

# Russia and Pseudo-Orthodox "Active Measures" Against the West and Romania

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## Abstract

In November 2025, 30 years were commemorated since the death of Corneliu Coposu, former personal secretary to Iuliu Maniu, political prisoner during the communist regime, and leader of the opposition in the 1990s. In an interview granted in 1995, Corneliu Coposu warned about the way Russia could extend its influence over Romania through what we could today call "active measures", instruments of hybrid warfare:

Ever since Russia has existed in our immediate neighborhood, whether it was Tsarist, Orthodox, or Pravoslavnic Russia, it has represented the same danger to us... We have no interest in promoting rapprochement, not even along the lines of a Russian imperialist Pravoslavnic movement... Our idea of integrating Christian moral concepts into European parties has no connection with the manifest or hidden ideas of Russian imperialism. Russia, in my opinion, whether governed by Tsarist, Communist, or, as we might call it now, Revolutionary rule, has not abandoned the same ideas of agrarian expansion and penetration into Europe. May God preserve us from a successful Russian attempt to penetrate under the banner of Pan-Slavism or Pan-Orthodoxy.

Corneliu Coposu's analysis proved prescient about the negative consequences that Kremlin propaganda, disseminated through pseudo-Christian, Orthodox, and nationalist channels, has had on Romanian society in recent years. This study aims to demonstrate that over the past 10 years, Russia has consistently deployed "active measures" to expand its influence in Romania through pseudo-Christian and Orthodox channels.

**Keywords:** propaganda, Russia, Orthodoxy, Dughin, Romania.

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<sup>1</sup> This publication draws exclusively on open-source materials. The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the institution.

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## INTRODUCTION

Starting in 2014, Romanian-language media and social networks were flooded with news predicting an imminent, systemic collapse of Romania, critical comments against the West, articles proposing a return of Romanian society to a controversial conservatism with religious overtones, and medical conspiracies (in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic). These materials were heavily imbued with nationalist discourse indebted to interwar far-right ideology and Ceaușescu-era national-communism, and with fundamentalist and extremist interpretations of Orthodoxy. Nationalist or ultra-religious opinions were also disseminated, claiming that Romanians are threatened by imminent dangers coming from the West—despiritualization, abandoning tradition, and the disappearance of Orthodoxy.

The transmitted messages were not necessarily favorable to the political regime in Russia. Most of them aimed to discredit the EU, NATO, Ukraine, Romanian institutions, pro-Western politicians, as well as official positions of the Patriarchate in Bucharest.

The ideas of Russian propaganda were promoted by media outlets and institutions officially funded by the state budget of the Russian Federation, as well as by journalists/influencers from Romania, the Republic of Moldova, and the United States. Propaganda was also fueled by politicians and parties in Romania, as well as by non-governmental organizations promoting an agenda that ideologically claimed descent from interwar far-right movements – the Legionary Movement. Russian propaganda messages were also spread by individuals adhering to the cause out of conviction, as well as by nationalist and conservative voters (unrepresented following the disappearance of PRM and PNȚCD), and those who did not benefit from Romania's accession to the EU.

## HOW RUSSIA PENETRATED THE ROMANIAN-LANGUAGE ONLINE SPACE AND WHO IMPLEMENTED THE KREMLIN'S "ACTIVE MEASURES"?

Starting in 2014, a media project and a distribution network for pro-Russian propaganda were created for Romania. Iurie Roșca (former leader of the main unionist party in the Republic of Moldova – *Partidul Popular Creștin și Democrat*, whose political project failed following

the vote of support for pro-Russian president Vladimir Voronin) opened a special section dedicated to Romania on the Sputnik.md website.

During the same period, other Russian state-funded publications appeared in Romanian online media: *Rusia la zi*, *Vocea Rusiei*, *Russia Today*, *Vești din Rusia*. Roșca also created a *Sputnik Newsroom* dedicated exclusively to Romania, composed of former journalists who worked for the unionist newspaper *Flux* in the Republic of Moldova and journalists, influencers, and bloggers from Romania.

The media project was supported against an extremist backdrop that persisted and later re-emerged in post-communist Romania – Legionnarism – bringing together (former) journalists promoting Ceaușescu-era nationalism, as well as academics, researchers from the Romanian Academy, and university graduates who questioned the benefits brought to Romania by joining the EU and NATO. To these were added Orthodox clerics, Protestants, or influencers broadcasting a discourse that blended religious ideas with Romanian nationalism.

Sputnik narratives were heavily popularized on social networks during the 2018 referendum to amend the Romanian Constitution by NGOs and civic activists from Christian circles (united in the Coalition for Family, having links to similar structures in the Russian Federation and the West)<sup>3</sup>. A section of the leaders and influencers within the Coalition for Family were also found in far-right movements in Romania (Noua Dreaptă)<sup>4</sup>.

Iurie Roșca's efforts were complemented by organizing public debates to which Russian far-right ideologue Aleksandr Dugin was invited, alongside translating and publishing his books in Romania<sup>5</sup>. However, Dugin was already known to certain academic circles in Romania as early as 2011<sup>6</sup>. In his work *Foundations of Geopolitics*, Dugin proposed:

...a theoretical model for Romania's participation in the Eurasia Project... through the qualitative development of the cultural and social space linking the East (Russia) to the West (Europe), with this space assuming the identity of Orthodox European countries, while keeping national and cultural distinctive features intact (without dissolving them into the stereotypical world of globalism or succumbing to the influence of the American lifestyle that annihilates all ethnic characteristics)<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> See annex.

<sup>4</sup> Răzvan Filip, *What the leaders of the Coalition for Family are up to these days*, PressOne, 13.02.2022, <https://pressone.ro/cu-ce-se-mai-ocupa-zilele-astea-liderii-coalitiei-pentru-familie> accessed 23.06.2025.

