

A person wearing headphones is seen from behind, operating a vintage reel-to-reel tape recorder. The scene is set in a room with window blinds. In the background, the flags of the Republic of Moldova and Malaysia are visible. The title of the article is overlaid on the left side of the image.

RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE TASK FORCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze how the secret services of the Russian Federation have managed to control the political life in the Republic of Moldova through their interlocutors. The main objective is to argue that the activities of the agents coordinated by the FSB, SVR, and GRU represent the greatest threat to the security of the Moldovan state. The ways in which these activities affect the Republic of Moldova's prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration and state sovereignty are also examined.

Keywords: the Russian Federation, the Republic of Moldova, SIS, SVR, FSB, GRU.

Introduction

The Russian Federation's strategic interest in the ex-Soviet zone is in instability and dependence. This interest has been highlighted in countries that have declared their independence from the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), such as the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, and the Baltic States. In order to undermine the security of these countries, the Russian Federation has stepped up its espionage activities.

Since the days of the Soviet Union, the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR, until June 1990), later the Republic of Moldova (declared its independence on August 27, 1991), has received special attention from the Kremlin administration. This was due to the danger posed by Romania, which contributed to the spread of the national idea in the region. In this case, the KGB in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova (name used for a short period, between June 1990 and May 1991) was important for the Moscow authorities, because through the 5th Directorate¹, the regime's opponents, including those promoting the Romanian identity, were monitored. Intelligence officers from the other Soviet republics were sent to the local KGB for further training and, in most cases, those who had worked in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova acquired command positions in the security structures of the republics that emerged after the dissolution of the USSR. These included Yakov Pogonii - head of the Moscow FSB Directorate, Andrei Homici - first deputy director of the Ukrainian Security Service, Vladimir Cozma - deputy head of the Ukrainian Counterintelligence Service and Anatol Taran - head of the Security Service of the Russian Federation's Border Guard Troops (Moraru, 2019). Although in most of the republics of the USSR, the KGB directors were natives of those regions, also belonging to the same ethnicity, the first local KGB chief from the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova was Gheorghe Lavranciuc, who was appointed only in January 1989, followed by Tudor Botnaru (Moraru, 2019). However, their ethnic origin should not mislead us into believing that they had pro-Romanian sympathies².

Currently, the Russian Federation is the greatest threat to the security of the Republic of Moldova. Out of

the six threats identified in the National Security Strategy adopted by the Parliament in 2023, three refer to the threat posed by the Russian state. The spectrum of activities carried out by the Russian secret services against the security of the Moldovan state is highlighted by the fact that “the Russian Federation and its interlocutors in the Republic of Moldova represent the most dangerous and persistent source of threat which, if not countered, can have severe effects on the statehood, democracy and prosperity of the country” (SSNRM, 2023).

Therefore, the paper analyzes the objectives and methods through which the Russian secret services have managed to influence the political life in the Republic of Moldova. It also aims to establish a pattern of the subversive activities that the Russian Federation is carrying out in the Republic of Moldova and who are the persons and entities that provide support to the Kremlin.

Iurie Roșca and the Destruction of the Unionist Movement in the Republic of Moldova

During the 1980s, the nationalism of the peoples of the Soviet republics began to manifest itself publicly, questioning the Soviet Union's right to control these regions. In an organized way, the national movement in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova was promoted by the Popular Front of Moldova (FPM – Frontul Popular din Moldova), created in 1989. The topics discussed by the members of the FPM were the sovereignty of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova and the *right to leave the USSR*, the adoption of the Romanian language and the *tricolor* (the national flag), and the consequences of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on Bessarabia (Corneanu, 2016). As a result, as objectives, the KGB had to infiltrate the Popular Front of Moldova, and in 1985 it received a secret directive stating: “Infiltrate our trusted persons into the National Liberation Movements, so that they will do everything possible to denigrate and compromise those who are truly committed to these movements, so that in time they can take their place” (Dabija, 2004). KGB Major Alexandr Sevcuic was sent to Chișinău, specializing in the *National Movements* of the Soviet

republics, with the aim, according to historian Anton Moraru, of penetrating “deeper into the organizational structures of these movements, monitoring their leaders and controlling them, and if necessary, compromising or neutralizing them politically” (quoted in Dabija, 2004). Alexandr Sevcuic, as a result of his work in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova and with the support of the local branch of the KGB, draws up a list of trustworthy individuals, including Iurie Roșca, the future and longest-serving head of the FPM, who, on Moscow's instructions, dismantled the unionist movement in the Republic of Moldova (Dabija, 2004).

