

THE RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION NETWORK IN MOLDOVA: ANATOMY OF A SOCIAL MEDIA OPERATION

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1. Executive Summary

In the context of the parliamentary elections scheduled for 28 September in the Republic of Moldova, the Kremlin has activated an extensive propaganda machinery across YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and Threads, with the objective of influencing public opinion and shaping the electoral outcome. The “WatchDog.MD” community has identified a network of 910 accounts across these platforms, which disseminate Russian propaganda narratives, attack the European Union, Moldova’s European integration process, democratic institutions, and pro-European leaders in Chisinau.

The network includes:

- TikTok - **392 accounts**;
- YouTube - **51 accounts**;
- Instagram - **137 accounts**;
- Facebook - **290 accounts și 10 pages**;
- Threads - **30 pages**.

The identified network includes:

- **512 sock puppet accounts** (individuals acting in a coordinated manner under false identities used for deceptive purposes);
- **329 inauthentic accounts** (cyborgs, mixing automated and human activity);
- **58 bots**;
- **10 Facebook pages**.

At the same time, the propaganda network played a role in amplifying the manipulative messages of pro-Russian politicians and parties in Moldova. Thus, among the most cited politicians within the network were:

- **Victoria Furtuna** - former anti-corruption prosecutor, sanctioned by the EU for attempts to destabilize Moldova;
- **George Simion** - leader of the extremist AUR party in Romania;
- **Eugenia Gutul** - governor of Gagauzia, sanctioned by the EU and US for destabilization attempts;
- **Ilan Shor** - fugitive oligarch based in Moscow, sanctioned internationally for destabilization efforts;
- **Calin Georgescu** - former Romanian presidential candidate, known for conspiracy theories and Kremlin-linked affiliations;
- **Ion Ceban** - Mayor of Chisinau, supported by the FSB during the 2019 mayoral election, banned from the Schengen Area as a national security threat to Romania.

A special role within the network is held by the Orthodox Church of Moldova (Metropolis of Moldova), affiliated with the Russian Patriarchate. The propaganda network exploited the Church’s image to disseminate messages opposing European values and the LGBT community. The clerical figure most



promoted by the network was the Bishop of Balti and Falesti, Marchel, known for his pro-Kremlin stance and support for pro-Russian politicians.

The propaganda network also made extensive use of artificially generated videos and images. In the case of Victoria Furtuna, the network produced a series of clips featuring avatars intended to convey support for the former anti-corruption prosecutor and the party she leads. The aim of such clips is to create the impression that Furtuna enjoys popular backing among citizens.

The 910 accounts identified so far represent only a segment of a much larger network, potentially numbering in the tens of thousands of entities used for similar operations in other European countries, including Romania. This network poses a direct threat to the informational security of the Republic of Moldova and the integrity of the September 28 electoral process. The “WatchDog.MD” community intends to report the entire network to META, TikTok, and YouTube platforms, which have the responsibility to act swiftly and effectively block digital tools used by sanctioned individuals and organizations engaged in destabilizing Moldova.

2. Introduction

For many years, Russia has used social media to influence elections in democratic states with the goal of destabilization, or, in the case of post-Soviet countries such as the Republic of Moldova, to bring them under control.

Ahead of the parliamentary elections on 28 September, the Russian Federation reactivated its propaganda machinery across social networks. Through these platforms, Russia began to actively promote its proxies in Moldova, following the model of Calin Georgescu during the 2024 Romanian presidential elections. At the same time, online platforms are used to discredit the current pro-European government led by Maia Sandu and Moldova’s process of European integration.

By promoting pro-Russian candidates, the Kremlin seeks to install a pro-Russian government in Chisinau that will halt Moldova’s integration process. In parallel, discrediting the EU and the European path aims to dampen public backlash against antidemocratic policies that a future pro-Russian government might implement, following the Georgian model.



3. The Network

Following Calin Georgescu's model in Romania, the Kremlin created in Moldova a vast network of accounts and pages to promote pro-Russian parties in the 28 September elections. These accounts amplify one another's content and that of Kremlin-affiliated politicians, boosting their visibility while discrediting Moldova's European course.

[The Moldovan police](#) reported that it identified on TikTok an extensive network of accounts distributing thousands of false videos. The purpose of these campaigns is to *'manipulate public opinion in the context of the September elections and Russia's war against Ukraine'*. Authorities report that new accounts are created daily to spread manipulative content, with cases continuously referred to competent institutions.

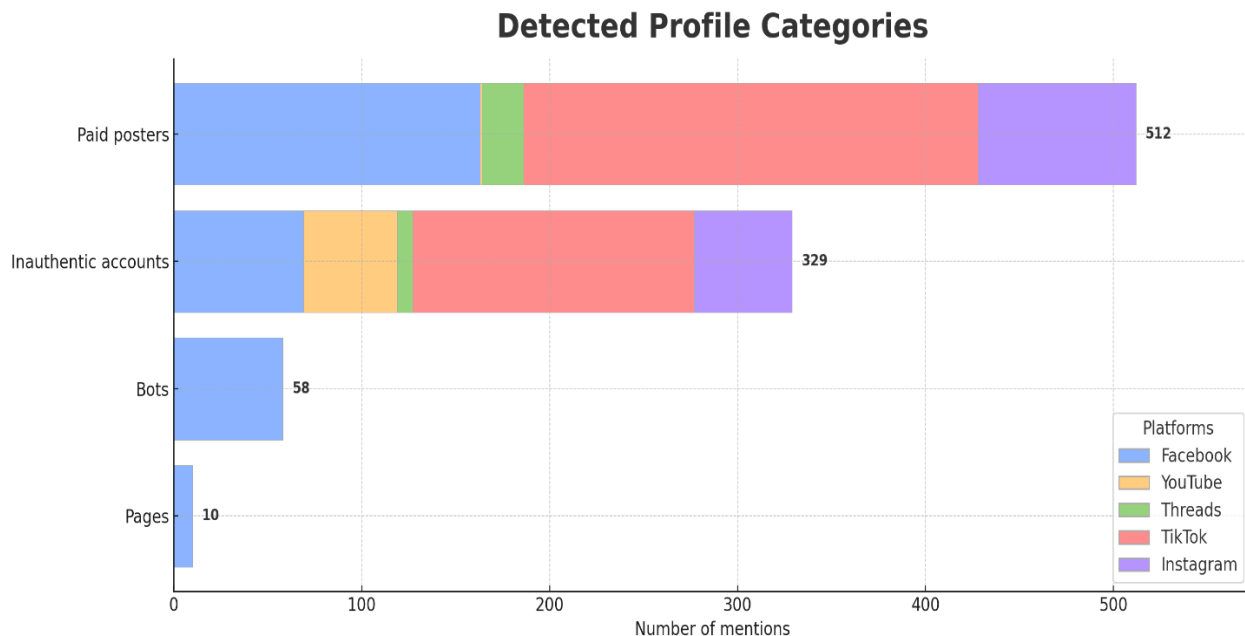
WatchDog.MD identified a network of 910 accounts/pages across TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Threads that promote Russian propaganda narratives and Moscow's candidates in the upcoming elections. This confirms that Russia has built a large-scale disinformation network on Moldova's most popular platforms to sway public opinion.

Thus, on the following platforms we have identified:

- TikTok - **392 accounts**;
- YouTube - **51 accounts**;
- Instagram - **137 accounts**;
- Facebook - **290 accounts și 10 pages**;
- Threads - **30 de accounts**.

Of the 910 accounts:

- **512 sockpuppet accounts** (individuals who hide their true identity but publish altered content, or share external links and material from other profiles.);
- **329 inauthentic accounts** (profiles that share only unaltered content, without posting external links or redistributing material from other accounts);
- **58 bots** (fake, automated accounts that post or comment in large volumes with identical or near-identical messages);
- **10 pages** (used to publish and sponsor propaganda materials or content praising pro-Russian parties).



In most cases, these accounts are managed by real individuals, known as “postaci”(sockpuppets) who modify content to avoid detection by digital platforms as part of an inauthentic campaign promoting a candidate or party. While the majority of these operators are active on only one platform, there are also individuals who maintain accounts across multiple platforms to disseminate their content more widely.

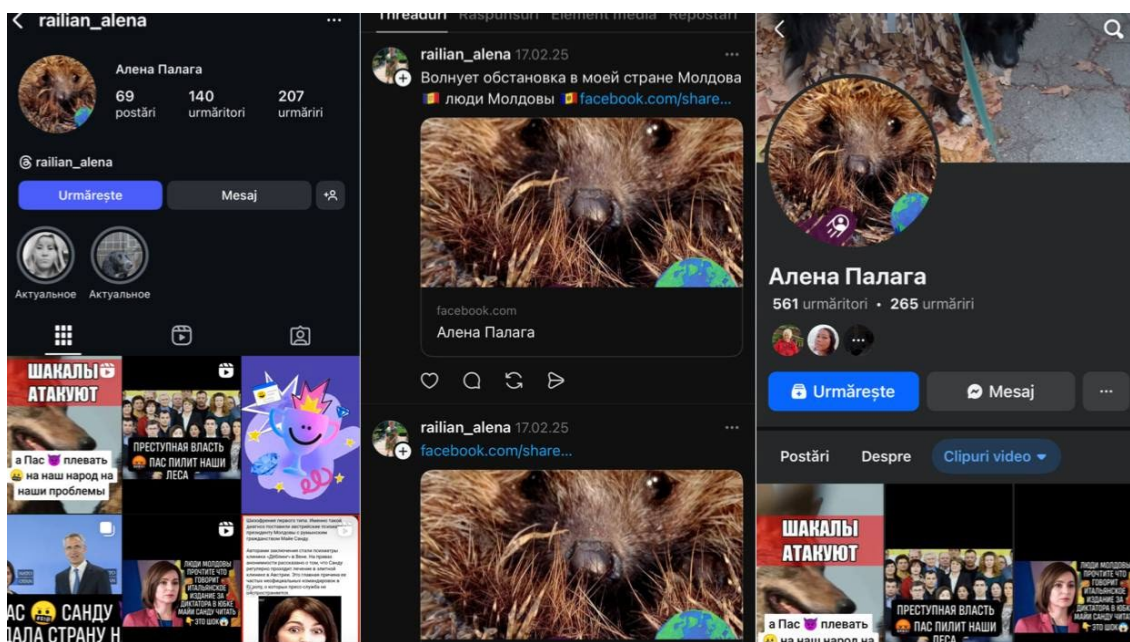


Photo: Operator Railean Alena maintains accounts on Instagram, Threads, and Facebook, where she posts and shares propagandistic content.

The fact that most accounts are managed by real individuals suggests that their communication may follow the model of the [Calin Georgescu group](#). His operators received materials for distribution via thematic groups on Telegram.

