



Evaluation of promotional campaigns of Șor and Platon

Analysis of investments and tactics used in July 2024

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Summary

In just a short period of **90 days**, fugitive oligarchs Ilan Şor and Veaceslav Platon spent approximately **136,000 euros** on Facebook advertising.

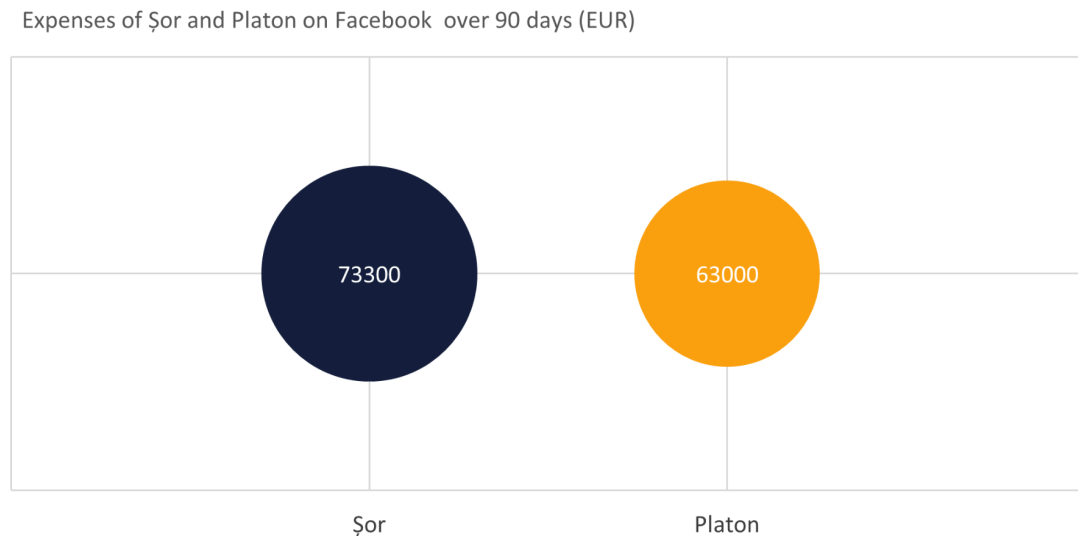


Fig. 1 - Comparison of the amounts spent by Ilan Şor and Veaceslav Platon on Facebook advertising for disinformation over a 90-day period.

Main manipulative narratives (ideas) promoted in sponsored posts by Platon and Şor:

1. *The referendum is useless:* the disinformation campaign argues that the referendum holds no value, manipulating official statements to suggest that the results will have no impact on the EU accession process.
2. *The government pressures Gagauzia:* it is promoted the idea that the central government is unjustly imposing sanctions on the Gagauzia region, thereby undermining local stability.
3. *The government scares the public with war:* it is suggested that authorities exaggerate military risks to gain political advantages, denying the real threats to national security.
4. *EU accession negotiations are due to Ukraine:* this narrative implies that Moldova's progress in joining the EU is solely a result of the situation in Ukraine, downplaying the importance of our country's efforts.
5. *The government accepts any condition imposed by the EU:* it is claimed that Moldovan government unconditionally accepts all EU demands to receive European funds, insinuating a lack of sovereignty and discernment in the negotiation process.



The main goal of these sponsored campaigns is to sow panic in society, discredit the European integration process of Moldova, and wash Russia's image. At the same time, Russia is actively preparing for destabilization during the electoral campaign for presidential elections and the referendum on European integration.

Unfortunately, the authorities do not have effective mechanisms to combat such disinformation tools. The only solution to counter these falsehoods remains the active informing of society about how these messages circulate in the public space (what? who? why?) and postfact reporting of the promoted falsehoods.

Neither META nor Google is taking any serious action to block this manipulative content. The two companies should pay attention to the calls from Moldovan authorities and civil society to stop running ads from oligarchs sanctioned internationally. The lack of action from META and Google allows for political influence operations and interference by the Russian Federation in the electoral processes of Moldova.

Introduction

The Russian Federation's hybrid war against Moldova is becoming more aggressive as presidential elections and European integration referendum on October 20 approach. One of the main disinformation tools is sponsored ads on platforms like Facebook (META) and Google.

