

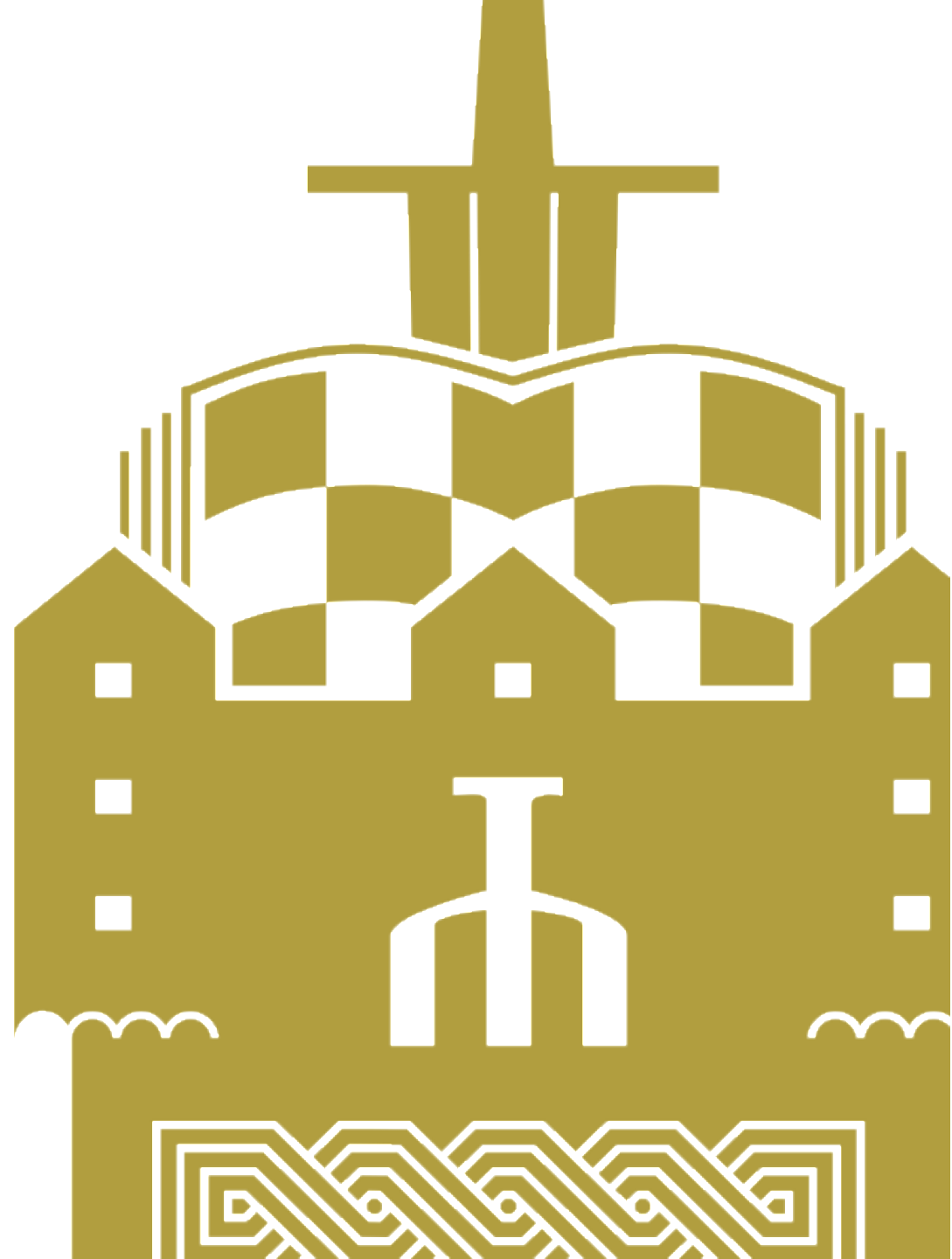


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The Republic of Moldova: **Democratic Resilience Against Hybrid Threats** and the Structural Imperatives for EU Accession

Dr. Csongor B. VERESS

Sapere Aude et Agere





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The Republic of Moldova, a landlocked country situated in Eastern Europe bordering Romania and Ukraine, stands as a critical **test case for democratic resilience** in the post-Soviet space.





