Elections in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. What Role for Russian Foreign Policy Tools?

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Executive Summary

The parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova and the presidential elections in Ukraine, which took place in 2019, are the subject of this policy paper. The aim of the study is to analyze the Russian Federation's foreign policy instruments and options in addressing the two electoral campaigns, how the narratives of Moscow's official leaders have developed, as well as the interests of other stakeholders for whom the campaigns served as a base to redefine the approaches and strategies to Moldova and Ukraine. The analysis also seeks to identify additional elements promoted by Russia that influenced the public opinion, or the voters in the two states in order to contribute to the final decision of the citizens. The premises for this study are multiple. These include discourses - officially Kremlin positioning as an actor/partner who does not interfere with the domestic affairs of other states; actions and systemic presentation of anti-interference measures from Moldovan and Ukrainian political leaders; and active measures[2] used by Moscow to strengthen its positions in the region. The internal policy options of Ukraine and Moldova are vulnerable to foreign policy resources allocated by Russia to achieve external goals.

Keywords: Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Russian Federation, elections, tools, foreign policy

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[2] In this policy paper "active measures" are a mix of tools and strategies that include tools of political warfare, that aimed to influence some political decisions through the manipulation of politics, through disinformation, cyber-attacks, hybrid warfare, and manipulation of electoral decisions via social media.

Background: What is the current policy? Why is it being conducted this way?

The Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are two ex-soviet countries that decided to adopt officially as a foreign policy option the European and Euro-Atlantic integration direction[3]. This decision is still difficult to be accepted by the Russian leadership. The explanation is simple: that can contribute, especially in the case of Ukraine, to the erosion of Russian influence in the post-soviet space, and as a consequence around the world. And, in these conditions of losing the authority on the domestic political decision-making process, any little success in influencing certain political processes in Moldova can serve as examples for being applied in Ukraine, when after the Crimea annexation the Kremlin image suffered. The main objective of being accepted as an "equal partner" of the West has become even more difficult to achieve because now Russia is identified as an aggressor. So, the context requires consistent action wherever control has been lost.

Election processes have been an opportunity over time to promote specific political actors, political parties or messages about strategic development options of partners wanted in an alliance or regional cooperation format. Both Moldova and Ukraine offer many examples in which Moscow intervened with various types of support in order to achieve foreign policy objectives. Currently, the national laws of these states more specifically regulate how foreign actors may or may not intervene in national democratic processes[4]. In the past, external support (speeches, photos, energy and economic promises) provided an important advantage over opponents who opted officially for values or processes of European integration[5]. Energy, political and security stability (insistence on the principle of neutrality) is preferable to the resilience of public institutions because it provides cheap conditions for preserving power. Any institutional resilience implies qualitative transformations, and Moscow has not formulated claims referring to principles or values. Foreign policy loyalty has been sufficient and often remunerated.

Despite this, some leaders of the ex-Soviet states, Moldova[6] and Ukraine being no exceptions to this, have failed to remain loyal to the Moscow leadership. In particular, under internal pressure (see also the Voronin case and the Kozak Memorandum in 2003 or the pro-

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[3] ”*Порошенко подписал указ о евроатлантической интеграции Украины*”, DW, April 20, 2019, https://www.dw.com/ru/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%BE-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BB-%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%B7-%D0%BE-%D0%B5%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9-%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B8-%D1%83%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%8B/a-48419394

[4] ”LEGE Nr. 294 din 21.12.2007 privind partidele politice, Parlamentul Republicii Moldova, Publicat: 29.02.2008 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 42-44, art Nr.: 119”, 29.02.2008, http://lex.justice.md/md/327053%2520/

[5] ”Igor Dodon se promoveaza cu ajutorul imaginii preşedintelui Rusiei, Vladimir Putin”, Publika TV, October 28, 2016, https://www.publika.md/igor-dodon-se-promoveaza-cu-ajutorul-imaginii-presedintelui-rusiei-vladimir-putin_2793381.html

[6] In 2005 Vladimir Voronin has criticized Moscow for the support offered to the regime in Transnistria region. ”Президент Молдовы резко раскритиковал Россию”, Korrespondent.net, October 29, 2005, https://korrespondent.net/amp/134864/