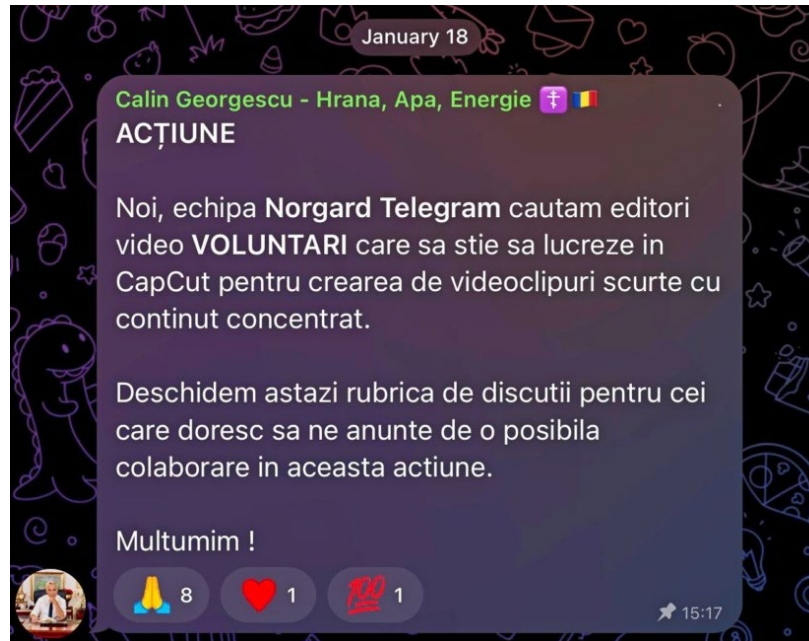


Photo: The Telegram channel “Calin Georgescu - Food, Water, Energy” shares an announcement seeking volunteers to edit long videos of candidate Georgescu into shorter clips for later distribution on social media. Source: [G4Media](#).

In the Republic of Moldova, such a scheme has been carried out by the fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor since 2022. Initially, activists were used to comment on sponsored posts by Shor through anonymous pages.

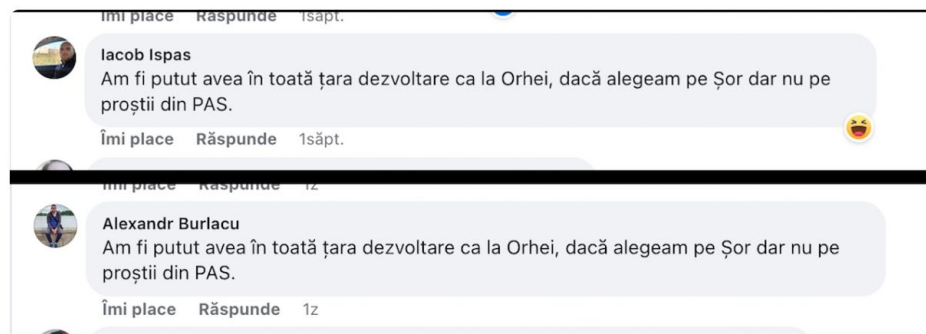


Photo: Fake accounts posting praise for Ilan Shor and criticism of the PAS government. Source: [ZDG.MD](#)

An investigation by [Ziarului de Gardă](#), based on information from a phone that belonged to the president of Orhei district, Dinu Turcanu, revealed that in one of the party members’ chats, a document titled “Организация диванных войск Оргеева”, translated as “*The Couch Troops Organization of Orhei*” had been attached. In the same chat, it was mentioned that the document contained “*the list of those who comment online*”.

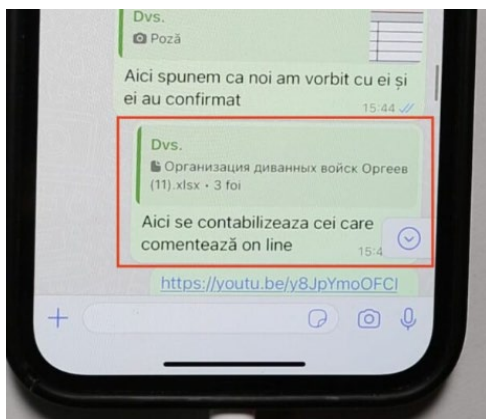


Photo: Screenshot from a chat of Shor group members discussing those who “comment online”.

Source: [ZDG.MD](https://www.zdg.md)

During the presidential elections and the referendum on European integration in the fall of 2024, the Shor criminal group managed its online commenters through Telegram bots linked to the [„Eurasia” organization](https://eurasia.org/), which is directed from Moscow by the fugitive oligarch and the Russian secret services.

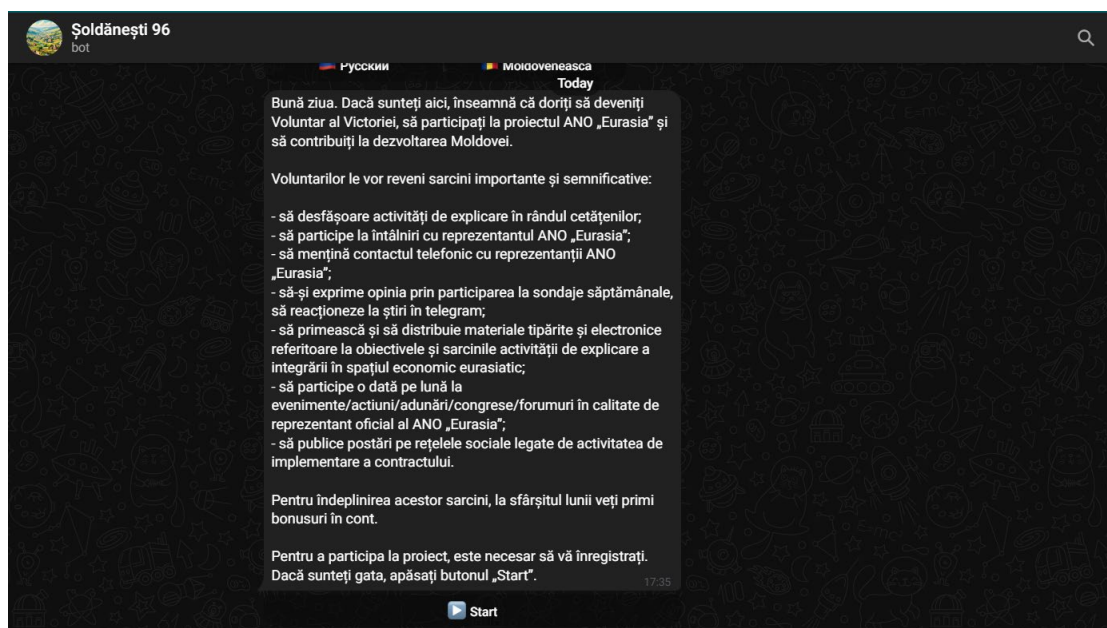


Photo: One of the bots from the Eurasia organization, responsible for the Soldanesti district, showing the tasks assigned to the future activist. One of the tasks requires the activist to publish social media posts that will be disseminated through the bot.

In total, the Eurasia organization operated **120 bots** across all districts of the Republic of Moldova. The activity of these bots [was halted](#) within Moldova by the Telegram platform following a request from the National Investigation Inspectorate in Chisinau.

To attract even more followers, some inauthentic accounts create Facebook groups where the network's bots distribute propaganda content. These groups are sponsored through ads without disclaimers, and the posts are written in neutral language to attract new members. Overall, the “WatchDog.MD” community identified **eight such groups**, managed by inauthentic accounts, in which **dozens of bots** post propagandistic content in support of pro-Russian candidates in the presidential elections. Beyond the groups created by the propaganda network, sockpuppet accounts and inauthentic profiles distribute manipulative content across all Moldovan groups and diaspora-related groups, flooding the information space.

