

# Minorities, frozen conflicts and the Eastern Partnership in Moldova and Ukraine

25th -30th July, 2016, Chişinău

Ion Creangă Pedagogical State University

## SUMMARY OF THE SUMMER SCHOOL

The project aimed to develop future scenarios for the political and ethnographic development of the region with respect to frozen conflicts. In the first part, the foundations for joint work on the project were laid in an intercultural workshop. Since the participants have been influenced in different cultural contexts this segment contributed to a better understanding of the differences and similarities. In the second part, an overview of the current frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet area was given. The participants were informed about the different aspects and challenges of conflict resolution. The regional focus was on the conflicts in Transnistria and Eastern Ukraine, extended by conflict analysis from Central Asia and the Caucasus. Both causes of conflict and prevention mechanisms were discussed in those sessions. Each of the discussed conflict was examined by taking into account historical, social, political and regional factors. Through the expertise of the speakers from the respective regions, the local conditions and the international circumstances (including the options for action of the European institutions) could be taken into consideration. At this stage, also the European Neighbourhood Policy was explored, notably with regard to the prevention and resolution of regional conflicts. In the third part, then future scenarios for the frozen conflicts were developed by the participants under the guidance of the lecturing team.

## SCENARIOS FOR 2025

The project had mainly two objectives. Firstly, the participants were briefed on the Eastern Partnership and Eurasian Economic Union. This was the basis for understanding the current political situation in Moldova and Ukraine and the tensions between the EU and the Russian Federation. The existing conflicts and secessionist movements in both countries are steadily growing and challenging the international constellation between EU and Russia. A key role is played by the minority policy in Chişinău, and respectively, in Kiev. Second, the event served as a forum for innovative concepts of university and non-university education. The purpose of the workshop was to interconnect the teaching methods "simulation" and "scenario planning". Simulations are a didactic method to teach students certain facts while also developing "soft skills" such as communication and negotiation skills, rhetoric and social competences.



Photo credit: Christoph Schmeibach

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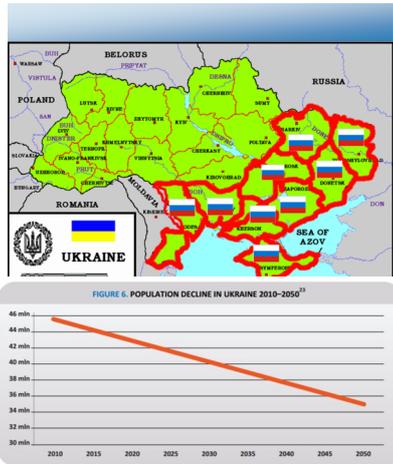
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## Worst Case Scenario Ukraine 2025



In 2025 Ukraine is wrapped into economical and political crisis. Ukraine is a federal state divided into 16 regions. Since 2019 the territory actually controlled by Ukraine has significantly decreased. Crimea belongs to the Russian Federation. Donetsk and Lugansk regions have declared independence. Following their example, Odessa, Mykolayiv, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizzhia, Kharkiv regions organized referendums and proclaimed their own people republics. The people republics united in the Republic of Novorossiia. The war between Ukraine and Novorossiia supported by the Russian army, started in 2020 and lasted till 2022, when Novorossiia joined the Russian Federation. Ukraine lost its access to the Black Sea. Zakarpatskyi region declared the referendum on independence which

would be held in the beginning of 2026.

Due to the war in the South-East of Ukraine and poor economic development, the amount of emigrants from Ukraine has significantly grown, whereas the level of brain drain from Ukraine increases. The main states the Ukrainians are moving to are Russia, EU member states (mainly Italy, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic), USA and Canada. The Hryvnia depreciated in five times comparing to 2016.

*“Since 2019 the territory actually controlled by Ukraine has significantly decreased.”*

### SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT

The scenarios were developed in group sessions. Scenarios uncover inevitable or near-inevitable futures

Pre-determined outcomes:

- Demographic trends,
- Economic action and reaction,
- The reversal of unsustainable trends,
- Scheduled events

#### Wild Card Event

The groups discussed in what ways a certain, unlikely but still possible, high-impact event (a «black swan») would change a scenario.

## “Winter is Coming“

Yulia Tymoshenko won the presidential elections in 2024. She has declared the social guarantees in her presidential campaign and, in particular, due to this gained her popularity again. She also promised to get back the territories Ukraine lost during the war with self-proclaimed Novorossiia.

Putin died in 2022. Prior to the presidential elections following his death, there was a rise of democratic movement in Russia with a few millions of people involved. However, the rebellion was crushed by the Russian troops. The leaders and participants of the movement were arrested, a few hundred of people died. Sergey Shoygu won the elections. “United Russia” is the only party represented in Russian parliament. Right afterwards Novorossiia was declared to be the region of Russia.

Transnistria was included to Russian Federation after the local referendum. Russia got the access to Transnistria through the Odessa region.

