**A Window of Opportunity with an Existential Stake:**

**The European integration of the Republic of Moldova**

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***Abstract***

*In the context of Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine, an opportunity, previously seen as unrealistic, arose: The Republic of Moldova received an EU candidate status in June 2022. As the Chisinau administration is currently the most pro-European in the country’s history, and considering the great mobilisation towards integration on Brussels’s side, it is a very relevant endeavour to analyse Moldova’s main opportunities and barriers. This paper looks at the European integration process within the Republic of Moldova, by analysing their historical evolution (both within the Soviet Union and post-Soviet).*

***Keywords:*** EU, *Moldova, European integration, hybrid threats*

**Introduction**

Russia’s unjustified and brutal invasion of Ukraine has caused inconceivable destruction and death, making an increasingly larger majority of post-Soviet countries realize that their future as independent nations can only be built outside of Kremlin’s influence. In the case of the subject of the invasion, Ukraine, it is obvious that Europe is not just the better, democratic alternative, but the only option that would sustain the existence of the country and of Ukrainian identity. Meanwhile, another country, heavily targeted by Russia’s hybrid warfare, is the Republic of Moldova, who has recently sensed an opportunity in a time of crisis and, along with Ukraine, managed to receive the European Union candidate status in June 2022.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This does not imply a fast-track path towards membership though. The Balkan countries are great examples in that sense, as they have been waiting at Brussels’s doorstep for years or even decades in some cases to meet the requirements and get accepted. Nevertheless, while this announcement is not a guarantee *per se*, it certainly signals a paradigm shift from the EU’s side coupled with an acceleration in reform efforts by both countries to meet the EU accession criteria. The two countries have made considerable progress over the past year, but the journey towards membership is long, bumpy, and can conceal many unexpected U-turns. Still, if we were to conceive such a geopolitical development a few years ago, that is Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova having a realistic chance to EU membership, it would have seemed idealistic to say the least.

The current geopolitical situation shows that under great challenges arise great opportunities and vigorous mobilisations, and it remains to be seen whether the two post-Soviet countries will be able to escape the “grey zone” status: an area that is neither Kremlin’s, nor part of the European family.

This paper will analyse the current European integration process of the Republic of Moldova since the start of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, on the 24th of February 2022.

1. The historical background will be provided, detailing the country’s recent geopolitical evolution, with a focus on their post-Soviet developments and rapprochements with the European Union.
2. Analyse of the strongest impediments the country is facing in its Europeanization process.

While Ukraine is facing Russia’s brutal and unjustified invasion, The Republic of Moldova has been subjected to an insidious hybrid warfare from Moscow. The country is in the proximity of the war and Russia’s influence has always been significant here. It consisted, among others, in energy supply blackmail, disinformation campaigns and sabotage attempts directed towards the current pro-European leadership, such as paid protests. While energy dependence has been lowered recently, the Eastern European nation still has to counter aspects such as separatism, corruption, oligarchs, and propaganda.

When it comes to EU integration, thus far, the Republic of Moldova managed to fulfil three of the European Commission’s nine recommendations, mainly the ones related to civil society involvement in decision-making and in human rights protection, while also making good progress in the justice and public finances domains.[[3]](#footnote-3) It fulfilled more conditions than Ukraine and Georgia since June last year. While the progress is palpable, the Chisinau authorities still have a long way to go, as some of the issues they are facing are not novel, but have a deep historical root.

Historical background and context

The Republic of Moldova was under Russian rule during two different political systems: the Czarist Empire from 1812,[[4]](#footnote-4) being reconnected to Romania only in 1918, only to be lost again in 1940, and then to be fully incorporated within the Soviet Union in 1944. Under Soviet rule, the Republic of Moldova went through a deep denationalization process, as Romanian became a pariah language and was artificially named “Moldovan” by Soviet authorities, to create a cultural separation between Chisinau and Bucharest, both institutionally and socially.[[5]](#footnote-5) Meanwhile, the Latin script was replaced with Cyrillic and the upper-middle classes of Romanian origins were deported in Siberia and northern Kazakhstan (approximately 35.000 people), being replaced with ethnic Russians.[[6]](#footnote-6)

As a reaction, pro-Romanian identity groups would later emerge in the late 1980s,[[7]](#footnote-7) Moldova ultimately gaining independence on August 27, 1991, benefiting from the Perestroika. That was the founding moment of what will become a thus-far flawed and corrupted democracy, but a democracy, nonetheless. A year later, in 1992, after a month-long conflict, a pro-Russian separatist regime emerged in the Eastern part of Moldova’s territory with Russia’s support, named Transnistria.[[8]](#footnote-8) It has remained a thorn in the flesh of the country’s European integration process to this day, with Russia’s 14th Army Regiment still active in the region.

