 Dniester Treaty, the Moldovan-Ukrainian Dniester Commission, and EU4Environment represent meaningful institutional progress, critical deficits persist: ecological flow regulation remains inadequate, early-warning infrastructure underdeveloped, and climate risk only partially embedded within national security and EU accession frameworks.

Integrating Ecological Considerations into Security Policy

The integration of ecological considerations into security policy represents one of the most consequential governance challenges of the contemporary period. Traditional security architectures, built around military deterrence and territorial sovereignty, are structurally ill-equipped to address threats whose origins are environmental, whose trajectories are non-linear, and whose consequences fall most heavily on civilian populations rather than state borders. The emerging paradigm of environmental peacebuilding addresses this gap by emphasizing early intervention in ecological stress zones and recentring security around human and ecosystem welfare rather than purely military metrics⁸⁴.

Environmental peacebuilding specialized literature and scholarship has demonstrated that shared ecological vulnerabilities, when managed through cooperative governance frameworks, can function as platforms for confidence-building even amid deep political mistrust. In the Dniester Basin, this dynamic is directly observable: communities on both the Moldovan and Ukrainian banks depend on reliable seasonal flows for irrigation, drinking water, and rural livelihoods, and remain acutely exposed to upstream hydropower operations, pollution events, and climate-induced hydrological variability. Joint monitoring protocols and coordinated early-warning systems have been shown to prevent localized ecological stress from escalating into broader interstate friction, converting potential flashpoints into arenas of technical cooperation and incremental trust-building. The March 2026 Dniester petroleum crisis, which forced emergency water restrictions across northern Moldova, illustrated with stark clarity both the consequences of absent joint crisis-response

mechanisms and the urgency of deepening bilateral ecological governance between Moldova and Ukraine.

Moldova's Ecological Security Profile

The Republic of Moldova presents a particularly relevant illustration of the compound vulnerabilities that characterize ecological security challenges in small, transitional states at the periphery of the European security order. The country's developmental profile, a climate-sensitive agricultural economy in which approximately 25% of GDP derives from a sector almost entirely dependent on rainfed cultivation, employing a disproportionate share of a population of approximately 2.6 million, generates structural exposure to climate variability that few comparable European states share. Water insecurity constitutes the most immediately consequential dimension of Moldova's ecological exposure. Measured flows in the Dniester have declined by an estimated 20% since 2000, reflecting climate-driven precipitation variability, upstream hydropower regulation, and increased consumption demand, generating seasonal shortfalls that simultaneously compromise irrigation reliability, drinking water security, and ecosystem health.

Infrastructure fragility compounds these pressures: recurrent flood events between 2023 and 2025 caused damage estimated at approximately €200 million, exposing hydraulic infrastructure whose design standards reflect Soviet-era hydrological assumptions now rendered obsolete by accelerating climatic change.

The socio-economic consequences are structurally significant. Moldova faces a particularly dense portfolio of climate hazards: floods, droughts, spring frosts, and hail, whose frequency and severity have increased markedly in recent decades. Agriculture accounts for approximately 12% of GDP, employs 30% of the workforce, and underpins the livelihoods of over half the population, rendering the national economy acutely sensitive to climatic variability.

⁸⁴ European Commission. (2024). Republic of Moldova 2024 Report [SWD (2024) 698 final]. Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 30 October 2024. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/moldova-report-2024_en

⁸⁵ World Bank. (2023). Moldova Country Climate and Development Report. World Bank Group.

The 2020 and 2022 drought sequences pushed substantial proportions of rural households below subsistence thresholds, accelerating the demographic outmigration that has already reduced Moldova's working-age rural population to critical levels. Rural poverty rates remain among the highest in the European region. Without sustained resilience investment, these converging pressures will continue to erode food security and intensify competition over diminishing water and land resources.

The Dniester River Basin Case Study

The Dniester River constitutes Moldova's most critical natural infrastructure asset and the primary determinant of the country's water security. Flowing approximately 1,352 kilometres from the Carpathian Mountains of western Ukraine to its estuary on the Black Sea, the river traverses a shared basin of renders its governance structurally complex under any circumstances. The combination of climate change acceleration, upstream hydropower operations, legacy pollution



from Soviet-era industrial and agricultural activity, and the fragmentation of governance authority across unrecognized and recognized administrative entities has generated a compound ecological security challenge whose severity is increasing in direct proportion to the inadequacy of existing institutional responses.

Main Ecological Challenges

Six interrelated ecological challenges currently define the Dniester Basin's security profile and collectively constitute the operational context within which governance frameworks must function.

⁸⁶ Corobov, R., Sîrodoev, I., Koeppel, S., Denisov, N., & Sîrodoev, G. (2013). Assessment of climate change vulnerability at the local level: A case study on the Dniester River Basin (Moldova). *The Scientific World Journal*, 2013, Article 173794. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2013/173794>

The first is seasonal flow reduction. Measured summer debit rate in the Dniester river has declined by an estimated 25–40% since 1990, reflecting the combined effects of climate-driven precipitation variability, increased upstream water consumption, and hydropower regulation patterns that prioritize electricity generation over downstream ecological and agricultural water requirements. These reductions directly compromise the reliability of irrigation systems that underpin a substantial portion of Moldova's agricultural output.

The second challenge is flood risk variability. Paradoxically, reduced annual flow volumes are accompanied by increased frequency and intensity of high debit rate flood events, driven by the concentration of precipitation into shorter, more intense episodes characteristic of a warming climate.

Flood events in the 2023–2025 period caused estimated damages of approximately €200 million to infrastructure, agricultural land, and residential property in Dniester riverane communities, exposing the inadequacy of hydraulic infrastructure whose design standards were established under Soviet-era hydrological assumptions.

The third challenge is the degraded water quality. Agricultural runoff carrying elevated concentrations of nitrates, phosphates, and pesticide residues from intensively farmed catchment areas in both Moldova and Ukraine contributes to recurrent episodes of water quality degradation in the Dniester mainstream and its tributaries. The March 2026 petroleum pollution crisis, in which transformer oil from infrastructure damaged by a Russian military strike on the Novodnistrovsk Hydroelectric Power Plant entered the Dniester and moved downstream through Moldova, added a war-related acute pollution vector to the chronic pollution pressures already documented in the river basin. Moldova's Environment Minister recommended that residents should not consume fish from the Dniester River following the oil spill, noting that fish may have absorbed petroleum products, while the National Agency for Food Safety initiated certain sampling to assess contamination levels across the affected river sections.

The fourth challenge is the inadequate joint monitoring infrastructure. The current shared monitoring coverage of the Dniester river basin, estimated at approximately six jointly operated hydrometeorological stations, falls significantly below the density required to support reliable early-warning, water quality surveillance, and adaptive management functions across a basin of this scale and complexity. Sweden financed the modernization of six automated hydrological stations along the Dniester River at: Unguri, Soroca, Sănătăuca, Criuleni, Vadul lui Vodă, and Răscăieți, as part of the broader UNDP-coordinated 42-station network expansion: an important improvement, but one that remains partial relative to the monitoring density required for comprehensive basin management. The Transnistrian segment of the river basin presents a particularly acute monitoring gap, as the non-recognition of Transnistrian authorities under Moldovan and international law creates jurisdictional barriers to the deployment and operation of monitoring infrastructure on the left bank.

The fifth challenge is limited institutional capacity. Moldova's State Hydrometeorological Service, the primary national agency responsible for hydrological monitoring and early-warning, has operated with infrastructure and human resource constraints that have historically limited its ability to provide the real-time, high-resolution data products required for modern ecological security governance.

Governance Architecture: Progress and Persistent Deficiencies

Despite diplomatic progress, three structural deficiencies continue to limit the ecological security effectiveness. First, the absence of legally binding minimum ecological flow requirements, ensuring sufficient downstream discharge to sustain ecosystems and water rights, creates a critical regulatory gap.

⁸⁷ Moldova Environment Ministry. (2026). Official Statement on the Dniester Petroleum Pollution Crisis, March 2026.

In their absence, upstream hydropower operators retain broad discretion over discharge timing and volume, with potentially severe downstream impacts on Moldovan communities and ecosystems. Second, basin-wide, climate-resilient integrated water resources management remains underdeveloped: scenario-based planning for future hydrological conditions is still

preliminary, and the national IWRM Strategy lacks the operational depth needed to guide basin management. Third, early-warning system coverage is inadequate, failing to capture many flash floods from ungauged or poorly monitored sub-catchments; this is compounded by the Transnistrian governance gap, which continues to obstruct comprehensive basin-wide monitoring.



Photo: <https://www.magnific.com/>

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence assembled across this article leads to one inescapable conclusion: the ecological security is no longer a peripheral concern within the broader architecture of European security policy. It is central to it. For Moldova, for the Dniester Basin, and for the Eastern Partnership region more broadly, the question is no longer whether climate change will generate security consequences, it already is. The question is whether governance institutions will develop the capacity to manage those consequences before they become irreversible.

Three conclusions emerge with particular clarity from the analysis.

- Ecological stress and political fragility are mutually reinforcing. Moldova does not face climate risk in isolation. It faces it simultaneously with an unresolved territorial conflict, a war on its border, chronic institutional under-resourcing, and acute demographic pressure from outmigration. The March 2026 Dniester petroleum crisis was not simply an environmental emergency, it was the convergence of military aggression, inadequate transboundary governance, and an ecosystem already under chronic stress. These intersections are not coincidental. They are structural, and any governance framework that addresses ecological risk without accounting for the political environment in which it operates will systematically underperform.
- The institutional architecture for ecological security governance in the Dniester Basin is real but incomplete. The 2012 Treaty, the Dniester Commission, the Strategic Framework for Climate Change Adaptation, and the UNDP-supported monitoring modernization programme represent genuine and hard-won achievements. They demonstrate that cooperative governance between Moldova and Ukraine is possible even under conditions of extraordinary geopolitical pressure. However, binding ecological flow regulation remains absent, basin-wide climate-resilient planning remains preliminary, and the Transnistrian

monitoring gap remains structurally unresolved. The gap between what the framework formally mandates and what it operationally delivers is where ecological security is being compromised.

- EU accession represents the most consequential governance lever currently available to Moldova. The conditionality, financing, and technical assistance embedded in the accession process create an opportunity to accelerate ecological governance reform at a rhythm and scale that domestic institutional capacity alone could not achieve. Moldova's Environmental Strategy for 2024–2030 signals genuine alignment ambition. Whether that ambition translates into operational reality will depend on how systematically ecological security criteria are embedded within the accession process itself, and on how seriously EU institutions treat environmental governance as a security issue rather than a regulatory compliance exercise.

The extent to which this ambition will transform into an operational reality will depend on how ecological security criteria are systematically integrated into the accession process itself, as well as the seriousness with which European Union institutions treat environmental governance as a security issue, and not exclusively as a regulatory compliance exercise.

The analytical and policy challenge is not a lack of strategic institutional frameworks. The real problem consists in the insufficient implementation, funding, and political will required to close the gap between the formal existence of these frameworks and the concrete results they are meant to generate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are directed at three levels of governance: national, bilateral, and European.

At the National Level: Moldova's National Security Concept, should formally incorporate climate risk assessment as a structural component of threat analysis. Ecological vulnerability indicators: river flow levels, drought indices, agricultural water stress, should be routinely reported to senior decision-makers alongside conventional security metrics. This is not a rhetorical adjustment; it is an institutional one, requiring inter-agency coordination mechanisms that do not currently exist in adequate form.

Real-time, high-resolution hydrological data is the foundational input for every other governance function in the basin: early warning, agricultural planning, infrastructure management, diplomatic engagement. The UNDP-supported modernization programme is a start; it should be consolidated and extended, with adequate recurrent budget allocation to prevent infrastructure from degrading once external project financing ends.