The primary malign actors funneling money into online disinformation are fugitive oligarchs Ilan Șor and Veaceslav Platon. These two oligarchs spend thousands of euros monthly to sow panic among the Moldovan public, aiming to derail the country's European path.

Currently, the Moldovan state lacks any effective tools to stop these manipulation campaigns and can only request their cessation from international platforms post-factum.

Șor's expenses for the period July 1- 30, 2024

The fugitive oligarch Ilan Șor promoted at least **104 advertisements on 11 Facebook pages** between 1 and 30 July, spending **30,500 euros**. Compared to the period from 1 to 30 June, the number of sponsored advertisements **increased by 20, while the budget remained unchanged**.

The evolution of number of ads sponsored by Şor`s pages

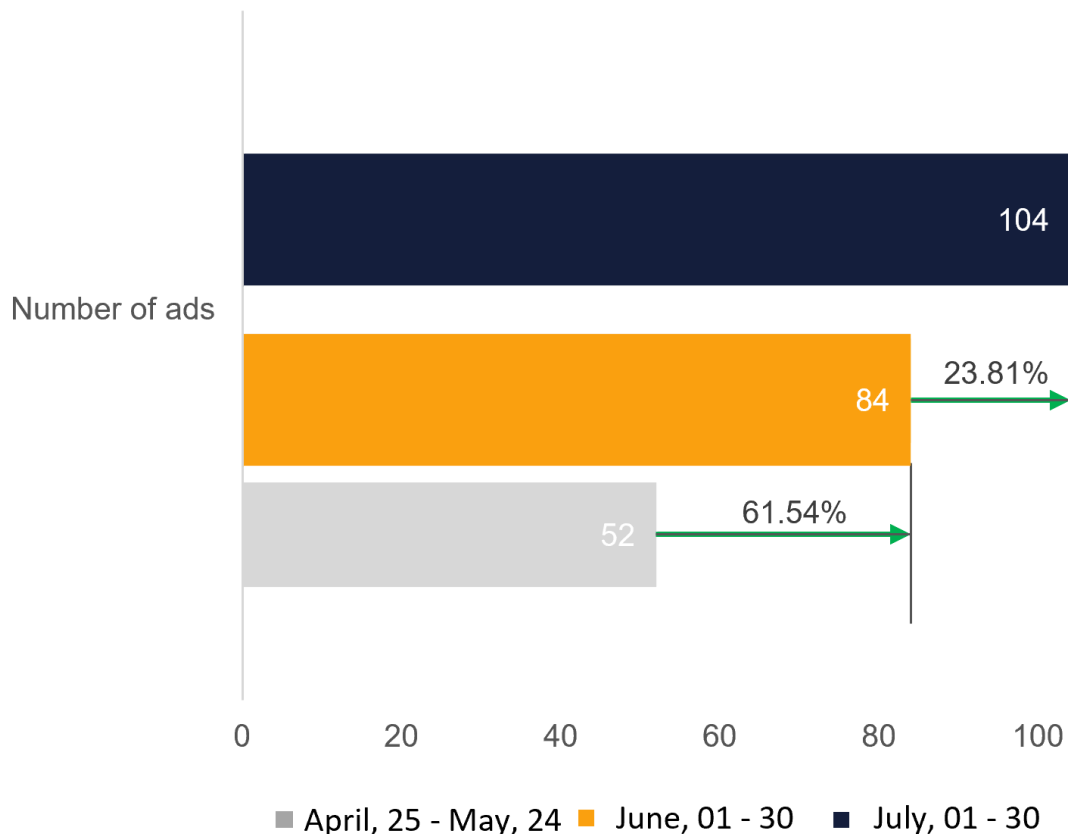


Fig. 2 - Evolution of the number of advertisements sponsored by the pages affiliated to the Şor group in the period 1 - 30 July, compared to the periods 25 April - 24 May and 1 - 30 June.

Just for **the week of July 24 - 30**, Şor spent approximately 4,741 euros on advertising. For comparison, during the same period in June, he spent **1,600 euros more**.

