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Kremlin Condemns Arrest of Pro-Russian Leader in Moldova's Gagauzia

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Vladimir Putin and Evghenia Gutul. **kremlin.ru**

The Kremlin on Wednesday condemned the arrest of the leader of Moldova's semi-autonomous Gagauz region, calling it a political move aimed at suppressing opposition to the country's pro-EU president.

Moldovan police arrested Gagauz leader Evghenia Gutul at Chisinau International Airport late Tuesday, placing her in custody for 72 hours. A Moldovan court last year opened a trial against Gutul on charges of funneling Russian funds to the now-banned pro-Russian Shor Party.

Gutul is affiliated with the Shor Party, whose exiled leader, Ilan Shor, allegedly received Russian financing — including from oligarch Roman Abramovich — to orchestrate destabilization efforts in Moldova. Last spring, Gutul traveled to Russia to seek support from President Vladimir Putin, claiming Moldova's authorities were trying to undermine her.

"The current Moldovan authorities are undoubtedly exerting blatant pressure on popular and active politicians who could rival [Moldovan President] Maia Sandu," Kremlin spokesman

Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

“We strongly condemn such actions and believe Chisinau should abandon these methods and allow all political forces in the country to operate freely,” he said.

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Russia’s Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, linked Gutul's arrest to Moldova’s upcoming parliamentary elections in July.

“As the parliamentary elections approach, opponents of the current authorities increasingly report arbitrary actions by law enforcement, saying the country has turned into a police state,” Zakharova said.

She accused Moldova of suppressing pro-Russian voices through criminal cases against opposition figures, censorship of Russian-language media and “immense pressure” on politicians and journalists favoring closer ties with Moscow.

Gutul’s detention follows the unexplained disappearance last week of two pro-Russian lawmakers — one sentenced to prison and the other awaiting a verdict on corruption charges similar to those against Gutul.

Gagauzia, a predominantly Russian-speaking, ethnic Turkic region in southern Moldova, has a population of 140,000. After being incorporated into the Moldavian SSR, it underwent significant Russification, strengthening its cultural and linguistic ties to Russia.

Following Moldova’s independence in 1991, Gagauzia sought and was granted autonomy in 1994. Since then, local leaders have frequently clashed with Moldova’s central government over cultural policies, economic development and foreign affairs.

Gutul’s June 2023 election victory remains unvalidated by Moldova’s Central Election Commission due to alleged campaign finance violations and foreign interference. She has been barred from Cabinet meetings and was recently sanctioned by the United States.

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