At the Bilateral Level: Moldova and Ukraine should negotiate binding ecological flow minima under the Dniester Treaty framework. The single most consequential gap in the existing governance architecture is the absence of legally binding minimum discharge requirements at key downstream points. Without them, upstream hydropower operations can legally impose severe water stress on Moldovan communities and ecosystems. Negotiating and ratifying binding ecological flow protocols, potentially facilitated through UNECE Water Convention mechanism, should be the immediate priority of the Dniester Commission's next work programme.

The left bank monitoring gap is the most structurally intractable problem in basin governance, and at the same time the most dangerous, since it creates conditions in which pollution events and hydrological extremes can develop undetected until they reach Moldovan communities downstream. Creative diplomatic approaches, including the involvement of international intermediaries such as the OSCE, which already has a presence in the Transnistrian settlement process, should be actively explored to establish monitoring access arrangements that do not require formal recognition of Transnistrian political authority.

At the European Level the current accession benchmarking should be expanded to include measurable ecological security outcomes: ecological flow compliance, monitoring network density, climate risk integration in national planning, and transboundary governance participation. Without such embedding, the leverage that accession conditionality could provide for accelerating ecological governance reform will be systematically underutilized.

The gap between the ecological monitoring density required for effective basin governance and the infrastructure currently in place cannot be closed through technical assistance alone. The EU, in coordination with the Green Climate Fund and bilateral development partners, should establish a dedicated financing facility for transboundary ecological infrastructure in the Eastern Partnership space, one that treats monitoring stations, early-warning systems, and shared data platforms as security infrastructure rather than environmental amenity. The five risk dimensions identified across the Eastern Partnership space: historic contamination, energy insecurity, hydrological extremes, socio-economic vulnerability, and geopolitical instability, are not country-specific problems compliant to country-specific solutions.

A dedicated EU Neighbourhood ecological security framework, building on the EaP Green Deal commitments and aligned with the UNECE Water Convention, would provide the regional coordination architecture currently absent. Furthermore, such a framework would send an unambiguous political signal that the EU treats ecological security as a genuine dimension of neighbourhood stability, not as a technical annex to environmental regulation. The Dniester Basin will not wait for perfect institutions. Climate trajectories are accelerating, geopolitical pressures are intensifying, and the communities

most exposed, rural Moldovans dependent on a river whose flows are declining and whose water quality is increasingly compromised, are running out of adaptive space. The recommendations advanced here are not aspirational. They are operationally specific, institutionally grounded, and calibrated to the time horizon within which action remains meaningful. The difference between a manageable ecological future and an unmanageable one in this corner of Europe will be determined not by the severity of climate changes but by the quality of the decisions made in the next five to ten years.



Photo: <https://www.magnific.com/>



Pollution That Poisoned Both the Moldova's Drinking Water and the Information Space

✦ *Vladimir Ternavski*⁹⁰

The Republic of Moldova is critically dependent on its main source of drinking water, the Dniester River, which covers the needs of more than 80% of its citizens⁹¹ while at the same time being under pressure from climate change, new Ukrainian hydroelectric plants, and now Russian missile strikes. The crisis of early March 2026 demonstrated once again that the Dniester is Moldova's greatest asset and, at the same time, its greatest strategic vulnerability.

What happened?

On the night of March 7, 2026, Russia launched a massive strike on Ukraine: roughly 200 drones and 60 missiles aimed at the country's energy systems⁹² including the Novodnistrovsk hydropower complex in the Chernivtsi region. This complex sits upstream on the Dniester, about 25 kilometers from Moldova's northern border, and anything that happens upstream inevitably affects the Republic and its people. That is especially so when it involves technical fluids spilling straight into the riverbed as a result of military action⁹³.

It should be said at the outset that no precise information is publicly available about the scale of the damage or its consequences for the complex's installations: the Ukrainian government and armed forces do not disclose

the results of Russian attacks. This secrecy is understandable and justified in wartime. But it also makes it impossible to establish what may have entered the Dniester's water, creating an information vacuum that is immediately filled with fears, speculation, and Russian propaganda.

The installations could be repaired, how about people's health?

About three days after the strike, on March 10, the first environmental consequences of the attack were recorded in Moldova: oily slicks on the water's surface, filmed by Ilie Cojocar, a resident of the village of Naslavcea⁹⁴. According to him, the slicks were sizeable (20–30 meters across)⁹⁵, and the video set off a wave of online discussion that drew a response from Moldova's Ministry of Environment⁹⁶. It is meaningful that the news of the contamination came from a video blogger rather than from the Environmental Protection Inspectorate or any other state body and, as far as we can tell, no preventive measures were taken to counter the potential threat. This most likely happened because the cross-border environmental alert mechanism worked in a purely formal way. Ukraine did officially notify Moldova of the strike on the hydropower complex, through the Dniester Commission and the relevant

⁹⁰ Director Executiv, EcoVisio

⁹¹ Dniester Commission - <https://dniester-commission.org/en/dniester-river-basin/region/>

⁹² Suspilne (Cernăuți), 07.03.2026 - <https://suspilne.media/chernivtsi/1257664-vnoci-pid-cas-povitranoi-trivogi-bila-novodnistrovska-na-bukovini-prolunali-vibuhi/>

⁹³ Romania Insider - <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-sends-drinking-water-moldova-dniester-river-pollution-2026>

⁹⁴ Europa Liberă Moldova - <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/ilie-cojocari-vloggerul-care-a-dat-primul-alarma-despre-poluarea-nistrului/33713573.html>

⁹⁵ TVR Moldova, reportaj video „Criza ecologică de pe Nistru, atacul Rusiei și ajutorul României” (YouTube).

⁹⁶ Ministerul Mediului al RM, 10.03.2026 - <https://mediu.gov.md/index.php/ro/comunicate-de-presa/reactia-ministerului-mediului-privind-situatia-de-pe-raul-nistru>



Photo: <https://www.magnific.com/>

intergovernmental agreement, but we do not know how much information was passed on or what conclusions our government bodies drew from it⁹⁷. Looking back at the situation today, it appears that the data received did not make clear how serious a threat was approaching our country's shores. As a result, time was lost, and chemical pollutants reached Moldovan territory.

How did events unfold?

The timing of the sampling, together with the uneven nature of the contamination, produced contradictory reports: at first the Minister announced that pollution was minor and within permissible limits⁹⁸, but soon, after repeat samples, the fifth - maximum level of pollution was confirmed and a state of environmental alert was declared. It is worth clarifying here: the contamination was unusual and arrived in waves. Upstream on the Dniester lies a buffer reservoir that blocks the free flow of water. Because releases from this reservoir are uneven, rising in the evening and almost stopping at night, the oily substances first built up in the reservoir and along the banks downstream, and were then discharged together with the water. The first samples, it appears, were taken during a moment of "clean water". Once the first slicks were spotted, events moved quickly:

- March 11 - the water supply to Bălți, Moldova's largest northern city, was shut off⁹⁹;
- March 12 - samples collected near Naslavcea showed the worst, fifth-class water pollution¹⁰⁰;

⁹⁷ UNN - <https://unn.ua/en/news/russian-attack-caused-transboundary-pollution-of-the-dniester-oil-slicks-found-ukraine-informed-moldova>

⁹⁸ Moldova 1, 11.03.2026 - <https://moldova1.md/p/70820/ministrul-mediului--analizele-arata-ca-urmele-de-petrol-in-nistru-sunt-foarte-mici-si-la-aceasta-etapa-nu-prezinta-un-pericol--ce-spun-medicii>

⁹⁹ Ziarul de Gardă - <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/ucraina-poluarea-raului-nistru-este-legata-de-atacul-federatiei-ruse/>

¹⁰⁰ Ministerul Mediului al RM, actualizare 12.03.2026, 17:00 - <https://mediu.gov.md/ro/comunicate-de-presa/actualizare-cu-privire-la-situatia-de-pe-nistru-1203-1700>

- March 13 - Romania sent Moldova a specialized team, “Apele Române” along with 200 meters of burlap, 600 kg of absorbents, 2,000 meters of sorbent rolls, oil skimmers, and containment booms¹⁰¹.
- March 14 - the water supply was cut off in the Soroca, Bălți, Florești, and Sângerei districts; about 55,000 residents were left without water¹⁰².
- March 15 - the government declared a 15-day state of environmental alert across the Dniester basin¹⁰³.
- That same day, an inventory of backup wells in Bălți found that only 2 out of 67 were operational; restoring the rest would take a year¹⁰⁴.
- March 16 - drinking water ran out in Bălți; supplies were trucked in from other localities¹⁰⁵.
- March 17 - 92.9 tons of water were delivered from the city of Iași (Romania)¹⁰⁶.
- March 19 - concentrations of petroleum products returned to permissible limits at the Dniester’s critical points; the CNMC decided to resume the water supply in stages¹⁰⁷.
- Through March 31 and beyond - additional booms and absorbents continued to be installed along the Dniester; Romania sent further aid¹⁰⁸.
- March 30 - the state of environmental alert was officially lifted¹⁰⁹.
- We have yet to grasp the real consequences of this environmental crisis for the lives and health of Moldova’s citizens, including residents of the Dniester’s left bank, who were not adequately informed by the local so-called

authorities and kept drinking the water even after cities on the opposite bank had been cut off. According to left-bank media and officials, residents drew water from surviving underground wells and from deeper layers of the Dniester¹¹⁰. How far these claims hold true is hard to judge, especially given the absence of modern laboratories and water-quality testing methods.

Pollution of the information space

It is worth noting that, when it came to the speed of communication, Moldova’s authorities did a good job. After March 10, people were kept informed reasonably quickly about how the situation was developing, the tests under way, and the restrictions being imposed. Ministry staff showed booms being installed and water being delivered to affected communities. Even so, the information and therefore the authorities’ communication remained incomplete and contradictory.



¹⁰¹ BTA - <https://www.bta.bg/en/news/world/844781-moldova-declares-environmental-alert-over-oil-spill-in-the-dniester-after-russia>

¹⁰² CNMC, 14.03.2026 - <https://cnmc.gov.md/ro/comunicate-de-presa/masuri-preventive-si-informare-pentru-gestionarea-poluarii-raului-nistru>

¹⁰³ Guvernul Republicii Moldova - <https://gov.md/ro/comunicate-de-presa/guvernul-instituie-stare-de-alerta-de-mediul-pe-bazinul-fluviului-nistru>

¹⁰⁴ TV-Nord / News.yam.md - <https://news.yam.md/ro/story/18799995>

¹⁰⁵ Europa Liberă Moldova, 16.03.2026 - <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/cozi-la-fantani-la-balti-denunt-la-procuratura-si-ajutor-din-ue-cum-face-fata-r-moldova-crizei-de-pe-nistru/33708085.html>

¹⁰⁶ Romania Insider („over 90 tons of water... distributed”; convoi din Iași) - <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-sends-drinking-water-moldova-dniester-river-pollution-2026>

¹⁰⁷ CNMC, 19.03.2026 - <https://www.cnmc.gov.md/ro/comunicate-de-presa/reluarea-etapizata-alimentarii-cu-apa-nordul-tarii>

¹⁰⁸ EU Neighbours East, 26.03.2026 - <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/oil-spill-on-dniester-river-eu-civil-protection-mechanism-expands-its-support-to-moldova/>

¹⁰⁹ Europa Liberă Moldova, 01.04.2026 (alerta a expirat pe 30 martie, nu se prelungește) - <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/starea-de-alerta-pe-nistru-nu-va-fi-prelungita-dar-cea-de-urgenta-in-energetica-se-mentine-pana-saptamana-vitoare/33722398.html>

¹¹⁰ Administrația de la Tiraspol (sursă de facto; captarea apei de la adâncimi sub pelicula de petrol), 16.03.2026 - <https://government.gospmr.org/na-selektornom-soveshhanii-u-prezidenta-obsudili-gazosnabzhenie-i-ekologicheskuyu-situacziyu-na-dnestre/>

Russia exploited this to the full, deploying its standard information-warfare tactics: Kremlin-controlled media did not even try to build a single coherent line, instead they generated a multitude of competing versions to confuse people and instill the sense that the truth would never be known. On March 7, Russia's own Defense Ministry had publicly acknowledged the massive strike on Ukraine's energy infrastructure¹¹¹. Yet, when Moldova linked the crisis to that strike, the Russian Foreign Ministry and its embassy in Chișinău dismissed the accusations as "unfounded"¹¹².