Three pages belong to members of the "Revival" Party, officially supported by Ilan Şor: [Veaceslav Jucov](#), [Vasile Bolea](#), and [Alexandr Nesterovschi](#). The remaining pages use a similar visual identity: they have profile pictures with the Moldovan flag and usernames that hint at either media organizations or patriotic groups, such as "[Cultural Moldova Plus](#)," "[Moldova Radiance News](#)," "[True MD news here](#)," "[Onedaypoll](#)," "[With love from Moldova](#)," "[Eurasia](#)," "[Tinki Vinki](#)," and "[Simple Overkill](#)." All these pages use categories like "*Media/news website*," "*Newspaper*," or "*Media production and broadcasting company*" to create the illusion that they belong to legitimate media institutions.

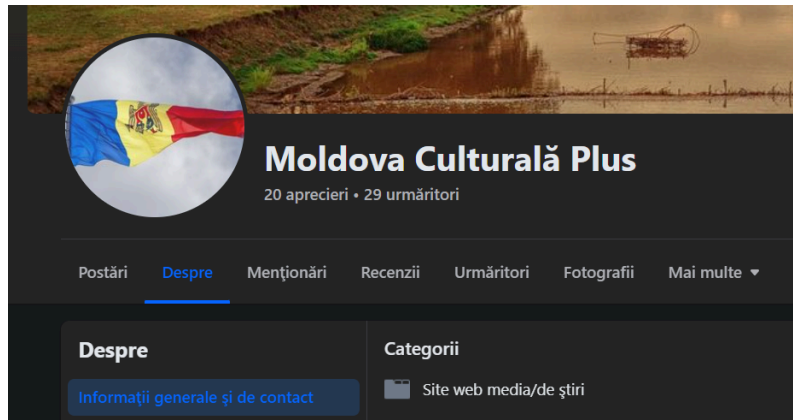


Fig. 3 - The page “Cultural Moldova Plus” uses the Moldovan flag as its profile picture and positions itself as a “Media/News website.”

The main manipulations promoted by Șor's anonymous pages were:

- **The referendum is pointless** – [the sponsored post](#) manipulated statements by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mihai Popșoi, who stated that regardless of the referendum results, EU accession negotiations would continue. Thus, the Șor group “expresses doubts about the effectiveness of the referendum on Moldova's EU accession, considering it a costly and unnecessary event.” According to the group, the current government “does not take into account the opinions of all citizens on this issue.”



Fig. 4 - The page “Cultural Moldova Plus” promotes Șor group's opinion that the referendum will be ineffective and costly.

- **Recognition of the 1946-47 famine as genocide will worsen relations with Russia** – according to the Șor group, recognizing the 1946-1947 famine as [genocide](#) is nothing more than "a political speculation that does not address the country's current issues." They believe that "adopting such a law could lead to discrimination against the residents of Gagauzia, who receive aid from Russia."



Fig. 5 - The page "With love from Moldova" promotes the so-called "Festival of the peoples' friendship," organized by the "Victory" Bloc, where a special attention was given to the Russian Federation.

- **The government puts pressure on Gagauzia** - [Vasile Bolea](#) says that the US sanctions imposed on Eugenia Guțul are "an additional method of putting pressure on the Governor of Gagauzia and those who administer the region" by the current government. Bolea believes that the current government is trying to divide the Gagauz society by hindering the implementation of Gagauz team's projects.
- **The government is a dictatorial regime** – [Veaceslav Jucov](#) claims that "the current government turned the country into a dictatorship and deprived the people of their right to make decisions." According to Jucov, "a handful of politicians impose their will on millions of citizens." This narrative was emphasized on the occasion of the three-year anniversary of PAS governance. [Alexandr Nesterovschi](#) promoted a post accusing PAS of "turning the country into a repressive state where any dissent is suppressed."

Platon's expenses for the period July 1- 30, 2024

Veaceslav Platon promoted around **82 ads** on [his personal Facebook page](#) and on [Natalia Morari's page](#) from **July 1 - 30**, spending approximately **19,500 euros**. Compared to the period from June 1 - 30, Platon **spent 5,750 euros less** on ad sponsorship, although the number of ads **increased by 11**. For **the week of July 24 - 30 alone**, Platon spent about **3,600 euros** promoting ads on the two pages.

