

# Moldova's External Vector(s) After the 2025 Elections: Between 'Pro-EU', 'Hedging Foreign Policy with a pro-Russian Tendency' and 'Alternative' Scenarios

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## Summary

On 28 September, Moldovans will go to the polls in what promises to be historic parliamentary elections. Their outcome remains uncertain. A variety of scenarios are possible, depending on how the population will respond to a mixture of fears and frustrations: 1) the urgency of pushing forward with EU accession as a form of protection against a perceived Russian threat, versus 2) the reality on the ground, which is aggravated by socio-economic and reform-related discontent. The following policy brief takes a brief look at the current situation within the country and examines four major post-election scenarios. Each of these entails potential effects in four different areas: domestic stability, relations with the EU, resolution of the Transnistrian conflict, and dialogue with Russia, including in light of the war in Ukraine. One of the more realistic of these scenarios involves a post-election situation in which EU accession negotiations are initiated once Ukraine's hurdles are surmounted another involves a shift in the political landscape that could pose challenges for the retention of EU candidate status, predicated as it is on an election outcome that results in a coalition which chooses to follow the Georgian example. If the Moldovan government determines that Russian interference has affected the outcome and a PAS-majority or coalition is unlikely, then the "Romanian Scenario"<sup>1</sup> of cancelling the elections could arise.

## Introduction

The irreversibility of Moldova's current domestic and foreign policy trajectory is open to question. One area in which changes may occur is that of Moldova's relations with the European Union (EU). There are concerns that the country may adopt a less pro-EU stance and shift towards the opposite end of the geopolitical spectrum. Scenarios along these lines are based on the assumption that political forces that are perceived as linked to Russian influence will emerge victorious in the parliamentary elections on 28 September 2025. Like the presidential elections in 2024, the 2025 parliamentary elections are expected to be of enormous significance for the country's future. Recent surveys have detected a decline in pro-EU sympathies. Moreover, the general support for EU accession may not be the decisive factor determining voter behaviour on election day. The overall support for accession to the EU does not necessarily translate into electoral preferences for the governing political party, the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS). No other political force at the national level, except for the PAS, unconditionally supports the EU and has a strong chance of entering the next parliament. However, despite their fragmentation, collectively Eurosceptics, advocates of a multidimensional foreign policy, and pro-Russian parties enjoy greater public support. Thus, the main concerns in Chisinau (and, to a large extent, in the EU) consist of the fear that the election will give rise to a parliamentary majority that will change the tenor of the current dialogue with Brussels.

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<sup>1</sup> On 6 December, Romania's Constitutional Court invalidated the results of the first round of the presidential election and cancelled the second round of voting, in which the sovereigntist populist independent candidate Călin Georgescu was perceived as having better chances to win against the candidate of the Save Romania Union (USR), Elena Lasconi. The Court's decision cited Russian interference through the TikTok platform. <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/monitor/6410-cancellation-of-the-vote>

The aim of this policy brief is to explore potential scenarios for Moldova's domestic and, by extension, foreign policy that may play out, depending on the outcomes of the parliamentary elections. It presents four possible scenarios, examining possible developments in the following four areas for each of them: 1) domestic stability; 2) dialogue with the EU; 3) Transnistrian conflict resolution; 4) relations with Russia. The scenarios in the policy brief help depict the possibilities that Moldova is facing as the elections approach, to inform a more accurate risk assessment by European partners. This could be very useful for better anticipating negative scenarios.

## Domestic politics

In the last parliamentary elections, which were held in July 2021, the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) won the majority of parliamentary seats (63), followed by the Bloc of the Communists and Socialists (BCS), with 32 seats, and the Shor Party, with 6. Since then, there has been considerable shifting in the party affiliations of parliamentarians. Two PAS MPs were expelled from the party.<sup>2</sup> Four BCS parliamentarians left their parties and now support extra-parliamentary parties. And the Shor Party MPs became independent in 2023 after Moldova's Constitutional Court ruled that the Shor Party was "unconstitutional"<sup>3</sup> on the grounds of illegal financing. The fast-tracked EU accession dialogue with Moldova during the 2022-2024 period was capitalised by PAS to bolster its brand as the main pro-EU party. The other political forces that are represented in Parliament have opposed close ties with the EU, instead promoting Eurosceptic views (BCS) or, in the case of the Shor-linked MPs, openly supporting integration with the Russia-aligned Eurasian Economic Union.