Iurie Roșca was recruited in 1986 by the KGB, while he was working for the publication *Tinerimea Moldovei*, under the conspiratorial name *Budulai*. Also, in 1986, Roșca joined the editorial staff of *Teledio-Moldova*, where he received a salary of 400 rubles. In order to find out about the intellectuals in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova that supported the unionist movement, Roșca was sent to the Dimitrie Cantemir Museum of the Writers' Union of Moldova³, where he was paid 75 rubles⁴. To justify his departure from his former job, Roșca first used as a cover the accusation that some of the employees of the TV station belonged to the KGB. Later, this strategy was also used against Nicolae Costin, the mayor of Chișinău at that time, who was seen by Roșca as an opponent for the position of head of the Popular Front. Thus, Roșca managed to infiltrate the movement and became its leader in 1993, being re-elected in 1996 and 1999. As a result of the change in the statute, Roșca's conspiratorial name was changed from *Budulai* to *Leader* (Sitov, 2009).

In August 1990, at the Second Congress of the FPM, one of Roșca's initiatives was to rename the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova into the Romanian Republic of Moldova. This project led the Transnistrians to announce the creation of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic, in September 1990. Later, Roșca abandoned the project because its purpose was to give the separatists a justification for future actions. Also, in 1992, during the Moldovan-Russian war on the Dniester, Roșca declared that the frontists being *Christians*, *pacifists* and *anti-violence* should not get involved in the war, in the context of Moldovan Romanians being killed by Russian separatists supported by the Russian 14th Army (Sitov,

2009). Iurie Roșca's *pacifist* position has now been abandoned. In the wake of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Roșca urged people to pray “not for an end to the war, but for the continuation of this war and for the victory of Putin's Russia against Satanist globalism” (Botnarenco, 2022).

Between 1998 and 2001, Iurie Roșca and Vladimir Voronin, the leader of the Communist Party, formed an alliance that led to the dismissal of the government of Ion Sturza before it managed to sign the Helsinki Document of 1999, which allowed the Republic of Moldova to begin the process of European integration. On April 4, 2005, Iurie Roșca and the 11 members of Parliament of the Christian Democratic People's Party, formerly the Popular Front, voted to re-elect Vladimir Voronin as President of the Republic of Moldova, marking a new stage in the rupture of relations between Republic of Moldova and Romania. For this support, Iurie Roșca was rewarded with the position of Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, and in 2009 he became Deputy Prime Minister (Sitov, 2009).

As a result, the Russian secret services managed to infiltrate and destroy the unionist movement in the Republic of Moldova by making Iurie Roșca a unionist. Thus, it can be seen how, through a good agent, the secret services can cause disastrous effects.

FSB Activity in the Republic of Moldova

The Federal Security Service (FSB - Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации) is one of the intelligence services of the Russian Federation. It has an extensive list of responsibilities inside the country, covering counterintelligence activities, counterterrorism, defense of state borders, economic and information security. Officers of this service also operate in the former republics of the USSR. Directorate 5 of the FSB³ has these tasks and has been headed since 2009 by Sergei Beseda (TVR-Moldova, 2022). Within this directorate is the Operational Intelligence Department, headed by Georgy Grishaev, his deputy is Dmitry Milyutin, responsible for the Republic of Moldova and Belarus. The latter supervises the work

¹ Directorate 5 or the Service for Operational Intelligence and International Relations provides the FSB leadership and the Kremlin administration with assessments in the “near abroad”.

² Tudor Botnaru was deployed until 1978 to covert residences in Romania, Belgium and France. His official capacity was First Secretary of the Embassy. Botnaru collaborated in Bucharest with Gagauz Feodor Angheli, a KGB officer undercover as a correspondent for the newspaper Pravda. The two had him in charge and were constantly interested in Ion Iliescu, former Romanian president in the periods 1990-1996, 2000-2004. Botnaru was the head of the KGB in the MSSR from 1990-1991, and between 1997 and 1999 he was Minister for National Security of the Republic of Moldova. The appointment of such a person in a leadership position, who worked against Romania, testifies that the Russians were actively involved in the Republic of Moldova even after the declaration of independence (Sorin Aparaschivei, KGB Residence in Bucharest (1970-1980), in Historia, <https://historia.ro/sectiune/general/rezidenta-kgb-la-bucuresti-1970-1980-2297779.html>).

³ At present, The National Museum of Literature Mihail Kogălniceanu.

⁴ In 1986, 400 rubles were worth 645 dollars. This means that Iurie Roșca's salary was reduced to about 112 dollars as a result of his change of job. According to Nicolae Dabija, former editor-in-chief of the weekly Literature and Art published by the Writers' Union of the Republic of Moldova, during that period, Roșca bought a four-room apartment, while his colleagues, who received a similar salary, “were living from today to tomorrow” (Nicolae Dabija, “The Killers of National Awakening”, article first published on April 15, 2004, <https://www.podul.ro/articol/14910/killerii-deteptrii-naionale>).

