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Moldovan military personnel rehearse for the Independence Day military parade on 27 August 2026. Source: Ministry of Defence.

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The Drone Threat at the Mouths of the Danube: A Shared Challenge for the Republic of Moldova and Romania

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Russia's war against Ukraine has transformed the area between the Black Sea, the Danube Delta and the south of the Republic of Moldova into a shared zone of risk, where military security, critical infrastructure and economic stability can no longer be analysed separately. In this issue, we have included interviews, analyses and editorials by security experts who explain the dynamics of drone warfare, as well as the economic dimension of this protracted war of attrition in Ukraine.

Security expert Cristian Barna explains why Russian drone incursions should be viewed through the logic of the "area of denial" and why Romania and the Republic of Moldova need a multi-layered defence system: detection, jamming, anti-drone systems, interceptors and, only as a last resort, fighter aircraft. He also advocates the development of local production, financed through SAFE and based, among other things, on cooperation with Ukraine and Ukrainian technology.

In his editorial, journalist and analyst Mihai Isac argues that the Republic of Mol-

dova is no longer merely a neighbour of the war, but has become part of the area directly affected by it. After dozens of aerial incidents, Chisinau needs an anti-drone architecture integrated into a regional system, clear rules of engagement, and its own capabilities in areas such as sensors, software and interceptor drones.

Former Defence Minister Vitalie Marinuta warns that Russia's strategic intentions towards the Republic of Moldova have not disappeared, while the main vulnerability remains the lack of effective means to neutralise drones. He proposes the development of a joint Romania–Republic of Moldova–Ukraine system, in which Chisinau could contribute through its capabilities in IT, electronics and communications.

Security policy expert Angela Grămadă links the drone threat to grain exports, the ports of Reni and Giurgiulesti, and control over regional economic routes. Her analysis shows how Russia combines military pressure, public threats and disinformation in an effort to weaken trilateral cooperation and fuel domestic tensions.

News in brief:

The military depot at Cobasna, in the Transnistrian region, is estimated to still contain approximately 14,000 tonnes of ammunition, according to data provided by the Intelligence and Security Service and analysed by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. It is one of the few official assessments made public by Chisinau regarding the arsenal on the left bank of the Nistru River, where Russian troops also continue to be illegally stationed. The findings were presented in a study on 21 August in Chisinau.

A new land route for Ukrainian grain exports, running through the Republic of Moldova and Romania to the Port of Constanța, is being considered as an alternative to vulnerable routes in the Black Sea. The project increases the strategic importance of Moldova's infrastructure, but also the risks posed by Russian attacks on Ukraine's logistics corridors, Economica.net reports.

Chisinau has not joined a new package of EU restrictive measures against Belarus, while eight non-EU countries have decided to align themselves with Brussels' sanctions. The decision has renewed debate over the extent to which Moldova's foreign policy is aligned with that of the European Union, at a time when the Republic of Moldova is negotiating EU accession.

“The Red Arrows Pointing towards the Republic of Moldova Have Not Disappeared from Russian Military Maps”



Vitalie Marinuța, former Minister of Defence and reserve general
Photo: Jurnal TV

Former Minister of Defence and reserve general Vitalie Marinuța gave an interview to the FES/APE Foreign Policy Bulletin, in which he discussed the main security threats currently facing the Republic of Moldova. Russian drones pose a direct threat to the Republic of Moldova, and Chisinau must move beyond simply detecting them towards developing an effective interception capability, Vitalie Marinuța argues. In this context, the former Defence Minister proposes developing, together with Romania and Ukraine, a regional drone and anti-drone defence system.

President Maia Sandu recently stated that some drones enter the territory of the Republic of Moldova accidentally, while others may be sent deliberately, something that can be established, among other things, on the basis of their trajectory. Following the 16 August overflight and the explosion of the aircraft near Talmaza, do you believe that Russia is deliberately testing radar capabilities, reaction times and the political will of the authorities in Chisinau? What technical indicators could demonstrate that such an incursion was intentional?

First of all, we must all understand that Russian drones pose a direct threat to the Republic of Moldova. This is not only because of the possibility that they may enter or crash on our territory, but also because Russian attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure along the Danube and on export routes create a permanent risk for the airspace of both the Republic of Moldova and Romania.

Secondly, we must understand that Russia's intention to reach the Republic of Moldova, outlined from the very beginning of the active phase of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022—more precisely, through those red arrows pointing towards the Republic of Moldova—has not disappeared from Russian military maps.

In this context, once the Republic of Moldova recognised the danger it faces and incorporated into its strategic documents the need to develop its national defence sector, Russia could not remain indifferent. Moscow is expanding its offensive capabilities and, of course, is also testing our defence capabilities.

Under these circumstances, I believe we must understand that, until the war in Ukraine comes to an end, we will continue to face such situations on a regular basis. Therefore, we must also develop our rapid-response capabilities against Russian drones entering our airspace.

Export Corridors: Targets for the Russian Federation

Given that we are currently in a favourable period for Ukrainian grain exports, including through the use of the Republic of Moldova's railway and port infrastructure, do you believe that Russia could be tempted to carry out unauthorised drone incursions into the airspace of the Republic of Moldova or even Romania?

