

THE SHADOW OF THE BEAR THE ROLE OF RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE AND HYBRID WARFARE IN THE 2024 ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA AND THEIR IMPACT ON EU ACCESSION PROSPECTS¹

Lucas Pitaval

INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2024, both Georgia and Moldova went through crucial elections that determined their paths to the European Union (EU). While Moldova saw the re-election of its pro-EU President, Maia Sandu, and the adoption of constitutional measures regarding Moldova's involvement in the European integration process, Georgia entered a period of political crisis following the victory of a pro-Russian party in the legislative elections, and the will of the new government's intentions to halt EU accession negotiations. This triggered a series of demonstrations in the streets of Tbilisi, where Georgian youth, sometimes draped in the EU flag, denounced the government's decision, which they deemed contrary to their aspirations and a setback to democracy.² In both cases, the shadow of Russia lingered over the elections results, as it did later in the Romanian presidential elections, in November 2024, which were cancelled by the Romanian Constitutional Court on grounds of Russian manipulation of the electoral campaign through means of hybrid techniques of interference. Russian interference in elections is not new and had already triggered turmoil during the

ABSTRACT

This article examines the recent electoral developments in Georgia and Moldova, focusing on their implications for European Union integration and on the impact of Russian interference. The analysis highlights the role of Russian interference in shaping political discourse and electoral outcomes, particularly through social media platforms. It provides an analysis of the different hybrid warfare tactics used by Russia to maintain control over post-Soviet countries with pro-European Union ambitions. It also delves into the possible perspectives for Georgia and Moldova in terms of European integration and questions the ability of these countries to implement the necessary reforms to meet Union standards. The contrasting experiences of these states provide valuable insights for the European Union and other candidate countries navigating similar geopolitical challenges.

Keywords: Russian interference, European Union enlargement, Georgia, Moldova.





RESUMO

A SOMBRA DO URSO: O PAPEL DA INTERFERÊNCIA RUSSA E DA GUERRA HÍBRIDA NAS ELEIÇÕES DE 2024 NA GEÓRGIA E NA MOLDOVA E O SEU IMPACTO NAS PERSPETIVAS DE ADEÇÃO À UE

Este artigo analisa os recentes desenvolvimentos eleitorais na Geórgia e na Moldovia, centrando-se nas suas implicações para a adesão à União Europeia e no impacto da interferência russa, destacando o papel desta na formação do discurso político e dos resultados eleitorais, nomeadamente através das plataformas das redes sociais. Analisa as diferentes táticas de guerra híbrida utilizadas pela Rússia para manter o controlo sobre os países pós-soviéticos com ambições pró-União Europeia. Analisa igualmente as perspetivas possíveis para a Geórgia e a Moldovia em termos de integração europeia e questiona a capacidade destes países para implementarem as reformas necessárias para cumprirem as normas da União. As experiências contrastantes destes Estados fornecem perspetivas oportunas para a União Europeia e outros países candidatos que enfrentam desafios geopolíticos semelhantes.

Palavras-chave: interferência russa, alargamento da União Europeia, Geórgia, Moldovia.

2016 United States (US) presidential elections.³ However, in these three cases, it took on a whole new dimension prompting further investigation into the ways Russia attempted to interfere in the electoral processes of sovereign countries, undermining their aspirations to join the EU. Both countries were part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) before gaining independence in 1991, and they have since become important components of the Eastern Partnership, an initiative established in 2009 within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy.⁴ With the war of aggression led by Russia against Ukraine and the threat posed to other former Soviet Republics, Georgia and Moldova presented their candidacies to join the EU on 3 March 2022.⁵ In an expedited process, the EU granted Moldova candidate status on 23 June 2022,⁶ and opened accession negotiations on 14 December 2023.⁷ The candidate status was granted to Georgia on the same day.⁸ All these dates emphasize the intricate fates of these countries. Therefore, this article aims to determine how the recent electoral outcomes in Georgia and Moldova have been shaped by Russian interference and what hybrid warfare tactics were used by Putin's regime to maintain control over its former colonies. In parallel, it will also analyze how Georgia and Moldova attempted to counter these external pressures on their democracies and improve their alignment with EU values and standards. This comparative analysis, based on the study of electoral processes, their regularity, and their aftermath, as well as on media analysis, should allow us to better understand the possible prospects for both countries and draw lessons on how to counter Russian hybrid warfare and interference against the EU and the countries aspiring to join it.

