

ODNOKLASSNIKI AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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The beneficial effect of the new information technologies and of Internet on the society development is well known. But, at the same time, the informational global interconnection and the capacity to rapidly disseminate the information also create new problems. As it occurred throughout the history, the technological progress may be used with both good faith, and bad faith.

The way how the technological progress influenced on the human societies throughout the history has been a thoroughly investigated subject over the past years. The historians compared the spread of printing in the 16th and 17th centuries with the spread of personal computers and of Internet nowadays. Before Guttenberg brought the printing press in Europe, the information was controlled by monks in the monasteries who copied the manuscripts and gave them to specific people within the Church and the nobility. There was a very severe system of access and control of the information. The printing press "democratized" the process of accessing and communicating the information. It had both positive and negative effects: on the one hand, much more people had access to information and could ask questions about what the Church and the nobility were doing, on the other hand, the typography revolution produced a polarization and about 100 years of political and religious conflict in Europe.¹

This incursion into the history is useful for revealing some of the *effects of the technological progress on the contemporary societies and on the political institutions* that govern them. The impact of the technology on democracy first of all manifests through the multiplication of entry points to public life, public debates and political stage.

The new information technologies make possible the "democratization" of the public opinion: anyone, anywhere, having Internet access and a social network account, may intervene to express one's opinion on a particular social issue. The technologies simplify the citizen involvement in public debates on issues of major importance.

¹ Ferguson, Niall. The square and the tower: Networks and power, from the freemasons to Facebook. 2019.

The new information technologies make possible the "democratization" of the mass-media: small teams of online journalists, without having significant financial resources, may become influential as sources of information, news and views. The technologies simplify the independent media's access to the citizens' "hearts and minds" and amplify their impact on the public debates.

The new social information technologies make possible the "democratization" of the political competition: the political parties and the political candidates who have no financial resources and access to the traditional media can successfully start and conduct online political campaigns, entering thus the big politics. The technologies simplify and encourage the participation in the political life even with limited resources.

Besides the multitude of positive aspects that the effects of the technological progress imply, they also produce a series of **unplanned disruptions** for the democratic processes and institutions: deepening the polarization and the societal division, amplifying the extremist voices, converting the popularity into legitimacy, using the personal data for political targeting, and others. Easy spreading of the misinformation and fake news is one of the most serious unplanned disruptions from the perspective of the risk it poses to the democratic societies.

However, the technological progress changes not only the way how the information is disseminated. In parallel, there is also a *change in the patterns of information consumption*. People gradually re-orient from the traditional media to the online media. At the same time, the social networks are becoming more and more important as a point of access to the online media. The sociological surveys conducted over the past years in the Republic of Moldova have constantly indicated the increase of the share of respondents from whom the Internet is the main source of information: in January 2019, the Internet was the main source of information for 42% of the population, with a share of 73% in the age-group 18-29.²

Thus, with the changes in the ways of access to the public space and in the patterns of information consumption, the manipulation of the public opinion through the online media and the social networks and the development of the phenomenon of

² Institute for Public Policy. *Barometer of Public Opinion, January 2019*. p.29 http://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/BOP_02.2019-new.pdf

fake news have an increasing impact on the civic processes, the public life and the political processes. They distort the objective perception of the reality by the citizens and can lead, in the long run, to the degradation of the democratic political processes.

The Republic of Moldova, along with Ukraine, has been, for at least a decade, a site for testing the tools for influencing and manipulating the public opinion through the new information technologies, long before this problem has caught the attention of the media, of the decision-makers and of the Western researchers.

In the Republic of Moldova, there are approximately 2 million Internet users who mainly use two social networks: Facebook and Odnoklassniki³. Against this background, the Odnoklassniki social network has a particularity. Launched in 2006 by a Russian company, Odnoklassniki has become one of the most popular social networks in the post-Soviet area over the years, reaching a high degree of popularity in the Republic of Moldova, as well. This was the most popular social network in Moldova until recently, with almost 800,000 real users in January 2018.⁴

Odnoklassniki has been proficiently used to create an online pro-Russian propaganda eco-system in the Republic of Moldova. This eco-system was analyzed in a study published by IPP in January 2018, supported by the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation of the German Marshall Fund⁵. The survey revealed how the Russian propaganda works in the online communities of the Moldovan segment of Odnoklassniki.

The Russian propaganda in Moldova promotes a feeling of affiliation with Russia and discredits the European Union and the West in the eyes of the Moldovan citizens. In this way, the propaganda supports, within the Republic of Moldova, a nostalgic segment of the population, considered as "left-wing", promoting Kremlin's mythology about the legitimacy of its expansion in the post-Soviet area.

Thus, the following dominant topics are explored: the nostalgia for the Soviet past, the glorification of the Russian past, the ethnic Moldovanism and Romania phobia, accusing and discrediting the Western countries and institutions.

³ Gramatic Social Media Report, January 2019 – www.gramatic.md/socialmediareport

 ⁴ Gramatic Social Media Report, January 2019 – www.gramatic.md/socialmediareport
 ⁵ Nantoi, Oazu et al. The Russian propaganda on Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova. 2019.

http://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Odnoklassniki_ro.pdf

The nostalgia for the Soviet past is encouraged by promoting the concept of "compatriots", meant to strengthen the mental and nostalgic connections between the former Soviet citizens and their descendants and the so-called Homeland. In particular, the Gagauzian groups on Odnoklassniki widely promote the nostalgia for the Soviet past. In general, the propaganda promotes the idea that the Republic of Moldova is a part of the Russian world – *Russkiy mir*, a space with shared values based on orthodoxy, common past and Russian language. From this perspective, the ethnic Moldovanism interconnected with the Romania phobia is strongly present. These ideas are insistently advanced, by evoking the superiority of the Moldovan identity over the Romanian identity.

The glorification of the Russian past is done by the means of the Great Patriotic War's symbols and of the Saint George's ribbon. On the one hand, the policies of glorification of the Soviet past ensure the loyalty of the ethnic Russians to the Russian Federation. On the other hand, they strengthen the inferiority complex in relation to the Russian Federation among the socalled "compatriots" who are not ethnic Russians and live outside the Russian Federation.

The accusation and discredit of the Western countries and institutions (USA, EU, NATO) are done through various conspiracy theories, presenting them as degenerate and fragile, and amplifying the message of the internal Western opposing movements. Thus, the Russian propaganda in the Republic of Moldova is anti-American: all pro-Western politicians, journalists and opinion leaders in the Republic of Moldova allegedly have "American masters" and the USA are allegedly accountable for the tension in the relationship between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation. The Russian propaganda in Moldova is anti-European: the orientation of the Republic of Moldova towards the EU is allegedly a civilization error, incomparable with the prosperous future we could have within the Customs Union. The Russian propaganda in Moldova is also anti-NATO: the neutrality status of the Republic of Moldova is allegedly in constant danger because of the "NATO's offensive and expansionist policy".

These messages are successfully transposed by the pro-Russian politicians who have a much higher degree of visibility on Odnoklassniki than the pro-European politicians. Their presence and messages are reiterated and strengthened through

a large network of pro-Russian online communities focused on the Republic of Moldova. They are more numerous and active, than other types of communities on the network. 170 pro-Russian groups with over 1,000 members were identified, including 35 groups with over 10,000 members and 3 groups with over 100,000 members. The authors of the survey concluded that 57% of the content generated by the pro-Russian Odnoklassniki communities contained pro-Russian propaganda elements.

The massive visibility of the pro-Russian politicians on Odnoklassniki, especially of the Moldovan President, Igor Dodon, ensures a favourable environment for the unilateral creation and dissemination of content with different propaganda messages, manipulative or even false, especially during the election periods. The large number of people who may be covered by such messages through the stream of posts on their Odnoklassniki page raises concern. Despite the dramatic decrease in the number of Odnoklassniki users, we should not forget that the possibilities for audience penetration through Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova can easily compete with the TV channels with national coverage. And the fact that the pro-Western politicians are almost irrelevant from the perspective of their Odnoklassniki visibility makes it impossible to timely react and mobilize the networks of subscribers in order to combat the manipulative messages in the elections.

Protecting the democratic institutions in the age of the institutionalized misinformation on the social networks primarily implies protecting the truthfulness of the information. The quality of the information we use impacts on the decisions concerning the society in which we live, whether it is an electoral decision or a policy option. The Odnoklassniki network remained an important environment for the political communication in the campaign for the legislative election held on 24th of February 2019 in the Republic of Moldova, although Facebook's influence was much more significant in this regard. This study analyzed the content and the behaviour of a number of online communities and political stakeholders during the election campaign in February 2019 and traces the ability of certain stakeholders to influence through Odnoklassniki on segments of the Moldovan population.

MAPPING THE ODNOKLASSNIKI SOCIAL NETWORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The Odnoklassniki social network, launched in 2006 in the Russian Federation, is based on the concept of restoring the relationship and the communication with former school mates and friends via the Internet (*odnoklassniki* is literally translated from Russian as *schoolmates*). *Odnoklassniki* is the second most used social network in the Russian Federation, after *VKontakte*, and it enjoys an increasing popularity in the post-Soviet space. Nevertheless, as of January 2018, the network had over 330 million users ⁶.

According to the online audience measurements conducted in the Republic of Moldova, in January 2019, *Odnoklassniki* was the second most popular social network in the country, with about 810 thousand unique users per month⁷. It is no longer the social network with the largest number of users in the Republic of Moldova since the end of 2017, when it was overtaken by *Facebook*.

Throughout the period 2014-2016, the number of Odnoklassniki users in the Republic of Moldova was in a continuous decrease (from 1 million in January 2014 to 875 thousand in June 2016), but it registered a spectacular increase by almost 325 thousand users during the period July-November 2016. This period coincided with the campaign for the presidential election in the Republic of Moldova. As a result of that election, the candidate proclaimed as pro-Russian, Igor Dodon, President of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova, became the Moldovan President. However, over the past 2 years, the number of Odnoklassniki users in the Republic of Moldova has been in a continuous decrease and this network is steadily losing its popularity in favour of Facebook.

At the same time, one can notice a rapid tendency of "aging" among the Odnoklassniki users in the Republic of

⁶ Odnoklassniki overpassed 330 million users (ru). Russian Business Channel, January 2018 - https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5a572ee39a7947463987d219

⁷ Gramatic Social Media Report, January 2019 – www.gramatic.md/socialmediareport Cf, Facebook has about 1.1 million users, Instagram - 610 thousand users and VKontakte - 208 thousand active users.



Moldova. In January 2019, 31% of Odnoklassniki users in Moldova were aged over 50 (in August 2017 - 16%), 16% - between 40-49 (in August 2017 - 19%), 21% - between 30-39 (in August 2017 - 19%), 23% - between 20-29 (in August 2017 - 31%) and 9% were less than 20 years old (in August 2017 - 18%). Currently, almost 38% of Odnoklassniki users in the Republic of Moldova identify themselves as pensioners / stay-at-home.⁸

57% of Odnoklassniki users are from the rural areas, 43% from the urban areas. 57% of Odnoklassniki users are female users, 43% - male users. Only 21% (in August 2017 - 28%) of Odnoklassniki users in the Republic of Moldova have a higher education background. 8% of Odnoklassniki users stated they have an incomplete higher education background (college education), 22% - lycee education, 48% - secondary and/or vocational education. Approximately 33% of Odnoklassniki users in the Republic of Moldova are located in the North region (including in Bălți), 35% - in the Centre region, 15% - in Chișinău, 15% - in the South region, 2% - in Găgăuzia.⁹

Thus, one can notice that Odnoklassniki is a favourable environment for informational targeting of a demographic group which is considered as the most vulnerable to fake news and misinformation - the elderly population from the rural area.

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Actual Odnoklassniki users in the Republic of Moldova

^{8 38% -} retired / stay-at-home, 24% - middle-level managers, 18% - students, 12% - skilled workers, 8% - CEO/ entrepreneur

⁹ Audit Bureau of Circulation and Internet – Multi-platform Audience of Websites, January 2019 http://www.bati.md/news/0012

A survey conducted by IPP in 2017¹⁰ pointed out the diversity of informative and/or social-political Odnoklassniki communities¹¹ in the Republic of Moldova. A total of 170 active Odnoklassniki communities with at least 1000 members were identified and analyzed, whose purpose is to share news and information about the national and international political processes.

The declining trend of the number of Odnoklassniki users, along with the change in their demographic structure (user "aging" and ruralisation), re-imposed a mapping of the relevant communities. Thus, three types of communities have been delimited, based on their purpose: mass-media communities, pro-Russian social communities and communities of the political stakeholders. Among them, the media communities are major sources of social-political information, with the largest number of members. The pro-Russian communities prevail among the Odnoklassniki communities established on the basis of political preferences, being both large and quite vocal. The largest Odnoklassniki community set up based on political preferences is a pro-Russian community.

Most of the communities subject to the previous analysis are still active, but have a lower frequency of posts and a lower level of reaction and interaction among the users. In parallel with the rapid decline of the number of Odnoklassniki network users, a centralization tendency was revealed by the analysis of the developments of the number of members of the largest Odnoklassniki communities in the Republic of Moldova. A very large number of users are grouped around several very large Odnoklassniki communities, while the number of members in smaller communities is decreasing.

http://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Odnoklassniki_ro.pdf

¹⁰ Nantoi, Oazu et al. *The Russian propaganda on Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova*. 2019.