The evolution of the number of ads sponsored by Platon on Facebook

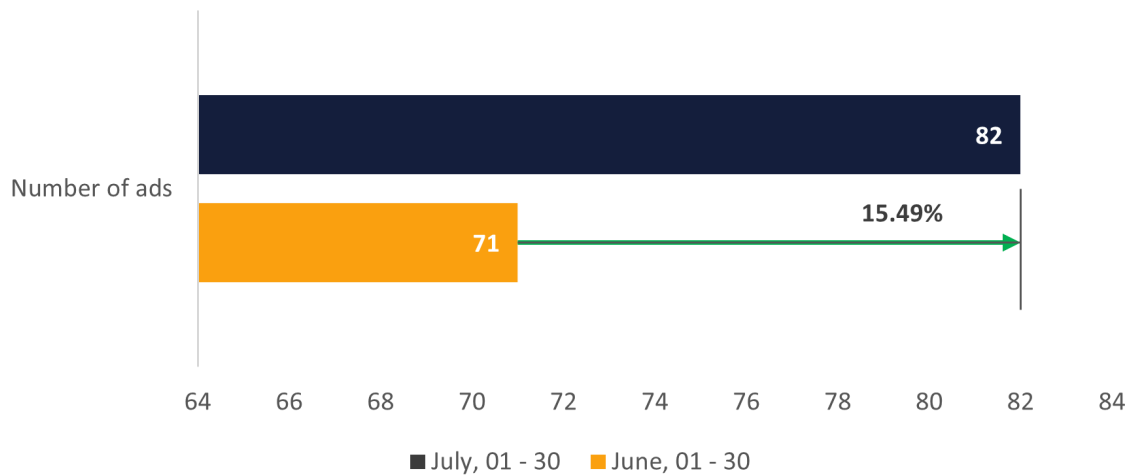


Fig. 6 - The evolution of the number of sponsored ads from pages affiliated with Veaceslav Platon on Facebook from July 1-30, compared to the period from June 1-30.

Comparison between the amounts spent by Platon on Facebook for two different periods

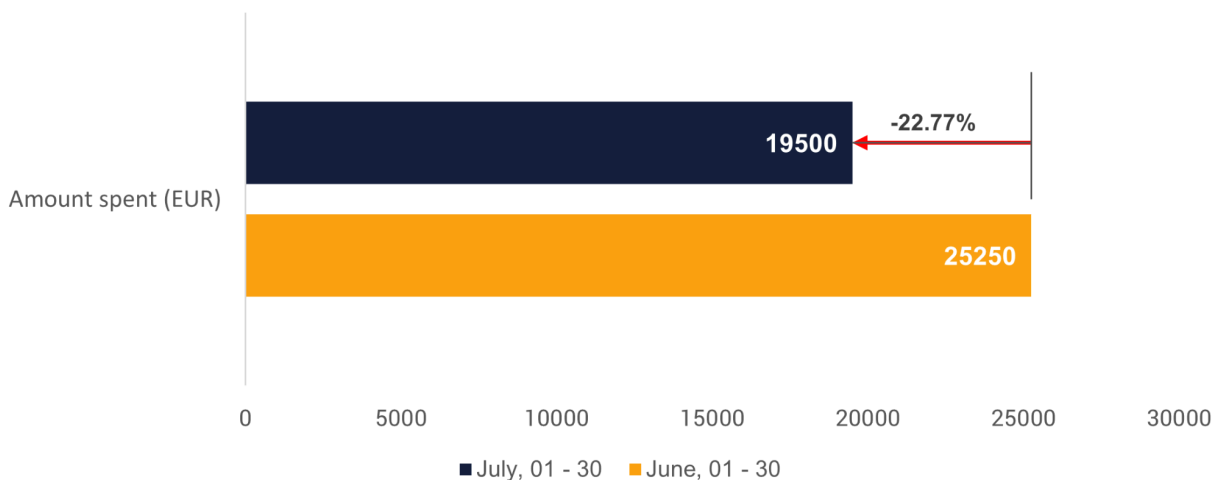


Fig. 7 - Comparison of the amounts spent by pages affiliated with Veaceslav Platon for the periods July 1 - 30 and June 1 - 30.