The most recent polls (IMAS, June 2025)<sup>4</sup> predict that PAS will secure 31.5% of the total votes. PAS support has ranged between 36%<sup>5</sup> to 40%<sup>6</sup> in other polls. Four other political groups have a good chance of winning seats if they are permitted to compete in the elections:<sup>7</sup> the Socialists (17.4%), the political bloc Alternative (11.7%), the political bloc Victory (10.6%), and Our Party (9.4%). Out of the five political groups with clear chances of entering parliament, only PAS and the Alternative bloc support Moldova's pro-EU orientation. However, the Alternative bloc's support is not unalloyed: like "Our Party", it has frequently taken critical positions on LGBTQ+ rights or sectoral reforms. The Socialists in Moldova share sceptical views about the EU, which puts them closer to the ideologically anti-EU bloc Victory.

The political landscape could still change dramatically in the lead-up to the elections. For instance, the bloc Victory was declared ineligible to participate in the election due to its links to the fugitive businessman Ilan Shor.<sup>8</sup> The political forces forming Victory were also ruled ineligible to compete individually.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the votes that would have naturally shifted towards Shor's political network

<sup>2</sup> Victoria Cazacu, <https://moldova1.md/p/26783/igor-grosu-a-cerut-demisia-unei-deputate-pas-a-carei-fiica-este-vizata-intr-un-dosar-de-coruptie>, and Olesia Stamate, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/olesea-stamate-exclusa-din-randurile-pas-din-cauza-amendamentelor-aduse-legii-amnistiei/33373533.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.constcourt.md/ccdocview.php?tip=hotariri&docid=828&l=ro>

<sup>4</sup> [https://imas.md/pic/archives/49/\[imas\]%20barometrul%20socio-politic\\_iunie%202025.pdf](https://imas.md/pic/archives/49/[imas]%20barometrul%20socio-politic_iunie%202025.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://tv8.md/2025/06/12/sondaj-3-formatiuni-ar-ajunge-in-parlament-dupa-alegeri-cum-vad-moldovenii-implicarea-rusiei/283288>

<sup>6</sup> <https://newsmaker.md/ro/sondaj-patru-partide-cu-sanse-de-a-intra-in-cursa-pentru-parlamentare-formatiunea-condusa-de-usatii-iese-din-joc>

<sup>7</sup> [https://imas.md/pic/archives/49/\[imas\]%20barometrul%20socio-politic\\_iunie%202025.pdf](https://imas.md/pic/archives/49/[imas]%20barometrul%20socio-politic_iunie%202025.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Ilan Shor is a Moldovan businessman who is hiding in Russia due to his involvement in the 2014 bank fraud, for which he was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2023. He is subject to Western sanctions for his role in activities aimed at destabilising Moldova and has been accused of coordinating his actions with and from Russia, mainly through illegal financing of political parties linked to him, disinformation, and other hybrid activities.

<sup>9</sup> <https://newsmaker.md/ro/patru-partide-exclude-din-lista-celor-care-au-dreptul-sa-participe-la-parlamentare>

are likely to move towards a more moderate, left-leaning Socialists-dominated mega-bloc. Such a bloc was registered by the Central Electoral Commission on 3 August. The leftist mega-bloc, made up of the Socialists, “Heart of Moldova,” “Future of Moldova,” and eventually the Communists, supports the resumption of political-economic ties with Russia.<sup>10</sup> Voters loyal to Shor may be lured, through radicalisation, into voting for the mega-bloc if they are deprived of the option of voting for populists linked to Shor.

