

# I. THEMATIC ARTICLES

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## INTERFERENCE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES. THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND GEORGIA

***Abstract:** This article highlights the key aspects of the 2024 presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova and Georgia. It also reflects on foreign interference in the electoral campaign in the Republic of Moldova. The presidential elections on October 20, 2024, held on the same day as the republican constitutional referendum, and the second round of the presidential elections on November 3 of the same year, represent the fifth presidential election since the independence of the Republic of Moldova. In these elections, citizens had the opportunity to directly choose the president of the country. Thus, the 2024 elections in the Republic of Moldova are shaping up to be a decisive turning point for the country's future. These elections were not just about determining who would govern Moldova, but were also the elections that decided the European future of the Republic. We would witness significant Russian interference in the electoral process. Since independence, Russia has attempted to disrupt Moldovan politics using various methods, from subtle to coercive. Traditionally, left-wing political parties in Moldova could rely on Russian support to consolidate a diverse electorate through various forms of assistance – financial, symbolic, etc. Russia's influence in economic, religious, and cultural circles, its presence in Transnistria, and*

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*its media presence have long ensured Moscow a special role, though this has been called into question by the war in Ukraine. Russia spent approximately one hundred million dollars to influence the outcome of the election. This article also highlights the main interferences of the Russian Federation in Georgia, resorting to the use of “soft power” as a mechanism of influence.*

**Keywords:** *Republic of Moldova, Georgia, elections, soft power, presidential elections, vote, interference, voters, influence.*

## **Introduction**

The presidential elections (first round) on October 20, 2024, held on the same day as the referendum on the Republic of Moldova’s accession to the European Union, and the second round on November 3, became a historic event that marked the country’s destiny. These elections are shaping up to be a decisive turning point for the country’s future, including its aspirations to join the European integration space.

Furthermore, the 2024 presidential elections were marked by foreign interference in the internal affairs of the Republic of Moldova. We witnessed massive interference from Russia in the electoral process. More than three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the attainment of independence on August 27, 1991, the Republic of Moldova remains a state where the Russian Federation pursues its own geopolitical interests. In order to achieve its objectives, Russia attempts to employ a range of methods, from soft tactics to coercion.

Although, according to the provisions of the UN Charter and the principles of international law, every state has the right to choose its own destiny without interference from other states, we are currently witnessing a series of international events in which this principle is being violated. The Republic of Moldova is no exception to this phenomenon, and the 2024 presidential elections serve as a clear example.

### **The Principle of Non-Interference in the Internal Affairs of a State**

Interference in the internal affairs of states is not only an old phenomenon but also a constant one in international relations. External interventions are by no means a recent occurrence, and states have always found ways to justify even the most blatant violations of sovereignty against those targeted by such interventions.

To confirm this, we need only recall the military interventions against the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, officially justified by the need to protect persecuted Christians; or the expansionist policy of the Nazi regime, which was

initially based on the need to protect German minorities allegedly subjected to unacceptable repression. More recently, we can see this pattern in the actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and even in the Republic of Moldova<sup>4</sup>.

The existence of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a state in international law establishes that no state may intervene in what is generally referred to as internal affairs or matters of national competence, whether reserved or even exclusive to another state. However, in recent times, we have witnessed numerous instances of interference in the internal affairs of other states.

This principle is closely linked to the right of peoples to self-determination, an indisputable principle in international law. If we refer to the concept of interference, according to international law, interference is defined as the act of a state or an international organization intervening in the internal affairs of a third country without its consent. Such intervention contradicts the notion of the “full and complete sovereignty of states”.

For this reason, the United Nations Charter of June 26, 1945, established the strict principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of any independent state (Article 27)<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, in 1965, during its 21st session, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 2131 (XX), whose provisions were later incorporated into Resolution 2625 (XXV) of October 24, 1970, concerning the *Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations*.

Since then, international law has established the rule that every state has the duty to refrain from intervening – whether alone or in alliance with other states, directly or indirectly, and for any reason – in the internal or external affairs of another state. This principle excludes any form of interference or action that undermines a state’s legal personality, sovereignty, and its political, economic, and cultural elements. Every state has the inalienable right to choose its own political, economic, social, and cultural system without any form of interference from another state. No state may apply or encourage the use of economic, political, or any other measures to coerce another state into subordinating the exercise of its sovereign rights or to gain any form of advantage from it. Moreover, all states must refrain from organizing, assisting, promoting, financing, encouraging, or tolerating armed or terrorist activities aimed at forcibly changing the government of another state, as well as from interfering in the internal conflicts of another state<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> O. Corten, F. Dubuisson, *Histoire et actualité de l'ingérence: droit ou politique?*, <[https://www.ceja.ch/images/CEJA/theses/Droit\\_ingérence\\_interventions\\_humanitaires.pdf](https://www.ceja.ch/images/CEJA/theses/Droit_ingérence_interventions_humanitaires.pdf)> (12.02.2025).

<sup>5</sup> *Ingérence, droit d'ingérence*, <<https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/glossaire/ingerence-et-securite>> (12.02.2025).

<sup>6</sup> M. Ben Raies, *La non-ingérence dans les affaires internes de l'état: Définition Et Fondements*, <<https://www.leaders.com.tn/article/32302-la-non-ingerence-dans-les-affaires-internes-de-l-etat-definition-et-fondements>> (12.02.2025).

This principle has been one of the means adopted to ensure equality among sovereign states and to promote the self-determination of peoples<sup>7</sup>. The principle of non-intervention in internal affairs is a fundamental principle of international law that prohibits any state from interfering in the internal affairs of another state. When analyzing the principle of non-interference or non-intervention, it is important to note that it encompasses multiple aspects.

First and foremost, the principle prohibits the use of threats or armed force against a third state. However, beyond the threat or use of force, the principle of non-interference covers a broader range of interventions in another state's affairs. These include political or economic pressure, which a state may use to ensure that another state conducts its affairs in a manner that aligns with its own interests or benefits its citizens.

The prohibition of the use of armed force against another state, which involves a material and physical dimension, is sometimes distinguished from non-intervention and is referred to specifically as the principle of non-intervention<sup>8</sup>. The principle of non-intervention is, therefore, a fundamental norm. However, its content and limits in relation to other norms of this kind have not yet been precisely defined by modern international law with the desirable level of clarity<sup>9</sup>.

The principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states is one of the fundamental principles of international law that governs international relations. This principle includes the notion of non-intervention in matters that fall exclusively within a state's jurisdiction, which has been broadly interpreted in state practice. As a result, not only armed intervention but also any other form of interference or threat directed against the legal personality of a state or its political, economic, and cultural elements is contrary to international law and constitutes a violation under it. This principle was explicitly enshrined in Article 2 of the United Nations Charter for the newly created organization, stating that no provision of the Charter "authorizes the United Nations to intervene in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state", except in cases involving serious threats to international peace, breaches of peace, or acts of aggression. The same principle is also recognized in relations between states<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> B. Graefrath, *Ingérence et droit international*, pp. 17-32, <<https://books.openedition.org/iheid/2927>> (12.02.2025).

<sup>8</sup> M. Bizeau, *Le principe de non-ingérence en droit international*, <<https://fiches-droit.com/principe-de-non-ingerence#:~:text=Un%20autre%20exemple%20de%20violation,secrets%20fran%C3%A7ais%20en%20Nouvelle%2DZ%C3%A9lande>> (12.02.2025)

<sup>9</sup> G. Fischernon, *Intervention*, <<https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/non-intervention/>> (12.02.2025).

<sup>10</sup> *Carta Natiumilor Unite din 26 iunie 1945 Emitent: Organizatia Natiumilor Unite*, publicat in: Monitorul Oficial din 26 iunie 1945, <[chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/legislatie/internationala/Carta\\_Organizatiei\\_Natiumilor\\_Unite\\_ONU.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/legislatie/internationala/Carta_Organizatiei_Natiumilor_Unite_ONU.pdf)> (12.02.2025).

## The 2024 Presidential Elections

The 2024 presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova will become a subject of discussion among political leaders as well as representatives of the academic community. Amid an active war on Moldova's eastern border and considering Moldova's recent attainment of candidate status for accession to the European Union, these elections will shape the country's future and destiny. To better understand the situation surrounding the 2024 presidential elections in Moldova, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the electoral campaign period. Analyzing the context, it is worth noting that in the first round of voting, the voter turnout was 51,75% (50,72% for the referendum), surpassing the validation threshold of one-third of registered voters.

During the 2024 presidential elections in Moldova, multiple politicians and public figures announced their intention to run for office (tab. 1)<sup>11</sup>.

Tab. 1. The 2024 Presidential Elections

Nr / ordine	Concurent electoral	Tur I
1.	Alexandr Stoianoglo Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova	25,95%
2.	Maia Sandu Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate	42,49%
3.	Renato Usatii Partidul Nostru	13,79%
4.	Vasile Tarlev Partidul pentru Viitorul Moldovei	3,19%
5.	Irina Vlah candidat independent	5,38%
6.	Ion Chicu Partidul Dezvoltării și Consolidării Moldovei	2,06%
7.	Andrei Năstase candidat independent	0,64%
8.	Octavian Țicu Blocul electoral "Împreună"	0,93%
9.	Victoria Furtună candidat independent	4,45%
10.	Tudor Ulianoschi candidat independent	0,52%
11.	Natalia Morari candidat independent	0,61%

Source: Alegeri prezidențiale din 2024 în Republica Moldova, <[https://alegeri.md/w/Alegeri\\_preziden%C8%9Biale\\_din\\_2024\\_%C3%AEn\\_Republica\\_Moldova](https://alegeri.md/w/Alegeri_preziden%C8%9Biale_din_2024_%C3%AEn_Republica_Moldova)> (12.02.2025).

<sup>11</sup> Alegeri prezidențiale, <[https://alegeri.md/w/Pagina\\_principal%C4%83](https://alegeri.md/w/Pagina_principal%C4%83)> (12.02.2025).

The second round of voting was organized on November 3, 2024, because none of the 11 candidates for the office of President of the Republic of Moldova obtained at least 50% of the valid votes<sup>12</sup>. Thus, in the second round of the presidential elections (tab. 2), the top two candidates from the first round competed: Maia Sandu (42,49%) and Alexandr Stoianoglo (25,95%).

*Tab. 2. The second round of voting*

Nr / ordine	Concurent electoral	Tur II 3 noiembrie 2024
	Maia Sandu Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate	930 238 de voturi 55,35%
	Alexandr Stoianoglo Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova	750 371 de voturi 44,65%

Source: *Votarea peste hotare în 2024*, <[https://alegeri.md/w/Votarea\\_peste\\_hotare\\_%C3%AEn\\_2024](https://alegeri.md/w/Votarea_peste_hotare_%C3%AEn_2024)> (12.02. 2025).

The final results of the second round were: Maia Sandu (55,35%) and Alexandr Stoianoglo (44,65%).

Despite the large-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine and intense interference from the Russian Federation, the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, both within the country and abroad, participated in the constitutional referendum and the first round of the presidential elections on October 20, 2024. They cast their votes at one of the voting stations, including at 231 polling stations set up in 37 countries for Moldovan nationals abroad.

In total, according to the data provided, over 240,000 voters from the Moldovan diaspora, of which 1,344 opted for postal voting, voted for the future president of the Republic of Moldova.

For the Republic of Moldova, the 2024 presidential elections were a first. For the first time, postal voting was partially available for the presidential elections and the constitutional referendum on October 20, 2024. This was applied to Moldovan citizens in six countries: the United States, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and Finland. Postal voting represents an alternative method that allowed Moldovan citizens abroad to exercise their right to vote using postal or courier services. This method is regulated by Law No. 109/2024, which provides for the partial implementation of postal voting, thus ensuring broader participation in the electoral process<sup>13</sup>.

### **The 2024 Presidential Campaign in the Republic of Moldova in the Context of Foreign Interference**

If we are to draw a correlation between the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a state and the 2024 presidential elections in the Republic

<sup>12</sup> *Votarea peste hotare în 2024*, <[https://alegeri.md/w/Votarea\\_peste\\_hotare\\_%C3%AEn\\_2024](https://alegeri.md/w/Votarea_peste_hotare_%C3%AEn_2024)> (12.02.2025).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

of Moldova, it is important to note that these elections took place within a tense geopolitical context. The presence of an active war in the immediate vicinity of Moldova has conditioned the emergence of numerous threats to the country's national security<sup>14</sup>. In June 2022, when Moldova was granted candidate status for EU membership and began accession negotiations in June 2024, and in light of the increasing political rhetoric regarding the country's geopolitical orientation, Moldova has increasingly been subjected to foreign interference. Since February 2022, in the context of the war caused by the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, the political discourse surrounding the country's geopolitical direction has intensified. The government publicly announced that Moldova is the target of a "hybrid war" directed from abroad. Authorities warned that Moldova had been subjected to various forms of manipulative interference aimed at destabilizing the country, including illicit funding of political actors, disinformation campaigns, and cyberattacks. Opposition voices criticized the countermeasures, including the suspension of several media outlets, as excessively restrictive<sup>15</sup>.

