



| Brief |

Russian Hybrid Warfare Tactics Against Western Europe

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Scope Note

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Brief | Russian Hybrid Warfare Tactics Against Western Europe

Executive Summary

With the January 15, 2025, accusation by Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk that Russia had planned terrorist attacks across the global aviation sector, there has been renewed focus on the global impacts of Russia's war in Ukraine.¹ However, the revelation is just one part of Russia's aggressive hybrid warfare strategy using tactics like disinformation, the weaponization of energy resources, sabotage, and cyber campaigns to limit the effectiveness of military aid to Ukraine. As 2024 went on and a large, albeit delayed, U.S. aid package to Ukraine was approved, Russia began expanding its use of hybrid measures beyond its western periphery, where most states have strong links with Russia, further into Western Europe. A slew of important elections gave Russia opportunities to weaken and destabilize Europe by propping up and supporting candidates who favor ending military support for Ukraine. There was also a notable increase in other types of hybrid warfare, including a surge in acts of sabotage against critical infrastructure. This expansive use of hybrid measures is unlikely to slow down even if there is a positive settlement to the war in Ukraine. Europe remains deeply divided on how to address a variety of issues, including improving European Union (EU) economic competitiveness and increasing defense spending; it is in Russia's interests to worsen these divisions. Because European states lack the unity to properly counter Russia's hybrid measures, Russia is very likely to expand the use of such tactics in the coming year.

¹ [hXXps://www.politico\[.\]eu/article/russia-planned-terror-attacks-airlines-around-world-donald-tusk-says/](https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-planned-terror-attacks-airlines-around-world-donald-tusk-says/)

| Types and Uses of Russian Hybrid Warfare Tactics

Hybrid warfare refers to the mixing of conventional and unconventional tactics. In Russia's instance, it is fighting a conventional ground conflict against Ukraine; however it also engages in a series of parallel unconventional tactics against Ukraine and its allies. The tactics range from cyberattacks and targeted disinformation campaigns to economic coercion to acts of sabotage and criminal violence, like assassinations.

- Specifically, this has included sending groups of migrants to the borders of EU states; jamming global positioning system (GPS) signals; recruiting criminals for petty acts of sabotage of critical infrastructure; economic coercion; elections interference; and reports of Russia assisting Houthi rebels target ships in the Red Sea belonging to countries that back Ukraine.²

The attacks are most prevalent in Eastern Europe or in the former Soviet Republic states, where Russian diaspora groups and criminal gangs with links to Russia are able to integrate with large Russian-speaking populations and better target their operations—taking advantage of cultural ties while making it harder to trace specific acts directly back to Russia.³ However, there was a notable movement westward during several Western nations' elections in 2024. These hybrid attacks are very likely to continue and escalate in Western Europe in 2025.

- Russia's hybrid measures are generally low-risk, low-cost, and offer Russia potentially high rewards.
- Since in most cases they do not rise to the level of a military attack, the hybrid warfare measures have gone largely unanswered by European authorities.
- Meanwhile, pro-Russian politicians or points of view have gained a stronger foothold in European society.

²

[hXXps://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-detects-satellite-navigation-jamming-spoofing-baltic-sea-2024-10-31/](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-detects-satellite-navigation-jamming-spoofing-baltic-sea-2024-10-31/)

³ [hXXps://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03071847.2024.2401232](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03071847.2024.2401232)

Sabotage of Infrastructure

One of the key types of hybrid warfare has been strategic attacks on European critical infrastructure, like GPS jamming and targeting physical supply chains such as rail networks.

- On December 25, 2024, a major electricity cable in Finland that provides power to neighboring Estonia was cut by a suspected Russian tanker operating as part of Russia's shadow fleet to clandestinely move sanctioned oil.⁴
- In November 2024, two undersea fiber optic cables in the Baltic Sea were cut. Authorities in Estonia, Finland, and Sweden believe that a Chinese ship that had visited Russia days earlier deliberately dragged its anchor hundreds of miles to sabotage the cables. A nearly identical incident occurred in October 2023.⁵
- European airlines routinely report signal jamming on navigation systems, which also reportedly comes from Russia. Finland and Sweden have reported that multiple commercial aircraft have been prevented from landing at small airports due to interference with the global positioning system.⁶
- Finland has detected increased disturbances to its satellite navigation systems in the Baltic Sea since April 2024, alleging Russia is doing it to help oil tankers visit the sanctioned country without being tracked.⁷ Finland claims it is causing ships to become lost at sea and raising the risk of an oil wreck.

Russia has reportedly sabotaged wind farms and communication cables in the North Sea since 2023. On April 13, 2024, Norway expelled 15 Russian officials, accusing them of spying and orchestrating a program to sabotage wind farms.⁸

- The Czech government has also accused Russia of sabotaging its railway, including attempts to hack signaling and ticket systems.⁹ Czech Transport Minister

⁴ [hXXps://yle\[.\]fi/a/7-10069708](https://yle.fi/a/7-10069708)

⁵ [hXXps://www.bloomberg\[.\]com/features/2024-undersea-cable-sabotage-russia-norway/](https://www.bloomberg[.]com/features/2024-undersea-cable-sabotage-russia-norway/)

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[hXXps://www.bloomberg\[.\]com/news/articles/2024-06-15/russian-fighter-jet-breached-swedish-airspace-on-friday](https://www.bloomberg[.]com/news/articles/2024-06-15/russian-fighter-jet-breached-swedish-airspace-on-friday)

⁷

[hXXps://www.reuters\[.\]com/world/europe/finland-detects-satellite-navigation-jamming-spoofing-baltic-sea-2024-10-31/](https://www.reuters[.]com/world/europe/finland-detects-satellite-navigation-jamming-spoofing-baltic-sea-2024-10-31/)