Other factors that could influence the election results include the EU sanctions against the (Shor-linked) “Victory” bloc and Romania’s recent imposition of a ban on entry to the Schengen area on Ion Ceban, the mayor of Chisinau, who is one of the leaders of the Alternative bloc, for reasons of national security.<sup>11</sup> These sanctions may tarnish the reputation of parties and candidates participating in the election, thus diminishing their electoral prospects. The tightening of measures to combat electoral corruption<sup>12</sup> might also help to hold back the political forces that gravitate around oligarchic circles tied to Ilan Shor, Vlad Plahotniuc, and Veaceslav Platon. The complications surrounding the extradition of Plahotniuc, who was detained in Greece on 22 July, could lead to unforeseen developments.<sup>13</sup> PAS may gain electoral points if Plahotniuc finally faces legal consequences in the banking fraud case. However, PAS could also lose points if the extradited Plahotniuc benefits from a lenient trial process.

The “wild cards” in the upcoming elections are the votes in the diaspora and voters from the Transnistrian region. The government increased the number of polling stations abroad from 150 in 2021 to 231 in 2024. A total of 243,605 votes were cast abroad in the second round of the presidential elections in November 2024, compared to 212,434 in the July 2021 parliamentary elections.<sup>14</sup> The majority of the diaspora votes went to the PAS (in 2021) and to its founder, Maia Sandu (in 2024). The number of people from the Transnistrian region voting decreased between those two elections (from 28,791 in 2021 to 26,136 in the second round of the presidential elections in 2024). Voting behaviour for this group differed from the diaspora in respect to political preferences as well: in 2024, 79.4% of the Transnistrians who voted chose the Socialist supported Alexandr Stoyanoglo (20,753 votes), only 20.6% were for Maia Sandu (5,383 votes).<sup>15</sup> The number of diaspora ballots cast in that election exceeded that of ballots in Transnistria by a factor of 10. Still, Transnistrian turnout may increase if the ongoing economic crisis, escalated by a shortage of Russia-paid gas supply from Hungary, develops into a humanitarian crisis.<sup>16</sup>

## The EU accession process and reforms

EU accession and the Russian threat are likely to be the central themes in the election campaign. The ruling party rallies its supporters by emphasizing the urgent need to safeguard Moldova’s EU path against the possibility of derailment should PAS lose its majority. In 2024, a referendum on a constitutional amendment establishing the EU as a strategic goal passed with 50.35% of votes cast (by 1.4 million of the 3.3 million eligible voters<sup>17</sup>). The opposition continues to argue that a voter turnout of 50% of the total eligible voters was required to make the referendum valid, but the Constitutional Court confirmed its outcome, enabling the PAS majority to incorporate the amendment

<sup>10</sup> <https://newsmaker.md/ro/dodon-vlah-si-tarlev-din-nou-in-rusia-s-au-intalnit-cu-un-vicepremier-rus-liderul-psrm-vrea-reluarea-livrurilor-de-gaze>

<sup>11</sup> <https://tvrmdova.md/article/801cc2e0ac359ad9/tvr-bref-blocul-victoria-sub-sanctiunile-ue-ion-ceban-interzis-in-romania-pentru-cinci-ani.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.parlament.md/ns-newsarticle-Au-fost-nsprite-pedepsele-pentru-corupia-electoral-i-finanarea-ilegal-a-partidelor.nspx>

<sup>13</sup> <https://moldova1.md/p/54025/consimtamant-pentru-extradare-plahotniuc-a-transmis-procurorilor-decizia-prin-avocatul-sau>

<sup>14</sup> [https://alegeri.md/w/Votarea\\_pestre\\_hotarele\\_Republicii\\_Moldova](https://alegeri.md/w/Votarea_pestre_hotarele_Republicii_Moldova)

<sup>15</sup> <https://pvt2024.cec.md/cec-presidential-results-tour2.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://newsmaker.md/ru/v-pridnestrove-prodlili-rejim-chp-v-ekonomike>

<sup>17</sup> <https://stiri.md/article/politica/cati-votanti-trebuie-sa-participe-la-referendum-pentru-a-fi-validat/>

into the Constitution on that basis. Polls have shown EU approval ratings fluctuating between 43%<sup>18</sup> and 62%,<sup>19</sup> reflecting the volatility of pro-EU sentiments observed during the constitutional referendum. However, the dialogue on the EU accession negotiations is now underway. Their start was approved by the European Council in late 2023,<sup>20</sup> followed by the Inter-Governmental Conference in June 2024. In its recent conclusions,<sup>21</sup> the European Council reaffirmed Moldova's readiness to open the initial negotiation clusters. However, due to its "coupled" status with Ukraine, Moldova seems to be on hold, as it waits for the EU to find a way to unblock Ukraine's negotiations, which are currently stalled because of Hungary's veto. In case PAS loses the majority in the parliament and a political crisis compromises the democratic transition of power, the EU could withhold the opening of the first clusters regardless of whether Ukraine advances.

