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How can Moldova's resilience to security threats be enhanced in the context of the EU accession process?

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Abstract

This article examines Moldova's strategic response to Russia's hybrid war in the last four years. It proceeds by investigating the country's reform of its security sector in the context of multiple crises. It explores how Moldova has systematically addressed multifaceted security challenges through institutional reforms and resilience-building mechanisms. The article argues that Moldova has gone through a strategic shift from a passive, neutrality-based approach to a proactive security paradigm, characterised by wider engagement with Western partners. Furthermore, the EU accession process has enhanced the transformation of Moldova's security sector, providing critical financial and technical support with responding to Russian electoral interference, energy weaponisation, cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns.

Keywords

Security, Threats, Hybrid war, Convergence, Accession

Introduction: adapting to a multiple-crisis environment

In the last four years, Moldova has been a constant target of Russia's hybrid war. Moscow has intensified its efforts to destabilize the country through political, economic and energy instruments. The Kremlin has weaponised its domestic proxies to produce instability and increase electoral support for anti-European forces. Russia's end goal is to take control of the government and install a puppet regime.

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During the last two electoral cycles—for the presidential elections in 2024 and parliamentary elections in 2025—Russia invested hundreds of millions of dollars in buying votes, illegally financing political parties, carrying out cyber-attacks and spreading disinformation. According to the post-election report of the Security and Intelligence Service of Moldova (2024, 10), in 2024 Russia created a vote-buying network of approximately 100,000 to 130,000 voters, which represents 7%–9% of the average number of voters during national elections. Between May and September 2025, almost 250 online pages connected to Russia were used to spread disinformation and fake news about the parliamentary elections (Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation 2025, 3). On the election day, there were concentrated cyber-attacks on the Central Electoral Commission and other state institutions. These attacks aimed at disrupting the digital infrastructure used for vote counting. To coordinate these malign actions, Moscow created a non-commercial entity called *Evrazia* (Eurasia), which was in charge of coordinating the election-related activities with political parties, youth groups, priests and social media trolls.

In addition to this electoral interference, the Kremlin has used the Transnistrian region in its attempts to subvert Moldova's internal affairs. It is alleged that Russian proxies in Tiraspol orchestrated drone attacks, explosions in public buildings and other forms of sabotage to create panic, instability and security tensions on the left bank of the Nistru River (*Ukrainska Pravda*, 2024). Furthermore, on 1 January 2025 Russia stopped exporting gas to the Transnistrian region following Ukraine's decision not to extend the contract to transport gas through its territory. Gazprom refused to provide the gas through alternative routes, such as the Trans-Balkan pipeline or Turkstream, leaving the 350,000 inhabitants of the region in a humanitarian crisis (Całus 2025). The objective was to diminish the legitimacy of the pro-European leadership in Chisinau and create the prerequisites for increased energy prices and, with this, higher inflation in Moldova.

In 2026, following the defeat of the Kremlin-backed candidates during the last elections, Russia's strategy towards Moldova has been reviewed and updated. At present Moscow is trying to use other leverage instruments on Chisinau, which are triggered through airstrikes on the territory of Ukraine. On 7 March Russia targeted the Novodnistrovsk power plant in southwestern Ukraine and heavily polluted the Nistru, from which most regions of Moldova obtain potable water. The Moldovan government was obliged to instate an environmental alert for 15 days and temporarily cut off the water supply for four municipalities. Weeks later, on 23 March, Russia attacked a high-voltage line transporting electricity to Moldova via Ukraine. As a result, for the next six days citizens lived under the threat of a blackout. Both cases show that Russia will most probably continue to provoke crisis situations in different areas and test the capacity of the national authorities to manage them.

Building a strategic vision for Moldova's national security

Since Russia launched its full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, Moldova has gradually reshaped its strategic vision for national security and defence. In December 2023 the

authorities approved a new National Security Strategy, which emphasises that Russia is the most persistent threat to Moldova's sovereignty. This strategy points out that Russia's goal is to carve out a land corridor to Moldova by force and destabilise the country through a number of malign instruments, including cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, energy blackmail, illegal financing of political parties and meddling in the electoral process (Moldova, President of the Republic 2023).

