

THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN FUTURE SCENARIOS FOR THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP 2030

Natalia Stercul

*Program Director, Department of Eastern Studies:
Ukraine and Russia, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova*

The Eastern Partnership as a regional dimension of the Eastern Neighborhood is one of the most successful initiatives that have brought positive dynamic transformations in a wider region. Moldova has essentially changed over the past decade due to excellent platform of the EaP, building a sustainable network between EU and the partner countries. The collective efforts have brought considerable benefits including to the Moldovan citizens in different areas.

The future context of the EaP countries development depends on quality of lessons learned during the last ten years and capabilities to resist challenges that lay ahead. The future scenarios for the Eastern Partnership 2030 reflect the possible ways of changes, based on the narratives of global politics transformation.

The socio-political modeling of developments in the region respectively, framed in four EaP scenarios: Pragmatic Integration, Russian Hegemony Revisited, EU Pivot to Moscow, and Civic Emancipation scenario. Therefore, there were elaborated the country-specific scenarios according to the above-mentioned set ups aimed to enhance the usefulness of scenario narratives through the political and socio-economic development paths.

Moldova's future within these scenarios is defined by the main tendencies based on the situation on the ground. Also, found on the identification of major driving forces that represent key factors and process that influence the subsequent development and building images of the future, taking into account the specifics of the links between driving forces: political, institutional, economic, social, cultural, technological, educational and demographic.

The Pragmatic Integration scenario for Moldova assumes no essential change in terms of geopolitical tensions and general domestic policy's parameters, except for the continued implementation of the Association Agreement and DCFTA with EU, improvement of the foreign trade performance and progression of economic development, especially the agricultural and agro-food sector. This scenario is based on the realistic view of the Moldova's future and can be regarded as an illustration of the pragmatic integration and concentration on the economic interdependence between the EaP countries.

Russian Hegemony Revisited – this scenario suggests the strengthening of Russian influence in Moldova. A lack of good governance, transparency and low level of democracy, increased corruption at all levels, highly dependence on major foreign actors' policy, lead towards the subversion of Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The settlement of the

Transnistrian conflict is artificially prolonged. At the same time, the high concentration of state power in the narrow political interests of a small oligarchic group affects the entire economic, political and social development of the country. Subsequently, the Moldovan citizens continue to leave the country in search of a better life and the population is clearly reducing, while the country is losing its main work forces. In a zero-sum process, Moldova comes under pressure, with destructive tendencies of domestic development and governance. This is the most pessimistic scenario for Moldova, which reflects the possible way of long-term stagnation with dire consequences.

EU Pivot to Moscow - illustrates the situation when many within Moldova's political class are supportive of partnering with Russia and new parties emerge which take a pragmatic approach towards the changed external situation. While there is some optimism about closer economic cooperation, Moldova's main political and socio-economic problems continue to prevail. Moldova's dependence of the Russian energy resources represents an obvious internal vulnerability of the state. In the framework of this not the worst-case scenario, instability remains the central issue. At the same time, this scenario can be understood as plausible description of a possible Moldova's future. This is an alternative image about the choice of Moldovan development we face today.

Civic Emancipation – this scenario develops practical foresight by identifying the general trends as a result of growth of the activism and reformist sentiments of civil society. There is an understanding that the ability to change the political situation in the country directly depends on the level of political literacy of the population. More attention is focused on education, strengthening the civic position of the younger generation and activism of civil society. Electoral literacy is improving. The legal foundation of democratic state is gradually being strengthened in Moldova. Meanwhile, the country maintains an apparent neutral position in terms of foreign policy. The scenario is more oriented on the youth consolidation through education and raising the active civic position among young generation that might change the pessimistic sight of country's future.

These scenarios examine the different trajectories that Republic of Moldova could take out to the next decade. In addition, reveal that inertia will not bring to preferred outcomes for Moldova. In the conditions of considerable uncertainty, forecast analyses such as these scenarios are critical for policy-makers. The vision of how the future of the country may unfold is important for taking measures and action to draw the optimal further development course.

Which scenario will win out? The most likely scenario is not the key question, but improving the incentive-based mechanism by building deep and pragmatic cooperation between the EaP countries is the answer. The synergy and convergence of activities would become the keystone to succeed in achieving sustainable development of the entire region according to the European standards and values. As a result, the EaP countries can maximize its benefits and advantages and best compete in a rapidly changing world.