<sup>5</sup> In 2017, Aleksandr Dugin and Nikolai Starikov visited Romania. Dugin launched his book *Eurasian Destiny*. Starikov was an admirer of Stalin, leader of a nationalist party, and an old friend of former Moldovan president Igor Dodon. <https://nstarikov.ru/prezentatsiya-v-rumynii-80980>

<sup>6</sup> "Cozmin Gușă, doctor in geopolitics", *Qmagazine*, 1.07.2011, accessed 23.06.2025.

<sup>7</sup> Aleksandr Dugin, *Foundations of Geopolitics*, vol. I, Eurasiatica Publishing, Bucharest, 2011, pp. 17–18.

In 2013, Dugin reconfigured his "geopolitical project" in another publication funded by the Russian state (*Voice of Russia*):

Entering this [Eurasian] Union, Romania could unite with Moldova, into which Transnistria would be reintegrated. Everyone would have something to gain!... In Europe, there is a negative and unfair perception of Romanians. I believe Romania's integration into the Eurasian space could take place under the sign of Orthodox cultural identity. Within the Eurasian Community, this country could solve its economic and territorial problems and, moreover, will be welcomed with joy<sup>8</sup>.

In 2014, Dugin visited several monasteries in northern Moldavia, including the private settlement at Dorna Arini belonging to Archbishop Teodosie, a known supporter of President Putin. Monasteries in northern Moldavia were not chosen by Dugin at random; it was public knowledge in Romania that they were permeable to Legionary ideology and propaganda opposing the Patriarchate in Bucharest (disseminated through the Bănceni Monastery in Ukraine).

In 2017, Dugin returned to Romania to launch his volume *Eurasian Destiny*, an occasion on which he created a blend of religious discourse, Russian nationalism, and Romanian nationalism, drawing even on the writings of interwar Romanian philosophers who supported the Legionnaire Movement:

There is an ideal, heavenly, eternal Russia. This is our deep identity, the way we would like to be, the way we dream of ourselves—our deep Russia. It does not always come to the surface, but it exists within us. Thanks to the teachings of philosophers who exerted an influence over me—Blaga, Eliade, Nae Ionescu, Ioan Culianu—thanks to these philosophers, I know there is also a heavenly and deep Romania, that Romania representing your eternal identity. It is Holy Romania, that Romania making a Romanian be Romanian. It is a dialogue between Holy Russia and Holy Romania, between deep Russia and deep Romania, between eternal Russia and eternal Romania.<sup>9</sup>

After Iurie Roșca was banned from entering Romanian territory (2021) and *Sputnik.md* along with other publications funded by the Russian state, were shut down (in the context of

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<sup>8</sup> Claudiu Zamfir, *PHOTO Aleksandr Dugin in Romania. Putin's ideologue met at Neamț and Dorna Arini Monasteries with several Orthodox priests and abbots*, Hotnews.ro, 25.06.2014 <https://hotnews.ro/foto-aleksandr-dughin-a-fost-in-romania-ideologul-lui-putin-s-a-intalnit-la-manastirea-neamt-si-manastirea-dorna-arini-cu-mai-multi-preoti-si-stareti-ortodocsi-surse-558551> , accessed 23.07.2025.

<sup>9</sup> Iulia Marin, *Dugin in Bucharest: "We, the Russians, have committed many injustices toward Romania"*, PressOne, 6.04.2017 <https://pressone.ro/dughin-la-bucuresti-noi-rusii-am-comis-multe-nedreptati-in-raport-cu-romania> , accessed 12.08.2025.

Russia launching its full-blown military aggression against Ukraine in 2022), pro-Russian propaganda with religious overtones continued to be distributed by individuals and NGOs previously active in the Coalition for Family, as well as through artificial intelligence/bots. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the authorities' decision to restrict access to churches during holidays, narratives regarding the curtailment of religious rights by authorities proliferated. At the same time, Orthodox and Protestant clerics with controversial, conspiracy-driven discourse contributed significantly to disseminating propaganda. The situation was amplified by the fact that these messages were picked up by extremist parties and NGOs promoting Legionnaire ideology.

Russia's "active measures" also included the direct involvement of Russian officials in promoting Christian values, as well as in efforts to court the far right and clerics sanctioned or defrocked by the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church. They were invited to official receptions organized by the Russian Embassy in Bucharest or were visited by Russian officials. Former priest and film director Ciprian Mega and Archbishop Teodosie fall into this category. Mega produced a film with a strong anti-Western message, was awarded twice at a film festival in Moscow, and appeared in photos alongside Russian MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova. Ambassador Vladimir Lipaev met with Archbishop Teodosie of Tomis<sup>10</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

Over the last 10 years, Russia has penetrated the Romanian-language online space with messages that distorted Orthodoxy by associating it with far-right anti-Western or national-communist discourse. These Kremlin "active measures" should not be confused with official Orthodox dialogue actions between the Patriarchate in Bucharest and the Patriarchate of Moscow and All Russia, which took place until the Russian Orthodox Church supported the war against Ukraine.

Initially, Moscow utilized publications subsidized by the Russian state and later benefited from the expansion of social networks. The promotion network for these "active

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<sup>10</sup> Alex Vlaicu, "Archbishop Teodosie caught alongside the Russian Ambassador at the Archdiocese of Tomis. Context of the meeting", *Adevărul*, 5.05.2025 <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-interne/societate/ips-teodosie-surprins-alaturi-de-ambasadorul-2441047.html> , accessed 14.07.2025.



measures" included both individuals without official roles and employees of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



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- Operating the RDI as a think-tank of the MFA;
- Integration of the RDI into an international network of similar relevant institutes.

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