

# Border ammo incident - a false flag operation used by Russian propaganda

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The detention of a truck carrying weapons at the Moldovan-Romanian customs post in Leuşeni-Albiţa quickly turned into an intense disinformation campaign against the governments in Chişinău and Kyiv. Moreover, the incident bears all the hallmarks of a false flag operation, i.e., a provocation deliberately organized to create political and diplomatic problems.

On the same day the truck was detained, a number of controversial political actors across the political spectrum, from leftwing populists Renato Usatîi and Victoria Furtună to right wingers like Vlad Filat and Dragoş Galbur, became active in Chişinău, spreading outright false information or at least erroneous speculation about the detained weapons and ammunition.

The internal narrative was that the government in Chişinău is corrupt and involved in arms and drug smuggling, or at least incompetent and powerless to stop this illegal trafficking. The external narrative focused on the corruption of the Ukrainian government, which was allegedly smuggling weapons received as Western aid. The conclusion: Ukraine should no longer be supported, either by Moldova or by its Western partners. The theme was quickly spread by the Pravda network and the Russian media.

In this analysis, we present a brief OSINT examination of publicly distributed images, the chronology of events and statements, the actors involved, and the narratives promoted.

## **What was actually in the truck?**

On November 20, at 1:30 a.m., a truck carrying weapons and ammunition of uncertain origin and with a fictive destination for Israel was detained at the Albiţa customs post. In other words, it is unclear where this truck came from and where it was headed. The vehicle belongs to S.P.-SOLAR SISTEM SRL, a civilian company specialized in construction materials and furniture, not military equipment. One of its founders, Veaceslav Pîrvu, says he knew nothing about it: a "friend" asked him to

export the cargo through the company. This mechanism is often used in smuggling networks: clean companies are used as a cover.

What we do know, however, is what was actually in the truck, based on the images released to the public. The weapons in those images **are not Western-made models, but Soviet and Russian models.**



The launch tubes visible in the image are extremely similar in shape, length, and rigid construction to the **RPG-26** and **RPG-27** single-use anti-tank rocket launchers. All weapons are of Russian/Soviet military origin, as evidenced by their design, colors, and markings. The beige tube at the bottom bears the inscription "MISSILE" in English. It is most likely the ["METIS"](#) or [Kornet/Fagot](#) system from the same range of Russian/Soviet launchers, intended for export. For example, all markings beginning with 9M133 refer to missiles for the Kornet series. It was widely exported and marked in English.

In other pictures, we also see Russian-made equipment:



The object in the image is most likely a portable surface-to-air missile system (MANPADS), most likely from the Russian [9K38 Igla](#) family or an earlier variant, the [9K34 Strela-36](#). It is also possible that it is the more modernized model from the same series, the "[Verba](#)."

To sum it up, **only Russian or Soviet models appear in the images and no Western-made equipment.** This information is essential to understanding the disinformation operation surrounding this incident, because the narratives being promoted are based on the idea that these weapons are *Western donations to Kyiv*, meaning they could only have come from Ukraine and only through smuggling.

### **Timeline of public reactions**

The truck was detained at 1:30 a.m. At 10:00 a.m., [Antena 3](#) in Romania published the first news story on the subject. In the next two hours, the information was picked up by Romanian online newspaper [Adevărul](#), then in Moldova by the websites [NOI.md](#), [Știri.md](#), and [Unimedia](#). On Telegram, the first channels to react were the pro-Russian anti-government [Гений Карпат](#) (Genius of the Carpathians) and [Sputnik Молдова 2.0](#). The latter also launched the basic narrative: Moldovan-Ukrainian corruption and arms trafficking from the West: "*It is strange that Maia Sandu's best friends in Ukraine, who serve as her role models and objects of admiration, did not smuggle more Patriots from there.*"

On the political scene, the first to react was the [Liberal Democratic Party](#) led by former prime minister Vlad Filat, who spent time in jail for corruption. The Lib Dems claimed the event was *"an extremely serious warning sign regarding the integrity of the institutions responsible for border control and the level of infiltration of criminal networks into customs operations."* Their post also linked this incident to claims circulated in recent days by the Moldovan opposition about an alleged increase in drug trafficking and consumption in Moldova.

The same narrative was taken up by two leaders of the Alternativa Bloc, a political alliance that claims to be pro-European, but whose members have well-documented ties to Russia. First to react was [Ion Chicu](#), prime minister under the pro-Russian president Igor Dodon and minister of finance during the oligarchic rule of Vlad Plahotniuc. Chicu was shortly followed by mayor of Chişinău [Ion Ceban](#), a „pro-European” politician that is under an entry ban to the Schengen space, issued by Romania because of his ties to Russia. Both Chicu and Ceban complained about incompetent authorities, risks to national security and linked the incident to drug trafficking.

Just minutes later, ex-president [Igor Dodon](#), leader of the pro-Russian Socialists, advances the narrative to the next level. He does not directly mention the truck with weapons, but attacks Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelensky's government for being authoritarian and corrupt. According to him, corruption in Kyiv is spreading to Chişinău, and the opposition must mobilize against this phenomenon.

The authorities in Chişinău reacted belatedly, following public statements by opposition politicians. The head of the Customs Service of the Republic of Moldova, Radu Vrabie, announced that the request for inspection came from Moldovan customs officials, but was carried out by the Romanian side because only they had the necessary scanning equipment.