¹¹ In this study, the phrase 'Odnoklassniki communities' means both the groups and the pages in the Odnoklassniki social network addressed to the public of the Republic of Moldova. It should also be noted that there are differences between the 'groups' and 'pages' in terms of who can make posts.

| Odnoklassniki and | parliamentary | elections in the | Republic of Moldova |
|-------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|
|-------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|

| Name | No. of members January 2017 | No. of members January 2019 | Growth, % | Language |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| Ultimele ştiri din Moldova (Latest news from Moldova) ¹² | 487.700 | 496.000 | 1.70% | RO |
| Descoperă Moldova (Discover Moldova) ¹³ | 239.000 | 244.300 | 2.22% | RO |
| ProTV Chisinau (The official page) ¹⁴ | 102.200 | 128.300 | 25.54% | RO |
| РУССКО - СЛАВЯНСКАЯ ПАРТИЯ МОЛДОВЫ (RUSSIAN-SLAVIC PARTY OF MOLDOVA) ¹⁵ | 86.600 | 86.300 | -0.35% | RU |
| Digital 24 Moldova ¹⁶ | 76.000 | 85.200 | 12.11% | RO |
| Игорь Додон (Igor Dodon) ¹⁷ | 48.600 | 75.600 | 55.56% | RO/RU |
| Moldovenii de pretutindeni! (The Moldovans from all over the world) ¹⁸ | 41.400 | 47.400 | 14.49% | RO |
| Наша Партия - Partidul Nostru (Our Party) ¹⁹ | 44.800 | 45.700 | 2.01% | RU |
| Publika TV ²⁰ | 34.000 | 41.600 | 22.35% | RO |
| Știri Moldova (News Moldova) ²¹ | - | 36.600 | - | RO |
| ЗА ЕВРОАЗИЙСКИЙ СОЮЗ - ПРОЦВЕТАНИЕ МОЛДОВЫ (FOR THE EURASIAN UNION - PROSPERITY FOR MOLDOVA) ²² | 33.500 | 35.300 | 5.37% | RU |

The developments of the number of members of the largest Odnoklassniki communities

Ultimele știri din Moldova (Latest news from Moldova) and **Descoperă Moldova (Discover Moldova)** are the pages with the largest number of Odnoklassniki members in the Republic of Moldova. Identical content is published on these pages. At present, the largest share of the posts are articles and reports from <u>www.moldova.org</u> informative website. This website was launched in 1997 and it is managed by Moldova Foundation from the USA. Starting with 2010, the website is financially supported by grants provided by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). According to the *Final Report on mass-media monitoring in the campaign for 2019 legislative election*", <u>www.moldova.org</u> website gave coverage in a gener-

¹² https://ok.ru/ultimele.stiri.din.moldova

- ¹³ https://ok.ru/moldova2014
- 14 https://ok.ru/protv.md
- ¹⁵ https://ok.ru/vybormoldovy
- ¹⁶ https://ok.ru/digi24.moldova
- ¹⁷ https://ok.ru/igor.dodon1
- ¹⁸ https://ok.ru/moldovenii.de.pretutindeni
- ¹⁹ https://ok.ru/novayapartia
- ²⁰ https://ok.ru/tvpublika
- ²¹ https://ok.ru/stirimoldovamd
- ²² https://ok.ru/referendum

ally balanced way to the campaign and to the candidates in the election, using mostly a neutral way for reporting." $^{\rm 23}$

РУССКО-СЛАВЯНСКАЯ ПАРТИЯ МОЛДОВЫ (RUS-SIAN-SLAVIC PARTY OF MOLDOVA) and ЗА ЕВРОАЗИЙСКИЙ СОЮЗ-ПРОЦВЕТАНИЕ МОЛДОВЫ (FOR THE EURASIAN UN-ION - PROSPERITY FOR MOLDOVA) are the largest pro-Russian communities on Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova. The goal of the PYCCKO - СЛАВЯНСКАЯ ПАРТИЯ МОЛДОВЫ (RUSSIAN-SLAVIC PARTY OF MOLDOVA) group is "to defend the interests of the Russian-speaking population of the Republic of Moldova". The group ЗА ЕВРОАЗИЙСКИЙ СОЮЗ - ПРОЦВЕТАНИЕ МОЛДОВЫ (FOR THE EURASIAN UNION -PROSPERITY FOR MOLDOVA) has been "created for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova and of other countries who support the idea of Moldova's integration into the Eurasian Union".

The pages Digital 24 Moldova and Moldovenii de pretutindeni! (The Moldovans from all over the world) are part of a network of pages posting pro-Romania unionist content. The page Digital 24 Moldova mostly disseminates informative content from www.cotidianul.md, and the page Moldovenii de pretutindeni (The Moldovans from all over the world) - entertainment content produced in Romania, combined with unionist news and messages. The network also includes the pages: Tinerii din R. Moldova (Youth of Moldova)²⁴ (11.2 thousand members), Românii din Odnoklassniki (Romanians on *Odnoklassniki*)²⁵ (9.7 thousand members), Blocul Unirea (Unification Bloc) (5 thousand members), Basarabia e România! (Bessarabia is Romania!)²⁶ (4.2 thousand members).

Игорь Додон (Igor Dodon) and Наша Партия - Partidul Nostru (Our Party) are the most popular pages of Moldovan political stakeholders on Odnoklassniki.

²³ CJI, API – Mass-media monitoring in the campaign for 2019 legislative election. Final report, p.21

http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/monitorizarea-mass-media-%C3%AEn-campania-electoral%C4%83-pentru-alegerile-parlamentare-2019-rapo-3

²⁴ https://ok.ru/tineriibasarabiei

²⁵ https://ok.ru/romanism

²⁶ https://ok.ru/romaniamare

The largest **mass-media communities** are the official pages of the Moldovan online press on the Odnoklasniki network.

According to the number of members, the top 10 media communities include 4 pages disseminating news in Romanian language (ProTV Chisinau, Publika TV, realitatea.md and Unimedia) and 6 pages disseminating content in Russian language (kp.md, golos.md, point.md, gagauzinfo.md, sp.md and alfanews.md). In January 2019, the total number of members of the 4 Romanian-language media communities amounted to almost 200 thousand, while the 6 Russian-language media communities totalled almost 98 thousand members.

| | No. of members January 2017 | No. of members January 2019 | Growth, % | Language |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| ProTV Chisinau (The official page) ²⁷ | 102.200 | 128.300 | 25.54% | RO |
| Ştiri Moldova (News Moldova) ²⁸ | - | 36.600 | - | RO |
| Publika TV ²⁹ | 34.000 | 41.600 | 22.35% | RO |
| Realitatea.md ³⁰ | 19.200 | 21.200 | 10.42% | RO |
| Комсомольская правда - Молдова - КР.MD ³¹ | 19.000 | 19.700 | 3.68% | RU |
| Golos.md ³² | 20.000 | 19.000 | -5% | RU |
| Point.md ³³ | 8.400 | 11.800 | 40.48% | RU |
| Новости АТО Гагаузия (Гагауз Ери)/ Gagauzinfo.md ^{34, 35} | - | 11.200 | - | RU |
| Nokta.md | - | 10.900 | - | RU |
| Эхо Молдовы - самые актуальные новости Молдовы! (Echo of Moldova - the latest news from Moldova!) ³⁶ | - | 10.200 | - | RU |
| Газета "СП" Бельцы ("SP" newspaper, Bălți) ³⁷ | - | 8.900 | - | RU |

²⁷ https://ok.ru/protv.md

- ²⁸ https://ok.ru/stirimoldovamd
- ²⁹ https://ok.ru/tvpublika
- ³⁰ https://ok.ru/realitatea
- ³¹ https://ok.ru/kpmoldova
- 32 https://ok.ru/golosmd
- ³³ https://ok.ru/point.md
- ³⁴ https://ok.ru/gagauznews
- ³⁵ https://ok.ru/gagauzinfo
- ³⁶ https://ok.ru/group/55162628931699
- ³⁷ https://ok.ru/spgazeta

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The developments of the number of members of the largest media communities

| UNIMEDIA – News from Moldova ³⁸ | 6.100 | 8.300 | 36.07% | RO |
|--|-------|-------|--------|----|
| ALFA NEWS - свежие новости Молдовы | 6.900 | 7.200 | 4.35% | RU |
| (ALFA news-latest news from Moldova) ³⁹ | | | | |

ProTV Chisinau is the largest media community on Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova, with approximately 128 thousand members. **ProTV Chisinau (The official page)** is the official page of ProTV Chisinau TV channel. It shares news from <u>www.protv.md</u> website and from other sites affiliated with ProTV Chisinau (Pro Digital LLC) media group. Pro Digital LLC is owned by WarnerMedia American media conglomerate, through the subsidiary Central European Media Enterprises Ltd. The number of members of this page has substantially increased over the past two years, attracting over 25 thousand new members between January 2017 and January 2019. According to the *Final Report on Media Monitoring in the campaign for 2019 legislative election*", in most cases, [ProTV Chisinau channel] was neutral when reporting about the political protagonists".⁴⁰

Știri Moldova (News Moldova) and **Point.md** share contents from <u>www.știri.md</u> and <u>www.point.md</u> websites that belong to Simpals, a company owned by the businessman Dmitri Volosin. <u>www.știri.md</u> is an aggregator of news in Romanian language collected in the Moldovan mass-media, and <u>www. point.md</u> is an aggregator of news collected in the Russian-language media from Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.

Publika TV (about 41.600 members) is the official page of Publika TV channel. It belongs to General Media Group Corp LLC, a company owned by Vladimir Plahotniuc, the leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM). The monitoring of this TV channel throughout the campaign for the legislative election held in February 2019 pointed out that the political issues prevailed on Publika TV agenda. "As far as the political stakeholders are concerned, the DPM representatives (26-29%) and the candidates/competitors affiliated with this party have mainly had access to this TV channel. They were presented in a predominant-

³⁸ https://ok.ru/unimedia

³⁹ https://ok.ru/alfanews.m

⁴⁰ CJI, API - Media monitoring in the campaign for 2019 legislative election. Final report, p.13

http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/monitorizarea-mass-media-%C3%AEn-campania-electoral%C4%83-pentru-alegerile-parlamentare-2019-rapo-3

ly positive light (63-73%), the DPM being also favoured through the presence of Government members in newscasts and other broadcasts (60-80%). The representatives of ACUM Electoral Bloc and the candidates for the uninominal constituencies affiliated with this Bloc were mainly presented in a negative light (83-93%), and just their photos were shown. The representatives of the Party of Socialists and President Dodon were presented in a negative (38-48%) and neutral light (23-33%)."⁴¹

Realitatea.md page (about 21.200 members) shares news and content from <u>www.realitatea.md</u>. This website belongs to Bright Communications LLC, a company owned by the media manager Dumitru Țîra, through MDT Business LLC. In the election campaign held in February 2019, "<u>www.realitatea.md</u> presented the candidates of the Democratic Party, Pavel Filip and Vladimir Plahotniuc, as well as the party as a whole in a mostly positive light. Ilan Shor often appeared in a positive context, too. The other electoral candidates were mostly presented in a neutral way".⁴²

Комсомольская правда - Молдова - KP.MD page (about 19.700 members) shares content from <u>www.kp.md.</u> This website belongs to Комсомольская правда - Basarabia LLC, owned by the joint venture Media Invest LLC. The Media Invest founders are the Russian company "Komsomol'kaya Pravda Publishing House" and a number of natural persons - Sergiu Ivancenko, Andrei Primak, Dmitri Primak and Tatiana Primak.⁴³ Previously, it was mentioned that <u>www.kp.md</u> website had spread fake news about the European integration and the pro-European parties. "Kp.md website has disadvantaged the ACUM electoral bloc and its candidates, who were almost every time presented in a negative light, labelled and accused without being given the right of reply. The Party of Socialists, the President Igor Dodon, as well as Ilan Shor, on the contrary, were favoured, being frequently presented in a positive light".⁴⁴

http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/monitorizarea-mass-media-%C3%AEn-campania-electoral%C4%83-pentru-alegerile-parlamentare-2019-rapo-3

⁴¹ Ibid., p.12

⁴² Ibid., p.21

⁴³ Newsmaker.md - «Комсомольская правда в Молдове» has become closer to the Socialists. The newspaper and the website have another owner, 07.06.2019 http://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/komsomolskaya-pravda-v-moldove-stala-blizhe-k-sotsialistam-gazeta-i-sayt-smenili-v-43983

⁴⁴ CJI, API - *Media monitoring in the campaign for 2019 legislative election. Final report*, p.21

Golos.md page (about 19.000 members) shares content from <u>www.golos.md</u>. This website is part of the press group affiliated with the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova and with Igor Dodon. The website promotes the broadcasts of NTV Moldova and AccentTV and has the same address as Accent TV channel, which is owned, through a company from the Russian Federation, by Vadim Ciubara, adviser to President Igor Dodon.⁴⁵

Point.md page (about 11.800 members) shares content from <u>www.point.md</u>, a website belonging to Simpals, a company owned by the businessman Dmitri Volosin. This website is an aggregator which collects news in the Russian-speaking mass-media from Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.

Two media outlets which mainly cover the events occurred in the Gagauzian autonomy are in the first positions among the mass-media pages on Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova: www.gagauzinfo.md and www.nokta.md. Новости АТО Гагаузия (Гагауз Ери) (The news of the Gagauzian TAU (Gagauz-Yeri)) page (about 11.200 members) shares content from www.gagauzinfo.md regional website. This informative website focused on the events from the Gagauzian Territorial-Autonomous Unit belongs to lusivmedia LLC, a company founded by Iulia Cîlcic⁴⁶. The repeated monitoring of the way how this website covered various political events revealed that it had presented in a positive light the agenda of the politicians Irina Vlah and Igor Dodon and of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova and in a negative light - their political opponents.⁴⁷ Nokta.md (10.9 thousand members) is the page of www.nokta.md, an website created as part of a project of Piligrim-Demo NGO, with the financial support of the National Endowment for Democracy.48

⁴⁵ Rise.md - The shadow advisers to Igor Dodon, 19.10.2016

https://www.rise.md/prezidentiale2016/consilierii-din-umbra-ai-lui-igor-dodon/
 ⁴⁶ Anticorupție.md – *The owners of news websites and the interests they promote*, 23.05.2017

https://www.anticoruptie.md/ro/investigatii/social/proprietarii-site-uri-lor-de-stiri-si-interesele-pe-care-le-promoveaza

⁴⁷ CJI, API - Media monitoring in the campaign for 2019 legislative election. Final report http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/monitorizarea-mass-media-%C3%AEn-campania-electoral%C4%83-pentru-alegerile-parlamentare-2019-rapo-3

⁴⁸ http://nokta.md/%d0%be-%d0%bd%d0%b0%d1%81/

Эхо Молдовы - самые актуальные новости Молдовы! (Echo of Moldova - the latest news from Moldova) is the official page of <u>www.ehomd.info</u>. Эхо Молдовы (Echo of Moldova) was mentioned as a website publishing and disseminating fake news. In January 2019, the former domain name of this source – <u>www.eho.md</u> – was blocked by the Security and Intelligence Service of the Republic of Moldova.⁴⁹ Although it presents itself as an independent source of news about Moldova⁵⁰, the editorial staff of this website prefers anonymity. Open source research shows that it is a component part of NewsFront press agency network.

Group History

Group History shows when this group was created, as well as changes to its name. You can use Group History to see whether a group's purpose has changed over time.

- \D The group NOUTĂŢI DRP LRP WORLD NEWS-FRONT was created Aug 31, 2018
- (2) Changed name to Эхо Молдовы самые актуальные новости Молдовы! Sep 12, 2018

Changed name to Эхо Молдовы - Только свежие новости! Sep 11, 2018

Changed name to Актуальные новости и события Молдовы. "Эхо Молдовы" Aug 31, 2018

Changed name to Актуальные новости и события Молдовы. "Эхо Молдов" Aug 21, 2018

Aug 31, 2018

×

The history of name change of the mirrorgroup of Эхо Молдовы (Echo of Moldova) on Facebook

⁴⁹ Eho.md website was deprived of the domain according to a directive of the special services https://point.md/ru/novosti/obschestvo/sait-eho-md-lishili-domena-po-ukazaniiu-spetssluzhb

⁵⁰ Echo of Moldova - is an independent news resource with a clear position on key issues for the country. We love Moldova, we believe in Moldova, we protect our country.

⁵¹ NewsFront press agency is a project of "South-East Front" information centre, which started its activities in March 2014 (in the context of annexation of Crimea). This agency reports the world foreign policy events from the perspective of Russia's interests, its purpose being "to defend the interests of the Russian civilization and to unmask the enemies of the Russian world".