European shift of Yanukovych in February 2013[7], argued by the need to obtain a second mandate), the Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities have caused problems for Kremlin, thus questioning Russia's geostrategic positions in these countries. Over time, Russia understood that stake on a single political personality/actor without trying other strategies to weaken the sustainability of different internal policies is not the best option and a mix of tools is more appropriate in order to maintain the status quo:[8]

"The Kremlin has demonstrated both its versatility in deploying multiple and overlapping tools of influence, and extensive skills in tailoring its toolbox to the conditions in individual countries."

Losing control over these countries is not just a foreign policy issue. It is also a domestic priority. The arguments in favour of this hypothesis must be sought in the social development model that these state actors want to embrace. In both country cases analyzed in this policy paper, as mentioned above, the option is European integration, is a different model of political, economic and social development. The existence of such a political alternative generates interest among Russian citizens for democratization processes. Over time, this interest may become a threat to the current structure of the Moscow ruling regime. In this context, threats are beginning to have a domestic impact and become vulnerabilities for the Russian political elite. Thus, many of the Russian foreign policy decisions over the past decade have an internal policy argumentation[9].

Turning to the particular contexts of Moldova and Ukraine, to national electoral regulations, Moscow is forced now to apply different instruments. Firstly, Moscow is generating internal debates about the inability of government authorities in both states to produce material benefits and prosperity for their own citizens. For this, even voices from separatist areas are used: Transnistria[10][11], Donetsk, Luhansk. This confirms even more that separatist movements are not just the actions of private individuals seeking recognition and political power at the local level. There are inside voices that allow penetration of public debate. Social "convictions" against legitimate authorities invoke macroeconomic figures and indicators or corruption cases and domestic actions against their own citizens (language law in Ukraine or the initiative to declare Russian as the second official language in Moldova). Secondly, opinion-makers from both countries - politicians or experts - are invited to Russian

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[7] In February 2013 took place the Ukraine – European Union Summit, when Viktor Yanukovych received from Bruxelles financial promises for reforms. After a few months Moscow started an informational aggression against Ukraine.

[8] Laurynas Jonavicius, Laure Delcour, Rilka Dragneva, Kataryna Wolczuk, "Russian Interests, Strategies, and Instruments in the Common Neighbourhood". EU-Strat Working Papers Series, Nr. 16, March 2019, p. 22, http://eu-strat.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/EU-STRAT-Working-Paper-No.-16.pdf

[9] Angela Grămadă: "Russian Foreign Policy: looking for a new status quo" in "Russian Federation after Crimea's Annexation. Impossible to ignore and difficult to engage". Collection of Studies on Russian Politics, ESGA, November 2017, http://www.esga.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Russia-collection-of-policy-papers2.pdf

[10] "Krasnoselski: Criza politică din Moldova se poate transforma în orice", AllMoldova, October 02, 2017, http://www.allmoldova.com/ro/news/krasnoselski-criza-politica-din-moldova-se-poate-transforma-in-orice

[11] "Liderul separatist de la Tiraspol: „În R. Moldova mereu este vreo criză politică, poporul mereu este dezbinat, totul este dezbinat"", TVR Moldova, June 19, 2019, http://www.tvrmoldova.md/actualitate/liderul-separatist-de-la-tiraspol-in-r-moldova-mereu-este-vreo-criza-politica-poporul-mereu-este-dezbinat-totul-este-dezbinat/

political TV shows to be dismantled in front of the Russian domestic public[12]. Russian public opinion is increasingly convinced of having a different situation. Such an opinion is being promoted by its own politicians (Russian political elite) in a "responsible way". Economic pressure, through embargoes or the promotion of energy agreements with European states (Nord Stream 2), serves a double interest: 1. mobilizes the domestic political actor to be loyal to the Kremlin; 2. fears the population of the two countries with the danger of imminent energy crises.

A number of policy tools and weaknesses are explored: minority/majority divergences (ethnic, social, regional), technical errors in the electoral and political systems, cyber attacks, legislative gaps, coordinated actions on social networks, false debates about different problems are identified and promoted. Even dialogue with Western partners on divergent topics becomes part of the electoral campaign.

