Policy Brief
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Lessons in Resilience

Moldova's Response to Russia's Hybrid Interference

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Summary

Following the pro-EU outcome of the 2024 presidential election and constitutional referendum, Russia intensified its hybrid campaign against Moldova for the 2025 parliamentary elections. The aim was clear: destabilize the government, weaken public trust in democratic processes, derail Moldova's EU accession path, and bring to power pro-Moscow actors. Russia deployed a broad set of tactics, including political proxies, oligarchic networks, disinformation, illicit financing, cyberattacks, and attempts at street-level disruption. Despite the sophistication of these measures and the outsourcing to third-country actors, Moldova's institutions, civil society, and media responded decisively through rapid exposure, dismantling of interference networks, and transparent public communication. The country's international partners played an important role in bolstering its resilience. The success of the pro-EU Party of Action and Solidarity, which won another parliamentary majority, if reduced, dealt a heavy blow to Moscow and its allied oligarchs.

Russia's interference was part of a long-term multi-layered destabilization campaign abusing democratic freedoms. At its core, it sought to normalize the perception that Moldova could not conduct a fair, sovereign vote while empowering pro-Russia or anti-establishment forces. Ultimately, the strategy relied on mercenaries, corrupt networks, and short-term political technologies that lacked broad appeal. Moldova's legislative and institutional reforms curbing illicit financing and safeguarding electoral integrity blunted these tactics, although uneven judicial interventions related to the exclusion of certain parties also risked casting a shadow over the process.

There are now three main priorities for Moldova's democracy. First, Moldova must consolidate institutional readiness against hybrid threats and restore public trust, especially in the judiciary. The swift interagency response around the elections should be developed into a permanent, institutionalized framework. Clearly defined roles for the Supreme Security Council, the Strategic Communication Centre, and the Crisis Management Centre are essential. Second, the fight against polarization and erosion of public trust must be intensified. Strengthening communication capacities, working with civil society experts, promoting digital literacy, and cooperating with independent watchdogs and platforms are all needed to counter disinformation and coordinated inauthentic behavior. There is a risk of civic pluralism shrinking under the pressure of malicious lawsuits, polarization, and economic constraints. Platforms could be established that provide civic actors with timely access to legal aid, cyber defense, and more sustainable funding. Third, international engagement with Moldova must be sustained and predictable. Following the successful completion of its EU accession screening in September, negotiations need to be fast-tracked. With US assistance cut, the EU and other donors need to step in more consistently, focusing on long-term core funding for civil society organizations and media. Moldova's experience should also inform EU-wide resilience mechanisms, including developing new bilateral and cross-border cooperation targeting mainly inauthentic online behavior and illegal political financing.

Moldova's elections have showed that determined institutions, an active civil society, and international solidarity can resist Russia's hybrid campaigns. Yet resilience remains fragile. Sustained reforms, economic development, societal cohesion, and long-term donor commitment are indispensable for consolidating Moldova's democratic path and for ensuring stability in a region that remains a target of Moscow's disruptive strategies.

Introduction

Since being given candidate status in June 2022, Moldova has made progress on its path toward EU accession despite overlapping crises: energy insecurity, the war in Ukraine, economic vulnerability, and persistent political polarization. The result of the October 2024 presidential election and constitutional referendum endorsed the country's EU trajectory, but they also triggered an intensification of Russia's campaign of hybrid threats against the country. Moscow broadened its tactics, deploying a mix of political, financial, and informational tools in a multi-layered strategy aimed at immediate disruption and longer-term influence. Moldova's experience fits into a regional pattern as Russia seeks to undermine democratic processes and Western integration also in Georgia, Ukraine, and the Western Balkans.

