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Hybrid War Is Politics: How Moldova Out-Played the Kremlin in 2025

by David Smith



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across 2024 and 2025 Russia orchestrated a massive, sustained and aggressive hybrid campaign against Moldova's democracy. Despite spending hundreds of millions of euros and utilizing sophisticated disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, violent actions aimed at destabilization and a mass voter bribery network, ***they failed****.*

Traditional analyses of FIMI, bot farms, fact-checking, pre-bunking, etc, all tell a story of what Russia did, but not why it didn't work. That is because the underlying framework is a security oriented attack-defense model that assumes that elections must be insulated from these hybrid actions. In reality, we must understand hybrid attacks on political processes ***as politics****, and therefore that the response is not simply defensive information operations but offensive political messaging. This report found that these elections were not simply secured but were* ***won*** *by a combination of defensive democracy and out-campaigning by pro-EU political forces.*

Work from investigative journalists created an enabling atmosphere for Moldova's government to take firm action to crack down on voter bribery networks and overt interference. At the same time, PAS learned from the near-failure of the 2024 referendum to build a political campaign strategy that was designed in the context of the hybrid attacks and which out-performed that of the pro-Russian political forces. Critically, this was paired with serious mistakes by Kremlin political technologists in forming their controlled parties/blocs and in determining their messaging focus. This is especially highlighted by the decision to bundle "pro-EU" politicians like Mayor Ceban and Irina Vlah into incoherent, strongly pro-Russian political blocs.

While not all lessons from Moldova's 2024-2025 experience are relevant to other European democracies, many are, and Russia has consistently used Moldova and Ukraine as testing grounds for new tactics. This report contains implications for EU countries as well as concrete recommendations. At the core though, the report argues that these hybrid attacks should be seen as a political challenge with political implications, not merely a security challenge or an attack/defend information space dynamic.

ARGUMENTATION

The Puzzle: How Did Moldova Resist Russia's Hybrid Attacks?

Across three elections in 2024-2025, Russia orchestrated the most aggressive hybrid campaign against a European democracy in recent history. They mobilized hundreds of millions of euros to bribe voters at an industrial scale[1], run mass disinformation campaigns targeting Moldova and Moldova's image abroad, stood up coordinated regional and church networks, bankrolled numerous political parties and planned mass violent provocations. By any conventional measure Moldova was an extremely vulnerable state: small and poor, with fragile and reforming institutions, weak social trust and a population deeply concerned about energy, inflation and war.

But they failed across all three ballots.

An analytical toolkit that looks at FIMI frameworks, pre-bunking vs fact checking, disinformation channels, etc. are good at explaining what Russia did. They are weaker at explaining why it didn't work. That's because they assume an attacker/defender dynamic, with a series of hybrid actions that need to be resisted, detected or debunked. The framing assumes that Moldova's government, journalists and civil society were mostly playing defense and resisted these attacks.

This is the wrong way to view the story of these three elections. In each case where Moldova succeeded at resisting these attacks, it was because these institutions were on offense, not defense.

Carl von Clausewitz famously wrote that "war is the continuation of politics by other means." Russia's hybrid attacks against Moldova were fundamentally about creating or enabling political outcomes. Many of these attacks represented tactical successes but resulted in a strategic failure. This is because Moldova out-played the Kremlin politically. This happened in two primary ways:

1. **Defensive Democracy**: The state mobilized coercive and legal powers to delineate authentic expressions of democratic sentiment from

[1] NYTimes, "Inside Russia's Giant Push to Upend a Tiny Country," August 14, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/14/world/europe/russia-moldova-putin.html

illegitimate and criminal actions operating under the guise of protest or free speech. This was done in concert with civil society - either with the state convincing people to come along with them, or being pushed by the public to take firmer actions.

2. **The pro-EU Movement out-campaigned the pro-Russians**. This took the form of the PAS party being prepared to learn lessons, civic groups and individuals self-mobilizing with full awareness of the threat and critical failures in political strategy by Kremlin linked politicians and campaigners.

The key inflection point was the 2024 referendum on EU integration held simultaneously with the first round presidential elections. Polls had shown the referendum passing comfortably and on the night of the election the mood in the PAS campaign HQ was good. As the results came in this turned from shock to disbelief to fear and to anger[2].