Despite Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine and intense interference from the Kremlin in electoral processes, the 2024 presidential elections were a decisive moment for Moldova, stated Petra Bayr, Head of the Delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The October 20, 2024 elections in the Republic of Moldova appear to be a pivotal turning point for the country's future. This vote was not just about determining who would govern Moldova but could have marked the country's European destiny. However, this historic opportunity was threatened by a wave of Russian disinformation and other hybrid attacks, which could have compromised the vote.

With less than a month until the presidential elections, Moldova's national security advisor warned that Russia had launched an unprecedented attack of hybrid attacks aimed at hindering any progress towards European integration. If the integrity of the electoral process had not been maintained, the Republic of Moldova could have missed the opportunity to join the European Union (EU) due to Russia's interference. One of the main misleading claims circulated by pro-Russian media was that the constitutional referendum in Moldova was, in fact, a covert attempt to abolish the principle of Moldova's neutrality by replacing it in the Constitution with the objective of joining the EU. This would open the way for NATO integration, thus endangering the country's security.

<sup>14</sup> *Alegerile și Referendumul din Republica Moldova, Considerate Eficiente și Competitive de către Observatorii Internaționali, în Ciuda Tentativelor de Subminare a Integrității*, <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/election-o> (12.02.2025).

<sup>15</sup> *Misiunea de observare a alegerilor. Republica Moldova – Alegerile Prezidențiale și Referendumul Constituțional, 20 octombrie 2024*, <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/b/578857.pdf> (12.02.2025).

The Russian threat to Moldova's elections and state institutions in general should not be underestimated. The presence of pro-Russian oligarchs in the Republic of Moldova exerts considerable influence over the country, dominating the economic, political, and public life. Additionally, Moldova faces the issue of the separatist region of Transnistria, closely tied to Russia, where Russian troops are stationed. Despite limited human and financial resources, the Republic of Moldova has managed to implement several key reforms to strengthen its democratic institutions in the face of external interference. However, the fight against corruption in the judiciary remains a challenge for the country. To reform the judiciary, a key condition for EU membership, the government has established a verification process where judges and prosecutors are evaluated based on their ethical and financial integrity. It is believed that some judges, who are sympathizers of the Russian Federation, tried to disrupt the electoral process, knowing that their backgrounds could disqualify them in this evaluation and strip them of power and professional prospects in a reformed state.

Furthermore, the integrity of the electoral process largely depends on media regulation. The media landscape in Moldova is marked by a high concentration of media in the hands of a few groups, often affiliated with pro-Russian interests. The European Commission reported media concentration among groups affiliated with fugitive oligarchs and linked to the Russian state media group RTR. Thus, during 2022-2023, following the recommendations of the Republic of Moldova's intelligence services, twelve TV channels broadcasting mainly Russian content were suspended. These channels were allegedly controlled by internationally sanctioned individuals and provided inaccurate coverage of the war in Ukraine. The suspension measures were taken in light of evidence showing that Russia was using these channels to undermine the democratic process through disinformation campaigns. In September 2024, Moldova took further action by banning five Russian state-owned media institutions.

The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova recently obstructed the executive's attempts to regulate the media and ensure impartial coverage of election campaigns. The provision in question limited the appearances of candidates on audiovisual programs not specifically related to elections, as explicitly defined in the editorial policies of the press. This measure aimed to restrict discussions on electoral issues to specific programs listed by the media and monitored by the Audiovisual Council. In July 2024, the court declared this provision unconstitutional, ruling that it imposed an excessive restriction on press freedom<sup>16</sup>.

Another significant moment that highlights foreign involvement in the internal affairs of the Republic of Moldova, particularly in the electoral processes, is the financing of pro-Russian groups. It was established that the highest concentration

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<sup>16</sup> A. Maréchal, *Elections en Moldavie: comment limiter l'influence russe?*, <<https://prospective-innovation.org/moldavie-integrite-elections-2024-ingerence-russe-adhesion-ue/>> (12.02.2025).

of dirty money sent from Russia through the criminal group Șor to influence Moldova's elections was in the Gagauzia Autonomous Territorial Unit (in the south) and in Bălți (according to the estimates of the Moldovan authorities). The effort to undermine the referendum in Moldova cost the Russian Federation over 100 million euros. The money was spent on disinformation and society destabilization actions, as well as vote-buying (through direct payments to voters).

Thus, in early October 2024, Moldova's law enforcement agencies dismantled a scheme that involved bribing around 130,000 people in Moldova (equivalent to 5% of the country's population) using electronic cards to boycott the referendum on October 20, which coincided with the presidential elections. According to estimates by the authorities in Chișinău, these financial sources cost the Russian Federation and the Șor group over 15 million euros.

Convicted in 2023 for bank fraud after embezzling nearly one billion dollars from three banks in the country, Șor is considered the key figure in organizing destabilization maneuvers on behalf of Russia. On the Telegram social media platform, he regularly accuses the Moldovan "police state," which he claims has become a "compliant puppet" of the West. His political party – which bears his own name – was banned in 2023<sup>17</sup>.

The Security and Intelligence Service of the Republic of Moldova collected and analyzed data indicating an unprecedented level of intensity in actions carried out by the Russian Federation, aimed at anchoring the Republic of Moldova within its sphere of influence. The hybrid mechanism applied specifically targets attacks on democratic processes and the undermining of Moldova's European integration vector. Based on the operational data collected, confirmed, and systematized by the SIS, it has been demonstrated that the Russian Federation maintains as its strategic goal the attraction of the Republic of Moldova into its sphere of influence. In this regard, the tactical objectives pursued for the next two years were:

1. For 2024 – discrediting the referendum for European integration, interference in the presidential elections, and undermining political candidates associated with this goal.
2. For 2025 – ensuring that political parties under the influence of the Russian Federation enter the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova to create a pro-Russian majority or at least a moderate one regarding European integration.

The data indicates a strategy for the years 2024-2025, which will include three main interrelated elements:

<sup>17</sup> T. Barnaud, *Moldavie: ces ingérences russes «sans précédent» pour perturber des élections cruciales Europe. Moscou a investi des millions de dollars dans des opérations de corruption et de désinformation en Moldavie, où se tient ce dimanche l'élection présidentielle et un référendum sur l'adhésion à l'UE*, <<https://www.lexpress.fr/monde/moldavie-ces-ingerences-russes-sans-precedent-pour-perturber-des-elections-cruciales-PAH63HGS3RD4TGDYRV4GB2FCMQ/>> (12.02.2025).