⁸ [hXXps://www.bbc\[.\]com/news/world-europe-65309687](https://www.bbc[.]com/news/world-europe-65309687)

⁹ [hXXps://english.radio\[.\]cz/czech-minister-tells-financial-times-russia-trying-sabotage-critical-8813329](https://english.radio[.]cz/czech-minister-tells-financial-times-russia-trying-sabotage-critical-8813329)

Martin Kupka said this was part of "thousands of attempts" to attack European railways.¹⁰

Targeting of critical infrastructure serves multiple purposes. Russia is likely using acts of sabotage in strategic areas like the Baltics because it does not have the resources to challenge NATO militarily.¹¹ The sabotage of critical infrastructure like the internet or electricity outages also serves to weaken Western resolve to back Ukraine, with states suffering attacks reconsidering their support for Ukraine after facing domestic unrest from citizens concerned about the impacts. The attacks also harm Europe economically. Rising energy costs and an overall elevated cost of living attributed to the war have frequently been cited by critics of Western support for Ukraine. By targeting critical infrastructure, Russian-backed groups can worsen these economic issues and threaten future investment in Europe.

Migration

Russia has also weaponized migration by pushing refugees across borders into European states where increased immigration is politically unpopular. This is an example of Russia utilizing an effective low-tech hybrid measure to overwhelm EU border officials and cause social unrest.

The first known instance of Russia weaponizing migration started in 2015, when dozens of migrants suddenly appeared at remote Lapland border stations in Finland and Norway. Finnish authorities later determined it was a test to gauge preparedness. Since then, Russia, along with ally state Belarus, has sponsored spontaneous migrant arrivals that have overwhelmed border controls by providing migrants with guidance, routes, and supplies in places like Poland and Finland, which have lengthy borders with Russia and Belarus.¹² In response, both Poland and Finland increased security along their border

¹⁰ [hXXps://www.ft.com/content/f8207823-f5e1-4caf-934d-67c648f807bf](https://www.ft.com/content/f8207823-f5e1-4caf-934d-67c648f807bf)

¹¹ [hXXps://geopoliticalfutures.com/how-russia-defends-its-baltic-lifeline/](https://geopoliticalfutures.com/how-russia-defends-its-baltic-lifeline/)

¹²

[hXXps://www.voanews.com/a/finland-debates-measure-to-block-asylum-seekers-at-border-with-russia/7623132.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/finland-debates-measure-to-block-asylum-seekers-at-border-with-russia/7623132.html)

posts with Belarus and Russia, and, in some cases, they have stopped processing asylum applications at certain border posts.¹³

Supply Chain

In July 2024, a package exploded at a DHL warehouse in the United Kingdom (UK). In September 2024, another package from a Baltic nation exploded at a DHL warehouse in Leipzig, Germany. In mid-October, UK counter-terrorism police reported the packages were bombs planted by Russian-backed groups.¹⁴

- The packages contained modest amounts of explosives, but they were reportedly shipped by plane; had the explosions occurred mid-flight, they could have downed the plane.¹⁵
- By targeting EU supply chains, Russia could cause transportation delays and increase the costs to ship goods, which could have an overall inflationary impact in affected states.
- In early January 2025, before Tusk's high-profile revelation that Russia planned terror attacks on Polish and other global aviation sectors,¹⁶ U.S. intelligence reportedly also warned that Russian groups were planning to smuggle incendiary devices aboard U.S. cargo planes.¹⁷

Similarly, Russia has been accused of providing the Iran-backed Houthis with satellite data to better target Western ships transiting the Red Sea.

- Continued supply chain disruptions in the Red Sea serve multiple purposes. One is to further destabilize the Middle East and keep global attention away from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- It also causes inflationary disruptions, particularly in Europe, where most goods shipped between Asia and Europe transit via the Red Sea. Most shipping companies have chosen to avoid the area, which has added weeks of travel time and millions of dollars to shipping costs.

¹³

[hXXps://ecre\[.\]org/eu-eastern-borders-poland-publishes-data-showing-6000-pushbacks-in-past-six-months-finl-and-russia-border-closure-extended-again-estonia-considers-closing-border-crossing-points/](https://ecre[.]org/eu-eastern-borders-poland-publishes-data-showing-6000-pushbacks-in-past-six-months-finl-and-russia-border-closure-extended-again-estonia-considers-closing-border-crossing-points/)

¹⁴ [hXXps://www.ft\[.\]com/content/6c57e5b6-6084-4fdc-a7fd-7653a1c9d1ba](https://www.ft[.]com/content/6c57e5b6-6084-4fdc-a7fd-7653a1c9d1ba)

¹⁵ [hXXps://www.dw\[.\]com/en/germany-warns-over-incendiary-devices-in-freight/a-70092377](https://www.dw[.]com/en/germany-warns-over-incendiary-devices-in-freight/a-70092377)

¹⁶ [hXXps://tvpworld\[.\]com/84532008/russia-was-planning-acts-of-terror-on-airlines-says-polish-pm](https://tvpworld[.]com/84532008/russia-was-planning-acts-of-terror-on-airlines-says-polish-pm)

¹⁷ [hXXps://www.nytimes\[.\]com/2025/01/13/us/politics/russia-putin-airplane-shadow-war.html](https://www.nytimes[.]com/2025/01/13/us/politics/russia-putin-airplane-shadow-war.html)

Having the United States and its allies preoccupied with other issues around the world, like impacts from the Israel-Hamas war or supply chain disruptions, leaves space for Russia to pursue its goals: mainly a military victory in Ukraine but also a weaker Western community less able to confront Russia.

| Russian Periphery

States along Russia's western periphery are likely experiencing the bulk of Russia's hybrid warfare. This includes states from the Baltics through to Eastern Europe like Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, which share about 2,200 miles of borders with Russia and its ally, Belarus. It also includes states bordering Ukraine or the Black Sea like Moldova, Bulgaria, and Romania.

- Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, these states have grown closer to the West; following the start of Russia's war in Ukraine, their governments have been Russia's sharpest critics.¹⁸ However, if Russian actors can cause divisions in these places, they can maintain a security buffer with Western Europe.

Most of these states have strong economic and ethnic ties to Russia. These shared histories under Soviet occupation or as former members of the union have, in many cases, made them the most leery of Russia. However, these countries still have large Russian-speaking populations and economies deeply intertwined with Russia. Therefore, Russia's propaganda efforts may be more successful with significant minority populations, and they may be better at identifying social fissures around issues like immigration. The lack of a language barrier may also better-assist their disinformation when it comes to tying things like the EU's support for Ukraine to the cost of living. In recent elections, Russia has successfully backed pro-Russian candidates who argue closer ties to the EU will worsen the cost of living and increase the likelihood these states could experience a direct military conflict with Ukraine.

¹⁸ <https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/10/contesting-russia-the-baltic-perspective/>

Baltics

Estonia

Since Russia's war in Ukraine began, former Soviet Union member Estonia has experienced a spate of attacks it attributes to Russia—including vandalizing the cars of the interior minister and defacing several monuments. In February 2024, Estonian security services arrested a network of 10 individuals, including both Russian and Estonian nationals. Some of the suspects were reportedly recruited on social media.¹⁹

- About 25 percent of Estonia's population is Russian-speaking, giving Russia a large pool of potential recruits potentially more receptive to its propaganda.²⁰

On December 31 2024, the known actor "JokerDPR" (Joker Donetsk Peoples Republic) issued several publications related to the internal affairs of Estonia.²¹ One of them explicitly mentions the Baltic cable sabotage, while other posts targeted funding problems and the economic situation in Estonia in general, attributing them to Estonia's backing of Ukraine straining its economy.

- The posts were part of a larger operation that JokerDPR claimed was intended to boost the military efforts of the Russian state. JokerDPR has been active since October 2019 and has been engaged in operations intended to support Russia's information war, as well as to supplement military-related activity in Ukraine. There is a possibility that this persona is coordinated by the Russian state, although JokerDPR claims to be operating a network of "hackers" that are available on demand.

¹⁹ <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/20/europe/russia-shadow-war-attack-estonia-kallas-intl/index.html>

²⁰

https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/feeling-cornered-analysis-russian-speaking-minority-estonia_en

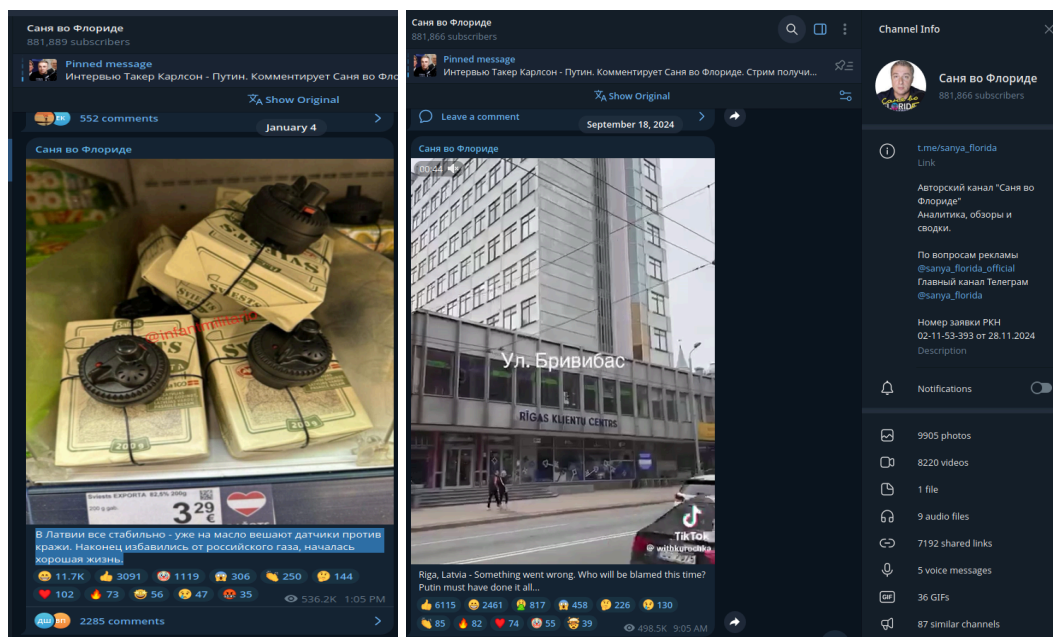
²¹ ZeroFox Intelligence

Source: Zerofox Intelligence

Latvia

One of the most-popular Russian propagandist Telegram channels “sanya_florida” covers a wide spectrum of economic, military and geopolitical issues. In mid-September, they published a video depicting relatively poorly-maintained streets and scarcity of people in Riga, Latvia. The accompanying message rhetorically suggests that this is a result of Western interference and Putin has nothing to do with it.²²

Similarly, on January 4, 2025, “sanya_florida” published a photograph which depicts packages of butter with anti-theft devices attached to them in a Latvian supermarket. The author explicitly claims that the economic condition of Latvia is in this state due to sanctions imposed on Russia. Similarly, the above-described channel “bear007” published a similar message related to sprat production in Latvia, which is diminishing due to sanctions imposed on Russia.²³



Screenshots from popular propagandist “sanya_florida” depicting propaganda implications about the economic struggles of Latvia. The associated text can be machine-translated as “Everything is stable in Latvia – they are already putting anti-theft sensors on the oil. Finally they got rid of Russian gas, and the good life began.”