Ukraine does not recognize Russian jurisdiction over so-called Novorossiia. The UN Security Council is deeply concerned with Russia breaking international law. Russia is still the permanent member of the UN Security Council. The attempts to reform the decision making system in UN Security Council failed. The negotiations on the credit transfer from European commission to Ukraine will be held in Brussels. Following the exit of Great Britain from European Union, Greece, Austria and the Netherlands and France also left the European Union. The European Union is deeply concerned with Russia breaking the international law.

The European Union is suffering from terror attacks. The right wing parties accuse immigrants in carrying them out. The freedom of people and capital movement in European Union is subsequently limited due to the security restrictions measures. The Schengen zone does not exist anymore. Each member of the European Union has the control over its own borders. The right wing parties came to power in France, Austria and initiated their exit from the European Union. Ukraine neither became the member of the EU, nor received visa free regime with the European states. The European Union is developing alternative sources of energy. However, the European states still depend on Russian gas transferring. As far as the representatives of right wing parties in Europe declined the sanctions against Russia, the price for oil has increased. This enabled Russia to further be involved in the war conflicts on the South East of Ukraine and lead a strong military campaign in Arab states against ISIS and rebellions to the Assad regime.

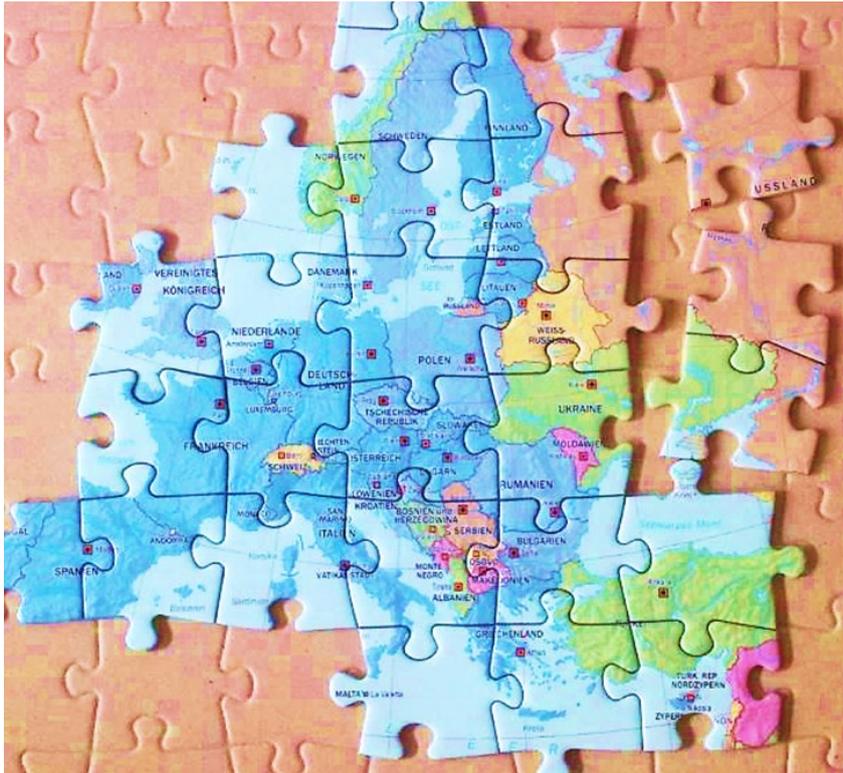


Photo credit: Christoph Schmeilbach

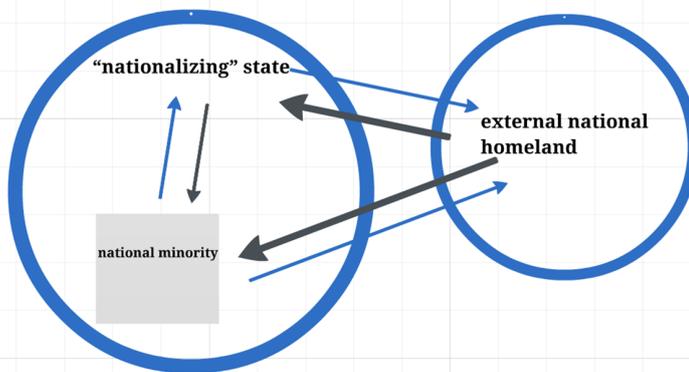
No end to the crisis in Donbas? A dissolving Ukraine in 2025

## Transatlantic Relations Matter

The USA controls the account transfers in the world within the FATCA system. Donald Trump being the US president for 2016-2020 was re-elected in 2024. The US sanctions against Russia withdrawn by Trump in 2017 are considered to be applied again. The USA leads the campaign against ISIS in Syria, North Africa, Turkey, Iraq. The Russian troops are also highly involved the war against ISIS. Assad is ruling Syria. The rebellions against Assad are supported by the USA, whereas the Russian Federation supports Assad. The Eurasian Union headed by Russia has grown from economic union of independent states to the supranational institution with its own legislative, executive and judicial authorities.