Russia's interference has tested Moldova's institutions and societal resilience, which made the integrity of the September 28 parliamentary elections a matter not only of democratic legitimacy but also of national security. The electoral cycle starting with the 2024 presidential election was widely seen as the first major test for Moldova's resilience following the formal opening of EU accession negotiations in June 2024. In her September address to the European Parliament, President Maia Sandu summarized Russia's strategy as trying to weaponize the freedoms at the heart of the democratic process: "Freedom of religion is turned into propaganda; freedom of assembly into paid protests; freedom of association into Kremlin-backed parties created overnight; free movement of capital into illicit money injected into politics".[1]

The elections showed clearly that citizens understood the threats posed by Russian and oligarchic interference and that they endorsed the country's EU path. The next parliament and government will have to quickly take further steps to strengthen governance and the rule of law, to address socioeconomic grievances, to prepare for meeting energy needs for heating during winter, and to continue to resist Russia's persistent hybrid campaign.

This brief examines how Russia's interference playbook evolved and was applied in Moldova's elections, how Moldova's institutions and society responded, and how its international partners supported it. It concludes with recommendations for Moldova's main stakeholders and international partners for further strengthening democratic resilience against external, mainly Russian, hybrid threats.

A Test of Democratic Resilience

The elections produced a decisive outcome. The governing pro-EU Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) again won a majority in parliament with 55 seats out of 101 (down from 63 in the previous one) and 50.2% of the vote, ensuring that Moldova will stay on the EU accession path. The main opposition force, former president Igor Dodon's pro-Russia Patriotic Electoral Bloc, gained 24.2% and 26 seats. The Alternativa Electoral Bloc (led by Moscow-linked figures but with claims to be pro-EU) obtained 8% of the vote and eight seats, while the populist Our Party secured 6.2% and six seats. The biggest surprise was the performance of the Democracy at Home Party, which won 5.6% and six seats, a result probably linked to online campaigning including by Romania's right-wing populist Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) party.

At 52.2%, the turnout was the highest for parliamentary elections since 2014. The diaspora vote was once again very high at 280,746, the second-highest after the peak of 330,000 in the second round of the 2024 presidential election, with a large majority for the PAS (78.5%). In the separatist region of Transnistria, the trend of declining turnout continued with around 12,000 votes cast, down from 26,000 in 2024. Interestingly, almost 30% of voters there voted for the PAS.

Before the elections, a risk assessment by the German Marshall Fund of the United States identified vulnerabilities and threats to electoral integrity stemming from weak governance, polarization, and Russia's hybrid campaign.[2] Many of these materialized, ranging from disinformation and intimidation to vote buying and manipulation of the online space through "digital troops". Networks linked to fugitive oligarchs further enabled voter corruption and organized protests. The media environment was pluralistic yet fragile, with gaps in regulation and pressure on journalists. Overall, civic space was under pressure, with internal and external actors targeting trust in democratic institutions and processes, spreading fear and anxiety, and deepening divisions in the society.

The risk assessment showed that a series of key vulnerabilities remain. The political landscape is characterized by fragmentation and polarization, unclear party funding, and ongoing influence by oligarchic and Moscow-linked actors. Efforts to exclude subversive actors from political life face legal and public communication challenges, with risks of politicization if such measures lack transparency or consistent judicial oversight. Governance risks stem from under-resourced institutions, rushed legislative reforms, and implementation gaps, with a large body of laws modified earlier this year. The socioeconomic situation, worsened by Russia's energy pressure on both sides of the Nistru river, and low societal trust make the ground fertile for electoral corruption and information manipulation. The economic crisis in Transnistria created a risk of manipulation around election day and of escalation, which will still be present in the coming months. The autonomous region of Gagauzia and Russian-leaning communities in the north and south remain particularly susceptible to anti-EU messaging. The traditional mass media are struggling with financial sustainability, especially with the end of US assistance funding, and with stricter regulations and oversight, while the online environment, including social media, remains largely unregulated.