Ukrainian grain exports are particularly important not only for Ukraine, but also for a large part of the world. Under these circumstances, Romania and the Republic of Moldova are a very important part of the corridors through which Ukraine maintains its trade links, primarily with Europe.

Therefore, these corridors will be targets for the Russian Federation, but at the same time, we must understand that they need to be very well protected. Protecting these corridors is becoming a security issue not only for the Republic of Moldova or Romania, but for the region as a whole.

We cannot separate Ukraine's economic security from its military security. In this context, I believe we should view the economic security of Romania and the Republic of Moldova in exactly the same way—together with their military security.

These threats from Russia will persist, and the scenario in which these targets are singled out is a real one. We are talking about attacks on Ukrainian grain export corridors both in the Republic of Moldova and, potentially, in Romania. We can already see that some drones are falling in Romania as well. In this context, regional cooperation in this area is imperative.

Vulnerabilities and Solutions

Defence Minister Anatolie Nosatîi has stated that Russia's military actions against Ukraine pose a direct threat to the Republic of Moldova. Where, however, does the country's main vulnerability lie: in its capacity to detect and identify drones, in the chain of command, in the legal framework governing intervention, or in the lack of effective means to shoot them down?

I believe that the greatest vulnerability is, nevertheless, the lack of means to shoot down and destroy these drones. At present, we can see that the legislation has been adjusted to the Republic of Moldova's current security needs.

We can also see that, in recent years, considerable financial resources have been invested in acquiring means of detecting these drones. We also have some means of neutralising them, but these are quite limited and insufficiently diversified. In this context, an effective air defence system should, of course, consist of capabilities for identifying and detecting drones, as well as means of neutralising them.

I believe that, over the next few years, we must also invest in capabilities to neutralise such aircraft. Drones are now a constant feature of warfare and have become one of the most widely used weapons. Therefore, discussions about developing anti-drone systems should not remain merely discussions, but should also be translated into practical measures, both in the Republic of Moldova and Romania.

We should probably work together to design and implement a regional system involving Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Romania for the development of both drones and anti-drone systems.

Contributing through IT, Software, Electronics and Communications

President Maia Sandu has called for legislative amendments that would enable the Republic of Moldova to produce interceptor drones, including through public-private partnerships and by attracting foreign investment. How realistic is it for the Republic of Moldova to develop such an industry from scratch, and what should it prioritise initially: interceptor drones, jamming systems, sensors, guidance software, or components for regional manufacturers?

I believe that when there is political will, things move fairly quickly. We have plenty of examples of areas

where nothing moved forward for years, including investment in security and defence. For more than 30 years, almost no investment was made in these areas. Now we can see that, over the past two or three years, when there is political will, significant investments are being made in these fields.

The Republic of Moldova's legislation could be amended fairly quickly and, in this context, I believe that the Republic of Moldova should not venture on its own into developing the entire range of drones and anti-drone systems. We need to cooperate regionally in this area, together with Ukraine and Romania. Ukraine has the necessary experience, while Romania has access to NATO technology.

We have very good IT specialists. The Republic of Moldova can therefore contribute to such a regional defence initiative through research, software development, electronics and communications. We can develop such products and components, but we also have other capabilities. In this way, we will all be stronger and more effective in the region.

Defensive Response Measures

The European Union has approved 120 million Euro for the Republic of Moldova to acquire a medium-range air defence system. What could such a system realistically protect: Chisinau, the airport, power plants, or certain sections of the border? And how effective would it be to use costly air defence missiles against relatively inexpensive drones without a layered defence system that also includes jamming, guns and interceptor drones?

I do not believe it would be effective for us to purchase just one radar. I am not familiar with the Ministry of Defence's specific plans, but the Republic of Moldova should have at least five or six radars capable of intercepting targets at medium and high altitudes. We need a comprehensive system for detection, identification and neutralisation. I believe that without these capabilities, even if we invest a large amount of money, we will not achieve the necessary level of effectiveness.

At present, we can see that it is much more important not only to have surface-to-air missiles against these aircraft, but also to develop a comprehensive system for neutralising them. This means that foreign drones could also be shot down using less costly systems. I repeat: we need to invest in an anti-drone system. A drone costing tens of thousands of dollars should not be shot down with a missile costing several hundred thousand dollars. We therefore need to be smart and

think one or two steps ahead of current developments.

In practical terms, we have all the necessary conditions to do this, because Ukraine is already implementing such solutions in the course of the war it is fighting, while NATO has drawn on Ukraine's experience and is further developing it in its research laboratories.

Against this background, given that the Republic of Moldova has very good cooperation with both Ukraine and Romania, we can reduce costs and increase the efficiency with which the funds allocated by our partners are used, precisely so that this money is spent effectively for the benefit of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova.

From Words to Action

Romania and Ukraine are already developing a joint drone production project, for which Bucharest intends to allocate approximately 200 million Euro through the European SAFE mechanism. Could the Republic of Moldova join such a regional partnership by contributing through component production, software development, testing, or operator training? What specific agreements should be signed with Romania and Ukraine to turn this cooperation into a real defence capability rather than merely a political declaration?