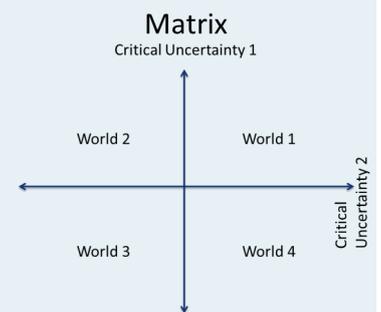
China organized a cyberattack on the Pentagon and some other strategic infrastructure objects and stole data, which they sold to Russian Federation. The scandal following the incident catalysed the negotiations of states on establishing cybersecurity system within the multilateral agreement. However, the representatives of the states have not agreed on the main provisions of the convention.

EU



## WHY SCENARIO PLANNING?

- To generate a solid set of scenarios that bound a plausible range of alternative trajectories given considerable uncertainty and several underlying drivers for change
- This establishes a framework a decision maker can use to develop strategies for dealing with each future scenario by:
  - Taking the “right” decisions to make “good” stories happen
  - Mitigating the impact of “bad” scenarios
- Scenario analysis is an effective tool for mitigating the impact of many cognitive biases, including:
  - Confirmation Bias
  - Premature Closure
  - Groupthink
  - Mirror Imaging
  - Anchoring Effect



## FROZEN CONFLICTS

- In international relations, a frozen conflict is a situation in which active armed conflict has been brought to an end, but no peace treaty or other political framework resolves the conflict to the satisfaction of the combatants.
- The term has been commonly used for the Post-Soviet conflicts in Central Asia, but the term has often been applied to other perennial territorial disputes.
- Post-Soviet conflicts are those conflicts which engulfed the countries of the former Soviet Union, in the time period beginning shortly before its official breakup in December 1991 and continuing until today.



## Best Case Scenario Ukraine 2025

It is assumed that by the year 2025 the international system will remain multipolar with a slight interchange in the balance of power. Unsurprisingly, China is expected to appear as a new global economic power, the EU political influence is perceived to decrease, whereas the USA is believed to preserve its stable role in the world politics.

In the framework of this three major actors, Russia is considered to approach the eve of its “collapse” as the world's big power due to a number of reasons. First and foremost, Russia's economy is going to struggle tremendously not because of the maintenance of the EU sanctions for non-accomplishing Minsk Agreements, but primarily due to its high investments in the military sector.

Constantly increasing military expenses and degree of corruption, devaluation of the national currency, as well as unsatisfying demographical index might together lead to mass depression of the Russian people. This pro-

cess may also be accelerated by the high involvement of Russian men in military conflicts all over the world.



Photo credit: Christoph Schmelbach

*Ukraine will opt for the European option*

## “On Equal Terms with the World: Puppet Game Over“

In the policy of “closed doors”, which Donald Trump is expected to exercise in his presidency, primary focus will be placed on domestic issues. Reduce of the financial funding for the EU and the developing countries, including Ukraine, as a result, is to observe. Cautious partnership with Russia will be developed regardless of Mr. Trump's contemporary sympathy with Vladimir Putin. Meanwhile, an increased interest towards more close cooperation with China is to expect.

### Uprising Chinese Power

Expectedly enough, China is perceived not to cease prospering owing to strong economic and education reforms. It is believed to appear as a new super-economic power in the world where it

might even overrate the USA. Due to steadily increasing population rates, the country might expand its territory and go beyond the Russian borders on the South East. The armed conflict between China and Russia is likely to appear over the part of the Eastern-Siberian region which is currently given to the Chinese Huaie Sinban Company for agricultural purposes. Russia would probably strive to get its lands back on the pretext of the illegal settlement of the Chinese in the area not given for exploitation. An involvement threat of a Russian army into a new armed conflict might lead to the upraise of revolution towards existing political regime, whereby new appeared independent states will enter and strengthen the existing world's multipolarity, as a result.

## The EU with Ever Strong Intergovernmental Ties

No “domino” effect in the European Union after Brexit is believed to take place largely due to the overall slowing down of “ever-closer” political integration. The process of Brexit itself is going to be suspended due to the overcomplicated bureaucratic nature of the EU, which will help to maintain the existing number of states within the union. Intergovernmental approach is assumed to prevail due to the representation of the right win parties in many national governments. Each member state will strive to develop bi- and/or multilateral partnerships individually – as Germany now does it with its Nord Stream Pipe Project – which in turn believed to weaken influence of the EU as an unanimous, supranational entity. On the other hand, the EU will succeed in stabilizing its economic and refugee crises owing to the effective implementation of the “2020” and “2030” Energy Strategies, as well as complete integration of earlier arrived refugees. Interestingly, how weakened Russian interventions in the Syrian conflict due to its own inner-state separatist movements will foster stabilization of the current EU situation, meaning that no new massive refugee waves are to expect.