ELECTORAL OUTCOMES IN GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA

Analyzing the influence of Russian interferences on the political landscapes of Moldova and Georgia requires a thorough examination of the recent elections results. On 20 October, the Moldovans went to the polls to express their opinions in the European Union Membership Referendum, responding to the question: 'Do you support the amendment of the Constitution with a view to the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union?'.⁹ After a very tight vote, the proposal was adopted with 50.35%

in favor (749,719 votes) against 49.65% opposed (739,155 votes).¹⁰ Voter turnout reached 50%. Nonetheless, the margin was much closer than expected, and the significant mobilization of Moldovans living abroad decisively contributed to the victory of the ‘Yes’ vote.¹¹ In this regard, it is also worthy to emphasize that the geographical proximity between Moldova and the EU territory, as well as the massive number of Moldovans having a dual-citizenship with Romania, has contributed to a wider exposure to the benefits of EU membership and therefore favored the pro-EU vote. The Moldovan presidential elections took place on 20 October and 3 November 2024. Eleven candidates ran in these elections with the second round featuring a contest between the pro-EU incumbent, Maia Sandu, and Alexandr Stoianoglo, who advocated for a balanced approach toward the EU, the US and Russia.¹² Two other candidates, Victoria Furtuna and Vasile Tarlev, were accused by Moldovan media of being backed by the pro-Russian oligarch Ilan Shor.¹³

In Georgia, parliamentary elections were held on 26 October 2024, resulting in a landslide victory for the Georgian Dream with 54% of the votes.¹⁴ This pro-Russian party founded by the influential oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, had promoted the controversial Global War Party theory, alleging that the EU and the US were plotting against sovereignist leaders worldwide.¹⁵ This election also resulted in Irakli Kobakhidze becoming Prime Minister, succeeding Irakli Garibashvili. The new government immediately declared its intention to halt accession negotiations with the EU, triggering a massive wave of protests across. In this context, the EU High Representative declared:

‘The European Union regrets Irakli Kobakhidze’s statement on the Georgian Dream’s decision not to pursue the opening of EU accession negotiations and rejecting EU financial support until 2028. We note that this announcement marks a shift from the policies of all previous Georgian governments and the European aspirations of the vast majority of the Georgian people, as enshrined in the Constitution of Georgia.

We recall that the Georgian authorities’ course of actions and democratic backsliding led to the *de facto* halt of the accession process already in June this year and that financial assistance from the EU directly benefiting the Georgian authorities is currently on hold. The Georgian people have once again taken to the streets to reaffirm their aspirations for joining the European Union. The EU strongly condemns the violence against peaceful protesters, who are standing firm for their European and democratic future. These actions by the Georgian government have direct consequences on our relationship’.¹⁶

This statement highlights the degradation of bilateral relations following the elections results, as well as genuine concerns about Georgia’s future. On 14 December, the ruling party elected former football player Mikhaïl Kavelachvili as President of Georgia, replacing the former diplomat and pro-EU independent Salome Zourabishvili. Since then, Zourabishvili has contested the legitimacy of the elections, asserting that she is

the only legitimate President.¹⁷ In both cases, the elections were followed by political turmoil, with the shadow of Russian interference increasingly evident.

THE RUSSIA-EUROPE APPROACH: ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESSES AND THE ROLE OF RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE

In Moldova, the existence of Russian interference was denounced during the vote counting, when the gap between the results and the opinion polls made during the previous days and weeks became obvious.¹⁸ In response, President Maia Sandu attempted to mobilize the Moldovan diaspora. Inquiries conducted after the elections revealed that ‘criminal entities’ affiliated with Russia had spent several million euros to buy around 300 thousand votes of Moldovan citizens, with half of these documented by the judiciary.¹⁹ Maia Sandu labeled these practices as ‘dirty interference’²⁰ but did not identify any state actor. The Moldavian oligarch Ilan Shor was suspected of attempting to destabilize the Moldavian democratic system.²¹ In 2017, he had been sentenced for fraud but fled to Israel and later to Russia. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) special envoy, Lucie Potůčková, noted that ‘the manner in which the presidential election and referendum campaigns were conducted simultaneously and media coverage which favored the incumbent, and the President did not provide fully equal opportunities’.²² This suggests that external interference compounded internal issues regarding election transparency. Potůčková also stated that the ‘election day was calm and well organized, and the voting process was assessed overwhelmingly positively by international observers’,²³ contrasting sharply with the situation in Georgia. The OSCE envoy also mentioned that the Moldovan government