Газета "СП" (Бельцы) ("SP" newspaper, Bălți) page (about 8900 members) shares content from <u>www.esp.md</u> regional website. This website, which primarily covers the events occurred in Bălți municipality, is owned by Publicația Periodică SP LLC, which belongs to the editorial team of SP newspaper. As a result of this website's monitoring throughout the 2019 campaign for the legislative election, it came out that it had "covered the election campaign only from a regional perspective, the electoral candidates being always presented in a neutral way".⁵²

UNIMEDIA - Știri din Moldova (UNIMEDIA - news from Moldova) (about 8300 members) shares content from <u>www.un-</u> <u>imedia.info</u>, a website owned by Miraza LLC whose founder is the journalist Cristian Jardan.⁵³ The monitoring of the contents of Unimedia website revealed that it had covered the election campaigns (the campaign for the presidential election in 2016 and for the legislative election in 2019) in a generally neutral and balanced way, "the Democratic Party and its leader, Vladimir Plahotniuc, being often presented in a negative context".⁵⁴

ALFA NEWS - свежие новости Молдовы (ALFA NEWS - latest news from Moldova) (about 7200 members) shares

⁵³ Anticoruptie.md – The owners of news websites and the interests they promote, 23.05.2017 https://www.enticoruptie.md/re/investigatii/casial/proprietorii.gite.wri

https://www.anticoruptie.md/ro/investigatii/social/proprietarii-site-uri-lor-de-stiri-si-interesele-pe-care-le-promoveaza

⁵⁴ API, CJI - Media monitoring in the campaign for 2016 presidential election. Final report

http://api.md/upload/Raport%20de%20monitorizare%20a%20mass-media%20%20in%20campania%20electorala,%20FINAL,%2015.09.2016-11.11.2016.pdf

CJI, API - Media monitoring in the campaign for 2019 legislative election. Final report http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/monitorizarea-mass-media-%C3%AEn-campania-electoral%C4%83-pentru-alegerile-parlamentare-2019-rapo-3

⁵¹ https://www.facebook.com/groups/news.eho.md/about/

⁵² CJI, API - Media monitoring in the campaign for 2019 legislative election. Final report http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/monitorizarea-mass-media-%C3%AEn-campania-electoral%C4%83-pentru-alegerile-parlamentare-2019-rapo-3

content from <u>www.alfanews.md</u>, a Russian-language news aggregator, owned by Media Pres Group LLC⁵⁵.

The pages and the groups promoting the traditional messages of the Russian propaganda are quite widespread and visible on the Moldovan segment of the Odnoklassniki network. This category of communities includes, besides the pro-Russian social groups, the pages of the pro-Russian political stakeholders and of the Russian-speaking media outlets of the Republic of Moldova affiliated with these parties.

The news feeds and the posts of these communities reiterate the main leitmotifs of the Russian propaganda. A large share of the content that appears in these communities is produced by Russian media outlets, the pro-Russian media and the pro-Russian organizations of the Republic of Moldova, while the members of these pages/groups just have the role to share this content within the network of their virtual friends. In general, these pages share informative products made by several online resources which are part of the Russian propaganda machine. Many of these communities seem to operate as a network for information re-sharing.



pro-Russian Odnoklassniki communities in the Republic of Moldova

⁵⁵ Media Pres Group LLC belongs to Iana Coropceanu, the daughter of Sergiu Coropceanu, a person from the entourage of the businessman Victor Shelin.

However, against the background of the decline in the number of users of the Odnoklassniki network in Moldova, a moderate evolution and even a stagnation in the dynamics of the number of members can be noticed within the pro-Russian social communities.

> Р 0

The developments of the number of members of the largest pro-Russian social communities

| | No. of members January 201 | No. of members January 201 | Growth | Language |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|----------|
| РУССКО - СЛАВЯНСКАЯ ПАРТИЯ МОЛДОВЫ (RUSSIAN-SLAVIC PARTY OF MOLDOVA)56 | 86.600 | 86.300 | -0.35% | RU |
| ЗА ЕВРОАЗИЙСКИЙ СОЮЗ - ПРОЦВЕ- ТАНИЕ МОЛДОВЫ (FOR THE EURASIAN UNION –PROSPERITY FOR MOLDOVA) ⁵⁷ | 33.500 | 35.300 | 5.37% | RU |
| МОЛДОВА ОНЛАЙН (новости, события, мнения) (Moldova online (news, events, opinions)) 58 | 17.000 | 18.100 | 6.47% | RU |
| Лига русской молодёжи Республики Молдова (Russian Youth League of the Republic of Moldova) ⁵⁹ | 18.000 | 18.000 | 0.00% | RU |
| MOLDOVA ⁶⁰ | 14.500 | 15.900 | 9.66% | RU |
| Молдова должна быть с Россией! (Moldova should be with Russia!) 61 | 9.500 | 11.800 | 24.21% | RU |
| Таможенный союз - возрождение Молдовы! (The Customs Union - the revival of Moldova!) 62 | 10.000 | 10.100 | 1.00% | RU |
| Mîna Moscovei (Moscow's hand)63 | 9.400 | 10.100 | 7.45% | RU |
| MOLDOVA ⁶⁴ | 6100 | 6.000 | -1.64% | RU |
| Молдавское Сопротивление!Rezistenta Moldoveneasca! (The Moldovan Resistance) > has changed its name into: Молдова за мир и дружбу! Moldova pentru pace! (Moldova for peace!) ⁶⁵ | 2.500 | 5.100 | 104.00% | RU |
| vesteMD ⁶⁶ | 4.600 | 4.900 | 6.52% | RU |
| Родина - Евразийский Союз (Our homeland – the Eurasian Union) | 3.200 | ŞTERS | ŞTERS | RU |

⁵⁶ https://ok.ru/vybormoldovy

- ⁵⁷ https://ok.ru/referendum
- ⁵⁸ https://ok.ru/moldovao
- ⁵⁹ https://ok.ru/ligarusmoldova
- ⁶⁰ https://ok.ru/moldovaunita
- ⁶¹ https://ok.ru/moldovadol
- ⁶² https://ok.ru/tamozhen
- ⁶³ https://ok.ru/minamoscovei
- ⁶⁴ https://ok.ru/patriotismmoldova
- 65 https://ok.ru/moldavskoe
- 66 https://ok.ru/vestemd

| Молдавия - Наша Родина СССР! (Moldova – our homeland is the USSR!) 67 | 3.100 | 3.900 | 25.81% | RU |
|--|-------|-------|--------|----|
| R.Moldova-Noua Generație (The Republic | 2.900 | 3.000 | 3.45% | RU |
| of Moldova – the New Generation) > has changed its name into: Basarabia ⁶⁸ | | | | |
| ЗА ТАМОЖЕННЫЙ СОЮЗ!!! (FOR THE | 2.400 | 2.300 | -4.17% | RU |
| CUSTOMS UNION!!!)69 | | | | |

Five pro-Russian groups on Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova stand out due to their size and activity.

РУССКО-СЛАВЯНСКАЯ ПАРТИЯ МОЛДОВЫ (*RUS-SIAN-SLAVIC PARTY OF MOLDOVA*) (86.3 thousand members) is the official page of the Russian-Slavic Party of Moldova. Unlike the party itself, which has not actively participated in the political life of the Republic Moldova⁷⁰ and was not included in the survey of the visible political stakeholders on the Odnoklassniki network,



РУССКО - СЛАВЯНСКАЯ ПАРТИЯ МОЛДОВЫ 86 168 participanti, 8 prieteni + Alátură-te



Молдова приняла беженцев из Бангладеш, от которых отказалась Италия

В Молдову поступили первые беженцы из Бангладеш. Хотя статус беженцев приезжим еще не определен, Кишинев готовится принимать гостей,...

Выбор Молдовы - Последние новости РМ

Comentesză 46 Distribuie 33 🍿 Super 210

- 67 https://ok.ru/moldaviavtm
- 68 https://ok.ru/r.moldovan.tineret.ngeneratie
- 69 https://ok.ru/zatamozhen
- ⁷⁰ http://www.e-democracy.md/parties/mpuv/

Postare Odnoklassniki

5 feb V

its page enjoys popularity among the users. This page is currently the largest community of people with pro-Russian political preferences on Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova. According to the description of the page, its goal is: "to defend the interests of the Russian-speaking population in the Republic of Moldova" *(We advocate for the rights of the Russian-speaking population of the Republic of Moldova*). At present, the largest share of posts are news and articles from <u>www.vybor.md</u> (Выбор Молдовы -Первый Информационный), as well from the websites <u>www. prsm.md</u> (the website of the Russian-Slavic Party of Moldova) and <u>www.slavyane.md</u> (the website of the Slavic Community in the Republic of Moldova Public Association), all affiliated with Oleg Topolnitsky, President of the Russian-Slavic Party.

Differently from the previous monitoring period, the posts from websites which are not affiliated with Oleg Topolnitsky have practically disappeared from this group. According to an IPP study conducted in 2007, a large share of items on these news aggregators were either false or unilaterally presented certain foreign policy events, putting in a favourable light the policies of the Russian Federation⁷¹.

www.vybor.md mostly re-shares **selectively** the news published by the news aggregator - www.point.md. Even under these conditions, the social-political news taken over on www.vybor.md during the election campaign have favoured the candidate of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, voluntarily or involuntarily, **PYCCKO-C/IABAHCKAA ΠΑΡΤΙ/A MO/I_AOBbI** (**RUSSIAN-SLAVIC PARTY OF MOLDOVA**) and www.vybor.md participated in a new attempt to resume the fake topic about the emigrants invading the Republic of Moldova.⁷²

ЗА ЕВРОАЗИЙСКИЙ СОЮЗ - ПРОЦВЕТАНИЕ МОЛДОВЫ (FOR THE EURASIAN UNION-PROSPERITY FOR MOLDOVA) (33.5 thousand members) is a group of "citizens of the Republic of Moldova and of other countries who support the idea of Moldova's accession to the Eurasian Union" (*This group is intended for the adult citizens of the Republic of Moldova and of other countries who support the idea of joining the Eurasian Union by the Republic of Moldova*). This group mostly posts news from <u>www.news-front</u>.

⁷¹ IPP, Odnoklassniki 2017

⁷² https://ok.ru/vybormoldovy/topic/82151609868288



info website and the most active sharer is the anonymous profile *Α***настасия Российская**⁷³. The profile picture represents a young woman wearing army clothes who holds the flag of Novorussia.

<u>www.news-front.info</u> website belongs to NewsFront news agency (see above). NewsFront agency is present in the Republic of Moldova through <u>www.ehomd.info</u> website, whose content is also shared by the means of the page **3A EBPOA3ИЙСКИЙ COЮ3 - ПРОЦВЕТАНИЕ МОЛДОВЫ (FOR THE EURASIAN UNION-PROSPERITY FOR MOLDOVA).** The page also shares news from the websites <u>www.a-tv.md</u>, <u>www.ru-an.info</u>, <u>www.</u> <u>rossaprimavera.ru</u>, <u>www.putin-today.ru</u>, <u>www.svpressa.ru</u>.



Лига русской молодёжи Республики Молдова (Russian Youth League in the Republic of Moldova) (18 thousand members) is a group of the Russian Youth League of the Repub-

73 https://ok.ru/profile/583798600966

25

www.ru-an.

info website

Odnokklassniki profile

lic of Moldova Public Association (<u>www.ligarus.org</u>). According to the information on the organization's website, the "Russian Youth League of the Republic of Moldova is an apolitical and independent public organization, established on the basis of the freely expressed will of the Russian youth". The organization aims, among other, "at defending the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova" and "at stopping the spread of fascist ideas, of the aggressive nationalism and of the religious intolerance in the Republic of Moldova". In December 2012, the Russian Youth League became the youth wing of "Родина - Евразийский Союз" (Our Homeland – the Eurasian Union) social movement.

In the previous monitoring period, this group shared content from the websites <u>www.aif.md</u>, <u>www.basarabia.md</u>, <u>www. rodina.md</u>, <u>www.slavyane.md</u>, <u>www.vkurse.md</u>, <u>www.vybor</u>. <u>md</u>. However, after a period of inactivity in 2018 (only 5 posts during the period February-December 2018), this group has been posting content exclusively from <u>www.enews.md</u> website since January 2019 until now. The website is administered by the journalist Iulia Semionova, President of the Association of Russian-language Journalists of the Republic of Moldova.⁷⁴

МОЛДОВА ОНЛАЙН (новости, события, мнения) (**MOLDOVA ONLINE (news, events, opinions)**)⁷⁵ (17 thousand members) is a closed group that shares pro-Russian content, mostly from <u>www.sputnik.md</u>. According to its description, the group **MOLDOVA**⁷⁶ (14.5 thousand members) was set up to "fight against the dirty games imposed by Romania and NATO".

Most communities on this network refer to each other through the "links" section of their profile, making thus possible to establish the interconnection between them.

The overview of the largest Odnoklassniki communities in the Republic of Moldova subject to the analysis helps understand how Odnoklassniki works in the context of the Republic of Moldova, how they relate to the country's information and political space and how the debates about the possible propaganda and misinformation campaigns of the Russian Federation fall within this context.

⁷⁴ http://www.moldovenii.md/ru/people/1182

⁷⁵ https://ok.ru/moldovao

⁷⁶ https://ok.ru/moldovaunita

THE ELECTIONS AND THE SOCIAL NETWORKS

In 2018, almost 3 million users in the Republic of Moldova accessed the mobile Internet and 625 thousand users accessed the fixed Internet. The penetration rate of the mobile Internet access services was estimated to 83% of the population and the rate of the fixed Internet access services was of 17,5%.⁷⁷ About 52% of the population use the Internet every day⁷⁸, 66% of the population use Facebook, 56% use Odnoklassniki and only 12% of the population do not use any social network.⁷⁹

Thus, there is no room for skepticism regarding the influence and the impact of the use of social networks in the election campaigns. The social networks have become a space for access to the potential voters and an indispensable political communication tool. The social networks made possible the *democratization* of the public opinion, becoming a tool for collecting feedback, listening to marginalized voices and evaluating the success and/or failure (*political accountability*). The political parties can no longer afford ignoring the social networks, if they want to accede to power.

The social networks can present options, influence on the views and determine the actions or the inaction during an election campaign. Paradoxically, the social networks can be both an independent source of information in contexts where most of the traditional media outlets are politically controlled, as well as a toxic environment, full of misinformation and fake news.

Extremely useful for helping the citizens get informed about the electoral candidates and their platforms, the social networks are, on the other hand, dangerous when they influence on the electoral decisions and options through the manipula-

https://www.anrceti.md/news26042019

⁷⁷ ANRCETI published details about the developments of the electronic communication market in 2018

⁷⁸ Institute for Public Policy. *Barometer of the Public Opinion, January 2019*. p.25 http://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/BOP_02.2019-new.pdf

⁷⁹ IRI, Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Moldova, June 2019, p. 77-79 https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_moldova_may-june_2019_poll_final. pdf

tive or false information. Thus, being used by the unscrupulous political stakeholders to misinform, the social networks may jeopardize the informed expression of the electoral views, disrupting the democratic processes.