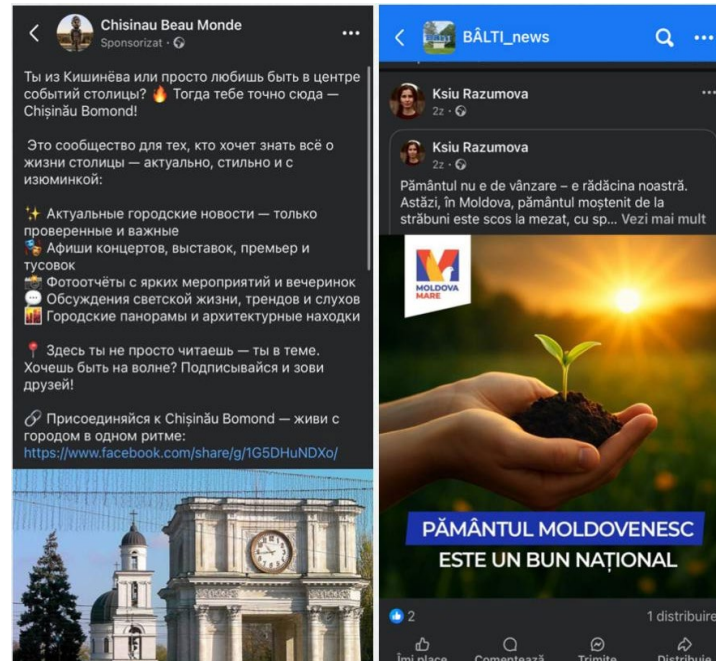


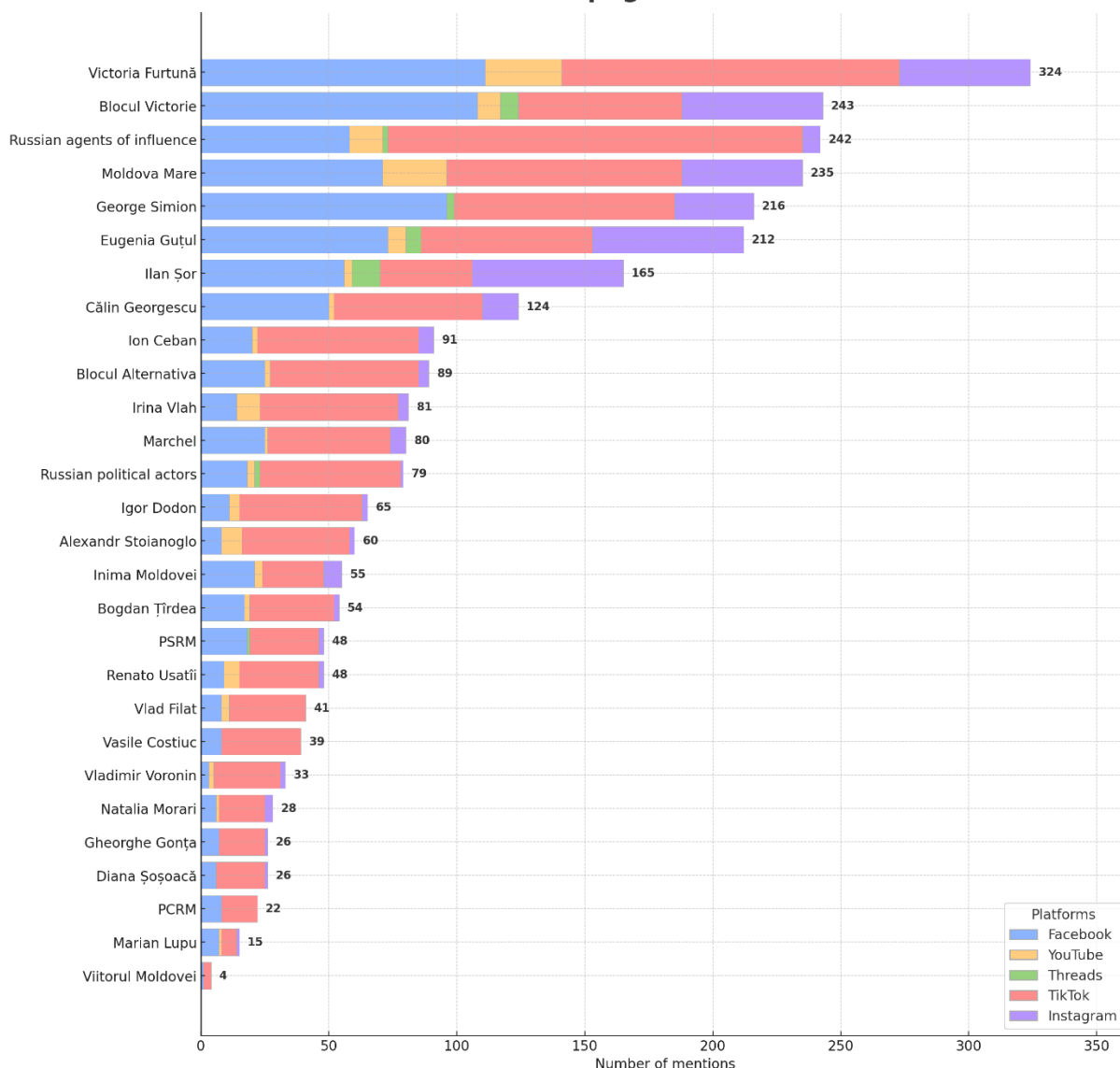
Photo: The “Chisinau Beau Monde” page sponsored a neutral-looking ad inviting users to join a group with the same name. In reality, the link led to a fake group where propaganda materials or content supporting pro-Russian politicians were posted.

4. Disinformation Campaigns

The Russian propaganda network in the Republic of Moldova focuses on discrediting the country's European integration path, the European Union, democratic processes, and President Maia Sandu. Toxic messages are spread through text posts, images, and videos either generated by artificial intelligence or taken from pro-Russian politicians in Moldova. Some accounts are used exclusively to promote the messages of specific pro-Russian politicians in the country. Amplifying the toxic narratives of Kremlin-aligned politicians aims to boost their image among both the conservative center and left-leaning segments of the electorate.

Analysis of the distributed content revealed that the politicians most heavily featured by the Russian propaganda network were: Victoria Furtuna, George Simion, Eugenia Gutul, Ilan Shor, Calin Georgescu, and Ion Ceban.

Distribution of Mentions about Pro-Russian Actors in the Russian Propaganda Network in Moldova



Campaign for Victoria Furtuna and Moldova Mare

Former anti-corruption prosecutor [Victoria Furtuna](#), affiliated with the Shor criminal group, was mentioned by more than 324 accounts within the Russian propaganda network. Furtuna is under investigation by the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office for allegedly disclosing information from cases handled by the institution. During the presidential elections, the Shor criminal group [arranged meetings for Furtuna with network activists](#), who [were encouraged](#) to vote for the former anti-corruption prosecutor on election day.

Victoria Furtuna was promoted by two types of accounts:

- those that post exclusively about her and her party, “Moldova Mare”;
- accounts that share the toxic messages of the pro-Russian opposition about the EU, European integration, democratic values, and Maia Sandu.

The content promoting Victoria Furtuna and the “Moldova Mare” Party could be identified on platforms thanks to the hashtags used in the descriptions. This made it possible to expose not only the network that promoted Victoria Furtuna directly, but also other accounts pushing pro-Russian politicians with the same toxic narratives. On YouTube, all anonymous accounts that promoted Victoria Furtuna and the “Moldova Mare” Party were deleted.



Photo: Victoria Furtuna's speech at the “Make Europe Great Again” conference in Chisinau, attended by supporters of the Kremlin regime from Moldova and [Western countries](#), shared on Instagram by three online commenters.

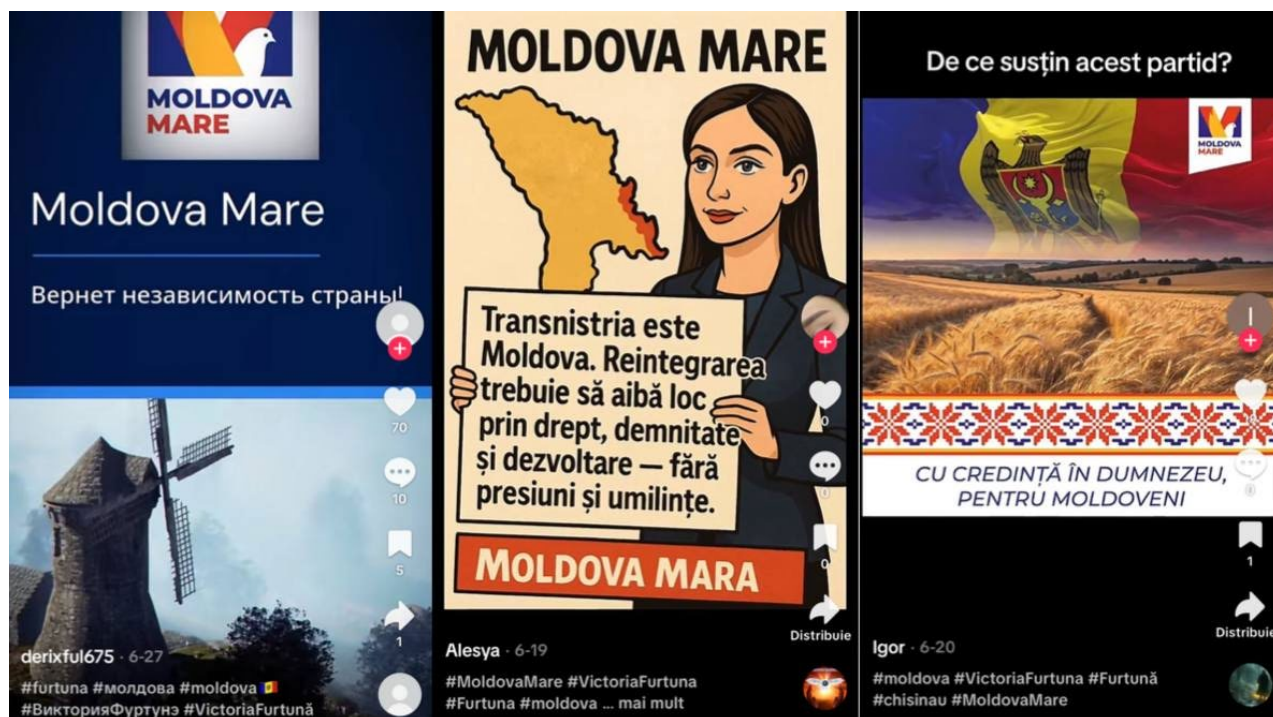


Photo: The “Moldova Mare” Party, led by Victoria Furtuna, promoted on TikTok by three sock puppet accounts.

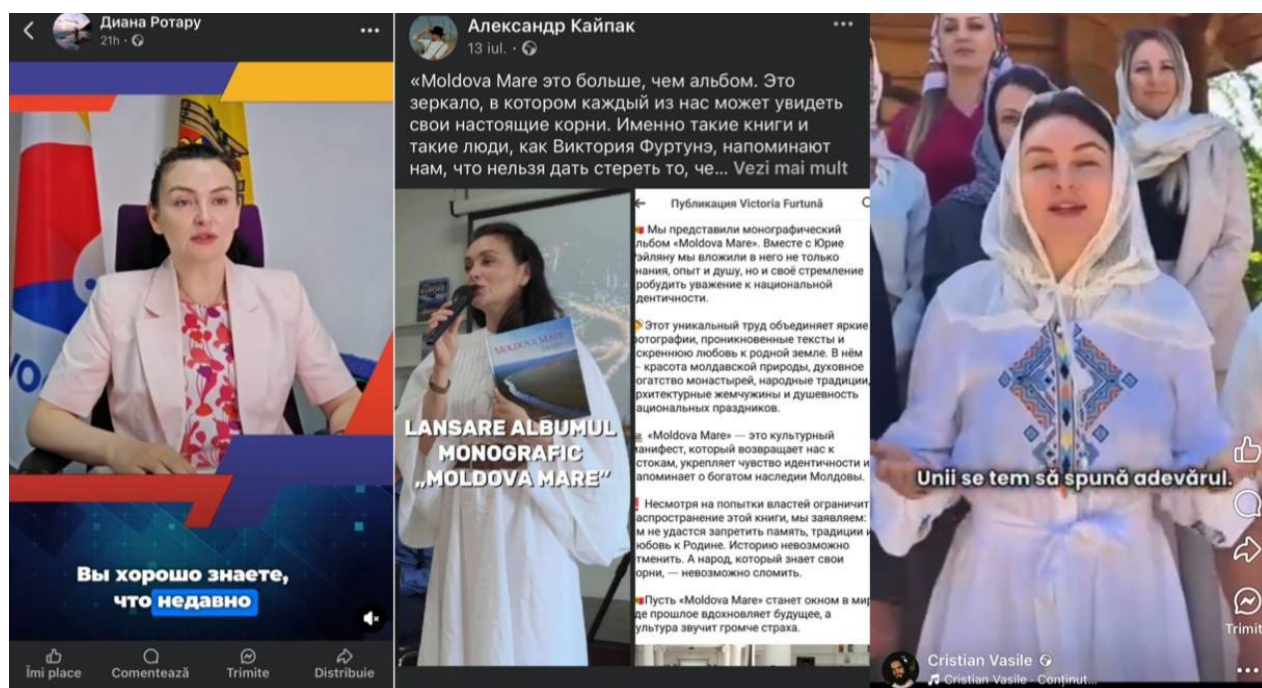


Photo: The “Moldova Mare” Party, led by Victoria Furtuna, promoted on Facebook by three sock puppet accounts.

To create the appearance of popular support for Victoria Furtuna, the accounts promoting her use AI-generated videos created with the *VEED* app. In these videos, the generated characters urge citizens to support Furtuna and the “Moldova Mare” Party, spreading falsehoods about the EU, Maia Sandu, and the democratic processes in the Republic of Moldova.