From my point of view, first and foremost, Romania and Ukraine should move from words to action as quickly as possible. For the time being, there is considerable discussion about starting drone production, but production has not yet begun.

I very much hope that this process will nevertheless start as soon as possible. It is quite difficult for the Republic of Moldova to access these EU SAFE funds, but we have very good cooperation with Romania and Ukraine. By signing bilateral cooperation agreements in this field, as well as by building on last year's trilateral joint declaration in Chernivtsi between the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Romania, we can move forward.

I believe that, under the current circumstances and given the security situation, the European Union and our partners will allow the Republic of Moldova—which is not a NATO member, but is a candidate country for accession to the European Union, just like Ukraine—to become part of this defence programme and benefit from all the advantages it offers.

Thank you!

Regional Security between Drones and Grain

*Analysis by Angela Grămadă,
Director of the Experts for Security and
Global Affairs (ESGA) think tank*

Ukrainian grain exports are one of the most sensitive issues in Russia's war against Ukraine. In addition to the humanitarian component of supplying grain to developing countries in the Global South, or to countries with which Ukraine had already signed sales contracts, the issue is also part of the negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow. This is because it includes another extremely important component: providing financial resources for Ukraine's state budget. It is well known that the financial assistance provided by Kyiv's external partners cannot be used to purchase ammunition. Under these circumstances, revenues generated through taxes and duties paid by domestic businesses remain essential for meeting the needs of the armed forces. Ensuring the functioning of the national economy is a strategic priority, and the efforts undertaken are not only about trade connections, but also about active economic diplomacy.

On 9 August 2026, Yuri Pilipson, Director of the Second European Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accused Romania, in an interview with the TASS news agency, of intervening and supporting Ukraine through its recent acquisition of the Port of Giurgiulesti in the Republic of Moldova. Put more simply, Romania is facilitating military assistance through this economic infrastructure facility. This makes it a target of Moscow's actions, as Russia seeks to challenge Romania's strategic position in the region. Very little time elapsed between these "appreciative" statements and Russian attacks on several strategic facilities near the Romanian-Ukrainian or Romanian-Moldovan borders. During the same period, drones that fell near the Ukrainian, Romanian or Moldovan borders affected or endangered the Port's operations. As a result of these incidents, several areas of vegetation in the Republic of Moldova caught fire, requiring the intervention of the relevant authorities to mitigate the impact.

Near the Giurgiulesti International Port, recently acquired by Romania, lies the Port of Reni, which, following the expansion of the war, not only became operational again but also acquired strategic importance. Through this port, Ukraine has been able to export part of its grain. This has turned it into a target of Russian at-



Angela Grămadă. Photo: Facebook

tacks. Other drones have disrupted the proper functioning of several border crossing points between Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, while in Romania this type of munition has become a constant threat. Both the authorities in Chisinau and those in Bucharest have accused the Russian Federation of violating their borders, carrying out deliberate attacks and threatening national security. Nevertheless, there are several specific features and differences that require further explanation.

Security Has Different Dimensions

For both the Republic of Moldova and Romania, violations of national borders and the increasingly frequent incursions by Russian drones are heightening security risks. This is not merely a hybrid war waged in the information space or through attempts to disrupt the proper functioning of democratic institutions. It is a direct challenge. So far, there have been no human casualties, but the dangers are becoming increasingly evident for the population in the affected areas. Through its sustained attacks against Ukraine, Russia is violating the country's territorial integrity. Moreover, the effects of these attacks are also reaching the national territories of neighbouring states.

Statements made by certain Russian politicians or officials accusing Ukraine's partners of supporting an

“illegitimate regime in Kyiv” should not be interpreted merely as public rhetoric intended for a domestic audience. They should be regarded as veiled threats to the national security of Ukraine’s partners, which may be followed by concrete actions.

Such strategies require a firm and vigilant diplomatic response, both to leave no room for interpretation or concern among citizens and to deter any further expansion of Russian aggression in the region. Both Romania and the Republic of Moldova have condemned Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, as well as the way in which Moscow threatens their own national security, including their prospects for economic cooperation and the development of their logistics and energy infrastructure.

Thus, the new security context has required a certain type of diplomatic and political response and conduct. While there are differences among political elites in terms of rhetoric, the technical side of cooperation between public and defence institutions is much more coherent and logical. The Romania–Ukraine–Republic of Moldova trilateral format, launched even before the full-scale war, provides the necessary platform for advancing major infrastructure projects that will be important for Ukraine’s post-war reconstruction.

Mutual Benefits

The approach is somewhat different from that at the beginning of the cooperation, but it remains consistent with the logic of mutual benefits. Romania is putting forward arguments for Chisinau to have a distinct role in these initiatives—not merely as a translator, but also as a connector of opportunities, a facilitator of the transit of goods and services, and a contributor to the infrastructure needed for the economic recovery of the neighbouring country. Public opinion is also being prepared through the constant communication of the new dimensions of cooperation within the same trilateral format, which has now been elevated to the level of heads of state, beginning in August 2025. Moscow, however, has no interest in Ukraine maintaining a constructive dialogue with its neighbours or Western partners and is acting to suppress this interaction.