In parallel, alternative versions circulated in the pro-Russian information space:

- it was an "accident at a Ukrainian hydroelectric station" not a Russian strike¹¹³;
- the pollution "came from Ukrainian territory", so Ukraine was to blame¹¹⁴;
- a Ukrainian truck carrying 30 tons of oil had overturned on the bridge at Otaci¹¹⁵.

For Moldovan audiences, these versions were wrapped in an everyday narrative: your officials are making money off the cleanup; the authorities are hiding the truth; the crisis is being blown out of proportion to feed "Russophobia"¹¹⁶. Russia applied the same playbook as after the destruction of the Kakhovka dam: first sever the cause-and-effect link, then shift the blame onto Ukraine, and finally attack anyone who points to Russia's responsibility¹¹⁷.

At the same time, a "soft" disinformation campaign targeted the population on the Dniester's left bank: on the one hand, the local

so-called authorities admitted that 1.5 tons of pollutants had entered the water "because of an accident at a Ukrainian power station" (without specifying the cause); on the other, local media blamed everything on Chișinău and hinted that the real source was the dysfunctional treatment plants in Moldova's major cities^{118 119}.

It is important to stress that people's fears in this situation were entirely justified and not inflated by propaganda. If anything, the opposite is true: media and political forces hostile to Moldova tried to steer that fear into a political channel of their own choosing, in order to chip away a little further at trust in Moldova's authorities and institutions. After the failure of Russian political technology in the recent elections and referendum, the effort to discredit the current government has intensified and continues relentlessly. For neighboring Romania this crisis was more than a neighbor's problem. It was perceived as a cross-border act of environmental aggression, part of a wider system of threats along the EU's Eastern frontier. European Commissioner Marta Kos put it plainly: "Russia's war does not stop at Ukraine's borders"¹²⁰.

Moldova has no way to monitor the quality of the Dniester's water on its own: most of the flow forms beyond its borders. This is a structural vulnerability that the war has only laid bare more sharply.

¹¹¹ Anadolu Agency, 07.03.2026 (comunicatul Ministerului Apărării al Rusiei privind atacul asupra complexului militar-industrial și a obiectivelor energetice ale Ucrainei) - <https://bit.ly/3SroyG4>

¹¹² RIA Novosti, 18.03.2026 (poziția oficială a MAE al Rusiei / a ambasadei) - <https://ria.ru/20260318/moldaviya-2081521796.html>

¹¹³ Dezmințit de fact-checkeri: StopFake - <https://www.stopfake.org/en/ukraine-s-aggression-against-moldova-three-fake-claims-about-russia-s-attack-on-the-dniester-hydropower-plant/>

¹¹⁴ Dezmințit de fact-checkeri (substituirea cauzei): Detector Media - <https://disinfo.detector.media/post/try-feiky-pro-rosiyskiy-udar-po-dnistrovskii-hes-iak-propahanda-perekladaie-vidpovidalnist-za-tekhnohennu-katastrofu-na-ukrainu>

¹¹⁵ Dezmințit ca fals: StopFals - <https://stopfals.md/ru/article/deversariile-din-nistru-prilej-pentru-dezinformare-camioane-rasturnate-raci-care-fug-zvonuri-alarmiste-si-contestarea-declaratiilor-oficiale-181438>

¹¹⁶ Consemnat și dezmințit: StopFals - <https://stopfals.md/ru/article/deversariile-din-nistru-prilej-pentru-dezinformare-camioane-rasturnate-raci-care-fug-zvonuri-alarmiste-si-contestarea-declaratiilor-oficiale-181438>

¹¹⁷ Prin analogie cu dezinformarea din jurul hidrocentralei de la Kakhovka: StopFake - <https://www.stopfake.org/en/it-collapsed-on-its-own-five-russian-media-fakes-about-the-destruction-kakhovka-dam/>

¹¹⁸ Novosti Pridnestrovia (sursă de facto), 11.03.2026 - <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/26-03-11/poltory-tonny-nefteproduktov-popali-v-dnestr>

¹¹⁹ Novosti Pridnestrovia (sursă de facto; V. Ignatiev), 23.04.2026 - <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/26-04-23/moldova-skryvaet-realnyu-kartinu-zagryazneniya-dnestra-vitaliy>

¹²⁰ Moldova Live, 16.03.2026 - <https://moldovalive.md/marta-kos-on-pollution-in-the-dniester-russia-is-guilty/>

In this story the Dniester itself proved to be not a dividing line on a map but a shared system that knows no state borders¹²¹. The strike was aimed at Ukraine. The water was shut off in Bălți. The booms were installed by Romanian specialists. The fakes about the Ukrainian truck spread through Moldovan Facebook groups with the help of Russian agents of influence.

In the meantime, people in Naslavcea, just like the residents of Tiraspol on the other side of the river, were asking the same question: is the tap water safe to drink? No answer came that satisfied everyone. But the situation was stabilized. This time, for now¹²².

What can (and should) we do to be ready for the next blow?

- Not rely solely on official reports, but send experts to assess independently water conditions in the event of any man-made threat.
- To build a strategic reserve of absorbents and the equipment needed to purify water.

- To restore the wells used to draw underground drinking water to proper working order.
- To not wait for pollutants to reach Moldovan homes, but use the buffer reservoir as a point of intervention and find ways to filter pollutants along that stretch of the river.
- To analyze the long-term impact on the Dniester ecosystem: bottom sediments, fish, aquatic flora and take measures to minimize the consequences.
- To publish the data from the already carried out laboratory studies.
- To establish accredited laboratories on Moldovan soil and ensure their work is transparent.
- Only by drawing the right conclusions and acting ahead of events can we prepare for the challenges the future holds. And there will be many of them: climate change, a fragile demography, a new economy... All of this will come to the fore once the central crisis finally ends: the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war...



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

¹²¹ Agenția de Mediu (environment.md): „less than 30% are formed on the territory of the country” - https://www.environment.md/en/dniester_hydrographic_district

¹²² Detector Media (răspândirea fake-urilor de către canale pro-ruse) - <https://disinfo.detector.media/post/try-feiky-pro-rosiyskiy-udar-po-dnistrovskii-hes-ia-ropahanda-perekladaie-vidpovidalnist-za-tekhnohennu-katastrofu-na-ukrainu>

INTERVIEW



VALERIU CHIVERI

-

Deputy Prime Minister for
Reintegration of the
Republic of Moldova



In the context of the initiative launched in March to promote a gradual reintegration process, including its economic dimension, how do you assess the potential of these measures to contribute to strengthening cooperation and building trust between the two of the Dniester river banks?

The reintegration of the Republic of Moldova should be viewed as a strategic and long-term process, built gradually through the expansion of the state's presence, the strengthening of unified national spaces, and the provision of tangible benefits to people and economic operators in the Transnistrian region.

In this regard, the economic dimension has significant potential, as it can transform interaction with the constitutional authorities into a natural, practical, and predictable choice. The measures promoted by Chişinău are not aimed at creating artificial formulas of institutional cooperation with unconstitutional structures, but rather at bringing citizens, local communities, and the business environment in the region closer to the legal, economic, and administrative framework of the Republic of Moldova. It is important that residents of the left bank of the Dniester and the municipality of Bender directly experience the benefits of belonging to the Republic of Moldova, including access to public services, economic opportunities, social protection, quality education, and European prospects.

How is the reintegration process of the Republic of Moldova positioned within the current context of the country's accession negotiations with the European Union, and to what extent do you believe that the European path can contribute to advancing the reintegration process?

The country's European path provides this process with a very strong strategic anchor. European integration is not only a foreign policy objective, but also an internal instrument for modernizing the state, strengthening institutions, improving living standards, and extending benefits to all citizens, regardless of where they live.

In the current context of the accession negotiations with the European Union, the country's reintegration process should be strategically linked to the reform agenda, infrastructure development, the strengthening of the rule of law, and gradual economic integration. The more developed, attractive, and capable the Republic of Moldova becomes in delivering tangible results, the stronger the foundations for a sustainable reintegration process will be.

The opportunities and benefits offered by the European Union provide new momentum and make the right bank increasingly attractive to residents of the country's eastern districts, who can access competitive, high-quality public services integrated into European and international systems. Chişinău's objective is for the reintegration process to proceed gradually and without arrangements that would undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. The goal is to build a reality in which citizens of the Transnistrian region increasingly identify with and participate in the legal, economic, and European space of the Republic of Moldova.

Risk and Impact Assessment

Photo: <https://www.magnific.com/>

ARTICLE



When the Transnistrian Region Enters Collapse: Preparing the Republic of Moldova for a Costly Reintegration



Vadim Vieru¹²³

Economic indicators in the Transnistrian Region, Human Rights Pressures, and the Institutional Burden Facing Chişinău.

The Inevitable Horizon: Economic Collapse and Administrative Takeover

For more than three decades, the Republic of Moldova has spoken about the reintegration of the Transnistrian region as a political objective. Throughout this period, however, a practical question has remained unanswered: what happens on the day when the left bank must actually be taken over, with its schools, hospitals, utility networks, and the hundreds of thousands of people who depend on a budget administered from Tiraspol? Until recently, such a scenario appeared distant. The economic data from the past year suggest otherwise. In January 2025, the region lost access to the free Russian gas that had sustained its economy for three decades¹²⁴.

The impact was not merely a temporary crisis; it amounted to the breakdown of the economic model on which the entire region had relied. One year later, gross domestic product had contracted by nearly one-fifth, industrial output had fallen by approximately one-third, and the budget was operating with a deficit exceeding 40 per cent, covered through transfers of non-transparent origin.

For the Republic of Moldova, the significance of these figures goes far beyond statistical interest. A left bank experiencing economic collapse inevitably becomes a security challenge for the right bank. Internal migration pressures, the cost of assuming responsibility for social payments, the risk of an administrative vacuum, and exposure to political instrumentalization by Moscow are all direct consequences of the region's economic deterioration. The further the economic collapse progresses without adequate state preparation, the more costly, abrupt, and difficult any future reintegration process is likely to become.

The End of the Subsidy-Based Economic Model

The economic model of the left bank was both simplistic and fragile. Russian gas was delivered through Ukraine and was not paid for by the region. This gas powered the Cuciurgan power plant, heated households,



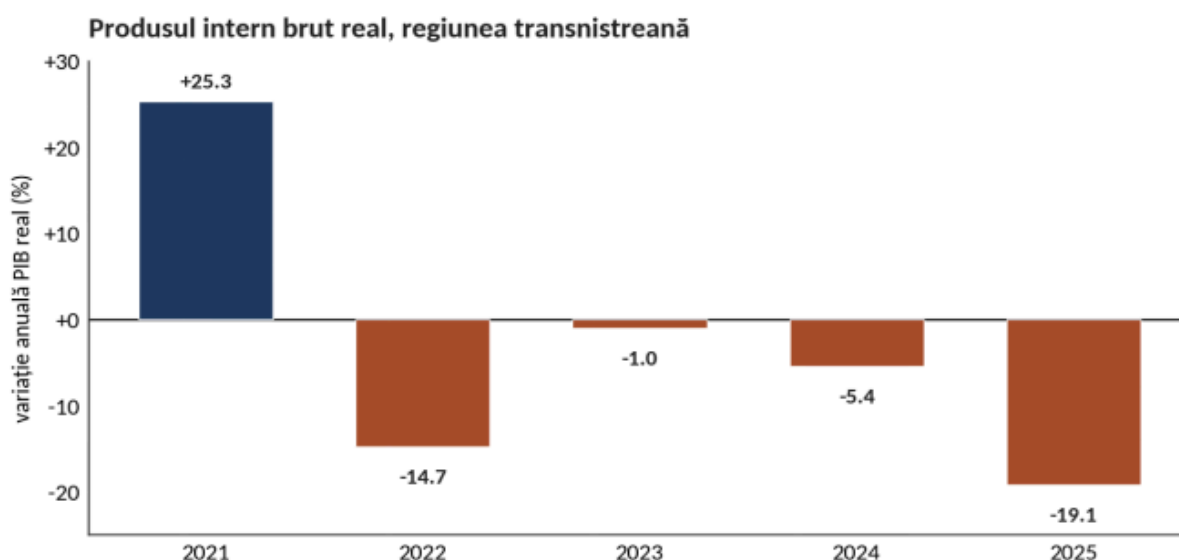
¹²³ Avocat

¹²⁴ Livrările de gaz din Federația Rusă către malul stîng au încetat la 1 ianuarie 2025, odată cu expirarea acordului de tranzit prin Ucraina dintre Naftogaz și Gazprom. Vezi cronologia evenimentelor energetice la OSW, Centre for Eastern Studies, „Moldova: Russia's gas crisis game in Transnistria”, ianuarie 2025. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-01-08/moldova-russias-gas-crisis-game-transnistria>

and sustained heavy industry, including the steel plant in Rîbnița, the textile mill complex, and cement and chemical factories. The revenues collected from domestic consumers for gas that had effectively been supplied free of charge were accumulated in a special account that, according to estimates by independent analysts, covered roughly one quarter of budget expenditures¹²⁵. When the gas flow stopped, the shock came from both directions. The region lost access to free imports, while exports of electricity to the right bank, its principal source of hard-currency revenues almost completely ceased.