In its interim report published on September 12, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) stated that the legal framework for the elections was largely in line with international standards but noted controversies over candidate registration, polling stations abroad, and voting for residents of the separatist region of Transnistria. Almost 3,500 observers were accredited, showing the high interest in the elections.[3]

Russia's Use of its Evolving Interference Playbook

Russia's strategic aims across Eastern Europe are consistent with its aggression against Ukraine and successful undermining of Georgia's EU accession path. They are to prevent the presence of the EU and NATO on its periphery, to keep buffer zones under its influence there, and to ensure there are political regimes or conditions favorable to its geopolitical objectives. In this context, Moscow has long

understood that, even if this does not immediately lead to desired electoral outcomes, efforts at eroding public trust in institutions and society in other countries serve its strategic objectives.

Moldova is a crucial target because of its goal of EU membership as well as of its borders with Ukraine and EU and NATO member Romania. In June, Prime Minister Dorin Recean warned that Russia was exploring options to deploy up to 10,000 troops in Transnistria (where it already has around 2,000 troops, most of them there illegally)[4] for use against Ukraine if the political situation in Chișinău turned favorable.[5] There have also been allegations that Moscow's plan envisioned up to 40,000 foreign "contract workers" who could double as paramilitary operatives and taking control of strategic infrastructure in Moldova, notably airports.[6] These claims reflected persistent concerns that the Kremlin views Moldova's elections as a potential gateway for expanding its military footprint in the region.

Russia's interference campaign ahead of the elections combined traditional methods of influence with newer, digitally enhanced tools. It was more open and ruthless and better resourced than before, and allegedly with a streamlined chain of command following changes in the Presidential Administration in Moscow in August.[7] In these changes, two departments coordinated since 2019 by former envoy to Moldova Dmitry Kozak were dismantled and a new department "for strategic partnership and cooperation" was created under Sergey Kiriyenko, the deputy head of the Presidential Administration responsible for "political technology".

According to investigative journalists and Moldovan officials, the 2025 electoral cycle saw an unprecedented influx of foreign financing, possibly exceeding $350 million. In September, Sandu told the European Parliament that "hundreds of millions" were being pumped into Moldova to subvert the elections.[8] These funds were channeled through networks linked with Moldovan oligarchs, notably the oligarch Ilan Șor, a fugitive from justice now based in Moscow; shell companies, including in EU jurisdictions; cryptocurrency transactions and new payment apps such as TAITO; and Russia's sanctioned Promsvyazbank and affiliated "laundromats".

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In an undercover investigation by the independent media outlet Ziarul de Gardă, Russian-backed actors described their operations as an "information war", with "digital troops" paid to seed fear and distrust online. This information war includes various methods, such as coordinated troll farms on Telegram and TikTok, reuse of infrastructure previously employed in Ukraine and elsewhere, such as "doppelganger" fake news sites and "matrioshka" layered disinformation campaigns, and AI-generated deepfake content targeting government leaders. This was in line with the assessment in the European External Action Service's threat report in March.[9] Moreover, media investigations showed how activities of the Șor network and Russia's Evrazia Foundation were interlinked, with undeclared political campaigning, fake opinion polls, and other activities preparing the ground for questioning the legitimacy of results.[10]

The dominant Russian narratives framed the elections as a choice between "peace with Russia" and "war on behalf of NATO", and as an existential threat to people's identity and Orthodoxy. They also presented

"evidence of dictatorship" under Sandu, who was accused of suppressing opposition parties. Moscow proxies continuously claimed that the elections had been already falsified before the voting, and the Patriotic Bloc delayed the recognition of the election results due to alleged irregularities.

Despite new measures by the authorities, the political activity of Russian proxies and networks continued. According to Moscow organizers quoted by Ziarul de Garda, the Șor network still includes at least 12,000 activists and 10,000 sympathizers, out of whom hundreds of communicators have been trained this year.[11] Moreover, in a move probably coordinated by Moscow, two major electoral blocs—the Patriot Bloc on the left and the Alternativa bloc in the center—were created only months before the vote, and certain networks and structures were used interchangeably to support both as well as the Șor-linked Greater Moldova Party.