Ultimately, the referendum passed by just over 10,000 votes, under 1% of the margin. In an interview deputy campaign manager Artur Mija told me that after they realized that they "dodged a bullet" the finger pointing began. This loosely broke down into two groups - those who blamed the campaign for failing in the politics, and those who blamed the security services for not intervening to stop the voter bribery. Mija claims that his argument is still open within PAS to this day[3].

Whatever the answer is, both lessons were learned and acted on, in both the second round of the presidential elections and in 2025. The first of them was to focus the security services in the defense of democracy. The second was to adapt the political campaign and message to a radically new geopolitical situation.

Finding 1: Defensive Democracy

The Shor Network's attempts at wide scale voter bribery efforts in round two of the 2024 presidential elections and in the 2025 parliamentary elections failed. This was primarily due to efforts by the police, security services and international partners to deter participation, arrest the leaders of criminal networks and interdict financial flows.

The key change was not about new laws or new state powers, it was about the willingness of the state to use its power to decisively intervene when attacks against the democracy itself were being wrapped up in the guise of political rights and liberties. Such interventions are inherently fraught and require broad public support as well as the support of international partners.

Public Support for Defensive Democracy

Two weeks before the EU referendum investigative journalists at ZdG published an undercover investigation into the inner workings of the Shor network. The journalists demonstrated how the network operates regional cells which organize protests and bribe voters[4].

This report shocked Moldovan society at the time and was key to supporting the authorities' claims of mass voter bribery after the referendum results came in.

Alina Radu, CEO of ZdG, told me that one effect of the report was for society to put massive pressure on the police. She believes that the police knew a lot of what was going on already in 2024 but they were overwhelmed and unsure how to act. President Sandu or another official would give an interview about how 'everyone has a right to protest' and the police were unsure how to draw the lines in questions of real import for a democracy[5].

In those two weeks, the police and security services worked extensively to deter selling of votes via hefty fines, while also working to dismantle the network itself.

Critical to these efforts was public legitimacy. The original ZdG investigation was followed by the revelation of a second undercover investigation from them[6], as well as undercover investigations from Cu Sens[7] and TV8[8].

I asked Alina Radu about the decision to go undercover. She explained that the ZdG team had seen "*that there is a huge disinformation campaign coming from Russia. It was more and more active, so we decided that we should do something different.*" They determined that reactive stories debunking claims and trying to parse truth from

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[2] Artur Mija, Deputy PAS Campaign Manager 2024, Campaign Manager 2025 interview with the author, July 16, 2026.

[3] Artur Mija, interview with the author

[4] ZdG, "În slujba Moscovei. Trei luni printre „robii" lui Șor. Investigație ZdG sub acoperire" [In the service of Moscow. Three months among Shor's "slaves". Undercover ZdG investigation], October 11, 2024, https://www.zdg.md/investigatii/ancheta/video-in-slujba-moscovei-trei-luni-printre-robii-lui-sor-investigatie-zdg-sub-acoperire/

[5] Alina Radu, CEO, Ziarul de Gardă, interview with author, July 21, 2026.

[6] ZdG, "Cum a fost fraudat referendumul. Rețeaua lui Șor, de partea lui Stoianoglo. În slujba Moscovei (II): o nouă investigație ZdG sub acoperire" [How the referendum was rigged. Shor's network, on Stoianoglo's side. In the service of Moscow (II): a new undercover ZdG investigation], October 31, 2024, https://www.zdg.md/investigatii/ancheta/video-cum-a-fost-fraudat-referendumul-reteaua-lui-sor-de-partea-lui-stoianoglo-in-slujba-moscovei-ii-o-noua-investigatie-zdg-sub-acoperire/

[7] Cu Sens, "Vasile Tarlev - susținut de Ilan Șor din culisele Kremlinului," [Vasile Tarlev - supported by Ilan Shor from behind the scenes of the Kremlin], October 18, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/cusens.md/videos/1442146217174954/?t=2

[8] TV8, "Cutia Neagră PLUS: Secretul din Karlovy Vary. Cum a avut Stoianoglo un Crăciun de poveste pe banii sponsorului lui Șor," [The Secret of Karlovy Vary. How Stoianoglo had a fairytale Christmas with the money of Șor's sponsor], November 1, 2024, https://tv8.md/2024/11/01/video-cutia-neagra-plus-secretul-din-karlovy-vary-cum-a-avut-stoianoglo-un-craciun-de-poveste-pe-banii-sponsorului-lui-sor/268641

fiction in the campaign were not enough. The decision to send in undercover journalists was made months in advance and it took multiple attempts to breach the Shor network before their first journalist found a way in.