Source: Zerofox Intelligence

²²ZeroFox Intelligence

²³ZeroFox Intelligence

Lithuania

In mid-March 2024, in the run-up to Lithuania's October 2024 elections, Leonid Volkov, a former strategist of leading Russian opposition activist Alexy Navalny, was violently attacked in Vilnius, Lithuania, just weeks after Navalny died in a Russian prison.²⁴ Lithuanian intelligence said the attack was "likely organized and implemented by Russia, the purpose of which was to stop the implementation of Russian opposition projects."²⁵

On January 15, 2025, "NoName" announced a DDoS campaign against numerous Lithuanian entities, due to the fact that the Lithuanian government sent 4,500 drones as military aid to Ukraine.²⁶ This was part of a wider mid-January 2025 campaign by other pro-Russian hacktivists like the "DDoSia Project" and the "Z-Pentest Alliance," who also claimed to have targeted Lithuanian websites.²⁷

Poland

Poland has also publicly accused Russia of being behind a spate of fires since the war in Ukraine started. The deliberate acts of arson targeted a large department store in the capital, Warsaw, as well as a paint factory in the western city of Wroclaw.²⁸ Poland announced it arrested a network of supposed Russian spies that included Russian and Polish nationals who were linked to similar attacks across Europe, including a fire at an Ikea in Lithuania.²⁹ Poland closed the Russian consulate in the city of Poznan over the acts of sabotage.³⁰ Poland has also arrested individuals reportedly tied to Russia who plotted

²⁴ [hXXps://t.me/teamnavalny/23563](https://t.me/teamnavalny/23563)

²⁵ [hXXps://www.rferl.org/a/navalny-aide-volkov-attacked/32859028.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/navalny-aide-volkov-attacked/32859028.html)

²⁶ ZeroFox Intelligence

²⁷ ZeroFox Intelligence

²⁸ [hXXps://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/polish-minister-cites-possible-russian-involvement-in-recent-fires/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/polish-minister-cites-possible-russian-involvement-in-recent-fires/)

²⁹

[hXXps://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/20/poland-arrests-nine-suspects-over-alleged-russian-sabotage-plot](https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/20/poland-arrests-nine-suspects-over-alleged-russian-sabotage-plot)

³⁰

[hXXps://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/10/22/poland-closes-russian-consulate-in-poznan-over-sabotage-attempts-a86780](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/10/22/poland-closes-russian-consulate-in-poznan-over-sabotage-attempts-a86780)

an assassination attempt on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, as well as an attack on Volkov in Lithuania.³¹

Election Interference

Recent elections in the former Soviet states of Georgia and Moldova, as well as the Soviet-occupied state of Romania, represented a key battleground for Russian disinformation campaigns.

- Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, these countries have remained in Russia's orbit; however, recent governments have also grown closer to Europe, where they have become important for energy, security, and trade. Pro-Western governments benefit Ukraine and advance Western military and economic interests.

Successful Russian hybrid attacks in these states undermine the formation of a pro-Western security and economic coalition, thus limiting NATO and the EU's capacity to deter Russia.³²

Romania

During the recent November 2024 elections in Romania, intelligence services there revealed mis- and disinformation attacks that favored candidate Calin Georgescu,³³ who campaigned for reduced support for Ukraine and better ties with Russia.³⁴ His election victory was annulled, and new elections have now been set for May 2025;³⁵ Russian-backed groups will very likely orchestrate renewed disinformation campaigns online, as well as other hybrid attacks.

³¹

[hXXps://www.theguardian\[.\]com/world/article/2024/may/20/poland-arrests-nine-suspects-over-alleged-russian-sabotage-plot](https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/20/poland-arrests-nine-suspects-over-alleged-russian-sabotage-plot)

³² [hXXps://geopoliticalfutures\[.\]com/black-sea-region-divided-not-quite-conquered/](https://geopoliticalfutures[.]com/black-sea-region-divided-not-quite-conquered/)

³³ [hXXps://www.politico\[.\]eu/article/calin-georgescu-romania-presidential-election-appeals-court-upholds-scrub/](https://www.politico[.]eu/article/calin-georgescu-romania-presidential-election-appeals-court-upholds-scrub/)

³⁴ [hXXps://www.bbc\[.\]com/news/articles/cvg6l06ldpqqo](https://www.bbc[.]com/news/articles/cvg6l06ldpqqo)

³⁵

[hXXps://balkaninsight\[.\]com/2025/01/08/romania-sets-new-date-for-presidential-polls-after-vote-controversially-annulled/](https://balkaninsight[.]com/2025/01/08/romania-sets-new-date-for-presidential-polls-after-vote-controversially-annulled/)

- In the immediate aftermath of annulling the election, Romanian security services allegedly disrupted an armed mercenary campaign aimed at causing unrest in the capital, Budapest.³⁶

In recent years Romania has positioned itself as a key Eastern European ally against Russia, giving Russia strong incentive to stir social unrest. Romania hosts NATO troops,³⁷ and its incumbent government strongly backs Ukraine.³⁸ Interfering in Romania serves two key purposes for Russia: weakening a key supporter of Ukraine that also serves as a supply chain alternative for Ukrainian goods and helping weaken regional support for Ukraine and NATO deterrence against Russia.