The review of the political stakeholders's behaviour on Odnoklassniki during the campaign for the legislative election aimed to monitor the potential use by them of manipulative or false information in order to get electoral benefits. This section of the study analyzed the largest groups and official pages of the political stakeholders in the Republic of Moldova on the Odnoklassniki network.

In general, the Moldovan political parties rather prefer to promote the figures of party leaders on the social networks, including on Odnoklassniki, with less emphasis on the visibility of the party itself or of other party members. As far as the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova is concerned, the figure of the Moldovan President, Igor Dodon, who is not formally a member of this party, is dominant and crucial for promoting the party. The same was true of other major electoral competitors in the campaign for 2019 legislative election. The Democratic Party of Moldova campaigned on Odnoklassniki through the page of its President - Vlad Plahotniuc. The main platforms for the promotion of ACUM Electoral Bloc and of its two components - "Demnitate si Adevăr" ("Dignity and Truth") and "Actiune si Solidaritate" ("Action and Solidarity") political parties on the Odnoklassniki network were the pages of the respective party leaders - Andrei Năstase and Maia Sandu. Shor Political Party did the same.

From the viewpoint of the number of members, the largest Odnoklassniki community of a political stakeholder in the Republic of Moldova is the one of Igor Dodon, President of the Republic of Moldova and (former) leader of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova. He is followed by the politicians Renato Usatâi and Alexandr Kalinin.

| | No. of members January 2017 | No. of members January 2019 | Growth | Language |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Игорь Додон (Igor Dodon) ⁸⁰ | 48600 | 75700 | 55.76% | RU/RO |
| Наша Партия - Partidul Nostru (Our Party) ⁸¹ | 44800 | 45600 | 1.79% | RU |
| Ренато Усатый (Renato Usatâi) ⁸² | - | 37500 | - | RU |
| Официальная группа Игоря Додона (The official group of Igor Dodon) ⁸³ | 28500 | 36800 | 29.12% | RU/RO |
| Александр Калинин (Alexandr Kalinin) ⁸⁴ | - | 23500 | - | RU |
| Vlad Plahotniuc ⁸⁵ | 3500 | 9900 | 182.86% | RO |
| Andrei Năstase ⁸⁶ | 3900 | 6500 | 66.67% | RO |
| Илан Шор (Ilan Shor) ⁸⁷ | - | 6300 | - | RU/RO |
| Irina Vlah ⁸⁸ | - | 5600 | - | RU |
| Maia Sandu ⁸⁹ | 2000 | 4400 | 120% | RO |
| Партия Социалистов - Partidul Socialiştilor (Party of Socialists)90 | 1900 | 2200 | 15.79% | RO |

The developments of the number of members of the largest communities of the political stakeholders

The official page and group of Igor Dodon have altogether over 112 thousand members. The official press-releases of the Presidency are disseminated on them. During the electoral periods, they need to be interpreted in the context of the image transfer from President Igor Dodon to the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova. The alleged actions undertaken by Igor Dodon to obtain from the Russian Federation a "migration amnesty" for the Moldovan citizens and to free the Moldovan pilots held captive in Afghanistan gave results in the election campaign.

In addition to the official posts of Igor Dodon in his Odnoklassniki communities, the comment sections on Igor Dodon's page and group were the most active platforms for discussions, debates and interpretation of different social-political events occurred in the Republic of Moldova during the election peri-

- ⁸² https://ok.ru/renato.usaty
- 83 https://ok.ru/igordodoni
- 84 https://ok.ru/profile/347465666795
- ⁸⁵ https://ok.ru/plahotniuc
- ⁸⁶ https://ok.ru/andreinastase
- ⁸⁷ https://ok.ru/ilanshor
- ⁸⁸ https://ok.ru/irina.vlah
- ⁸⁹ https://ok.ru/acummaiasandu
- 90 https://ok.ru/socialistii.moldova

29

⁸⁰ https://ok.ru/igor.dodon1

⁸¹ https://ok.ru/novayapartia

od. They have a much higher level of interaction than all other Odnoklassniki communities of the Moldovan political stakeholders. Given the degree of penetration and the influence of these communities within the Moldovan segment of Odnoklassniki, they are subject to a thorough analysis in the next chapter.

The Odnoklassniki network of communities (targeted at specific districts) set up around the personality of Renato Usatâi, President of Partidul Nostru (Our Party) Political Party has eroded. The absence of Renato Usatâi from the Republic of Moldova has gradually led to the decline of his and his political project's support, including in the online environment. Only two online communities - *Hawa Партия - Partidul Nostru (Our Party)* (45.6 thousand members) and *PeHamo Ycamый (Renato Usatâi)* (37.5 thousand members) – still actively share content, ensuring a certain degree of visibility.

During the campaign for the legislative election held in February 2019, the above-mentioned pages disseminated the interviews given by Renato Usatâi to different media outlets, which were critical of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova and not so critical of the Democratic Party of Moldova. The page disseminated news items about the activity of Partidul Nostru (Our Party) in the election campaign and election videos of Our Party's candidates for the uninominal constituencies.

Александр Калинин (Alexandr Kalinin) is the official page of the politician Alexandr Kalinin, President of the Party of Regions of Moldova (since February 2016). However, Alexandr Kalinin, resident of the Russian Federation, owes his popularity on the Odnoklassniki network to another position he holds – that of President of the Congress of the Moldovan Diaspora in the Russian Federation⁹¹. During the campaign for the legislative election in February 2019, the page disseminated the interviews with Alexandr Kalinin in which he criticized the alleged success claimed by Igor Dodon – the "migration amnesty"⁹² and the release of the Moldovan pilots held cap-

⁹¹ www.moldova.ms

⁹² President of the Moldovan diaspora in Russia: Dodon's amnesty is just empty words!, 6th of February 2019

tive in Afghanistan⁹³, along with the dissemination of electoral videos of the Party of Regions. Although the page has a large number of members, its content does not enjoy much popularity and user interaction.

In terms of percentage, there was a substantial increase in the number of members of the communities of the politicians Vlad Plahotniuc - 182.86%, Maia Sandu - 120% and Andrei Năstase - 66.67% during the period January 2017- January 2019. However, the number of these communities' members is much lower than the number of members of the pro-Russian politicians.

| | <u>की</u> क | • | \odot | Ŕ | ©,▼ | ERpost | ERday |
|---|-------------|-----|---------|------|-------|--------|--------|
| | 39.6K | 168 | 32.5K | 2.4K | 11.6K | 0.700% | 1.994% |
| V | 6.5K | 68 | 23.1K | 1.5K | 4.5K | 6.545% | 7.947% |
| • | 10.0K | 43 | 15.0K | 684 | 1.7K | 4.051% | 3.110% |
| | 45.7K | 194 | 9.8K | 1.4K | 1.1K | 0.138% | 0.479% |
| | 4.4K | 32 | 4.4K | 1.2K | 774 | 4.439% | 2.680% |
| | 6.5K | 20 | 5.2K | 782 | 534 | 5.002% | 1.819% |
| * | 2.2K | 185 | 2.3K | 290 | 197 | 0.698% | 2.189% |

Frequency of postings and level of interaction on the political stakeholders' pages Period: 1st of January – 28th of February 2019

Between 1st of January – 28th of February 2019, there was a considerable difference in terms of frequency of postings on

https://deschide.md/ro/stiri/interviu/43838/(VIDEO)-INTERVIU--Pre%C8%99edintele-diasporei-moldovene%C8%99ti-din-Rusia-Alexandr-Kalinin-Amnistia-anun%C8%9Bat%C4%83-de-Dodon-doar-vorbe-goale!.htm

⁹³ Alexandr Kalinin: Igor Dodon paid \$ 2 million for the release of the Moldovan pilots, 13th of February 2019 https://adevarul.ro/moldova/politica/alexandr-kalinin-igor-dodon-platit-2-mil-

ioane-dolari-eliberarea-pilotilor-moldoveni-1_5c641716445219c57e18d389/ index.html Igor Dodon's page (168 posts) and on the pages of Vlad Plahotniuc (54), Maia Sandu (32) and Andrei Năstase (20). Due to the frequency of postings, Igor Dodon's page had the highest number of interactions - 32.5 thousand likes, 2.4 thousand shares and over 11.6 thousand comments during the period under consideration.

With only 6.5 thousand members, Ilan Shor's page ranked second based on the number of interactions, with 23.1 thousand likes, 1.5 thousand shares and 4.5 thousand comments for 68 posts during the same period. Thus, **the comment sections on Ilan Shor's page and group became another great platform for discussion between the users - mostly between the supporters of the Party of Socialists and of Shor Political Party**. Ilan Shor's page (about 6.5 thousand members) also had a very large number of interactions per post (6.545%), overcoming from this viewpoint the pages of Maia Sandu, Vlad Plahotniuc and Andrei Năstase.



The page of **Vlad Plahotniuc**, President of the Democratic Party of Moldova (about 9,900 members) ranked third from the perspective of the number of interactions. This page had 15 thousand likes, 684 shares and 1.7 thousand comments for 43 posts in the period under consideration. The election videos with the highest number of views on Odnoklassniki in the campaign for the legislative election were also disseminated on this page. The videos of the Democratic Party of Moldova **Deeds not words!**⁹⁴ and **On 24**th **of February Moldova chooses the deeds**,

94 https://ok.ru/plahotniuc/topic/69264724052839

Post on Ilan Şor's Odnoklassniki page *not the words*⁹⁵ had about 1 million and 2 million views by Odnoklassniki users, respectively.



Наша Партия - Partidul Nostru (Our Party) page (45.7 thousand members) had the largest number of postings during the period subject to the review - 194. They had 9.8 thousand likes, 1.4 thousand shares and 1.1 thousand comments.

The low number of members in the communities of Andrei Nastase and Maia Sandu on the Odnoklassniki network determined the relatively low popularity of their posts during the election period. Among the top 10 postings by political stakeholders during the election period, there are 4 posts on Ilan Shor's page, 3 posts on Igor Dodon's page, 2 posts on Vlad Plahotniuc's page and 1 post on the page of Andrei Năstase.

⁹⁵ https://ok.ru/plahotniuc/topic/69398202862439

Post on Vladimir Plahotniuc's Odnoklassniki page

34 is posti

Top postings by the political stakeholders during the election period

Odnoklassniki and parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova

| | | | Interaction ⁹⁶ |
|----|--------------------|--|--|
| 1 | lgor Dodon | Release of the Moldovan pilots held captive by the Taliban (video: about 800.000 views) https://ok.ru/igordodoni/ topic/69434422640808 | 11.02.2019 / 10:47 • Likes 6412 • Reposts 379 • Comments 4202 |
| 2 | Vlad Plahotniuc | On 24 th of February, Moldova chooses the deeds, not the words! (video: about 2 million views) https://ok.ru/plahotniuc/ topic/69398202862439 | 21.02.2019 / 20:42 • Likes 5727 • Reposts 238 • Comments 234 |
| 3 | llan Shor | Your community may look like Orhei! (In Russian) (video: about 340.000 views) <u>https://ok.ru/ilanshor/</u> topic/69631724350413 | 28.01.2019 / 16:23 • Likes 4230 • Reposts 222 • Comments 360 |
| 4 | llan Shor | Your community may look like Orhei! (In Romanian) (video: about 320.000 views) <u>https://ok.ru/ilanshor/</u> topic/69631578139597 | 28.01.2019 / 15:56 • Likes 3650 • Reposts 124 • Comments 208 |
| 5 | llan Shor | llan Shor for the people (banner) <u>https://ok.ru/ilanshor/</u> topic/69636940950477 | 29.01.2019 / 15:25 • Likes 3372 • Reposts 170 • Comments 2799 |
| 6 | lgor Dodon | To further take advantage of the non- recognition, "Sheriff" goes against Putin and supports Plahotniuc (video: about 290.000 views) https://ok.ru/igordodoni/ topic/69498004160680 | 23.02.2019 / 22:01 • Likes 3167 • Reposts 379 • Comments 1223 |
| 7 | llan Shor | Your community may look like Orhei! (In Russian) (video: about 290.000 views) <u>https://ok.ru/ilanshor/</u> <u>topic/69616034900941</u> | 25.01.2019 / 20:19 • Likes 3017 • Reposts 211 • Comments 588 |
| 8 | lgor Dodon | Meeting with Vladimir Putin (photos) <u>https://ok.ru/igordodoni/</u> topic/69372913762472 | 30.01.2019 / 17:44 • Likes 2178 • Reposts 147 • Comments 671 |
| 9 | Vlad Plahotniuc | Deeds, not words! (video: about 1 million views) <u>https://ok.ru/plahotniuc/</u> <u>topic/69264724052839</u> | 25.01.2019 / 21:23 • Likes 2155 • Reposts 123 • Comments 132 |
| 10 | Andrei Năstase | The cry of a desperate mother (video: about 20.000 views) <u>https://ok.ru/andreinastase/</u> topic/69547485607254 | 28.01.2019 / 15:12 • Likes 778 • Reposts 128 • Comments 61 |

⁹⁶ Datele au fost colectate în perioada ianuarie-martie 2019

During the monitoring period, the communities of the political stakeholders subject to the review did not have posts that would clearly promote any fake news. The **comment sections** of these communities were very active in terms of discussions about the political stakeholders involved in the campaign. The main leitmotifs of the discussions were related to the geopolitical orientation and the "theft of the billion", the 2014 bank fraud in the Republic of Moldova. The complexity of the mixed electoral system and the informational confrontation of everyone against all across the political spectrum added uncertainty, in an atmosphere of total confusion, among those commenting on the social networks. The desire to avoid such a confusion makes people extremely vulnerable to misinformation. In an attempt to simplify the complexity that creates confusion, people accept any information that matches their previous biases or any information that is more repetitive, more persistent, more sensational or more shocking.

In all communities of the political stakeholders subject to the survey, the discussions about the election campaign in the



Lugaru 333 replied to Alex

В Акум самое дерьмо собралось. Мая Санду была в партии Филата помогала воровать школы закрывала а теперь вдруг стала порядочной. Усатый хороший человек но в свое время тоже лучшим друганом Плахотнюка он сам говорил. Ну а теперь разошлись пока у них путидорожки, Бабло вместе рубили в России после перестройки, Так что лучше Игоря Додона у нас в настоящий момент нет,

🔈 Наталья Фэту(Давлетова)

Додон политик умный. Он прекрасно понимает к чему может привести хорошая дружба с англосаксами. Преврашение территории в ядерную свалку, плацдарм для террористов и боевиков, которых будут готовить для войны с Евроазией. Торговля людьми и органами. Такую участь постигла Ливия и Украина.



Lugaru 333

Игорь Додон настоящий патриот своей страны Он борется за нашу страну чтобы она по-правильному пути развития, Чтобы государственным был родной язык-молдавский, Чтобы не третировали постоянно русский язык и чтобы не тероризировали постоянно национальные меньшинства гымповцы и ему подобные, Чтобы Молдова развивала дружественные отношения с Россией,



Наталья Фэту(Давлетова)

На Украине под прикрытием нацистских группировок готовят террористов для войны.