In the 1990s, Moldova was definitely not on the European Union’s priority list. Humanitarian aid was the main concern for Western nations regarding one of Europe’s poorest countries.[[9]](#footnote-9) At that time, the small republic was seen as clearly being part of Russia’s sphere of influence and its Europeanization process seemed highly unlikely. An important breaking point was recorded in the mid-2000s, when after years of pro-Russian rule, Moldovans from both opposition groups and civil society protested against the 2003 Kozak Memorandum, a settlement that, in the context of a “unified” Republic of Moldova, would have offered asymmetrical federal powers and a veto on foreign affairs to Transnistria and guarantee Russian military presence for the next 20-30 years.[[10]](#footnote-10) Following the rejection of this memorandum, Moldovan authorities intensified their European integration process, signing a EU-Moldova action plan in 2004.[[11]](#footnote-11) Moldova was led by the Communist Party since 2001, but its leaders profited from a “best of both worlds” scenario, in which Russian and European economic advantages can be accessed simultaneously, while also maintaining the corrupt political system.

A breaking point was represented by the April 2009 protests, when under the guise of election fraud by the Communist leadership, protesters clashed with the authorities, leading to later snap elections won by the pro-European forces.[[12]](#footnote-12) Four young people were killed by the authorities during those manifestations.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Still, the subsequent pro-European governments’ actions were severely shadowed by their unbridled corruption. As such, the Moldovan authorities (both pro-European and pro-Russian) facilitated the greatest fraud in the country’s history, **the infamous “billion-dollar theft”** from the Republic of Moldova’s banking system between 2012-2014. Some of the main architects of this crime were the oligarchs Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Shor. At the time, their deep control of the media sphere, politicians and businesses turned the country into a captured state.[[14]](#footnote-14) The prime minister at that time, Vlad Filat, was also put under trial.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Currently, the Republic of Moldova is under the most pro-European leadership in its history, whose reforms and track record have been acknowledged by the European Union, leading to being granted the EU candidate status in June 2022, simultaneously with Ukraine.[[16]](#footnote-16) There is great pressure on the current government to seize this opportunity, considering the ideological divide within society. In an attempt to decrease Moldova’s energy dependence on Russia, the country is dealing with a volatile energy market, as end-consumer bills have soared tenfold compared to 2022.[[17]](#footnote-17) Also, as a result of the energy costs, but also of protesters paid by Russian-backed forces,[[18]](#footnote-18) manifestations have been common wise in the last months, demanding pro-European authorities to negotiate a better energy deal with Vladimir Putin.[[19]](#footnote-19)

While society has always been divided more or less equally among pro Russians and pro Europeans, Moldova is currently experiencing its biggest EU public support, as almost 60% of the population views EU adherence as the right way forward.[[20]](#footnote-20) Moldova’s path is intertwined with Ukraine’s not only in its European integration, but also in the ongoing war. As some analysts claim, the fate of the Republic of Moldova is ultimately decided by the victory or loss of Ukraine against Russia.[[21]](#footnote-21) If Russia keeps on advancing in Ukraine’s south-eastern flank, into the Odessa region, then Moldova’s chances of becoming a military target, from both Russia and Transnistria, will increase. In addition to these pivotal external factors, the Republic of Moldova has internal impediments to tackle to enable a European future.

Some of the domains in which the country has to create significant reforms are justice, corruption, deoligarchization, public administration reform and public finances management.[[22]](#footnote-22) Currently, the Republic of Moldova has received the approval from the European Parliament that accession negotiations can start in late 2023.[[23]](#footnote-23) That is a first step towards a long process which requires the approval of all member states after a long negotiation process.[[24]](#footnote-24)

In that sense, the organization of the second **European Political Community summit in Chisinau on June 1**, 2023, was a milestone which showed the commitment of both European countries and the Republic of Moldova towards integration.[[25]](#footnote-25) It marked in a symbolic manner the detachment between Chisinau and Moscow, the former finally forming its true independent identity.

