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## TEXTS ADOPTED

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### **P10\_TA(2024)0016**

## **Strengthening Moldova's resilience against Russian interference ahead of the upcoming presidential elections and a constitutional referendum on EU integration**

**European Parliament resolution of 9 October 2024 on strengthening Moldova's resilience against Russian interference ahead of the upcoming presidential elections and a constitutional referendum on EU integration (2024/2821(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the Republic of Moldova,
  - having regard to the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part<sup>1</sup>, which includes a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area,
  - having regard to the Republic of Moldova's application for EU membership of 3 March 2022, and the European Council's consequent granting of candidate country status on 23 June 2022,
  - having regard to the convening of the first Intergovernmental Conference on Moldova's accession to the EU, held in June 2024,
  - having regard to Articles 2 and 49 of the Treaty on European Union,
  - having regard to the joint statement of 13 June 2024 by the US, Canada and the UK on exposing Russia's subversive activity and electoral interference targeting Moldova,
  - having regard to Rules 136(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas on 20 October 2024, the Republic of Moldova is scheduled to hold a presidential election and a constitutional referendum on EU integration, amid ongoing Russian interference and attempts to destabilise the political situation and electoral process in the country;
- B. whereas the Russian Federation has been using economic blackmail, provocation, disinformation, illegal funding of political parties, cyberattacks and other hybrid means

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 260, 30.8.2014, p. 4.

to undermine the stability, sovereignty, constitutional order and democratic institutions of the Republic of Moldova; whereas Russia's subversive activities in Moldova seek to undermine popular support for the European path chosen by the people of Moldova and to incite destabilisation; whereas the active measures envisaged include establishing and promoting front organisations disguised as non-governmental organisations and 'cultural centres', disseminating online and offline disinformation, establishing strong pro-Russian political and societal constituencies and returning the Republic of Moldova to a state of dependency on Russian hydrocarbons;

- C. whereas in 2023, the EU imposed sanctions on key Moldovan oligarchs and pro-Russian actors, such as Ilan Shor, Vladimir Plahotniuc, Igor Ceaika, Gheorghe Cavaliuc and Marina Tauber, on the basis of a recently established sanctions regime targeting persons responsible for actions aimed at destabilising, undermining or threatening the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Moldova; whereas allies of Mr Shor have reportedly actively recruited, arranged logistics for and provided financial compensation to individuals to join their protests; whereas on 3 October 2024, a large-scale electoral fraud operation was uncovered, financed by pro-Russian oligarch Ilan Shor, revealing that over USD 15 million had been transferred in September 2024 to over 130 000 Moldovan citizens involved in this voter bribery scheme; whereas on 18 September 2024, two close allies of Ilan Shor – deputy Marina Tauber and the Governor (Bashkan) of Gagauzia, Evghenia Guțul – met with the spokesperson of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, and subsequently gave false information about the EU and the Republic of Moldova's future within it;
- D. whereas one of the tools used by the Russian state is the state-funded RT network (formerly Russia Today), which has moved beyond media activities, becoming actively involved in cyber operations, covert influence, military procurement and information warfare across various regions; whereas in June 2024, the US, together with the UK and Canada, exposed Russia's efforts to engage in subversive activities and electoral interference targeting the Republic of Moldova;
- E. whereas in September 2024, the US imposed sanctions on three entities and two individuals for their involvement in Russia's destabilising actions abroad, including in the Republic of Moldova; whereas these covert efforts have included RT personnel providing direct support to fugitive Moldovan oligarch Ilan Shor, the key perpetrator of the 2014 USD 1 billion bank fraud scandal; whereas, according to the US State Department, RT and its employees, including editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan, have directly coordinated with the Kremlin to support Russian Government efforts to influence the Moldovan presidential election of October 2024, with the apparent aim of inciting unrest in the Republic of Moldova;
- F. whereas the Security and Intelligence Service of the Republic of Moldova has reported an unprecedented level of intensity in Russia's actions aimed at anchoring Moldova within its sphere of influence; whereas this hybrid threat is targeted at democratic processes and undermines European integration by amplifying radical separatist tendencies in the south of the country, particularly in Gagauzia (UTAG), using propaganda, manipulating the information space, interfering in the electoral process and conducting subversive operations; whereas Moldova's national security services have stated that Russia is funding the 'no' campaign, with around EUR 100 million for pro-Russian political groups, and spreading disinformation on social media to sow doubt about the legitimacy of the electoral process; whereas in 2023, Ukrainian intelligence

reported that it had intercepted a plan by Russia to stage a coup and oust Moldovan President Maia Sandu;