The timing of the release of the investigations was not coincidental. Radu explained that for them, the key moment was when the undercover journalist was paid - this indicated proof of criminality. At the same time, they chose to push and complete the investigations two weeks before the first round, and in the middle of the second. It allowed them to get the maximum amount of inside information and present it at a time that voters were paying attention.

The work of investigative journalists, combined to lend credibility to the substantial and ongoing messaging efforts of the government itself. This combined with the shock of the near loss of the referendum and the sheer scale of the bribery effort to create fear and anger in the public and to lend support to decisive intervention.

International Recognition of the Attacks Against Moldova

Olga Rosca, Foreign Policy and Strategic Communication Adviser to President Sandu, told me that the ZdG reporting was critical in mobilizing public support for a response[9].

Rosca stated that as the security services worked to prevent another mass bribery event, the political and communications team was working to expose these actions and explain them - both to the public and to the country's international partners.

For those two weeks the state moved decisively as a matter of self-preservation and buoyed by wide public support. But critical for 2025 would be lining up international support for robust efforts to defend Moldova's democracy.

In November 2024 the shock of the unexpected interference in the Romanian elections and their subsequent cancellation cast Moldova in a new light. Rosca explained that the contrast was stark - in Romania interference appeared "*suddenly*" while the Moldovan government had "*started ringing bells about Russian interference well before.*"

The events in Romania caused alarm and fear in much of Europe - including Moldova - but they also cast Moldova's struggle with hybrid attacks in a different light. Prior to the 2024 elections the Moldovan government had taken many important steps including banning Ilan Shor's eponymously named "Shor Party" as unconstitutional, blocking Russian TV channels, interdicting financial flows and more. But these efforts were overwhelmingly cautious and reactive. The government was highly sensitive to accusations, especially from Western Europe, of democratic backsliding or abridging political rights.

Russian disinformation campaigns played on these fears with astroturfed NGOs in the west, paid articles and op-eds in Brussels news outlets, staged conferences that brought together prominent journalists to discuss backsliding human rights in Moldova and more[10]. These information campaigns, combined with a poor understanding of Moldova's actual situation, resulted in international opinion operating as a major constraint on defensive democratic actions[11].

The brazenness of the attack on Moldova's referendum and the crisis in Romania dramatically shifted perceptions in this area.

Result: A Substantially More Secure 2025 Election

The result in 2025 was a substantially more robust response to the Shor network from all state institutions, especially police and prosecutors.

This type of defensive democracy from the state was only possible in the context of widespread public support for the broader political argument. The public could understand these interventions as necessary to safeguard the system if they understood what the system was promising and where political leaders wanted to take the country.

This legitimacy was only possible by political campaigning.

Finding 2: The Pro-EU Movement Out Campaigned the Pro-Russians

On the night of the EU referendum, the PAS campaign team stayed at their HQ until around 2 am. By that time, the numbers had shifted and although the race had not been called it was becoming clear that the referendum would narrowly pass - but also that President Sandu was facing a very challenging path to re-election in two weeks time. As the team left to continue refreshing the Central Election Commission (CEC) website on their home computers, deputy campaign manager Artur Mija addressed some staff saying:

"we dodged the bullet today, we are going home, tomorrow we are going to win the referendum, in two weeks we're winning the presidential elections and then we will fuck them in 2025.[12]"

The shock of the electoral interference was moving quickly to anger and to the creation of a new strategy. Then-press secretary of Prime Minister Recean, Daniel Vodă, explained that the 2024 campaign strategy was too cautious[13]. He said that "*the logic behind it was not to provoke the bear, not to escalate.*" In this vision the

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[9] Olga Rosca, Foreign Policy and Strategic Communication Adviser to President Sandu, interview with the author, July 28, 2026

[10] Moldova Matters Investigation: "The Western PR Campaign Undermining Moldova's EU Aspirations," October 17, 2024 https://www.moldovamatters.md/p/the-western-pr-campaign-undermining

[11] This is a long term problem as highlighted in relation to justice reform efforts here: Persuasion, "Democratic Moldova" by Francis Fukuyama, September 19, 2022 https://www.persuasion.community/p/democratic-moldova

[12] Artur Mija, interview with the author.

[13] Daniel Vodă, Government Spokesman (2023-2025), interview with the author August 11, 2026

referendum was portrayed as a positive future in Europe rather than a choice between Russia and the EU. Vodă explained that this did not work because it failed to resonate with the Moldovan people who could see the war, hybrid attacks and interference.