In addition to the sponsored ads on Facebook, Platon is actively promoting content on YouTube and through Google Ads. However, the issue is that Google Ads Transparency **does not display the amounts spent by Platon** for sponsoring ads on his channel or Natalia Morari's channel. The time period for these promotions and the number of users reached by the ads are also unknown. In total, Platon sponsored **9 ads** from his account in July. Following her launch into the presidential campaign, Natalia Morari's account promoted **173 ads**, of which **15 are sponsored YouTube videos**, while the rest are electoral posters.

The evolution of the number of ads sponsored by Platon on Google

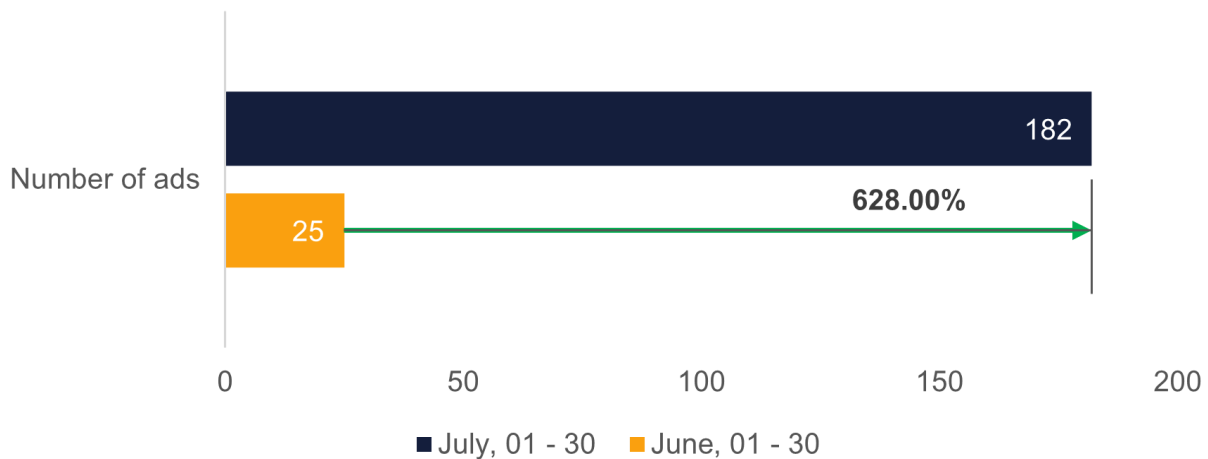


Fig. 8 - The evolution of the number of sponsored ads from pages affiliated with Veaceslav Platon on YouTube from July 1 - 30, compared to the period from June 1 - 30.

The main manipulations promoted by Platon affiliated pages were:

- **The government scares people with war** – Morari states that "[the government scares the population with the threat of war to gain political credit](#)." She mocks the idea that Maia Sandu maintained peace in Moldova. According to Morari, "*there is no imminent military risk from Russia*." To support her position, she cites arguments from Western experts who assert that Russia lacks the military capacity to break through the front in Ukraine. In reality, authorities say that Russia is waging a hybrid war against Moldova, but Morari ignores this detail.