‘addressed national security threats resulting from the war caused by the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine. Law enforcement authorities, many international actors and civil society have proclaimed that Moldova is the target of an ongoing hybrid war directed from abroad that includes various forms of manipulative interference to destabilize the country, illicit financing of political actors, disinformation campaigns and cyber-attacks’.²⁴

Petra Bayr, from Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), welcomed Moldova’s ability to remain on the path to the EU despite what she termed ‘intensive Kremlin packed interference in the electoral process’.²⁵ These conclusions from international organizations highlight Russia’s significant involvement in the political landscape of an independent state. Similarly to Romania during its last presidential election, Moldova faced large-scale disinformation campaigns. The cyberspace and social media were turned by the Federation of Russia into a cyber-warfare battlefield, with the Chinese app TikTok being an efficient weapon for promoting anti-EU discourse. A pro-Russian strategy consisted in exploiting the people’s fears regarding the war of aggression

against Ukraine and its potential spread to Moldova, exacerbated by the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria, despite the notable weakness of these troops.²⁶ Moreover, the EU's consistent support for Ukraine's war effort may have fueled fears of a potential mobilization of the Moldovan army as reinforcements for Ukrainian armed forces. The extensive use of TikTok to incite atavistic fears among the population has sparked debates within Moldova and the EU about the need for more stringent regulations or even a ban on the platform. Following the second round of the presidential election, the OSCE special envoy noted that 'the challenges posed by foreign interference and vote buying schemes continued to reverberate in the run of campaign'.²⁷ The representative of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe condemned the 'continuous efforts by Russian and its allied, Moldovan oligarchs to interfere and to offer a legit intent incentive that did not succeed'.²⁸ This underscores the extent to which Russia's influence strategy relies on economic elites and oligarchs whose fortune are tied to their countries' relations with Russia.

The electoral developments in Georgia illustrate the same strategies employed by Russia to manipulate election outcomes and eliminate the influential pro-EU opposition and

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President, favoring pro-Russian forces in both Parliament and the Orbeliani Palace. The elections in Georgia occurred on 26 October 2024, and, similarly to Moldova, multiple international organizations deployed delegations to monitor the electoral process's regularity and organization.

However, the overall assessment was more concerning than in Moldova, characterized by a highly polarized media landscape, the instrumentalization of social media, physical pressure on voters, and 'hate speech against civil society and dissenting opinions triggered by the controversial law on transparency of foreign influence' (a law that was directly inspired, if not dictated, by Russia). Additional issues included 'vote buying, double-voting, cameras of the ruling party in the polling stations, party organized intimidation, and an atmosphere of "big brother is watching you"', in reference to Orwell's 1984 dystopian world.²⁹ These factors severely undermined the election's outcome and fairness. International observers concluded that the ruling party, the Georgian Dream, led by pro-Russian oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, attacked Georgian democracy and the rule of law. Ivanishvili played a pivotal role in disseminating Russian propaganda, particularly the Global War Party theory, which falsely claimed that the Western World aimed to overthrow the Georgian government and impose values on Georgia.³⁰ The manipulation of atavistic was again evident in the electoral process. Media images corroborated the conclusions of the international observers and testify to widespread ballot-box stuffing practices.³¹ Unlike in Moldova, the Russian interference strategy proved effective as the Georgian Dream retained its parliamentary majority and ousted

independent President Salome Zourabishvili in favor of its puppet candidate, Mikhaïl Kezerashvili. Following the elections, the pro-EU youth in Georgia organized a series of demonstrations in Tbilisi, which were violently suppressed by police and pro-Russian militias. On 29 December, the newly elected president assumed office, while Salome Zourabishvili ultimately vacated the Presidential Palace but reaffirmed that she was the legitimate President of Georgia. These elections represented a rejection of Georgian people's aspiration to join the EU, as expressed by a 2023 poll from the National Democratic Institute showing 79% support for EU membership, a sentiment frequently echoed by President Zourabishvili.³²