Russia is adapting, taking active measures and decisions useful to its own interests in foreign policy. However, the Kremlin is careful not to expose too much and prefers to accuse the others of interference in the domestic affairs of states in the Russian area of influence.

In the following, various examples of actions/measures/ reactions taken by the governmental authorities of Moldova and Ukraine will be presented to show how it is possible the interference of Moscow in the electoral processes in the two countries.

Analysis: How Russian influence was instrumentalised? How Moldova and Ukraine reacted?

There are a few significant tactical differences on how the Russian Federation approached electoral campaigns in different post-soviet countries, but the foreign policy tools used by the Kremlin were more or less similar.

1.   The "defensive strategy" - was one of the tactics used. During the electoral campaign, Maria Zaharova[13] accused the United States of interfering in the elections in Moldova and qualified the Moldovan authorities decision to ban the presence of Russian journalists as a provocation[14]. Russia considered unacceptable the pro-Western speeches of diplomats acclaimed in Chişinău or Kiyv[15], accusing the United States of promoting double standards in the relationship with the Russian Federation, and this despite the fact that some issues in the bilateral Moscow - Chisinau dialogue were used to bring extra points to the pro-

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[12] "Гордон на канале "Россия 1": Путин — преступник!" Dmitriy Gordon YouTube channel, February 04, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Git42C97DA

[13] "Захарова рассказала о вмешательстве США в выборы в Молдавии", Federal News Agency, Moscow, March 28, 2019, https://riafan.ru/1164824-zakharova-rasskazala-o-vmeshatelstve-ssha-v-vybory-v-moldavii

[14] "В Молдавию не пустили журналистов НТВ и «Россия 1»", Izvestia, February 19, 2019, https://iz.ru/847709/2019-02-19/v-moldaviiu-ne-pustili-zhurnalistov-ntv-i-rossiia-1

[15] According to the Ukrainian media experts, many Kremlin media consistently pushed the narrative that the United States controls Ukraine's internal politics. Tetyana Matychak, "#WordsAndWars Digest 5: The Kremlin's Top Eight Lies about the Second Round of Ukraine's Presidential Race", Ukraine World, April 24, 2019, https://ukraineworld.org/articles/infowars/kremlins-top-eight-lies-about-second-round-ukraines-presidential-race?fbclid=IwAR12BIkMjz3LT6dSuKKjuwbpvxqC9Wdm7XLxB3lk9lpFHFH0ZT0x8P0blwo

Russian parties in Moldova[16]. At the same time, the problems related to the bilateral trade (January 2019) served as further motivation for Moldovan leaders to remain loyal to the Kremlin[17]. The same Russian official, Maria Zaharova, has made some comments about the legislative changes regarding the banning of Ukrainian observers in the presidential elections in Ukraine[18]. Moskow also criticized the decision of Ukrainian authorities to not organize the election process for Ukrainian citizens who live in Russia. In both cases, Moldova and Ukraine, together with their partners are being accused of promoting false democracy and double standards.

    2.   **Cyber attacks** - both, in Moldova and Ukraine the intelligence services have released statements in which they drew attention to some possible interference or even occurred measures during or after the electoral campaigns.

On February 25, 2019, the Moldovan Intelligence and Security Service informed that during the 2019 parliamentary elections, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) Information System was targeted by several cyber attacks.

According to the press release of the Moldovan institution, most of the attacks were detected with the closure of the polling stations, attempts being blocked and stopped by the platforms for displaying the preliminary results of the parliamentary elections[19].

During the electoral campaign, the Security Service of Ukraine informed about a set of options or measures, and at the same time vulnerabilities, that Russia might use to distort the election results. The objectives were multiple and they referred to discredit some candidates, but also to the modification of the domestic narrative towards Moscow. Later, the information about multiple attacks was confirmed by other experts in the field[20]. After the presidential elections in April 2019, Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Arsen Avakov[21] said there were several attempts by VPN systems to discredit the election results, but the prevention measures worked efficiently.