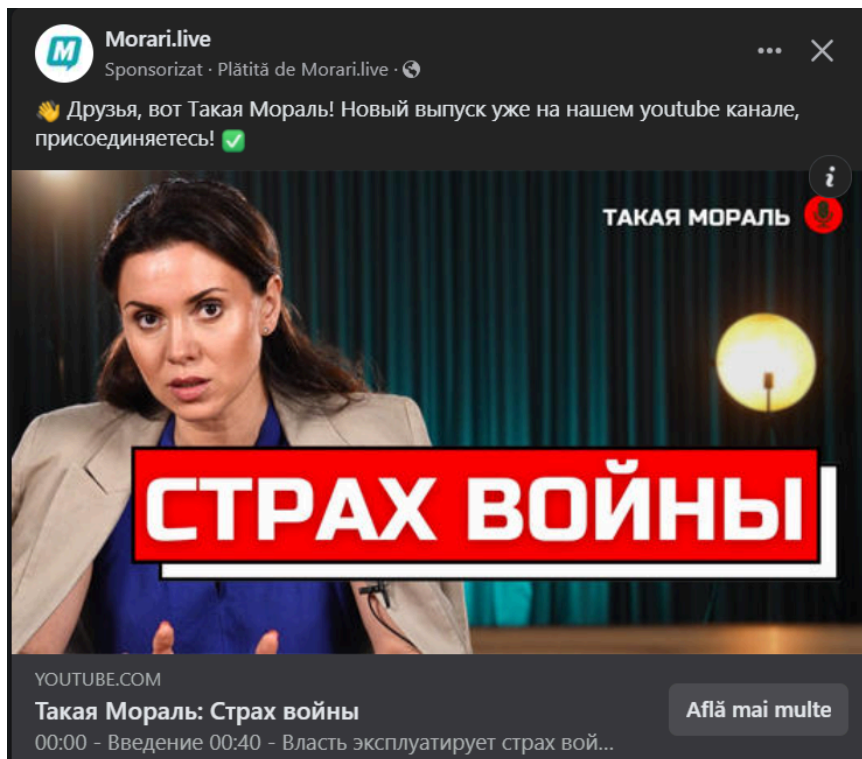


Fig. 9 - Sponsored video from Natalia Morari's page, in which she claims that the government is scaring Moldovans with the threat of war.

- **EU accession negotiations are due only to Ukraine** – [Morari argues](#) that "Moldova was granted the start of EU accession negotiations solely due to Ukraine." She contends that the current government had no role in initiating negotiations and is merely using this process for its own benefit. According to Morari, the Chişinău government took six months to officially support Ukraine. However, she does not mention that Moldova condemned the Russian invasion from [day one](#) and did everything possible to receive and care for Ukrainian refugees on its territory. Regarding the argument that the opening of negotiations is exclusively due to Ukraine, Morari remains silent about Georgia.
- **The government accepts any condition imposed by the EU** – [Veaceslav Platon](#) criticized Maia Sandu for signing the decree to begin EU accession negotiations. According to Platon, "Maia Sandu is willing to accept any condition from the EU" to receive European funds. He further asserts that in the EU, money is given just for having your land without cultivating anything. Additionally, Platon [advised Georgians](#) to follow Moldova's example to open negotiations. Mocking, he suggests that "it is enough to grab an EU official by the sleeve and tell them about the hybrid war."

Unusual cases

In addition to ads sponsored by fugitives Veaceslav Platon and Ilan Șor, several atypical cases were found. The first case concerns an anonymous page that promoted the video launching Natalia Morari in the race for President of Moldova. Although the page has the same elements as the anonymous pages promoted by Șor, we cannot claim with certainty that this clip was promoted by one of the fugitive oligarchs.