After the 2014 "billion-dollar bank fraud",[12] vote-buying and paid protests became well-established tools of influence in Moldova, set up initially by the oligarchs Șor and Vladimir Plahotniuc. The scale of vote-buying through these networks is yet to be properly ascertained. Pro-Moscow opposition figures, especially those linked to Șor and the Party of Socialists, have repeatedly mobilized demonstrators to portray the country as sliding into authoritarianism. The intelligence services and law-enforcement bodies warned that criminal figures and mercenaries could be used to escalate incidents into "false flag" disturbances around the elections, and several operations were carried out to disrupt these networks and their plans. As expected based on the 2024 experience, election day was marked by heavy cyberattacks against electoral infrastructure as well as security incidents (bomb threats) aimed at disturbing the voting process for the diaspora and in Transnistria. However, they were largely unsuccessful.

Pro-Russia actors used emotional appeals to voters in the country and in the diaspora linked to identity (European versus "Russian world", Romanian versus Moldovan), the Orthodox faith, and economic insecurity to influence voters abroad (especially in Italy, Romania, and other EU countries). Romania's AUR party amplified anti-EU and anti-Ukraine narratives, openly targeting Sandu with accusations of "dictatorship" and "interference" in Romania's presidential election in May. Monitoring of online activity showed the AUR using messaging similar to Russia's, as well as links between its members and Russian companies and proxy figures.[13] Networks of priests from the Moldovan Orthodox Church, which is under the Moscow Patriarchate, continued to get involved in political activities and to mobilize believers, portraying the EU as morally corrupt and urging voters to resist what they called "Western imperialism".

Moldova's Response and Resilience

In the run-up to the elections, Moldova's authorities took a firm approach against Russian interference and oligarchic networks. Some legal and institutional reforms, even if late, gave the authorities stronger tools to push back against attempts to exploit the country's vulnerabilities.

President Sandu worked to raise domestic and international awareness of the threats facing the country's democratic institutions and its EU course. She repeatedly described Moscow's actions as "a hybrid war against Moldova". She announced that the Supreme Security Council had discussed ten tools used by Russia to interfere with the elections.[14] The Security and Information Service and law-enforcement

bodies took actions to dismantle proxy structures, resulting in the exposure of several clandestine networks for vote-buying, disinformation, and disturbing public order.

Investigative journalists and watchdog organizations filled crucial gaps. For example, Ziarul de Gardă revealed how the Șor vote-buying networks were re-engineered into "an online army built on fake accounts and coordinated Telegram channels".[15] Other media investigations revealed that young people from Moldova were being trained in Western Balkans in violent tactics and public protests,[16] as well as the use of the Evrazia Foundation's network to interfere in the elections through fake opinion polls, undeclared paid political campaigning, and other political activities.[17]

Legal and regulatory measures were also strengthened. The Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections judged them to be "more robust than in previous elections and setting out more safeguards against abusive practices".[18]

Successor parties to the Șor Party (which the Constitutional Court had ruled unconstitutional and was dissolved in 2023) were banned and several political parties had their activities limited in punishment for illicit financing of political campaigns. Due to the time needed for court proceedings, several parties were excluded from the elections very close to election day. On the last day of the campaign, candidates from the Heart of Moldova party were excluded from the Patriotic Bloc list. On election day, the Supreme Court excluded the Great Moldova Party, another Șor successor party. The government also designated the Evrazia Foundation as an extremist organization. Several political figures, companies, and nongovernmental organizations had their bank accounts frozen. This followed criminal investigations as well as with reference to the inclusion of certain individuals on the updated EU and Canadian sanctions lists of people and entities undermining Moldova's democracy.