⁵ Ghennadi Moskal, the former governor of Lugansk region, stated in 2014 that “Russian and Ukrainian foreign intelligence services have signed an agreement committing the two states not to spy against each other. To circumvent these agreements, President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on the creation of this Fifth Directorate of the FSB, but there is no signed agreement between FSB and the Ukrainian Security Service. So, they operate in three countries: Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia” (Moskal: In Lugansk the Transnistrian brigade of the Russian FSB is active, November 5, 2024, <https://centers.ulbsibiu.ro/ccsprise/lact/05-11-2014-moskal-in-lugansk-actioneaza-brigada-transnistreana-a-fsb-ului-rusesc/>).

of Valeri Soloha, head of FSB operations in the Republic of Moldova, as well as Ivan Koroli, head of operations in the Transnistrian region, who has maintained contacts with the chiefs of the Tiraspol security structures in recent years (Thorik, 2022; Kanev, 2024).

The FSB provided support to the pro-Russian establishment in Chişinău during the election campaigns through political consultants. Among these advisers were Yuri Gudilin, FSB officer of Directorate 5, Olga Grak, Leonid Gonin, Sergei Galiev, Sergei Galiev, Stanislav Patriev, Igor Golubev, Dmitry Dimler, Sergei Perfiliev, and Vladimir Shirobokov. They were trying to help Igor Dodon win the 2020 presidential elections (Thorik, 2022). The work of the consultants was condemned by the US Treasury Department, which said that “although efforts to influence the 2020 and 2021 elections in the Republic of Moldova have failed, the Kremlin continues efforts to return a pro-Russian government to power. Recognizing the loss of popular support for Moldova's old pro-Russian political elite, Gudilin's team has offered support to an opposition political group, the National Alternative Movement” (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2022), a party led by Ion Ceban, the mayor of Chişinău.

Ion Ceban's pro-Russian orientation has been noticeable since 2014, when he supported the illegal referendum in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and improved relations with the Russian Federation⁶. When the conflict in Ukraine broke out on February 24, 2022, Ion Ceban was in Moscow. The decision to leave the territory of the Republic of Moldova is said to have been taken following instructions from Grigory Velikhikh, an FSB colonel acting under the cover of deputy director of the Roscongress Foundation⁷, in the context of the special military operation, which was also intended to occupy the Republic of Moldova. According to Guildhall, the FSB regards Ceban as the most promising pro-Russian politician in Moldova and expects to use him both as the country's leader in case of an occupation and as a possible political opponent of Maia Sandu, if the military scenario fails (Guildhall, 2022).

On July 10, 2023, Alexandru Musteaţă, the director of Information and Security Service of the Republic of Moldova (SIS – Serviciul de Informații și Securitate), stated that SIS has dismantled an agent network led by

Yuri Gudilin and Vadim Iurcenco, Igor Dodon's deputy in the Moldovan-Russian Business Union. According to the director of the SIS, the group allegedly transferred in the period 2021-2022 about 500,000 USD to support illegal actions to influence political processes in favor of the Russian Federation (Liubec, 2023). The aim of the network was to establish contacts with persons in the political and economic circles of the Republic of Moldova, to maintain the dependence of the Republic of Moldova on the Russian Federation and to finance media platforms in the context of influencing public opinion (SIS.md, 2023). Thus, the activity of FSB officer Yuri Gudilin began during the 2020 presidential elections and continued until 2023, when SIS managed to document and destructure the network led by him.

To finance operations in the Republic of Moldova, the FSB, through Milyutin, worked closely with Igor Ceaika, a Russian businessman and son of former Prosecutor General and member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Yuri Ceaika. Dmitry Milyutin is said to have communicated with Ceaika more than 6,000 times between December 2020 and June 2022. According to an official of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU - Служба безпеки України), the FSB discussed with Ceaika all the issues that needed to be resolved in the Republic of Moldova (ZDG.md, 2022). Against the background of the crisis within the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) in 2021, the FSB arranged the withdrawal of Igor Dodon from political life. Documents produced by FSB-affiliated advisers allegedly show that the defeat of the PSRM in the July 2021 parliamentary elections was “the result of a systemic crisis” and that Dodon is a person with an “irreversibly damaged reputation” whose removal from the political scene should be carried out with “surgical virtuosity” (ZDG.md, 2022). After Igor Dodon resigned from the PSRM, he was appointed president of the Moldovan-Russian Business Union, an organization founded by Delovaya Rossiya, with a monthly salary of 45,000 USD (ZDG.md, 2022). One of the founders of Delovaya Rossiya is Igor Ceaika, the ambassador of this organization to the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria, who has financed with millions of rubles the organization where Igor Dodon was appointed (Thorik, 2022; Kanev, 2024). About Igor Ceaika, the U.S. Department of the

Treasury said that he “brokered an alliance between supporters of Ilan Shor and the PSRM” with the aim of removing the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS) from the control of President Maia Sandu and bringing it under the opposition-dominated parliament, and that the Russian government “used Ceaika's companies as a front to funnel money to collaborationist political parties in Moldova”, which was earmarked for bribes and electoral fraud (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2022).