Analysts from the Carnegie Endowment and the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw have argued that Moscow's decision not to redirect gas deliveries through alternative routes was deliberate and driven by political objectives, including increasing pressure on the pro-European government in Chișinău¹²⁶. The economic contraction was severe and is reflected across virtually every major indicator. Real gross domestic product declined by 19.1 per cent during the first nine months of 2025, following several years of stagnation and only modest recession¹²⁷.

Figure 1. Real GDP Growth, 2021–2025/ (2025 estimate based on data from the first nine months of the fiscal year)



Source: Statistical data of the de facto authorities; 2025 estimate based on data for the first nine months of the year

Industry, traditionally the backbone of the region's economy, has been the hardest hit. Industrial output declined by 31% during the first eleven months of 2025. The energy sector contracted by more than half, while manufacturing output fell by nearly one quarter, largely due to the temporary shutdown of the steel plant and other energy-intensive industrial facilities.

The negative trend was driven primarily by the decline in the energy sector and manufacturing industry, which account for the largest share of the region's production capacity. At the same time, growth recorded in other industrial sectors points to limited economic adjustment processes; however, these have proven insufficient to offset the contraction in the region's key economic sectors.

¹²⁵ Mecanismul așa-numitului „cont de gaz” și ponderea sa în finanțarea publică a malului stîng sînt analizate de International Crisis Group, „Securing Moldova's Future as the Gas Runs Low”, 2025. Sursa - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/moldova/securing-moldovas-future-gas-runs-low>.

¹²⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, „Transnistria's Energy Crisis Could Backfire on Moscow”, ianuarie 2025; vezi și analizele ulterioare ale aceleiași instituții din octombrie și decembrie 2025. Sursa - <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia- Eurasia/politika/2025/01/moldova-gas-crisis-solution?lang=en>.

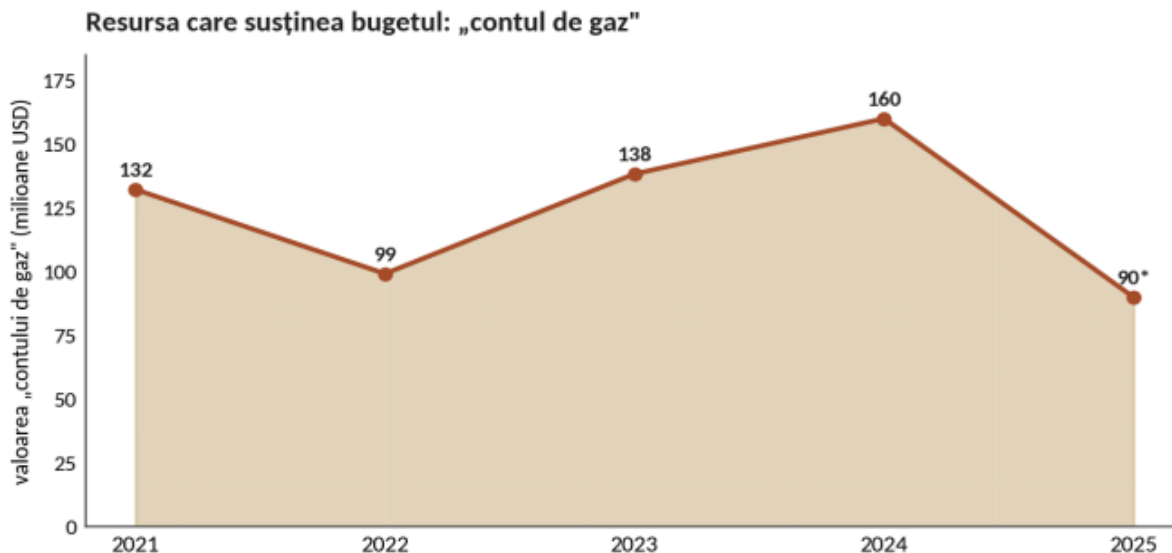
¹²⁷ Datele privind evoluția PIB provin din statistica administrației de facto, agregată și prelucrată de analiști economici independenți. Cifrele nu pot fi verificate integral printr-o sursă oficială recunoscută internațional și trebuie tratate ca estimări.

The current situation: a budget that cuts from its own citizens

The primary revenue source sustaining the public budget has diminished sharply. The account funded through the sale of

subsidized gas fell from approximately \$160 million in 2024 to an estimated \$90 million for the full year 2025 - declining from 27% to 18% of total public expenditure.

Figure 2. Value of the “gas account” - a budgetary resource eroded by the ongoing crisis.



Source: Estimates based on data from the de facto administration. Estimates for the entire year 2025

In order to maintain budgetary solvency, the Tiraspol administration implemented across-the-board expenditure cuts and transferred a portion of the fiscal burden directly onto the population. Utility tariffs for residential consumers increased by between 50% and 95% in April 2025. Despite these adjustments, rates remain below those on the right bank; however, relatively to local income levels, the burden is considerable.

The expenditure structure reflects the extent of fiscal stress. Nearly half of all public spending is allocated to pensions, social assistance, education, and healthcare. Capital expenditure has been reduced to zero, road and infrastructure funding cut by 58%, and defence spending by 38%. The healthcare sector received a nominal increase of 4% — which, against an inflation rate of 14.6%, represents a real-terms reduction.

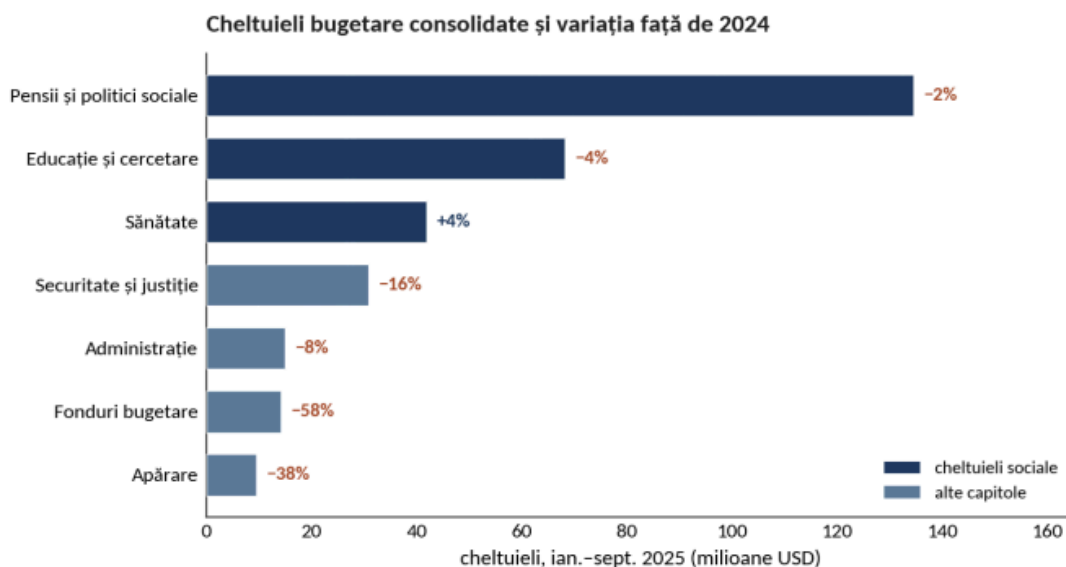


Figure 3. Consolidated public expenditure, January-September 2025, and year-on-year variation relative to 2024

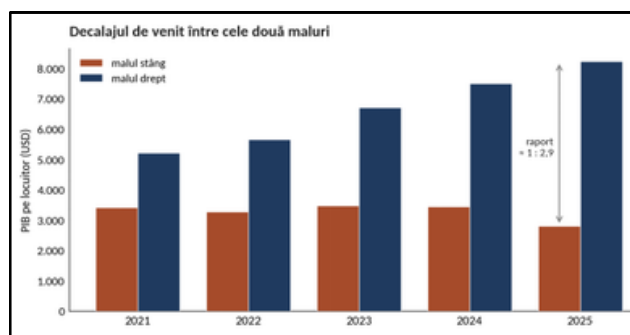
Source: data from the de facto administration's Ministry of Finance: the percentage indicates the change compared to the same period in 2024

Budgetary rebalancing was achieved primarily through the compression of public services. While the fiscal deficit was reduced on paper, the associated costs were effectively transferred to the population in the form of higher utility tariffs and deteriorating service quality. A new revenue line has also emerged, recorded as grants from non-residents, which generated \$32.5 million over the first nine months of 2025, compared to just \$5.4 million for the entirety of 2024. The origin of these funds remains opaque, and the region's growing dependence on them increases its vulnerability to decisions taken by external actors¹²⁸.

Fiscal Consolidation and Its Impact on Social Rights

The relationship between budgetary figures and daily living conditions is not abstract. When a budget structurally dependent on subsidized gas loses that resource, those most immediately affected are individuals who rely entirely on public transfers.

Figure 5. GDP per capita gap between the two banks, 2021-2025



Source: statistical data from the de facto administration (left bank) and the National Bureau of Statistics (right bank): 2025 estimates

During the winters of 2025 and 2026, schools were closed for weeks at a time as heating systems failed. Particularly vulnerable are schools operating in the Latin script, already subject to sustained administrative pressure, for which each winter without adequate heating provides an additional pretext for closure. The healthcare sector operates with hospitals that are underfunded in real terms, and with pharmaceutical supply chains increasingly dependent on costlier imports. Chronic shortages of medical treatment within the local prison system, documented over a

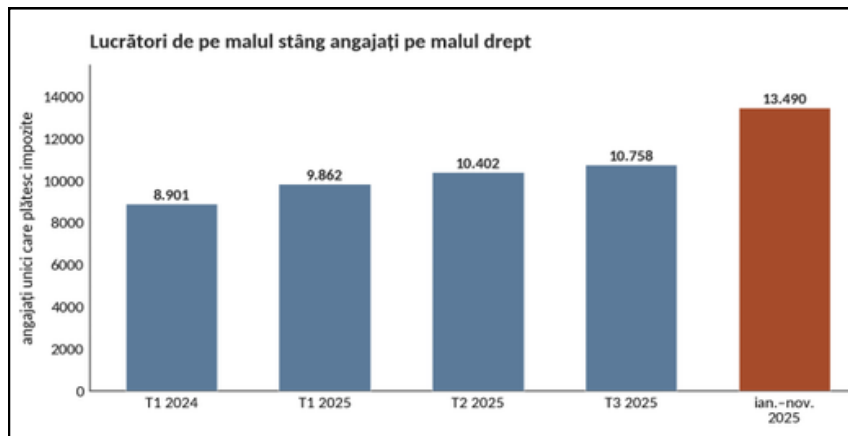
number of years, have deepened further under these conditions. Access to heating, hot water, and electricity has become, for many households, a matter of financial capacity rather than a basic given. For pensioners, families with young children, and persons with disabilities, these reductions are not statistical abstractions - they represent a tangible erosion of already modest living standards. A 2% reduction in pensions and social assistance may appear modest in nominal terms; however, against an inflation rate of nearly 15%, it represents a significant erosion of purchasing power for a population whose pension levels were already approximately half of those on the right bank¹²⁹. These reductions carry legal consequences that Chişinău cannot disregard. The case law of the European Court of Human Rights recognizes the positive obligations of the state to ensure a minimum level of social guarantees. Should constitutional authorities assume de facto jurisdiction over the left bank, they would simultaneously assume responsibility for the fulfilment of those guarantees. An administrative vacuum in which pensions or access to healthcare are effectively eliminated does not constitute a purely budgetary matter - it represents a direct exposure to litigation and potential sentencing at Strasbourg. Education funding was reduced by 4%. The gap between the two banks illustrates what is at stake. The GDP per capita gap between the two banks illustrates the extent of the disparity. Per capita output on the left bank declined to approximately \$2,810 in 2025, while on the right bank it rose to \$8,239. The ratio has widened from approximately 1:1.5 in 2021 to nearly 1:3 today. This disparity has a direct consequence for Chişinău: population movement. The number of left bank residents employed on the right bank and contributing to its tax base increased from 8,901 in the first quarter of 2024 to 13,490 by the end of 2025, a rise of more than 50% within a single year¹³⁰.