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The authorities increased penalties for electoral corruption and worked with social media platforms and civil society organizations (CSOs) to dismantle coordinated online networks. Law-enforcement bodies uncovered vote-buying networks, disrupted illicit financing, and undertook a public campaign to discourage people from selling their votes. While these steps curtailed certain money-laundering schemes used to fund media outlets sympathetic to Moscow, civil society monitors emphasized that "pro-Russian disinformation networks remain resilient and adapt quickly to enforcement actions".[19]

There was some progress in high-profile legal cases related to political corruption and oligarchic influence. In August, in a first, the governor of autonomous region of Gagauzia, Evghenia Guțul, received a jail sentence for her involvement in earlier illegal financing of the Șor Party. The fugitive oligarch Plahotniuc was extradited from Greece on September 25 on charges of fraud, money laundering, and running a criminal organization linked to the 2014 "billion-dollar bank fraud". He is currently detained and awaiting court proceedings.

Overall, public trust in justice remained fragile. As the ODIHR observed in its interim report, "the ongoing lack of confidence in the independence of the judiciary has become itself an election issue, with opposition figures portraying prosecutions as selective or politically motivated". The Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections pointed out also that "inconsistent decisions, including the review of a ruling by the Supreme Court of Justice, generate jurisprudential instability and weaken public trust".[20]

Adjustments were made to the organization of the vote. The number of polling stations in Transnistria was reduced to 12 from 30 in 2024 and, close to election day, five of them were relocated. The Central Electoral Commission defended the decision on the grounds of security reasons and decreasing turnout, but opposition parties accused it of "deliberately disenfranchising" voters there. The Security and Information Service had recommended to the commission to open eight polling stations for Transnistria, citing security reasons and indications of vote manipulation.

Institutional resilience has generally improved since the 2024 election and constitutional referendum.

Institutional resilience has generally improved since the 2024 election and constitutional referendum. The number of polling stations abroad was increased to 301 (69 more than in 2024). Postal voting, which is only allowed for voting from abroad was expanded to ten countries (from six in 2024), with over 2,000 votes cast this way. This was in response to long-standing diaspora demands, yet it was contested, especially as the number of stations in Israel, Russia, and Ukraine was capped at two due to security concerns. The diaspora has become in recent years an important supporter of Moldova's EU accession course and mobilized strongly during elections for pro-West parties.

The Central Electoral Commission and the Audiovisual Council generally acted with professionalism, with the ODIHR noting that the former had "maintained transparency and cooperation with stakeholders, though it continues to operate under pressure from political actors". The Audiovisual Council, with support from Association of Electronic Press, launched a consultancy center to assist broadcasters during the election period and, with the Independent Press Association, strengthened monitoring of campaign coverage. The police's cooperation with platforms such as TikTok led to the removal of coordinated inauthentic networks. The authorities launched interagency working groups to address complex challenges including online campaigning, cybersecurity, candidate vetting, and diaspora voting. The intelligence and law-enforcement agencies organized several complex operations aimed at dismantling the networks for vote-buying, disinformation, and civil disobedience and violence. These actions showed a growing institutional awareness of hybrid threats, even as resources remained stretched.

Monitoring by the CSOs forming the Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections showed an increase in hate speech and discriminatory language, as well as the use of violent rhetoric by some political actors.[21] Cases of intimidation of journalists, observers, and civic activists, as well as judges and other public officials continued to be reported.

In its preliminary statement on the elections on September 29, the ODIHR election observation mission said that they had been "competitive and offered voters a clear choice among political alternatives but

the process was marred by serious cases of foreign interference, illicit financing, cyber-attacks and widespread disinformation".[22] The main domestic election observation organization, Promo-lex, pointed out the high number of cases of voting bulletins being photographed and the unjustified presence of unauthorized persons near polling stations,[23] which might be related to vote-buying attempts. The European Network of Election Monitoring Organisations pointed out the "foreign influence and other hybrid threats seeking to shape public narratives" and that "Despite extensive legal amendments and more proactive action by the authorities, these hostile operations at times remained ahead of institutional responses", while also noting that "late deregistrations, broad executive and security powers, and continuing risks of illicit financing may have affected public confidence in equal conditions".[24]

The Role of International Actors

Moldova's international partners, especially the EU, have been central to its ability to withstand hybrid pressure from Russia by supplying technical assistance, election observation, funding, and high-level political backing. They have also been at times targets in domestic political narratives.