Georgia

During Georgia's October 2024 parliamentary elections, Russia was accused of orchestrating numerous irregularities, including vote-buying, misuse of state resources by pro-Russian candidates, voter intimidation, and violence at polling stations.

- Election observers from NATO,³⁹ the EU,⁴⁰ and the International Republican and Democratic Institutes⁴² in the United States documented widespread instances of controlled voting, double-voting,⁴³ ballot stuffing,⁴⁴ coercion, voter suppression, and violence.⁴⁵

³⁶

[hXXps://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-12-10/romania-is-out-to-prove-its-election-was-worth-cancelling](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-12-10/romania-is-out-to-prove-its-election-was-worth-cancelling)

³⁷ [hXXps://home.army.mil/blacksea/about/visitors](https://home.army.mil/blacksea/about/visitors)

³⁸

[hXXps://gov.ro/en/news/the-government-of-romania-will-keep-intensifying-the-concrete-and-multidimensional-support-for-ukraine](https://gov.ro/en/news/the-government-of-romania-will-keep-intensifying-the-concrete-and-multidimensional-support-for-ukraine)

³⁹

[hXXps://www.nato-pa.int/news/georgias-elections-marred-uneven-playing-field-pressure-and-tension-voters-were-offered-wide](https://www.nato-pa.int/news/georgias-elections-marred-uneven-playing-field-pressure-and-tension-voters-were-offered-wide)

⁴⁰ [hXXps://x.com/RihardsKols/status/1850554045666095247](https://x.com/RihardsKols/status/1850554045666095247)

⁴¹ [hXXps://www.iri.org/news/iri-preliminary-statement-on-georgias-parliamentary-elections/](https://www.iri.org/news/iri-preliminary-statement-on-georgias-parliamentary-elections/)

⁴²

[hXXps://www.ndi.org/publications/ndi-presents-preliminary-statement-georgian-elections-and-finds-pre-election-period](https://www.ndi.org/publications/ndi-presents-preliminary-statement-georgian-elections-and-finds-pre-election-period)

⁴³ [hXXps://x.com/geome1_ge/status/1850652436798578984](https://x.com/geome1_ge/status/1850652436798578984)

⁴⁴ [hXXps://x.com/KShoshiashvili/status/1850094860960661648](https://x.com/KShoshiashvili/status/1850094860960661648)

⁴⁵ [hXXps://x.com/Publika_ge/status/1850114164879958340](https://x.com/Publika_ge/status/1850114164879958340)

- In the run-up to the elections, ZeroFox reported violent assaults on Georgian protesters,⁴⁶ with some attacks near their homes, which supporters claim are organized by Russia.⁴⁷ Opposition figures also claim they received threatening phone calls from unknown numbers,⁴⁸ likely another part of Russia's hybrid war strategy.

Moldova

In October 2024, Moldova held presidential elections and a referendum vote on joining the EU. Polls conducted prior to the elections predicted the EU referendum vote would pass by a wide margin; however, on Election Day, the measure passed by only 0.4 percent. Many observers and Moldovan leaders have suggested Russia's influence campaign could be behind this discrepancy.⁴⁹ President Maia Sandu argued that widespread Russian interference tilted the vote closer to pro-Russian policies and candidates. Sandu cited recent government reports of Russia-backed networks that purchased 150,000 votes to influence the elections.⁵⁰

- On December 12, 2024, Director of the Intelligence and Security Service (SIS), Alexandru Musteața, presented a report to Parliament on Russian interference in the election. According to the report, Russia created a command center in Moscow under the control of fugitive Moldovan oligarch Illan Shor to coordinate interference in the key votes. The declassified report details how Russia provided Shor with financial, logistical, and technical resources to support the effort, which included vote-buying and an online disinformation campaign.⁵¹

⁴⁶ ZeroFox Intelligence Brief: "Russia Increases Use of Hybrid War Tactics After Aid to Ukraine" – May 10, 2024

⁴⁷ [hXXps://twitter\[.\]com/formulage/status/1788293146121548258](https://twitter.com/formulage/status/1788293146121548258)

⁴⁸ [hXXps://twitter\[.\]com/tabula_media/status/1788236186500157852](https://twitter.com/tabula_media/status/1788236186500157852)

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[hXXps://moldova.europalibera\[.\]org/a/raport-sis-la-moscova-ar-fi-fost-creat-un-centru-de-comanda-pentru-a-frauda-scrutinele-din-r-moldova/33237815.html](https://moldova.europalibera[.]org/a/raport-sis-la-moscova-ar-fi-fost-creat-un-centru-de-comanda-pentru-a-frauda-scrutinele-din-r-moldova/33237815.html)

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[hXXps://www.bloomberg\[.\]com/news/articles/2024-10-30/kremlin-is-advancing-in-hybrid-war-on-europe-s-eastern-flank](https://www.bloomberg[.]com/news/articles/2024-10-30/kremlin-is-advancing-in-hybrid-war-on-europe-s-eastern-flank)

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[hXXps://moldova.europalibera\[.\]org/a/raport-sis-la-moscova-ar-fi-fost-creat-un-centru-de-comanda-pentru-a-frauda-scrutinele-din-r-moldova/33237815.html](https://moldova.europalibera[.]org/a/raport-sis-la-moscova-ar-fi-fost-creat-un-centru-de-comanda-pentru-a-frauda-scrutinele-din-r-moldova/33237815.html)

Since January 1, 2025, there has been an acute energy crisis in Moldova and the disputed territory of Transnistria after the transit of Russian gas through Ukrainian territory stopped. This in turn halted operations at the Cuciurgan Power Plant (MGRES) in Transnistria, which previously generated electricity from free Russian gas. MGRES used to cover 100 percent of Transnistria's electricity supply and over half of Moldova's electricity consumption on the right bank of the Dniester. Since the cut-off, Transnistria has halted all non-essential industrial operations and has been unable to provide heating or hot water to residents.