# Ukraine`s Outlook

Ukraine, being only a spot on the map of the previously described multipolar world, manages to shift substantially towards a more active international position. This is made possible thanks to the certain tendencies in the situation of the global actors, mentioned above, as well as to profound inner processes.

## Resolution of the Armed Conflict

The Anti-Terrorist Operation in Ukraine (ATO) was turned off by the Ukrainian government after the elections in 2019. No further proceeding of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and (Luhansk People's Republic) LNR on the Ukrainian territory could be observed, although no progress in implementing the Minsk agreements had been achieved either. However, lately Russia, undermined by the increased separatist movements on its territories, has been forced to withdraw its military forces from the Donbas region. Subsequently, the financing of the so-called people's republics has ceased. The infrastructure and social services have somehow been maintained by the efforts of the local people, but they are on the verge of destruction. All initial leaders of the republics having been replaced by mere executors, who've now fled to the Russian Federation, people have no further aspirations. The fear of the Russian civic war spreading on their area encourages the inhabitants to develop the dialog with the Ukrainian government. The latter launches social rehabilitation programs and declares amnesty to Ukrainian citizens who've been involved on either side of the conflict. Slow reintegration of the region into Ukrainian economic space seems to take place.



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*“The 2017 Eurovision song contest, held by Ukraine, became a demonstration of the ever-high European capability of the country, which gave a hint to international tourism.”*

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## Crimean Issue

Nothing has changed in official Russian rhetoric towards the peninsula after its being included into the Southern Federal District. Gradual abandonment of the Crimean needs and the obligatory service in the Russian army appeal no more to the citizens. The supplies from Russia have become scarce due to the inner-state turbulence. Moreover, the struggling Russian media endeavors to blame the Crimean people as a “burden”, which has contributed to the current decline. The crisis is used by the Ukrainian government to start negotiations with the local authorities. Renewing of economic ties is accompanied by the discussion on the possibility of the return of Crimea.

## Restructuring From the Bottom

Ukraine has faced a few more years of recession since 2016. Still, eventually the reforms and corruption fighting, initiated after the Revolution of Dignity, show their results as the economic and social indexes improve. The significant limitation of the international aid from the EU and the USA has turned out bearable, for Ukraine has no further military expenditures. Allocating the national wealth in the human sector and economics is considered a priority of the new generation of Ukrainian politicians and specialists. The hazard of a new turmoil, which was in the air in 2018, was overcome by the truly democratic election with new names and parties. In 2016 hardly any of the today politicians were acting on the public scene, including the president of the cadence 2019-2024.

Having obtained the power during the 2019 presidential and parliament elections and received a fresh inflow in 2024, they represent the European-oriented majority of the Ukrainian society, with an

objective view on the state's Euro-Atlantic integration perspectives and a prime focus on the national interests. Realizing that the balanced political socialization from the earliest age is a corner-stone of a strong nation, the government puts emphasize on patriotic education, at the same time promoting mutual tolerance and intercultural values. Positive amendments in Ukrainian economy are achieved by paying attention to such market niches as the IT-sector and bio-technologies alongside with the traditional branches. Restoration of Donbas coal mines is expected to boost Ukraine's industry, especially its metallurgy, in several years. Gas independency from Russia is reached to an excessive extent by renewable energy production technologies, in which sphere Ukraine cooperates actively with the EU.

## Ukraine as an International Player

Ukraine has become neither a member of the EU nor the NATO ally. However, the Membership Action Plan has been signed recently with the Alliance. As for the EU, Ukraine gradually implements the EU acceptance requirements, making all possible benefits of the Association Agreement. A change of policies within the EU leads to the prevalence of the economic relations over political. Ukraine tries to stay aside from the clashes between the “big players” and proceeds in the international branding of itself. Inter-cultural and educational events and public diplomacy serve as tools for this purpose. The 2017 Eurovision song contest, held by Ukraine, became a demonstration of the ever-high European capability of the country, which gave a hint to international tourism. The efforts of the Ukrainian government to end the informational war between Russia and Ukraine and dispel the atmosphere of hatred have been much appreciated by the UN.



Photo credit: Christoph Schmelbach



## Worst Case Scenario Moldova 2025

The European Union continues to exist, but political, economic and military relations will be governed primarily by bilateral or limited multilateral relationships. Members of the EU refuse an idea of “ever closer” union and creating a supranational organisation. Tendency to disagreement on “ever closer” union we can observe in Global Attitudes Survey 2016 provided by Pew Research Centre. In the majority of states people don’t support the idea to transfer more power to EU.

The European Union in 2025 will stay an important economic power, but not political or military. Brussels will not be able to provide Common Foreign and Security Policy and create EU army. EU is concentrated on own internal problems and lose its ability to become a united and influential actor on international stage.

