Telegram’s Pavel Durov Accuses French Intelligence of Political Pressure in Moldova

Maria Cattini | 28/09/2025 | CYBERSECURITY

Pavel Durov, the founder of Telegram, has revealed a striking episode that allegedly unfolded in Paris about a year ago. According to his statement, French intelligence services approached him through an intermediary, asking for Telegram’s cooperation in removing certain Moldovan channels ahead of the country’s presidential elections.

The request, Durov said, came at a delicate moment. He was under legal pressure in France following his arrest order in August of last year. The French side reportedly suggested that “speaking well” of him to the judge could be part of the bargain if Telegram complied.

The First List: Clear Violations

Durov explained that Telegram initially reviewed the channels highlighted by the French and Moldovan authorities. Some were indeed in breach of Telegram’s rules, and those were taken down. The decision, he stressed, was not political but based strictly on platform policies.

The twist came afterward: the intermediary hinted that French intelligence would use Durov’s cooperation to influence judicial proceedings in his favor. For Durov, this was unacceptable. Either the agency really tried to sway a judge — which he considered interference in due process — or it manipulated his legal troubles to push a political agenda in Eastern Europe. He drew a parallel with similar dynamics observed in Romania.

The Second List: Political Voices

Not long after, Telegram received a second list of “problematic” Moldovan channels. This time, the picture was different. Most of the flagged channels were legitimate, Durov said, and complied fully with Telegram’s rules. Their only common trait: expressing political views disliked by the French and Moldovan governments.

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Telegram refused to act. “Telegram is committed to freedom of expression and will not remove content for political reasons,” Durov declared. His closing words carried a promise: he will continue to expose attempts to pressure Telegram into becoming a tool of censorship.

Why Moldova Matters

Moldova, a small Eastern European country wedged between Romania and Ukraine, has long been caught in a geopolitical tug-of-war. Elections there often become battlegrounds for influence between Western institutions and Moscow. Social media — and especially encrypted platforms like Telegram — play a central role in shaping narratives.

For governments, curbing disinformation is a stated priority. For Telegram, however, political neutrality is a cornerstone of its identity. Durov’s claims place this tension under a harsh spotlight: when does the fight against disinformation become political censorship?

Telegram’s Dilemma

Telegram has built its reputation as a platform that resists political pressure. From Russia to Iran, and now within the European Union, Durov has positioned the app as a defender of unfiltered communication. Yet this stance carries risks. Refusing government requests can lead to bans, legal action, or intensified scrutiny of the platform’s role in spreading harmful content.

In Moldova, where disinformation campaigns are a recurring threat, authorities argue that unchecked Telegram channels can destabilize elections. Critics counter that governments often conflate criticism with disinformation, using the label as a tool to silence opposition.

Broader European Context

Durov’s accusations also point to a wider trend: European states increasing their pressure on platforms to act against political content they consider harmful. In 2024, the EU’s Digital Services Act came into force, expanding obligations for platforms to monitor and remove illegal or misleading content.

For Telegram, which is not based in the EU but operates widely within it, the line between compliance and censorship is becoming increasingly thin. Durov’s decision to make this episode public seems designed to underline that distinction: Telegram, he insists, will act on clear rule violations, not on political convenience.

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What Comes Next

The revelation will likely spark debate in both France and Moldova. If confirmed, it raises questions about how intelligence agencies engage with tech platforms and the extent to which judicial processes can be entangled with political aims.

For Telegram’s users, the statement reinforces the app’s self-image as a bastion of free speech — but also highlights the constant negotiations behind the scenes, where governments, courts, and platforms clash over control of information flows.

As Moldova heads into another election cycle, and as European governments tighten their digital oversight, the battle between political power and platform independence is far from over. Durov’s warning is clear: Telegram intends to resist becoming a pawn.

Do you think platforms like Telegram should draw a harder line between illegal content and political speech? Share your thoughts in the comments.

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