The communication campaign about possible external interference in Ukraine and Moldova have had for the users a different meaning and impact on the voters, hence the different definition of objectives and threats that each country has to face. Ukraine's public reaction has been firmer in condemning these interferences, and communicating with citizens also

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[16] "Москва и Кишинев определили порядок поставки молдавских товаров через Украину", Izvestia, January 30, 2019, https://iz.ru/840122/2019-01-30/moskva-i-kishinev-opredelili-poriadok-postavki-moldavskikh-tovarov-cherez-ukrainu

[17] This temporary economic crisis has been used by Igor Dodon's opponents to demonstrate the inefficiency of the meetings of the Socialist leader with Russian officials over time.

[18] "Захарова назвала украинский закон о наблюдателях "торжеством демократии"", Ria Novosti, February 07, 2019, https://ria.ru/20190207/1550548891.html

[19] "Comunicat", Informational and Security Service of the Republic of Moldova, February 25, 2019, https://sis.md/ro/comunicare/noutati/comunicat-4

[20] "Хакнути вибори. Огляд кібератак напередодні виборів Президента України 2019", NetFreedom, Kyiv, April 07, 2019, https://netfreedom.org.ua/haknuty-vybory-oglyad-kiberatak-naperedodni-vyboriv-prezydenta-ukrayiny-2019/?fbclid=IwAR1pboL983Zb6kXpeF2Fi1PxAGDZHE4aU27XD3ojdYpUyC9N4mdmTKJ5A-s

[21] "Арсен Аваков: Для дискредитації українських виборів РФ використовує весь свій гібридний арсенал", Ministry of Interior of Ukraine, Kyiv, April 21, 2019, https://mvs.gov.ua/ua/news/20129_Arsen_Avakov_mizhnarodnim_sposterigacham_Dlya_diskreditacii_ukrainskih_viboriv_RF_vikoristovu_ves_sviy_gibridniy_arsenal.htm

referred to guaranteeing some hard ways to promote national interests:[22]

"*Ukraine can hold elections more calmly because, besides our soldiers, the NATO squadron of frigates will ensure the sea along with the Ukrainian Navy. And this is the first time. And this means and says a lot - above all about the risks and their prevention. In fact, there is a signal from the NATO Naval Command, as well as from our soldiers at the front: "Vote calmly, we will cover ...*"

This message was released a few days before the elections by Andriy Klimenko, Head of the Supervisory Board of Maidan Foreign Affairs.

In Moldova, these cyber attacks have been more widely debated on social networks, while the authorities did not insist too much on them.

3. **Social media tools** – an important number of politicians are using Russian social media tools, such as VKontakte and Odnoklassniki to promote their messages and strategies. But not only. Facebook was also used in order to influence the trends in the electoral processes. The arguments are simple:[23]

"*In a survey by Magenta Consulting, the results of which were made public in February 2019, showed that 60% of Moldovans use the Internet regularly, almost half of the population - daily. Research has found that 55% of respondents can have online access at least once a week, and 4% - more than once a month.*"

The regulations[24] imposed by the Ukrainian authorities to block Odnoklassniki and VKontanke work only partially. People have found solutions to avoid the banned social web pages using VPN or other technical options[25]. The subject of presidential elections was actively promoted through these social media instruments:[26]

"*The greatest number of active VK users who wrote about the election are located in Donetsk Oblast (29.7%), followed by Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (10.7%), Luhansk Oblast (9.9%) and Kyiv city (7.9%).*"

VKontanke and Odnoklassniki are more and more pro-Russian and negative. The main question debated on pro-Russian social media channels was about the legitimacy of the

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[22] "Во время выборов в Черном море будет находиться ударный состав кораблей НАТО", InfoResist, March 28, 2019, https://inforesist.org/vo-vremya-vyborov-v-chernom-more-budet-nahoditsya-udarnyj-sostav-korablej-nato/

[23] "Alegeri parlamentare-2019: politicienii caută pe net cheia spre inimile alegătorilor", Noi.md, February 22, 2019, https://noi.md/md/politica/alegeri-parlamentare-2019-politicienii-cauta-pe-net-cheia-spre-inimile-alegatorilor

[24] "Ukraine blocks access to Russian social networks "VKontakte" and "Odnoklassniki" – Poroshenko decree", Ukraine Crisis Media Center, 2017, http://uacrisis.org/ua/56242-ukraine-blocks-russian-sm

[25] The ESGA website cannot be accessed on the territory of Ukraine, the experts' explanation is that is a technical error. However, Ukrainian experts can access the content by installing VPN tools.

