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Arrested Leader of Moldova's Gagauzia Asks Putin for Help in Securing Her Release

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Evghenia Gutul. **@evgheniagutul**

The head of Moldova's semi-autonomous region of Gagauzia has called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to pressure Moldovan authorities to release her from police custody after she was arrested earlier this week.

Moldovan police detained 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 her on charges of funneling Russian funds to the now-banned pro-Russian Shor Party.

In a statement published by her lawyers Thursday morning, Gutul urged Putin to use "all diplomatic, political and legal mechanisms" to pressure the Moldovan government to release her from police custody. She called her arrest an "open attack on our rights and freedoms, on everything that defines our identity."

Gutul also appealed to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for help in a separate statement published on her Telegram channel.

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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.

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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