Because of concentrating on internal problems EU will limit European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership Policy. Support of democratisation process in Eastern European non-EU member states will not be on EU political agenda.

European left and right-wing political parties are continuing to get more supporters and increase influence on state policy. Level of political competition will be high and represent high level of political and cultural tension in states.

After Brexit some other member states will leave the EU. Because of feelings that they will be stronger without EU, such countries as Denmark, Netherlands could also leave the EU. Also Greece could be pushed out by other EU countries.

### WILD CARD EVENTS

First “wild card”.

Every year, thousands and thousands Moldovans are applying for Romanian passports, especially when Russia will forbid Moldovan working emigrants on its territory. The percentage of Moldovan-Romanians will increase. Together with a strong lobby in Romania and Moldova, that can lead to final unification of Moldova with Romania. Even if Romania will not be anymore part of EU, Moldova will get strong support from its bigger neighbour. But the fact is that Moldova will lose its independence and the country will disappear from the world map. Then the territory of Moldova will become automatically a part of European Union and NATO with their values, rules and laws. Is it good? is it bad? Who knows.

The second “wild card”.

The situation, when European Union starts to lose its members can cause the wave of protests inside the country. The pro-European ideas of Moldovan integration will lose the actuality due to dismemberment of the EU. That will lead to success of pro-Russian parties, such like socialist party of Moldova and the communist one. Note, the biggest political party of Moldova today is a socialist one.

The relations with Russia will get much better, conflicts between Chisinau, Comrat, Tiraspol and Moscow will be not so “hot”. The strong wish of European integration of big part of the population will be ignored. That again can cause some inter-ethnic problems within the country.

## NATO. Strengthening, but no Enlargement.

NATO remains one of the most important and influential security organizations in the world. We will observe the relative withdrawal of the USA from the international affairs and moderate policy towards the other international actors. Still with the decline of the EU and EUexit tendencies, the European-NATO members will feel a strong need to secure their borders. This is mostly the reason for deepening cooperation between member states and activeness of the NATO forces in the Europe and on its borders.

From the theoretical point of view, the NATO development may be explained in the following way. The limited interference of the EU in the international relations outside the EU, especially dropping the attempts to enforce CFSP and its concentration on the internal problems creates the situation, when the vacuum of power in the region appears. This means that this empty space in security of the European countries should be occupied by other actor. We suppose that this will potentially lead to the growing interests in NATO-cooperation and strengthening the position of the block through new military bases in EU countries as well as the EUexit countries and possible members of the NATO like Georgia.

NATO will try to expand its influence on the countries of eastern Europe and potential members offering them deeper cooperation, promising though only the possibility of becoming its member.

The most probable is the accession of Georgia, as according to the Warsaw summit in July 2016, NATO confirmed all the previous agreement, made in 2008 in Bucharest. Nevertheless, this is the long-term perspective and does not have any fixed time limits. That is why we suppose that none of the countries will be joining NATO as a member in the next 10 years.

The border region, which includes Ukraine and Moldova, will remain the buffer zone, where both NATO and Russia will be trying to promote its interests and values. NATO will support military cooperation with Moldova and Ukraine.

The constellation of power between NATO and Russia will remind some kind of cold war of limited scope. This means that both will remain the strongest actors in the world in the military sphere, but taking in account growing multipolarity, development of other new actors, competition with them, internal problems and relative power decline by both sides, there will be no direct confrontations between the parties. NATO will restrain the aggressive Russian foreign politics. Russia will be considered as a failed stated, though strong in its military capacities and possibility to use force against the enemy.



Photo credit: Christoph Schmelchen

*Europe in 2025: A process of continuing disintegration?*

## USA. Not that Big an Actor.

In 2025, the USA remains the major economy, strong state in political and military sense. It will, on the other hand, be less involved in the world processes as it will follow more moderate position. The country will think twice before engaging in that or this case, there will be some kind of self-insulation of the States, with the concentration on the economy, which should be able to compete with the new economic giants, and internal issues. The internal problems in focus might be also the refugee policy, growing criminality and terrorism. What will ensure the possibility of growing independence of the USA is the self-reliance on energy sources, dropping export etc. The USA will give up the role of top-priority pacifier and responder to each major problem or conflict in the world and its foreign policy will be more or less selective.

The direction of the USA internal development depends much on the results of the soon-coming president elections. There is the huge chance that the USA will convert in “almost a friend” of Russia or at least “no more the enemy”, if Trump wins. There already are evidences that Putin supports Republicans in the elections. Due to its help in their campaign, the pro-Russian trends in USA policies might emerge with unbelievable force.

Russia: survived but unstable

Within the next 9 years Russia’s economy will continue relying on natural sources. According to World Bank Commodity Forecast Price Data April 2016 oil prices will grow. It will provide a certain level of economic stability.

