

A Hybrid Front in Eastern Europe: Anatomy of an Information War

Description

As the Moldovan election deadline of September 28 approaches, Eastern Europe reveals its vulnerability. From Chişinău to Bucharest, an invisible but decisive front is emerging: that of the information war.

Both Moldova and Romania are confronting the emergence of a new battleground: sophisticated information warfare orchestrated from Moscow. These operations, unprecedented in their complexity, combine cryptocurrency financing with AI-powered disinformation campaigns designed to fracture Euro-Atlantic unity along the continent's eastern frontier.



A Hybrid Front in Eastern Europe

Moldova, a geopolitical laboratory with 2.6 million inhabitants, is experiencing interference of unprecedented sophistication. Crypto-financing, AI-generated disinformation, coordinated cyberattacks: these documented methods reveal an escalation in operational capabilities. According to Moldovan authorities, over €100 million has been mobilized to corrupt the upcoming election process *via* cryptocurrency networks. Meanwhile, Romania serves as a sounding board, a testing ground for anti-European and anti-NATO narratives before their regional dissemination. This synchronization reveals a coherent strategy targeting the entire eastern flank of Europe. What unfolds today between the Prut and the Carpathians foreshadows tomorrow's security challenges for the European Union and NATO.

Moldova: At the Heart of an Interference System

Since 2020, President Maia Sandu and her Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) have been targets of systematic destabilization orchestrated according to the classic Russian hybrid warfare playbook. The campaigns mirror methods used against Volodymyr Zelensky: corruption allegations, challenges to democratic legitimacy, exploitation of specific societal vulnerabilities. In Sandu's case, her status as an unmarried woman has become a recurring attack vector to question her leadership capabilities in a society still shaped by traditional values.

This destabilization is supported by networks sanctioned by the European Union. Exiled oligarch Ilan Şor, convicted of bank fraud, operates a covert financing system from Moscow, as documented by Moldovan authorities. Former Gagauzia governor, Yevgenia Guţul, convicted in August 2025 to seven years in prison, has been relentless since her election in 2023 in mobilizing her autonomous region against Chişinău's European trajectory. These figures function as influence relays, coordinating demonstrations and communication campaigns from abroad.

Pressure is also exerted *via* Transnistria, a self-proclaimed entity under *de facto* control of pro-Russian authorities. Pro-Moscow networks transport large numbers of voters to polling stations during each election, frequently offering cash payments as incentives. Meanwhile, Gagauzia, which enjoys constitutional autonomy including a secession clause, serves as a permanent lever for institutional weakening. These two enclaves allow Moscow to exert structural pressure on the Moldovan state, regardless of electoral cycles.

This mechanism is not unique to Moldova. The Bulgarian example reveals similar patterns: covert financing through oligarchic networks, exploitation of identity divisions to fracture state cohesion and impede Euro-Atlantic integration.

Romania: Mirror and Narrative Testing Ground

Romania now functions as a narrative laboratory where stories intended for all of Eastern Europe are refined. The Vidraru dam affair perfectly illustrates this mechanism. In August 2025, the technical draining of this hydroelectric dam, a maintenance operation planned for years, became a pretext for a massive disinformation campaign. On *TikTok*, *Facebook*, and *Telegram*, fantastical stories accused France of secretly « *purchasing* » Hidroelectrica, transporting water from the lake to France via tanker trains, and extracting gold from the sediments.

These entirely fabricated accusations nevertheless build upon a real, mundane fact (a civil engineering project) to construct extraordinary claims rooted in conspiracy theories. The method reveals its sophistication: Hidroelectrica remains a Romanian public company 80% state-owned, no French company is involved in work contracted to the Romanian Croatian consortium Elektromontaj-Končar, and no gold deposits exist in the Argeș basin according to official geological surveys.

This campaign pursues several strategic objectives. First, to delegitimize France's presence in Romania, particularly its leadership of the NATO multinational battalion as part of Operation Eagle deployed in Cincu. Second, to recycle narratives deployed in the Sahel, where France is systematically accused of plundering uranium and gold. The same template applies to Eastern Europe: only geography changes. Finally, it aims to erode confidence in European integration by suggesting foreign control over Romania's strategic infrastructure.