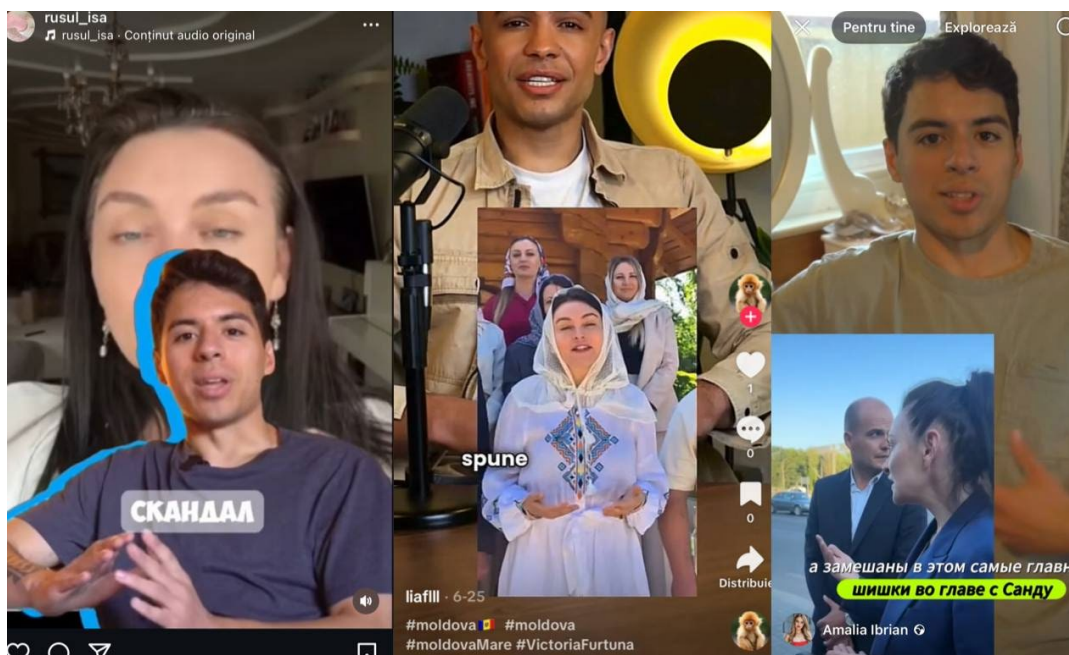


Photo: Videos featuring AI-generated avatars created with the VEED app, promoting Victoria Furtuna and the “Moldova Mare” Party.

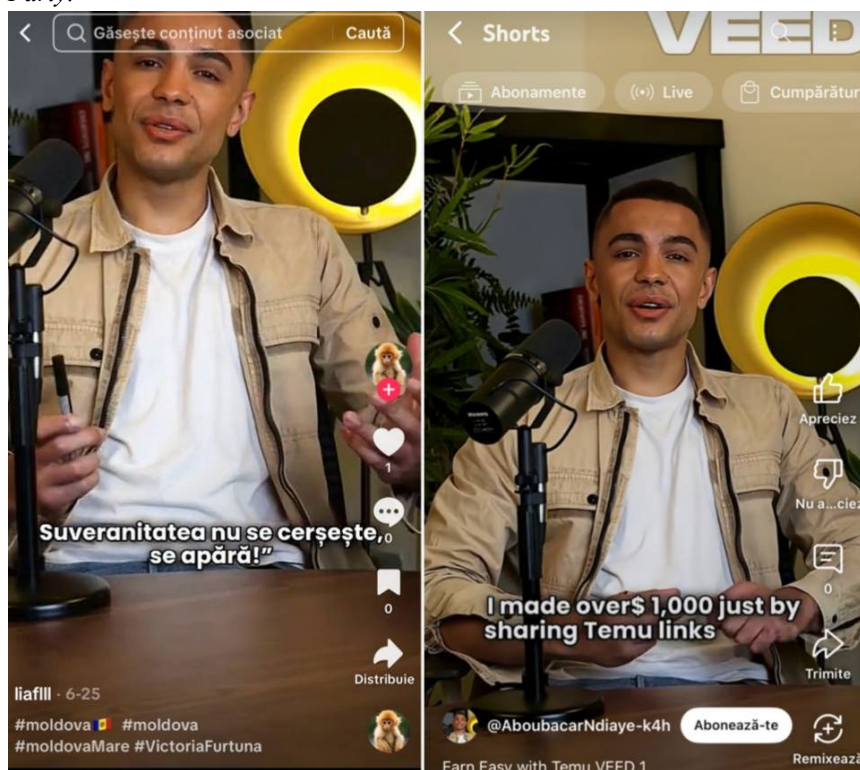


Photo: The AI avatar used to promote Victoria Furtuna and the “Moldova Mare” Party, identified in a test video on YouTube that appeared to promote the Chinese platform Temu. In the top-right corner, the VEED app logo can be seen, which is absent from the first video, indicating that the video was edited.



Campaign for Calin Georgescu and George Simion

The rejection of [Calin Georgescu](#) candidacy in the Romanian presidential elections was one of the events widely covered by the Russian propaganda network on social media platforms in the Republic of Moldova. Accounts that previously promoted only local politicians suddenly became active, spreading false claims that “*democratic processes are being violated in Romania and elections are being prepared for fraud*” and that “*parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova will be rigged following the Romanian model*”.

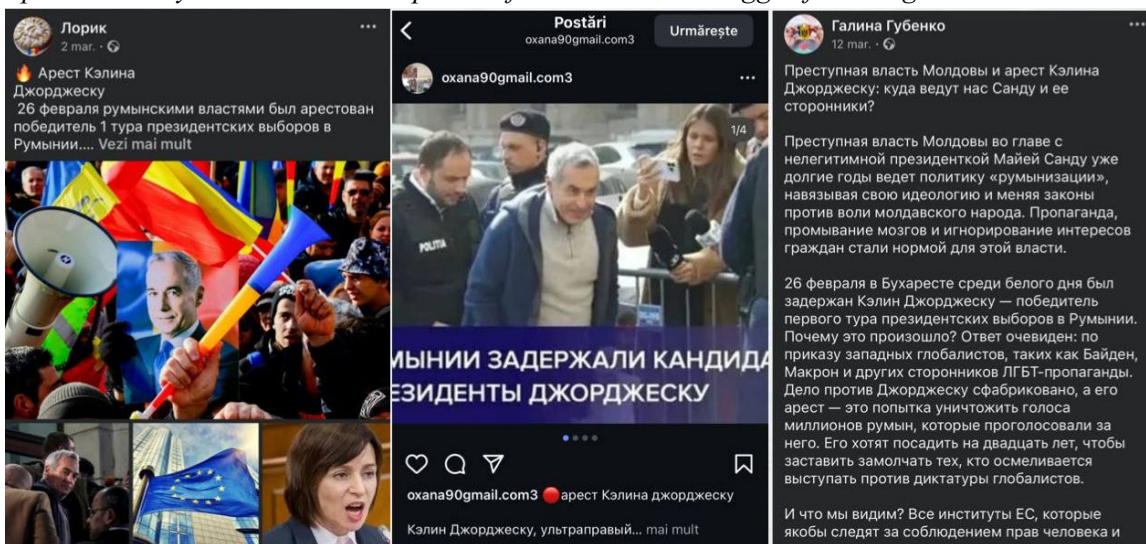


Photo: Posts supporting Calin Georgescu after [he was detained by authorities](#) in Bucharest for actions against the constitutional order, public incitement, and false statements related to campaign financing.

At the same time, messages claiming that elections in Romania have been rigged and that Georgescu's exclusion from the race was illegal were also promoted by pro-Russian politicians in Chisinau.

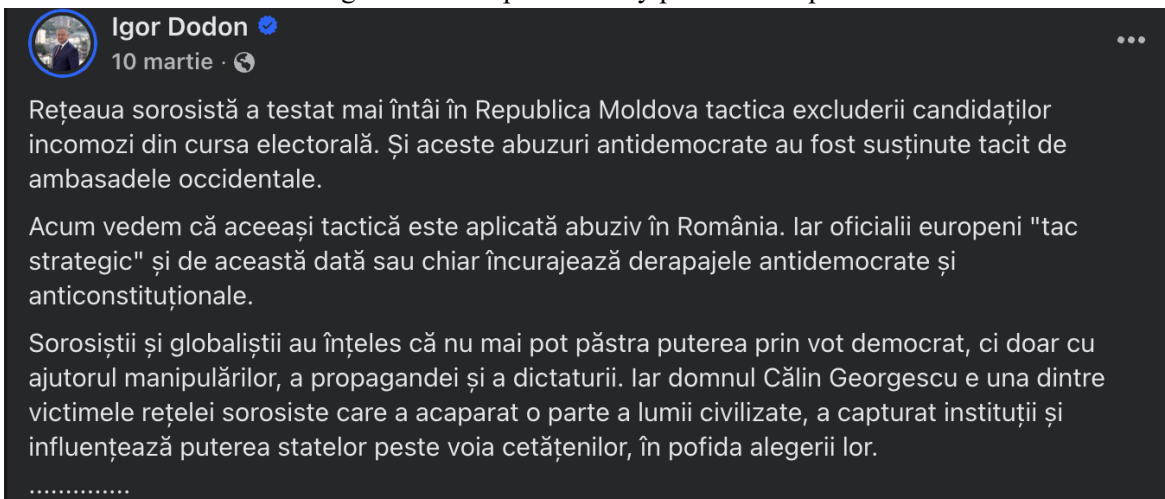


Photo: The leader of the Socialists in Moldova, Igor Dodon, condemns the exclusion of Calin Georgescu from the Romanian presidential race. As with the propaganda network, Dodon promotes the false claim that parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova will be rigged following the Romanian model.

After George Simion's victory in the first round of the presidential elections on May 5, 2025, the Russian propaganda network began heavily promoting him in the Republic of Moldova. Moscow sought to popularize the extremist-sovereigntist movement in Moldova, following the successful model from Romania.

