**Ecaterina, you deal with disinformation in Moldova. Could you tell us more about your work?**

Our main mission is building resilience to disinformation and propaganda. Moldova is a relatively young democracy, pursuing its path to an European future. As a former USSR republic, Moldova's informational and political environment is still influenced by Russia through media, pro-Kremlin political parties. Moldova is also being a permanent target of economical blackmail because we are almost 100% dependent on Russian gas. Another way Russian malign influence spreads is through corruption.

**Tell us more about the disinformation in Moldova? What are the messages most often used as a disinformation narrative?**

Moldova is constantly being targeted by disinformation campaigns launched by Russian Federation, or its proxies in order to keep the country in the Russian orbit, undermine democracy, and influence it politically. The messages that are used In Moldova resemble a lot with those used in Ukraine. One of the most used is that pro-democratic political parties are Western puppets. That West wants to take under control Moldova, that it already infiltrated its people on almost all levels. Another message was aimed to divide people based on the language they talk. Russian diplomacy accused the official Chisinau of Russophobia.

**What about the channels of communication - what are the main conductors of such messages? Is online media the only or main source of disinformation?**

Until the invasion in Ukraine, Kremlin through its agents controlled some of the TV stations in Moldova with significant national coverage. In the last half a year, all Russian informational programs disappeared, as the Audio-visual Council enforced the regulations, and monitored stricter all TV stations with national coverage.

Another way of spreading Russian malign influence is through pro-Kremlin parties. Socialists Party is the biggest opposition party in Moldova. Its leader, Igor Dodon is the former president of the country.

But the most important means of spreading disinformation that gain more and more coverage are through Social Media platforms (Tik Tok, Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube). Another way is through, mostly anonymous telegram channels, that are spreading untruthful information, that is published by Russian-funded online

platforms, and some of them go high up and become topics discussed on pro-Russian TV channels, or even used in news shows.

**We had elections in Bulgaria on the 2nd of October. From your experience could you point out the main disinformation practices used during election campaigns and how they affect the public debate?**

The most used disinformation campaigns are targeting pro-western politicians and empowering conservative and kleptocratic political movements. And Russia deploys all sorts of disinformation campaigns, most of them appeal to fears of conservative electorate, for example, that pro-western politicians will bring too much freedom for sexual minorities, that children will be exposed to harmful information about sexual education or that some religious beliefs will be suppressed. Aiming to bring into power politicians that are thriving for isolationism, disinformation campaigns exploit subjects related to inflation, and rising prices, and blame pro-democratic forces for short-sighted policies, not taking into account regional or international context. For example, "since democrats came to power the prices increased" or that pro-western politicians are exposing the country at risk by supporting Ukraine.

**What are the main efforts of organizations in Moldova countering disinformation? Can you give us some examples of non-governmental initiatives in this direction? What about the role of the state - is it active in countering false narratives?**

Our main focus is on creating media content and providing expertise and disseminating it as widely as possible, through traditional media, and social media. We are providing expertise to all the governmental stakeholders that are willing to work with us. Nevertheless, we consider that the most efficient way to counter disinformation is through massive public presence on all possible channels in order to bring truthful information to the public, to each person holding a smartphone or watching TV. Other NGOs that are working in the field designed a curriculum for media literacy lessons and managed to convince authorities to introduce it as an optional course in Moldovan schools. Moreover, NGOs contributed to designing and promoting regulations for countering Russian propaganda.