The extensive influence of Russia, and its ongoing attempts to interfere in the electoral processes of former USSR countries emphasize the establishment of a Russia-Europe strategy by Putin's regime. This strategy bears resemblance to the France-Afrique approach, historically employed by France to maintain regimes in its former African colonies that were favorable to French interests, sometimes involving the use of military force and economic pressures.³³ The legacy of French influence in Africa has recently diminished under the impact of Russia and its militia, the Wagner Group, which is actively involved in the region.³⁴ Additionally, Russia capitalizes on a broad network of oligarchs and economic elites whose wealth is closely tied to Russia itself.³⁵ In Moldova and Georgia, Russia benefits from a direct military presence through troops stationed in the separatist regions of Transnistria since the early 1990s and respectively of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which it has illegally occupied since the 2008 war. This military presence, coupled with the perceived power of the Russian army, serves as a potent tool for exerting psychological pressure on both political elites and the populations of these countries. The France-Afrique strategy, characterized by the military superiority of the French army and the establishment of

numerous military bases in former colonies, similarly enabled pro-French regimes to maintain power despite their often authoritarian and anti-democratic practices. This approach reflects a traditional form of Russian imperialism and represents a modern reinterpretation of the

Brezhnev Doctrine, which limited the sovereignty of countries within the Soviet sphere of influence. This doctrine is now applied to former USSR countries and, to some extent, to the former USSR's satellites in Central and Eastern Europe.³⁶ The Soviet military interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1956 and 1968 echo the Russian military aggression against Georgia and Ukraine in 2008, 2014, and 2022. The destabilization and interference tactics employed by Russia in Moldova and Georgia during recent elections, along with the blatant electoral frauds it orchestrated, illustrate the gradual disintegration of a Russian Empire that clings to its historical territorial ambitions.

THIS APPROACH REFLECTS A TRADITIONAL FORM OF RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM AND REPRESENTS A MODERN REINTERPRETATION OF THE BREZHNEV DOCTRINE, WHICH LIMITED THE SOVEREIGNTY OF COUNTRIES WITHIN THE SOVIET SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.

Amid the ongoing war against Ukraine, this form of hybrid warfare against sovereign states aligns with what Timothy Garton Ash refers to as the ‘Putin Doctrine’.³⁷ The substantial economic investments made by Putin’s regime in the war against Ukraine, alongside the global hybrid warfare waged against the EU and former Soviet colonies aspiring to join the EU, represent a squandered opportunity for Russia, given its vast territory, advanced education system, abundant natural resources, rich history and culture. While Russia’s future appears to one of gradual decline, the recent elections in Georgia and Moldova present new opportunities for these nations, which must be closely monitored to safeguard their sovereignty from hostile forces.

DIVERGENT PATHS: THE IMPACT ON EU ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS AND ITS ACTORS

The contrasting outcome of the elections in Moldova and Georgia are likely to set these countries on divergent paths. The closely contested elections in Moldova were a source of relief for pro-EU supporters, marking a significant victory against the hybrid warfare waged by Russia in the country. Consequently, Moldova, alongside Ukraine, will remain the only nation within the Eastern Partnership that is firmly committed to the EU accession process and will continue its negotiations. The warm congratulations of the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to Maia Sandu, the re-elected President of Moldova, underscore the steadfast support of European institutions for Moldova’s aspirations to join the EU and the necessary reforms required to meet the criteria outlined in the 35 chapters of the *acquis*.³⁸ The effective implementation of these reforms, especially in areas such as judiciary and fundamental rights (Chapter 23), justice, freedom and security (Chapter 24), external relations (Chapter 30), foreign, security and defense policy (Chapter 31) and institutions (Chapter 34), will be crucial in countering future external interference and ensuring the respect for Moldova’s national sovereignty and independence. The Romanian Supreme Court’s decision to annul the last presidential elections marred by Russian frauds highlights the necessity of these reforms in upholding the rule of law and combating the external interferences. Given the current geopolitical landscape, characterized by multiple conflicts and an intense war on Ukraine territory, the EU will need to provide substantial support to Moldova, notably through the transfer of knowledge and expertise in these strategic areas. Initiatives to bolster Moldova’s capacity to counter external interference have already been launched.³⁹ On 10 October 2024, just days before the elections, Maia Sandu met with President von der Leyen who praised the Moldovan leader for her dedication to the country’s EU accession path and acknowledged the ‘remarkable progress’ made since Moldova was granted the candidate status in June 2022.⁴⁰ This progress reflects Moldova’s commitment to shared values. Von der Leyen reiterated her intention to provide Moldova with significant investments over the next three years (amounting to 1.8 billion euros), to expand access to the Single Market, and to support the ongoing reform efforts.⁴¹ The inclusion of Moldova’s European future in its Constitution will help realize these commitments and further enhance Moldova’s independence from Russia.