The next EU report regarding the enlargement package is set to be published in November 2023, evaluating the progress made by both Chisinau and Kyiv.[[26]](#footnote-26) What could accelerate the Republic of Moldova’s advancement towards accession, just as in the case of Ukraine, is the current war situation in Ukraine. Nevertheless, it is ultimately Moldova who is the master of its own destiny, the speed of the accession process depending mostly on the success of the reforms.

Impediments to Moldova’s European Integration and reforms since 2022

* Transnistria and Gagauzia

The frozen conflict in Transnistria has been a geopolitical reality for 31 years now. The dictatorial regime instilled in the region is viewed by the European Union as a serious security risk if the Republic of Moldova becomes a member state. Nevertheless, there is a precedent of a nation facing separatism entering the EU, namely Cyprus. There are doubts regarding the acceptance of another similar case, especially when dealing with Russia-backed separatists, who are arguably a more considerable security threat than the Northern Cyprus separatists.

Currently, the Chisinau government’s relation with the separatists is tense, but stable. According to the Moldovan parliament speaker, Igor Grosu, since Transnistria has not represented an impediment to EU accession thus far, it will not represent one in the future. Furthermore, he emphasized that the Transnistrian conflict is artificially produced by Russia and that Moldova’s constant reform for its integration process will increase the openness to reform of the general population.[[27]](#footnote-27) Furthermore, from an economic point of view, Transnistria is exporting 70% of its products to the EU market, while its connections with the Russian market have been severely affected since the start of the Ukraine war,[[28]](#footnote-28) which force the separatists to interact more with Europe.

All leaders from Transnistria are connected to a certain extent to Russia since Moscow has represented a lifeline for the region since its formation in 1992. Despite the dictatorial nature of the regime, there are two rival factions to consider. The first one is a hard-line pro-Russian side, which is fully subservient to the Kremlin, headed by the so-called foreign minister, Vitaly Ignatiev. Second is the “Sheriff” camp, a plutocratic group currently controlling the monopolizing “Sheriff Tiraspol” company and seizing the legislative and executive branches of the regime.[[29]](#footnote-29) Since the second group currently holds the power grips in Transnistria, this could play into Moldova’s European integration, especially on the economic side. In regard to issues such as human rights or rule of law, little can be expected from the dictatorial regime in Tiraspol, regardless of who is in charge. Still, the “Sheriff” group could be more lenient towards negotiating with Moldova, out of a mercantile interest, in order to protect its business with the European market. It will definitely not be open for European integration, because that would spell the end of Sheriff’s monopoly in Transnistria.

Because of the war in Ukraine, Transnistria is isolated from its nanny state, Russia, indicated also by the decrease in pension payments (Russia covers around 20% of Transnistrian pensions) and of the construction of schools, kindergartens, hospitals.[[30]](#footnote-30) On the energy situation, the Chisinau authorities managed to reach a deal with the separatists, that allows the former to benefit from electricity while decoupling from Russian gas, and the Transnistrians to continue receiving subsidized gas from Moscow.[[31]](#footnote-31) As such, relations with the Transnistrians are much more stable at this point, based on an interdependency and on the separatists’ need to work with Chisinau. Furthermore, the experience of the current Moldovan Prime Minister, Dorin Recean, of negotiating with the separatist authorities will prove useful in future encounters.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Gagauzia is a constitutionally recognized autonomous region within the Republic of Moldova with a significant pro-Russian population which can represent a Trojan Horse for Moldova. Whilst Transnistria is a separate entity, *de facto*, whose totalitarian regime and total dependency on Moscow exclude it from any reintegration or Europeanization talks at this point, Gagauzia is a pro-Russian region *within* Moldova’s territory, whose form of autonomy was constitutionally recognized in 1994. Oftentimes, the region’s leadership called for a secession from the country if European integration advanced which was perceived as a possible reunification with Romania by the local leaders.[[33]](#footnote-33)

While Gagauzia expressed its indignation regarding Moldova receiving EU candidate status last year,[[34]](#footnote-34) the regional protests have been against the pro EU government and the high energy prices[[35]](#footnote-35) and have not explicitly called for separatism. Thus, it is less likely for Gagauz separatism to take shape, especially in the current geopolitical context, but destabilisation is still on the table. Moldova has the great challenge of integrating Gagauzia, whose informational sphere has been for a long time dominated by Russian propaganda, both on TV and in the online space.[[36]](#footnote-36) It is the Republic of Moldova’s responsibility to make it an active part of the EU accession process, otherwise either the process is slowed down, or it moves forward with an increasingly separatist Gagauzia.

