

ROMANIAN MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
INFORMATION NOTE

- i. After undergoing technical verifications on the internet and after analyzing metrical values identified on social media platforms, especially on Tik-Tok, in the context of elections and the electoral process, the existence of a electoral campaign that was not unclaimed by its actual authors, in which, beginning with November 2024, over 100 influencers (that could engage with roughly 8 million active followers) were subjected to manipulation activities targeted to the promoted candidate.

Tik-Tok did not implement the instructions of the Romanian Central Electoral Bureau regarding the marking as an electoral candidate of candidates that promote themselves on social-media platforms as well as the marking of electoral materials in general with the unique code that is provided by the Permanent Electoral Authority.

The metrics analysis showed a very sudden increase in the analyzed candidate (CĂLIN GORGESCU) between 13 and 26.11.2024, as he reached no. 9 in the global trend top according to the hashtags used by his campaign, however an actual artificial amplification campaign has not been identified on the Tik-Tok platform up until 24.11.2024, as the sudden surge of the views, which reached hundreds of millions was identified after 25.11.2024.

The analyzed data revealed approximately 130 Tik-Tok accounts which were used for disseminating video content with said content, using the hashtags *#echilibrusivverticalitate*, *#prezidentiale2024*, *#unliderpotrivitpentrumine* (*#balance and verticality*; *#presidential elections 2024*; *# the right leader for me*), the majority of these not being marked as paid publicity.

In this regard, videos were identified in which national influencers promoted a predefined scenario regarding elements that must be fulfilled by each candidate. The videos in question were posted on multiple platforms (TikTok, Instagram and Facebook), generating between 1.000 and 500.000 views per video, all of which had the hashtag #echilibruşivverticalitate

The evaluation of the scenario in which the content elements were created, indicated similar situations with the ones carried out to influence the intention of Romanian influencers to promote the pro-Russian candidate from the Republic of Moldova in the analyzed posts.

Within the comments section related to each content element, a series of messages promoting a presidential candidate were identified. The analysis of these accounts indicates anomalies in their formulation, with indications regarding the use of fake accounts created only for the distribution of such comments.

Most influencers were not aware that they were promoting a specific candidate using *#echilibrusivverticalitate*. As of the date of this report only 51 of them still keeping their content elements associated with the three hashtags, the rest denouncing the messages and content as soon as they learned the identity of the candidate targeted by the respective electoral campaign.

An essential stage of the campaign was aimed at associating the mentioned ideal presidential profile with the candidate Călin GEORGESCU, through a high number of comments specifying his name, made for each promotional video post.

The influencers were co-opted and paid via a platform dedicated to micro-influencers.

At the level of the online marketplace through which the payment was processed, the request for the creation of publicity materials and services was submitted and published, along with clear instructions

regarding de promotion campaign, which included certain characteristics and hashtags corelated with the ideal type of presidents.

After the analysis of the content on the platform, it was revealed that the request for publicity services was posted by a certain company (possibly fake). More than that, influencers are paid for such campaigns depending on the number of followers, which in this case had as a calculation formula - 400 RON per 20.000 followers- the offer being accessible once every three days. Afterwards, the company could not be found anymore.

- ii. Some of the campaign supporters involved in promoting and buying votes are exponents of right-wing extremist, criminal environments and religious cults, previously involved in promoting pro-Russian, anti-Semitic, anti-NATO or anti-Ukraine narratives, among which:
- One of them delt with the centralization of signatures (for Călin Georgescu) for running for president.
He is a supporter of far-right ideologies, has been a fighter in the Foreign Legion. He openly promotes far-right ideologies by organizing para-military camps. Some of his objectives include the radicalization of youth, including minors, with the general purpose of the initialization of actions contrary to the rule of law.
 - One of them is a known clan member and participated in a promotional campaign on Tik-Tok for Călin Georgescu.
He participated in the said campaign by individual posts and live stories, where he openly associated with members of the organized crime world.
 - Another two known members of the organized crime world posted content and participated financially in the campaign.

On 23.11.2024 (one day before the election), he posted on his Facebook page a message in which he implied that the elections are being rigged. Currently, the post has a limited public exposure, however in one of the comments there was clear hate speech and instigation to public manifestations elements.

It must be mentioned that the account has several photos posted one day prior to the end of the campaign in which the independent candidate is promoted, while older posts show obvious promotion of the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. According to the Facebook profile, between 2018-2019, he mentioned he was in Moscow.

Counterespionage activities revealed clear information that indicate the intentions of certain persons of undergoing actions that would affect the Romanian national sovereignty.

Following the analysis of the specific information space, in relation to the lessons learned and presented by other states, a similar action pattern was identified at the level of Ukraine, active in the period preceding the initiation of the aggression by the Russian Federation. Specifically, the information campaign "Balance and Quality" is identical to the "Brother next to Brother" campaign carried out by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, both being carried out through the manipulation of micro-influencers and algorithms.

As such, the campaign of influence of the Russian Federation in Ukraine was initiated via Telegram channels, organized by an anonymous Admin, who requested the creation of certain content elements on well-defined coordinates destined to promote the narrative of the cohesion of ethnical groups.

At the same time, the coordinators sent a set of minimum conditions that content creators had to respect (number of views, time coordinates at which the content elements had to be posted, the sound to be used, the emoticons to be used, the text-narrative). Also, within both campaigns, the initiators presented to the people involved, specific methods of avoiding the detection of content elements that do not comply with the policies of the TikTok platform, respectively ways to make the videos go viral.

The stated goal of the campaign was to raise awareness about the importance of participating in the voting process. Another similarity is the deletion of all data available online regarding the promotion campaigns to limit the possibility of attributing them to hostile actors. After contracting the content creation services, the influencers created and disseminated content elements according to the established coordinates, without knowing the real beneficiary of the promotion campaign. After the exposure of the influence campaign, several opinion vectors on social media criticized the actions of those involved, accusing them of promoting those hashtags only in exchange for financial benefits. In the Ukrainian campaign, each content element was paid 17USD/per content, while in Romania each influencer received 390 lei/ 20.000 followers. Also, the content creators involved in the contracted campaign in Ukraine were encouraged to distribute the content elements through other people, similar to the promotion campaign in Romania.