¹²⁸ OSW, Centre for Eastern Studies, op. cit.

¹²⁹ Compararea dintre nivelul pensiilor şi salariilor de pe cele două maluri este documentată de IPN, „Salaries and pensions in Transnistria twice as low as on the right bank of the Nistru”, 2025. Sursa - <https://ipn.md/en/salaries-and-pensions-in-transnistria-twice-as-low-as-on-the-right-bank-of-the-nistru/>

This trend carries a positive dimension insofar as it deepens the economic integration of the region with the rest of the country.

Figure 5. Workers from the left bank employed on the right bank, 2024–2025.



Source: Data from the tax authorities of the Republic of Moldova

instance, with European Union accession processes. It may instead be triggered by a collapse that no actor has scheduled. At that point, the state would be required to assume, virtually overnight, administrative functions it has never exercised over that territory. The most demanding challenge is social in nature. Nearly half of the left bank's current budget is allocated to pensions, social assistance, education, and healthcare.

However, it also reflects the pace at which the active labour force is departing the left bank, leaving behind a population increasingly dependent on public transfers.

Chișinău's Vulnerabilities in the Event of an Unplanned Transition

This constitutes the central security challenge for the Republic of Moldova. Reintegration is unlikely to unfold as a decision taken by Chișinău at a moment of its own choosing, with planned and predictable steps - as is the case, for

Should the Tiraspol administration become unable to meet these obligations, they do not cease to exist - they transfer, both in practical and moral terms, to the only recognized constitutional authority, namely Chișinău. The question of who finances the pensions and salaries of hundreds of thousands of people ceases to be theoretical.

Figure 7. Structure of expenditures on the left bank: what would need to be assumed in the event of reintegration

Nearly 50% of expenses are social in nature: what should be covered upon reintegration



Source: Data from the de facto administration's Ministry of Finance, Jan. – Sept. 2025. Total expenditures: 373.5 million USD

Beyond the fiscal dimension, there is the question of administrative capacity. Assuming governance over the region would require operationalizing schools functioning under different curricula (which likewise requires a very well-thought-out and planned reintegration plan¹³¹), hospitals organized along different institutional lines, and water, gas, and electricity networks that have been maintained separately for decades. It would further necessitate integrating population

registries, property records, and pension systems that are entirely disconnected from Moldovan administrative infrastructure. None of these challenges can be resolved through a single political decision. All require administrative preparation, detailed planning, which has regrettably not been undertaken over the past thirty years - compatible information systems, trained personnel, and resources allocated well in advance.

¹³⁰ Date ale autorităților fiscale ale Republicii Moldova privind contribuabilii unici din regiunea transnistreană înregistrați pe malul drept.

¹³¹ Asociația Promo-LEX, Cartea Albă privind reintegrarea educațională a regiunii transnistrene, Chișinău, mai 2026. Disponibil la:

https://promolex.md/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/cartea-alba-reintegrarea-educationala_2026.pdf

A further dimension is the security risk. A humanitarian crisis on the left bank provides Moscow with a lever of pressure, whether through the manipulation of gas supplies or through the exploitation of social discontent. Timeline pressures converge from multiple directions simultaneously. The gas contract between Gazprom and Moldovagaz expires in October 2026, which may entirely eliminate the legal framework through which gas has hitherto been supplied to the region. In parallel, the Republic of Moldova's European Union accession process establishes a timeline against which the Transnistrian question will inevitably be assessed.

Chişinău has taken its first concrete step toward financial preparedness for reintegration. In May 2026, Parliament adopted in final reading a law that gradually phases out the fiscal privileges of the Transnistrian region and establishes a Convergence Fund, announced by Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Valeriu Chiveri. The Fund is expected to become operational from 1 August 2026 and to accumulate approximately 300 million lei by the end of the year - a figure which, according to authorities, could reach around four billion lei annually by 2030. The funds are sourced from taxes and duties collected by constitutional authorities from economic operators in the region, supplemented by external financing, and are designated for social, infrastructure, and business support projects on the left bank. The underlying rationale is to gradually reduce the living standards gap between the two banks, without transferring the full cost onto the state budget and taxpayers on the right bank. However, the figures cited by officials confirm the scale of the task: Deputy Radu Marian estimated the costs of reintegration, including salary and pension alignment and infrastructure investment - at approximately \$500 million per year, at least in the initial years. The Tiraspol administration rejected the plan, warning that the new taxes would generate a humanitarian crisis and obstruct negotiations - a reaction that illustrates how closely fiscal reform is tied to the region's economic fragility. The state's capacity to assume governance over the left bank is not keeping pace with the speed of economic deterioration in the region. The Republic of Moldova risks being confronted with a crisis-driven reintegration, without the plans, financial resources, or institutional frameworks necessary to manage it in an orderly manner.

¹³² Ministerul Energiei al Republicii Moldova, Ce se întâmplă, de fapt, cu gazele în Moldova?, articol, 15 iulie 2025. Disponibil la: <https://energie.gov.md/ro/content/ce-se-intampla-de-fapt-cu-gazele-moldova-articol>

¹³³ NewsMaker, Cine va plăti pentru reintegrarea Transnistriei? De ce lansează Chişinău Fondul de convergenţă şi ce urmează, 6 martie 2026, <https://newsmaker.md/ro/cine-va-plati-pentru-reintegrarea-transnistriei-de-ce-lanseaza-chisinaul-fondul-de-convergenta-si-ce-urmeaza-analiza>.

CONCLUSIONS

The economic model of the Transnistrian region has been exhausted. What is unfolding is not an instantaneous collapse, but a continuous deterioration sustained through opaque transfers, expenditure cuts, and the displacement of costs onto the population. All indicators converge in the same direction: sharply declining GDP, substantially reduced industrial output, elevated inflation, a budget dependent on opaque external sources, and an exodus of the active labour force.

The region's economic data has consistently been published selectively and with delay. As the crisis deepened in 2025, statistical series became increasingly fragmented and difficult to verify. Recent figures on budget execution and financing sources are either partial or entirely absent — precisely in the areas where revenues derive from transfers of unclear origin. When an administration ceases to account for how it covers its expenditures, the silence is more revealing than an open acknowledgement of deficit. For Chişinău, this information gap represents a practical obstacle: it is not possible to plan the take-over of governance over a region whose actual accounts remain inaccessible.

For Chişinău, the window for reintegration preparedness is closing rapidly. With each month of economic deterioration, the social and administrative burden of an eventual assumption of governance increases, while the region's capacity for self-sustainment declines. Should the state fail to establish the necessary budgetary, administrative, and social mechanisms in advance, it risks being caught in a collapse-driven reintegration, with human and financial costs significantly greater than those of a planned transition. This issue has ceased to belong to the distant future. It is already a matter of decisions being taken now, and of sufficient political will at the highest levels of authority, the Presidency, Parliament, and Government.

Preparedness for a costly reintegration can begin before such a reintegration becomes inevitable. Several courses of action are achievable within existing institutional and resource capacities.

- A governmental contingency budget plan estimating the cost of assuming social payment obligations on the left bank, in particular pensions and public sector salaries and identifying financing sources in advance, including through negotiations with European partners on a dedicated reintegration financial instrument.
- Administrative mapping of systems requiring integration, namely population, pension, and property registries, utility networks, and education and healthcare institutions, followed by the development of technical procedures for their connection to national systems.
- Gradual expansion of left bank residents' access to Moldovan social services in the areas of healthcare, education, and social protection, using as a starting point the more than thirteen thousand workers already fiscally integrated on the right bank, in order to build institutional trust and functional mechanisms in advance of a potential crisis.
- Consolidation of existing trade integration, given that the majority of the region's exports already reach the European market through the free trade agreement, using this channel to progressively align the left bank economy with the legal and fiscal framework of the Republic of Moldova.
- Completion of energy security projects that reduce dependence on left bank infrastructure, such as the Vulcănești-Chișinău high-voltage transmission line, so that a potential crisis in the region does not automatically translate into an energy crisis for the country as a whole.
- Sustained external coordination with the European Union and international financial institutions, ensuring that reintegration preparedness is an explicit component of the accession process, with technical and financial support that is planned in advance rather than improvised in response to an emergency.

OPINION



Transnistrian society appears ready for reintegration. Is Chisinau ready too?

*Irina Tăbăranu*¹³⁴

We are at a moment in which Transnistrian society appears ready to abandon the unrecognized status and pursue the path of reintegration. Chișinău, however, appears unprepared and hesitant, objectively so, given the continued presence of Russian military forces and intelligence services, but also for more subjective reasons, namely a reluctance to take this step.

The desire for reintegration is, of course, not shared by the Tiraspol regime; however, it is necessary to distinguish between the population and the self-styled political elite. Data from the most recent study¹³⁵ on perceptions among residents of the region, conducted by the media platform Zona de Securitate and the WatchDog.md community, indicate a significant shift in attitudes among inhabitants of the country's eastern districts.

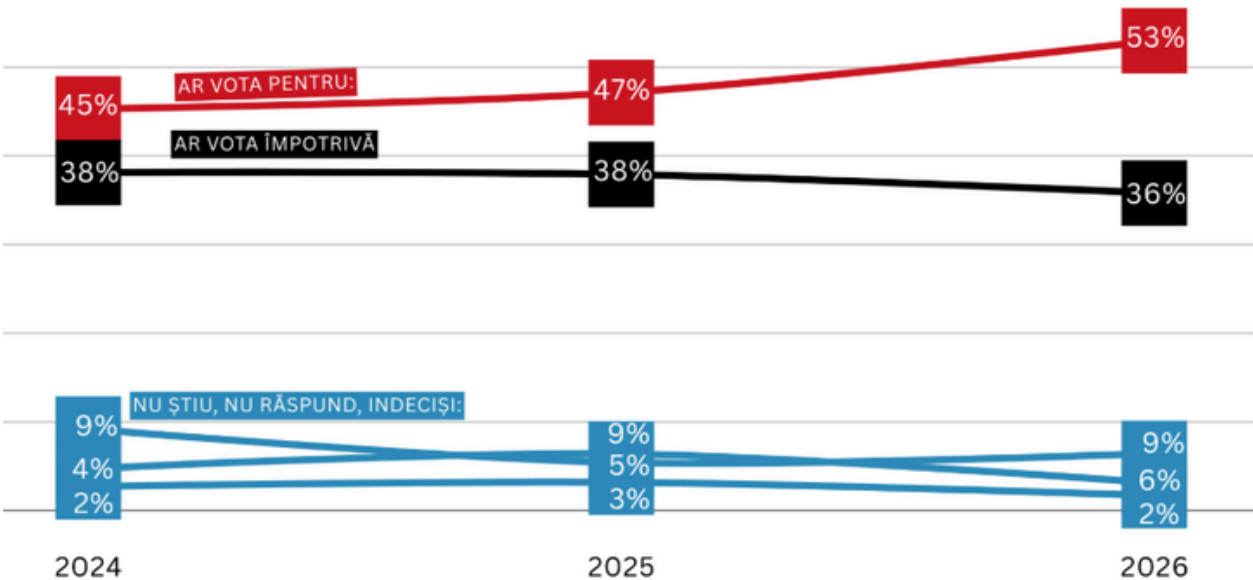
¹³⁴ Jurnalistă, fondatoarea proiectului „Zona de Securitate”

¹³⁵ Sondaj: sprijinul pentru reintegrare crește în regiunea transnistreană — fiecare al doilea locuitor ar vota pentru. <https://zonadesecuritate.md/sondaj-sprrijinul-pentru-reintegrare-creste-in-regiunea-transnistreana-fiecare-al-doilea-locuitor-ar-vota-pentru/>

For the first time in three decades, closer ties with the right bank are perceived as equally important as relations with the Russian Federation, and every second resident of the region would support the

reintegration of the Republic of Moldova. Over the past two years, support for reintegration has increased by approximately 8%, reaching 53% in favour¹³⁶.