[26] The Ukrainian experts explain that "the top 10 most reposted websites in the Ukrainian segment of Vkontakte regarding the Ukrainian elections are primarily pro-Russian or anti-government (separatist) in nature, for example, news-front.info, rusvesna.su, politdnr.ru, nahnews.org, ukraina.ru, and politnavigator.net. These are mostly websites promoting Russian narratives, usually while eschewing political correctness and using hate speech. "WHAT RUSSIAN SOCIAL NETWORK VK SAYS ABOUT UKRAINIAN ELECTION", Internews Ukraine, March 27, 2019, https://internews.ua/en/opportunity/vk-and-elections?fbclid=IwAR0SvjKVo2A5UWX-TjDd0_cevNNbtArMcOXbEfkCjAZ3eahgiZ4TEv6tf20

Ukrainian authorities to organize the elections and especially if Petro Poroshenko wins[27]. One of the suggested measures was to contest the results:[28]

"*In general, specific portrayal of any candidate and putting them against each other serves the main role behind Kremlin's media campaign – to undermine trust into the electoral process and delegitimize the elections.*"

For the same purpose, to influence the behavior of the voter, the Facebook social network was also used, although different from Odnoklassniki and VKontakte. Russia turned to local human resources. In an analysis dedicated to Russian interference in Ukrainian presidential elections it is explained the scheme:[29]

"*In a video confession published by the S.B.U., Ukraine's domestic intelligence service, a man it identified as the Russian agent said that he resided in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital and that his Russian handlers had ordered him "to find people in Ukraine on Facebook who wanted to sell their accounts or temporarily rent them out."*"

The aim behind the strategy of using active measures in Ukraine was to have access to some domestic Facebook accounts from were to release to the public political ads or fake articles. The objective behind this tactic is to increase the level of credibility for messages transmitted in the information space.

But the question of how national political actors are doing on social media is just as well legitimate. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, Facebook experts have uncovered a vast network of governmental trolls[30], including electoral targets, promoting messages of discrediting and attacking opponents. Such situations are being exploited by those who have interests to expose and make vulnerable the political struggle on the inside. In the same context, the message from the ambassadors of the G7[31] states in Kiyv should be analyzed because it could be framed of prejudicing the image of Ukraine and its governing authorities. The ambassadors sent an official letter alerting the Foreign Affairs Minister of the work of extremist movements that can create security issues during the election. Many times appreciations about Ukrainian extremism have been launched by the Russian authorities to question the legitimacy of the Ukrainian political elite. In Russia, many of the Ukrainian politicians are often associated with right-wing extremism.

The same thing, the internal erosion of political competition, also happened in the Republic of Moldova, where it was demonstrated that administrative resources were used to

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[27] Nataliya Bugayova, Darina Regio and Andrea Snyder with Michaela Walker, "Russia in Review: March 1 - March 18, 2019", Institute for the Study of War, March 18, 2019, https://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2019/03/russia-in-review-march-1-march-18-2019.html?fbclid=IwAR0NXD8SvKbpVXiS1drBt5igHJ6sYPeU44nBR1UC_VaahkvHKp9ahRXClWg

[28] "Main narratives Kremlin applies to Ukrainian elections", Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group, March 2019, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2262488097147016

[29] "In Ukraine, Russia Tests a New Facebook Tactic in Election Tampering", The New York Times, March 29, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/29/world/europe/ukraine-russia-election-tampering-propaganda.html

[30] "„Trolii guvernului" de la Chișinău blocați de Facebook înainte de alegeri", Radio Free Europe, February 14, 2019, https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/cur%C4%83%C8%9Birea-de-conturi-false-facebook-%C3%AEnainte-de-alegeri/29770167.html

[31] "Послы стран G7 написали Авакову об угрозе "экстремистских движений"", Ukrainska Pravda, March 23, 2019, https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2019/03/23/7210009/

discredit opponents. In February 2019, Newsmaker.md[32], a Russian language publication from Moldova, explained how government authorities take on a non-European model, which is unacceptable for democratic states because it contributes to manipulating public opinion and is anti-democratic.