The increasingly frequent attacks and abusive statements by Russian officials pursue clearly targeted objectives: discouraging cooperation initiatives, generating information noise, and manipulating the truth for propaganda purposes. In this way, drones and the direct security threats they create generate the necessary noise, while concrete economic opportunities

are incorporated into disinformation campaigns and skilfully manipulated to turn citizens against government decision-makers. While Romania has already experienced such information-driven divisions as a result of facilitating the transit of Ukrainian grain through its territory, the Republic of Moldova has acquired this “privilege” of becoming a target more recently.

More Effective Communication

The farmers’ protests demanding explanations from the authorities in Chisinau regarding the latest decisions to facilitate the transit of Ukrainian grain using the Republic of Moldova’s national railway infrastructure illustrate very well not only the challenges that farmers anticipate for their own production. Such a decision should have been accompanied by more effective communication, particularly since the experience of Ukraine’s neighbouring states has shown how public reactions can evolve.

Nevertheless, the efforts to engage in dialogue with farmers’ representatives should also be acknowledged, even though a consensus and a concrete formula for guarantees have not yet been reached. Discussions are currently ongoing, and it could be useful for the government authorities in Chisinau to provide more details on the technical aspects of the solutions implemented by the Romanian authorities in previous years in order to minimise the impact on Romanian producers. The guarantee mechanism for Romanian producers has been regarded as one of the most effective in the region.

The internal vulnerabilities of Ukraine’s neighbouring states are effectively exploited by Russia, but it is up to the national authorities of the Republic of Moldova and Romania to find appropriate solutions and build the internal cohesion necessary to minimise the negative impact of external forces within their countries. In this case, those external forces originate from Russia.

For the Republic of Moldova, the major challenge will be to identify domestic solutions that can ensure cohesion with the segments of society affected by the war and prevent an erosion of the solidarity expressed in response to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. For Romania, the challenge is to reaffirm its status as an important actor in several frameworks of regional cooperation, including the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance. Such a status leaves little room for hesitation or for displaying a lack of cohesion among different domestic actors. The actions of public institutions must be underpinned by political will.

“The Republic of Moldova and Romania should be much more assertive and understand that drone technology is constantly evolving.”

Cristian Barna, a security expert, gave an interview to the FES/APE Foreign Policy Bulletin, in which we discussed the regional security challenges posed by Russian drones entering the airspace of the Republic of Moldova and Romania without authorisation. According to Cristian Barna, the Russian drones entering Romanian and Moldovan airspace do not, for the time being, constitute deliberate attacks against the two states. The expert explains the vulnerabilities of the Republic of Moldova and Romania and outlines how a multi-layered defence should be built, ranging from detection and jamming to interceptor drones and F-16 fighter aircraft. We invite you to read the full interview below.



Cristian Barna, a security expert
Photo: Facebook

Russia Operates in the “Area of Denial”

How serious is the threat currently posed by Russian drones to Romania and the Republic of Moldova, and what scenarios should be considered on Russia’s part: accidental incursions, actions intended to test the response of defence systems, or deliberate attacks on strategic targets?

At present, I believe we can rule out the idea of deliberate attacks by Russia, for a very simple reason. First of all, the diplomatic consequences would be very serious, even if such an attack targeted the Republic of Moldova, and all the more so if Romania were involved.

If we were talking about deliberate attacks that could be demonstrated through a specific trajectory, radar records and a signature indicating direct aggression, they could generate major diplomatic problems and have serious implications for international relations.

I do not believe Russia is prepared to undertake such an action at this point. I do not think this is

the moment when Russia wants to do so. Moscow may want to take such action at some point, but I do not believe that moment has arrived.

I think everything we are currently seeing falls into the category of attacks against Ukrainian critical infrastructure and possible incidents occurring within what I would call the “area of denial”. By “area of denial”, I mean something along the lines of: “It was not us. Ukrainian jamming or electronic warfare caused the drones to stray over the Republic of Moldova or Romania.”

Russia could clearly say: “We are attacking our enemy, and if you, the Republic of Moldova and Romania, happen to believe that those systems entered your airspace in order to test your vigilance, they were in fact the result of electronic warfare or other disruptions generated by this war between us and Ukraine.” This is the game the Russian Federation is currently playing.

At the same time, it is obvious that the area encompassing Romania and the Republic of Moldova is

not particularly safe, primarily because of its geographical proximity to the mouths of the Danube. The Danube Delta area is close to Odesa, where Ukraine still has port infrastructure capable of making a significant difference in terms of the revenues it earns from grain exports.

I am referring here to the financial revenues that support Ukraine's war effort. I believe all these elements are interconnected, in a way that is unfortunate and undesirable for Romania and the Republic of Moldova. This is where we can see the Russian Federation's growing capacity to project destruction.

The objective is to reduce Ukraine's ability to finance its war through grain exports, which the Russian Federation sees as a counterweight to Ukraine's ability to weaken Russia in the Black Sea.