Because of lack of EU member states common position, Europe will withdraw sanction against Russia. Russian authorities will have good established relations with some politicians, especially right-wing and left parties, which will be in power in some EU states in that time. Russian lobby will increase not only in EU, but also in US.

Separatism movements in Russia will strengthen, but the country will save its territory. To calm the separatist tendencies, Moscow will appoint more regional manager with military background. Because of separatism, central authorities will use more authoritarian methods against own citizens to overwhelm regions. It will make Moscow as centre even stronger.

Because of permanent confrontation in Russia’s political elite, western countries will not consider Russia as a reliable partner. Russia does have a massive nuclear strike force distributed throughout the hinterlands. Danger, that someone inside of Russia will assume it, force NATO to increase own presence in Eastern Europe but not confront Moscow direct. United Russia will be considered the lesser evil comparatively to several unstable areas instead.

Eurasian Economic Union continues to be an economic union without significant political value. Potential new members such as Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan will not make a union stronger.

## WORST CASE MOLDOVA

In 2025 Moldova will remain a victim of big game of big players, such as NATO and Russia. Because of great problems in European Union, by 2025, the question about future accession of Moldova to the EU will disappear. All the grants and money for Moldovan development and reforms will stop coming. That will cause very deep social-economic crisis. Thousands of migrants from Moldova will leave the country forever. The number of population will strongly decrease. Hundreds of villages throughout the country will represent abandoned ruins, like some of them are nowadays.

Romania will still be a part of European Union, that is why the pro-European and pro-NATO positions in Moldova will remain strong. The political elite of Moldova will try to protect the country from Russian possible invasion, increasing the cooperation with NATO. Parallel with this, NATO members, specially the USA and those situated close to Russia, will initiate the process of strengthening the presence of NATO in Moldova. And again, the question about unification with NATO will not stay, because of a big part of Moldovan people who do not agree with that.

The cooperation and common military exercises will provoke Russia to act. Using the situation, that a big part of Moldovans are working in Russian cities, Russia will make the process of getting permission for Moldovans to work in Russia almost impossible. The most important source for Moldovan economy will be shut down.

The price for natural gas will increase for Moldova significantly. That will increase the number of protests and conflicts in Moldova, specially the conflicts between Chisinau and Gagauzia, Transnistria and another pro-Russian regions of the country. Anyway, the political course of the country will be still oriented to the West. Being pressed from three parts – NATO, Russia and local population – any attempt of Moldovan government to implement some changes and reforms will fail. It will become a hub for international contraband, criminal, human trafficking etc.

Transnistria, Gagauzia and some northern pro-Russian regions – will declare the total removal from Chisinau policy. Taraclia region populated by Bulgarians will unify with Gagauzia autonomous state. They will introduce border control and will set their own governments, but because of its small territory, population and budget, will not be able to declare independence. Because of limited resources Chisinau will not be able to change the situation. Thus, by 2025 we will have one territory, divided on 3 or 4 small independent countries. Since Moldova will become a buffer zone between two great military powers – NATO and Russia, both parts will be interested in Moldova to remain neutral and weak. The main idea of this scenario is that this indeterminacy of Moldova, that we see since its independence till nowadays, will lead the country to disorder, poverty and final disintegration.

## BIG PLAYERS

The United States is still the only real super-power in the world and it remains committed to its global leadership position in the world. US government continues to support its European partners (especially those in the Eastern Europe), provides military, financial, technical and consultative support for the countries conducting reforms in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) group among which there is also the Republic of Moldova. The strategy of Washington is based on the deterrence of Russia, defending Russia's neighbours in the near-abroad (including Moldova) and creating the security belt in the Eastern Europe (on the borders of the NATO-countries).

The EU at the same time continues deep cooperation with Washington and NATO in the economic and security areas. At the same time Brussels plays more active role in the EaP region as well: provides investments, security, elaborates energy efficiency programs and common infrastructural projects with Moldova. EU actively stimulates and rewards the reforms conducted in the EaP-countries among which there is the Republic of Moldova as the most actively reforming state in the EaP region.

China economy grows (not with the same pace actually) and Beijing plays more active geopolitical role in the Eurasian region further marginalizing Russia's position in the region. China turns out to be a powerful pole of attraction for the South-Asian states and countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan etc). At the same time India is growing steadily and competes with China for the leadership in the Asia as well.

Russia at the same time is more focused on internal socio-economic problems, growing grievances among Russian citizens and protest activity in the country. In order to avoid further deepening of economic crisis (as well as to get rid of sanctions, get access to the Western technologies, investments etc) Moscow is seeking rapprochement with the West and is trying not to provoke the situation in the near-abroad that might be negatively perceived by the West.