- Russia could resume gas supplies to Transnistria via the Turkstream pipeline but has refused to do so, citing a payment dispute with Moldovagaz, Moldova's largest energy provider.⁵² The Moldovan government has also offered to help Transnistria purchase supplies on the open market, but Transnistria has refused, arguing these supplies are too expensive. These refusals have prompted concern among Moldovan officials that Russia aims to create a humanitarian crisis in Transnistria designed to destabilize Moldova.⁵³
- Meanwhile, Moldova's energy utility, Energocom, announced its average purchase price of electricity for the first 10 days of 2025 was EUR 110.83 per megawatt hour, which is nearly double the price of electricity Moldova previously purchased from MGRES.⁵⁴ This significant rise in electricity prices will increase business operating costs and living costs for most Moldovans, as well as contribute to inflationary pressures. The Moldovan government has promised to provide financial assistance to those who cannot afford the price increases, however, this assistance is unlikely to cover 100 percent of the increase. Sustained heightened costs may lead to social unrest and protests throughout the country.

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[hXXps://www.themoscowtimes\[.\]com/2025/01/06/tensions-rise-between-moldova-and-russia-as-transnistria-fears-electricity-collapse-a87517](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/01/06/tensions-rise-between-moldova-and-russia-as-transnistria-fears-electricity-collapse-a87517)

⁵³

[hXXps://www.politico\[.\]eu/article/moldovan-separatists-refuse-eu-gas-despite-warnings-humanitarian-crisis-transnistria/](https://www.politico.eu/article/moldovan-separatists-refuse-eu-gas-despite-warnings-humanitarian-crisis-transnistria/)

⁵⁴

[hXXps://radiomoldova\[.\]md/p/45835/energocom-announced-the-average-purchase-price-of-electricity-in-the-first-10-days-of-2025](https://radiomoldova[.]md/p/45835/energocom-announced-the-average-purchase-price-of-electricity-in-the-first-10-days-of-2025)

This is very likely part of a pattern since the start of Russia's war in Ukraine to expose the EU's vulnerability to Russian energy sources. The halting of Russian energy supplies is a key contributor to EU-wide inflation, as energy is a leading factor in the final cost of food, transportation, utility bills, and manufacturing. Persistently high energy prices and elevated costs of living will very likely weaken Western support for Ukraine.

| Western Europe

At the start of 2024, the United States was caught in a high-profile political dispute that caused months of delays to a USD 60 billion aid package to Ukraine that was ultimately approved in April 2024.⁵⁵ During this period, ZeroFox observed that Russia stepped up the use of hybrid attacks on the West.⁵⁶ The attacks were designed to further delay Western aid to ensure that Ukraine lacked the equipment necessary to repel Russian forces. These hybrid attacks complemented battlefield gains, leading to further successes.

At the time, ZeroFox observed Russian-backed threat actors supporting EU-wide farmer protests by targeting government websites in states experiencing protests.⁵⁷

- Several EU states (including France, Germany, and the Czech Republic) cited similar Russian-backed social media campaigns ahead of EU parliamentary elections on June 6-9, 2024.⁵⁸ The campaigns were designed to promote candidates who back ending EU support for Ukraine, arguing it drives up immigration and the cost of living.⁵⁹

Since the aid package was approved, Russia has become increasingly brazen in its efforts to stem the flow of Western aid to Ukraine. The developed West is a target-rich

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[hXXps://www.defense\[.\]gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3754238/biden-administration-announces-significant-new-security-assistance-for-ukraine/](https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3754238/biden-administration-announces-significant-new-security-assistance-for-ukraine/)

⁵⁶ ZeroFox Intelligence Brief: "Russia Increases Use of Hybrid War Tactics After Aid to Ukraine" – May 10, 2024

⁵⁷ ZeroFox Intelligence Flash Report: "German Protests Supported by Pro-Russian Threat Actor" – January 12, 2024

⁵⁸

[hXXps://www.euronews\[.\]com/my-europe/2024/05/03/eu-and-nato-condemn-malicious-russian-cyber-attacks-against-germany-and-czechia](https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/05/03/eu-and-nato-condemn-malicious-russian-cyber-attacks-against-germany-and-czechia)

⁵⁹

[hXXps://www.rfi\[.\]fr/en/international/20240507-eu-green-deal-targeted-by-online-disinformation-campaign-ahead-of](https://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20240507-eu-green-deal-targeted-by-online-disinformation-campaign-ahead-of)

environment for any hostile actor looking to target infrastructure like railroads, warehouses, and other key logistical facilities, sometimes by hiring local criminals or refugees.⁶⁰

Like in Eastern Europe and the Baltics, likely Russian-backed cyber groups are also linking the state of Western Europe's economy to its support for Ukraine. In January 2025, the pro-Russian hacker collective 'DDoSia PProject,' in its manifesto available at [telegra\[.\]ph/Manifest-NoName05716-01-22](https://t.me/Manifest-NoName05716-01-22), clearly states they target Western citizens who believe their own governments fund Ukraine before addressing their own issues.

Eng version:

This is not the first year that we have been defending Russia's interests on the information front. **We see how the discontent of adequate citizens of foreign countries is growing, whose authorities do not care about the problems of their compatriots and spend huge amounts of money on sponsoring Ukrainian terrorists.** We also see total censorship, which prevents the residents of these countries from telling the truth. There it has become unacceptable to speak positively about Russia. There is absolutely nothing left of freedom of speech in the West.