In contrast, Georgia faces the peril of reverting to a satellite state of Russia, or at least drifting closer to Moscow, from which it has never fully distanced itself. In May 2024, just months prior to the elections, Georgia enacted a controversial law on transparency of foreign influence, modeled after the 2012 Russian foreign agent law.⁴² This legislation was introduced by the regime in response to protests against Vladimir Putin's reelection and has since been utilized to target human rights defenders and NGOs, such as the Memorial association, which investigated Stalin's crimes.⁴³ Consequently, the electoral victory of the Georgian Dream party is likely to promote an authoritarian drift, endangering Western organizations and individuals advocating for fundamental rights in Georgia. The EU, a significant funder of such organizations, may also find itself directly or indirectly affected by this law's implementation, which could further alienate Georgia from European core values. Unlike Moldova, Georgia may struggle to meet the criteria outlined in the *acquis*, complicating the efforts of any future pro-EU majority. Additionally, the situation is further complicated by Salome Zourabishvili's claim to be the only legitimate President of Georgia, following allegations of electoral manipulations. French President Emmanuel Macron, in his New Year Address, emphasized that the manipulation of elections in Moldova, Georgia and Romania poses ongoing threats to security and democracy, reflecting Western skepticism regarding the legitimacy of the Georgian elections results.⁴⁴ Should Western nations align with Zourabishvili's stance, the newly elected Georgian government may not receive recognition, rendering its decisions void. Conversely, Zourabishvili could potentially lead a government in exile, whose decisions would be acknowledged. In practice, only the newly elected government can govern, but the irregularities surrounding the elections have rendered it illegitimate. This raises concerns about the government's authority, as it is expected to maintain the monopoly of legitimate violence through law enforcement.⁴⁵ If the government is illegitimate, any violence it enacts becomes equally illegitimate, transforming law enforcement into mere militias serving the regime. From the EU's perspective, President von der Leyen stated that 'the situation following the elections remains concerning. [...] If Georgia wants to keep a strategic orientation towards the EU, we need concrete actions from the leadership'.⁴⁶ This statement underscores the EU's distrust of the Georgian Dream, which has expressed intentions to halt EU accession negotiations, contradicting Article 78 of the Georgian Constitution that says 'the constitutional bodies shall take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization'.⁴⁷ Consequently, halting these negotiations could be viewed as anti-constitutional by the Constitutional Court of Georgia, which is then expected to safeguard the country's European trajectory and democratic integrity. Once again, the Romanian Supreme Court's intervention to annul elections marred by significant manipulation serves as a precedent for protecting national democracy.

The divergent experiences of Moldova and Georgia following their recent elections provide valuable insights not only for these nations but also for the EU's other candidate countries.

THE DIVERGENT EXPERIENCES OF MOLDOVA AND GEORGIA FOLLOWING THEIR RECENT ELECTIONS PROVIDE VALUABLE INSIGHTS NOT ONLY FOR THESE NATIONS BUT ALSO FOR THE EU'S OTHER CANDIDATE COUNTRIES.