   4.   Support for pro-Russian candidates – for Ukraine, Russia is not a simple partner, but a state that violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. However, there are political actors who are supported or encouraged by Moscow. Some of them are openly acting as agents for Russian foreign policy interests. Thus, Ukrainian experts have monitored how Russians have appreciated some candidates during the presidential election. According to them, although the options of the Russians were only a few, they aimed to ensure multiple winnings for the domestic public in the event that one candidate or another reached the second round. The example below illustrates the scenarios taken into account by the Kremlin:[33]

   ”*During the lead-up to the first round of the presidential election, the Kremlin's media exclusively supported the pro-Russian candidate Yuriy Boyko, who polled fourth place on March 31. Now, with Volodymyr Zelensky and Petro Poroshenko competing in the second round, the same media praise the newcomer Zelensky and criticize the current president Poroshenko.*"

   At this moment it is important to mention two things: 1. the aim of promoting Yuriy Boyko as a potential winner was not the presidential elections, as the chance for him to become the next president of Ukraine was minimum; that served as a base to analyse further the potential of this candidate and his party for the parliamentary elections; 2. the praise of Zelenskyy has also has led to confusion among Ukrainian voters because it was promoted by Moscow as an honest alternative to the former president and to add into the debate the issue about the price paid by the Ukrainians in the struggle for territorial integrity. For some of the Ukrainians, Zelenskyy was acting as a non-patriot candidate, this being the reason for accusing him of promoting Russian messages or points of view.

   In the case of Moldova, Moscow preferred not to make public appraisals about a pro-Russian candidate. Kremlin preferred to criticize the opposition or the government, rather than publicly defend the interests of the party wanted to govern the country. This attitude is explained by the existence of those legal regulations that do not allow external intervention in electoral debates. However, it is important to mention the following: after the results for the parliamentary elections were made public, several Russian officials and opinion-makers, ie journalists and experts, criticized the electoral campaign of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova[34]. This has put tremendous pressure on the contents of the negotiations for the future parliamentary coalition. This is also a kind of interference, even if it officially

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[32] "«Тролли ДПМ начали войну в стиле Кремля». PAS требует снять Демпартию с выборов", Newsmaker.md, February 14, 2019, http://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/trolli-dpm-nachali-voynu-v-stile-kremlya-pas-trebuet-snyat-dempartiyu-s-vyborov-41781

[33] Tetyana Matychak, "#WordsAndWars Digest 5: The Kremlin's Top Eight Lies about the Second Round of Ukraine's Presidential Race", Ukraine World, April 24, 2019, https://ukraineworld.org/articles/infowars/kremlins-top-eight-lies-about-second-round-ukraines-presidential-race?fbclid=IwAR12BIkMjz3LT6dSuKKjuwbpvxqC9Wdm7XLxB3lk9lpFHFH0ZT0x8P0blwo

[34] "Итоги выборов в Молдавии: впереди — обострение отношений с Россией", Regnum, February 25, 2019, https://regnum.ru/news/2579799.html

seems to be only an "analysis"[35] of an actor who preferred to stay out of the electoral game.

5. Seasonal migrants - a large number of Ukrainian and Moldovan citizens are on the territory of Russia. Moscow has facilitated meetings between pro-Russian parties and migrants from these countries. In the early 2000s, an important number of citizens of Moldova and Ukraine were attracted by the socio-economic growth in Russia. The lack of language barriers has only contributed to this phenomenon. During the time it became clear that this tool can be used in order to influence the strategic options of the migrants in their origin country.