The quality of the EU accession process depends on reforms in key sectors vital for the state's sustainability. The most significant changes introduced since the last parliamentary elections were in the justice and energy sectors. Progress on rule of law reforms, including anti-corruption measures and the (pre-)vetting of judges and prosecutors, was hampered by revelations from Veronica Dragalin, former head of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office.<sup>22</sup> According to her repeated statements to the media, government officials tried to sway political influence over the justice system.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, reforms in the energy sector gained greater credibility and resulted in the diversification of gas supplies and the elimination of the monopoly held by a Russia-controlled company.<sup>24</sup>

Socioeconomic hardship in Moldova is accompanied the non-linearity in the reform agenda. The rising energy poverty rate, caused by higher energy prices and the 2022 inflation spike (annual average inflation reached 30%),<sup>25</sup> raised the percentage of the population living below the absolute poverty level to 31% in 2023.<sup>26</sup> Economic growth remains sluggish: with no strong drivers, it is not expected to surpass 1% in 2025-26.<sup>27</sup> These developments reflect increasing emigration trends: as many as 168,000 people left the country between 2021 and 2023.<sup>28</sup> Moldova's current population of 2.4 million recalls demographic data from the early 1950s, with almost 40% of emigrants being young people between the ages of 25 and 34.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, Moldova has managed, with significant support from the EU and its member states, to withstand Russia-induced shocks of three kinds: the energy crises, the collateral damages from the war in Ukraine, and hybrid interference, primarily in the form of support for illegally financed political forces and disinformation campaigns.

## The four scenarios and their effects

As mentioned earlier, the political and socio-economic conditions in Moldova are shaped by a series of structural issues the country is grappling with, ranging from the various impacts of the multiple crises to the mixture of problematic and effective reforms. The pressures to which the population is exposed increase the number of high probability electoral scenarios. Of all the possible developments, four scenarios deserve attention: 1) preservation of the status quo, i.e. a "Continuing PAS majority" (re-election of PAS); 2) a coalition committed to "staying on the pro-EU track"; 3) a

<sup>18</sup> <https://imas.md/rom/studii-socio-politice>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.moldova1.md/p/51957/ue-sau-rusia-sondaj-majoritatea-aleg-europa-dar-38-vor-si-relatii-mai-stranse-cu-estul>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/12/15/european-council-conclusions-14-and-15-december-2023/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/06/26/european-council-conclusions-26-june-2025/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://newsmaker.md/ro/dragalin-ii-acuza-pe-recean-si-sandu-ca-i-ar-fi-cerut-liste-cu-procurori-integri-presedintia-acuzatii-false>

<sup>23</sup> <https://newsmaker.md/ro/cat-de-credibili-sunt-cei-care-afirma-ca-ea-minte-reactii-la-scrisoarea-veronicai-dragalin>

<sup>24</sup> <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/energocom-in-loc-de-moldovagaz-un-nou-furnizor-de-gaze/33422241.html>

<sup>25</sup> <https://newsmaker.md/ro/guvernatoarea-bnm-inflatia-a-scazut-cu-30-dupa-ce-moldova-a-scapat-de-dependenta-de-gazul-rusesc>

<sup>26</sup> <https://tvrmdova.md/article/acd4482b95b92ae1/nivelul-saraciei-in-republica-moldova-a-crescut-constant-in-ultimii-ani.html>

<sup>27</sup> <https://logos-pres.md/en/article/imf-and-world-bank-significantly-worsen-the-outlook-for-moldova/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://stiri.md/article/social/peste-168-000-de-moldoveni-au-plecat-din-r-moldova-in-ultimii-trei-ani/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://agora.md/2024/08/09/analiza-aproape-42percent-dintre-tinerii-din-r-moldova-sunt-plecati-peste-hotare>

coalition pursuing a hedging foreign policy (“multi-vector foreign policy”) with a pro-Russian tendency (elements of the “Georgian Scenario”); 4) interim governance of PAS due to the cancellation of the elections on grounds of Russian interference (“Romanian Scenario”).