The period of retirement from politics from 2021-2024⁸ helped Igor Dodon avoid public scandals. His return and election as president of the PSRM on March 23, 2024 is nothing more than an operation carried out by the Russian Federation to stop the re-election of Maia Sandu as President of the Republic of Moldova (Apostu, 2024).

Involvement in election campaigns is a way for Russian secret services to infiltrate their interlocutors into key positions in Moldova. Alexandru Musteaţă said that the SIS has information on how “attempts are being implemented to jeopardize the referendum on European integration, to interfere in the presidential elections, as well as to denigrate institutions and political candidates who will promote EU membership”. The Kremlin also aims, by 2025, to gain control over the Republic of Moldova “by gaining access to Parliament for political parties under the influence of the Russian Federation” (Gherța, 2024). At the same time, the Russian services will make use of several actors, such as Ilan Shor, “whose main task for 2024 is to compromise the results of the referendum” on EU accession. SIS also warns that there is a high probability that the “sovereignist/statist” groups and the Shor group are “guided by Russian intelligence services or Russian Federation centers of influence linked to the Kremlin President's Administration” (SIS.md, 2024). The relationship between the FSB and Ilan Shor has been highlighted in the context of the party led by Ilan Shor receiving support in 2021 from FSB-affiliated Russian advisers. In order not to be discovered, they bought PrePay SIM cards and kept confidential the addresses of the apartments they rented in the Republic of Moldova. The FSB also coordinated a deal in 2020 in which Shor's controlling stake in the company that managed the Chişinău airport was transferred to Andrei Goncharenko, an oligarch close to Russian intelligence (ZDG.md, 2022; SIS.md, 2023).

The head of the General Inspectorate of Police of the Republic of Moldova, Viorel Cernăuțeanu,

has confirmed that about €1 million enters Moldova from the Russian Federation every month to illegally finance pro-Russian parties in the context of the 2024 presidential elections. In these subversive actions, the Russian Federation is using Moldovan citizens as *mules*. According to Cernăuțeanu, at least four political parties would benefit from the money sent from Russia. Of the four, two have been confirmed as the parties Șansa and Renașterea, both led by Ilan Shor (Putregai, 2024).

SVR Activity in the Republic of Moldova

The Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (SVR - Служба внешней разведки Российской Федерации) is also concerned about the situation in the Republic of Moldova. One of those in charge is SVR Colonel Igor Maslov, head of the Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries of the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, who previously was in charge of the “Moldovan Department”. He replaced SVR General Vladimir Cernov, head since 2012, on March 2, 2021, following a decree signed by Vladimir Putin (kremlin.ru, 2021). Those under Igor Maslov⁹ prepare “briefing notes and reports on politicians, monitor compromising information, draft speeches that refer to the Republic of Moldova, both for Russian and Moldovan dignitaries and politicians” (Thorik, 2020). The information Igor Maslov receives is directed to the SVR headquarters and the Presidential Administration (Dossier Center, 2020).

The briefing notes are based on information sent by Russian agents in the Republic of Moldova. One of them is Igor Tuleanțev, former leader of the Russian Youth League of Moldova. Between 2012 and 2014, he promoted the Eurasian current, setting up several media platforms, among which today only www.eurasianews.md is still functioning. Tuleanțev was also observed in the company of Dmitry Rogozin, the former Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, who was declared *persona non grata* on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Igor Tuleanțev maintains links with people in the Transnistrian region who are connected to Russian secret services, such as Igor Beloborodov, director of the Pruto-Nistean Analytical Information Center in Tiraspol

⁶ Video of Ion Ceban: https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0SLK6x4eu28Ee9Zajbzue6fewQVyMi5FBmY5GBmiS394Ud8SQiTiSdNPAfITJzrAVl&id=100047673480177.