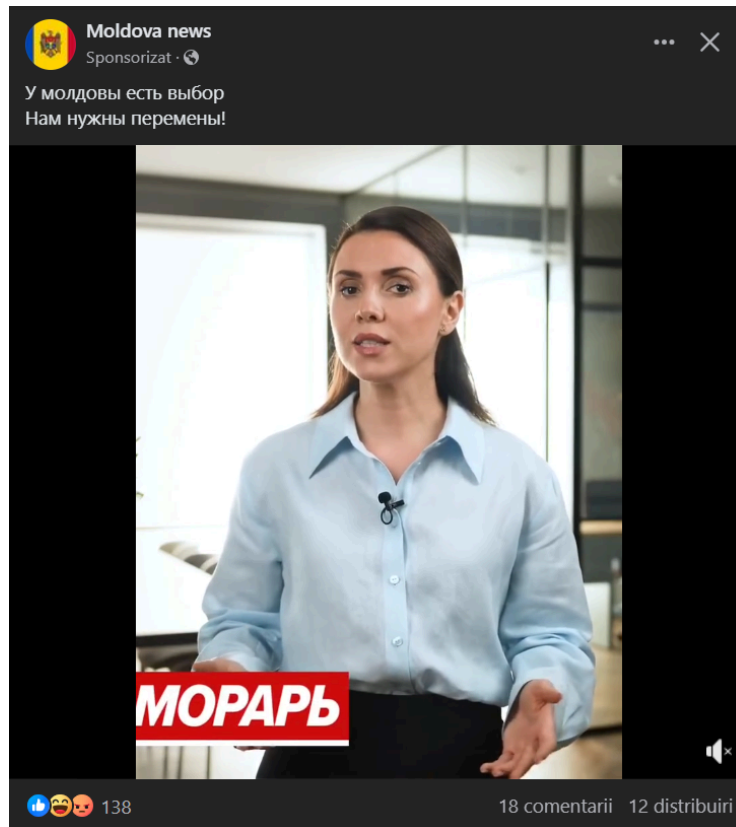


Fig. 10 - Anonymous page sponsoring the launch video of Natalia Morari's presidential campaign.

Additionally, on Facebook, a page supporting Maia Sandu was promoted. Accessing the page, we find a post generated by artificial intelligence, which contains a number of grammatical and logical errors. We suppose that the page is to be used to falsely promote messages from President Maia Sandu in the election campaign.



Fig. 11 - Anonymous page claiming to support President Maia Sandu. At the time of publishing this analysis, the page was deleted.

Another unusual case on Facebook was a poll on a Russian website promoted by an anonymous page. In some of the questions in the poll, Internet users were asked about their attitude towards discrimination on the basis of language, whether the declaration of independence brought benefits to Moldova, whether people would be ready to go out to rallies and block roads. In this case, too, we cannot affirm that any of the fugitive oligarchs are behind this poll.

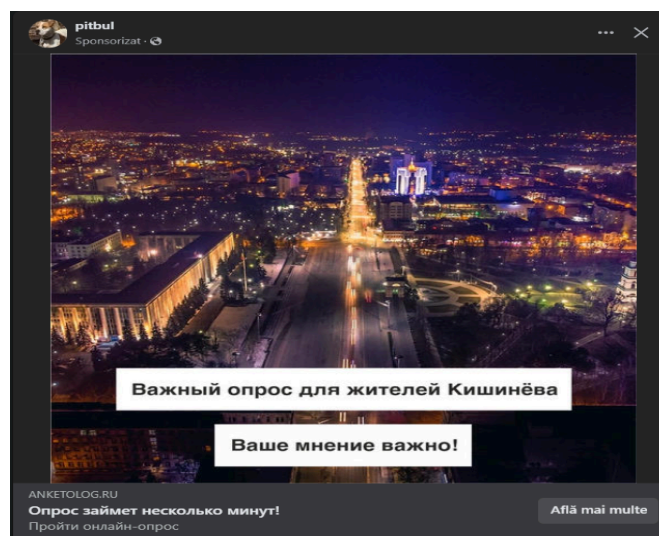


Fig. 12 - Anonymous page promoting a survey with provocative questions from the Russian website anketolog.ru. The advertisement was hidden by the page administrator and

does not appear in the META Ads Library.

anketolog.ru/e/63776259/FnKyUU8C?utm_medium=paid&utm_source=fb&utm_id=120211124437670714&utm_content=120211124437650714&utm_term=120211124437680714&u... 🔍 ☆

Если бы Вам предложили участвовать в акциях протеста, чтобы привлечь внимание власти к острым проблемам, то Вы приняли бы в них участие или нет? Если да, то в чём именно Вы готовы принять участие? *

- Подписать обращение, петицию
- В шествии, массовой акции протеста
- Распространить листовки, информацию в интернете
- В перекрытии дорог
- В одиночном пикете
- В акциях онлайн-протеста
- Другое (напишите)

Напишите ваш вариант ответа

- Не принял(а) бы участие в акциях протеста
- Затрудняюсь ответить

ДАЛЕЕ

Fig. 12 - The poll promoted by the anonymous "pitbul" page asks the respondent what they could contribute in case of a protest. The response options include "blocking roads", a tactic used by the criminal group Şor during the 2022 protests.