Several technical details of election organization process have been used to undermine national electoral authorities image among migrants. In the case of Ukraine, the decisions to not organize the voting process on the territory of the Russian Federation was intensely debated. Moscow accused Kyiv of not respecting the right to vote of Ukrainian citizens. Kyiv explained differently the decision: to protect Ukrainians under the Russian territory. Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Pavlo Klimkin added:[36]

”*During the last presidential election, 1,100 people voted at all polling stations in Russia ... There is no need to manipulate the fact that millions of Ukrainians will not be able to vot*e."

And for Moldova, the same argument for the limitation of the right to vote functioned. The Moldovan authorities decided to open a limited number of voting sections[37]. In both cases, the decisions of the national electoral authorities, ie governments, were used to influence voters' choice to vote for pro-Russian parties, open to cooperation with Russian political actors.

6. Media influence - in terms of the media influence on electoral processes multiple perspectives must be considered. First, there are national regulations in both states prohibiting propaganda - the so-called anti-propaganda laws, adopted by the authorities to prevent or minimize the impact of the hybrid warfare instruments used by Moscow. The implementation of these laws did not substantially change the de facto situation. In the case of Moldova, because the regulations do not prohibit all retransmission of Russian broadcasts, the content remains more attractive. In the case of Ukraine, the struggle in the Eastern part of the country has contributed to civic education of the citizens, so the perception of the state of things and the responsibility are different. The new regulations, which limit access to political content from the Russian Federation, solve the problem of national governments only partially. It is only in part because people can find solutions for access to Russian media content, but also for reasons of internal politics. In the second situation – domestic/internal politics - the responsibility is already in the field of those empowered with the organization national political debates and who has the control of the internal political processes. Officially, they speak of European values and principles, but de facto act to preserve a model of governance eroded from within by their own financiers.

7. Voting remuneration - a vulnerability of democracy - if the analysis is drawn

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[35] ”Российские СМИ: Москва больше не верит слезам Додона”, Gagauzyeri.md, February 27, 2019, http://gagauzyeri.md/politika/5097-rossiyskie-smi-moskva-bolshe-ne-verit-slezam-dodona.html

[36] ”Украина не будет открывать в РФ избирательные участки из-за "опасности для украинцев"”, Interfax, March 25, 2019, https://www.interfax.ru/world/655624

[37] ”În Federația Rusă vor fi deschise 11 secții de votare pentru alegerile parlamentare. Adresele acestora”, TV8, February 17, 2019, http://tv8.md/2019/02/17/in-federatia-rusa-vor-fi-deschise-11-sectii-de-votare-pentru-alegerile-parlamentare-adresele-acestora/

from the perspective of possible domestic vulnerabilities that Russia may use to influence or maintain a certain status of "supervisor" in the Republic of Moldova or Ukraine, it is imperative to pay attention and those internal elements and decisions that may prejudice the choices of these two states. The Chisinau and Kyiv political actors contributed by some decisions or investments to undermining the electoral process as part of the development of democracy through concrete actions. These actions refer to those votes cast in favour of political parties or candidates for which the citizens entitled to vote have been remunerated[38]. Journalists have documented multiple cases of citizen pay for votes in favour of a candidate.[39][40][41]

The above examples illustrate how the Russian authorities have promoted their own interests and objectives of foreign policy, using a mix of tools to influence certain democratic processes. However, the political actors themselves in both countries have often undermined electoral processes, thus contributing to the image deterioration for their origin countries.

What policy options for Moldova and Ukraine?

In recent years, including the events that took place in Ukraine since November 2013, there has been much talk about the need to implement the principles of good governance and the need for resilience of public institutions. Moldova is not an exception to this, especially after 2010, when the process of negotiating the signing of the Association Agreement began and became clear that Moscow is losing control over the politics. Online aggression or cyber attacks, were not the only tools used by the Russian Federation to undermine the final results of the elections in both countries.

Following the US presidential election scandal in 2016, the attention of the experts turned to study a complex methodology, used by foreign actors. To influence the final results - it was just part of the strategy. The debate on this issue - the potential fraud of the election - was the reason behind the strategy. Why? Because it allowed external actors to fundamentally change the way the voters think, intervening in the structure and content of democratic values and principles. Once democratic institutions are vulnerable, it becomes easier to coordinate or manage collective emotion and to reduce its resilience to external threats.

