The EU's Support Against Russian Hybrid Threats

21 JULY 2026

Mariami Aliashvili



Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

The EU's Support Against Russian Hybrid Threats: Safeguarding Elections in Moldova and Armenia

On June 7, 2026, Armenia held highly contested parliamentary elections, which concluded with a decisive victory and reelection of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his pro-Western Civil Contract party. The electoral outcome generated intense regional scrutiny, including from both Brussels and Moscow. Ultimately, the election is viewed as a critical preservation of Armenia's pro-European trajectory for the next four years, against the risk of the country reverting to Moscow's sphere of influence under a pro-Russian opposition alliance.

The pre-election context was shaped by two critical factors. First, a rapid acceleration of Armenia-EU ties was driven by Pashinyan's foreign policy shift. Second, the pre-election period saw a significant influx of Russian disinformation campaigns aimed at influencing the electoral outcome. Along with the freezing of Armenia's membership in the Moscow-led CSTO

military alliance, Brussels-Yerevan relations reached historic highs. This momentum was underscored by the launch of a visa liberalisation dialogue, a newly adopted Partnership Strategic Agenda, and the inaugural bilateral Armenia-EU Summit in May 2026. Given the emergence of Armenia's pro-Western trajectory, the EU had strong incentives to support free, fair, and democratic processes. To this end, the EU took crucial, impactful steps by implementing targeted policy initiatives to support countering disinformation and hybrid threats.

A similar geopolitical tug-of-war over strategic alignment characterised Moldova's pivotal 2024 presidential and 2025 parliamentary elections. In close coordination with Moldovan local authorities, the EU deployed unprecedented measures to prevent and neutralise massive disinformation campaigns, propaganda, illicit financial flows, and systematic vote-buying. This operational experience in Moldova proved groundbreaking; it served as a turning point that allowed the EU to not only grasp the full scale of Russian malign interference but also to step up as a vital security provider for partner states in the Eastern Neighbourhood through a newly expanded institutional toolbox.

This brief explores the development of EU policy on supporting its Eastern neighbours against Russian hybrid threats. It argues that the EU leveraged its successful experience in countering FIMI (Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference), disinformation, and other hybrid tactics in Moldova to help safeguard Armenia's June 2026 parliamentary elections. First, the brief provides an overview of Russian interference in both countries ahead of their respective polls. It then analyses the primary EU support tools deployed to both Chisinau and Yerevan.

The Russian election-interference toolkit in both countries has proven to be remarkably similar. Reflecting Russia's broader approach to information manipulation, particularly its "quantity over quality" strategy, the aim is to flood the information space with content that creates confusion among the public. Several distinct strands of disinformation narratives can be identified within this broader information environment: the manipulation of narratives related to the regional war; the targeting and weaponisation of diaspora communities; and support for pro-Russian political parties. Together, these efforts seek to weaken public trust in democratic institutions, undermine the credibility of democracy, and damage relations with the EU.

One of the most impactful propaganda narratives among populations living with frozen or recent territorial conflicts is the exploitation of fears related to war. Both countries have experienced long-lasting territorial disputes. Moldova has the Russia-occupied, de facto breakaway region of Transnistria, over which the government does not exercise control. Russian disinformation actively exploits this unresolved conflict by linking it to the ongoing war in Ukraine. In particular, it promotes the narrative that the West seeks to draw Moldova into the war as a second front, while domestic messaging frequently claims that the Moldovan government could initiate

military action in Transnistria, ultimately escalating into a broader conflict with Russia. In the case of Armenia, Russia has weaponised the country's tense relations with Azerbaijan. Following the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2023, Russian disinformation has sought to promote the narrative that PM Pashinyan agreed to allow hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis to enter Armenian territory. Opposition leader Samvel Karapetyan has also been exposed for sharing AI-generated videos on social media purportedly showing Azerbaijanis entering Armenia.

In May 2026, documents attributed to the Kremlin-linked disinformation firm, the Social Design Agency (SDA), exposed Russia's broader disinformation strategy in Armenia. From AI-generated fake videos to newly created disinformation websites, the campaign sought to undermine not only Prime Minister Pashinyan and his political party but also the image of the EU in Armenia. At the same time, another key objective was to target the Armenian diaspora, which comprises around 7 million people worldwide and represents a significant voting constituency. Similarly, Moldova's national police and security services investigated schemes involving the weaponisation of the diaspora. Authorities uncovered the organised transport of voters from Russia to polling stations in neighbouring countries, including Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye, to influence the election outcome.

Moreover, aggressive and overt economic pressure was used to influence voters by exploiting fears of losing access to Russia as a cheap resource provider in both Moldova and Armenia, alongside alleged ties to and support for pro-Russian opposition parties. Even the same Western-sanctioned Russian NGO, Evrazia, has been reported to employ similar election-interference tactics as in Moldova, including the use of humanitarian aid as a tool to influence voters among displaced populations from conflict-affected regions. The organisation has also been accused of pressuring and mobilising religious institutions to encourage voter participation and advance political and electoral objectives.