2 Feb

comments section were very often diverted by the repetitive posts made by the same users. They acted following a similar pattern: hidden identity and/or false profile and identical and repetitive comments under the most viral posts in the respective communities.

These messages evoked the specific topics of the Russian propaganda, along with denigrating messages and licentious language, transforming thus the comments sections into panels for dissemination of the Russian propaganda and hate speech. Although Odnoklassniki has the option of comment modera-

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ОДНОПАРТИЕЦ С ВОРОМ НЕСТАСЕ - МАЯ САНДУ = КТО ЭТО ТАКАЯ ТЕМНАЯ ЛОШАДКА ОГРАБИВШАЯ ВСЕ НАСЕЛЕНИЕ МОЛДОВЫ НА 900 МИЛЛИОНОВ ЕВРО МИНИМУМ - ЭТО РУМЫНОАМЕРИКАНСКАЯ ПРОСТИТУТКА НЕЗАМУЖНЯЯ ЗЛАЯ ЛЕЗБИЯНКА И ПОДСТИЛКА ПРИБЛИЖЕННАЯ И ПОДЧИНЕННАЯ ФИЛАТА ПОДПИСАВШАЯ ГРАБИТЕЛЬСКИЙ ДОКУМЕНТ О МИЛЛИАРДЕ ЕВРО ВОЗЛОЖЕННЫЙ НЕПОМЕРНЫМ ДОЛГОМ НА ПЛЕЧИ НАСЕЛЕНИЯ ПРОДАВШАЯ АЭРОПОРТ ЧИЧЕНЦАМ, ЗАКРЫВАЛА ШКОЛЫ, ОТМЕНЯЛА ПОСОБИЯ. КРОМЕ АМЕРИКАНСКОГО ФЕСБУКА НИКАКОЙ ПРОГРАММЫ ПАРТИИ И ДАЖЕ ПОПЫТОК НАМЕРЕНИЙ ИЗМЕНИТЬ ЖИЗНЬ НАСЕЛЕНИЯ СТРАНЫ И МНОГОЕ ДРУГОЕ НЕ ГОВОРЯ УЖЕ О ФИНАНСОВЫХ КРИМИНАЛЬНЫХ . ГРАБИТЕЛЬСКИХ МАХИНАЦИЯХ БУДУЧИ МИНИСТРОМ ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ , А НЫНЕ ПОДЧИНЕННАЯ ГОСДЕПА США И ПЛАХОТНЮКА М. САНДУ ЧТОБ ТЫ ПОДАВИЛАСЬ ЭТИМ МИЛЛИАРДОМ !! а также и все остальные румыноиды из ДПМ где САНДУ ПОСТОЯННО УЧАСТВОВАЛА В КРИМИНАЛЬНЫХ СХЕМАХ. И ДРУГИЕ АМЕРИКАНСКИЕ ХАЛУИ И ЛАКЕИ никогда не думали о возрождении страны, они украли все деньги молдавского народа из бюджета и продолжая просить у МВФ и моментально грабить и распиливать по своим карманам эти кредиты находясь в сговоре и бесприкословно выполняя вражеские советы чиновников и кураторов из еврожопы и нацистами и шпионами из сша КОТОРЫЕ НАЧИНАЯ С 2009 ГОДА НЕ ВЫЛЕЗАЮТ ИЗ КИШИНЕВА И СООТВЕТСТВЕННО ОБЛАДАЮТ ПОЛНОЙ ИНФОРМАЦИЕЙ И РУКОВОДЯТ АБСОЛЮТНО ВСЕМИ СХЕМАМИ ПО РАЗГРАБЛЕНИЮ МОЛДАВСКОГО НАРОДА и за все годы правления и разграбления от момента захвата власти 7 апреля 2009 до украденных миллиардов евро из бюджета и т.д., а это деньги пенсионеров и налогоплательщиков ии вы увидите что венцом БАНДИТСКОЙ И ГРАБИТЕЛЬСКОЙ ватханалии будут повышены налоги, штрафы, а так же тарифы на газ и свет на необъяснимую и непроверенную вымышленную сумму, А СООТВЕТСТВЕННО ЗАРПЛАТЫ И ПЕНСИИ ПОНИЖЕНЫ! КУДА ДЕЛИСЬ ВСЕ НАЛОГИ НА ВСЕ И ДАЖЕ НАЛОГ ЗА ВОЗДУХ И ПОБОРЫ ЗА ДОРОГИ И Т.Д., СБОРЫ ПО ТАРИФАМ И ТАК ДАЛЕЕ НАЧИНАЯ С 2008 ГОДА ? КУДА ИСЧЕЗЛИ МИЛЛИАРДЫ ЕВРОКРЕДИТОВ ГРАНДОВ И ПОМОЩИ ОТ ЕВРОПЫ, МВФ, США, КИТАЯ И ТАК ДАЛЕЕ С 2009 ГОДА ?????ГДЕ УКРАДЕННЫЙ С БАНКОВСКОЙ СИСТЕМЫ МИЛЛИАРД ЕВРО???????? А ВОЗВРАЩАТЬ ЭТИ МИЛЛИАРДЫ ЕВРО ПРИДЕТСЯ НЕ ФАШИСТСКИМ РУМЫНОАМЕРИКАНСКИМ ЖОПОЛИЗАМ ПРИСЛУЖИВАЮЩИМ ГОСДЕПУ США КОТОРЫЕ ЗАХВАТИЛИ ВЛАСТЬ В МОЛДОВЕ, А ВСЕМ ЖИТЕЛЯМ СТРАНЫ МОЛДОВЫ И ИХ ВНУКАМ И ПРАВНУКАМ . ВСЕХ РУМЫН ЗА ГРАБЕЖ МОЛДАВСКОГО НАРОДА В ЯМУ И СЖЕЧЬ ПЕРЕД ВСЕМ НАРОДОМ ПОКАЗАТЕЛЬНЫЙ СУД. А ТО ОТКУПЯТСЯ И ЗБЕГУТ !ЗБЕГУТ ! НЕ НАЖРАЛИСЬ ЕШЁ ЦЫГАНЬЁ ВОРОВСКОЕ ЗА СТОЛЬКО ЛЕТ!?

Example of repetitive posting in the comments section
tion to prevent the hate speech, no moderation was done, not even on the official Odnoklassniki page of the President Igor Dodon.

Although the postings made in Odnoklassniki communities by the political stakeholders subject to the review enjoyed a high degree of user interaction, it should be noted that the discussions in the comments section related to these posts essentially contrast with the debates on the electoral issues on Facebook. Odnoklassniki remains a space where the comments are almost exclusively influenced by the emotions and the geopolitical rationale, lacking the rationality that is sometimes displayed in similar discussions on Facebook.

The Odnoklassniki network was relevant from the viewpoint of shaping the public opinion through the Internet in this electoral cycle, but the constant decrease of the number of users and the quality of the social-political content that it provides now will, probably, lead either to its transformation into a pro-Russian bubble, or to its irrelevance in the coming electoral cycles.

However, the election cannot be won or lost exclusively on the social networks. Although no quantitative sociological surveys were conducted to show how the citizens use the social networks for accessing the political news and events, a series of focus-groups held by the Institute for Public Policy of Moldova during the legislative election campaign in winter 2019 pointed out that the citizens were annoyed by the too large amount of information about politics in their news feed on the social networks. The respondents were also annoyed by the fact that the social-political news items were focussed on negative issues and there were no debates on positive solutions or topics. Thus, the largest share of respondents intentionally avoided to access the political news in the stream of posts on the social networks. The respondents expressed feelings of disappointment, frustration, upset in relation with the political processes in the Republic of Moldova. Many of them consider that their opinion cannot influence on the current processes, which are controlled by the influential people, with great financial possibilities.

THE POLITICIANS ON ODNOKLASSNIKI -

Igor Dodon, the current President of the Republic of Moldova and the informal leader of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), is the most visible Moldovan politician on Odnoklassniki.

Igor Dodon is an acknowledged and committed promoter of the pro-Russian policy in the Republic of Moldova. He has been constantly promoting the strategic partnership with Russia, which he has always considered as "a very important part of the concept for our country's foreign policy".⁹⁷ During the campaigns for the legislative elections held in 2014 and 2019, as well as in the campaign for 2016 presidential election, Igor Dodon made a transfer of popularity, using photos in which he appeared with the Russian President, Vladimir Putin⁹⁸, as well as with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and of all Russia.⁹⁹

Since his investiture as President of the Republic of Moldova in December 2016 until the end of 2018, Igor Dodon undertook multiple visits to Russia, but none visit to a neighbouring country: Romania and Ukraine. During one of his visits to Moscow for a meeting with Vladimir Putin, Igor Dodon stated he would denounce the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union, if the PSRM won the majority in the Parliament after the legislative election in February 2019.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Igor Dodon: The strategic partnership with the Russian Federation will always be a very important part of the concept for our country's foreign policy. http://socialistii.md/igor-dodon-parteneriatul-strategic-cu-federatia-rusa-va-fi-intotdeauna-o-parte-deosebit-de-importanta-a-conceptiei-politicii-externe-a-tarii-noastre/.

⁹⁸ Meeting with Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, 4th of November 2014.

http://dodon.md/intilnirea-cu-presedintele-federatiei-ruse-vladimir-putin/

⁹⁹ Dodon met Patriarch Kirill in Moscow: What invitation did the head of state make? https://sputnik.md/society/20190405/25409939/Dodon-intalnire--la-Moscova-cu-Patriarhul-Kiril.html.

¹⁰⁰ Dodon vows to Putin that he will cancel the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the EU, 17th of January 2017. https://www.euractiv.ro/euractiv-moldova/dodon-a-promis-in-fata-lui-putinca-va-anula-acordul-de-asociere-al-republicii-moldova-cu-ue-6427.

This priority was proclaimed in 2014, along with the promise to conduct a referendum on the accession of the Republic of Moldova to Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan Customs Union.¹⁰¹

The PSRM, under the leadership of Igor Dodon, organized several marches to support the Customs Union¹⁰², as well as the so-called "traditional Christian" family values promoted by the Metropolitan Church of Moldova which is subordinate to the Russian Patriarchate. According to the Socialists led by Igor Dodon, the traditional family values are incompatible with the rights of the LGBT people and with the provisions of the law on ensuring equality and prohibiting discrimination.

The *Moldovan history and statehood* are central concepts of Igor Dodon's political platform. In his opinion, the Moldovan language defines the origin and the identity of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, while the "Romanian language is just an invented political term". President Igor Dodon made several initiatives to materialize these concepts, namely: proclaiming the 2nd of February as the "Day of Moldova's Statehood"¹⁰³, replacing the national flag of the Republic of Moldova with the "historical flag of Moldova", a red one, with a golden aurochs head in the middle, and replacing the "history of the Romanians" school subject with the "history of Moldova"¹⁰⁴.

President Igor Dodon has repeatedly stood categorically against the accession of the Republic of Moldova to NATO, what would mean, in his view, "a war for Moldova". At the same

http://www.promis.md/evenimente/psrm-moldova-uniunea-vamala/.

¹⁰¹ Igor Dodon: The Customs Union or the European Union – the people should decide by a REFERENDUM.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OSqolkIhhQ.

¹⁰² Socialist march "For Moldova joining the Customs Union", 14th of September 2014

¹⁰³ Igor Dodon argues that 2nd of February 1365 is the date when the statehood of Moldova was officially recognized for the first time: "The first historical data about Moldova are from 1359. This year, we will celebrate the 658th anniversary. We have something to be proud of, we are a people with a centuries-long history. The 2nd of February 1365 is the date when the statehood of Moldova was officially recognized for the first time. It is a historical date. I come up with the initiative to decorate on 2nd of February the personalities who have contributed to the statehood of our country."

¹⁰⁴ Dodon's flag, 2nd of February 2017. https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/28275025.html.

time, Igor Dodon believes that a decision about the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union would lead to the country's disappearance, following the incorporation of its districts by Romania.¹⁰⁵

In the view of Igor Dodon, Romania, the neighbouring country, is the main adversary of the Republic of Moldova's statehood. The major threat for destabilizing the internal security is associated with the Unionist movements and marches in the Republic of Moldova, seen by Igor Dodon as being financed by Romania which risks to become "the number one enemy of the Moldovans"¹⁰⁶, and he promised to ban them. In general, Igor Dodon inoculates a kind of superiority of the Republic of Moldova over Romania, both from the language and from the territorial perspective. As for the territorial point of view, Igor Dodon perceives half of the territory of today Romania as historically belonging to Moldova, but denies any territorial claim by the Republic of Moldova against Romania.¹⁰⁷

Such theories and issues, promoted and supported in the public space by the Moldovan President, Igor Dodon, are acknowledged elements of the Russian propaganda in the Republic of Moldova. The Russian propaganda has two main messages in the Republic of Moldova: one of them focuses on the opportunities for association with the greatness and unlimited power of Russia, and the second one proclaims that no other country's orientation is a viable and desirable alternative.¹⁰⁸

The anti-Romanian, anti-USA and anti-EU feelings, combined with a high degree of support for the pro-Russian foreign policy and the Soviet nostalgia, were identified as the main narratives of the Russian propaganda in public debates.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Igor Dodon, 10th of July 2017.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=PEY8vlyH11o,

¹⁰⁶ Igor Dodon: There is a major risk that Romania becomes the number one enemy of the Republic of Moldova, 19th of March 2018. https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=z61l3pjwW4c."

¹⁰⁷ Igor Dodon for DW: "Moldova does not have a patriot like Putin at the helm of the country", 24th February 2018.

https://www.dw.com/ro/igor-dodon-pentru-dw-moldova-nu-are-un-patriot-ca-putin-la-conducerea-%C5%A3%C4%83rii/a-42723678.

¹⁰⁸ Study on the "Russian propaganda on "Odnoklassniki": The case of the Republic of Moldova", Institute for Public Policy, 2018,

Therefore, this chapter is meant to review the key-issues of the Russian propaganda raised in Igor Dodon's Odnoklassniki communities or in the posts about Igor Dodon, as well as the users' reactions to them.

• A. Overview of the postings related to Igor Dodon

The review of the content of the Odnoklassniki social network disseminated throughout the last three weeks of the election campaign¹⁰⁹ pointed out a considerable fluctuation in the number of posts related to Igor Dodon. During the first half of the period subject to the review, there was a tendency to increase the number of posts, followed by a considerable decrease in the number of posts in the second half of the period under consideration. The number of posts related to Igor Dodon on the Facebook social network, collected during the same period (significantly higher), displayed the same trend.



Dinamica postărilor referitoare la Igor Dodon

A possible explanation for this trend could be the decrease in the number of public appearances of Igor Dodon during the last weeks of the campaign for the election on 24th of February 2019, following the warning issued by the Central Electoral Commission on 9th of February 2019¹¹⁰ about the "inadmissibil-

¹⁰⁹ Monitoring period: 4th of February – 24th of February 2019.