The EU mounted the most visible, multi-dimensional response. High-level political support was expressed during the EU-Moldova summit in Chişinău on July 4, followed by the visit of France's President Emmanuel Macron, Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz, and Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk to Chişinău for Moldova's Independence Day on August 27.

The European External Action Service's threat reports and the EU's analytical work have mapped the architecture and tactics of foreign information, manipulation, and interference (FIMI), providing Chişinău with analytical tools and indicators to detect campaigns and networks.[25] The EU Moldova sanctions list was updated in July, adding new individuals and entities accused of involvement in disinformation, illicit party financing, and foreign interference, increasing the pressure to hold accountable those undermining democratic processes in the country.

The EU also extended the mandate of its Partnership Mission in Moldova to 2027. The mission works on crisis-management procedures, rapid response, and institutional training to strengthen resilience to hybrid threats, including cyber ones and FIMI. EU support has ranged from targeted cybersecurity assistance (rapid-assistance projects and technical audits) to strategic communications and media-monitoring support, hybrid-threat assessments and democracy and rule-of-law projects.

The United States provided some financial support for resilience and capacity-building in the past and continued to do so, to a certain extent. For example, it announced in September a $130 million grant to finance the construction of the Strășeni-Gutinaș high-voltage transmission line to reinforce Moldova's energy security. The current US administration did not take a strong public position over Russian interference, compared to the previous one's in 2024—a gap some other voices in Washington attempted to fill. Thus, in September, eight former US ambassadors warned that a victory by pro-Moscow forces would "shake regional security, threaten NATO's eastern flank, and hand the Kremlin another launchpad for aggression against Romania and Ukraine".[26] That same month, two senators

urged Alphabet (Google) and Meta to take stronger action to block Russian-backed disinformation and inappropriate political financing ahead of the elections.[27]

At the same time—in the context of the change of administration in January, the closure of the US Agency for International Development, and the broader US political climate—a wide array of political actors in Moldova and Romania have exploited the lack of clear positioning by Washington on Russia's hybrid campaign against Moldova order to attack the government's pro-EU and pro-Ukraine policies.

Romania has been active through civil-society links, including cooperation between organizations and investigative media partnerships, political support at the presidential and prime ministerial, and bilateral cooperation. Its National Audiovisual Council issued notifications to TikTok under the EU's Digital Services Act regarding accounts exhibiting coordinated inauthentic behavior that could influence Moldova's diaspora voters. At the same time, some Romanian political actors—including figures such as the AUR's leader George Simion and radical or populist groups aligned with the party—have at times amplified polarizing narratives in Moldova.

Ukraine showed strong interest in the elections. Its Foreign Ministry stated that Russia was mounting "enormous efforts to destabilize Moldova … through propaganda, disinformation, and various other methods".[28] Its concern stemmed from the potential security and geopolitical risks associated with an electoral outcome favoring Russia, particularly given the long, porous border with Moldova and the shared exposure to Moscow's hybrid tactics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Russia's interference in Moldova's parliamentary elections amounted to a multilayered destabilization campaign designed to fracture the country's political landscape, to erode public trust in the electoral process, to normalize the perception that it could not conduct a fair, sovereign vote, and to empower parties aligned with Moscow. The combination of illicit financing, digital disinformation, diaspora manipulation, cyberattacks, and street-level pressure echoed earlier campaigns, but also featured new levels of digital sophistication, outsourcing to third-country actors, and partnerships with fugitive oligarchs. At its core, the strategy exploited greed and fear.