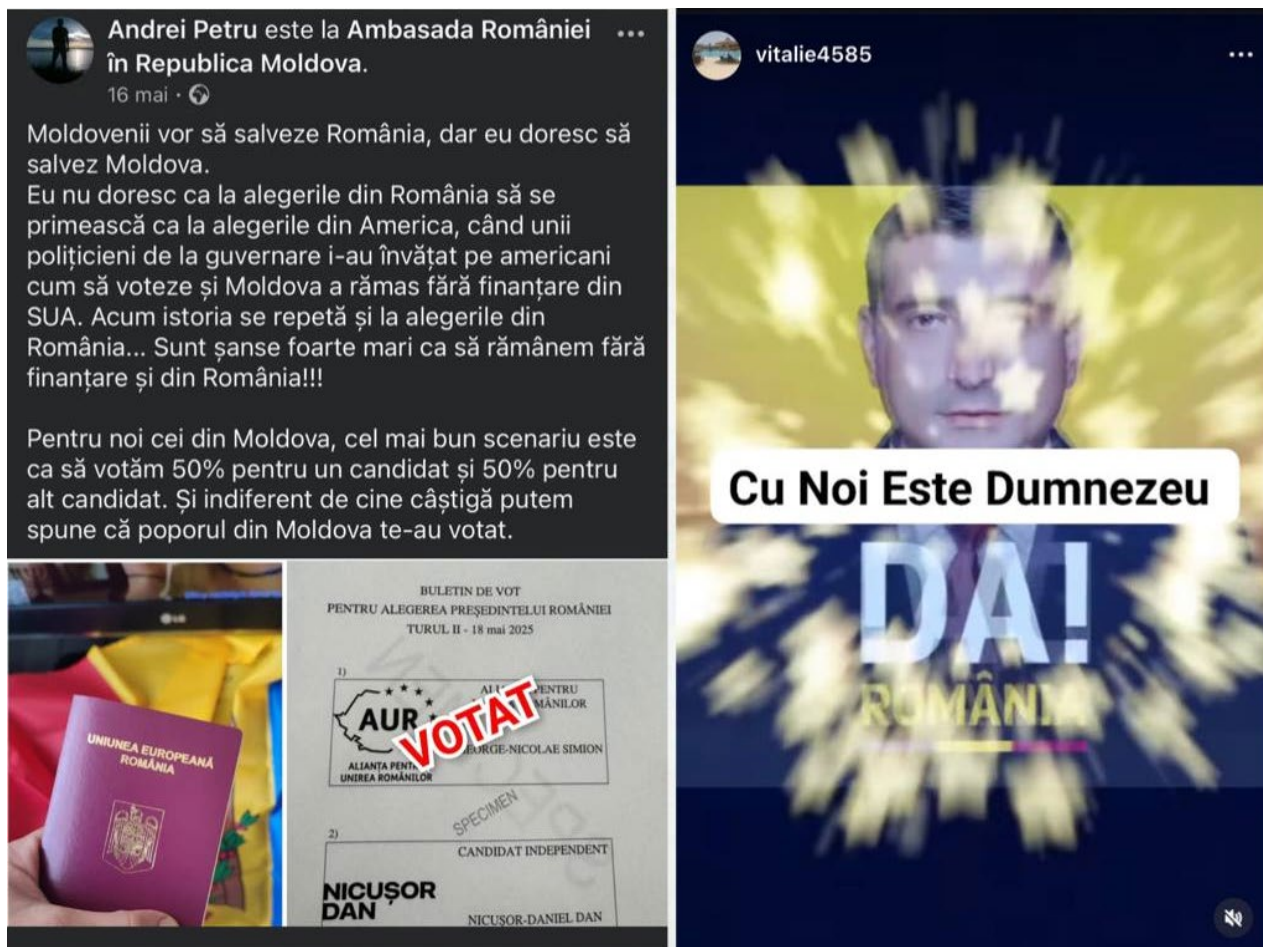


Photo: Sockpuppet accounts ("Postaci") urged Moldovans to vote for George Simion in the second round of the Romanian presidential elections. Some spread the fear that Moldova would lose Romania's financial support if Simion became president and Moldovans voted against him.

Simion's defeat in the second round fuelled the false claim that *"the election was rigged with the help of Maia Sandu and the Moldovan diaspora"*. This cultivated feelings of hostility toward the Republic of Moldova, its authorities, and the Moldovan diaspora with Romanian citizenship. As a result, George Simion [issued a statement](#) urging Moldovan citizens to vote in parliamentary elections against Maia Sandu and PAS. His message was amplified in Moldova by the Russian propaganda network. In effect, Simion revealed the Russian plan to gather 100,000 diaspora votes against Maia Sandu and the PAS government votes that could potentially tip the balance of the elections.

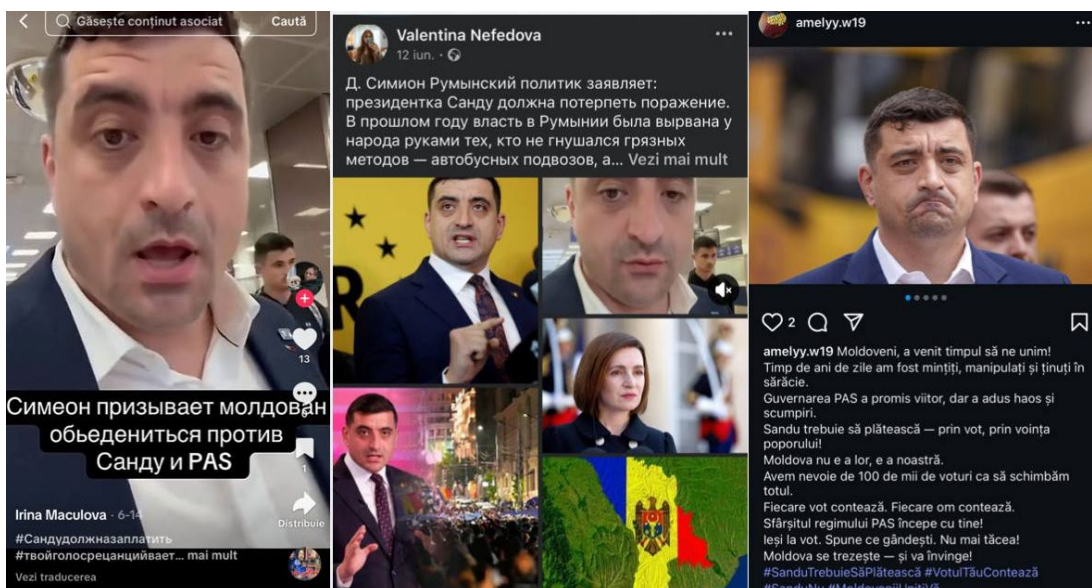


Photo: Sockpuppet accounts in the network are distributing the message of extremist George Simion, in which he urges Moldovans to vote in the September 28 parliamentary elections against Maia Sandu and the PAS government.

At the same time, Romania is being discredited in the Republic of Moldova. The main false claim promoted is that “Romania is interfering in Moldova’s elections because Nicusor Dan needs to repay Maia Sandu for her support in the Romanian presidential elections”. This aims to mobilize the pro-Russian electorate, which believes the false narrative that Romania seeks to annex the Republic of Moldova, while also intensifying disputes between Romanians and Moldovans over alleged interference in each country’s internal affairs.



Photo: The false claim that Romania is interfering in the elections in the Republic of Moldova, promoted across multiple platforms of the propaganda network.

Campaign for Alexandr Stoianoglo during the 2024 Presidential Elections

During the 2024 presidential elections, the propaganda network, which had only recently established its infrastructure, began actively promoting pro-Russian candidates such as Irina Vlah and Alexandr Stoianoglo.



Photo: Video clips were used to promote these candidates for the presidency of the Republic of Moldova.

Moscow's stake in the presidential elections was the candidate Alexandr Stoianoglo. In this context, multiple accounts on YouTube and TikTok promoted content favorable to Stoianoglo. In one of the [analyzed clips](#), Stoianoglo was portrayed as “the president who will not allow Moldova to become involved in the war between Russia and the West”. In other clips, the Russian propaganda message was promoted that “the Moldovan diaspora in the West should not decide the country's fate”.



Photo: Video clips promoting Alexandr Stoianoglo on TikTok and YouTube during the presidential election campaign.

After Stoianoglo's defeat in the second round of the presidential elections, Russian propaganda actively promoted false claims such as "Maia Sandu lost the elections within the country", "Maia Sandu is not a popular president", "The elections were rigged" and "Maia Sandu won the elections and the referendum thanks to the diaspora".



Photo: Video clips spreading false claims that the 2024 presidential elections "were rigged by President Maia Sandu".

The parallels with the messages following George Simion's defeat in the Romanian presidential elections which he also claimed were rigged, are evident. Additionally, this helps explain why George Simion is trying to take action within the Moldovan diaspora in the West to gather 100,000 votes against PAS and Maia Sandu.

Campaign for the organized Shor group

The fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor and the group he leads are also actively promoted by the Russian propaganda network on social media platforms. Similar to the case of Victoria Furtuna, the Shor criminal group is promoted by two types of accounts:

- Accounts that post only content about him and the group he leads.
- Accounts that post the toxic messages of the pro-Russian opposition regarding the EU, European integration, democratic values, and Maia Sandu.

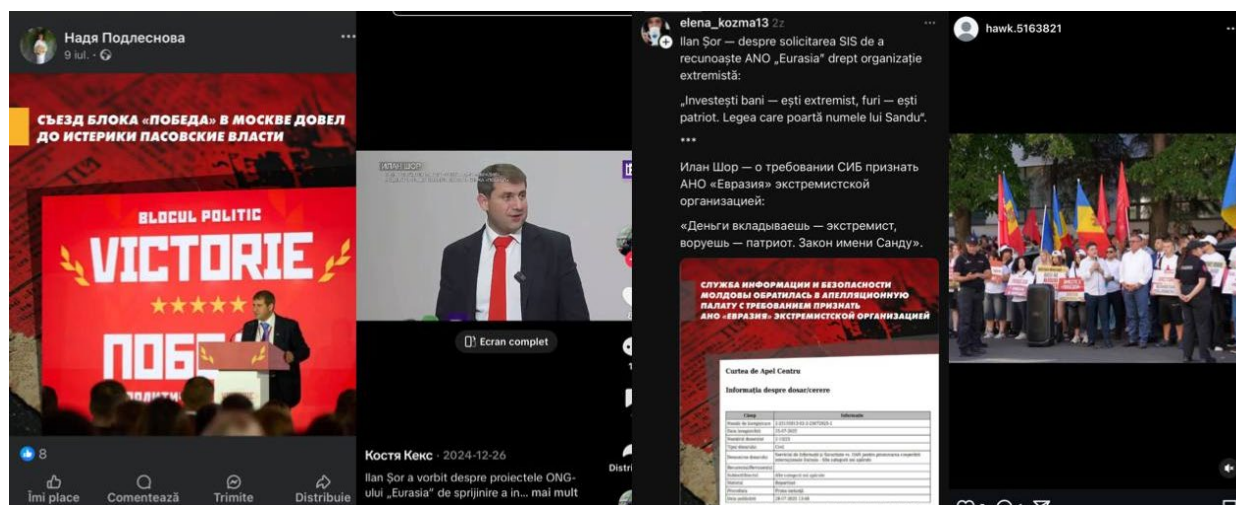


Photo: The Shor criminal group promoted by sockpuppets on Facebook, TikTok, Threads, and Instagram.