The influence of social media in spreading Russian propaganda, polarizing political discourse and amplifying extreme viewpoints has been significant. In particular, platforms like TikTok have been exploited by external actors in Moldova and Romania. The situation has prompted calls for a reevaluation of the regulations governing such media. In this regard, the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, following a domestic murder story, announced plans to ban TikTok, citing its promotion of 'all kinds of perversity and thuggery'.⁴⁸ More broadly, this decision aligns with Albania's proactive strategy to expedite its EU accession process, which has seen the country successfully conduct two Inter-Governmental Conferences with the EU in only two months.⁴⁹ The reliability of leaders like Prime Minister Rama and Moldova's Maia Sandu, who is also viewed favorably by EU institutions, is crucial for their nations' European aspirations. While closing TikTok may be pertinent for Moldova, the country faces unique challenges due to its historical ties to the USSR, contrasting with Albania's long-standing independence. The presence of Russian troops in Moldova is a remnant of Soviet imperialism, highlighting the complex issues that must be navigated before EU membership can be realized. Unwavering support from all EU Member States is essential, and the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU and its focus on security could aid Moldova in its necessary reforms. Conversely, the manipulation of elections in Georgia poses a setback for its European ambitions. The Georgian government may pursue reforms dictated by Russia leading to arbitrary restrictions on fundamental rights, including the right to protest, which has already been compromised by the disproportionate military responses to youth demonstrations, the rights of minorities or even the electoral laws that might be distorted to favor the Georgian Dream in future polls. This situation complicates the EU's engagement with Georgia, as the two parties may have conflicting strategic objectives. The US has already announced plans to impose sanctions on certain Georgian oligarchs, and the EU is expected to follow suit.⁵⁰ Such sanctions, if not targeted on individuals, could adversely affect the living standards of the Georgian population, potentially fostering anti-EU sentiment and reinforcing the Georgian Dream's position. Amid the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia is unlikely to mitigate the potential economic repercussions that Georgia may experience, resulting in a zero-sum dynamic where the Georgian Dream capitalizes on the geopolitical crisis it has exacerbated.

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NAVIGATING RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE AND DRAWING LESSONS FOR EU ENLARGEMENT

The recent electoral process in Moldova and Georgia have been significantly marred by massive Russian interference, as demonstrated by international observers and media

reports. These actions, orchestrated by the Kremlin, are part of a broader hybrid warfare strategy employed by Russia against the EU and its allied and candidate countries, especially those within the former Soviet sphere of influence. Under the Putin Doctrine, which is the neo-Brezhnevian Doctrine of modern Russia, electoral fraud has emerged as a non-violent means to limit sovereignty of other countries. The manipulation of social media to spread disinformation and pro-Russian propaganda, play on atavistic fears, and polarize political landscapes serves as a tool in this hybrid warfare, alongside tactics such as migration instrumentalization on the EU's Eastern border, cyberattacks, and sabotage of critical infrastructure. While Moldova successfully resisted attempts at destabilization and voted to constitutionalize its European future, the situation in Georgia starkly illustrates that such constitutional measures do not guarantee stability. The EU must uphold its commitment to support Moldova in the implementation of the necessary reforms to align with EU standards, especially in light of the ongoing geopolitical tensions and the war in neighboring Ukraine. European decision-makers should accelerate Moldova's accession process while remaining vigilant about the internal risks associated with enlargement. The presence of Russian troops in Transnistria poses a significant challenge, necessitating uncompromising diplomatic efforts for their withdrawal. In contrast, Georgia's elections have been successfully manipulated, resulting in an unprecedented political crisis characterized by competing claims to the presidency and ongoing protests from youth who view the election as a theft of their European future. This case study of two countries about to take completely divergent directions must serve as a critical lesson for EU enlargement policymakers, emphasizing the need for increased support for Moldova and the Western Balkans in their struggles against external interference. Strengthening the European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats and sharing its expertise with EU candidate countries is essential. Eventually, it must be noted that another Caucasian country recently announced its intention to take a more resolute path towards the EU. Armenia has actually expressed a desire to pursue a closer relationship with the EU, with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan advocating for the initiation of the country's EU accession process as the so-called Russian peacekeeping forces prepare to withdraw.⁵¹ This development exemplifies the region's gradual decolonization, presenting the EU with a significant opportunity to provide protection to Armenia, a nation whose cultural heritage is integral to Europe and which is trapped between Putin's imperialistic regime and Aliyev's genocidal dictatorship.⁵² Dmitri Medvedev's reaction to the announcement from the Armenian government to back the bill on launching the EU accession process illustrates the regime's imperialistic tendencies, by reminding Armenia about its belonging to the Collective Security Treaty Organization. **RI**

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