¹¹⁰ The Central Electoral Commission notified the Presidency of the Republic of Moldova on the inadmissibility of its involvement in the election campaign and issued a warning about the use of the administrative resources by a candidate in the election

https://a.cec.md/ro/comisia-electorala-centrala-a-atentionat-presedintia-re-publicii-moldova-asupra-2781_92497.html

ity of the involvement in the election campaign" by the Presidency, as well as in the context of the rumours about the possible elimination of the PSRM from the election campaign, if the Presidency continued that practice.

During the period 4th to 24th of February 2019, the news websites from the Republic of Moldova were the main sources of the information related to Igor Dodon. Hereinafter, we provide a hierarchy and a brief description of the websites from which most of the news items related to Igor Dodon were taken up during the period subject to the review.

shared during the period subject to the review News items -anguage Number **3ias** Source of group members enews.md111 1.100-1.200 337 RU Neutral ehomd.info¹¹² RU Positive 4.500-4.600 318 stiri de calitate¹¹³ / 800-900 151 RO Neutral> cotidianul.md Negative ziarul de Gardă^{114,115} 2.100-2.200 Neutral 91 RO/RU gagauzinfo.md^{116,117} 10.000-10.100 77 RU Positive accent TV¹¹⁸ 1.000-1.100 72 RU/RO Positive 1news.md¹¹⁹ 300-400 45 RU Negative important.md¹²⁰ Negative 2.100-2.200 33 RO alfanews.md¹²¹ 7.200-7.300 32 RU Negative sputnik.md¹²² 700-800 34 RO Positive newsmaker.md¹²³ 2.000-2.100 28 RU Neutral noi.md¹²⁴ 1.300-1.400 Neutral> 28 RO Positive

111112113114115116117118119120121122123124

¹¹¹ https://ok.ru/profile/577762482357

¹¹² https://ok.ru/ekhomoldov

¹¹³https://ok.ru/profile/559584435456

¹¹⁴ https://ok.ru/profile/575173038892

- ¹¹⁵ https://ok.ru/zdgmd
- ¹¹⁶ https://ok.ru/profile/576282391992
- ¹¹⁷ https://ok.ru/gagauzinfo
- ¹¹⁸ https://ok.ru/accenttv
- ¹¹⁹ https://ok.ru/group/52573942055107
- ¹²⁰ https://ok.ru/important.md
- ¹²¹ https://ok.ru/alfanews.md
- ¹²² https://ok.ru/sputnikmoldova

¹²³https://ok.ru/newsmaker

¹²⁴https://ok.ru/noi.moldova

| Pro TV ¹²⁵ | 128.000-128.100 | 28 | RO | Negative |
|---|-----------------|----|----|----------------------|
| unimedia.info ¹²⁶ | 8.200-8.300 | 26 | RO | Neutral |
| golos.md ¹²⁷ | 19.000-19.100 | 21 | RU | Positive |
| moldova.europalibera.org ¹²⁸ | 2.500-2.600 | 20 | RO | Neutral |
| point.md ¹²⁹ | 11.500-11.600 | 19 | RU | Neutral> Positive |
| realitatea.md ¹³⁰ | 21.100-21.200 | 18 | RO | Neutral |
| bloknot-moldova.md ¹³¹ | 6.600-6.700 | 16 | RU | Positive |
| ava.md ⁷¹³² | 100-200 | 13 | RU | Negative |

During the election period, **eNews Moldova** (enews.md) and **Эхо Молдовы (Echo of Moldova)** (ehomd.info) were the sources of the most widely spread news items about Igor Dodon in Odnoklassniki communities. eNews Moldova and Eho Moldova are two online news websites in Russian language. In general, most of the posts on Odnoklassniki related to Igor Dodon were not formulated by Odnoklassniki users, but were rather taken up from the online press.

Between 4th and 24th of February, approximately 337 news items were disseminated on **eNews.md** (about 1.100 -1.200 members). eNews.md belongs to Emedia LLC. This website is managed by the journalist Iulia Semionova, President of the Association of Russian-language Journalists from the Republic of Moldova.

During the period under consideration, 318 news items were taken up from **ehomd.info** (about 4.500-4.600 members). Eho Moldova produces pro-Russian news. This website was included by Stop Fals anti-fake news campaign in the list of the websites disseminating fake or manipulative news. Here are some headlines published on ehomd.info (translated from Russian): "Igor Dodon: Everything that was agreed upon with Putin was fulfilled"¹³³, "Igor Dodon - the absolute leader in the Moldovan

- ¹²⁶https://ok.ru/unimedia
- ¹²⁷https://ok.ru/golosmd
- ¹²⁸https://ok.ru/aicieeurop
- ¹²⁹https://ok.ru/point.md
- ¹³⁰https://ok.ru/realitatea
- ¹³¹https://ok.ru/bloknotmd

- ¹³³ Igor Dodon: everything we agreed upon with Putin has been done, 20th of February 2019.
 - https://ehomd.info/2019/02/20/igor-dodon-vse-o-chem-my-dogovarivalis-s-putinym-vypolneno-video/.

¹²⁵https://ok.ru/protv.md

¹³²https://ok.ru/avamd

citizens' trust rating"¹³⁴, "Igor Dodon hopes that each district town will receive a gift from Putin"¹³⁵, "Bucharest has given up the idea of occupying Moldova"¹³⁶, "The leaders of ACUM bloc have supported the idea of a military operation against Transnistria"¹³⁷, etc.

Știri de calitate (Quality news) is a private profile that actively shares content from **cotidianul.md**. **Cotidianul.md** (about 800-900 members) is an online publication in Romanian language. The information published on this website is generally neutral. At the same time, the editorials of this publication express critical views of the Democratic Party and of the informal leader of the Party of Socialists - Igor Dodon. The accusations of Renato Usatâi that Igor Dodon had intentionally postponed the repatriation of the two Moldovan pilots taken hostage by the Taliban, so that their return to Moldova takes place during the campaign for the legislative election, were taken up from this website.¹³⁸

Ziarul de Gardă (about 2.100-2.200 members) is the webpage in Romanian and Russian languages of an independent newspaper from the Republic of Moldova dedicated to the investigative journalism, founded by Alina Radu and Aneta Grosu. Neutral news items in which Igor Dodon or the Party of Socialists were mentioned were shared by the groups: Miscarea Populară Antimafia (Anti-mafia People's Movement), Basarabia Pământ Românesc (Bessarabia-Romanian Land)¹³⁹, Unitate și Demnitate Națională și Cetățenie Română (National Unity and Dignity and Romanian Citizenship)¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁴ Igor Dodon is the absolute leader in the rating of trust by the Moldovan citizens, 15th of February 2019.

https://ehomd.info/2019/02/15/igor-dodon-absolyutnyj-lider-rejtinga-doveriya-moldavskih-grazhdan/.

¹³⁵ Igor Dodon hopes that every district town will receive a gift from Putin, 15th of February 2019.

https://ehomd.info/2019/02/15/igor-dodon-nadeetsya-chto-kazhdyj-rajon-nyj-tsentr-poluchit-podarok-ot-putina-video/.

¹³⁶ Bucharest gave up the idea of occupying Moldova, 18th of February 2019. https://ehomd.info/2019/04/18/buharest-otkazalsya-ot-idei-okkupatsii-moldovy/.

¹³⁷ ACUM bloc leaders supported the idea of a military operation against Transnistria, 23rd of February 2019.

https://ehomd.info/2019/04/23/lidery-bloka-asum-podderzhali-ideyu-voennoj-operatsii-protiv-pridnestrovya/.

¹³⁸ https://ok.ru/nistrutisa/topic/69477554165018.

¹³⁹ https://ok.ru/group/56232279932962/topic/69158395521826.

¹⁴⁰ https://ok.ru/group/47702153232464/topic/69800367297872.

Gagauzinfo.md (about 10.000 – 10.100 members) is a website that covers the events occurred in the Gagauzian TAU. The website is owned by IusivMedia LLC,¹⁴¹ whose founder is Cîlcic Iulia. It gives positive coverage to the work of Igor Dodon and of the Party of Socialists. The opinion that the international observers did not highlight the election advertising by Igor Dodon in favour of the Party of Socialists was the most disseminated during the period subject to the review.

Accent TV (about 1.000-1.100 members) is a TV station owned by Telesistem TV LLC¹⁴², managed by Stanislav Vâjga and set up by another Russian company, Media Invest Servis. The latter is owned by Vadim Ciubară, adviser to Igor Dodon.¹⁴³ This website exclusively disseminates positive news items about Igor Dodon, which are further shared by the pro-Russian Odnoklassniki groups: Молдова должна быть с Россией! (Moldova should be with Russia!), ЗА ЕВРОАЗИЙСКИЙ СОЮЗ - ПРОЦВЕТАНИЕ МОЛДОВЫ (FOR THE EURASIAN UNION - PROSPERITY FOR MOL-DOVA), MOLDOVA-PATRIA MEA (MOLDOVA-MY HOMELAND), etc.

1news.md (about 300-400 members) is a Russian-language news website owned by WINGS MEDIA LLC. This website disseminates negative news about Igor Dodon and highlights the existence of a collaboration between Vlad Plahotniuc and Igor Dodon.

Important.md (about 2.100-2.200 members) and **alfanews.md** (7.200-7.300 members) belong to the press agency "MEDIA Pres Grup" LLC. The content of these websites is critical of Igor Dodon.

Sputnik Moldova (about 700-800 members) shares content from <u>www.sputnik.md</u>, part of the Rosiya Segodnya media conglomerate, set up and operated by the authorities of the Russian Federation. In the Republic of Moldova, Sputnik news agency and radio channel is in favour of Igor Dodon.

Newsmaker.md (about 2.000-2.100 members) is an online publication owned by Vladimir Soloviov, whose team consists of former journalists of Kommersant Moldova. The publication neutrally covers the information related to Igor Dodon.

Noi.md (about 1.300-1.400 members) belongs to MLD ME-DIA LLC, managed by Constantin Burghiu. A number of compa-

¹⁴¹ https://website.informer.com/gagauzinfo.md.

¹⁴² https://website.informer.com/a-tv.md.

¹⁴³ https://crimemoldova.com/news/politika/afacerile-consilierilor-din-umbr-ai-lui-igor-dodon-investiga-ie-rise/.

nies owned by Vasile Chirtoca, former candidate of the Party of Communists to the position of mayor of Chişinău municipality in 2015, are among the shareholders of this company. In general, the news items about Igor Dodon published during the period under consideration were either positive, or neutral.

ProTV Chișinău (about 128.000-128.100 members) is part of the Central European Media Enterprises international trust. The director of this television station is Cătălin Giosan. The Odnoklassniki page of ProTV disseminated predominantly negative content about Igor Dodon.

Unimedia.info (about 8.200-8.300 members) is the property of MIRAZA LLC, managed by the journalist Cristian Jardan. Neutral articles have been taken up from this news website.

Europa Liberă Moldova (**Free Europe Moldova**) (about 2.500-2.600 members) is part of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE / RL), an independent media outlet funded by the United States Congress, through the United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM). Its content neutrally reflects the statements of Igor Dodon or of other political stakeholders about Igor Dodon.

Point.md (about 11,500-11.600 members) belongs to SIM-PALS LLC, owned by the businessman Dumitru Voloshin. Its content gave positive coverage to the activity of Igor Dodon, especially to his pro-Russian foreign policy.

Realitatea.md (about 21.100-21.200 members) is part of "Realitatea" online press group. Realitatea.md is managed by Dumitru Țîra through HB Media LLC. The news items on this page presented Igor Dodon in a negative context.

Bloknot-moldova.md (about 6.600-6.700 members) belongs to Rus-Media Group LLC, owned by Igor Dodon's close friend - Oleg Paholkov. Not surprisingly, it presented Igor Dodon in a positive context.

Ava.md (about 100-200 members) is a project of a group of economic and political analysts, historians and political scientists. The editor-in-chief of this informative-analytical website is Andrei Andrievschi. Its news items presented Igor Dodon in a negative context.

During the campaign for the legislative election, the news items presenting Igor Dodon in a positive or in a neutral context were more numerous on the Odnoklassniki social network than those showing his activity in a negative light. The positive news items about Igor Dodon were mainly

related to his popularity among the citizens of the Republic of Moldova and to the good cooperation relationship he built with the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. The negative news items mainly referred to the opinion that Igor Dodon had deliberately delayed the repatriation of the Moldovan hostages from Afghanistan to get electoral dividends.

Plahotniuc Ренато победитденьги Соглашение пилотов России сожет. Серджиу страны Кеосаян ассоциации ostatici Молдова освободить ГОСУДарства Основными Александр освоюдить гоодаласт помощью могут лётчиков делает четко ничего власти был калинин лётчиков селико партии Реницэ Партии Реницэ Путина выборы рамках против союзом молдавский ГОДа ДПМ партий Юрий разобраться глава llan объяснил Afganistan Россия | рм Усатый сбитого Мюнхен Шор presedintele ПРЕЗИДЕНТА время тема Политик плена Partidul визите видно Политик плена Освобожде Клан стране alegeri Известный известный партии плохо ACUM ФЕВРАЛЯ плена Рагійці Освобождение время сделал может выборов предвыборной Президентом Республики МОЛДАВСКИХ Тигран РΜ WordItOut

Based on the review of the frequency of the words used in postings related to Igor Dodon, several major topics may be identified¹⁴⁴:

- Igor Dodon's role in the release of the Moldovan pilots taken hostage in Afghanistan¹⁴⁵

One of the most important topics of the campaign for 2019 legislative election was the release of the two Moldovan pilots held captive in Afghanistan since 2015. The two pilots were taken hostage by Taliban militants after capturing the helicopter that provided civil air services for the Afghan security forces.¹⁴⁶

The release of the two pilots became the main topic of the news items posted and shared on Odnoklassniki during the Frequency of the words used in postings related to Igor Dodon

¹⁴⁴ 3388 posts containing the name "Igor Dodon" were used during the period 4-24 February 2019.

 ¹⁴⁵ Keywords: pilots: 173, Afghanistan: 143, pilots: 128, Afghanistan: 122, pilots: 118, captivity: 109, hostages: 105, release: 99, pilots: 69.

¹⁴⁶ Igor Dodon: the release of the two pilots from captivity in Afghanistan was possible due to Moscow's involvement, 11th of February 2019. https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/29763866.html.

election campaign, as well as a powerful generator of debates among the Odnoklassniki users. Such news mostly focused on the dispute generated between Igor Dodon, on the one hand, and Andrian Candu (President of the Parliament) and Renato Usatâi ("Partidul Nostru" ("Our Party") President), on the other hand. While Igor Dodon claimed, during the election campaign, that the release of the pilots was possible due to him, with the involvement of the Russian authorities, Andrian Candu and Renato Usatâi accused him of having intentionally delayed the release of the pilots for 10 months in order to organize their return during the election period.