Moldova's recent legislative reforms aimed at safeguarding electoral integrity, curbing illicit financing, and strengthening institutions to counter foreign interference. While the elections resulted in a renewed mandate for the PAS, they also showed the growing traction of populist, anti-establishment forces and the enduring influence of pro-Russia platforms. The fact that 43% of voters were still undecided a couple of weeks before election day highlights the volatility in society. The state institutions took strong steps against Russia's efforts, using the revised legislation to dismantle interference networks, but inconsistent judicial interventions and party exclusions risked casting a shadow over the process. Addressing socioeconomic vulnerabilities will be essential in the coming years, as this is the foundation on which stronger resilience can be built.

Increase Institutional Readiness Against Russia's Hybrid War

Russia's ongoing hybrid war requires a response that is robust, proportional, legitimate, and firmly anchored in the rule of law. The authorities demonstrated that the interagency process can be rapid; now this approach must evolve into a regular, institutionalized framework, with clearly defined roles for the Supreme Security Council, the Strategic Communication Centre, and the Crisis Management Centre. This should extend across strategic and operational levels and include regular assessments, preparing options for policymakers, and implementation monitoring. Periodic "stress tests" would allow the institutions to revise, to strengthen, and to improve their capabilities and transparency.

Address Polarization and Rebuild Trust at the Societal Level

In a polarized environment, trust erodes quickly. Moldova's institutional communication capacities—particularly in crisis response and countering hybrid threats—should be expanded, ideally with input from civil society experts skilled in public outreach. Effective countermeasures to FIMI should combine the existing rapid attribution and exposure with digital literacy initiatives, close coordination with media watchdogs, and cooperation with platforms to limit the algorithmic amplification of coordinated inauthentic behavior. Restoring trust in the judiciary and anti-corruption efforts must remain a priority for the coming years, as failures in this area undermine credibility in every other sector.

Moldova needs to continue to counter the polarization of society along geopolitical lines, as well as to convince those undecided by restoring trust in democratic governance and the EU path of the country. New communication channels should be explored, including community liaisons, citizen assemblies, and local "influencers" such as teachers, librarians, and small entrepreneurs, who can reach skeptical audiences in rural and Russian-speaking areas.

Civic space is under mounting pressure from the shrinking of independent media, strategic lawsuits against public participation, polarization, and resource constraints. Platforms and resource centers should be established for coordinated information campaigns and framework contracts to outsource services to enable CSOs and media outlets under attack timely access to legal aid, digital services, and cyber protection. To ensure continuity and impact, donors should shift toward multi-annual, programmatic, and core funding models, rather than short-term project grants. Such funding enables strategic planning, institutional growth, and rapid response—elements vital for CSOs and independent media operating in high-risk contexts such as the one in Moldova.

Ensure Sustainable Donor Engagement

With the EU accession screening process successfully concluded in September, Moldova is technically ready to advance in negotiations. The EU should now fast-track the next stages by opening the fundamental-values cluster, providing clear benchmarks on the other clusters and ensuring sustained financial and institutional support, while leaving broader political decisions for later. Accelerating Moldova's progression would not only anchor its reforms but also signal that the EU is committed to enlargement as a strategic response to hybrid threats in the region.

Following the cut in support from the United States, the EU and other donors are slowly stepping in to fill critical gaps, including in areas such as cybersecurity, democratic governance, and economic development. Moldova's authorities and think tanks advocacy in Washington should aim at restoring US support for Moldova. At the EU level, lessons from Moldova's experience in countering hybrid threats, disinformation, and cyberattacks should feed into pan-European resilience mechanisms. The Romanian National Audiovisual Council's efforts to disrupt inauthentic online behavior under the EU's Digital Services Act was a promising example of how cross-border cooperation can be deepened. Think tanks should assess and recommend ways for a sustained and multilayered international support for Moldova's resilience: the elections have been a setback for Russia but its hybrid war is not over.

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