Following the first round, the campaign recalibrated, got more aggressive and centered Russia as a threat. At the same time, the pro-Russian candidate was unprepared and allowed himself to be defined by the Sandu campaign[14].

This succeeded, in what amounted to a skilled improvisation for a campaign that did not seriously plan on facing a second round in the presidential elections. It also foreshadowed the key dynamic of 2025 - a highly motivated and aggressive PAS party that was able to motivate broad public support against a series of political blunders on the part of Russia and its proxies.

PAS Chose a Geopolitical Election Strategy

After carefully avoiding geopolitics in 2021 and walking lightly in 2024, the mass hybrid attacks caused PAS to pivot strategy. Artur Mija, 2025 PAS campaign manager, began planning in December 2024 with two initial goals:

1. Keep a pro-EU majority in parliament
2. Put PAS in first place so the party can lead a coalition

The key strategy was to center geopolitics in the electoral campaign. This strategy quickly collided with the set goals. PAS had no credible coalition partner. They negotiated with the small pro-EU parties but none had any electoral credibility on their own. International partners, afraid Moldova would lose a pro-EU majority, pushed an electoral bloc with Mayor Ceban's MAN or Usati's Our Party. But this **would have ruled out a geopolitical campaign** as both party leaders had deep and long attested links to Russia (in spite of their recent pro-EU pivots). PAS chose to keep their campaign strategy, and to aim instead for getting a parliamentary majority themselves.

PAS chose the campaign slogan "EU, Peace, Development," and consistently tied those issues together in messaging while casting 'development' as roads, infrastructure and tangible goods. They avoided questions of justice reform, economic development and other areas that invited debates on their record in power[15].

Additionally, the campaign was aggressive, but targeted. PAS was most likely to split votes with Usati and Ceban but chose not to focus on attacking them. Usati was to be completely ignored, while Ceban would be attacked for his actions as mayor but otherwise ignored as a national politician. The target for PAS were the Socialists and their "Patriotic Bloc" which was overtly pro-Russian. The idea was simple, a geopolitical election needs poles - EU vs Russia.

PAS would attack the Socialists and draw an intentional response from them. This response - fed by Russian propaganda and troll farms - was anti-PAS but also directly anti-EU and anti-European values. This polarization of the debate sucked the oxygen out of the center and smothered the messaging of the "pseudo European" parties like Mayor Ceban's Alternative Bloc.

The campaign for the first round/referendum in 2024 was literally organized as a referendum, while the second round and 2025 parliamentary elections were organized as a choice. PAS drove that contrast argument aggressively and doubled the time and spend allocated in the four week campaign for "contrast" messaging at the expense of traditional program/party list presentation[16].

The polarization, and unexpected speed of attacking messages, caught the opposition off guard and allowed PAS to define the key issues even within the context of massive Russian disinformation.

Russia: Too Many Eggs, All the Wrong Baskets

Going into 2025 the most prominent opposition parties were the overtly pro-Russian Socialists led by Igor Dodon, and the nominally pro-European National Alternative Movement (MAN) led by Chisinau Mayor Ion Ceban. Both men started their careers in the Communist Party led by Vladimir Voronin, which, despite being much diminished, remained a political factor.

In addition to Ceban, former Bashkan of Gagauzia Irina Vlah had been carefully charting a path away from her old campaign billboards with pictures of Putin and towards Brussels. She had learned Romanian and also embraced a pragmatic 'pro-EU, but…' set of positions. Politicians like Ceban and Vlah, who started in openly pro-Russian parties but shifted over the last few years came to be called the "pseudo Europeans."

In January 2025 this appeared to present Moscow with multiple credible combinations to get a parliamentary majority. These ranged from the staunchly pro-Russian Communists and Socialists, to the pro-EU options for those looking for an alternative to PAS (helpfully called "Alternative"), to a selection of smaller parties with niche purposes. Kremlin technologists had created flavors of iced cream suited to all palates, while using disinformation and propaganda to relentlessly attack and undermine PAS and the EU.

Therefore it was utterly shocking when Mayor Ceban announced the creation of the "Alternative Bloc" which included the Socialist presidential candidate from 2024 and two ***obviously*** pro-Russian leaders of tiny political parties. CEO of investigative outlet ZdG Alina Radu explained that while Ceban constantly had questions swirling around about his links to Russia, this put him in the company of "*absolutely pro-Russian, explicitly pro-Russian guys*.[17]" She explained that the move made no political sense and Ceban had to know that, with the only explanation being that "he *was requested to do so*."