⁷ Grigory Velikhikh's affiliation with the FSB is evidenced by the fact that he was present at Milyutin's 50th anniversary, where he said, “Working with the team of Dmitry Vitalievich Milyutin, I have achieved a lot. That is why, in the process of work, he became for me an important and remarkable person, a mentor and a Commander with a capital letter”. Moreover, the indirect relationship between Ion Ceban and Grigory Velikhikh is evidenced by the fact that in 2020, the Chişinău City Hall signed an agreement with the branch of the Roscongress Foundation, which provides for “the development of the master plan for the development of the city and the creation of the Joint Center for the management of investment and infrastructure projects” (FSB agents responsible for Moldova, in RISE Moldova, op. cit. More at: www.facebook.com/Ion.Ceban.public/photos/a.1919025351652737/2618553455033253/?ty).

⁸ It was only a withdrawal from the foreground, because he continued to be particularly active in the organization's activities taking on the role of honorary president.

⁹ Igor Maslov is an official of the Russian Presidential Administration who served in the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, responsible for the Kremlin's subversive policy and activities in the “near abroad”. He is known for advising President Vladimir Putin on Ukraine, Moldova and South Ossetia (Official Journal of the European Union, Vol. 65, April 8, 2022, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2022:110:FULL&from=EN>).



(Ziarul Național, 2022). This center is a subdivision of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI)¹⁰, which was created by Lieutenant General Leonid Resetnikov, head of the SVR's Intelligence and Analysis Department until 2009 (LACT, 2014). The recipient and forwarder of the information obtained by Igor Tuleanțev was Vasili Kashirin, who in 2014 held the position of deputy of the Tiraspol Center and advisor to the former so-called Transnistrian Foreign Minister Nina Shtanski. In October 2014, he was detained and deported to Russia, and in 2015 he was transferred from RISI to the Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, working until now in the “Moldovan Department” (Jurnal.md, 2020).

Therefore, the Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries of the Presidential Administration, coordinated by SVR Colonel Igor Maslov, and the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI) headed by Mikhail Fradkov¹¹, former head of the SVR, were highlighted as levers to support the work of the SVR in Moldova.

GRU-FSB Activity in Transnistria

Officers of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU - Главное разведывательное управление) are mainly active in Transnistria, contributing to the growing instability in the region. Their tasks are to prepare provocations in the region, train sabotage groups and destabilize the political situation in the Republic of Moldova and several regions of Ukraine. Coordination of these activities is carried out by President Vadim Krasnoselsky's adviser, Major

General Vitaly Leonidovich Razgonov, who was sent to the region in 2019. Between 2011-2019, Razgonov served as the head of the Novosibirsk Higher Military Command School (nvvku.mil.ru, n.d.). Since March 2012, this military educational establishment has been training officers of GRU special troops called Speţnaz (nvvku.mil.ru, n.d.).

GRU agents, who support the work of the Russian Federation, are placed in the most important positions in the Tiraspol administration¹². Among them are Nyagu Vitaly Nikolaevich, Minister of Internal Affairs of Transnistria, Nebeigolova Igor Petrovich, attaman of the Black Sea Cossack Army, Gerasyutenko Sergey Pavlovich, former Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and First Deputy to the Minister of Defense, Slobodenyuk Ruslan Viktorovich Slobodenyuk, a colonel in the Ministry of State Security (MSS), who uses the position of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Transnistria as a cover and Paulescu Ruslan Vasilievich, Deputy Minister of Defense (Moldova-news.md, 2022).

Following the outbreak of the conflict in 2022, the Russian Federation began to carry out a media campaign to justify aggression against Ukraine. To this end, Russian media outlets are working closely with military intelligence structures to create credible narratives, distributing disinformation about the military events in Ukraine into the Moldovan information environment. GRU officers have been appointed to head the Russian news agencies in the former Soviet space. They have the ability to coordinate these operations, which result in influencing public opinion and Moldovan politics. In this regard, we can talk about the case of Vitaly Denisov, the head of the Sputnik Moldova agency, who has been in this position since 2022. He was discovered to be a

GRU officer of the Special Service Center 72¹³. He was expelled from the Republic of Moldova on September 13, 2023, banned from re-entering the country for 10 years because he endangered state security (Dermejni, 2023).

The Federal Security Service also plays a very important role in destabilizing the Transnistrian region and parts of Ukraine. The FSB is the service that coordinates all activities carried out by the Ministry of State Security in Transnistria (MSS), which is in fact a subdivision of the Russian service. The MSS is headed by Lieutenant General Gebos Valeri Dmitrievich, who has held senior positions in the FSB (mgb.gospmr.org, n.d.). Valeri Gebos is known for being the most “loyal defender of Kremlin interests in Tiraspol” (EARC, 2024). RISE Moldova journalists have also posted a photo in which Ivan Koroli, the head of FSB operations in Transnistria, Ivan Koroli, is in the presence of Vitali Nikolaevich Suhodolsky, Valeri Gebos' deputy, who is in charge of operational activity in the MSS (Thorik, 2022).