The Chisinau authorities struggled to engage in such a Russophile area to find pragmatic solutions to attract Gagauzia towards European integration, especially by appealing to the local population. Gagauzia is stuck in an ideological and informational bubble that will be harder and harder to pop. Whereas the last governor (or Bashkan), Irina Vlah, was a pro-Russian open to negotiation who did not support separatism, the new Bashkan-elect, Evghenia Gutul, (elected in May 2023) is a member of the “Shor” party, created by the pro-Russian oligarch-in-exile, Ilan Shor.[[37]](#footnote-37) She could potentially be an agent provocateur, meant to deviate the Republic of Moldova’s course towards the European Union, through negotiation call outs towards Moscow or even through separatism. Nevertheless, having a “Shor” party member on the Bashkan seat does not spell out stability for the current pro-European forces, as once again the influence of oligarchs is showcased, even in their physical absence from the country.

Furthermore, while the elections have been validated by the Gagauz Court of Appeal,[[38]](#footnote-38) they are under investigation by Moldovan anti-corruption authorities, based on allegations of voter bribing.[[39]](#footnote-39) If the investigations are conclusive, the elections might be repeated. In that event, a pro-Russian candidate would still be the most likely to be elected, but it would be a better alternative than a governor backed by Shor. The oligarch’s influence in the small autonomous republic is relevant to this day, as he recently met with MPs from Gagauzia’s Popular Assembly, leading to an unofficial resolution calling for reforms regarding the autonomy of the region. These reforms, according to the appeal, have to be implemented until September 2023.[[40]](#footnote-40) In such a tense climate, where the geopolitical aspirations of the central authorities and of Gagauzia are polar opposites, it is to be expected that pro-Russian forces will keep using the region as a thorn in the flesh of Moldova’s Europeanization, by sabotaging the reform process and by promoting separatist narratives.

* Oligarch influence

The two aforementioned oligarchs, Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Shor, fled Moldova in 2019, now allegedly residing in Northern Cyprus and, respectively, in Israel.[[41]](#footnote-41) While the assets of both within Moldova have been seized in 2019[[42]](#footnote-42) and in 2022,[[43]](#footnote-43) - from media to real estate and banking - their foreign assets cannot be amounted and are skilfully hidden in offshores.

Considering their economic power, the two main Moldovan oligarchs can still easily influence Moldovan politics and society and have recently proven their capacity to do that. Plahotniuc threatened last year to return to Moldovan politics, based on what he claimed to be an increasing wave of popular discontent regarding the economic and energy crisis.[[44]](#footnote-44) Meanwhile, Ilan Shor’s influence in Moldova is even more palpable. He still has an eponymous party in parliament with 6 seats (out of 101) and he is the main funder of the latest anti-government protests. To push his pro-Russian agenda, he uses low-income vulnerable populations, who are willing to protest for days if paid even the mere sum of 400 Moldovan lei/day (approx. 20 euros). While these manifestations have been mainly ineffective thus far, and the current pro-European leadership has not been shaken yet, the two oligarchs remain a real concern.

The anti-oligarch reforms are an imperative for the country’s EU accession and the Moldovan authorities have made significant advancements at both legislative and execution level. In December 2022, an ambitious draft law was proposed by the Justice Minister, that would be inspired from the US Magnitsky Law. According to this, individuals who are subject to international sanctions will have their assets frozen and will not be able to open bank accounts in the Republic of Moldova. Furthermore, the licenses for their companies will be seized, including media outlets, dominated by pro-Russian oligarchs for many years.[[45]](#footnote-45)

However, there are still some doubts about the law. It is still up for review by the Venice Commission, since originally the law applied only to foreigners and there might be some constitutionality issues.[[46]](#footnote-46) It is important that beyond the effectiveness of the law, it should be applied democratically and assure that it will not be utilized against pro-European forces in the case of a future pro-Russian government, while also respecting European norms.