Support for political actors under direct or indirect control of the Russian Federation. Politicians openly declared pro-Russian. These individuals have confirmed direct links with special services, political consultants, organized criminal groups, the presidential administration at the Kremlin, and oligarchic groups.

In 2024, Russian influence actions will focus on the following directions:

The European Integration Referendum will be the target of discrediting. The applied scenario includes creating conditions to reduce voter turnout and/or undermine the idea of the referendum. According to assessments, Russia relies on the “boycott” option, the “vote against” option, and/or framing a question in the referendum that links European integration with joining military alliances and blocs. Additionally, for the coming period, the intensification of messages will be planned in the informational space, including those suggesting that “European integration of the Republic of Moldova equals the loss of neutrality and the unfreezing of the Transnistrian military conflict”.

In the 2024 presidential and 2025 parliamentary elections, the objective is to undermine the chances of pro-European candidates while boosting the prospects of a favorable candidate (either directly controlled by the Kremlin regime or with moderate anti-Russian views, with whom future negotiations can take place).

The elements of hybrid influence by the Russian Federation are based on interference in Moldova’s internal affairs, involving political actors, pro-Russian associative structures/groups of influence, information-analytic companies connected to Russian factors, as well as separate groups of citizens clandestinely funded by external subversive centers. Based on the current situation, the driving force, including one inclined to take measures leading to radicalization and violence, is the Șor group, through its socio-political extensions, which had the main task for 2024 to undermine the results of the referendum.

Moreover, some data indicates signs of the Russian Federation’s revival of the “sovereign/statist” doctrine in the Republic of Moldova. The action vector of the so-called “statist” groups has focused their rhetoric on populist principles, “patriotic-nationalist approaches”, emphasizing sovereignty, neutrality, and the principle of “by ourselves”. At the same time, some entities connected to this doctrine received direct and/or indirect financial support from the Șor group, and their activities stand out for evident pro-Russian views. There is a high probability that these structures are guided by Russian intelligence services or influence centers connected to the Kremlin’s Presidential Administration and disseminate the strategic narratives promoted by the Russian Federation regarding Moldova. In this sense, indicators of Russian interference in Moldova’s internal affairs were investigated, including the revival of “fifth column” elements camouflaged under the “sovereign national interest”.

Furthermore, in the context of the presidential elections, the premises of a coalition under the auspices of the Russian Federation began to emerge,

involving other statist forces to promote speculations regarding the “affectation of sovereignty through integration into the EU”<sup>18</sup>.

During the presidential vote and the referendum on EU membership on October 2024, attempts at interference were detected. On October 17, the police announced that they had identified a network of approximately one hundred individuals suspected of being trained to incite disturbances in the country during the elections, scheduled for October 20. As a result of the police’s operational actions, several suspects – young individuals around twenty years old – were arrested. These individuals had allegedly been sent to Russia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina for training with the aim of disrupting the vote<sup>19</sup>. As highlighted by the European Parliament, the authorities discovered a “large-scale electoral fraud system financed by oligarch I. Shor, which involved transferring 15 million dollars to 130,000 Moldovans” through bank accounts opened in the Russian Federation.

According to the police, cited by the media in the Republic of Moldova, approximately 130 individuals were responsible for coordinating these corrupt activities, while another 2,000 were tasked with recruiting voters for the “no” vote in the referendum and for the pro-Russian candidate. Over 50,000 members of the network were able to collect data from approximately 70,000 voters. All were allegedly paid for their actions, with amounts ranging from 200 lei to 11,000 lei (10 euros to 560 euros).

In the organization of the sabotage of the democratic process, the main suspect is I. Shor, who in September 2024 promised on his Telegram channel to pay remuneration to anyone who voted against the European referendum. As reported by CNN, the online video quoted by the channel stated: “If you did well and most people in your area voted against, the bonus you will personally receive from me on your card will be 5,000 lei”, or 260 euros, serving as evidence of these crimes.

Among the evidence seized by the police during the investigation were large sums of money and tens of thousands of leaflets in favor of the “no” vote, as documented by Sky News live from a warehouse in Chişinău. “Here we see huge piles of posters or leaflets that were supposed to be distributed, with ‘vote no in the referendum’ written on them. On one side, there are Russians, on the other side, Moldovans”, the authorities describe. “Over 100 young people participated in such training in June, under the pretext of participating in a cultural and tourist

<sup>18</sup> *Evaluarea implicării Federației Ruse în procesele electorale din Republica Moldova în 2024-2025*, Serviciul de Informații și Securitate al Republicii Moldova, <<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Scenarii%20de%20influen%C8%9B%C4%83%202024-2025.pdf>> (12.02.2025).

<sup>19</sup> *Géopolitique. La Moldavie affirme avoir arrêté des perturbateurs prorusses juste avant les élections*, <[https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/geopolitique-la-moldavie-affirme-avoir-arrete-des-perturbateurs-prorusses-juste-avant-les-elections\\_223571](https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/geopolitique-la-moldavie-affirme-avoir-arrete-des-perturbateurs-prorusses-juste-avant-les-elections_223571)> (12.02.2025).

program”, detailing a series of training sessions, including “tactics to destabilize the constitutional order”.

Additionally, as evidence of Russian interference in the 2024 Moldovan presidential elections, on June 11, 2024, Moldovan police arrested passengers arriving from Moscow by plane. Some of the trainers were reportedly linked to Wagner Group, the Russian paramilitary organization that declined after the death of its leader in an airplane crash in August 2023. Other citizens, including Moldovans, were trained in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, where they underwent longer training from early September to mid-October.

As a result of investigations, a massive vote-buying scheme was uncovered, involving tens of thousands of Moldovans being paid to insert anti-Sanda and anti-EU ballots into the voting boxes. According to statements made by the head of the police, V. Cernăteanu, due to the scale and complexity of the mechanism, these actions from the Russian Federation represent a “phenomenon without precedent”. This observation is corroborated by a study from the New Strategy Center based in Romania, which states that, between false information and a massive vote-buying system, “Russia’s interference has reached an unprecedented level”<sup>20</sup>.

According to data from the Security and Intelligence Service in Chişinău, among the coordinators of the group’s actions in Moldova are foreign nationals Konstantin Goloskokov and Mikhail Potepkin – the latter being subject to international sanctions. Potepkin is known for his connections to Wagner and the Russian organization “Ferma”, which were involved in financing and organizing destabilization actions in Moldova in 2023<sup>21</sup>.