Conclusion

Although in July the budget for ads did not increase much in the case of Şor, and even decreased in the case of Platon, the number of advertisements is constantly increasing. Their main purpose is still to discredit the EU accession referendum, but also to attack Maia Sandu, who is the main favorite in the presidential race.

The two oligarchs are trying to manipulate public opinion that Moldova's place is not in the EU. For example, Platon emphasizes the narrative that *"Moldova is not negotiating on an equal footing with the EU the conditions for accession"*. And oligarch Ilan Şor claims that *"the referendum will not take into account the opinion of the majority of Moldovans"*, which would be against EU membership.

The two oligarchs continue to whitewash Russia's image. Natalia Morari promotes the idea that Russia does not pose an imminent military threat to Moldova, despite Moscow's hybrid war against Chişinău. Platon argues that *"the hybrid war"* is a fabrication by the current government



to hide its failures. Meanwhile, Șor enhances Russia's image through his political parties by organizing events and promoting the narrative that "*Russia is Moldova's strategic partner.*"

At the same time, Russia is actively preparing to destabilize the electoral campaign for the presidential elections and the EU accession referendum. The promotion of the survey on the site *anketolog.ru* shows that, through the questions asked, the Kremlin is actively preparing for spreading falsehoods on topics such as language, ethnicity, political support, values, and beliefs. Moscow appears to be preparing violent actions in some regions of the country, asking respondents if they would be willing to participate in large-scale protests in their areas.

Unfortunately, the authorities lack effective mechanisms to combat such disinformation tools. The only solution to counter these falsehoods remains the active informing of the public about how these manipulations spread (who? what? why?). Security institutions should closely monitor the activities of Kremlin-affiliated groups, which are expected to organize destabilizations in the fall, and take measures to prevent them.

To resist the hybrid war waged by Russia against Moldova, it is crucial for civil society and media to unite their efforts in combating disinformation and providing accurate information to the public. Another important aspect is related to pro-European politicians and parties, who, due to their frustrations with the current government, are weakening the European vector before the referendum. Genuine pro-European forces should consolidate their efforts to resist the hybrid war of the Russian Federation.

Neither META nor Google are taking any action to block this manipulative content. Both companies should heed the calls from Moldovan authorities and civil society to stop the ads of internationally sanctioned oligarchs. META and Google need to understand that their inaction enables political influence operations and Russian interference in Moldova's electoral processes.

Our evaluations also suggest that some of the funds used for these campaigns might be redirected to ANO "Eurasia," led by former Orhei city hall accountant Nelly Parutenko. This could help them evade monitoring by authorities and social media platforms more effectively. New forms of manipulation could involve applications for purported regional development grants, participation in youth and teacher exchange programs, and political events such as the new congress of the "Victory" bloc in Moscow. These indirect funding methods might target both populist projects like OrheiLand and recruitment of potential participants for electoral protests, as [warned](#) by the governments of the USA, Canada, and the UK.

Constant attacks on the European integration process and the legitimacy of government aim to create divisions and destabilize the political situation at a critical time for Moldova. The lack of effective mechanisms to combat these manipulations allowed toxic messages to reach a wide audience without significant obstacles.

Recommendations:

1. **Rapid response to disinformation:** authorities and media institutions should respond promptly to disinformation campaigns by issuing statements and materials that debunk falsehoods. It is crucial that these responses are well-founded and reach the public before the disinformation takes root.
2. **Enhanced monitoring:** security institutions should increase monitoring of social media platforms to quickly identify and report manipulative content. A swift response can significantly reduce the impact of these campaigns on public opinion.
3. **Counter disinformation campaigns:** civil society, the government, and other goodwill actors should launch information campaigns aimed at directly countering false narratives. These campaigns should explain the importance and benefits of the European integration process and debunk the myths spread by oligarchs.
4. **Temporary partnerships with digital platforms:** authorities should establish short-term collaborations with social media platforms to expedite the removal of disinformation. These partnerships should include direct and prioritized reporting mechanisms for harmful content.
5. **Ongoing communication with strategic partners:** it is essential for Moldova to maintain dialogue with international partners regarding ongoing disinformation campaigns and work closely with them to apply pressure on social media platforms to act against manipulative content. This will ensure continuous and coordinated global support in combating disinformation.