Ministry of State Security (MSS) operations in Transnistria, coordinated by the FSB, have been particularly directed against Ukraine, especially after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Thus, the SBU documented a case in 2014 in which Russian secret services attempted to create a “People's Republic” in Odessa. Through a criminal group coordinated by the Russian services, Transnistrian smugglers were mobilized to smuggle arms, ammunition and explosives into the Ukrainian territory, with the aim of carrying out protests against the official leadership (Infotag.md, 2014). Also, FSB agent Igor Tkachenko, the former head of the Dnestr military broadcasting unit in the Transnistrian region, was tasked with recruiting SBU officers. The information Tkachenko obtained was provided to the Russian Consulate General in Odessa or the Transnistrian MSS. He was caught in 2017 by the SBU (LACT, 2017). At the same time, following the start of the war in 2022, the SBU condemned the fact that Ukrainians, who illegally crossed the border with the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (TMR)¹⁴, were being recruited by FSB officers in the region. Under the threat of expulsion to Ukraine, the FSB is trying to get Ukrainians to provide information about military installations and the arrangement of the Ukrainian border section with the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (sprotyv.ua, 2024).

Ethnic Russians born in the Moldovan Socialist Soviet Republic also helped destabilize and promote separatism in the eastern regions of Ukraine and Crimea, and are Kremlin henchmen. Among the Russian Federation's most important acolytes can be named: Sergey Valeryevich Aksonov, head of the so-called “Republic of Crimea”, Vladimir Andreevich Konstantinov, “chairman” of the “State Council” of the “Republic of Crimea”, Andrey Yurevich Pinchuk, former “minister of state security” of the “People's Republic of Donetsk”, Oleg Vladimirovich Bereza, former “Minister of Internal Affairs” of the “Donetsk People's Republic”, Aleksandr Akimovich Karaman, former Head of the “Administration of the Council of Ministers of the Donetsk People's Republic”, Mikhail Nikolaevich Kushakov, “First Deputy Minister” of the “Donetsk People's Republic”. Of these, Andrey Pinchuk, Oleg Bereza and Aleksandr Karaman were coordinated by Vladimir Yurievich Antiufeev, the former “Minister of State Security” of Transnistria, who in 2014 was appointed as “Deputy Prime Minister” of the “People's Republic of Donetsk”, but was dismissed after a short period of time (EUR-Lex, 2014). Vladimir Antiufeev communicated in the period from November 2021 to May 2022 at least 18 times via unsecured telephone connections with the Director of the FSB's Operational Intelligence Department, Georgy Grishaev (Thorik, 2022).

Under these conditions, we can assume that the Transnistrian region is controlled by the Russian secret services. The people in the so-called leadership of Transnistria are agents of the GRU and FSB, and their main objectives are to destabilize the RM and the southern regions of Ukraine. At the same time, ethnic Russians from the former SSMR have played an important role in consolidating separatism in Crimea and Donetsk, receiving leading positions in the “new republics” created by the Russian Federation.

¹⁰ The Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI) operated under the SVR until 2009, with the designation U.M.61360. It is now subordinated to the Presidential Administration (Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service Review, chapter "Covers Used by Russian Intelligence Services", p. 50, https://raport.valisluureamet.ee/2023/assets/4-1-WEB_VLA_ENG-raport_2023.pdf).

¹¹ Mikhail Fradkov's son, Petr Fradkov, was also involved in subversive activities in the Republic of Moldova. During her visit to Moscow in 2024, Evghenia Gutul, the pro-Kremlin Bashkan of Gagauzia, signed an agreement with the Promsvyazbank run by Petr Fradkov, which stipulates that all pensioners and public sector employees in the region can claim a monthly payment equivalent to 100 dollars, which is possible by using MIR cards. It can be considered that this action was an attempt to illegally finance pro-Russian parties in the Republic of Moldova in the context of the presidential elections in the form of support for the population of the Gagauz ATU. The bank should have financed at least 30 million dollars per year in relation to the population (Irina Borogan & Andrei Soldatov, The Kremlin Decides to Buy a Population, March 12, 2024, <https://cepa.org/article/the-kremlin-decides-to-buy-a-population/>).