The Shor group openly promotes Russian propaganda narratives about the European Union, democratic processes in the Republic of Moldova, and President Maia Sandu. The messages from this group are the most toxic compared to other pro-Russian actors in Moldova. Their purpose is to distract public attention from other political issues and to divert public discourse. At the same time, the manipulations launched by the Shor group aim to divide society, sow distrust in authorities, and generate fear of a potential war with the Russian Federation if citizens choose the pro-European option in parliamentary elections.

The topics most manipulated by the group led by Ilan Shor are related to:

- The trial of the governor of Gagauzia, Eugenia Gutul.
- The process of Moldova's accession to the EU.
- The situation in the energy sector.
- Moldova's relations with NATO.
- Moldova's relations with the Russian Federation.
- The closure of TV stations affiliated with the Shor group.

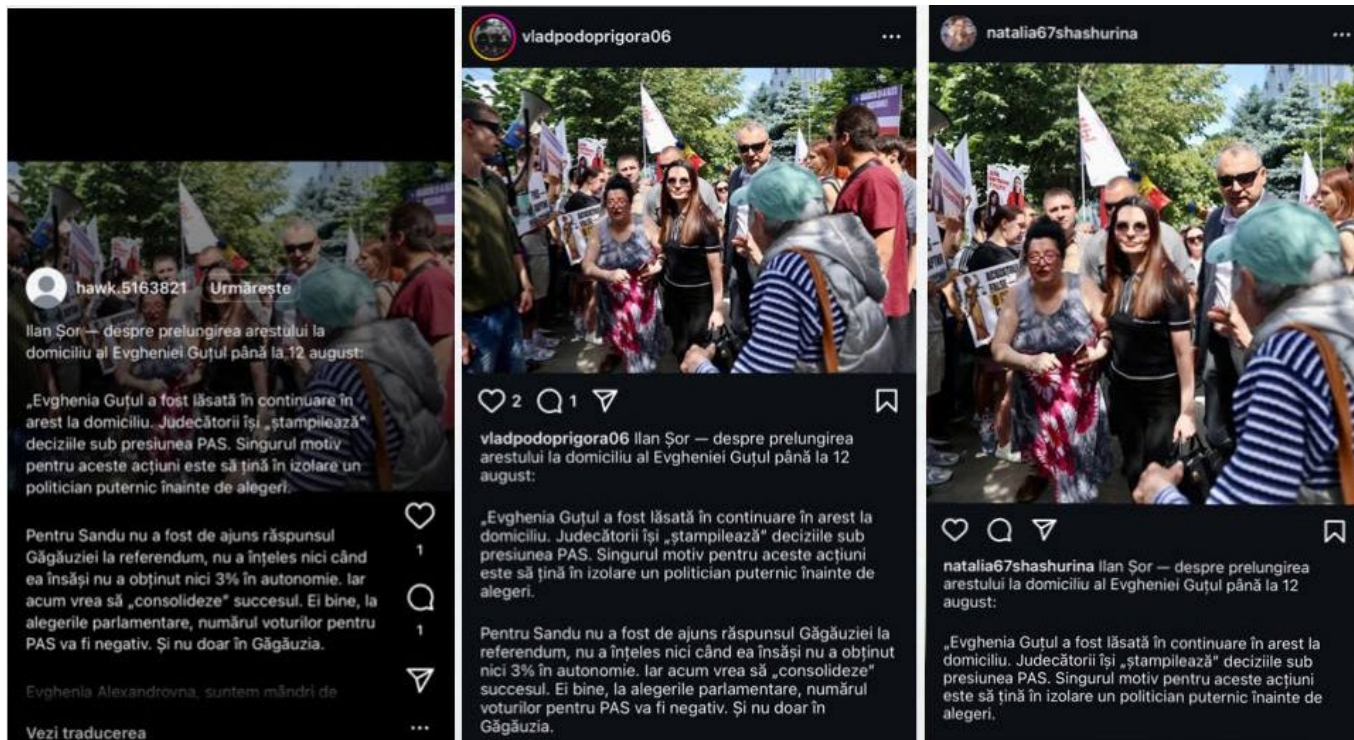


Photo: Inauthentic accounts on Instagram share Ilan Șor's post about the extension of Eugenia Gutul's arrest. The text is copied entirely from Ilan Șor's Telegram channel and has not been modified in any way.

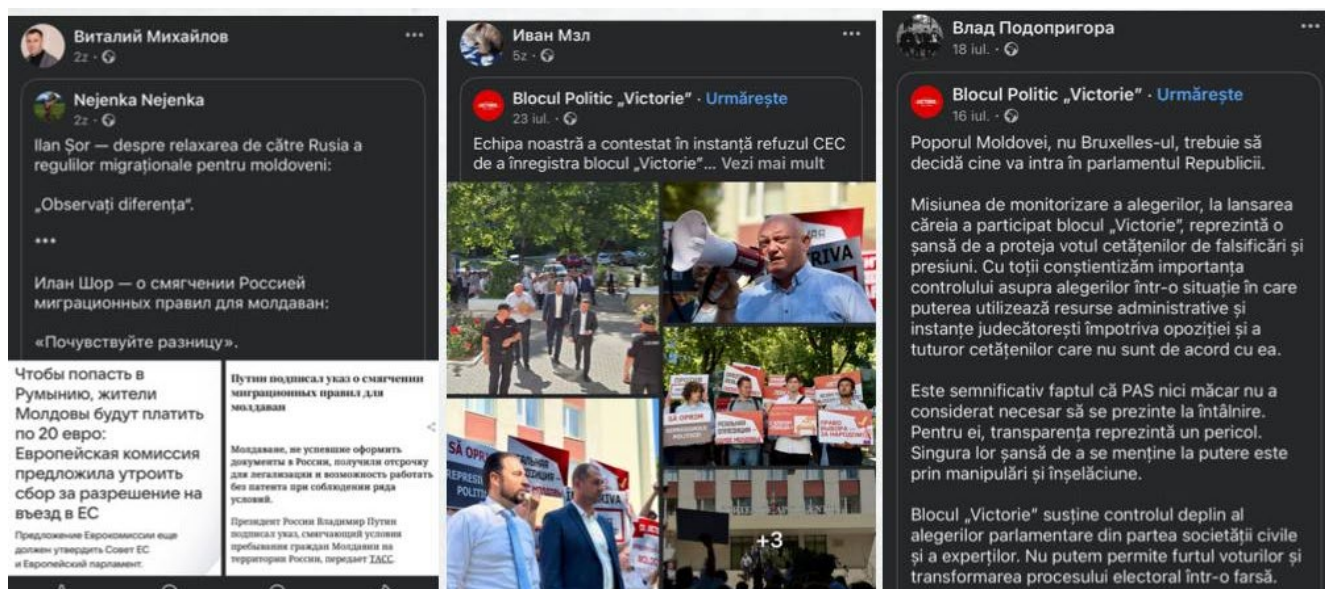


Photo: Sockpuppets distributing the texts of Ilan Șor's Telegram posts or the posts from the Victorie Bloc page, led by the fugitive oligarch from Moscow.

Anti-EU and Anti-Maia Sandu Messages from the So-Called Pro-Europeans (Amplified by the Russian Propaganda Network)

Another aspect of the Russian Federation's hybrid war against the Republic of Moldova involves the so-called pro-European politicians who, in fact, have ties to the Kremlin and oligarchic groups.

One of these political assets for the Russian Federation is the mayor of Chisinau, Ion Ceban, and the Alternativa Bloc, which includes former Prime Minister Ion Chicu, former Prosecutor General Alexandr Stoianoglo, and the former ideologue of the Voronin regime, Mark Tkaciuk. When Ceban or the Alternativa Bloc publicly criticize the PAS government and Maia Sandu, the Russian propaganda network picks up and amplifies their messages. The goal of promoting Ceban's and Alternativa Bloc's criticisms is to present pro-Europeans with a bait they may vote for in the parliamentary elections.



Photo: Clips and posts from anonymous pages distributing Ion Ceban's and the Alternativa Bloc's criticisms of the PAS government.

The peak of toxic message distribution from Ion Ceban occurred when the mayor "[*banned the LGBT community march in Chisinau*](#)". Although this decision was illegal, Ceban's message was massively picked up by the Russian propaganda network, portraying him as a defender of so-called traditional values.

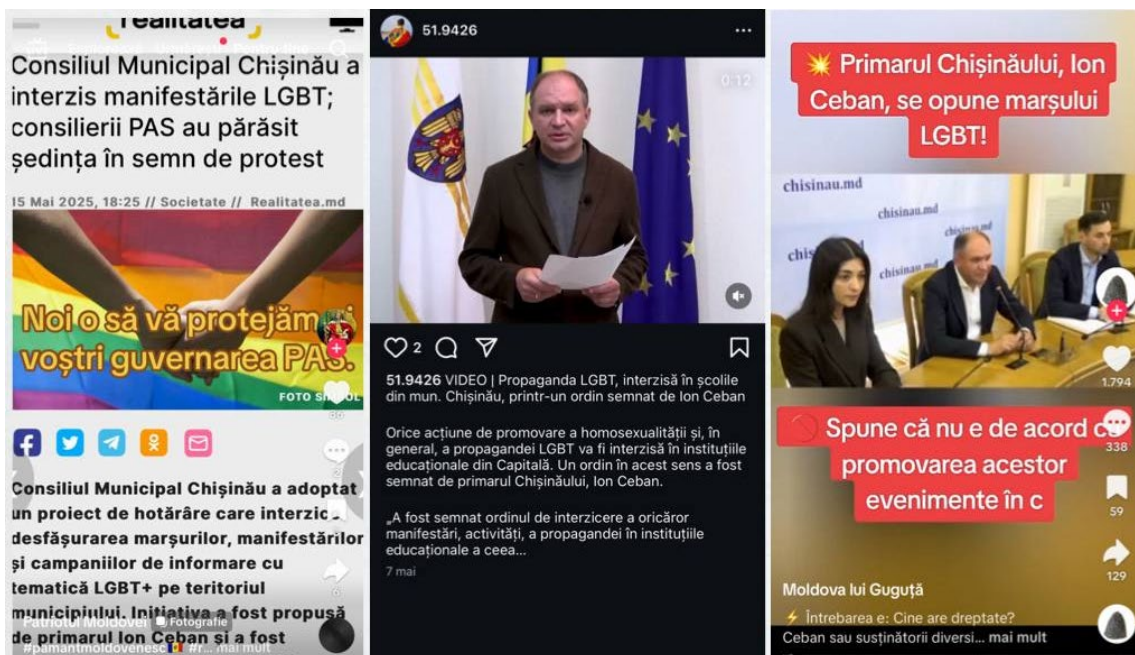


Photo: Ceban's message to ban the march and "LGBT propaganda in Chisinau schools" was widely distributed by the Russian propaganda network in Moldova.