This is not the first time that Moldova has been targeted by destabilization attempts from the East. During the local elections in December 2023, “disinformation narratives such as ‘Russophobia imposed by the West’” spread across the country through Facebook networks, confirms the independent platform Open Global Rights. Fake pages were created starting in July through Facebook’s advertising network to promote pro-Russian figures and interests, such as Ilan Shor, according to data from the NGO Reset, as reported by Le Monde. Deepfake videos targeting President M. Sandu also circulated. According to Reset, the total cost of the operation was estimated between €198,000 and €280,000<sup>22</sup>. The day after the referendum on October 20, the Kremlin immediately denounced “anomalies” in the vote counting, and Russian media rushed to discuss “manipulation”

<sup>20</sup> V. Călugăreanu, *Alertă sporită în ajunul alegerilor din Moldova*, <<https://www.dw.com/ro/alert%C4%83-sporit%C4%83-%C3%AEn-ajunul-alegerilor-din-moldova/a-70541679>> (12.02.2025).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> C. Quevrain, *D’ingérences russes dans le référendum européen en Moldavie?*, <<https://www.tflinfo.fr/international/que-sait-on-des-accusations-d-ingerences-russes-dans-le-referendum-en-moldavie-sur-l-adhesion-a-l-union-europeenne-eu-2329747.html>> (12.02.2025).

of the vote. This quick reaction is part of a broader pattern where external actors, especially Russia, attempt to discredit electoral processes that do not align with their interests, further fueling the atmosphere of distrust and destabilization<sup>23</sup>.

The second round of the presidential elections on November 3, 2024, took place amid allegations of foreign interference, vote-buying, and voter intimidation. According to the data from the Police of the Republic of Moldova, “reasonable evidence” was found regarding the organized and illegal transportation of individuals to voting stations both within the country and abroad. Additionally, official statements from Moldovan police officials revealed activities involving “air transport from Russia to Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Turkey”, aimed at destabilizing the situation in Moldova.

This pattern of interference highlights the ongoing efforts of external actors, particularly Russia, to influence Moldova’s electoral processes and undermine its democratic institutions. It further emphasizes the need for international support to strengthen Moldova’s institutional mechanisms to resist hybrid threats, including cyberattacks and information warfare, which are being leveraged to destabilize the country. The European Parliament’s call for the EU and its member states to assist Moldova in addressing these challenges underscores the importance of regional stability and Moldova’s sovereignty in the face of external pressures<sup>24</sup>.

According to Moldova’s Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Cristina Gherasimov, Moldova is currently a testing ground for Russia’s new subversive methods, with the Kremlin using this experience to later apply those tactics in other countries. She warns about Russia’s unprecedented attempts to undermine democratic institutions in Moldova, including through the use of violence, weapons, explosives, and drones. Gherasimov states that Russia’s ultimate goal is to prevent Moldova from joining the European Union.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby has also addressed Russian interference in Moldova’s presidential elections, confirming that “Russia is trying to undermine the presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova and has spent millions of dollars to do so”. This sentiment is echoed by European Council President Charles Michel, who, in a letter to the 27 EU leaders, stated that “the Republic of Moldova is facing crucial moments for its European path”. On October 17, 2024, the European Union Council condemned Russia’s interference in Moldova’s electoral process. Peter Stano, spokesperson for the European Commission, further emphasized that the elections took place under unprecedented interference and intimidation from Russia, which is aimed at destabilizing Moldova’s democratic process.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> *Acuzații de cumpărare de voturi și interferență a Rusiei*, <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/maia-sandu-alegeri-moldova/33186376.html>> (12.02.2025).

These international statements underline the ongoing challenges Moldova faces from external actors like Russia, who are seeking to thwart its integration into European institutions. The support from the European Union and the international community is crucial for Moldova to maintain its sovereignty and democratic processes in the face of such external pressures<sup>25</sup>.

Reactions to Russia's interference in the presidential elections of the Republic of Moldova were also expressed by NATO Secretary General, Mark Rutte. According to him, Russia is trying to derail the European trajectory of the Republic of Moldova. He praised the leadership of Maia Sandu and stated that, through her actions, she is working to build a stable democracy in Moldova, one that is capable of protecting itself, particularly from Russia's "hybrid interference"<sup>26</sup>.

In this context, the statements of Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk are also noteworthy, as he praised the Republic of Moldova's positive vote for EU accession. "It enrages Moscow, impresses Europe, and saves the country once again – this is Maia Sandu", Tusk remarked. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, also welcomed Moldova's vote in favor of EU membership despite Russia's "hybrid strategies". "Moldova shows that it is independent, that it is strong, and that it desires a European future", von der Leyen wrote on social media. "Maia Sandu, who turned her back on Moscow after the invasion of Ukraine and brought her country's candidacy to Brussels, called the referendum to validate her strategy and determine the fate of this former Soviet republic of 2.6 million people"<sup>27</sup>.

In the context created, when multiple accusations of Russian interference in the presidential elections of the Republic of Moldova were brought, the spokesperson for the Russian presidency, Dmitri Peskov, called for "evidence" regarding the "serious accusations" made by the pro-European President of Moldova. According to Peskov, "it is hard to explain the increase in votes in favor of M. Sandu and EU accession". "Anyone familiar with electoral processes can detect anomalies in the rise of these votes", Peskov stated. Furthermore, to defend his position, Russia's spokesperson denounced the "unfree electoral campaign" in Moldova, claiming that Moscow sees "how many people are not in favor of the president's actions".

## **Geopolitical Crisis in Georgia and Geopolitical Power Struggle for Influence on Georgia: Law on "Foreign Influence Transparency" Means for "Soft Power"**

The main reason in Georgia's instability caused by introduction to the Parliamentary adoption law draft on "Foreign Influence Transparency" prepared

<sup>25</sup> *Moldavie: l'UE dénonce «l'interférence sans précédent» de la Russie, après la victoire étonnante du oui au référendum*, <[https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/10/21/moldavie-le-non-a-l-adhesion-du-pays-a-l-ue-pointe-en-tete-la-presidente-sandu-denonce-une-attaque-sans-precedent-contre-la-democratie\\_6357047\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/10/21/moldavie-le-non-a-l-adhesion-du-pays-a-l-ue-pointe-en-tete-la-presidente-sandu-denonce-une-attaque-sans-precedent-contre-la-democratie_6357047_3210.html)> (12.02.2025).