## Best Case Scenario Moldova 2025

The world in 2025 looks different when compared to the situation that was a decade ago. Since 2016 the geopolitical and economic situation in the world substantially changed. The EU has managed to cope with the most acute challenges to its internal stability and unity (Brexit crisis, uncontrolled migration from the Middle East, Russian aggressive actions in the European borderlands etc) through more enhanced economic as well as political and military cooperation with the United States, NATO and further deepening of partnership and support of the Eastern Partnership countries (including Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova). Russian influence as a regional power was substantially undermined by the Western sanctions and low prices for natural resources (oil, gas) on the global markets due to the e-mobile revolution, renewable-alternative energy, return of Iran to the oil-market and shale gas technology development worldwide.

These global tendencies and conditions creat-

ed a "window of opportunity" for the positive transformations and reforms in the Republic of Moldova. The reforms have been supported and effectively implemented by the stable and consolidated pro-European coalition of the new political parties in the Republic of Moldova, which have been effectively moving the reformed country towards the European future. Besides, the Chisinau has initiated the important steps in the last decade to achieve the rapprochement and eventually – the successful reintegration of the breakaway unrecognized territory of 'Transnistria' into the body of the Republic of Moldova. The reintegration of Transnistria became possible due to the steadily growing in the period of 2016-2025 discrepancies in the living standards (GDP per capita, average salaries, unemployment rate etc) of Moldova (right bank of Dniester, mainland) in comparison to those in the steadily collapsing Transnistrian de facto state.

## "The Return of the Prodigal Son"

Brexit crisis in the European Union has made concerns that many countries of Western Europe share (about the uncontrolled work migration from the Eastern Europe to the rich Western states) a part of the political agenda of Brussels. In order to avoid further exit tendencies in Western Europe (Netherlands, Denmark, France etc) the EU has elaborated the strategy aimed at consolidation of the statehood and economic development in Eastern Europe as well as in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) states including Moldova. The goal that Brussels has stated and somehow achieved – to make Moldovans (as well as citizens of other EaP countries) interested to stay in Moldova and not to migrate in the Western Europe seeking for job opportunities. Direct investments of the EU into Moldova,

developing infrastructure, creating new working places in the region has stimulated during the last decade many young and active Moldovan citizens to rather stay at home (many of them have returned back to the Republic of Moldova). An important investment area was education that seems crucial in preparing qualified specialists for the steadily growing industrial sector of Moldovan economy. Romania turned out to be one of the leading investors in the Moldovan economy due to the language-cultural proximity, neighbourhood and geopolitical considerations. The high-added value production has raised its share in the Moldovas GDP for the last decade (the potential growth points might be the food industry, beverages, IT-sector).



The unfavourable tendencies on the global natural resource markets (especially of gas, oil) as well as the worsening of the general economic situation in Russia have substantially limited its ability to 'invest' in support or provide with resources the Moscow-led Eurasian Union as well as the the proxy-states of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia (possibly also Donbas breakaway republics of DPR and LPR). Otherwise, in order to pour more fresh blood in the dead-born geopolitical project of Eurasian Union Moscow might try to push unrecognized states to join this union in the nearest future.

# NATO

The NATO plays more active role in the Eastern Europe now seeing more clearly the source of threat to the security and stability of Europe coming from Russia. Moldova has reached a deep, enhanced partnership with with NATO without membership in order not to provoke Moscow and push unrecognized de facto republic of Transnistria away from Chisinau. At the same time, Romania as a NATO-member widely supports and assists the reforms in the security sector of its closest neighbour and partner that is the Republic of Moldova. Moldovan military forces actively participate in the military trainings conducted by NATO in the Black Sea region, in the bilateral trainings with the Romanian army with the special focus on the preparation for the possible local security threats in the South-Eastern part of Europe (such as the possible aggression coming from Crimea, Transnistrian enclave etc.).

The most important part of the NATO support and cooperation with Chisinau must be the provision of modern and efficient weaponry to Moldovan military forces which would substantially enhance the defensive capabilities of the country especially in the Dniester region and should raise the price (for Moscow and Tiraspol) of possible military intervention coming from Transnistria.

## UN, OSCE, REFORMS, MIGRATION, POLITICAL SYSTEM AND FOREIGN POLICY

The UN in cooperation with the OSCE will to 2025 elaborate the detailed strategy of reintegration of Transnistria into Moldova which will be proposed for the public deliberation in Moldova. The strategy will provide the roadmap of all the steps (with clearly defined time-schedule) which in future will make possible smooth reintegration of Transnistria into Moldova. The steps will include the gradual demilitarization of the region controlled by the international observers, creating interim government in Transnistria led by the international organizations, preparing elections and return of the national sovereignty of Moldova in the region.

The economic reforms of the next decade in Moldova will be focused on the reforms of the energy sector (attraction of investments in the development of alternative/renewable energy), diversification of energy supply, transparency and deregulation. The EU will provide Moldova as its EaP partner with the substantial support and investments in the areas mentioned above. Also the important direction of reforms will be combating corruption and creation anti-corruption institutions, reform of the law enforcement agencies, developing institutions, human rights and minorities protection, democracy and education.