Part of the "DDoSia Project" manifesto at [telegra\[.\]ph/Manifest-NoName05716-01-22](https://t.me/Manifest-NoName05716-01-22)

Source: Zerofox Intelligence

Germany

- Sometime between late December 2024 and January 2025, a German airforce base was broken into twice; the intruders were reportedly targeting the water supply system that also serves Cologne's military airport. The initial investigation pointed to deliberate sabotage.⁶¹
- In July 2024, German authorities disrupted a supposed Russian-backed plot to attack the head of Rheinmetall, the largest German arms manufacturer and a key

⁶⁰ [hXXps://www.tandfonline\[.\]com/doi/full/10.1080/03071847.2024.2401232](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2024.2401232)

⁶¹

[hXXps://www.spiegel\[.\]de/panorama/bundeswehr-wasserwerk-im-visier-a-255fa838-e973-444e-b6ad-a57f6ef9fd9f](https://www.spiegel[.]de/panorama/bundeswehr-wasserwerk-im-visier-a-255fa838-e973-444e-b6ad-a57f6ef9fd9f)

supplier for armed forces in Europe—including Ukraine.⁶² Rheinmetall has seen a sales surge since the war in Ukraine, as European states have looked to increase weapons manufacturing to aid Ukraine and rebuild their own stockpiles. The disrupted plot was reportedly just one of a series of Russian-backed efforts to kill defense executives in Europe whose companies were supplying Ukraine.

- Russian nationals have also been arrested in Germany on charges of planning to attack military facilities.⁶³ This included a failed plot to sabotage U.S. military bases in Germany, as well as a fire in May 2024 at a factory in the capital Berlin owned by a company that helps produce air defense systems.⁶⁴⁶⁵

France

French intelligence officials accused Russia of orchestrating the dropping of five coffins draped in a French flag and bearing the inscription “French soldiers of Ukraine,” which were deposited near the Eiffel Tower.⁶⁶ In October 2023, Stars of David designed to mimic the Israeli flag were graffitied across Paris. A Moldovan couple reportedly paid by Russian intelligence were arrested. In another instance, red hands were painted on a Holocaust memorial in Paris, and police said the perpetrators fled abroad.⁶⁷

Throughout the war, Russian-backed hacktivist groups have routinely conducted distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) campaigns against Russia’s enemies. One of the last DDoS campaigns of the major Russian hacktivist group “NoName” affected French governmental entities on December 30, 2024.⁶⁸ A similar case was observed in Italy. While the impact of these DDoS campaigns is likely limited from a cybersecurity standpoint, the inconveniences caused are likely to weaken Western resolve in backing Ukraine.

⁶²

[hXXps://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-07-11/us-and-germany-foiled-russian-plot-to-kill-rheinmetall-ceo](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-07-11/us-and-germany-foiled-russian-plot-to-kill-rheinmetall-ceo)

⁶³

[hXXps://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-arrests-two-alleged-military-sabotage-plot-behalf-russia-2024-04-18/](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-arrests-two-alleged-military-sabotage-plot-behalf-russia-2024-04-18/)

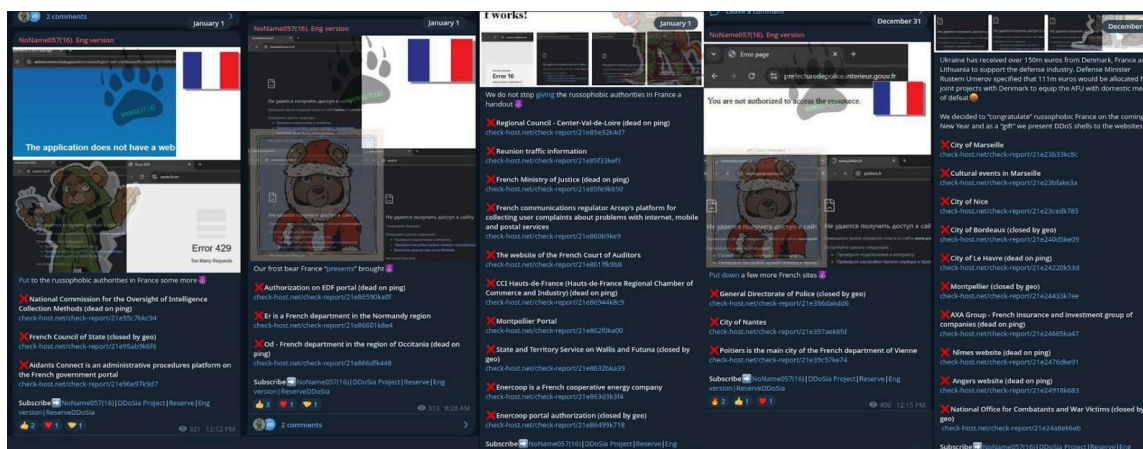
⁶⁴ [hXXps://www.economist.com/europe/2024/05/12/russia-is-ramping-up-sabotage-across-europe](https://www.economist.com/europe/2024/05/12/russia-is-ramping-up-sabotage-across-europe)

⁶⁵ [hXXps://www.politico.eu/article/russia-berlin-fire-diehl-behind-arson-attack-on-factory/](https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-berlin-fire-diehl-behind-arson-attack-on-factory/)

⁶⁶ [hXXps://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cldd7n97dvro](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cldd7n97dvro)

⁶⁷ [hXXps://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67360768](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67360768)