Similar to the cases of Victoria Furtuna and the criminal Shor group, Ion Ceban and the Alternativa Bloc are promoted separately by a series of TikTok accounts that do not distribute other critical voices against PAS and Maia Sandu. Some video clips on these accounts are narrated in Russian by an artificial intelligence-generated voice. In the descriptions of these accounts, there is no mention of any affiliation with the Alternativa Bloc or any of its member parties.

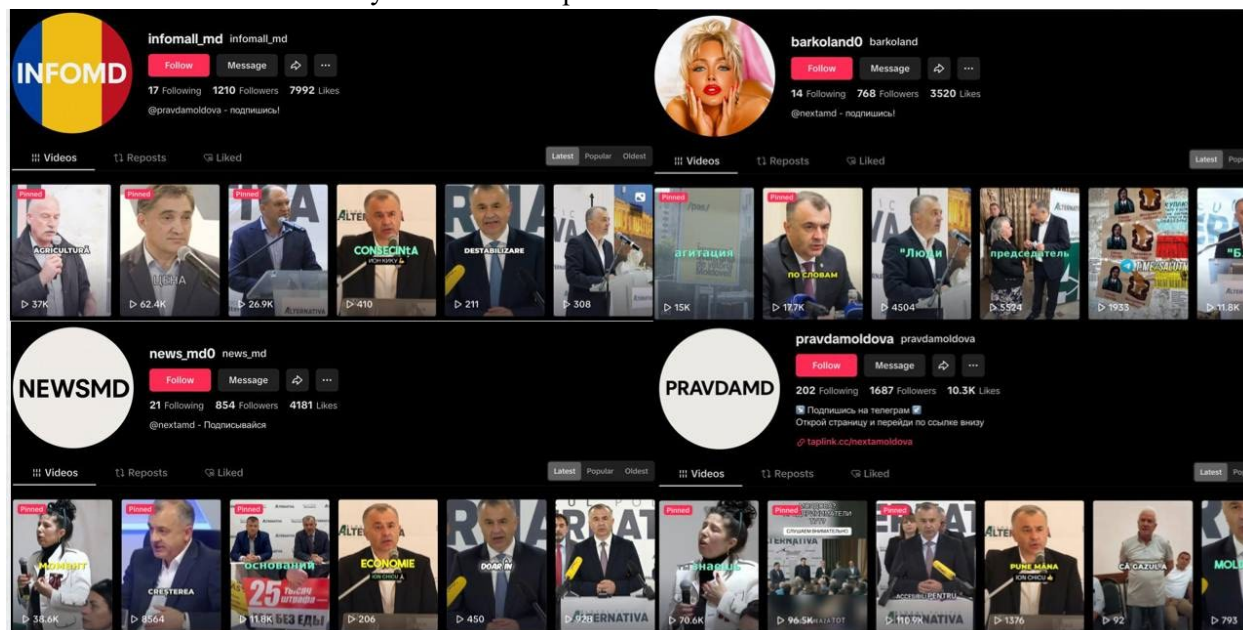


Photo: Anonymous TikTok accounts distributing video clips featuring the leaders of the Alternativa Bloc. The clips posted are identical across all detected accounts. In the descriptions, none of the accounts indicate any affiliation with the Alternativa Bloc or a connection to the anonymous portal Nexta.MD.

In addition to posts about the Alternativa Bloc and its leaders, some accounts directly share materials posted officially on the political formation's accounts and by its members. This allows multiple accounts to simultaneously distribute content created by members of the Alternativa Bloc, Ilan Shor's TV channels, humorous content, falsifications about Moldova's history, criticisms of Maia Sandu, and praise for Eugenia Gutul.

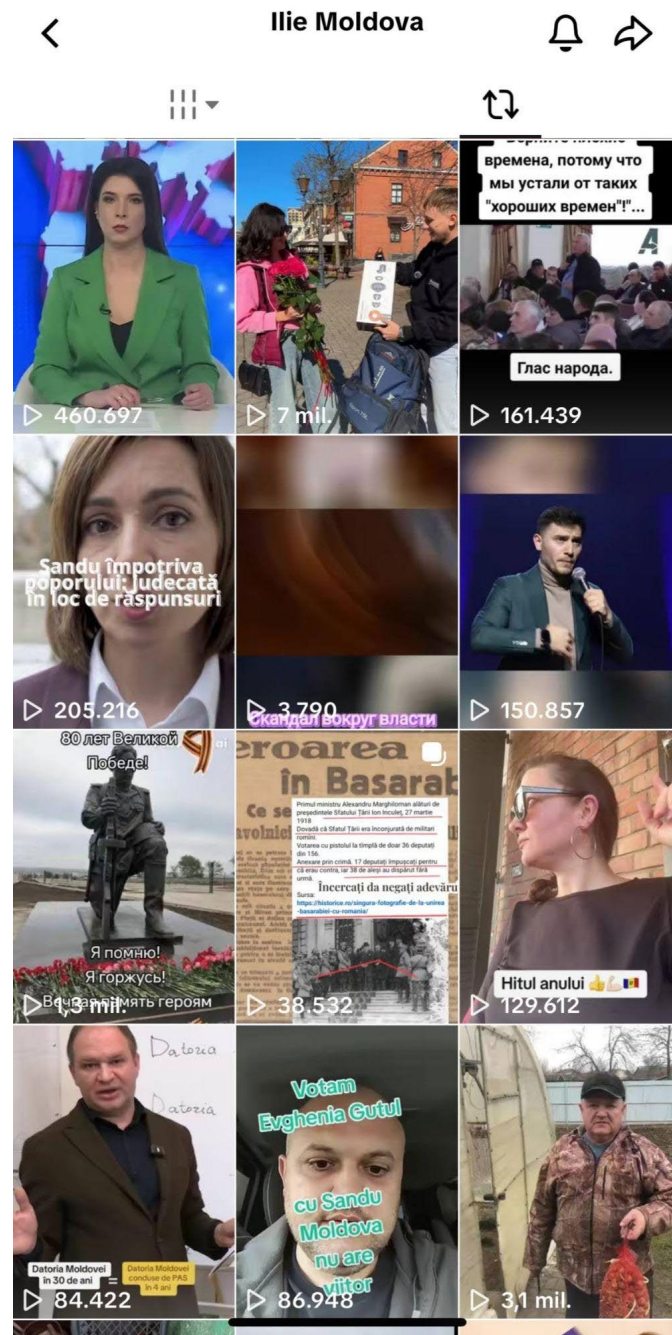


Photo: The account Ilie Moldova simultaneously resharing posts from Ion Ceban's account, humorous content, content falsifying Moldova's history during the Soviet era, and clips praising Eugenia Gutul.

Other so-called pro-Europeans amplified by the Russian propaganda network include, for example, the leader of the ,’ Democrația Acasă’ Party, affiliated with Romania’s AUR Party, and former Prime Minister Vlad Filat. Both played a role in spreading false narratives about [European](#) integration, Romanian elections, Moldova’s democratic processes, and criticisms of Maia Sandu.

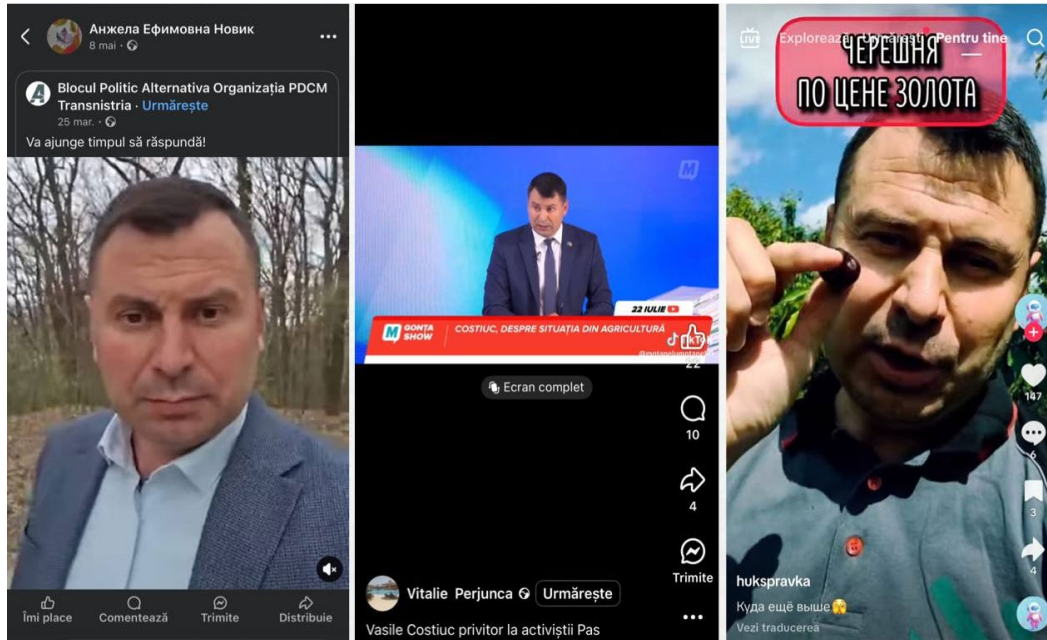


Photo: Clips of Vasile Costiuc distributed by the Russian propaganda network. In the first clip, Costiuc was shared by the Alternativa Bloc page covering the Transnistrian region.

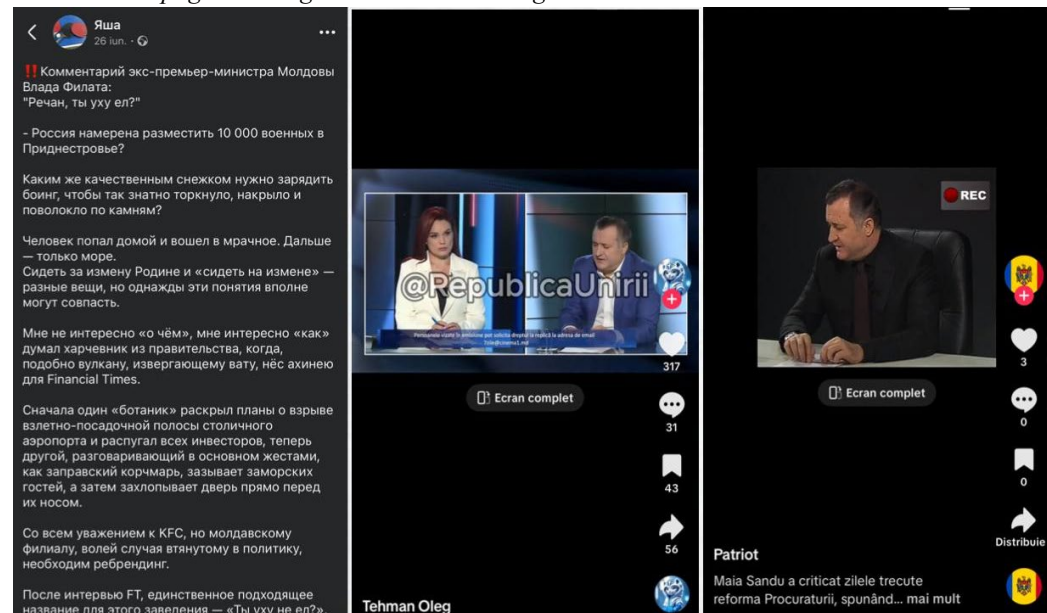


Photo: Posts and clips featuring Vlad Filat distributed by the Russian propaganda network on Facebook and TikTok.