Moldovan citizens prefer to stay in Moldova and those citizens who have migrated earlier to the EU-states – turn back to Moldova due to the steadily improving economic situation in the country (emerging new industries, jobs, raising salaries and improvement of the social security system), on the one hand, and the growing pressure and competitiveness on the labour-market in the Western Europe (due to the migration waves from the Middle East), on the other hand. The wave of out-migration from Transnistria either to Ukraine or to the right bank of Dniester (mainland of Moldova) due to the growing discrepancy in the standards of living on the two banks of Moldova – further devas-

tates Transnistrian economy and brings it to the brink of the complete collapse.

The deepening cooperation with the EU (Romania – soft power) brought tangible economic benefits to the Republic of Moldova within the last decade. This by-turn enhanced the internal electoral support of new pro-European parties in Moldova (new generation of transparent political parties instead of old corrupted oligarchic parties).

The rise of new generation of transparent political parties became possible due to the legislative changes limiting the financial factor in politics. New political parties of the pro-European orientation united and created the parliamentary coalition of parties “For Moldova as an integral part of the European family”. The united and consolidated pro-European elites have elaborated an action plan of reforms necessary to become an associate member of the EU which started to be implemented.

At the same time the Moldovan government in Chisinau (1) creates the Ministry of Reconciliation and Reintegration of Moldovan State (dealing with national minorities, dialogue and reintegration of Transnistria); (2) the profile Ministry initiates the program/strategy for rapprochement and reintegration of Transnistria into Moldova with the help-assistance of international organizations and partners (OSCE); (3) working groups on different issues (demilitarization, economic elections, adjustment of laws, reconciliation with Transnistria etc).

Through the smooth, step-by-step implementation of the strategy of reintegration for Transnistria to the year 2025 Chisinau comes close to the possibility of re-establishing its territorial entity as an administrative (territorial) autonomy within Republic of Moldova (with its political institutions, a wide range of administrative, local, cultural rights for self-governance BUT with the full sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova over this territory – that means common for the whole territory of Moldova police, military, judiciary etc.).

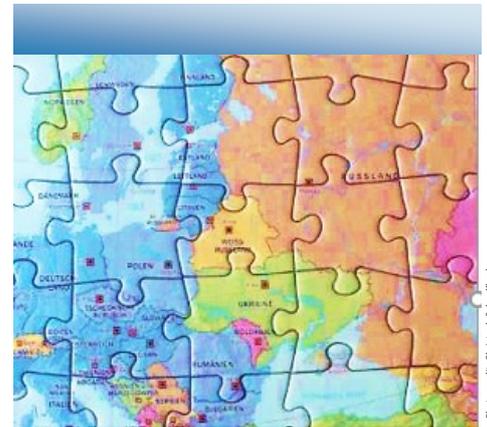


Photo credit: Christoph Schieblich

## SANCTIONS

Sanctions imposed on Russia (at least the ‘Crimean package’ of sanctions with the somewhat limited ‘Donbas package’) continue to be in force in 2025 creating chronic economic trouble for the Russian Federation. Due to the sanctions Russia has a limited access to the foreign financial markets and necessary for the energy sector Western technologies. These structural limitations lead to a reduction in the oil and gas extraction in Russia. At the same time, the decreased extraction (=export) of oil and gas is supplemented by the rather low prices for the oil/gas on the global resource markets. This price reduction for the energy resources during the last decade (2015-2025) would be dictated by the next tendencies and factors: 1) the expansion of electric car technology (Tesla) in the automobile industry; 2) the growing export of oil by the USA, countries of Persian Gulf and return of Iran on the global market; 3) shale gas revolution in Europe and Asia; 4) slowing economic growth in China etc. The reduction of oil/gas extraction in conjunction with rather low oil/gas prices on the global resource markets substantially reduces the financial ability of Russia to support its geopolitical projects (such as Eurasian Union) as well as its proxy-regimes in the post-Soviet area (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia etc.). The burden of sanctions and limited financial resources will undermine the ability of Moscow to provide political regime in Tiraspol with necessary support. The necessity at the same time to somehow deal with the Donbas proxy-states and Crimea (that is under sanctions) will also devastate the resources of Moscow. These objective structural tendencies will most probably directly or indirectly cause the worsening of socio-economic situation in Transnistrian unrecognized republic. To respond on the growing challenge to the stability of the situation in the ‘republic’ the authorities and political elites in Transnistria will be forced to initiate the negotiations with official Chisinau about the possibility of further rapprochement and even reintegration. The dialogue started in 2022 and closer to the year 2025 there is some progress achieved which makes the future reintegration of the breakaway republic on the conditions beneficial to Chisinau highly probable.

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## Disclaimer

Responsibility for the information and views set out in this publication lies entirely with the authors of the respective scenarios. The groups were randomly distributed and consisted of both Moldovan and Ukrainian participants.

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# Notes