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Following its declaration of independence from the Soviet Union on August 27, 1991, Moldova has been locked in a protracted internal and external struggle to consolidate its **sovereignty** against a persistent legacy of Russian influence and structural underdevelopment.

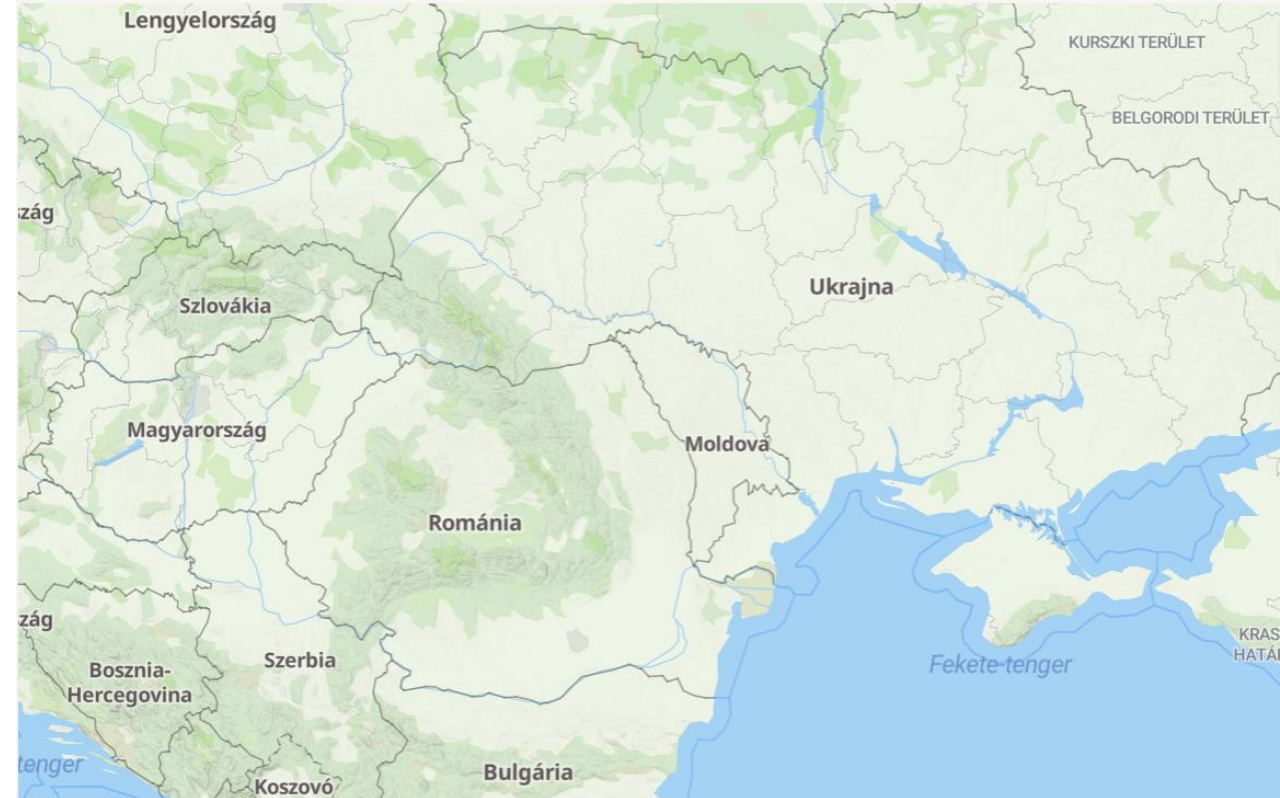




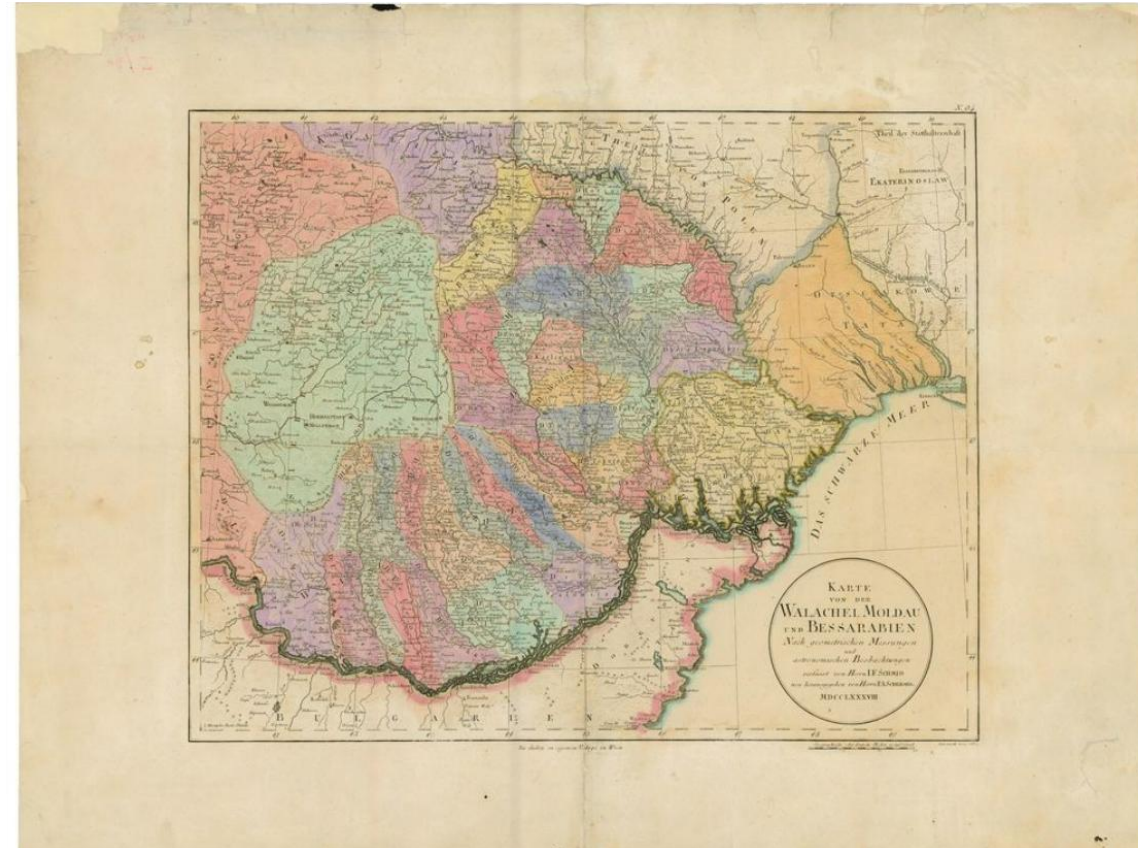
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With an area of 33,843 square kilometers and a population of approximately **2.38 million**, the country's fate is inevitably linked to the geopolitical confrontation playing out across the region.

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Moldova's current political difficulties are rooted in its **turbulent history**, which saw the eastern half of the Principality of Moldavia, known as Bessarabia, annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812.



The Soviet era, following the region's incorporation in 1940 as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), profoundly impacted the social fabric through policies of **Russification** and centralized economic transformation.





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The most pressing security challenge since independence has been the unresolved conflict in the **Transnistrian region**, a conflict ignited in 1992 which left the territory on the left bank of the Dniester River as a *de facto* independent state.





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The region's secession is sustained by the presence of successor forces to the **14th Army**, officially designated the Operational Group of Russian Forces. Moldovan authorities reported in July 2025 that the population of the Transnistria-controlled areas had decreased significantly to approximately 375,000, down from 555,000 in 2004.





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Furthermore, tens of thousands of Transnistrian inhabitants have acquired Russian citizenship (estimated at 60,000 to 80,000), providing Moscow with a pretext for **protective intervention** and further complicating any diplomatic resolution.