We all know that the Russian military fleet has been pushed significantly farther away from the port of Odesa compared with a few years ago, when the pressure was extraordinary and, to a large extent, only naval mines kept the Russian fleet away from the Ukrainian coastline in the Odesa area.

Now, however, we see that Ukraine's combined and multi-layered offensive actions, carried out with the help of drones, have succeeded in pushing back this threat. The port of Odesa has managed to become operational again for grain exports, to the extent currently possible, alongside the ports of Reni and Izmail.

Two Different Levels of Air Defence

What vulnerabilities do Romania and the Republic of Moldova face in detecting and neutralising small, low-flying drones, and how well integrated are their surveillance and early-warning systems?

Here, first and foremost, we need to talk about military protocols. It is one thing to discuss an integrated NATO-level system, of which Romania is a part, and *Eastern Sentry*, the project aimed at developing capabilities for drone defence and detection on NATO's south-eastern flank, and quite another to talk about the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, which are not part of this equation. So here we see two different dimensions.

First of all, there is clearly the issue of having the capacity to see what is happening at low, medium or high altitude. This must go hand in hand with the ability to neutralise the threat.

In Romania's case, we know that there have been several developments that can be regarded as successes, such as drones being shot down by Romanian F-16 fighter aircraft and, more recently, by a Spanish F-18 deployed as part of NATO Air Policing, which managed to shoot down a drone last week.

Romania has the capacity to detect drones and respond to them. The fact that it responds in a way that could be considered relatively costly compared with the level of the threat is simply a matter of very strict arithmetic.

You cannot put a price on the lives of people who might be affected by a drone explosion, as happened recently in Galați, Romania. In such circumstances, it is clear that any successful interception of a drone entering Romanian airspace must be regarded as a success.

Multi-Layered Defence: From Detection to Neutralisation

Deploying F-16 fighter jets is costly and not always proportionate to the threat. What should a multi-layered defence against drones look like, from electronic warfare and short-range anti-drone systems to missiles, guns and interceptor drones?

I think you have already given the answer. That is exactly what it should look like. It is obvious that we—Romania, the Republic of Moldova or Ukraine—do not need to reinvent the wheel at this point.

We can see that anti-drone defence should, first and foremost, have very vigilant "eyes and ears".

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, we have also heard a very candid statement from Defence Minister Anatolie Nosatîi, who said: "We are not capable of ensuring 100% monitoring of the Republic of Moldova's airspace when it comes to potential drones that may be detected or may explode in the country's airspace or on its territory."

This statement refers to the first stage: monitoring and identification. This should then be followed by a very important stage—the neutralisation of the threat, namely shooting down the drone.

The only success that NATO can currently point to in defending its eastern flank is the shooting down of drones by fighter aircraft. It is good that this capability exists, but it is a costly option.

As you rightly pointed out, multi-layered defence involves identifying and intercepting drones and,

ultimately, shooting them down, following a very clear logic. This is precisely what layering means: we first engage the drone using less expensive means and only ultimately resort to the most costly option. Everything also depends on the drone's ability to penetrate a country's sovereign airspace.

From Gepard Systems to Interceptor Drones

Romania has Gepard systems, which are not necessarily the most advanced systems for shooting down drones, but they are air defence systems. Then we come to dedicated anti-drone systems. We can already see that Ukraine is innovating in this field and has achieved considerable success in neutralising the threat posed by drones.

This multi-layered defence should mean, first and foremost, having the capacity to detect an incoming threat in real time. Secondly, it means being able to engage and neutralise the drone.

This multi-layered concept means having the capacity to engage a drone at different levels. For example, I engage it with Gepard systems but fail to shoot it down. I then deploy an anti-drone system—in other words, another drone designed to intercept and destroy the hostile drone. If that also fails, I deploy an F-16 fighter aircraft, and so on.

This, broadly speaking, is the idea behind multi-layered defence. The question is when, how and how quickly these missing layers will be put in place to manage drone threats, whether they arise directly from attempts to test national airspace or merely as collateral effects of attacks against Ukrainian targets.

Romania and the Republic of Moldova: Between Imports and Local Production

Does Romania have the capacity to rapidly develop a competitive industry for the production of drones and anti-drone systems, or does it risk remaining dependent on imports? What is your assessment in the case of the Republic of Moldova? In addition, what role should private companies, the state-owned defence industry, universities, and partnerships with Ukraine play?

I am among those military analysts who are considering the opportunity Romania has through the funds allocated by the European Union under the SAFE programme. These funds are intended for the constructi-

on of a drone factory using Ukrainian technology on Romanian territory.

In this case, there has been a shift from the idea of individual procurement to joint procurement. Joint procurement obviously means cooperation with other European states or with countries such as Ukraine, which is also among the states eligible to benefit from these funds.

This naturally raises the question we all ask when we see these drones drifting over the Black Sea and being destroyed or intercepted in the air by F-16 or F-18 fighter aircraft: will there also be less costly and much more efficient solutions, such as the deployment of an anti-drone system?

In Romania, everyone is wondering whether such solutions will become available. This automatically brings us to the financing that, as we all know, is available under the SAFE programme: 200 million Euro. These funds are earmarked for the construction of such a drone factory in Romania, using Ukrainian technology.