- Igor Dodon, as an electoral engine of the Socialists, Igor Dodon = PSRM¹⁴⁷

Although Igor Dodon is no longer the official leader of the Party of Socialists and, as President of the Republic of Moldova, should be apolitical, he actively involved in the election campaign, claiming that he cannot be stopped from meeting the citizens of the Republic of Moldova. Igor Dodon posted on Odnoklassniki a series of pictures from his meetings with the Moldovan voters in different regions of the country during the election campaign.¹⁴⁸

During his official visits to Moscow, Igor Dodon received many promises, along with several concrete actions (the migration amnesty, the release of the Moldovan hostages from Afghanistan, a truck donation)¹⁴⁹ which were widely disseminated and promoted during the election campaign, including on Odnoklassniki, as a support from the Russian Federation to the Moldovan citizens.

- Igor Dodon and the Russian Federation ¹⁵⁰

Like the previous election campaigns, both for the legislative and for the presidential elections, the totality of the campaign for 2019 legislative election was built around the good relationship between Igor Dodon and the Russian Federation, led by Vladimir Putin. Igor Dodon invoked the unequivocal

¹⁴⁷ Keywords: PSRM: 304, the Socialists: 295.

¹⁴⁸ https://ok.ru/group/50891460640964/topic/69165616884676.

¹⁴⁹ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69428723630248.

¹⁵⁰ Keywords: Russia (Россия): 190, Russia: 131, Moscow: 103, Putin: 66.

support provided by the Russian Federation for reaching positive results for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, such as: the amnesty of the Moldovan migrants who infringed the migration legislation of the Russian Federation, the release of the Moldovan hostages held captive in Afghanistan and Igor Dodon's attempts to get a decrease in the price of the Russian gas.

- Ridiculizing Igor Dodon by NTV channel during the election campaign¹⁵¹

The meeting between President Igor Dodon and the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, during his visit to the Russian Federation from 31st of January to 1st of February, was the subject of a satirical TV show on NTV Russian television channel. The presenter, Tigran Keosaian, said during the show that "it was clear to everyone who is the Tsar and who is Dodon".¹⁵²

The news items related to the statements made during that satire show were counteracted by another news flow that highlighted the statements of the same presenter on his social media page: "Dodon is loved in the Russian Federation and I regret having been misunderstood in Moldova"¹⁵³.

- The PSRM-Shor Party rivalry during the election campaign¹⁵⁴

Another visible topic of the election campaign on Odnoklassniki came from Ilan Shor's attacks on President Igor Dodon. Ilan Shor accused Igor Dodon of having received money from him for conducting the election campaigns and of having used his personal planes for the visits to Moscow¹⁵⁵. The Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Moldova stated it would investigate those allegations. In response, Igor Dodon claimed that the accusations were made at the request of the Democratic Party.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Keywords: Keosaian: 172, Tigran: 89, TV presenter: 79.

¹⁵² https://ok.ru/moldova24/topic/68813042622473.

¹⁵³ https://ok.ru/ekhomoldov/topic/69646197443443, https://ok.ru/point.md/topic/69231044670872.

¹⁵⁴ Keywords: Shor: 200, Ilan: 73.

¹⁵⁵ https://ok.ru/realitatea/topic/69113443044187, https://ok.ru/video/1222650563311.

¹⁵⁶ https://ok.ru/protv.md/topic/69667965572591.

- The PSRM-Partidul Nostru (Our Party) rivalry¹⁵⁷

Renato Usatâi made several accusations against Igor Dodon. First of all, Our Party's leader has repeatedly alleged that Igor Dodon was controlled by Vladimir Plahotniuc, President of the Democratic Party, and he acted at his command.¹⁵⁸ Secondly, Renato Usatâi made a series of statements about the fact that Igor Dodon had intentionally delayed the release of the Moldovan pilots held hostage by the Taliban until the eve of the legislative election.¹⁵⁹ Renato Usatâi also supported Ilan Shor's accusations that Igor Dodon had received money from him.¹⁶⁰

- Igor Dodon and the Munich conference¹⁶¹

Igor Dodon participated in the Munich International Security Conference, held on 15th of February 2019. According to Igor Dodon, he presented a security concept based on "the principle of permanent neutrality of the Republic of Moldova".¹⁶² Most of the news items focused on this topic reflected the statements made by Igor Dodon before and after the conference.

- Alexandr Kalinin's attacks on Igor Dodon¹⁶³

In connection with the release of the two Moldovan pilots held hostage in Afghanistan, another accusation against Igor Dodon, launched by Alexandr Kalinin, President of the Party of Regions of Moldova, was intensely circulated on Odnoklassniki. According to Kalinin, Igor Dodon paid to the Taliban \$ 2 million, out of a total of \$ 20 million, in exchange for the release of the hostages. Kalinin also accused Igor Dodon of having received \$ 20 million from the Kremlin for conducting the election campaign.¹⁶⁴ To challenge the genuineness of the pro-Russian orientation of the PSRM, Kalinin invoked the fact that 6 parliamentary candidates in this party's list had the Romanian citizenship.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁷ Keywords: Usatâi: 101, Renato: 87.

¹⁵⁸ https://ok.ru/novayapartia/topic/69627772777814.

¹⁵⁹ https://ok.ru/protv.md/topic/69697213240815, https://ok.ru/realitatea/topic/ 69150802168667.

¹⁶⁰ https://ok.ru/protv.md/topic/69690321540591.

¹⁶¹ Keywords: Munich: 98.

 ¹⁶² https://ok.ru/noi.moldova/topic/69145628374427, https://ok.ru/sputnikmoldova/topic/69063943411009.
 ¹⁶³ Keenender Kelining 70

¹⁶³ Keywords: Kalinin: 78.

¹⁶⁴ https://ok.ru/important.md/topic/68991254246850,

¹⁶⁵ https://ok.ru/important.md/topic/68991750747586.

• B. Igor Dodon's official profile and page on the Odnoklassniki social network

Overview

Igor Dodon's *official profile* on the Odnoklassniki social network - Игорь Додон (Igor Dodon)¹⁶⁶ - is followed by over 75,000 users. The profile contains over 3000 posts, accompanied by over 18 thousand photos and over 140 videos. Igor Dodon's *official page* - Официальная группа Игоря Додона (The official page of Igor Dodon)¹⁶⁷ is followed by over 36,000 users and contains over 2,500 posts, with 14,000 photos and over 70 associated videos.

/ 20 feb 🗸

Post on Odnoklassniki73

Официальная группа Игоря Додона 38 470 participanti, 7 prieteni + Alštură-te

Принял сегодня участие в презентации 12 единиц спецтехники «КАМАЗ», которые прибыли в Республику Молдова из Российской Федерации. Многофунициональная техника может быть использована для очистки дорог от снега, гололеда и для мойки улиц. Автомобили успешно проделали путь в 6 тыс. м.

Это стало возможным благодаря договоренностям с Президентом Российской Федерации Владимиром Владимироеннем Путиным летом прошлого года. Я обратится с проевоб навденти 100 единиц спецтехники для городое и раёнове Молдовы. Для этих целей российское Правительство выделило 100 млн. рублей из Резервелот фонда для сборим перебой партии автомобилей.

Искренне благодарю братский российский народ и лично Президента РФ Владимира Путина за помощь, оказанную нашей стране в разных областях. Буду и далее прилагать все усилия для укрепления стратегического партнерства между нашими странами.

После парламентских выборов ветомобили будут распределены между районами и муниципалитетами, где асть острая необходимость в такой технике. В частности, де единицы будут переданы Кышменеу. По армиму ветомобило оправатся в Бельцы, Бессврабу, Бричаны, Единцы, Комрат, Контаз, Окницу, Сороки, Тараклию и Фолоршты.

Am participat astăzi la prezentarea celor 12 autospeciale "Kamaz", care au ajuns în Moldova din Federația Rusă. Tehnica multifuncțională poate fi folosită în procesul de deszăpezire, de eliminare a poleiului și de spălare a străzilor. Autospecialele au parcurs cu succes peste 6.000 de km.

Post on Facebook⁷⁴

February 20 - O

Am participat astăzi la prezentarea celor 12 autospeciale "Kamaz", care au ajuns în Moldova din Federația Rusă. Tehnica multifuncțională poate fi folosită în procesul de deszăpezire, de eliminare a polelului și de spălare a străzilor. Autospecialele au parcurs cu succes peste 6.000 de km.

...

Acest lucru a devenit posibil grație înțelegerilor pe care le-am avut cu Președintele Federație Ruse, Vladimir Putin, în vara anului trecut. Atunci m-an adresat cu rugămintea de a dona 100 de unăți de tehnică specială pentru orașele și raloanele din Moldova. În acest sens Guvernul rus a rezervat 100 de min. de rubie din fondul de rezervă a FR pentru asamblarea primului lot de tehnică.

Am adus sincere multumin poporului fråfesc rus şi în mod special, Preşedintelui FR, Vladimir Putin, pentru sprijinul acordat fani noastre în diverse domeni, mentionît da ŝi în continuare voi depune toate eforturile în vederea consolidării parteneriatului strategic stabilir între fările noastre. Autospecialele vor fi transmise după alegerile parfamentare raioanelor şi municipalităților unde este nevvice stringentă de teninci areşpectiva, după cum urmează: 2 unități la Chişinău şi cîte una la Băţi, Briceni, Coniţa, Edineţ, Floreşti, Comrat, Congaz, Basarabeasca, Taraclia, Soroca.

Принял сегодня участие в презентации 12 единиц, спецтехники «КАМАЗ», которые прибыли в Республику Молдова из Российской Федерации. Многофункциональная техника может быть использована для очистки дорог от снега, голопеда и для мойки улиц. Автомобили успешию проделали путь в 5 тыс. мм.

During the period subject to the review, the content posted on the official profile was identical to the one posted on the official page of Igor Dodon. In fact, the same content was also shared on his official profile¹⁷⁰ and official website¹⁷¹ on the Facebook social network. Both on Odnoklassniki and on Face-

¹⁶⁶ https://ok.ru/igor.dodon1. Between November 2017 – March 2019, the number of subscribers to this profile increased from 28.500 to 75.000 users.

¹⁶⁷ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/. Between November 2017 - March 2019, the number of subscribers to this page increased from 28.500 la 36.500.

¹⁶⁸ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69481175302312

¹⁶⁹ www.facebook.com/dodon.igor1/posts/2189400881300794

¹⁷⁰ https://www.facebook.com/dodon.igor/. As of March 2019, the profile had over 31,000 subscribers.

¹⁷¹ https://www.facebook.com/dodon.igor1/. As of March 2019, the page had 120,000 subscribers.

book, the message of the posts was duplicated in two languages: Romanian and Russian.

The content is official both on the profile, and on the page. The texts and the pictures present and summarize the meetings with the Moldovan citizens, the meetings with foreign officials, the official visits and ceremonies, the award of State decorations, the statements and the interviews to the mass-media. Most of the posts contain (identical) messages in two languages: Russian and Romanian. The number of posts per page considerably increased during the pre-electoral period and during the election campaign.

The content of Igor Dodon's official page on Odnoklassniki is exclusively generated by this page's administrators. No content re-shared on this page by other Odnoklassniki users or other Odnoklassniki social groups was identified.

In general, Igor Dodon's postings on Odnoklassniki are primarily targeted at the Russian-speaking population and at users with pro-Russian views. A particular attention is paid to the inhabitants of the Gagauzian TAU, Igor Dodon appearing in several pictures together with Irina Vlah, Governor of Gagauzia, including on the occasion of 2nd of February.¹⁷²

As for third pages associated with Igor Dodon on the Odnoklassniki social network, the study revealed the existence of a number of pages meant to support and promote the activity of Igor Dodon. However, given the small number of users and their inactivity, we can conclude that **there was a strengthening of pro-Igor Dodon audience in only two key entry points: the official profile and page.**

The postings on Igor Dodon's Odnoklassniki communities during the pre-electoral period and the election campaign aimed to instrumentalize the popularity of Igor Dodon in order to maximize the electoral results of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova.

¹⁷² Igor Dodon participated in the 5th edition of the social-political forum "Gagauzia-2019: development through unity". The event was dedicated to the anniversary of the local referendum of 2014, not legally recognized by the central authorities of the Republic of Moldova, in which 98.47% of inhabitants of the autonomy supported the integration into the Customs Union. https://ok.ru/ profile/571988786344/statuses/69388005916840.

Although, according to the legislation of the Republic of Moldova, the head of state shall be apolitical, Igor Dodon supports and promotes the party he established and led until November 2016. During the pre-electoral period and the election campaign, Igor Dodon acted as an electoral engine of the PSRM. Igor Dodon publicized on his official page on the Odnoklassniki social network his participation in PSRM events and synthesized the electoral discussions held with the Moldovan citizens from different regions of the country. Under the pretext of the *Year of the Family*, launched on 28th of January 2019, Igor Dodon promised to visit all the districts of the Republic of Moldova before the end of April. Igor Dodon's meetings with the Moldovan citizens took place daily or every few days throughout the election campaign¹⁷³ :

- 3rd of February, district of Ocnița¹⁷⁴ and district of Soroca¹⁷⁵,

- 7th of February, district of Anenii Noi¹⁷⁶,

- 8th of February, Bălți municipality¹⁷⁷,

- 9th of February, district of Taraclia and district of Vulcănești, Gagauzian TAU¹⁷⁸,

- 13^{th} of February, district of Căușeni and district of Ștefan Vodă^{179},

- 19th of February, district of Fălești180,

- 20th of February, Basarabeasca¹⁸¹,

- 20th of February, Comrat municipality¹⁸²,

- 21st of February, Ceadîr-Lunga, Gagauzian TAU¹⁸³,

- 21st of February, district of Edineț, district of Briceni and district of Ocnița¹⁸⁴,

- 22nd of February, Ungheni municipality¹⁸⁵,

- 23rd of February, Chișinău municipality ¹⁸⁶.

¹⁷³ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69487307047080, https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/ 69491443876008,

¹⁷⁴ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69393456152744.

¹⁷⁵ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69394675646632.

¹⁷⁶ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69415645921448.

¹⁷⁷ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69421344669864.

¹⁷⁸ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69424367583400.

¹⁷⁹ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69447811842216.

¹⁸⁰ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69476822925480.

¹⁸¹ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69481906487464.

¹⁸² https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69482066657448.

¹⁸³ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69482859970728.

¹⁸⁴ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69485768917160.

¹⁸⁵ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69491443876008.
¹⁸⁶ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69493062025384.

One of these meetings - the one with the inhabitants of Chişinău - was held on 23rd of February 2019, one day before the parliamentary election.¹⁸⁷ During certain meetings, was displayed the slogan "Moldova are viitor" ("Moldova has a future"), proclaimed by Igor Dodon when launching his campaign for the presidential election as a PSRM candidate.¹⁸⁸

The visits to Moscow and the proposals for beneficial measures for the Moldovan citizens made up another tool used by Igor Dodon to promote the PSRM during the election campaign. These measures were meant to maximize the PSRM electoral results in the parliamentary election. For example, the effects of the migration amnesty could only benefit the Moldovan migrants from the Russian Federation who would have returned to the Republic of Moldova during the parliamentary election period and would not have gone back to Russia before the election date. The migration amnesty was announced by Igor Dodon in November 2018, stating that, as of January 2019, around 180,000 Moldovan migrants from the Russian Federation would be exempt from the sanctions imposed for breaking the provisions of the Russian migration law.