The National Security Strategy strongly emphasises both Moldova's goal of acceding to the EU and its growing involvement in EU missions and operations and in the EU–Ukraine Solidarity Lanes. It also stresses that the country needs to align itself more fully with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and agenda to combat climate change. Throughout the accession process, Moldova has committed to embracing the objectives and action plan of the EU's Strategic Compass for stronger security and defence in the next decade.

The military and hybrid threats posed by Russia were further analysed in the new *National Defense Strategy for 2024–2034* (Moldova, Parliament of the Republic 2024). This policy document highlights the need to increase the defence budget to 1% of GDP by 2030 and to expand the multilateral partnerships with countries and international organisations for consolidating Moldova's defence capacities. The *Strategy* clearly states that the neutrality principle, enshrined in Article 11 of Moldova's constitution, does not represent an impediment to the continuous development of cooperation with partner countries and with organisations in the field of security and defence (Moldova, Parliament of the Republic 2024). In issuing the *Strategy*, the government has committed itself to advancing the reform of the security sector and to exploring opportunities for wider cooperation with Western partners in the fields of defence, energy, cybersecurity, democratic resilience and combatting disinformation.

From strategy to institutional and policy reforms

To respond properly to the growing hybrid threats, Moldova has had to reform and empower the key institutions in the good governance and security sectors. The National Security and Intelligence Service has consolidated its responsibilities for the implementation of counter-intelligence measures to investigate the activity of Russian proxies in Moldova. Additionally, the authorities have upgraded the role of the National Security Council, which is led by the president. This body includes representatives of public institutions in charge of various security branches and has become a key decision-making structure at the domestic level. It coordinates the efforts of various institutions, with the aim of ensuring better synergy between the relevant actors in the security sector so as to advance the implementation of Moldova's strategic vision.

Other bodies have been created. The Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation was established in 2023 with the mission of strengthening societal resilience to foreign information manipulation and interference. In the same year, the parliament approved the creation of the Cybersecurity Agency, a focal point for

deterring and responding to cybersecurity incidents at the national level. Last year the government established the National Crisis Management Centre, which is charged with overseeing crisis-management activities in the areas of prevention, response and recovery after crises. Although these institutions are still in the process of becoming fully operational and adequately equipped, they have evolved into pillars of democratic resilience and policy coordination in their respective fields.

EU accession as a catalyst for security-sector reform

According to the Public Opinion Barometer conducted in 2025 (Institute for Public Policy 2025), over 41% of Moldovans believe that neutrality is the best solution to ensure Moldova's national security, followed by accession to the EU (30.7%). EU membership is perceived by the Moldovan people as a strong security guarantee for the country's democratic future and economic development.

The EU accession process has emerged as one of the key drivers of Moldova's comprehensive transformation of its security sector since 2022. Through the European Peace Facility instrument, Brussels has provided 197 million euros to support the Moldovan army, police and other institutions with both non-lethal and lethal equipment. This includes communication systems, logistics vehicles, protective equipment, cybersecurity infrastructure, ammunition and protective gear. This substantial financial support has enabled Moldova to address the chronic underfunding of its defence sector and to modernise its armed forces' operational capabilities. The European Peace Facility has also helped the country develop extensive programmes to train military personnel in areas such as crisis management and cyber defence. This is preparing the way for the country's armed forces to become more deeply integrated with EU security structures.

The establishment of the EU Partnership Mission in Moldova in 2023 marked an important milestone in Brussels' commitment to supporting Moldova's resilience against hybrid threats (Council of the European Union 2023). The mission focuses on enhancing Moldova's capacity in three critical areas: countering hybrid threats, strengthening cybersecurity infrastructure and improving strategic communication capabilities. With approximately 90 international experts stationed in Chisinau and regional offices, the mission provides specialised training, technical assistance and operational advice to Moldovan institutions, including the Security and Intelligence Service, the Cybersecurity Agency, and the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation.