The dissemination follows the classic pattern of *AdNow*, a Russian advertising platform that has become a major instrument of information warfare. Created in 2014 by Sergey Pankov and Alexey Kuznetsov, nominally registered in the United Kingdom but maintaining its technical infrastructure in Russia, *AdNow* orchestrated manipulation of the 2024 Romanian presidential election, which was ultimately annulled after interference was detected. *VIGINUM* reports and *Atlantic Council* analyses document its role in systematically amplifying pro-Kremlin narratives through an ecosystem of fake media and sponsored content.

Cross-Border Logic

The interference deployed between Moldova and Romania reveals consistent cross-border logic that transcends traditional national frameworks. The same narratives circulate on both sides of the Prut River with minor local adaptations. The narrative of « *French predation* » tested in Romania around the Vidraru dam finds its Moldovan variations in accusations of Western manipulation levelled against Maia Sandu. The accusation of creeping annexation by Bucharest, agitated on the Moldovan side, is inverted on the Romanian side into suspicion of « *forced romanianization* » of Chișinău's institutions.

This cross-circulation relies on three decisive multipliers. The Moldovan diaspora in Romania, representing nearly one-third of the Moldovan population holding Romanian passports, serves as a natural vector for narrative dissemination in both directions. Social networks, particularly *Telegram*, enable immediate and massive amplification beyond administrative borders. Finally, segments of the Orthodox clergy, particularly the Chișinău Metropolis under the Moscow Patriarchate, act as institutional relays in both countries, providing religious legitimacy to pro-Russian positions.

This cross-border strategy serves a specific geopolitical objective: undermining Euro-Atlantic resilience in eastern European Union territories. By fragmenting cohesion between member states and candidate countries, delegitimizing European and NATO institutions, and exploiting identity and socio-economic vulnerabilities, Moscow seeks to create a permanent destabilization buffer along Europe's eastern flank. The originality of this approach lies in its systemic dimension: rather than targeting each country in isolation, it orchestrates coordinated regional destabilization by exploiting the area's historical, cultural, and economic interdependencies.

Within this architecture of destabilization, Transnistria exemplifies Moscow's influence strategy. This separatist enclave serves as a key testing ground for hybrid operations, demonstrating how to maintain lasting control without direct military intervention. The territory's orchestrated dependence operates through several interconnected mechanisms: energy control via the Cuciurgan power plant (Inter RAO), parallel economic networks, pro-Kremlin media, and Orthodox clergy aligned with the Moscow Patriarchate. Since the 2022 logistical disruptions, these interference channels have

transformed Transnistria into a permanent gray zone serving Moscow's strategy of Euro-Atlantic fragmentation.

Will narrative contamination spread westward?

The Moldova-Romania case represents an exemplary study of information warfare conducted on a regional scale. This systemic approach, orchestrated from Moscow but relayed through local networks, combines technical sophistication with exploitation of local vulnerabilities. More structured than past isolated interference incidents, these coordinated operations exploit European interdependencies to maximize their destabilizing impact.

The primary risk lies in the gradual spread of these narratives into the heart of European space. Narratives tested and refined on the eastern periphery gradually infiltrate political debates in Western capitals. The logic of information contagion follows migratory flows, diaspora networks, and transnational media circuits. What begins as local electoral manipulation can evolve into a widespread crisis of confidence in Europe.

This reality demands greater coordination between the European Union and NATO in the information domain. The response can no longer be exclusively national when facing structurally cross-border threats. The French agency *VIGINUM*, cooperation with Moldovan services, and European investigations against *TikTok* represent first steps, but the challenge's scale requires institutional reinforcement. Europe must develop its own defensive information warfare capabilities or risk remaining indefinitely at the mercy of its adversaries. The stakes extend beyond Moldova and Romania: it is the resilience of European democracy that hangs in the balance on the continent's eastern fringes.

Thumbnail : « [House of parliament of Moldova](#) » (© [Guttorm Flatabø/CC BY 2.0](#))

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