All of the abovementioned Russian disinformation tactics ultimately aim to undermine public trust in institutions and democratic processes, as well as to weaken the perception of the EU as a reliable partner for these states.

"Deepen cooperation in countering hybrid threats, including tackling foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), consider capacity building and support to Armenia in the development of a comprehensive framework to effectively address hybrid threats." – In December 2025, the EU and Armenia have identified combatting hybrid threats as a priority through their Strategic Agenda of cooperation. Since then, the EU has offered Armenia its support primarily through expertise-sharing and capacity-building via the new civilian EUPM mission, deployment of a rapid response team, as well as through financial assistance.

The most significant development in the EU's relations with its neighbours in the disinformation and hybrid threat policy area has been the establishment of a first-of-its-kind CFSP civilian mission, with the mandate

of assisting state resilience-building against hybrid threats, FIMI, and cyberattacks. Three years after launching it in Moldova, the EU has deployed a similar EUPM mission in Armenia. These missions have adopted a "train, advise, equip" approach, whereby experts identify key vulnerabilities, share experience and expertise in crisis management, and provide institutions with technical and operational support, as well as equipment and know-how to strengthen capacities. In Moldova, the launch of the mission was largely driven by the regional security crisis and the challenges arising from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, the EUPM also played a crucial role in preparing for the electoral period, which contributed to its extension and informed its replication in Armenia. The EUPM in Armenia officially began its mandate on June 11, 2026, when its newly appointed Head of Mission, Cosmin George Dinescu, took office in Yerevan. Although the mission is initially established as a two-year mandate, Moldova's experience of mission expansion and extension suggests a potential shift towards a more sustained form of EU engagement in key partner states. This also highlights the growing importance and relevance of this policy area within the EU's external action.

Another unprecedented form of institutional cooperation was formally initiated by Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, who sent an official letter to Brussels requesting the urgent deployment of an EU "hybrid rapid response team," similar to the mechanism used in Moldova. The EU deployed a team of up to 15 experts to assist Armenia in countering hybrid threats and FIMI ahead of the parliamentary elections. The main form of support provided by this team involved advising national authorities, including the Office of the Prime Minister, the Central Election Commission, the Ministry of Interior, and the Security Council, on crisis management planning and responses to security, cyber, and FIMI threats. The tasks included detecting, analysing, and neutralising Russian interference and disinformation networks ahead of the parliamentary polls. This specialised deployment represented a direct application of lessons learned from the Moldovan elections.

Furthermore, the EU has provided significant financial support to Armenia. Most recently, in order to help the partner mitigate the impact of Russia's trade restrictions on the country's private sector, the EU allocated €34 million to sustain affected businesses and diversify markets. In the specific policy area of disinformation and hybrid threats, a €12 million package has also been granted to Armenia to build resilience. In addition, new grant schemes have been made available for civil society and other local actors engaged in countering hybrid threats and strengthening the country's overall preparedness. For instance, under the EU-funded regional initiative "ProElect," a grant was designed to enhance the capacity of local Armenian independent media and civil society organisations to monitor elections, expose foreign and domestic disinformation campaigns, counter

hate speech, and build public trust ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections.

Despite the fact that the support mechanisms in Armenia have been quite similar to those in Moldova, it should be noted that EU–Moldova relations are significantly deeper, mainly due to the earlier conclusion of the Association Agreement, the granting of candidate status, and the ongoing accession process. Consequently, the EU's impact on Moldova's preparedness against Russian hybrid threats has been considerably stronger overall. The EUPM in Moldova has even served as a catalyst for the establishment of new national institutions in this policy area, including the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation (StratCom Centre), the Cybersecurity Agency, and the National Crisis Management Centre, among others. In addition, the EU's engagement in supporting Moldova's media environment – through alignment with European standards and legislative reforms in the media sector – has been an important step in the country's broader democratic development. Although EU-Armenia relations and cooperation are not yet as deep, given that engagement has only recently intensified, this does not diminish the importance of the EU's involvement ahead of elections and its role in supporting stability in the country, particularly in countering foreign interference.

This brief has shown how similar Russian disinformation and interference attempts are across different countries. Considering the strategic importance of the EU's neighbourhood to the Union's own security, Russia's sustained engagement highlights the urgency for the EU to adopt a more systematised approach to this issue. The observed similarities between EU support to Moldova and Armenia in countering Russian interference during electoral periods reflect this trend. It appears that the EU has, to some extent, developed a more streamlined set of tools and support mechanisms for partner countries. The experience in Moldova, given its frontline position in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, provided valuable lessons for the EU, which were subsequently reflected in its engagement with Armenia. The EU has taken an inclusive approach to building resilience in third countries, involving key stakeholders such as local authorities and civil society.

However, tactics of hybrid attacks and information manipulation in the digital era continue to evolve, and responses must adapt accordingly. The EU will therefore need to demonstrate flexibility and speed in updating its countermeasures and tools in order to remain an effective security actor in the Eastern Neighbourhood.