Similarly, Voronin and Dodon were combined in the "Patriotic Bloc" despite deep personal animosity. Vlah was added as well in a move that cast aside her multi-year attempts to build credibility as a pro-EU politician.

[14] Artur Mija, interview with the author

[15] Artur Mija, interview with the author.

[16] Artur Mija, interview with the author.

[17] Alina Radu, interview with the author.

Artur Mija explained that this was a huge benefit to PAS on multiple fronts. Firstly, the composition of 'Alternative' destroyed Ion Ceban's pro-EU credibility. Secondly, he explained that blocs in Moldova are "*not 1+1=3, but usually 1+1+1+1=3*[18]." The combination of egos and political structures meant that the internal fighting over positions on the party list distracted from campaigning and often spilled into the open. For example: Voronin showed up to a key press conference wearing sandals and implicated Igor Dodon in a massive bribery scandal in a live interview[19].

Russian technologists created two incoherent blocs that fought like cats in a bag. Each had four leaders and neither bloc had the internal consistency to divide campaigning between the leaders - preferring instead to campaign together in order to watch each other.

Alternative's four pro-Russian politicians were particularly unable to articulate their nuanced and contradictory support for EU integration in the face of a relentless and focused PAS geopolitical attack against the overtly pro-Russian parties.

Stop the Steal

In addition to backing numerous parties and politicians in Moldova, Russia worked to structure a post-election crisis that combined real security challenges with serious political miscalculations. Their proxies began putting out messaging about how PAS was going to steal the election and that if the election were fair, it was clear the pro-Russian parties would win majorities[20]. Past election failures and the pro-EU vote in the referendum were thus framed as evidence of ballot tampering - especially in the diaspora vote.

Valeriu Pașa, Chairman of the WatchDog Community think tank, explained that "*one of the key pillars of Russian strategy was the post-electoral destabilization. [Sergey] Kiriyenko planned his own Maidan in Chisinau. (...) He really believes that there is a technology behind the whole thing and everything happens according to the plan*." He explained that with this goal in mind, "*they were running a multi month campaign to question the legitimacy of elections.*"

Pașa explained that at the core, Russia does not view Moldovans as having agency and built strategies based on the idea that they are passive actors.

These narratives, once seeded, were to be combined with mass protests in the days after the elections. Militants, trained in camps in Serbia and elsewhere on drone attacks, weapons use, inciting riots, incendiary devices, etc. were to help spur these protests into a revolution[21].

We know of at least two planned triggers for mass protests. Firstly, Russian cyberattacks attempted to directly disrupt the Central Election Commission (CEC) servers and indirectly disrupt the public's ability to see the outcome via mass DDoS attacks involving hacked routers[22]. Disruptions to the CEC website would be claimed as evidence of election tampering by PAS.

The second planned trigger was the presentation of evidence of ballot stuffing in the diaspora. To get this, Russia organized "Operation Diaspora" which paid people, often unaware of who they were working for, to count voters entering polling places across Europe. The idea being to show that "x" people voted in Athens Precinct 3 while "x+50" people there were counted for PAS, therefore there was fraud[23].

Incredibly, this scheme collapsed when they did not find any evidence of ballot stuffing. The Russian technologists seem to have internalized their own propaganda, namely that a) PAS was rigging the elections and b) if not rigged, there was mass support for Russia.

In parallel, efforts by Moldova's Cyber Security Service (STISC) and foreign partners prevented critical systems outages on election day.

Mass National Mobilization

These failures contrasted with the huge mobilization that PAS achieved via its campaign. Many pro-EU voters who were disappointed with PAS, or publicly opposed PAS, came home and voted for them because of the framing. The geopolitical election left the stakes too high for a protest vote. There were no serious alternatives and the "Alternative Bloc" was discredited. Finally, the direct messaging calling out Russian hybrid attacks and the presentation of the election as a choice between a future in Europe or with Russia fit the pro-EU electorate's understanding of what the stakes were.

It met the voters where they were - and they were angry, a bit scared and absolutely determined to fight off these attacks.

PAS recorded record donations from companies, endorsements from apolitical celebrities and huge numbers of volunteers who, if they didn't want to support PAS, could join a civic campaign effort for Europe that easily aligned with the message.