The deepening security cooperation between Moldova and the EU has been further institutionalised through the Security and Defence Partnership, which was launched in May 2024 (European External Action Service 2024). Moldova was the first country to sign this type of partnership agreement with the EU. This high-level framework brings together senior officials from the country's government, the European External Action Service and EU member states to coordinate responses to emerging security challenges and advance Moldova's alignment with the EU's security and defence policies. By 2025 Moldova had achieved an 88% alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (European Commission 2025).

Finally, the EU Security Hub, established in Chisinau in 2022, has served as a crucial coordination platform for intelligence sharing, joint threat assessments and rapid crisis response mechanisms. The Hub facilitates real-time communication between Moldovan security structures and EU agencies such as Europol, the EU Agency for Cybersecurity and the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell. During the March 2026 attacks, which affected Moldova's water and electricity supply, the Security Hub enabled immediate consultation with EU experts and expedited the deployment of technical assistance. This demonstrated the operational value of the integrated crisis-management architecture that had been developed over the previous four years.

Looking ahead: enhancing Moldova's resilience to hybrid threats

Despite significant progress in recent years, Moldova faces critical domestic security challenges that threaten its sovereignty and stability. The defence sector remains chronically underfunded, with spending barely reaching 0.5% of GDP, far below the target of 1% by 2030. The nation's airspace defence capabilities are rudimentary, leaving the country highly vulnerable to any Russian military incursions that might occur, with limited radar coverage and virtually no interceptor capabilities. The unresolved Transnistrian conflict continues to create a significant security risk. The breakaway region serves as a critical conduit for smuggling, illegal arms trafficking and the potential infiltration of subversive actors. Moldova's institutional crisis-management capacities are fragmented and under-resourced, limiting its ability to respond effectively to hybrid threats, energy disruptions or potential military escalations. Furthermore, societal resilience remains weak, with a significant portion of the population susceptible to Russian disinformation campaigns. This creates internal vulnerabilities that could be easily exploited by external actors seeking to destabilise the country's democratic processes.

The EU could enhance Moldova's resilience to hybrid threats through a few strategic actions. First, the Union should align the financial allocations provided for by the European Peace Facility with the country's security priorities and speed up the process whereby institutions procure and disburse non-lethal and lethal equipment. Second, the EU should provide opportunities for Moldova's participation in the SAFE programme and Eastern Flank Watch. This would help to ensure greater investment, the development of synergies and the transfer of good practices to Moldovan stakeholders. Third, now that the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine has concluded its mandate, Brussels could deploy a similar mission responsible for monitoring and securing the administrative line[1] between the Transnistrian region and other regions of Moldova. Fourth, the EU should consolidate its support for the Crisis Management Centre and provide advanced training and financial and technical assistance to strengthen Moldova's crisis-management capacities. Finally, additional efforts are needed to counter Russian disinformation and to advance media literacy programmes to build stronger societal resilience.

Conclusions

Moldova's attempts at comprehensively reforming its security sector within the EU accession process have produced important results. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of

Ukraine, the country has reshaped its approach to national security, moving from a passive, neutrality-based posture to a proactive, resilience-oriented strategy. This shift is evident in the development of key strategic documents, institutional reforms and engagement with EU and other key external partners. The creation of specialised institutions focused on countering hybrid threats, strengthening cybersecurity and enhancing strategic communication reflects a holistic approach to national security and a better understanding of Russia's hybrid war instruments. The EU accession process has been instrumental in this regard, providing not just financial and technical support but also a comprehensive framework for modernising institutions and building capacity.

In the short to medium term, Moldova must focus on consolidating its institutional framework and addressing persistent vulnerabilities. Increasing defence spending to the targeted 1% of GDP by 2030 remains crucial, as does further developing airspace defence capabilities and crisis-management infrastructure. Moldova must continue to deepen its security cooperation with the EU and explore opportunities for wider cooperation through the new security initiatives launched in the last two years. The ultimate goal is to transform the country's security landscape from a state of vulnerability to one of strong resilience, capable of effectively managing and deterring hybrid threats.

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1. The administrative line is a 411 km line of demarcation between the Trasnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, which is not under the control of the Moldovan government, and other regions of the country.

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