- G. whereas the Republic of Moldova has taken steps to combat Russian interference, including by banning pro-Russian political parties that are operating outside the law, sanctioning oligarchs, suspending media outlets that spread disinformation, and increasing customs controls; whereas Moldova's updated national security strategy attributes disinformation campaigns and other hybrid attacks to Russia;
- H. whereas the unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine profoundly affects regional security and stability, endangering the Republic of Moldova's macroeconomic situation, financial stability, democratic development and social cohesion, while further increasing the incidence and severity of poverty, inflation and emigration; whereas the Russian Federation, in cooperation with domestic Russia-sponsored actors, galvanises and uses the resultant widespread economic, geopolitical and security uncertainty to delegitimise and foster opposition to the Moldovan Government's pro-European policies;
- I. whereas despite the dramatic effects of the war on Ukraine and these destabilisation attempts, the Republic of Moldova has managed to significantly consolidate its democracy, continue its reform trajectory and develop its relations with the EU; whereas the improvements in the country's democratic system have been reflected in its progress on various international indexes; whereas the Moldovan Government's enhanced implementation of current agreements demonstrates its commitment to closer cooperation with and integration into the EU;
- J. whereas the Republic of Moldova is a close and valued partner of the EU; whereas its application for EU membership, and the European Council's decision to grant candidate country status to the Republic of Moldova on the understanding that nine steps are taken, demonstrates a strong joint ambition for swift EU integration; whereas through the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, in force since 2016, the EU and Moldova have committed to promoting political association and achieving economic integration;
- K. whereas on 3 March 2022, the Republic of Moldova applied for EU membership, and on 23 June 2022, was granted candidate country status by unanimous agreement of all 27 EU Member States; whereas the EU opened accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova during the first accession conference at ministerial level, held in Luxembourg on 25 June 2024, following the European Council's decision of 14-15 December 2023 to open accession negotiations with Moldova, and the Council's approval of the negotiating framework for these negotiations on 21 June 2024; whereas EU accession remains a merit-based process that requires the fulfilment of the EU membership criteria;
- L. whereas every sovereign state has the inherent right to defend itself and to invest in its defence and resilience capabilities, and such actions are consistent with the Republic of Moldova's status of neutrality;
- M. whereas the Council has adopted assistance measures worth EUR 137 million for the benefit of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Moldova under the European Peace Facility since 2021;

- N. whereas on 24 April 2023, the EU set up the Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova) under the common security and defence policy, with the objective of enhancing the security sector's resilience in the areas of crisis management, hybrid threats, including cybersecurity and countering foreign information manipulation and interference; whereas on 21 May 2024, Moldova became the first country to sign a Security and Defence Partnership with the EU, which will help strengthen cooperation on security and defence policy between the EU and Moldova;
- O. whereas, according to several reports, many priests from the Metropolis of Chişinău and All Moldova have travelled to Russia, where they received funds with the intention of using them for electoral purposes in the Republic of Moldova;
1. Stands in solidarity with the people of the Republic of Moldova and reiterates its unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognised borders;
  2. Strongly condemns the escalating malicious activities, interference and hybrid operations by the Russian Federation, pro-Russian oligarchs and Russian-sponsored local actors aimed at undermining the electoral processes, security, sovereignty and democratic foundations of the Republic of Moldova, fostering divisions within Moldovan society and derailing the country's pro-European trajectory, ahead of the upcoming presidential election and the constitutional referendum on EU integration;
  3. Reiterates its call on the Russian authorities to respect the Republic of Moldova's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to cease its provocations and attempts to destabilise the country and undermine its constitutional order and democratic institutions; reiterates its calls on Russia to withdraw its military forces and equipment from the territory of the Republic of Moldova, to ensure the full destruction of all ammunition and equipment in the Cobasna depot under international oversight and to support a peaceful resolution to the Transnistrian conflict, in line with the principles of international law and the 1999 Istanbul Summit Declaration of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe;
  4. Calls for the EU and its Member States to ensure that all necessary assistance is provided to the Republic of Moldova to strengthen its institutional mechanisms and its ability to respond to hybrid threats; calls for increased EU support for Moldova in countering disinformation, hybrid threats and cyberattacks; underlines that this should entail boosting Moldova's capacity to combat disinformation, strengthen its cybersecurity infrastructure and enhance resilience against external malign influences; emphasises the particular importance of countering false Russian narratives, while underscoring their malign interference in the Republic of Moldova and the ways in which they are used to justify Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine;
  5. Calls on the Council to adopt additional targeted sanctions listings against individuals and entities responsible for supporting or carrying out actions which undermine or threaten the Republic of Moldova's sovereignty and independence, as well as the country's democracy, stability or security, and the rule of law; calls for the EU and national authorities to make sure those sanctions are duly implemented; reiterates its call on the respective hosting states and territories to extradite Ilan Shor, Vladimir Plahotniuc and other individuals sought for trial in the Republic of Moldova;