Later in February 2023, another draft law was proposed to form the National Deoligarchization Committee, consisting of the Prime Minister, relevant ministers (justice, finance, internal affairs etc.), the Governor of Gagauzia, and other state institution representatives. Under this legislation, the committee can present proposals regarding someone’s oligarch status to the parliament, and to be ratified it has to be supported by 3/5 of the Moldovan parliament. A person legally designated as an oligarch would not be able to finance political parties, privatize public goods, create public-private partnerships, control media institutions or organize public demonstrations. The ones who are deemed as oligarchs can only be judged in the context of an appeal by magistrates who went through the pre-vetting process.[[47]](#footnote-47) If implemented, the draft would significantly reduce oligarch leverage, and would annihilate their ability to conduct hybrid warfare tactics through disinformation and paid protests.

European authorities clearly indicated they wanted to see more than legislative reform from the Chisinau authorities, especially results from high-profile cases.[[48]](#footnote-48) In that sense, the new chief of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office in Moldova, Veronica Dragalin, with experience in the US justice system, has proved to be a great asset. She has pursued criminal investigations against key Kremlin pawns, such as the former president Igor Dodon, for illegal financing of the party, or the “Shor” party president and general secretary,[[49]](#footnote-49) Ilan Shor and Marina Tauber, first sentenced *in absentia* to 15 years for the billion dollar bank fraud in Moldova,[[50]](#footnote-50) second detained in early May 2023 in the Chisinau airport, and being under prosecution for illegal financing.[[51]](#footnote-51) Not only the most infamous oligarchs and corrupted politicians have started to be sanctioned and prosecuted, but their associates as well. In that sense, the Moldovan Secret Service (SIS) created a list of people suspected of being associated with Shor and Plahotniuc, who are now banned from making financial transactions.[[52]](#footnote-52) Regarding the seizing of oligarch assets, one of the greatest accomplishments by the current Moldovan leadership was the return of the Chisinau airport in the property of the state. The airport was under the ownership of Ilan Shor, after the Moldovan state transferred it to the oligarch under suspicious conditions in 2013.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Moldovan authorities have also been showcasing a zero-tolerance policy towards the bribing of the vulnerable population for political purposes. As such, during the protests organized by Ilan Shor against the pro-European administration, large sums of cash meant to be used to bribe the protesters have been confiscated.[[54]](#footnote-54) Furthermore, election fraud has also been detected and dealt with quickly in the case of the May 2023 Bashkan elections in Gagauzia. It was determined by the anti-corruption authorities that a voter would receive 15000 Moldovan lei (about 763 euros) to vote for the candidate backed by the oligarch’s party.[[55]](#footnote-55)

This shows a clear shift of the Moldovan authorities’ play: from letting the authors of the most significant theft in the country’s history live in exile, to assuring their associates and similar oligarchic characters can remain in the country, receive a fair trial, and not continue the illegal activities. This can be seen as a big step forward by European authorities, who value action much more than draft laws.

The European authorities themselves are proposing measures to aid the country’s efforts to fight the Russian agents of influence. As such, according to the chief of the EU delegation in the Republic of Moldova, Janis Mazieks, the EU will follow the UK and the US’s lead in preparing a sanction mechanism targeting individuals who breached Moldova’s sovereignty and democracy, which includes Shor and Plahotniuc.[[56]](#footnote-56) A European and Western consensus regarding the sanctions that should be enacted against Moldovan oligarchs is crucial, as that limits their leeway in conducting financial operations and subsequently in influencing the political and social agenda of the Eastern European nation. Eventually, in late May this year, the European Union decided to impose sanctions against Moldovan oligarchs, including Shor, Plahotniuc, and Tauber, and high-profile individuals connected to the Russian secret service.[[57]](#footnote-57) This move will not only lower the chances of further destabilization acts from Moldova’s exiled oligarchs, but it will also increase the European Union’s credibility in the eyes of the Moldovan population.

Lastly, it must be emphasized that the billion-dollar theft is a cataclysmic event from the nation’s short history, which has affected all social classes of all political beliefs. If even the undecided or pro-Russian parts of the population will see that the EU is actively working to prevent any similar events, it might convince a considerable percentage of them to support the Republic of Moldova’s European pathway.