Russian disinformation and propaganda was a powerful tool targeted at supporting their desired political outcomes. But it was only a tool and it could not save an electoral strategy that floundered. Russian technologists' belief that a 'Maidan' could be manufactured, that democracies stuff ballots in order to offset real pro-Russian sympathies and that political coherency could be sacrificed to other concerns when building their blocs, all contributed to a strategic failure.

In parallel, the ability of pro-European political forces to deploy highly targeted contrast messages was able to

[18] Artur Mija, interview with the author.

[19] Moldova Matters, "Voronin's Last Rodeo," August 24, 2025 https://www.moldovamatters.md/p/voronins-last-rodeo?utm_source=publication-search

[20] Valeriu Pașa, Chairman of the WatchDog Community think tank, interview with the author, July 24, 2026

[21] WatchDog Report: "Engineering Doubt," authored by David Smith, March 2026, https://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Cyberwarfare-Moldovas-Elections.pdf

[22] Watchdog Report: "Engineering Doubt"

[23] Valeriu Pașa, interview with the author.

defeat the scattershot and more incoherent messaging they opposed.

Implications for European Democracies

While Moldova is one of only a few countries in Europe susceptible to a mass vote buying scheme, other hybrid election attacks that were tested in Moldova and Ukraine are finding purchase in established European democracies. While Moldova's small size and unique political history mean that not all lessons are transferable, there are many lessons Moldova can share with partners.

From Finding 1 (Defensive Democracy):

- **The lesson from Moldova's 2024-2025 experience is not "use state power more" but "improvise less.**" Complicated questions that require a line drawn between free speech and political rights and criminal activity should be worked out in advance and clearly communicated at all levels. The police or other security services should not find themselves making judgment calls they are unprepared for, as they did in 2024 Moldova.
- **Drawing these lines requires broad public buy-in**. Simply telling the public that a TV station is funded by a foreign state via an offshore company is not sufficient. State coercion directed in areas of political freedoms must be clearly politically communicated regardless of how thorough the process involved is. Cooperation with independent journalists and the civil society is critical when explaining these actions.
- **"Democratic Backsliding" is positional, not subject to a universal formula**. When a country is under sustained hybrid attack, allies and partners should apply situational, subjective evaluations and not simply rely on metrics and rankings. These can, and are, weaponized.

From Finding 2: Out Campaigning

- **Hybrid interference is a political competency problem**. Just as disinformation, troll farms, deepfakes, etc are tools, so too are de-bunking, pre-bunking, etc. Ultimately these are tactical questions in a strategic contest. Pro-democratic parties cannot treat hybrid interference as either a security issue only, nor as a type of information warfare for civil society and the media to parse. If hybrid war is politics by other means, then it should be no surprise that **in both conventional war and politics, being on the defense means you are losing**. In cases of hybrid interference, political strategy and messaging is the way pro-Democracy parties and their supporters go on the offensive.
- **Hybrid attacks make mincemeat of muddled messages**. "Least bad" coalitions like a combination of PAS and Mayor Ceban would have fatally undermined pro-EU politicians' ability to make a political argument against the onslaught of pro-Russian narratives. This is not an argument against coalitions - but an argument for a clear understanding of the value propositions underlying them, and underpinning the hybrid campaign. The case of Romania shows how fractious internal politics makes responding to common threats much more difficult.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are for European policy makers, development partners, pro-Democracy parties and activists and others tasked with preparing for or seeing off a hybrid election attack:

- **Assure sustained, predictable and long term funding for investigative journalists**. Short funding cycles and project-defined deliverable grants are incompatible with the multi-month investigative cycles presented by electoral interference.
- **Wargame out defensive democracy scenarios**. Electoral authorities and political leaders should identify key threats and organize tabletop games alongside civic activists, journalists and other political parties. These should include representatives of the security services and should test each party's response to a given incident.
- **Share experience in structured formats**. Countries like Moldova have long been seen as donor recipients with little to offer in return. In 2024 Moldova was caught off guard by the magnitude of the intervention, but not by the perpetrator, tactics, intentions or the outcome being pushed. In comparison, right next door, Romania was caught ***completely off guard***. New formats for sharing experiences and tactics between journalists, policymakers and civil society groups should be explored. Old formats that have since lost purpose such as the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum could be adapted for this new reality.
- **EU Foreign Lobbying Register**. Russia exploits the lack of regulation on EU lobbying and PR companies to directly hire companies to run their disinformation campaigns. The call is coming from inside the house and simple transparency requirements could help prevent the institutions of democratic politics from being turned on democracy itself.

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