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The sustained Russian military presence and political control in Transnistria mean that Moscow holds a structural, **non-military veto** over Moldova's ultimate integration with the European Union.





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In parallel with the Transnistrian issue, the autonomous region of **Gagauzia** represents another significant internal political fault line. Inhabited by the Turkic-speaking Gagauz minority, the region maintains a distinct **pro-Russian** orientation and frequently finds itself at odds with Chişinău on matters such as language policy and media direction.





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Moldova is currently a **unitary parliamentary republic**, with its government (led by Prime Minister Dorin Recean since 2023) and presidency controlled by the **pro-European** Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS).



Driven by the urgent geopolitical context resulting from Russia's **full-scale invasion** of Ukraine, Moldova accelerated its westward alignment, submitting a formal EU membership application in March 2022.

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The path to membership, however, is conditional on **rigorous** structural reforms, including improving economic efficiency, strengthening the rule of law, better enforcing property rights, and comprehensively tackling corruption and deoligarchization efforts.





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To support this ambition, the EU has demonstrated **significant commitment**, providing not only political capital but also substantial financial backing, notably a €1.9 billion Economic Growth Plan established for the 2025 - 2027 period.





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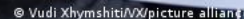
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The Economic Burden: Despite periods of growth, poverty reduction in Moldova has stagnated in recent years. Absolute poverty, calculated using the national methodology, increased from 25.2% in 2019 to 31.6% in 2023.





The economy has also suffered from severe external shocks, most notably the spillover **effects of the war** in Ukraine, which contributed to an energy price shock and saw inflation peak dramatically at 34%.





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The demographic catastrophe: mass migration, brain drain, and the ageing society. Moldova faces a depopulation crisis: this decline is overwhelmingly driven by mass labor migration, involving over **one million citizens** who sought better economic opportunities abroad.



Governance deficits

particularly concerning corruption
and the effective enforcement of the
rule of law, are frequently cited as the
most significant barriers to
development.





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The decoupling of energy security and economic coercion:

Russia explicitly deployed energy supplies as a **tool of geopolitical coercion**. Energy security is a central pillar of Moldova's reform agenda, viewed as a non-negotiable prerequisite for political sovereignty.





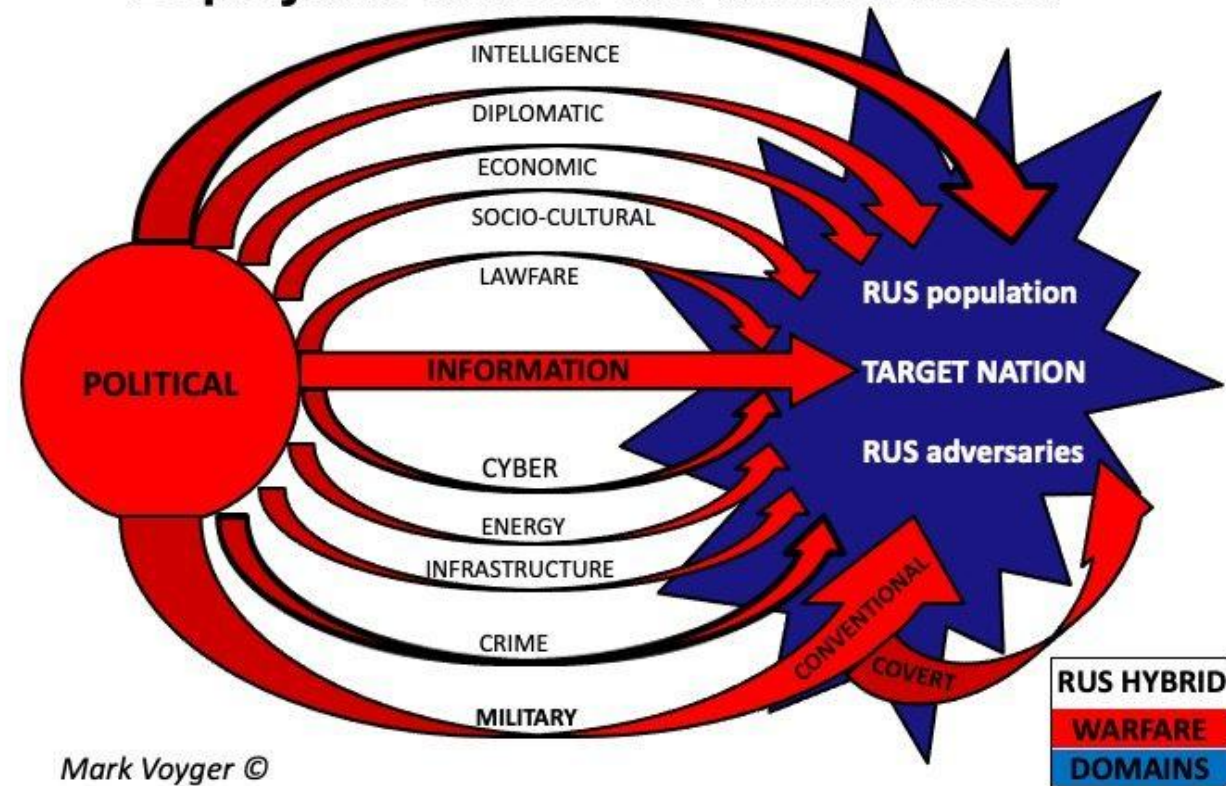
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Russian Hybrid Warfare:

the Russian campaign is a multi-layered hybrid strategy combining political, financial, informational, and digital tools, specifically calibrated to achieve strategic goals without provoking a conventional military response.

RUS Hybrid Warfare 'Hydra': Deployable abroad and inside Russia





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Estimates suggest that Russia spent between €150 million and €350 million on influencing the 2024 and 2025 election cycles. At its highest point, this spending represented approximately 1% of Moldova's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).





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Mechanisms of Influence: Disinformation, Media Control, and Cyber Operations

In 2025 alone, Moldovan authorities reported enduring over 1,000 **cyberattacks** directed at critical government infrastructure.



Image generated using OpenAI technology.



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The November 2024 presidential re-election of Maia Sandu on a pro-European platform was a primary **target for Russian interference.**





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The campaign involved systematic financial schemes, vicious information operations, and targeted physical disruptions, including bomb threats aimed at diaspora polling stations.

Despite these efforts, Sandu secured approximately **55% of the votes.**



The September 28, 2025, **parliamentary elections** held profound strategic significance, as control of the 101-seat Parliament determines the selection of the Prime Minister and the composition of the Cabinet, thus setting the legislative and executive policy direction for the country.



Controversies Surrounding Electoral Integrity:

- Illegal Financing and Voter Bribery
- Exclusion of Pro-Russian Parties
- Voter Register Anomalies in Transnistria



Despite the severe pressure and predicted instability, the outcome of the September 28, 2025, parliamentary elections confirmed a clear and emphatic mandate for **the country's westward path**. President Sandu's ruling Action and Solidarity (PAS) party secured **50.20%** of the vote, guaranteeing a majority of 55 out of 101 seats.

The pro-Russian Patriotic bloc lagged significantly behind with 24.26%.





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The success was fundamentally rooted in **robust state resilience**. Moldova's state institutions displayed impressive vigilance by enforcing campaign financing laws, dismantling interference networks, and communicating transparently with the electorate.





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Challenges Facing the Republic of Moldova

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- **Impact of the Russian–Ukrainian war:** 650 km Ukrainian–Moldovan border
- **Over 500,000 refugees**, with about **127,000 remaining** in the country
- **Unresolved Transnistrian conflict** – Russian troops block EU accession progress
- **Pro-Russian influence in Gagauzia** – internal political destabilization
- **High inflation**
- **Energy insecurity**
- **Corruption and weak rule of law**
- **Severe depopulation**
- **High poverty**
- **Economic fragility**
- **Cybersecurity vulnerabilities**
- **Hybrid threats and disinformation**
- **Organized crime and cross-border trafficking**
- **Political polarization** – EU integration vs. pro-Russian orientation



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Thank you for your kind attention!

veress.csongor.balazs@kre.hu

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