Q. If a referendum were held next Sunday (and you were asked to vote) on the reintegration of Transnistria into the Republic of Moldova, would you vote for or against reintegration?



Source: <https://zonadesecuritate.md/sondaj-sprrijinul-pentru-reintegrare-creste-in-regiunea-transnistreana-fiecare-al-doilea-locuitor-ar-vota-pentru/>

These trends are not incidental. They emerge against the backdrop of the region's continuous economic deterioration, uncertainty regarding its future, and the long-term effects of Russia's war against Ukraine. A growing number of residents are fatigued by international isolation, unrecognized status, and the absence of clear prospects.

It is important to note that these findings are not known exclusively in Chișinău. The separatist authorities in Tiraspol continuously monitor public opinion and conduct their own sociological research. The regime is aware of the shifts occurring within society and of the fact that the traditional model based exclusively on loyalty to Russia is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.

Official propaganda continues to project an image of unanimous support for the Russian vector. However, this narrative is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain in a region affected by economic stagnation, depopulation, and uncertainty.

Under these conditions, an adaptation of the official discourse is observable. Whereas previously the emphasis was placed almost exclusively on alignment with the Russian Federation, recent messaging increasingly promotes the concept of a distinct identity, that of a purported "Transnistrian people", seeking to shift the center of gravity from belonging to the Russian world toward the consolidation of a separate local identity.

This shift is not incidental. It represents an attempt to preserve the legitimacy of the separatist project at a moment when Russia is no longer able to offer the same economic, political, and security prospects it previously promised. At the same time, the Kremlin also appears to recognize that its influence over the region's population is increasingly subject to question. Several recent actions by Moscow suggest an attempt to arrest this gradual erosion of Russian influence.

¹³⁶ Grafic Q4. Dacă duminică viitoare ar avea loc un referendum (vi s-ar cere să votați) cu privire la reintegrarea Transnistriei cu Republica Moldova Dvs. ați vota pentru integrare sau împotriva integrării?

The simplification of Russian citizenship procedures¹³⁷ for residents of the Transnistrian region may be understood through this lens as well. It is not merely a symbolic or administrative gesture, but also an instrument for maintaining the political and identitarian connection between the region's population and the Russian Federation. In essence, it constitutes an attempt to slow or reverse the trends favouring closer alignment with the Republic of Moldova and the European space.

Nevertheless, the shifts in perception observed in recent years demonstrate that propaganda is no longer sufficient to offset the economic and social realities confronting the population. A growing number of residents form their views on the basis of pragmatic considerations: the ability to work, travel, study, and access services and economic opportunities.

For the trend toward reintegration and alignment with the European Union to become irreversible, people must have genuine access to the benefits, opportunities, and freedoms of which they have been deprived for decades through the isolation maintained by the Russian Federation and the Tiraspol regime.

This objective cannot be achieved, however, without a long-term communication strategy. On one hand, direct and sustained engagement with residents of the Transnistrian region is necessary, providing credible information about the benefits of reintegration and the opportunities

associated with European Union alignment, outreach that should extend to the social level within the region, bypassing the regime. On the other hand, communication with the society on the right bank is equally important.

Whereas for many residents of the Transnistrian region closer alignment with the Republic of Moldova is perceived primarily as a solution to economic and social difficulties, for citizens on the right bank reintegration must be understood as a strategic investment in security and the country's future. Reintegration does not represent merely a matter of solidarity or the restoration of territorial integrity. It is directly linked to the stability of the Republic of Moldova, to the elimination of its primary security vulnerability, and to the consolidation of its European trajectory.

Without resolution of the Transnistrian conflict and without effective reintegration of the country, the European Union accession process will be more difficult, more protracted, and considerably more vulnerable to external interference. For this reason, a genuine interest in reintegration must exist on both banks of the Nistru. Only when the societies on both banks come to regard reintegration as a shared project for the future will the positive trends observable today be capable of becoming durable and irreversible.



¹³⁷ Europa Liberă: Tiraspolul salută, Chișinăul condamnă: Cum se vede, de pe cele două maluri ale Nistrului, decretul lui Putin privind cetățenia rusă. <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/tiraspolul-saluta-chisinaul-condamna-cum-se-vede-de-pe-cele-doua-maluri-ale-nistrului-decretul-lui-putin-privind-cetatenia-rusa/33759505.html>

Security Sector Reform

OPINION



The National Security Strategy Two Years After Adoption: Is Security Still at the Centre of Attention?

Octavian Carteră¹³⁸

The Republic of Moldova approved the National Security Strategy (NSS) at the end of 2023, through Parliamentary Decision No. 391 of 15 December 2023¹³⁹. The document established the framework for the development and updating of key defence policy instruments, including the National Defence Strategy 2024–2034¹⁴⁰, approved by Parliamentary Decision No. 319 of 26 December 2024, and the Military Strategy for the period 2025–2035¹⁴¹, approved by Government Decision No. 653 of 8 October 2025.

However, the objective of the National Security Strategy was different: to transform the way the state understands, plans, and manages national security. In other words, security becomes a matter that extends beyond the traditional defence sector and includes the economy, energy, infrastructure, agriculture, justice, the environment, social protection, the information space, and the state's overall capacity to function under crisis conditions, as well as other domains that can directly or indirectly influence national security. In this regard, a major step taken following the adoption of the NSS was the development and approval of the Law on National Security of the Republic of Moldova, No. 249 of 10 July 2025¹⁴².

In essence, this law continued the logic of the NSS. It clarified the existence of areas of government activity relevant to national security that extend beyond the classical domain of security and defence institutions. Furthermore, through this legislative act, the NSS was placed, at last, at the center of the national security and defence planning architecture.

In other words, the NSS becomes the central document for planning in the field of national security and defence, while the National Development Strategy (NDS) remains the reference document for state development. This is significant, as it opens the path toward resolving a longstanding issue in the national-level strategic planning: the relationship between development and security. The law implicitly indicates that development must be sensitive to security risks, and that security must support development. Consequently, in the elaboration of public policy documents, the provisions of the NSS should not be relevant solely to the Ministry of Defence or to the classical institutions of the security sector. They should equally be taken into consideration by authorities responsible for ostensibly civilian domains that directly or indirectly influence national security. In other words, the security dimension must be naturally integrated into the manner in which the state plans its development.

¹³⁸ Expert asociat al Platformei pentru Inițiative de Securitate și Apărare

¹³⁹ Strategia securității naționale a Republicii Moldova / https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=141253&lang=ro

¹⁴⁰ Strategia națională de apărare a Republicii Moldova pentru anii 2024-2034 / https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=146655&lang=ro

¹⁴¹ Strategia militară a Republicii Moldova pentru anii 2025-2035 / https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=151103&lang=ro

¹⁴² Legea privind securitatea națională a Republicii Moldova / https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=150559&lang=ro

The challenge is that this shift in approach cannot remain confined to the NSS or to the Law on National Security of the Republic of Moldova. If security is a central pillar of planning, then the next step is the more active integration of this logic across all relevant domains. In accordance with the National Security Strategy and the Law on National Security, each domain or sub-domain contributing to the national security should have clear planning documents in place. Where sectoral strategies already exist, they should be reviewed or revised through the lens of national security: what risks they address, what vulnerabilities they reduce, what resilience capacities they develop, and how they connect to the overall objectives of the NSS. In other areas, new strategies, programmes, or plans may be required. It is important that this process not be a mechanical one. What is needed are documents that clearly address several essential questions: what problem they resolve, who bears responsibility, how institutions coordinate, how progress is measured, and how all of this connects to the NSS and to the European integration process.

Nearly two years after the adoption of the NSS, the relevant questions concern the opportunities of the next phase, particularly in the context of the Republic of Moldova's European Union accession process. The implementation of the National Security Strategy is also monitored in dialogue with European partners. In this regard, the Republic of Moldova could set a more ambitious objective: the synchronization of sectoral strategies with the logic of the National Security Strategy, and the more explicit integration of the security and resilience dimension into EU accession-related reforms. This should not be treated as a bureaucratic exercise.

On the contrary, it could represent one of the most significant long-term reform trajectories. If the European integration process assists the Republic of Moldova not merely in transposing norms, but also in constructing a more coherent internal architecture of security, resilience, and development, the resulting effect will be considerably more durable. Documents do not resolve problems on their own. But documents do matter. They provide direction, create obligations, and offer a point of reference. Without them, each institution proceeds according to its own understanding. With them, it becomes possible to ask more clearly: what has been done, what has not, what comes next, and where greater effort is required.

The NSS has its own monitoring mechanism, and the National Security Council is required to report annually to Parliament on progress in the implementation of the Strategy. Accordingly, the reports for 2024 and 2025 could provide an important basis for a more structured public discussion, within the limits permitted by the sensitive nature of the domain. Not all details can be made public. However, the direction, priorities, and logic of the reforms, as extracted from those reports, could contribute to a more dynamic debate on this subject. In this regard, the National Security Council could play a highly important role — not merely as the institution responsible for monitoring the implementation of the NSS, but also as a point of connection between security and defence sector planning on the one hand, and political and public dialogue on the other. It is necessary to assess whether the Strategy has changed the working methods of institutions, and whether the EU accession process is being used effectively to consolidate the security and defence architecture. The National Security Strategy has created an important opportunity for the Republic of Moldova. It is now essential that this opportunity not be lost to institutional inertia or to reporting processes that remain difficult to monitor from the outside. And if national security has been placed at the center of state planning, it would be advisable to treat it accordingly.



Crisis Management - A Real Test of Public Administration Reform

 Octavian Carteră

Crisis situations rarely manifest within isolated domains or within clearly defined boundaries. They frequently exceed the competencies of any single authority and cannot be managed effectively through individual institutional efforts alone. A recent example is provided by the events of March 2026, when petroleum products entered the Nistru river. At first glance, this appeared to be an environmental incident affecting certain localities in the northern part of the country, resolvable by local authorities, the Ministry of Environment, and subordinate institutions. However, developments on the ground indicated that the situation had the potential to produce broader effects: on water supply, public health, food safety, economic activity, local services, public communication, and citizen confidence in the state's capacity to respond¹⁴³. When a situation of this nature can no longer be managed solely through the resources of the relevant institutions, and its impact cannot be

contained within strict territorial boundaries, it enters the logic of a crisis. In the case of the Nistru incident, the declaration of a state of alert permitted the application of special measures and the mobilization of additional resources¹⁴⁴.