6. Highlights the important role played by EUPM Moldova; calls for the EU and its Member States to ensure that EUPM Moldova performs to the best of its ability, taking stock of progress and adapting its operations if necessary to make it as efficient as possible, while proposing to further extend its mandate beyond May 2025, adapt its scope and increase the mission's resources; calls for the EU and its Member States to increase their support for Moldova's Center for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation; calls on the Commission to report on the results of the EU support package for Moldova of June 2023, particularly the stated aim of countering foreign information manipulation and interference, and building capacity for independent media, civil society and youth;
7. Applauds the Republic of Moldova's steadfast support for Ukraine since the start of Russia's war of aggression; commends the Republic of Moldova for welcoming 1,5 million Ukrainian refugees throughout the war, of which an estimated 125 000 remain in the country; calls for the EU and its Member States to ensure continued support for Moldova and its people in addressing the challenges facing the country as a consequence of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, including large numbers of refugees, inflation, threats to its energy supplies and violations of its airspace;
8. Reaffirms its commitment to the Republic of Moldova's future membership of the EU; believes that its membership in the EU would constitute a mutually beneficial investment in a united and strong Europe; welcomes the widespread support in the Republic of Moldova for its European integration; stresses that the Republic of Moldova's European integration represents not only a path towards greater economic prosperity, but also a safeguard for political stability and security in the face of external threats;
9. Calls for the acceleration of the screening process and the timely organisation of subsequent intergovernmental conferences, where negotiations on Cluster 1 on Fundamentals should be initiated; calls for the EU to adequately support accession-related reforms by developing robust and adaptable financial instruments tailored to the Republic of Moldova's specific needs with a view to effectively addressing its economic and structural challenges, and ensuring the country remains resilient and capable of implementing the necessary reforms throughout its EU accession process; urges the acceleration of Moldova's gradual integration into the EU and the single market by allowing participation in new initiatives and EU programmes, which will deliver tangible socio-economic benefits in specific areas even before the country formally joins the EU; reiterates its call, in this regard, for the EU to take swift and significant steps towards the permanent liberalisation of its tariff-rate quotas;
10. Calls for more consistent support for the Republic of Moldova in its EU accession process, including increased technical assistance by sending additional EU advisors to the Moldovan authorities, as a contribution to strengthening capacity-building;
11. Calls for the adoption of a new growth plan for the Republic of Moldova so as to adequately finance and support Moldova in achieving economic convergence with the EU; believes that this plan should finance investments in infrastructure, human capital and the digital and green transitions, facilitating sustainable economic growth; calls for the full integration of the Republic of Moldova into the 'Roam Like at Home' initiative by the end of 2025;

12. Calls on the Commission, in this regard, to include the Republic of Moldova in the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance and to prioritise funding for candidate countries in its proposal for the next multiannual financial framework (2028-2034), ensuring the path towards EU membership;
13. Welcomes the Republic of Moldova's significant progress in implementing EU accession-related reforms and encourages the Moldovan authorities to continue the ambitious reforms on democracy and the rule of law; calls for the EU and its Member States to prioritise and allocate additional resources to efforts to support the rule of law and anti-corruption reforms in the Republic of Moldova in order to address vulnerabilities, including those related to corruption in the security sector, justice system, public administration and media, which could enable Russian interference and disinformation; encourages the Moldovan Government to continue working with all stakeholders towards a sustainable and comprehensive justice and anti-corruption reform, in line with EU and Venice Commission recommendations;
14. Underlines the importance of advancing the country's reform process in order to improve living standards, particularly for vulnerable groups, and to provide the younger generations with attractive prospects for life and work in the country, thereby increasing societal resilience to hybrid attacks and reducing the number of citizens seeking better living conditions elsewhere in Europe; highlights the need for the social acquis to be better represented in the Commission's assessments and recommendations;
15. Reiterates its support for stronger cooperation on security and defence policy between the EU and the Republic of Moldova; commends the Republic of Moldova for becoming the first country to sign a security and defence partnership with the EU and calls for this partnership to be put into practical action; calls for the EU to progressively include the Republic of Moldova in upcoming legislative initiatives and programmes relating to European security and defence; supports the continued work under the High-Level Political and Security Dialogue between the EU and the Republic of Moldova to enhance cooperation on foreign and security policy;
16. Calls on the Member States to increase the European Peace Facility's funding for the Republic of Moldova to further enhance the country's defence capabilities;
17. Reiterates its call for the EU and its Member States to continue supporting the efforts of the Moldovan authorities to maintain macroeconomic stability and enhance its energy security by supporting the construction of new electricity interconnections with neighbouring countries; calls for the EU and its Member States to financially support energy efficiency and renewable energy projects as a clean and sustainable way of reducing Moldova's energy demand and diversifying its supply, while ensuring energy affordability, in particular for the most vulnerable groups;
18. Urges the EU and its Member States to further strengthen cooperation with Moldova through targeted measures in order to enhance the country's resilience to hybrid threats, including by improving strategic communications about the EU, supporting journalists and civil society in countering disinformation, promoting independent Russian-language media content and enhancing public information literacy; calls for additional resources and technical know-how to assist the Moldovan Government's strategic communications, internal coordination and capacity-building against hybrid attacks and disinformation; commends the efforts of Moldovan civil society in supporting the

Moldovan Government's fight against disinformation and promoting democratic values; calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue supporting media literacy and media independence, as well as the strengthening of Moldova's critical digital infrastructure, including through the replacement of Russian-origin information and communications technology systems; calls for the EU and its Member States to expand and intensify their direct engagement with Moldovan citizens by including them in various EU and bilateral programmes and projects, such as citizen consultations, and to foster people-to-people connections;

19. Calls on the Commission to assist the Moldovan Government in putting pressure on social media platforms to address disinformation effectively;
20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the President, Government and Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the Russian authorities.