This investment was announced as early as August last year by Denys Shmyhal, who was Ukraine's Minister of Defence at the time, during a discussion with the then Romanian Minister of Defence, Ionuț Moșteanu. The latter did not confirm the statement to the press at the time, but subsequently, in September, Romania's Foreign Minister said that such an initiative did exist, and by then it was no longer a secret.

How should European funds available through the SAFE instrument be used to ensure that Romania does not merely purchase equipment from abroad, but also secures technology transfer, local production lines, maintenance capabilities, and the capacity to rapidly adapt systems to emerging threats?

We were pleased to learn that Romania, through individual procurement under the SAFE programme, purchased 34 drones from Germany. These are expected to arrive in Romania next year, probably no later than the beginning of 2028, and could become part of a multi-layered anti-drone defence system.

What we do not want is to reach the end of the European Union's 2030 SAFE budgetary cycle, while collective procurement under SAFE is being discussed, and only then hear that this factory has a future, or has finally become a reality, in Romania.

As for the Republic of Moldova, we very much welcomed President Maia Sandu's statement last month that the country's current legislative framework does

not allow for such investments in anti-drone defence, but that it will be amended.

She spoke about the need for the Republic of Moldova to make use of the expertise that already exists in this field in other European countries. She explained that Moldova's current legislation must be amended so as to allow public-private investment in the production of anti-drone systems.

In Romania, too, there are currently several private initiatives aimed at developing anti-drone systems that could prove effective, but they are not yet being considered within the framework of public-private partnerships.

So, the short answer, after this broader argument, is that both Romania and the Republic of Moldova should be much more assertive and understand that drone technology is constantly evolving. We should make the most of what can be offered to us at this stage and be prepared to allocate additional funding if necessary.

In Romania's case, this should also involve changes to the legislative framework. In the Republic of Moldova's case, it should also involve allocating funds that would make it possible to develop a drone-versus-drone anti-drone defence capability so that it becomes genuinely effective.

The Danube Delta, Neptun Deep and the Strategic Importance of Giurgiulesti Port

What should Romania's concrete priorities be over the next two to three years for protecting the Danube Delta, ports, military bases and energy infrastructure? How can the Republic of Moldova be integrated into a regional anti-drone defence architecture, particularly with regard to Romania's investment in the Giurgiulesti port area, without violating the Republic of Moldova's neutrality status?

Here, I would try to divide the answer into two, or even three, parts. I would frame the discussion about the Danube Delta primarily in terms of strategic interest. Strategic interest means the proximity of these branches of the Danube and their capacity to act as communicating vessels for everything related to Ukraine, Romania and the transport of grain.

But, of course, it also involves other aspects related to the effective defence of the area. I am referring both to the Romanian side and to the Ukrainian side.

From this perspective, I believe that when we talk about the Danube Delta, we should not think only about an ecosystem, biodiversity or a nature reserve, but especially about the branches of the Danube close to the Delta, which have an important role in communication, connectivity and transport. This is where I think the distinction lies.

Because of their ability to function as communicating vessels from the Danube to the Black Sea and vice versa, they represent a target for the Russian Federation. As such, both the branches of the Danube and the nearby communities must be protected –first and foremost the people who live there, and then, of course, the ecosystem and the environment. This should become a priority for the Romanian state.

Secondly, with regard to security in the Black Sea, the Neptun Deep perimeter must be protected. We know that Romania's exclusive economic zone in the Black Sea does not fall under NATO's Article 5.

It is no secret that, in the same statement, the Chief of the Romanian Defence Staff said that the military should do more in this area and that Romania relies heavily on the trilateral mission with Bulgaria and Turkey, which was initially a demining mission in the Black Sea. Following the NATO summit in Ankara, the mission expanded its mandate to include the protection of critical subsea infrastructure, among other things, in the Black Sea.

In this respect, I believe the Romanian Armed Forces must understand that both force projection and deterrence capacity need to be reconfigured there. More precisely, the first objective must be to deter an adversary such as the Russian Federation from taking any initiative to attack.

We are talking about strategic areas or critical infrastructure, such as the Neptun Deep offshore production platform, the 160-kilometre pipeline connecting the platform to the Romanian coast, subsea electricity cables or undersea internet cables crossing the Black Sea.

Any vulnerability identified by the Russian Federation in this respect could be exploited in a hybrid war, either through a direct attack or by diverting drones into the area in a way that endangers the projection of your interests there. You cannot simply refrain from reacting. You either do so through deterrence or by allocating response capabilities.

Given the discussion about NATO's Article 5, it is clear that these capabilities must belong to the Romanian Armed Forces. The Romanian military must

demonstrate that it has the capacity to protect these interests.

As for the port of Giurgiulesti, this is a much more complex discussion. First of all, Romania's involvement in the port of Giurgiulesti in the Republic of Moldova is based only on a contract signed by a maritime company which, although it is a Romanian state-owned company, remains a commercial actor.