The mechanism itself is not entirely new. The state has previously operated with formats of inter-institutional coordination in situations exceeding the capacity and available resources of a single institution. The distinction is that, through the new crisis management framework adopted in 2025, this logic has been given a clearer form: the National Crisis Management Centre (NCMC) coordinates the strategic response to the crisis, while the relevant sectoral institution retains responsibility for concrete actions within its domain¹⁴⁵.

Prior to the establishment of the NCMC, the coordination of crisis management processes fell largely to the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (GIES), operating on the basis of civil protection and emergency intervention logic, as well as to other relevant authorities and institutions. This logic was clear, necessary, and remains important. However, it was unable to cover the full spectrum of crises a modern state may face. The response to any crisis situation cannot automatically be reduced to the GIES. Equally, the model of multiple separate commissions, each managed by a sectoral authority, could not function indefinitely - particularly in the absence of a sufficiently strong mandate to address coordination gaps between sectors.



¹⁴³ Instituire a stării de alertă de mediu pe bazinul fluviului Nistru, Centrul Național de Management al Crizelor, 2026, disponibil la:

<https://www.ncmc.gov.md/ro/comunicate-de-presa/instituire-starii-de-alerta-de-mediul-pe-bazinul-fluviului-nistru>

¹⁴⁴ Hotărârea Guvernului privind declararea stării de alertă de mediu în bazinul fluviului Nistru, 15 martie 2026, disponibilă la:

https://gov.md/sites/default/files/media/documents/sedinte-de-guvern/2026-03/Stare%20de%20alert%C4%83-Nistru_1.pdf; Legea nr. 248/2025 privind managementul situațiilor de criză, art. 23, disponibilă la: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=150247&lang=ro

¹⁴⁵ Hotărârea Guvernului nr. 579/2025 privind organizarea și funcționarea Centrului Național pentru Management al Crizelor, disponibilă la:

https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=150843&lang=ro

¹⁴⁶ Legea nr. 271/1994 privind protecția civilă, disponibilă la: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=147609&lang=ro

Furthermore, persistent and uncomfortable questions arose: who coordinates a cyber crisis? Or one with terrorist elements? How should a hybrid crisis be addressed? In practice, certain sectors remained insufficiently covered or unclearly assumed, without a clearly designated authority to take over coordination when the situation exceeded the ordinary intervention logic. Equally, for a small country such as the Republic of Moldova, a more centralized model of this kind appears to be a practical solution. Large administrative capacities, evenly distributed across institutions, are not available. Resources are limited, vulnerabilities are numerous, and risks may overlap. Under such conditions, it is logical to have a center that consolidates information, supports decision-making, and ensures a common line of action.

From these perspectives, the establishment of the NCMC addresses a genuine need: to coordinate situations that exceed the competence of a single sector and to reduce duplication in coordination. The NCMC does not invent coordination from scratch, but renders it more coherent: it brings the relevant actors to the same table, integrates information, and provides a common point of strategic coordination. At the same time, the NCMC does not replace sectoral authorities. Each ministry retains responsibility for risks within its domain. The role of the NCMC is to assist institutions in operating according to a shared logic: with common procedures, risk registers, alert mechanisms, contingency scenarios, training, exercises, and integrated planning in crisis management.

The reform of crisis management has also been driven by the European Union accession process. In the context of EU accession, crisis management could be regarded as a component of central public administration reform, serving, in practical terms, as a test of the state's capacity to coordinate institutions, apply rules, and deliver public services under complex conditions¹⁴⁷.

Going forward, the reform of crisis management should not halt at the operationalization of the NCMC. An important next step would be the development of a National Resilience Plan, drawing in part on the reference points used within NATO logic: continuity of government, energy, mass population movements, food and water resources, the healthcare system, civilian communications, and civilian transport. Such a document would provide a clearer picture of the state's existing capacities, the vulnerabilities that remain, who bears responsibility for reducing them, and what measures, allocated resources, and involved parties are required.

A further subject requiring clearer definition is that of hybrid threats. Several institutions hold parts of this portfolio, but the question remains: who sees the complete picture? At present, it is not sufficiently clear which entity integrates the national-level response to hybrid threats. One option would be to incorporate this coordination function into the NCMC architecture. Additionally, civil society must not be excluded from this architecture. Not every organization, and not in every role, but if integrated crisis management and a whole-of-society approach are to be taken seriously, civil society must be included at minimum in the areas of preparedness, exercises, public communication, and community resilience. Ultimately, crisis management is not about yet another institution or yet another set of normative acts and procedures. It is about the capacity of the state to function effectively when pressure increases. The real test will be whether this logic of integrated crisis management becomes, over time, an institutional routine rather than a reactive response to specific problems as they arise.

¹⁴⁷ Hotărârea Guvernului nr. 818/2025 privind modificarea Hotărârii Guvernului nr. 306/2025 cu privire la aprobarea Programului național de aderare a Republicii Moldova la Uniunea Europeană pentru anii 2025–2029, disponibilă la: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=152863&lang=ro



Strategic Communication

OPINION



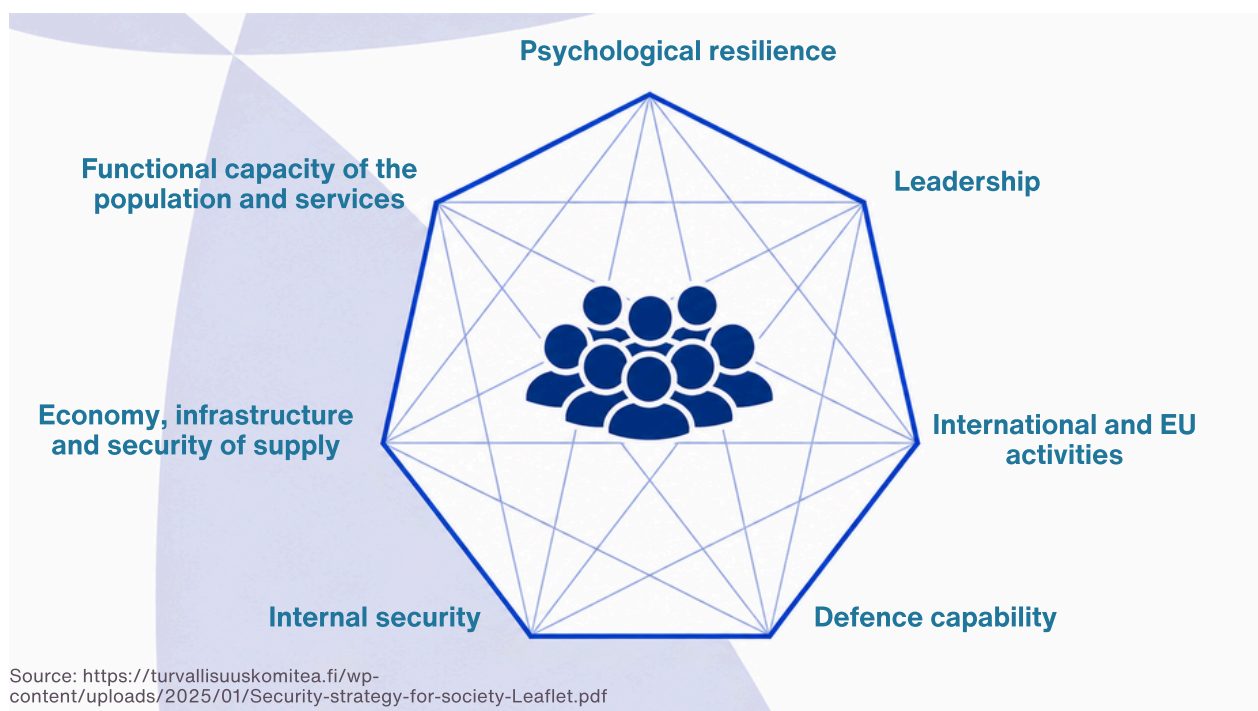
Strategic Communication in Finland and Lessons for the Republic of Moldova

 *Elena Mârzac, Sanda Sandu*

The Republic of Moldova is currently undergoing a process of developing and institutionalising strategic communication, particularly in the field of security and defence. In the context of hybrid threats, information pressures, and vulnerabilities related to public trust, social cohesion, and security culture, the analysis of international best practices becomes essential. Finland offers a relevant example through its comprehensive security model, in which communication, preparedness, cooperation, and public trust function as elements of the same resilience architecture. For the Republic of Moldova, the value of the Finnish model lies in identifying practices that can be adapted to national realities: candidate country status for European Union membership, proximity to the war in Ukraine, hybrid pressures, a fragmented information space, and the need to strengthen the relationship between institutions and citizens.

Finland's experience demonstrates how strategic communication can become an integral component of national security and whole-of-society resilience.

The Finnish model is based on a simple idea: security and resilience concern all actors within society. In Finland's comprehensive security model, the vital functions of society are understood as part of an interdependent system in which psychological resilience, leadership, international and European activities, defence capabilities, internal security, the economy, infrastructure, security of supply, essential services, and the functional capacity of the population form a unified whole. This logic of interdependence is particularly useful for states exposed to hybrid threats, as it demonstrates that the information space, energy, infrastructure, public order, and social trust all influence one another.



Source: <https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Security-strategy-for-society-Leaflet.pdf>

In Finland, comprehensive security is defined as the foundation of societal resilience. Vital functions are ensured through cooperation between authorities, the private sector, organizations, and citizens, under all circumstances and at all levels of society. This approach is grounded in arrangements and legislation applicable under normal conditions, which transforms preparedness into a permanent practice. The Security Strategy for Society provides all actors with a common implementation framework, includes risk assessment, strategic tasks for public authorities, and annual monitoring of implementation¹⁴⁹.

A central element of the Finnish model is the relationship between preparedness, response, and leadership. Preparedness reduces the likelihood of threats materializing and increases society's capacity to respond, while response mechanisms limit the impact of crises and support the restoration of functionality.

Leadership and management connect these stages within a continuous cycle. From the perspective of strategic communication, this means having plans, messages, procedures, institutional roles, and communication channels prepared before a crisis, activated coherently during the crisis, and evaluated after the crisis.

By comparison, the Republic of Moldova is developing strategic communication in a far tenser security environment. Strategic communication in the field of national security and defence highlights vulnerabilities such as the low level of security culture, limited trust in state institutions,

exposure to external influence, and the fragmentation of the information space. In this context, strategic communication is presented as a central element for social cohesion, a coherent national narrative, institutional resilience, and the protection of the information space¹⁵¹.



Photo: <https://www.magnific.com/>

¹⁴⁹ The Security Committee of Finland, "Comprehensive Security." <https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/en/comprehensive-security/>

¹⁵⁰ The Security Committee of Finland, "Security Strategy for Society." <https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/en/security-strategy-for-society/>

¹⁵¹ Mărzac, Elena. Comunicarea strategică în domeniul securității și apărării naționale: necesități și perspective pentru Republica Moldova. Rezumatul tezei de doctor în științe politice. <https://anacec.md/files/Marzac-tezumat.pdf>



Best Practices for the Republic of Moldova

- Building a comprehensive security narrative: Citizens must understand that security includes defence, energy, healthcare, infrastructure, education, verified information, public services, response capacity, and social solidarity. Such a narrative would make it possible to explain hybrid threats in accessible language and would connect European integration with the everyday safety of citizens.
- Institutionalising communication preparedness: The Republic of Moldova needs scenarios and exercises for energy crises, cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, electoral manipulation, security incidents, and emergency situations. Strategic communication must be integrated into crisis management through common protocols, rapidly approved messages, trained spokespersons, and credible official platforms. The Finnish model demonstrates the value of coordination between the local, regional, national, and international levels, with clearly defined roles for public administration, the private sector, civil society, and citizens.
- The citizen as a security actor: In Finland, individuals are presented as key actors in security through their knowledge, skills, functional capacity, and security-oriented mindset. For the Republic of Moldova, this idea could be translated into media literacy programmes, digital literacy, security education, and communication tailored to vulnerable groups, including in Romanian, Russian, and Gagauz languages. Finland's institutionally coordinated media education policy treats media literacy as a civic skill¹⁵¹.
- Professionalising and depoliticising strategic communication: In the Republic of Moldova, strategic communication institutions must serve the public interest

and national security objectives through transparency, professionalism, and continuity. Research in this field highlights the importance of institutionalising strategic communication and the need for effective policies aimed at protecting the information space, strengthening external partnerships, and increasing resilience in the face of hybrid threats¹⁵³.