<sup>26</sup> V. Călugăreanu, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> *Moldavie: l'UE dénonce ..., op. cit.*

by the ruling “The Georgian Dream” Party. As is known, on April 8, 2024 the Georgian ruling party “Georgian Dream” has registered the draft of the Law on “Foreign Influence Transparency”. This is almost copy of those drafts submitted by the ruling party at the beginning of March 2023, when by that time the Parliament of Georgia discussed draft laws (2 documents) “on agents of foreign influence” and supported by the first hearing (with 76 votes) the first bill. The draft was adopted by the Parliament on second hearing on 27 April, 2024 with 83 members consent and 22 ones rejection<sup>28</sup>. The third procedure adoption is sought to be arranged on 17 May, 2024. After the one, the President should sign the bill and if it fails (current President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili has firm decision to put veto and block the law draft), afterwards the Parliament once more debates the draft in order to overcome the veto done by the President and when it happens, the Chairman of the Parliament if Georgia signs the bill draft for taking into force the one.

The discussion of the mentioned draft laws took place against the background of fierce protests both in the parliament and outside the parliament. The bills were submitted by the political party “People’s Power”, which is a satellite party of the ruling party, “Georgian Dream”. Initially, the draft law “On transparency of foreign influence” was registered in the parliament. To “ensure transparency”, the mentioned draft law required the registration as agents of foreign influence of such non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities and media means, whose income (more than 20%) is received from abroad. But by that time the draft acceptance was failed due to the massive protest rally by the Georgian society and the draft was called back forcefully and discussion about it had been postponed until today and since today it became valid. According to the draft law, everyone who was considered to be an “agent of foreign influence” had to be registered in the public registry with the same name in a mandatory manner. At the time of registration, it would be necessary to reflect the received income<sup>29</sup>. At the same time, the organizations were obliged to fill in the financial declaration every year. The draft law on “detection of agents of foreign influence” granted the Ministry of Justice the authority to conduct an investigation and study-monitoring of the issue at any time. According to the same project, the basis for starting the monitoring should have been the decision of the relevant authorized person of the Ministry of Justice and the written statement submitted to the Ministry of Justice, which “contains an appropriate reference related to a specific agent of foreign influence”.

Avoiding registration as an agent of foreign influence or not filling out the

<sup>28</sup> V. Maisaia, *Law on Foreign Influence Transparency – Why It Labels as “Russian One”*, “Azerbaijan Today”, 13.05.2024, <<https://azerbaijantoday.az/2024/05/13/law-on-foreign-influence-transparency-why-it-labels-as-russian-one/>> (12.02.2025).

<sup>29</sup> *Top stories in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia from June 10-14, 2024*, “Jam-News”, 14.06.2024, <<https://jam-news.net/latest-news-in-georgia-armenia-azerbaijan-summary-live-opinions-photo-video/>> (12.02.2025).

declaration would result in the organization being fined 25 thousand Georgian Lari (GEL). The project also provided for the following types of fines:

- 10 thousand GEL if the organization does not fill out the application form within 10 working days from the entry of the information on the website of the Ministry of Justice;
- in case of non-correction of defects in the documents within the specified period – 10 thousand GEL;
- Committing a legal offense after one month – 20 thousand GEL. As for the second bill on – “Foreign Influence Transparency”, taking into account the mentioned bill, any natural and legal person who would receive funding from abroad should have the obligation to register as a foreign agent. Non-fulfillment or improper fulfillment of the obligation stipulated by the Law draft on “Foreign Influence Transparency” would result in criminal liability and would be punishable by a fine or imprisonment for a term of up to 5 years. According to the draft, entities that met the criteria of being an agent of a foreign power established by the draft law were required to apply to the Attorney General and request to be registered as an agent of a foreign power. The said law would not apply to diplomats, consuls, and employees of the diplomatic service and consular institution. The law would also not apply to foreign officials, a person engaged in charitable activities (authorities of Georgia very often underline that Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is considered an oligarch by the west is involved only in charitable activities), and a person “engaging in religious, educational, scientific, academic, or artistic activities in good faith”.

The Georgian draft law on “Foreign Influence Transparency” is very alike to the almost same name law of the Russian Federation adopted on 14 July 2022 – Federal Law on “Control on Activities Actors Acted in aegis of Foreign Influence”. In order to confirm why the Georgian version of the draft has been copied pasted for the Russian similar one (at least the titles of the both ones are very alike and equal) is necessary to have an idea what is content of the Russian law in itself.

The Russian law also excludes “foreign agents” from key aspects of public life. These include bans on joining the civil service, participating in electoral commissions, acting in an advisory or expert capacity in official or public environmental impact assessments, in independent anti-corruption expertise of draft laws and by-laws, or electoral campaigns or even donating to such campaigns or to political parties. To avoid the “foreign agent” label, an organization needs to ensure that no source of any donation was at any stage “tainted” by “foreign influence”, including indirectly. The law defines “foreign influence” as “support” from foreign sources that includes funding, technical assistance, or other undefined kinds of assistance

and/or open-ended “impact” that constitutes coercion, persuasion, and/or “other means”. Foreign sources include not only foreign states or foreign entities, but also international organizations, presumably including such multilateral organizations as the United Nations. The law considers Russian nationals or organizations “foreign sources” if they are respectively considered by the Russian authorities to be under “foreign influence” or to be beneficiaries of “foreign funding”. Foreign sources include not only foreign states or foreign entities, but also international organizations, presumably including such multilateral organizations as the United Nations. The law considers Russian nationals or organizations “foreign sources” if they are respectively considered by the Russian authorities to be under “foreign influence” or to be beneficiaries of “foreign funding”.

The absolutely the same content is relevant to above-mentioned the Russian law content is referred to the Georgian law draft “On Foreign Influence Transparency”. For more clearness in that regard it is possible to demonstrate in below chart:

Main Similarities' between Georgian Law Draft on “Foreign Influence Transparency” and the Russian Federal Law on “Control on Activities Actors Acted in aegis of Foreign Influence” by Chapter’s Titles					
The Russian Federal Law on “Control on Activities Actors Acted in aegis of Foreign Influence” by Article Titles			The Georgian Law Draft on “Foreign Influence Transparency” by Article titles		
Article#1: Foreign Agents			Article#1: Definition Foreign Influence Organization		
Article#2: Foreign Influence		Article#3: Foreign Sources	Article#2: Foreign Power Influence Provider Organization		Article#3: Foreign Power
Article#4: Foreign Influence Activity Types	Article#5: Registration List of Foreign Agents	Article#6: United Registration List of Affiliated Foreign Agents	Article#4: Registration of Actor who Promotes Foreign Influence	Article#5: Registration of Official Documentation for Organizations promoting foreign influence	Article#6: Annual Financial Declaration of the Organizations

Source: Law on Foreign Influence Transparency – Why It Labels as “Russian One”, “Azerbaijan Today”, 13.05.2024, <<https://www.azerbaijantoday.az/2024/05/13/law-on-foreign-influence-transparency-why-it-labels-as-russian-one/>> (12.02.2025).