¹² The publication The Insider has revealed that former Chief of the General Staff of the Republic of Moldova Igor Gorgan, who held the position from 2019-2021, was recruited by the GRU. Even after his dismissal, Igor Gorgan constantly maintained contact with his liaison officer Alexey Makarov, a military attaché. This provided information on the political and military situation in the Republic of Moldova. Gorgan also called for the armed intervention of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Moldova, specifying that he would support this intervention by neutralizing the army: “We urgently need to clean the country of all fascist filth! Many are ready. Transmit on...The time has come. I have the whole situation under control. Here, fortunately, there is no “Azov” or other national formations, and we will deal with the politicians quickly”. SIS has complied with the information published by The Insider, and by the Presidential Decree of June 11, 2024 Igor Gorgan was stripped of all state honors. So, it is not only Transnistrian “decision-makers” who support the subversive activity of the Russian Federation (Sergey Kanev, Moldovan liaison. Chief of the General Staff of Moldova leaked secret information to his handlers from the GRU, The Insider, June 5, 2024, <https://theins.ru/politika/272103>; “We know the objectives, the actors and the tactics applied”. SIS confirms information published by THE INSIDER, ZDG, June 5, 2024, <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/cunoastem-obiective-actorii-si-tactile-aplicate-sis-confirma-informatiile-publicate-de-the-insider/>; For the Presidential Decree see: <https://presedinte.md/app/webroot/Decrete/1483.pdf>).

¹³ This unit deals with GRU psychological operations. U.M.54777 created the narrative of “dogs of war” and “werewolves” to denigrate Chechen separatists, as well as fabricating narratives to justify Russia's intervention against Ukraine in 2014. U.M.54777 may also support any governmental, public or religious institution of the Russian Federation to accomplish its objectives (AQUARIUM LEAKS: Inside the GRU's Psychological Warfare Program, Free Russia Foundation, Washington DC, 2020, p. 4-7, <https://www.4freerussia.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/12/AquariumLeaks-EN-Web-1.pdf>).

¹⁴ The illegal smuggling of Ukrainians was the work of a criminal group broken up by the SBU and SIS. Its members transported citizens fleeing conscription into the army. The cost of escaping was up to 5 thousand dollars, depending on the urgency of the departure. The criminals drove their payers to the Transnistrian border and then escorted them along forest roads outside checkpoints. To find customers, the gang members created several Telegram channels, and to hide their illegal proceeds, they forced Ukrainians to pay using crypto wallets (<https://t.me/SBUkr/10776>).

Organization Rossotrudnichestvo - A Threat to Moldova's Security?

The Rossotrudnichestvo Organization (RCSC) is headed by Yevgeny Alexandrovich Primakov, grandson of former prime minister and SVR director Yevgeny Primakov. The European Union has imposed sanctions on Yevgeny Alexandrovich Primakov because “he has clearly demonstrated his support for Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. He is responsible for supporting and implementing actions and policies that undermine and threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine” (Europa.eu, 2023). Also, at the head of the Public Council of Rossotrudnichestvo, which is a civilian control body, is Yuri Ceaika (rs.gov.ru, n.d.), who supported and coordinated part of the FSB's operations in the Republic of Moldova.

Organizations dealing with Russian emigrants have existed since the time of the Soviet Union. The most important organization was the Soviet Committee for Cultural Ties with Compatriots Abroad, which closed in 1992. Rossotrudnichestvo was established in 2008 and it inherited the tasks from the former Soviet organization. In a 1968 KGB document entitled "The Use of the Soviet Committee for Cultural Liaison with Compatriots Abroad in Intelligence Service Activities", it was stated that: “The main operational task carried out through the Soviet Committee is the use of official activities, propaganda and other methods of influencing compatriots in order to prepare the ground for recruitment, respectively for other intelligence and counterintelligence measures, using emigrants as an operational base” (Soldatov & Borogan, 2022, pp. 231-232). These practices are also currently used by Russian intelligence officers. For example, in 2013, the FBI suspected Yuri Zaitsev, the head of Rossotrudnichestvo in Washington, D.C., of espionage for allegedly facilitating the recruitment of American citizens by Russian intelligence services (Newsru.com, 2013). Moreover, in 2020, the head of the Russian Center in Prague, Andrei Konchakov, was expelled for allegedly being a Russian intelligence officer charged with attempted assassination (Soare, 2020).

The former head of this organization in the Republic of Moldova, Andrei Muravyov, was expelled on August 14, 2023, along with other officials of the Embassy of the Russian Federation. He had contacts with pro-Russian leaders in Transnistria (mid.gospmr.org, 2020). Also, one of the most important promoters

of the “Russkii Mir” in the Transnistrian region is Pavel Anatolyevich Shevtsov, Deputy of Rossotrudnichestvo (rs.gov.ru, n.d.) and member of the Board of Directors of “Russkii Mir” (russkiymir.ru, n.d.). Pavel Shevtsov has visited the Transnistrian region at least three times between 2021-2022, and is also the only deputy of the organization to have visited the area since 2015 (mid.gospmr.org, 2021; mid.gospmr.org, 2022).