- International cooperation and continuous learning: Finland hosts the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, an autonomous international organization that provides expertise, training, and networks for the EU, NATO, and participating states¹⁵⁴. The Republic of Moldova could make more systematic use of partnerships with such platforms for the training of communicators, crisis exercises, FIMI analysis, pre-bunking activities, and the assessment of public communication impact.

In conclusion, Finland's experience offers the Republic of Moldova a logic of adaptation: strategic communication must be integrated into comprehensive security, activated before crises emerge, coordinated across institutions, and supported through education, trust, and civic participation. For the Republic of Moldova, information resilience can be strengthened through a coherent system of preparedness, transparent communication, interinstitutional cooperation, media literacy, and citizen engagement. In this way, strategic communication can evolve from an institutional instrument into a democratic culture of security.

¹⁵³ Mărzac, Elena. Comunicarea strategică în domeniul securității și apărării naționale: necesități și perspective pentru Republica Moldova. Rezumatul tezei de doctor în științe politice. <https://anacec.md/files/Marzac-tezumat.pdf>

¹⁵⁴ Hybrid CoE, "The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats." <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/>

Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda

OPINION



Why Strategic Communication Matters for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda?

PISA Team

In recent years, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda has begun to occupy an increasingly visible place in discussions on national security, societal resilience, and institutional reform in the Republic of Moldova. However, one of the most important challenges remains the way in which this Agenda is explained, understood, and integrated into the public space.

In the current regional context, marked by the war in Ukraine, the intensification of hybrid threats, information manipulation, and social polarization, strategic communication is becoming an indispensable component of security policies. The Republic of Moldova is simultaneously undergoing complex processes of institutional reform, resilience-building, and closer integration with the European Union, and these transformations require enhanced public communication capacities. From this perspective, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda offers a people-centred model of security focused on communities and institutional trust.

Strategic communication in the field of Women, Peace and Security plays the role of connecting public policies with social realities and citizens' perceptions.

In the Republic of Moldova, the security sector continues to be influenced by traditional stereotypes regarding gender roles, while women's participation in security and defence structures is often viewed through symbolic or superficial lenses. These perceptions also affect recruitment, promotion, and professional representation processes. At the same time, they reduce the visibility of the real expertise that women contribute in crisis management, security analysis, diplomacy, public order, cybersecurity, and peacebuilding.

In this regard, strategic communication produces an effect that goes beyond simple information-sharing. It contributes to redefining the way society understands security and the actors involved in ensuring it. Coherent communication on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda enables the integration of women into the national security narrative as professionals, leaders, negotiators, experts, and actors of societal resilience.

At the same time, it facilitates the development of a more inclusive institutional culture aligned with the principles of good governance.

The importance of this dimension becomes even more evident in the context of the Republic of Moldova's exposure to disinformation and hostile information operations. Topics related to gender equality, women's participation in security, and human security are frequently manipulated and transformed into polarizing issues. In the absence of clear and coordinated messaging, the information space becomes vulnerable to narratives that seek to portray the Women, Peace and Security Agenda as an external concept incompatible with the realities of Moldovan society. Strategic communication therefore also serves a democratic resilience function: it explains, contextualizes, and provides society with tools to better understand public policies within an increasingly complex information environment.

In this context, the development of the *Strategic Communication Guide for the Effective Promotion of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*¹⁵⁵ by the Platform for Security and Defence Initiatives (PISA)

represents a relevant step toward developing a modern approach to communication in the field of security.

The Guide comes at a time when national institutions need practical and conceptual tools capable of transforming communication from a formal activity into a strategic process of building trust and strengthening societal consensus. The value of this Guide also lies in its practical character. The document does not limit itself to defining general concepts, but provides concrete guidance on message formulation, the identification of target audiences, the development of common narratives, and the integration of the gender perspective into institutional communication. At the same time, the Guide reflects the experience accumulated by PISA in recent years through its cooperation with institutions involved in the implementation of the National Programme 1325, the organization of workshops and training activities, and the development of coordination and monitoring mechanisms.

An important element of this approach lies in the fact that the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is positioned as part of democratic security and institutional modernization, rather than as a separate or marginal issue. The Guide contributes to strengthening a narrative that links women's participation to institutional effectiveness, good governance, transparency, and societal resilience. This approach is also relevant for the Republic of Moldova's European integration process, given that gender equality, inclusive participation, and fundamental rights are part of the European value-based and institutional architecture.

From the perspective of strategic culture, communication on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda contributes to developing a different type of relationship between citizens and security institutions.



¹⁵⁵ Promovarea Agendei Femeile Pacea și Securitatea. Ghid de comunicare strategică. <https://pisa.md/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Promovarea-Agendei-Femeile-Pacea-si-Securitatea.-Ghid-de-comunicare-strategica.pdf>

Public trust in institutions is also influenced by their capacity to communicate transparently, coherently, and in a manner adapted to societal needs. When security is explained through the lens of human protection, participation, and public accountability, institutions become more credible and closer to citizens.

At the same time, strategic communication on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda also produces important effects within institutions. It facilitates interinstitutional coordination, the development of common response mechanisms, and the strengthening of a shared understanding of the objectives of the National Programme 1325. In the absence of such an approach, institutional messaging risks remaining fragmented, reactive, and insufficiently connected to the real priorities of society.

Today, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda represents one of the relevant dimensions through which democratic states are rethinking security in relation to new vulnerabilities and regional challenges. For the Republic of Moldova, the effective implementation of this Agenda also depends on the capacity to build strategic communication that is professional, credible, and coordinated. In this regard, the Guide developed by PISA provides a useful instrument for fostering an institutional culture oriented toward inclusion, resilience, and democratic security, contributing to the strengthening of a security sector that is more transparent, participatory, and connected to the real needs of society.



Photo: <https://www.magnific.com/>



Resources and Further Reading

Democratic Resilience and European Integration: Lessons from Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine

 *PISA team*

Democratic resilience extends beyond a state's capacity to organize competitive elections or maintain formal institutions. In the current environment, it encompasses the ability of institutions, civil society, independent media, and citizens to withstand external pressures, sustain public trust, and protect democratic processes in the face of information manipulation, political corruption, cyber-attacks, and social polarization.

The study “Strengthening Democratic Resilience and European Integration: Lessons from Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine”, elaborated by Elena Mârzac, Sanda Sandu, Artur Papyan, and Olga Chyzhova, offers a comparative analysis of the manner in which three states from the European Union's eastern neighbourhood are consolidating democratic resilience within a security environment characterized by war, hybrid pressures, external interference, disinformation, and complex reform processes.

Taken as a whole, the study demonstrates that democratic resilience is not a fixed state but a continuous process of adaptation. Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine illustrate that democracies under pressure can withstand, learn, and advance reforms - but only when institutions, citizens, and international partners treat democratic security as a strategic priority.

The shared lesson is clear: in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, European integration, democratic resilience, and national security are constituent parts of the same transformative process.

The Republic of Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine represent three distinct yet comparable cases. Moldova is examined as a state building democratic resilience under sustained hybrid pressure and within the context of the European Union accession process. Ukraine offers the example of a democracy continuing reforms under conditions of large-scale war. Armenia reflects the dynamics of a state engaged in a sensitive process of geopolitical reorientation, in which democratic reforms, security, and the relationship with the European Union are becoming increasingly interdependent.

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, the study indicates that the country has become one of the most relevant European examples of democratic resilience under hybrid pressure. Moldova has succeeded in maintaining genuine political competition, advancing rule of law reforms, establishing dedicated institutions for strategic communication and counter-disinformation, and anchoring state modernization within the EU accession process. At the same time, significant vulnerabilities persist: low public trust in central institutions, limited



administrative capacity, a personnel deficit within public administration, fragile financing for media and civil society, and a heavily contested information environment.

The study underlines that, for the Republic of Moldova, democratic security and national security have become inseparable agendas. Hybrid threats - disinformation, illicit financing, vote buying, cyber-attacks, pressure on media outlets, and energy coercion - directly affect the quality of democracy and citizen trust in institutions. Consequently, the state's response must move beyond a reactive logic and develop into a coherent system of prevention, strategic communication, democratic oversight, and societal engagement.

Armenia is presented as a case of democratic reform within an exceptionally sensitive security environment. Following 2018, the country made significant democratic advances, and closer ties with the European Union have become an increasingly relevant factor in institutional transformation. Nevertheless, Armenia continues to face vulnerabilities related to judicial independence, public trust, institutional coordination, reform implementation capacity, and exposure to disinformation and external interference. A further challenge is the sustainability of civil society and independent media, particularly in the context of reduced external assistance.

Ukraine constitutes a distinct case, as democratic resilience is being tested under conditions of the Russian Federation's war of aggression. The study highlights Ukraine's capacity to maintain the functioning of institutions, public services, and key reforms even under martial law, infrastructure attacks, pressure on media, and centralized decision-making. At the same time, Ukraine faces the risk of normalizing emergency governance, the weakening of parliamentary and judicial oversight, pressures on civil society, and the need to preserve European reforms as the primary framework for reconstruction and democratic legitimacy.

The comparative analysis indicates that, in all three cases, hybrid threats have become a structural condition of governance rather than isolated crisis episodes. Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine must simultaneously manage democratic reforms, institutional vulnerabilities, external pressures, and elevated social expectations. In this context, implementation capacity becomes as important as the adoption of legislation. Formal reforms produce results only when qualified personnel, inter-institutional coordination, adequate resources, and credible oversight mechanisms are in place.

A further key finding of the study concerns the central role of public trust. Democratic resilience is stronger where institutions are perceived as competent, transparent, and capable of providing protection during periods of crisis. Public communication thus becomes an instrument of democratic security. Rapid, credible, and coordinated communication reduces the space for manipulation, panic, and polarization, while the absence of communication or the issuance of contradictory messages can be exploited by hostile actors.

Civil society, independent media, and local authorities are identified as resilience multipliers. In all three countries, civic actors contribute to election monitoring, counter-disinformation efforts, human rights protection, reform advocacy, and the maintenance of the connection between institutions and citizens. At the same time, the study draws attention to the fact that excessive dependence on external financing may render these sectors vulnerable in the long term, should more sustainable support mechanisms not be developed.

The European Union is presented in the study as the principal external anchor of democratic resilience. For Moldova, the accession process provides direction, conditionality, and legitimacy for reforms. For Armenia, closer alignment with the EU is becoming a vector of institutional transformation and strategic reorientation. For Ukraine, European integration is a component of the strategy for survival, reconstruction, and democratic consolidation. However, European support can produce durable effects only when accompanied by domestic ownership, democratic oversight, and credible implementation.

Among the study's key lessons, four major directions are identified. First: governance in crisis must remain constrained through clear parliamentary, judicial, and civic oversight mechanisms. Second: implementation capacity, including personnel, coordination,

and institutional memory, determines the credibility of reforms. Third: strategic communication and the integrity of the information environment are essential components of democratic security. Fourth: resilience is a collective effort involving institutions, civil society, independent media, local authorities, and international partners.

The study recommends that Moldova transform crisis resilience into standard democratic practice, through democratic oversight, administrative capacity, strategic communication, and support for media and civil society. For Armenia, the emphasis falls on coordination, judicial independence, and anti-hybrid preparedness, while for Ukraine the focus is on democratic oversight in wartime, robust anti-corruption institutions, and the leveraging of its experience for the benefit of Europe.



PISA

Platforma pentru Inițiative
de Securitate și Apărare

The Platform for Security and Defense Initiatives (PISA) is a nongovernmental organization that supports civil society engagement in oversight of the security sector and builds bridges for dialogue between citizens, nongovernmental organizations, and public institutions in the field.

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

SECURITY NEXUS

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