As for the main questions outlined below is possible to proceed to more detailed answered on them with providing concrete evidences and credentials.

1. What political goals the USA and the West (USA+EU) hope to achieve with these protests and how to achieve these goals?

2. What will Russia do to counter the US and the Western actions in Georgia?
3. How does the Georgian government assess the current political situation in the country and how it will manage its relations with the U.S., the EU and Russia?
4. What will be Georgia's policy response to a possible political crisis?

Having considered above-mentioned questions it is really possible to proceed with them and answered relatively. Since introduction of the bill draft to the Parliament, the protest rally has been rising its potency for three weeks. Officially the ruling party and its supporters, who assembled only once on 29 April 2024, mainly public servants i.e. so-called “administrative resources”, have shifted their policy and geopolitical priorities from the Western direction toward the Northern one. Namely, the date – 29.04.2024 should be labeled as Georgia's ruling party chaired by the Georgian tycoon Bidzina Ivanishvili, Chairman and founder of the ruling party “The Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia” drastically reorientation the country's foreign policy from the Western track into the so-called “Appeasement” foreign policy toward Russia and more concretely, endorsement of “oriental-Eurasian” geopolitical strategy (it is not accidently that in Georgia was hold during the days, international forum organized by the Asian Development Bank). Namely at the counter-rally meeting personally Bidzina Ivanishvili labeled the collective West (the USA and the EU) as “Global War Party” and blamed that namely the one caused August war in 2008 with Russia and explained that he is in the sanction list and the Western community declared against him and his followers so-called “Cold War”. This psychopobia by Bidzina Ivanushvili tends him to reunite his ties with the Russian tycoons (namely, Konstantin Malofeev and Vladimir Vinogradov). By the way, indeed the USA started to curb sanction policy loop over Ivanishvili in real life. Last September, the U.S. sanctioned Otar Partskhaladze, a notorious ex-prosecutor general and Ivanishvili crony who holds Russian citizenship. Now many fear that the new law will also invite Russian oligarchs fleeing sanctions to Georgia and open doors to their criminal money (the person is Ivanishvili's closest aide and main communicator with Russian tycoons). Moreover, under the USA sanction list were included his brother and his cousin Ucha Mamatsashvili (main Ivanishvili's financial assets formally belonged to them). However, in December 2023, upon his formal return to politics, Ivanishvili claimed that he had been “de facto” sanctioned, citing difficulties in accessing his Swiss bank assets since 2022. The ruling party and government officials have openly confronted the West over Ivanishvili's banking problems that, they alleged, were used for financial “blackmail”. In parallel to the law draft on “Foreign Influence Transparency”, the ruling party “The Georgian Dream” majority in a hurry manner and in silent procedure had made amendments to the tax code passed on April 19 under a fast-track procedure will make it easier to bring offshore capital into Georgia. The amendments exempt such transfer operations from

profit and income tax; it will apply to transfers of businesses registered offshore at the time of the law's enactment and if their transfers to Georgia are completed by January 1, 2028. The tangible assets that may accompany the transfer – including “aircraft, machine tools, cars” – will enjoy a one-time exemption from import duties and will be exempt from property tax until 2030. The change comes as the party **brings** the widely opposed “foreign agent” law back to life, while increasingly questioning the financial transparency of civil society and media organizations. Many analysts fear the law will stimulate the flow of black money into Georgia while allowing ruling party founder Bidzina Ivanishvili and his cronies to evade possible Western sanctions. Here is great threat that Georgia is becoming a tax haven for black money, not just an offshore, but more than an offshore – a hub to bypass offshores and could be converted into so-called “interim black hole” from where the offshore capitals of the Russian tycoon would be transfer to further on directions, mainly to South-East Asia offshore zones.

The key evidence of the scenario is to be concrete data. There are in Georgia and in Tbilisi more the 150 000 Russian citizens. The foreign citizens have in the Georgian banks deposits in \$2.9 billion that is \$1.1 billion more than it was fixed in 2023. The foreign citizen's deposits consist of 28,4% of the whole ones in the Georgian banks and on the Russian citizens ones are considering 1/3. It means that the Russian citizen's deposits are being increased<sup>30</sup>. It is clear why the so-called “Offshore Amendments” have been adopted. It seems so that in nearest future, the Parliamentary majority of the “Georgian Dream” will be adopting the special laws, includes laws allowing the creation of Free Industrial Zones in the country and later – in 2019 – introducing preferential taxation for cryptocurrency trade (the laws greatly – and controversially – benefited Bitfury, the leading cryptocurrency mining company that in 2014-2016 received significant support from Ivanishvili's co-investment fund as well as Georgian authorities)<sup>31</sup>. Namely Bidzina Ivanishvili's main business activities in Georgia linked to cryptocurrency ones.

As for the foreign policy and geopolitical orientation implications perspectives, situation in Georgia deteriorated too much. Two key messages forwarded from the Washington to the Georgian government and ruling party. The main warning delivered as indicating that the ruling party violates so-called “red lines” in strategic relations between nations. Notable, The United States Department of State on Wednesday condemned what it called a “Kremlin-inspired” bill on transparency of foreign influence, advanced in Georgia's Parliament, and the “false narrative” it said Georgian Government officials had adopted to defend it. The statement claimed members of the ruling Georgian Dream party had been

<sup>30</sup> *Money Transfers from Russia Down by 62% in January*, “Civil Georgia” information agency, 20.02.2025, <<https://civil.ge/archives/664362>> (20.02.2025).

<sup>31</sup> *Despite Mass Protests, Georgia's “Foreign Agent” Bill Becomes Law*, RFE/RL's Georgian Service, Prague, 03.06.2024, <<https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-parliament-signs-foreign-agent-law/32976772.html>> (12.02.2025).

“clear” that the intent of the law was to “silence critical voices and destroy Georgia’s vibrant civil society”. The main message from the White House and “This legislation and Georgian Dream’s anti-Western rhetoric put Georgia on a precarious trajectory. The statements and actions of the Georgian Government are incompatible with the democratic values that underpin membership in the EU and NATO and thus jeopardize Georgia’s path to Euro-Atlantic integration”, the Department of State said<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, the USA condemns and blames of the ruling party of Georgia that the bill draft directly infringes two principles: “suppress peaceful assembly and freedom of speech” and “freedom of expression”.