The postings made on Igor Dodon's page during the pre-electoral period and the election campaign reveal his active role in promoting the PSRM as an electoral competitor in 2019 parliamentary election. Below is a brief description of the most popular posts on Igor Dodon's page:

18th of November 2018. Igor Dodon participates in the National March and Meeting of the PSRM. The post on his page reads: "In 2019, 10 years have passed since Moldova is being governed by **Euro-Unionist** alliances; throughout this period, the country has impoverished, the people have left abroad, the life expectancy has declined. But everything has an end. People no longer stand the governance. In February, the authorities will change in the Republic of Moldova. Our time, the Socialists' time, is coming"¹⁸⁹.

12th of December 2018. The page of Igor Dodon announces the opening of a call-centre where the citizens of the Republic of Moldova can find out information about the "migration amnesty" agreed upon between Igor Dodon and Vladimir Putin ("The Agreement between the two Presidents").¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69493062025384.

¹⁸⁸ https://ok.ru/igor.dodon1/album/770306690984/877723746472.

¹⁸⁹ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/68994015805608

¹⁹⁰ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69114429292712

The video attached to the post, explaining who the beneficiaries are, what is the duration and how the "migration amnesty" will work, has got over 4.1 million views and almost 20 thousand likes.¹⁹¹ This video is the most popular content placed on Igor Dodon's page. On the other hand, the same video posted on Igor Dodon's Facebook page has got not more than about 90 thousand views and 2 thousand likes.

11th of February 2019. Igor Dodon's posting meant to thank the Russian Federation for the support provided in the release of the two Moldovan pilots held hostage by the Taliban in Afghanistan, along with the attached video, was one of the most commented posts in the period subject to the review.¹⁹² The video attached to the post, entitled *"The release of the Moldovan pilots from the Taliban"*, contains sequences showing the arrival of the two released pilots in the country. It has got over 700 thousand views, 6 thousand likes, over 4 thousand comments and 350 shares.

19th of February 2019. The "Direct line with Igor Dodon" meant to answer the Odnoklassniki users' questions has got over 533 thousand views, 7 thousand likes, 2.8 thousand comments and 645 shares.¹⁹³

23rd of February 2019. The sequence from the "Механизм действия" ("Mechanism of action") show with Elena Pahomova,¹⁹⁴ in which Igor Dodon accuses the Sheriff holding of concerted actions with Vladimir Plahotniuc aimed at corrupting the voters from the left-side bank of the Dniester in favour of the Democratic Party in 2019 parliamentary elections, has got over 290 thousand views, 3 thousand likes, 1.2 thousand comments and 379 shares.¹⁹⁵

24th of February 2019. On parliamentary election day in the Republic of Moldova, a video was published on this page, in which Igor Dodon, in Russian language, urges the voters to forget about the geopolitics and to decide whom to vote for by answering the question: "Are we content with what has happened over the past 10 years?"¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ https://ok.ru/video/801731185320.

¹⁹² https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69434422640808

¹⁹³ https://ok.ru/live/964558003880.

¹⁹⁴ http://www.ntv.md/index.php?do=cat&category=mehanizm.

¹⁹⁵ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69498004160680.

¹⁹⁶ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69499417641128

The audience and the comments

The interaction between the users who follow Igor Dodon's profile and official page arouses a particular interest. Most of the comments are written in Russian. In most cases, the discussions do not fit into a logical framework of pros and cons, being usually diverted by comments that are not related to the topic of the posting.

Thus, in addition to the persons who express their views on a particular topic, there is a group of commenters who, regardless of the post's content and of the previous discussions, publish the same type of messages: pro-lgor Dodon, pro-PSRM, pro-Russian Federation, anti-USA, anti-NATO, anti-EU.

They follow a similar pattern: hidden identity and/or fake profile and identical and repetitive comments to most of the postings on Igor Dodon's page and group.

Comment on Igor Dodon's Odnoklassniki page

Василий Мошняга

2 Feb

Я считаю что Додон будет хорошим президентам, он и так сделал очень многое если бы не эти твари которые ставят ему палки в колеса была бы ещё лучше.

Раньше был товарооборот с Россией люди выращивали овощи фрукты. А сейчас с этой Европой вывозят на 70 процентов меньше продукции



Василий Мошняга

Или вам нравится ситуация на Украине туда тоже пришла Европа

Such messages usually re-iterate specific topics of the Russian propaganda, along with denigrating messages and licentious language, turning the comment sections in Igor Dodon's communities into panels for dissemination of the Russian propaganda and hate speech. Although Odnoklassniki has the option of comment moderation, meant to prevent the hate speech, Igor Dodon's official page on Odnoklassniki is not moderated to prevent the manifestation of hatred and intolerance.

The constant commenters in pro-Igor Dodon communities are very active, generating the highest number of comments, thus maximizing their potential impact on the users who follow the page and the official group of Igor Dodon in the Odnoklassniki network.

Besides the constant commenters, most of those who make sporadic comments in Igor Dodon's Odnoklassniki communities promote options that fit into the pro-Russian, pro-Igor Dodon and pro-PSRM narratives. They can be paraphrased as it follows: "If you vote for the PSRM, you vote for Igor Dodon. If you vote for Igor Dodon, you vote for the Russian Federation". Such a narrative is also supported by the anti-EU, anti-NATO and anti-Romania messages and images (see the Annex).

The sporadic commenters who stand against Igor Dodon and the PSRM often adopt a passive approach, attempting to combat or question the comments generated by Igor Dodon's supporters. Their comments are however assaulted with insulting attacks by pro-Igor Dodon commenters.

The main topics of the comments made by the Odnoklassniki users on Igor Dodon's official page

The national identity

The language and the history of the Republic of Moldova generate heated debates within Igor Dodon's Odnoklassniki communities. The comments remind about the current dissensions in the Moldovan society regarding the language, the ethnic identity, the attitude towards the unification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania and the interpretation of the historical past.

The comments on the national identity are most often not just textual, being represented by a series of images which are sometimes accompanied by a text. Both the images and the accompanying text are visibly taken up from other sources and repeatedly posted by Odnoklassniki users to express their views about the national identity.

There is often a phenomenon of debates consisting exclusively of pictures (*a memetic warfare*). For example, a user posted an image criticizing the fact of non-mastering the official language (paradoxically, the text of the quote was in Russian language), and another user responded by posting the image of a book cover - "Moldovans are not Romanians".

The ethnic Moldovanism

The ethnic Moldovanism is one of the central topics of the comments generated in Igor Dodon's Odnoklassniki communities. The ethnic Moldovanism is seen in contradiction and in opposition to everything that can be associated with Romania, but, at the same time, the Moldovanism is docile to the Russian Federation. The association with the greatness and the unlimited power of the Russian Federation is inevitable and desirable in the opinion of those who promote this approach and any other alternative orientation of the country is unacceptable. The ethnic Moldovanism is built around the Moldovan identity, defined by the "Moldovan language", the historical territory of the Principality of Moldova and the red flag with an aurochs head, associated with this Principality.

Taking into account that all these elements of the ethnic Moldovanism are found in the political discourse and platform of Igor Dodon, who is its main promoter, Igor Dodon and, by transfer, the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova automatically become the political option of those who proclaim themselves as "statehood's advocates". The following electoral calls were found in the comments: "for Moldova, for Dodon, for the Socialists, for the Union with Russia", "the citizens of Moldova together with Russia, for peace and self-defence, we vote for the Moldovanist-Socialists"¹⁹⁷. The Moldovanism, from the perspective of the commenters, is only compatible with a foreign policy oriented towards the Russian Federation.

The anti-Romanian feelings (Romania phobia)

Romania phobia is used as a counterargument in different contexts. On the one hand, the Romanians are demonized by invoking Romania's alliance with Nazi Germany in World War II. The war crimes committed by Ion Antonescu are invoked with the purpose to back the historical detachment from Romania and to glorify the Soviet past of the independent Republic of Moldova. The terms "invader" and "gendarme" are used with regard to Romania. On the other hand, the general image of the Romanians is superposed to that of the Roma people living in poverty in order to discredit any association of the Moldovans with the Romanians from the viewpoint of their identity. The image of the Roma's poverty is also invoked with the purpose to ridicule the advantages of the European integration of the Republic of Moldova.

The pro-European opposition leader, Maia Sandu, is labelled by certain constant pro-PSRM commenters as neofascist, because, in their opinion, Maia Sandu wishes the unification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania.

Anti-Americanism

Most of the Odnoklassniki users do not make a clear distinction between the USA and NATO. They impute the same things both to the United States, and to NATO: starting wars at the global level, interference into the internal affairs of the states, occu-

¹⁹⁷ https://ok.ru/igordodoni/topic/69388008276136.

pation of sovereign territories. Moreover, "America", along with the European countries, is accused of obstructing the Russian Federation's economic growth by the means of economic sanctions. Certain politicians perceived as pro-European are labelled as "American agents" who are in the service of the anti-Russian policies of the United States. Maia Sandu is among these politicians, being accused of carrying out a" mission of removing the Republic of Moldova, as a state, from the world's map."

Discrediting NATO

The North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) is depicted as an aggressive organization. Anti-NATO commenters claim that the accession of the Republic of Moldova to NATO would automatically trigger an aggression against the Russian Federation and against the internal stability of the Republic of Moldova. Two options are given to the Republic of Moldova: either to remain a neutral state, friendly with the Russian Federation, or, otherwise, to disappear as a country, being occupied by "NATO-Romania-USA". Certain commenters called the voters, on behalf of the PSRM, to save the country from "NATO-Romania-USA".

Discrediting the European Union

The European Union is considered as the main source of Christianity degradation in the Republic of Moldova. The most visible negative propaganda against the European Union on the Odnoklassniki social network is related to the guaranteed protection of the rights of sexual minorities, being generated by homophobic feelings. According to the commenters, the European Union accepts and "promotes" the homosexuality and the transsexuality and, as a result, LGBT people dominate the EU member states and impose their sexual orientation on children or other categories of people, as well.

In addition, the Odnoklassniki commenters suggest that the Republic of Moldova has no decision-making power in relation to the European Union and that the EU decisions are imposed and contravene the national interests of the Republic of Moldova. The European Union is also blamed for the corruption acts of the politicians who have proclaimed themselves as pro-European.

In general, the European Union is presented from the perspective of a poor Romania, a Romania that, by virtue of an agreement with the European Union, attempts to occupy and subjugate the territory of the Republic of Moldova. In such a context is presented the image of Maia Sandu who, according to the posted picture, by promoting a pro-European vision automatically advocates for the unification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania.

Glorification of the Soviet past

The pro-Dodon commenters glorify the past of the Soviet Moldova. The Odnoklassniki users invoke the stability of jobs, the economic prosperity of the Soviet republics, the friendship between the people as the reasons why they regret the dismantling of the Soviet Union.

Conclusions

- The comments in support of Igor Dodon and his pro-Russian policy are considerably more numerous than the comments against him. Most of them are written in Russian.

- The postings containing pictures of Vladimir Putin or of other Russian officials or text about the Russian Federation most often generate a higher number of comments than the other postings.

- The reactions to those who stand against Igor Dodon are harsh, insulting and licentious. The anti-Igor Dodon commenters are labelled as trolls, fascists / Nazi-Romanians, provokers, etc.

- The commenters are attempting to transfer Igor Dodon's electoral popularity to the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova.

- The elements of the Russian propaganda noticed in the official discourse of Igor Dodon are constantly resumed, reconfirmed and popularized by the commenters in his Odnoklassniki communities.

- A number of constant commenters, with hidden profiles, promote Moldovanist, anti-Romanian and anti-Western messages, regardless of the initial content of the posts in Igor Dodon's Odnoklassniki communities.

- In addition to re-iterating specific topics of the Russian propaganda, the anti-EU comments contain denigrating messages and licentious language, turning the comment sections into panels for dissemination of hate speech.

- The number of Odnoklassniki users in the Republic of Moldova is rapidly decreasing. This social network loses its users, because of their migration to Facebook and to other social networks. Compared to Odnoklassniki, Facebook is perceived by the users as more user-friendly and helpful. Thus, from the perspective of the social networks' role in social-political information and debates, we are witnessing a transition from the Odnoklassniki/Facebook duality to Facebook dominance in the Republic of Moldova. Against this background, there is also a rapid tendency to "aging" and ruralisation of the Odnoklassniki users in the Republic of Moldova.
- In this context, the analysis of the dynamics of the number of members of the largest social-political communities on Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova revealed a tendency to centralize the points for access to information. A large number of users converge around a few key Odnoklassniki communities, while the smaller communities lose their users and/or become inactive.
- The pro-Russian propaganda ecosystem on Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova (pro-Russian social groups, pages of the pro-Russian political stakeholders and pages of Russian-language media outlets) is still active and visible. However, one can speak about a stagnation in the increase of the number of members in smaller communities, and this ecosystem's tendency to centralization is manifested by user convergence towards the official Odnoklassniki communities of the Moldovan President, Igor Dodon, who advocates for a strategic partnership with the Russian Federation.
- In general, the political parties in the Republic of Moldova mostly promote on the social networks their leaders (formal or informal), with less emphasis on the visibility of the party or of other party members.
- The official page of Igor Dodon is the most popular page of a political stakeholder in the Odnoklassniki network. The symbiosis between President Igor Dodon and the PSRM, which involves an image transfer from Igor Dodon to the

PSRM, is also valid for the political communication of the two entities on Odnoklassniki. The postings in Igor Dodon's Odnoklassniki communities during the pre-election period and the election campaign aimed to instrumentalize the popularity of Igor Dodon in order to maximize the electoral results of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova.

- Considering the popularity of Igor Dodon's communities on Odnoklassniki, the comment sections on Igor Dodon's page and group were, in 2019 campaign for the parliamentary election, the most active platforms for discussions, debates and interpretations of different social-political events on Odnoklassniki in the Republic of Moldova.
- A multitude of messages in the comment sections on Igor Dodon's page and group, written in particular by users with a hidden identity and/or a fake profile, reiterate specific topics of the Russian propaganda, along with denigrating messages and licentious language, transforming the comment sections in Igor Dodon's communities into panels for dissemination of the Russian propaganda and hate speech. Although Odnoklassniki has the option of comment moderation, meant to prevent the hate speech, no moderation was done, not even on the official Odnoklassniki page of President Igor Dodon.
- In addition to the textual comments, many participants in the debates used memes, as a method of transmitting the messages. Thus, the users who follow Igor Dodon's official communities become viewers and targets of a campaign containing elements of an anti-Western "memetic warfare".
- During 2019 campaign for the legislative election, Odnoklassniki remained an important environment for the political communication in the Republic of Moldova, although Facebook's influence in this regard was much more considerable. Odnoklassniki's possibilities of audience penetration in Moldova can easily compete with the TV channels with a national coverage. At the same time, Odnoklassniki is a favourable environment for informational targeting of a demographic group considered as the most vulnerable to fake news and misinformation - the elderly population from the rural areas.

ANNEX. Memetic warfare on the comment section of Igor Dodon's odnoklassniki page

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