However, Ion Chicu, Igor Dodon and Ion Ceban had already put all the pieces of the narrative puzzle on the table and the one to assemble them was the populist leader of Our Party, Renato Usatîi, who made his fortune in Russia and sought shelter there in 2014-2019 after a conflict with oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc. Usatîi launched the false claim that there were seven FIM-92 Stingers in the detained truck:

Însă Chicu, Ceban și Dodon reușiseră deja să pună toate piesele narrative sunt pe masă, iar cel care le unește este deputatul populist [Renato Usatîi](#). [Într-o conferință de presă](#), el lansează falsul că în camion ar fi fost cel puțin șapte muniții Sistem FIM-92 Stinger: *"If it was an RPG or something else of Soviet design, we could say that it came from Transnistria and that there is a problem. But, from public information, we know that this type of weaponry, this portable anti-aircraft system, over 3,000 units, was transferred from the US to Ukraine [...] It is clear that this weaponry arrived in the Republic of Moldova from Ukraine."*

[Victoria Furtună](#), a former prosecutor turned politician with the support of fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor and target by EU sanctions for destabilization attempts in Moldova, turned up the panic level by claiming the whole incident was planned by occult forces in order to drag Moldova and Romania into war with Russia. crește nivelul de panică și sugerează că forțe oculte ar fi încercat astfel să atragă Moldova și Ucraina în război cu Rusia. For the less conspiracy-minded public, former justice minister and PAS MP [Olesea Stamate](#), now in open conflict with her former party, complained of a "problem of procedure, competence, or integrity" and criticised the authorities' discourse on national security.

Former PM [Vlad Filat](#) then redoubled his efforts by publishing a lengthy essay, in both Romanian and Russian, about the incompetence and corruption of the authorities, as well as the alleged violation of the country's neutrality. Joining him from the right wing was [Dragoș Galbur](#), a political activist for the unification of Moldova and Romania. Galbur hit a somber tone warning that the worst was still ahead: "*Serious arms smuggling is yet to come, because every war in modern human history has been preceded by arms smuggling, increased crime, and many other ugly things.*" A bit later, another pro-unification leader, MP [Vasile Costiuc](#), chimed in, accusing Ukraine of trafficking weapons through the Republic of Moldova and criticizing the authorities in Chișinău for incompetence. Costiuc is the head of the "Democracy at Home" Party, the Moldovan partner of the Romanian far-right party AUR.

All these reactions were published in just half a day by politicians of all political stripes in Moldova, targeting diverse audiences with complementary messages.

At the same time, the Russian Federation's information ecosystem came into play. The Pravda network produced **37 articles** in 48 hours, all in English, with standardized lengths (54 to 1,025 words), with **16 texts marked as strongly negative**. The traffic displayed is huge — **over 531,000 "estimated" hits** per subdomain and up to **998,000 unique visitors** — but the actual interaction is zero: **0 reactions on Facebook, 0 views on YouTube**, and the **most "viewed" tweet has 176 views and 3 likes**. An author with 25,997 followers produced only one retweet. This is the classic profile of a propaganda machine: high volume, minimal real impact, but enough to introduce false urgency and panic into the public space.

The topic was quickly and widely covered by mainstream Russian media: [Взгляд](#), [Topwar.ru](#), [Tsargrad TV](#), [Ria Novosti](#), [Gazeta.ru](#), [TASS.RU](#), [Kommersant](#). The Russian outlets massively quoted Renato Usatî and spread the fake narrative about smuggled Stingers from Ukraine.

### **The goal of the operation**

The message is consistent: Moldova is a weak, corrupt state that poses a threat to the EU. Ukraine is a state that is losing control over Western weapons, and the Moldovan-Romanian border is becoming a symbol of instability in the "gray zone." The timing is also noticeable. Russian networks are actively spreading the message that "the weapons come from Ukraine, Moldova is just a corridor."

Overall, the narrative and chronological coordination of political and media reactions in Moldova and Russia suggests a planned operation. The ground seems to have been prepared in advance, including with the launch of the narrative about the alleged increase in drug trafficking in Moldova. The opportunity of this operation is most likely related to the corruption scandal in Ukraine surrounding Energoatom.

The minimum expected outcome is to influence public opinion in Moldova: to sabotage the Moldovans' solidarity with their neighboring country, to associate Ukraine with corruption and military danger, to undermining trust in Moldova's security institutions, and to discredit the PAS government as incompetent and corrupt.

The maximum desired outcome is to discredit Ukraine internationally, to use this incident to exacerbate the damage to its reputation after the Energoatom scandal, in order to reduce the level of political and military support for Ukraine from Western countries.

The authorities in Chişinău facilitated the spread of these narratives through their delayed and weak responses, which were scarce in details and information. Publicly, it is still not known exactly where the truck came from, where it was headed, or who organized the whole thing. The Moldovan police only announced that the truck **did not come from Ukraine** and that it arrested three people for their involvement in the transportation of the military cargo. What is definitely certain is that these are **not Western weapons**, as Russian propaganda claims, but Russian and Soviet models.

Based on the publicly available information, the entire incident has all the hallmarks of a false flag operation, most likely organized by pro-Russian agents.