Two Assistants to State Secretary, Dr. Derek Chollet and Dr. James O’Brian personally provided concrete ultimatum to Prime-minister of Georgia Irakli Kobakhidze that if the bill draft would be adapted at third hearing of the Parliament on May 17, 2024, the USA Biden Administration unanimously impose economic sanctions to high-level Georgian officials, including Bidzina Ivanishvili and distort and call back the Strategic Partnership Charter signed by the parties on January 13, 2009. Hence, it means that USA never considers Georgia as its strategic partner and considers as Russia’s strategic ally with proper consequences actions. The fact the relations between Georgia and USA has deteriorated ultimately and reached to the stage of “Cold War” reflected the fact when the Georgian Prime-minister Irakli Kobakhidze rejected the American side proposal to arrive in Washington and even blamed and accused the USA Ambassador in Georgia organizing two anti-governmental coup d’état via revolutionary scenarios.

Moreover, the processes even taking place latent hybrid warfare scenario – notable, the American hacker group: “Anonymous” performed cyber-attack to the governmental structures of Georgia as well as to pro-governmental media TVs “POST-TV” and “IMEDI-TV” and blocked their sites and TV broadcasting.

Therefore, there is a concrete evidence of the “Anonymous” group result against Georgian pro-governmental servers and evidence of such attack consequences<sup>33</sup>.

Absolutely the same positions and strategies are reflecting from the EU current leadership and these ones are fully orchestrated with the USA Biden’s Administration and clear that the EU will also join the USA in imposing sanctions over the Georgian VIP politicians, suspend Georgia’s Candidacy Status to the Membership and also abolish Free-Visa Regime with Georgia with the EU member-states.

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<sup>32</sup> *US Department of State: Georgia’s actions jeopardize its path to Euro-Atlantic integration*, “Caliber” Agency, 02.05.2024, <<https://caliber.az/en/post/us-department-of-state-georgia-s-actions-jeopardize-its-path-to-euro-atlantic-integration>> (12.02.2025).

<sup>33</sup> *Anonymous Says It Will “Unleash Storm” if GD Pursues Authoritarian Agenda*, “Civil Georgia” information agency, 26.08.2024, <<https://civil.ge/archives/621593>> (12.02.2025).

These are true realities that are indicating how situation is being strained from Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy stance and only one the Georgian high-level politician who unwavering support the trend is President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili. She called up and summoned the EU member-states 27 Ambassadors in Tbilisi on May 5, 2024 and appealed to save democracy and Western foreign policy in Georgia. It seems so that Georgia's official policy regarding to possible crisis in the country is doubtful and falling in two directions: the President and the Georgian political opposition are fighting to denounce the bill draft and even defeat via the Parliamentary elections the ruling party and requested direct support from the Western community. As for the ruling party and their supporters in the governmental structures as well as the so-called "administrative resources" are conducting the Constitutional Coup d'état, reinforcing their ties with Russia and seeking other allies in the Eastern direction i.e. in "Eurasian space", probably including China.

As for Russia and its approach toward the situation in Georgia, certainly, the Kremlin supports the ruling Georgian party and government and fully expresses solidarity and support to them. The main VIP politicians and ideologists of the Kremlin – Volodin, Peskov, Dugin, Zakharova, etc. condemns the protest rallies and expressed full support to the ruling party. Moreover, according to some sources, around 30 political counsellors, political technologists and ex-law enforcement agencies employees, from FSB, GRU and Foreign Intelligence Service of Russia arrived in Georgia to coordinate and provide consultation to the ruling party leadership how to cope with the protest rallies. It seems so, upon my personnel mind the even military mercenaries from "Wagner" group could also emerge in Georgia to engage in probable combat activities if such scenario develops. Hence, the Kremlin puts its stake to the "Georgian Dream" and its supporters to keep power untouchable.

Regarding how the processes occur in Georgia and how it affect to China it depends who wins the game as in both political camps are seen pro-China and anti-China forces. How situation is reflected in the governmental structures and in ruling party, please see in detail the Second Report (on internal politics of Georgia and description who is who in the ruling party). However, it should be mentioned that by and large, in both camps are clearly perceived the China is the strategic ally to Georgia and will not change its policy toward China.

The Russia's "soft power" is indeed one of the strongest pillars of foreign policy of the nation. The country possesses more than 500-year experience of duplicitous and vicarious foreign policy implementation that is alike to Byzantium style and its prolongation<sup>34</sup>. Hence, it works quite clear with gaining Neo-Imperialistic benefits for the exploited actor. The "Georgian" case-study is a clear implication of the policy.

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<sup>34</sup> G. Abdaladze, *Soft Power in International Relations*, Warsaw Euro-Atlantic Summer Academy, Tbilisi 2020, pp.105-106.

## Conclusions

Analyzing the interference of the Russian Federation in the presidential elections of the Republic of Moldova, we could confidently state that Moldova is a case of how developing liberal democracies must protect themselves from disinformation and foreign interference. Other liberal democracies should observe what is happening in Moldova and learn from its experience. For Moldova, these elections represent a decisive turning point. Over three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union and Moldova's independence on August 27, 1991, the Republic of Moldova remains a state that continues to choose its future. A victory for pro-European forces would be synonymous with the country's closer integration into the European Union and the potential for accession. The Republic of Moldova, a former Soviet republic, is making efforts to break free from Russia's sphere of influence, but Russia, in turn, is increasing its efforts to keep it within its influence.

Russia's incumbent authority has prepared a solid basis for such activities. Even in February 2008, the Russian President Vladimir Putin signed up a special conceptual document: "Strategy on Development of Information Society of Russian Federation" and later adopted new: "Foreign Policy Conception of Russian Federation" (revised three times in 2009, 2012, 2013 – where in aegis of special part of the document – "Information Implication of Foreign Policy Activities" is outlined as one of the key goals as – "increasing of Russia's mass-media means positions at global level"). Moreover, on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 a new doctrine on national security was subsequently adopted. The document identifies the domestic threats to Russia's state sovereignty, society, information space, economy, transport and energy infrastructure, natural environment as well as foreign-born risks. In the document, at first time was mentioned information war as one of the key "soft security threat" component. Based on the documents attached with several new ones – the most latest document introduction of new draft of "Information Security Doctrine of Russian Federation" will be adopted in 2017 and "Main State Policy of Russian Federation for International Information Security till 2020", key priorities of the Russia's "Soft Power" strategy imply to dominate on information-telecommunication sphere at least in Post-Soviet space and last in Global political level. Hence, the Kremlin truly perceives importance of "Soft Power" strategy implementation and already has been launching the project in real life. As for Georgia, the Kremlin and its adepts have launched the realization of the strategy with manipulation of several above-mentioned components of the one.

Hence, interference into internal affairs of Moldova and Georgia is very clear indications that the incumbent Russia authority promotes very radical and aggressive geopolitical code against its close neighborhood and cast all efforts

to increase its geostrategic interests in aegis of the whole Eurasian space and implicates its dominance foreign policy.

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