The way in which electoral legislation was amended and the campaign for the parliamentary elections in February 2019 was organized showed that the political elite in this

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[38] "MISIUNEA INTERNAŢIONALĂ DE OBSERVARE A ALEGERILOR Republica Moldova – Alegerile parlamentare, 24 februarie 2019. DECLARAŢIA PRIVIND CONSTATĂRILE ŞI CONCLUZIILE PRELIMINARE, CONCLUZIILE PRELIMINARE", p. 2, https://www.osce.org/ro/odihr/elections/moldova/412367?download=true

[39] "CALUL TROIAN // Cine i-ar fi PLĂTIT şi pentru cine au VOTAT transnistrenii aduşi organizat la urne la alegerile parlamentare din 24 februarie", Ziarul National, February 25, 2019, https://www.ziarulnational.md/calul-troian-cine-i-ar-fi-platit-si-pentru-cine-au-votat-transnistrenii-adusi-organizat-la-urne-la-alegerile-parlamentare-din-24-februarie/

[40] "КАК В УКРАИНЕ ПОДКУПАЮТ ИЗБИРАТЕЛЕЙ: КАРУСЕЛИ, СЕМЕЙНЫЙ ПОДРЯД И ОПЕРАЦИЯ "ГРЕЧКА" - РАЗБОР СХЕМ И ФАЛЬСИФИКАЦИЙ", Newsone, February 07, 2019, https://newsone.ua/news/politics/kak-v-ukraine-podkupajut-izbiratelej-karuseli-semejnyj-podrjad-i-operatsija-hrechka-razbor-skhem-i-falsifikatsij.html

[41] "«Карусели», подкуп и технические кандидаты: какие выборы ждут Украину в 2019 году", Fakty.ua, February 20, 2019, https://fakty.ua/296518-karuseli-podkup-i-tehnicheskie-kandidaty-kakie-vybory-zhdut-ukrainu-v-2019-godu

country is ready to abandon the principles it has adhered to. Both concepts - good governance and the contribution to the resilience of public institutions, applied correctly, may be the best options and produce the best results for the governments and companies that implement them. However, the problem of lack of results remains the erosion of political will and political culture. In this context, the interference of foreign actors can become a major risk, especially if their goals are to undermine institutions and principles. Additionally, public authorities, as well as political actors, need to start setting long-term goals. Electoral legislation should not become a volatile instrument. It must provide all participants in electoral processes with the security of political stability - a prerequisite condition for the development of national economies. Finally, good communication of objectives and decisions is part of the overall plan to achieve national interests. Communicating intentions, public policy content, accepting debates involving all stakeholders and ensuring transparency in this process can help eliminate a large number of risks from the international environment. It is obvious that Moscow will not cease to promote its own interests and external policy objectives. But the responsibility of decision-making in Ukraine or Moldova implies a thorough preparation for threats and action against internal vulnerabilities in the first place.

Conclusions

According to international experts, who monitored electoral processes, Ukraine managed to hold presidential elections almost exemplary. For Moldova, the conclusions were more reserved. The final results of both polls were recognized by the international community. However, Russia preferred to show its reservations about the electoral campaign in Ukraine. Such behaviour has only demonstrated continuity in foreign policy approaches to addressing the bilateral relationship with Kyiv in this period.

The main conclusions on how Russia and the political leadership in this country approached these two electoral processes are as follows:

- Russia will not hesitate to promote its own interests by various means, while at the same time managing specific messages (federalization, the legitimacy of local authorities, preferences about possible coalition governments) in the agenda of local political actors;

- Moscow is still willing to invest important political resources in local political actors, even if its approach is to treat more those who want to get Kremlin's discursive support with more attention;

- Moscow will not hesitate to publicly "punish" certain political actors for the results obtained in order to demonstrate the influence in the region;

- Russian authorities do not hesitate to implement and test multiple techniques for influencing the political options of citizens from countries such as Moldova and Ukraine.

- Many times, local political actors are those who offer opportunities to external forces to influence national political processes. This weakens national security from the inside and undermines democratization processes.

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