The Role of the Orthodox Church in Disseminating Toxic Messages about European Values

During the 2024 presidential election and the European integration referendum campaign, the Orthodox Church in Moldova, affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate, was actively used by the Kremlin to influence the results of both votes. Beyond [acting as intermediaries](#) for transferring funds to the activists and parties of Ilan Shor, priests from the Metropolis of Moldova also served as local propagandists for pro-Russian and anti-EU narratives. Some priests affiliated with the Russian Patriarchate were caught by journalists spreading [anti-EU propaganda during religious](#) services.

A key propagandist for the Kremlin within the Metropolis of Moldova is Bishop Marchel of Balti and Falesti. He openly supported Igor Dodon in the [2016](#) and 2020 presidential elections and campaigned in [2024](#) for Victoria Furtuna. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Marchel actively promoted [false claims about the vaccine](#) and vaccination process.

Today, Marchel is used by the Russian propaganda network to promote false narratives that the Orthodox Church in Moldova is being persecuted by Maia Sandu and the PAS government.



Photo: A campaign supporting Marchel, organized by the Russian network, after [he missed](#) the flight to Tel Aviv on the eve of Easter. The bishop accused the government of obstructing him from bringing the Holy Fire to Moldova.

In addition to campaigns portraying the Orthodox Church as a victim, the Russian network distributed images on the day of the LGBT march suggesting that multiple parishioners were subjected to violence by police officers maintaining order, because they did not support the event. Russian propaganda framed the clashes as an attack by the government on Christian values and the traditional family.

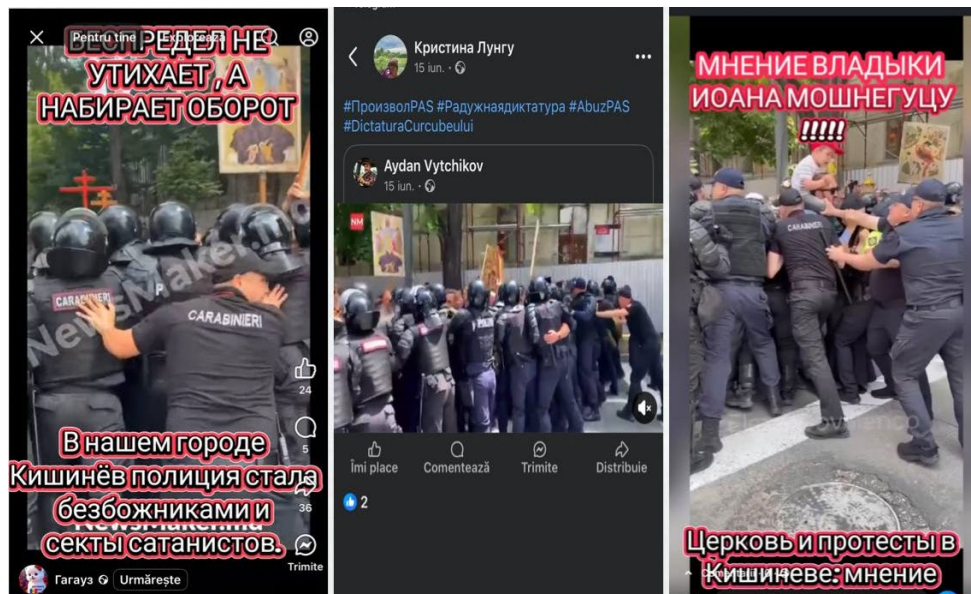


Photo: Network sockpuppets on Facebook share videos of clashes between police and parishioners of the Orthodox Church in Moldova during the LGBT community march. The captions claim that “the police have become part of a satanist sect” and are using force on PAS orders.

External Annexes of the Propaganda Network in the Republic of Moldova

To discredit the image of the Republic of Moldova abroad and promote pro-Russian candidates in the parliamentary elections, the Kremlin also uses annexes from other networks established at the European level, especially those in Romania connected to the AUR Party. These accounts spread false claims that Maia Sandu and Moldova allegedly manipulated the presidential elections in Romania, while simultaneously promoting political figures such as Victoria Furtuna and Vasile Costiuc.



Photo: Accounts within the AUR propaganda network distributing clips featuring blogger Sergiu Ungureanu and politicians Vasile Costiuc and Victoria Furtuna, accusing Maia Sandu of election fraud in Romania.

In the Russian propaganda network targeting Germany, Maia Sandu [was criticized](#) for “wearing expensive items while Moldovans live in poverty”. Another identified account [spread the false claim](#) that Moldova was preparing for war with Russia in Transnistria. According to the source, “specialists from the German army came to Chisinau to train the Moldovan army for a conflict with Russia”.



Photo: The first account spreads the false claim that “Maia Sandu wears expensive clothes while the people live in poverty.” The second account spreads the false claim that “the German army is preparing Moldova for a potential war with Russia in the Transnistrian region.”

These accounts primarily target the Moldovan diaspora in Europe, aiming to discredit Maia Sandu and spread the false narrative that Moldova is preparing for war with Russia, with the goal of discouraging Moldovans from voting for a pro-European government.



5. Conclusions

As Moldova approaches a pivotal election, the country is facing one of the most sophisticated disinformation campaigns orchestrated by the Russian Federation in recent years. Targeted between September 2024 and July 2025, these efforts aim to undermine Moldova's European path, discredit the European Union, weaken democratic institutions, and attack President Maia Sandu—all while promoting candidates and parties aligned with the Kremlin.

This campaign is neither spontaneous nor chaotic. It is an organized, coordinated, financed, and technologically adapted operation with a clear goal: to influence the results of the autumn elections and derail Moldova from its path toward EU accession.

Unlike last year's campaigns, when the Kremlin used only deepfakes of Maia Sandu, this year deepfakes of ordinary individuals promoting a Kremlin-favorable candidate have been employed. Currently, such examples have been identified only in the case of Victoria Furtuna, but their use for other Kremlin-affiliated candidates cannot be excluded.

Fear of a potential war with the Russian Federation in the Transnistrian region is being maximized by the identified network. Consequently, any visits by partner-state military personnel or joint exercises with NATO countries are interpreted by the propaganda network as preparations for war.

The involvement of the AUR propaganda network from Romania indicates that Russia has found an opening to worsen relations between Chisinau and Bucharest. The AUR network's role is to attack Moldovans and blame Maia Sandu for the deterioration of bilateral relations. In Chisinau, Igor Dodon, an open Russophobe, accuses Maia Sandu of *"ruining relations between two fraternal peoples"*.

Media coverage of so-called attacks on the Orthodox Church in Moldova by PAS and Maia Sandu aims to detach conservative voters from the current government and shift them toward the Electoral Patriotic Bloc led by Igor Dodon. Additionally, the Kremlin leverages religious sentiment through the Alternative Bloc led by Ion Ceban, portraying them as pro-European conservatives.

The Shor criminal group and Victoria Furtuna play the role of appearing as the most eccentric figures in this electoral campaign. Their purpose is to saturate the media space with scandals, while presenting the Alternative Bloc and Electoral Patriotic Bloc as more moderate to voters.

The 910 accounts identified so far represent only a segment of a much larger network, which could extend to tens of thousands of entities used for similar operations in other European states, including Romania, as demonstrated in the examples above.

The *"WatchDog.MD"* Community plans to report the entire network to META platforms, TikTok, and YouTube, which bear the responsibility to intervene promptly and effectively to block the digital tools used by individuals and organizations under international sanctions and involved in destabilizing the Republic of Moldova.



6. Methodology

Purpose of Monitoring

The purpose of this analysis was to identify the Russian propaganda network targeting the Republic of Moldova on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Threads, as well as to identify the disinformation narratives and pro-Russian politicians promoted in the campaign for the parliamentary elections on 28 September.

Objectives of Monitoring

Considering the stated purpose, the monitoring exercise had the following objectives:

- Identify accounts that promote and distribute manipulative content on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Threads;
- Classify the types of accounts used according to the definitions described in the methodology;
- Identify the political figures and topics the network aims to discredit;
- Analyze campaigns promoting Russian propaganda narratives by Kremlin-affiliated politicians;
- Compare the Moldovan network with the one in Romania during the 2024 presidential elections;
- Identify connections with the AUR party's propaganda network in Romania, as well as Russian propaganda networks in other EU member states.

Definitions

To classify the types of accounts used by the Russian propaganda network in Moldova, the following definitions were assigned:

- **Bots** - Fake, automated accounts that post or comment widely with identical or nearly identical messages. These accounts have been identified exclusively on the Facebook platform.
- **Inauthentic accounts** - Profiles that share posts from pro-Russian politicians or AI-generated/labeled clips. These profiles are not automated, and the content they post is not altered. In the U.S. Cyber Command methodology, they are referred to as "Cyborgs," i.e., real people using bots to counter comments on the false story.
- **Sockpuppet accounts ("Postaci")** - Profiles or accounts of real people that coordinately distribute, on Facebook and TikTok, material posted by inauthentic accounts or pro-Russian politicians. These profiles alter the media content they post so that platforms do not detect inauthentic behavior. A single sockpuppet can manage multiple profiles simultaneously on Facebook, TikTok, Threads, and Instagram.
- **Trap groups** - Fake groups created by inauthentic profiles for bots on Facebook to distribute content. These trap groups are promoted through anonymous pages to gather members. The initial posts are neutral in tone so that users are not distracted from the negative content posted later in the group.

Keywords

To identify the propaganda network, keywords and hashtags used by the network were employed for searches on TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Threads.

Monitoring Period

The monitoring period spanned from September 2024 to July 2025. During this period, the type of content distributed, toxic messages promoted, cited pro-Russian political actors, and the types of profiles distributing manipulative content were analyzed. The monitored period coincided with the 2024



presidential campaign and the start of the campaign for the parliamentary elections on 28 September 2025.

Research Stages

The methodology was structured into eight stages:

1. Identify the Russian propaganda network for monitoring using keywords and hashtags;
2. Classify the types of accounts identified according to the methodology;
3. Analyze pro-Russian politicians and the manipulative messages they used for distribution by the network;
4. Analyze the targets and topics manipulated by the network and pro-Russian politicians;
5. Analyze campaigns supporting Romanian extremist politicians during the presidential elections in Romania;
6. Analyze AI-generated content distributed by the network;
7. Identify connections with other external arms of Russian propaganda in Europe;
8. Reporting.