Therefore, that maritime company cannot necessarily be equated with the Romanian state. Especially since what exists there is only an operating contract for the port of Giurgiulesti, not a contract granting ownership of the port. The difference is significant. More precisely, you cannot purchase the national territory of another state.

Romania could not purchase the national territory of the Giurgiulesti administrative-territorial unit on which the port is located. This also opens a broader discussion about international law and the relevant conventions.

The port of Giurgiulesti is a Romanian investment on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, but it is only an investment involving Romanian state capital. This does not automatically imply military protection.

If we look at the geography of the area, however, we can say that the port of Giurgiulesti has extraordinarily high strategic importance. All the discussions—whether from the Russian side about its strategic significance, or the Romanian Government's communication that this acquisition was made from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and could contribute to Ukraine's reconstruction or help the economic reunification of the Republic of Moldova and Romania—must be viewed in the context of the very interesting geographic triangle formed by Romania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

More precisely, if the port of Giurgiulesti succeeds in assuming some of the strategic relevance currently

held by the nearby port of Reni, then it could play another role beyond grain exports.

I believe it is very important that, in that area, all capabilities for detecting, reacting to and responding to drone threats remain on the territory of the riparian states. Why do I say this? Because the port of Giurgiulesti is located in a very narrow geographic corner.

That narrow geographic corner lies on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Therefore, if we are discussing strictly the architecture or topography of the port of Giurgiulesti—that is, its geographic footprint—it must be protected directly by the Republic of Moldova.

However, if we consider that the Republic of Moldova has a very narrow border corridor there, with Ukraine to the right and Romania to the left, then, theoretically, if a threat to the port of Giurgiulesti were identified and neutralised using response capabilities located on the territory of Ukraine or Romania, the port could be protected without the Republic of Moldova having to allocate resources for that purpose.

More precisely, if you detect an incoming threat and neutralise it on your own territory, whether you are Ukraine or Romania, then, once neutralised, that threat will no longer reach its destination, even if the intended destination is neither Romania nor Ukraine, but the port of Giurgiulesti in the Republic of Moldova.

To answer more briefly: if Ukraine and Romania have the eyes, the ears and the capacity to destroy any Russian drones that might target the port of Giurgiulesti, and if they act from their own national territories, then international law would be respected. In that way, the port could continue operating without becoming a target that is actually struck, rather than merely one that is considered or designated by the Russian Federation.

Thank you!

The Republic of Moldova, Romania and the Need for a Regional Anti-Drone Shield

*Editorial by Mihai Isac,
political analyst
and journalist with TVR*

The Republic of Moldova is no longer merely a state located in the vicinity of the front opened by Russia against Ukraine. It has become part of this front—a space over which drones used by Moscow fly and where they fall and, at times, explode. The Presidency announced that, between 24 February 2022 and 9 August 2026, 52 incidents were recorded, 15 of them in 2026 alone. In Crocmaz, a missile-drone exploded and damaged households. On 20 August, an aircraft preliminarily identified as a Shahed-136 entered from the Reni area, flew towards Etulia and was monitored for six minutes before returning to Ukrainian airspace.



Mihai Isac,
Photo: Facebook

It cannot be demonstrated that every drone entering the airspace of the Republic of Moldova is targeting the country. It can, however, be demonstrated that the Russian Federation is aware of the consequences of its attacks and accepts the repeated occurrence of such violations. After dozens of incidents, the accidental nature of some deviations no longer removes responsibility. Moscow exploits even deviations from the intended flight path, generating fear. At the same time, it forces the state to expend resources, tests the capacity of its institutions, and observes whether society begins to regard such incursions as a new normality. In this sense, the drone offensive is also an intelligence-gathering operation.

Each aircraft provides information about where it is detected, how long it is tracked, who makes the decisions, how local communities are alerted, and where vulnerabilities emerge in the coordination between the armed forces, the Border Police, civil aviation and civil protection authorities. Constitutional neutrality cannot stop a drone, and diplomatic protests cannot replace the means to detect and neutralise one.

Comprehensive Defence

The Republic of Moldova needs a national anti-drone architecture, not merely a high-profile system. This architecture must form an integral part of a regional system developed in close cooperation with partner states, both in Europe and with the United States and Canada.

The first layer is detection. This means radars capable of detecting small, low-flying targets, radio, acoustic and electronic sensors, mobile units, as well as data received from civilian institutions and partners. The second layer involves the real-time transmission of information to a permanent command centre capable of rapidly turning an uncertain track into a common operational picture, including through the use of artificial intelligence.

Next comes the decision-making and intervention process. The law must establish who can order the jamming, diversion or destruction of a drone, under what conditions, and how risks to the population can be minimised. The response must be tailored to the type of target and may include electronic warfare and navigation signal spoofing, where possible. At the same time, this means

interceptor drones and low-cost systems to counter inexpensive aircraft, as well as short- and medium-range air defence systems for threats that cannot be neutralised by other means. Using systems that require considerable resources to operate or expensive munitions for every incident would mean playing into the aggressor's economic strategy.