⁶⁸ ZeroFox Intelligence



A collage of announcements by NoName targeting French entities

Source: Zerofox Intelligence

ZeroFox also observed a Russian-speaking Telegram channel t.me/bear007 with more than 38,000 subscribers targeting the French economy. On December 16, 2024, the user implied that France is experiencing a crisis in the pharmaceutical industry due to sanctions imposed on Russia.⁶⁹

UK

Like elsewhere in Europe, UK authorities blamed Russia for orchestrating arson attacks across the UK in the middle of 2024. In one instance, there was a mysterious explosion at a Welsh munitions factory; in another, there was a fire at a Ukrainian-owned business in the UK.⁷⁰⁷¹

Going Forward

EU and NATO members are belatedly preparing new, concrete targets for member-states to produce more weapons. For the EU, that will require each of the 27 member-states to commit to raising defense spending to 3 percent of gross domestic

⁶⁹ ZeroFox Intelligence

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⁷¹ <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/bae-systems-investigating-explosion-its-welsh-munitions-site-2024-04-17/>

⁷¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-68899130>

product (GDP).⁷² The measures are likely to be imposed uniformly, as Russia has shown the effectiveness of targeting relatively small states like Moldova and Estonia as well as larger economies like France and Germany. However, European governments will struggle to convince their populations to spend additional money on defense when most European budgets are already stretched.

- NATO is due to hold a summit in June 2025, where its 27 members are expected to announce a joint increase in the defense spending target from 2 percent to 3 percent.⁷³ Ahead of the meeting, DDoS attacks against NATO member websites are likely, as well as a disinformation campaign surrounding NATO member budgets.

These states will likely also need to make decisions to harden cyber and physical security protections for critical industries and European companies. A public awareness campaign that brings European voters onboard with the measures will likely be necessary, as well as increasing spending for law enforcement and counterintelligence officers. However, Europe remains divided on how to address a variety of other issues, including improving the competitiveness of EU businesses and bringing down the cost of living.

- It is in Russia's interests to worsen these divisions and make it as difficult as possible for the EU to countenance decisions like spending public money on boosting defense when there is already a cost-of-living crisis triggered first by COVID-19 and then by the energy cost increases that followed the start of Russia's war with Ukraine.
- It is politically inconvenient for the EU to acknowledge and formulate a plan to better-address the successful hybrid warfare Russia is carrying out across Europe. To acknowledge it would mean the EU has to put in place a costly plan spread across nearly all aspects of society.

⁷²

[hXXps://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/01/13/boosting-natos-defence-capabilities-means-going-beyond-3-target-says-rutte](https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/01/13/boosting-natos-defence-capabilities-means-going-beyond-3-target-says-rutte)

⁷³

[hXXps://www.reuters.com/world/europe/nato-seeks-agree-new-goals-weapons-troops-summer-says-top-official-2025-01-13/](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/nato-seeks-agree-new-goals-weapons-troops-summer-says-top-official-2025-01-13/)

Russia is very likely to expand its use of hybrid measures in the coming year. Expect continued attacks on critical infrastructure, energy targets, and online targeting of European elections. There will be consequential elections in Poland, parliamentary elections in Moldova, and re-run elections in Romania in May 2025, all of which present fertile ground for Russian-backed disinformation campaigns. However, political and social unrest in the two largest EU members, France and Germany, likely present the most ideal targets.

- France has gone through four prime ministers in less than one year.⁷⁴ The political dynamics that created this paralysis and dysfunction are not expected to change for the foreseeable future. Therefore, further short-lived governments are likely, leaving France poorly suited to address major domestic and regional issues.
- Germany will be holding snap elections on February 23, 2025.⁷⁵ The trigger for the elections is the ruling coalition's inability to address political differences around defense spending and stimulus spending designed to protect German manufacturing from elevated energy prices.

Without a politically stable France or Germany, the EU's ability to address and respond to ongoing geopolitical issues will very likely remain hindered.⁷⁶ These ideas require risk-sharing with other EU governments, increased financial contributions to the EU, and further reforms to the EU energy market. Even if smaller EU economies were focused on addressing these issues, the bulk of the funding would have to come from France and Germany; outside investors would be very unlikely to support these initiatives if they felt Germany and France may not be on board.

⁷⁴ [hXXps://www.dw\[.\]com/en/france-unveils-new-government-under-pm-francois-bayrou/a-71149291](https://www.dw.com/en/france-unveils-new-government-under-pm-francois-bayrou/a-71149291)

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[hXXps://www.aljazeera\[.\]com/news/2024/12/27/german-president-dissolves-parliament-confirming-february-elect
in](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/27/german-president-dissolves-parliament-confirming-february-election)

⁷⁶ ZeroFox Intelligence Brief: "How Unrest in France and Europe Benefits its Adversaries" – December 13, 2024

| Appendix A: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

	Red	Amber
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	Sources may use TLP:RED when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.	Sources may use TLP:AMBER when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	Recipients may NOT share TLP:RED with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.	Recipients may ONLY share TLP:AMBER information with members of their own organization and its clients, but only on a need-to-know basis to protect their organization and its clients and prevent further harm. Note that TLP:AMBER+STRICT restricts sharing to the organization only.
	Green	Clear
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	Sources may use TLP:GREEN when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.	Sources may use TLP:CLEAR when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	Recipients may share TLP:GREEN information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.	Recipients may share TLP:CLEAR information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

| Appendix B: ZeroFox Intelligence Probability Scale

All ZeroFox intelligence products leverage probabilistic assessment language in analytic judgments. Qualitative statements used in these judgments refer to associated probability ranges, which state the likelihood of occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns with how readers should interpret such terms.

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%