The official purpose of the Rossotrudnichestvo organization is to promote Russian culture and protect the rights of *compatriots*. For the Russian Federation, the term *compatriot* does not have an ethnic meaning, but is more of a social construct. Therefore, people who have chosen to identify with Russian spirituality and culture can be considered *compatriots* (rs.gov.ru, n.d.). These ideas to promote the culture and spirituality of the Russian people are aimed at dividing the societies of the former Soviet states and are based on the Lukianov doctrine, which, in the period close to the break-up of the Soviet Union, envisaged the Kremlin supporting the populations of the union republics that did not agree with leaving the USSR. Territories with such a population were encouraged to leave the republics seeking independence. The Lukianov doctrine contributed to the emergence of separatist republics (Moraru, 2023, p. 292). Therefore, the real aim of Rossotrudnichestvo is to support the separatist regions by promoting their Russian identity, hindering the former Soviet states in their efforts to consolidate their own identity and statehood. In this context, the visits to the Transnistrian region by Pavel Anatolyevich Shevtsov are intended to convey the message that this territory belongs to the “Russian World”.

Strategy of the Russian Federation - Why is the Republic of Moldova so Important?

The importance of the Republic of Moldova should not be analyzed from an economic point of view, but rather from a geostrategic point of view. The Republic of Moldova is necessary to the Russian Federation because of its landform, the plain, which, once mastered, can ensure Russia's security in the Black Sea region. Given that the declared interest of the Kremlin leaders is to create Novorussia, which would encompass the whole of southern Ukraine, the pro-Russian positioning of the Republic of Moldova is a guarantee of security for the Russian Federation if the Russian army carries out its military plan. In this

context, in order to realize its strategic goals, the Russian Federation has the following tasks to accomplish:

1.	Infiltration of interlocutors in the leading positions of the Republic of Moldova (president, government, parliament, prosecutor general, director of SIS, etc.);
2.	Promoting the neutral and disarmament status of the Republic of Moldova;
3.	Sabotaging the referendum on European integration;
4.	Promoting separatism in UTA Gagauzia ¹⁵ through propaganda and people subordinated to Ilan Shor;
5.	Breaking relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU and NATO;
6.	Stopping the good relations between the Republic of Moldova and Romania, promoting those with the FR;
7.	Promoting “Moldovan identity” and the “Moldovan” language;
8.	The imposition of Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication;
9.	Redirecting the Moldovan economy to the RF, creating dependencies (including by motivating Moldovan businessmen to strengthen economic relations with the RF);
10.	Exclusion of economic pressures exerted by Moldova on Transnistria;
11.	Maintaining Russian armed forces in Transnistria;
12.	Interrupting the process of Moldova's exit from the Commonwealth of Independent States;
13.	Accession of the Republic of Moldova to the Eurasian Economic Union.

Consequently, in the period 2024-2030, we can expect the Russian Federation's attempts to fulfill the mentioned objectives. By accomplishing these tasks, the Russian Federation wants to destabilize the Republic of Moldova, changing the European course taken by the government of President Maia Sandu.

Conclusion

The Russian Federation manages to maintain its influence in the former Soviet space, especially in the Republic of Moldova, due to the activities of the FSB, SVR, and GRU services. With the support of intermediaries coordinated by the intelligence services, Russia is trying to control political life in the

Republic of Moldova. The operations are well-organized, with the secret services using in their work both people with Unionist and pro-European legends and people with assumed pro-Russian leanings. The actions of the interlocutors are financed by the Kremlin, with the aim of blocking the Republic of Moldova's orientation towards Euro-Atlantic structures and Romania. The Transnistrian separatist region is also an outpost from which destabilization missions are being carried out against Moldova and Ukraine. Under these circumstances, the objectives of the Russian secret services for the year 2024 are to place their interlocutors in key positions in the Moldovan state and to sabotage the referendum on European integration, which would at least prevent the re-election of Maia Sandu as president.

¹⁵ In 2014 a referendum, declared illegal by the Chişinău authorities, was held in which it was decided to proclaim Gagauzia's independence in the event of the loss of Moldova's sovereignty by joining the EU or uniting with Romania. The former Gagauz Bashkan Mihail Formuzal, members of the PSRM led by Igor Dodon and Ion Ceban, Russian MPs and Russian secret services contributed to the organization of the referendum. In 2024, Başchana Evghenia Guţul, a subordinate of Ilan Shor, visited the Russian Federation where she met President Vladimir Putin, who promised "support and help to the Gagauz people" to defend their "rights" violated by the government in Chişinău. After returning to Moldova, Evghenia Guţul said that "any unification initiative (with Romania) will imply the immediate start of the procedure to separate Gagauzia and return to the independent republic of Gagauzia".

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