* Disinformation

As a remnant of the USSR, disinformation and propaganda narratives coming from Moscow are still effective and prevalent within the Republic of Moldova. Since the Soviet times, Moldovans were kept within a propaganda bubble, which later turned into a nostalgia bubble, where the USSR was portrayed as a saviour from Nazism and glorified as opposed to the “corrupted Western world”. In that sense, a generational gap was created within the Republic of Moldova, making the Soviet-time generation more vulnerable to Russian propaganda.[[58]](#footnote-58)

In the current geopolitical context, with the Ukrainian war in the proximity of the Republic of Moldova’s territory, Russian propaganda narratives are circulating through society, both generic themes and specifically tailored for Moldovans. They can be easily considered one of the Kremlin’s most effective hybrid weapons, which can sway the Moldovan population away from the Europeanization course pursued by the current government.

Firstly, the recurrent propaganda that is widely promoted in other European countries finds its way through Moldovan news and social media, through the usage of both politicians and of “deepfake” social media accounts. Some of the narratives include urges to demonize and deport Ukrainian refugees, portraying the Ukrainian Army as Nazis and Russia’s war as a liberation mission for the oppressed Russian population, or advancing the rumour that there are American labs in Ukraine containing chemical weapons and viruses.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Secondly, when it comes to Russian propaganda specifically tailored for the Republic of Moldova, there are several narratives which have been pushed since the start of the war. The current leadership is portrayed as a Western puppet, who is slowly pushed into a war with Russia. One way that would be achieved is through an alleged attack on Transnistria. Meanwhile, the government is depicted, much like Ukraine’s, as a dictatorial and Russophobe regime, actively persecuting the Russian-speaking population. It also repurposes historical narratives, in which the USSR and its “liberation” of the Republic of Moldova in 1940 led to its development, compared to Romania, who allegedly kept the region underdeveloped and with an illiterate population.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Due to the ethic, linguistic and historical connection between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, the former has always been depicted by Russian propaganda as an aggressor, labelling any unification aspirations as a form of annexation.[[61]](#footnote-61) As such, some narratives that were induced by Kremlin since the start of the war in Ukraine are: Romania will be using NATO’s military support to annex the Republic of Moldova and parts of Ukraine,[[62]](#footnote-62) or to firstly annex Transnistria,[[63]](#footnote-63) by instilling military provocations along with the current Chisinau administration.[[64]](#footnote-64) Especially prone to Russian propaganda is the aforementioned Gagauzia region, were, according to a 2021 pole, 90% of the Gagauz population consumes Russian-language media, which is trusted to a large extent.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Disinformation is a battlefront that the Republic of Moldova will have to face holistically in a society that is indeed becoming more and more pro-European,[[66]](#footnote-66) but which is split somewhere around the 40-60% mark on almost all foreign policy issues, indicating a still-large societal divide. The measures that the Moldovan state has taken against disinformation have been limited and reactive. The Moldovan Security Services firstly banned TV channels owned by Ilan Shor, responsible for spreading propaganda on the Ukrainian war.[[67]](#footnote-67) Later, that was followed by a Kremlin-related site ban, such as the Sputnik outlet.[[68]](#footnote-68) That is not enough to counter Russian disinformation, the government needs to work on active measures to educate and enhance the resilience to propaganda of the general population. Furthermore, although the EU has been investing much more in the Republic of Moldova than Russia in the last years, there’s an unawareness among the Moldovans regarding EU advantages and aid. The rampant Kremlin propaganda still makes a large part of Moldovans view Russia favourably. An informative, sustained counter-narrative coming from the European Union and from the Moldovan government is imperative to correctly inform the population.

The EU has also attempted to aid the Republic of Moldova in fighting disinformation (along with other forms of pressure) by sending a civilian taskforce specialised in hybrid warfare.[[69]](#footnote-69) Moldova has recently officially approved this measure, by creating the “Patriot” Centre, an institution meant to combat Russian propaganda and increase the population’s resilience towards disinformation campaigns.[[70]](#footnote-70) These are only the first steps towards lowering the impact of Russia’s greatest weapon, disinformation, and it remains to be seen to what extent it is effective.

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