The security architecture must also include public warning systems, procedures for border communities, the protection of power plants, bridges, the airport, storage facilities and communications infrastructure, as well as specialised teams to secure and examine drone debris. In August 2026, the Government approved the Programme for the Implementation of the National Defence Strategy for 2026–2030. This must be translated into clear deadlines, responsibilities, exercises and measurable capabilities.

Artificial intelligence can accelerate the identification of drone types, the correlation of data from different sensors and the estimation of their trajectories. The decision to use force, however, must remain under human control, based on clear and verifiable rules and subject to subsequent audit.

Partners and SAFE

Chisinau is not starting from scratch. In July 2026, the European Union approved Euro 120 million through the European Peace Facility for a medium-range air defence system. Together with previous measures for surveillance, command and control, and short-range defence, support provided to the Republic of Moldova through this instrument has reached approximately Euro 300 million.

This assistance must be linked to SAFE, the EU's Euro 150 billion instrument for joint procurement. SAFE does not provide Chisinau with a direct loan, given that only EU Member States are eligible to receive financing. The Republic of Moldova can, however, participate in joint procurement, and its industry can be involved in certain projects. Eligible areas include drones, anti-drone systems, air and missile defence, artificial intelligence and electronic warfare.

The Government needs a permanent SAFE coordination unit, bringing together representatives of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Infrastructure, the Civil Aviation Authority, universities and technology companies, among others. It should present partners with a

single, consolidated list of the needs of institutions in the Republic of Moldova. This includes sensors, command-and-control equipment, jamming systems, interceptors, munitions, training, maintenance and local production. Otherwise, the Republic of Moldova risks receiving modern but incompatible systems, without sufficient spare parts, trained operators or repair capacity.

Ukraine can provide operational experience, while EU Member States can provide standards, financing and access to industry. Cooperation should include the exchange of data on drone trajectories, the training of operators and other relevant units, joint exercises and the joint assessment of incidents. Donations can address an immediate emergency, but interoperability and joint production build national and regional resilience.

The Romania–Republic of Moldova Axis

The incident of 16 August showed that, in the face of the threat posed by Russian drones, the airspace of the Republic of Moldova and that of Romania form the same theatre of operations. A Shahed crossed southern Moldova and then entered Romania, where it was shot down by a Spanish F-18 performing an air-policing mission. Information about the target must travel faster than the target itself.

Romania already benefits from approximately €16.68 billion in approved financing through the SAFE instrument and is implementing projects to acquire Ground Master 200 radars, SHORAD-VSHORAD systems and mini-drones, as well as to develop regional drone production in cooperation with Ukraine. The Ministry of Defence in Bucharest has also expressed its openness to extending certain projects to the Republic of Moldova. Romania's business community has already expressed interest in participating in joint defence projects.

With the support of partner states, the two governments could adopt a joint anti-drone defence roadmap that would include early-warning and data-sharing protocols, joint exercises in the Prut and Danube areas, training for operators from the Republic of Moldova in Romania, the establishment of a regional maintenance centre and testing grounds, as well as joint procurement through SAFE. Such cooperation would neither transfer responsibility for the defence of the Republic of Moldova to Romania nor automatically extend

NATO guarantees to the country. It would, however, create operational continuity between two states exposed to the same drone routes, while respecting the Republic of Moldova's neutrality status, which has been violated by the Russian Federation for decades.

Technological Inclusion

The Republic of Moldova already has rules governing the civilian use of drones, categories of operations and authorisation procedures, while the Civil Aviation Authority is working with EUROCONTROL to implement the U-space concept. This is a necessary starting point, but regulating civilian drone operations is not equivalent to having a policy for developing a drone industry and dual-use technologies.

The state needs to establish a legislative framework governing the design, testing, certification, production, procurement and export of drones and anti-drone systems. This requires dedicated testing areas, fast-track procedures for pilot projects, competitive public procurement, research grants, cybersecurity and supplier-control rules, protection of intellectual property, screening of foreign investments, and strict end-user controls.

Local IT expertise can be leveraged in areas such as artificial intelligence, data transfer, navigation in challenging conditions, coordination of interceptor drones and predictive maintenance. The use of artificial intelligence in the military domain must, however, be accompanied by full human control over target engagement, traceability of decisions, and clear rules for preventing errors and cyberattacks.

The objective is not to replicate Russian drones, but to create a defensive, dual-use ecosystem. This means companies, universities and institutions capable of developing and producing sensors, software, components and interceptor drones, as well as providing maintenance services, with applications in areas such as agriculture, mapping and emergency response. The Republic of Moldova cannot afford to wait for the next explosion to reveal yet another vulnerability. A modern shield must be built simultaneously through technology, partnerships, legislation, industry, and confidence in the state's ability to protect us.

Imprint

Editor

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e. V. sucursala Chişinău (Moldova)
Strada Bucuresti 111, Chisinau, MD-2012, Republica Moldova
Web: <http://moldova.fes.de>
E-mail: fes.moldova@fes.de
Tel. +373 855830

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Pagina 1: Militarii moldoveni fac repetiții pentru parada militară de Ziua Independenței de pe 27 august 2026. Sursa: Ministerul Apărării
Pagina 2: Vitalie Marinuța. Foto: Jurnal TV
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