### **Scenario 1: Preservation of the status quo: “Continuing PAS-majority” – somewhat unlikely**

- The scenario necessitates PAS's re-election with a comfortable parliamentary majority. A majority comparable to 2021's 63 seats is unlikely, but a simple majority of more than 50% could be enough for the party to maintain a link with the Presidency. It would lead to a high level of internal stability for the country, while the state institutions will probably boost PAS's unilateral and monopolistic influence over state institutions.
- Relations with the EU will maintain their current intensity, benefiting from PAS's political ties with leaders of EU institutions who are politically backed by the European People's Party. The opening of the first clusters will depend on the removal of Hungary's veto on Ukraine.
- Resolving the Transnistrian conflict will require a reform of the current “5+2” format that emphasises the role of the EU and Ukraine, while further reducing Russia's involvement. The existing policies aimed at decoupling the Transnistrian region from Russia will continue to integrate the region under Moldova's sectoral control (trade, energy, etc.). Moldova will receive financial aid from the West if the separatist regime collapses, speeding up the reintegration process.
- The tension in relations with Russia is likely to persist. External factors affecting this include peace talks with Ukraine and the dialogue between Brussels and Moscow. Between 2021 and 2025, the PAS has shaped a strong public discourse based on the normative dichotomy between the EU supporting Moldovans and Russia waging war against Ukraine and bullying Moldova. Improvements in bilateral relations with Russia are unlikely if interference by Russian-linked political actors persists and the dispute over gas debts remains unresolved.

### **Scenario 2: Governing coalition: “Keeping the pro-EU track” – likely**

- This scenario could emerge if the PAS obtains less than 50% of the votes and thus needs to form a coalition government in order to remain in power and pursue its pro-EU agenda at the current level of intensity. The most likely junior partner for the PAS would be Renato Usatîi (of Our Party), who, unlike one of the Alternative bloc's leader Ion Ceban, is not subject to a Romanian entry ban and was allowed to invite Russian singers who are sanctioned in Ukraine.<sup>30</sup> Partnering with “Our Party,” would require trade-offs in the form of cabinet posts. This scenario foresees the possibility that intracoalition friction and even episodes of crisis will shake internal stability but remain manageable. Some likelihood of early elections triggered by the PAS' “junior partner” continues to exist throughout the entire term of the coalition government.
- The EU will remain a close partner. However, disputes between PAS and Our Party may arise, and these may result in mismanaged or delayed reforms that the EU will find difficult to tolerate. Progress in EU accession negotiations could slow down, but not to the point of compromising the

<sup>30</sup> At the concert organised by Renato Usatîi in Chisinau, Russian rappers Basta (Vasilii Vakulenko) and Macan (Andrei Kosolapov) performed on stage without any restrictions from the Moldovan authorities, despite the ban on entering Ukraine. Basta is sanctioned for holding concerts in occupied Crimea, and Macan for his concerts in Lugansk, a Ukrainian region illegally annexed by Russia in 2022. <https://newsmaker.md/ro/deputati-pas-despre-concertul-lui-usatii-cu-artisti-din-rusia-nu-au-fost-suficiente-motive-ca-sa-mearga-inainte-cu-interdictia-video>

bilateral dialogue and the financial support pledged by the EU for Moldova until 2027 (1.9 billion euros).

- The approaches to resolution of the Transnistrian conflict may shift towards greater flexibility on the part of the PAS, if its “junior partner” links this to the maintenance of the governing coalition.
- The dialogue with Russia will not improve, but the government’s discourse will soften the tone towards Moscow. This will not be enough to allow for the normalisation of relations. Until Moldova applies EU sanctions because Russian aggression against Ukraine continues, the structural conditions for any positive development will be absent.

### **Scenario 3: Governing coalition: “Hedging foreign policy” – likely**

- The opposition forces gain enough seats to form a grand coalition. The Socialists and the Alternative bloc could emerge as the leading groups, placing PAS in the opposition. This will trigger a political shock within the decision-making system. The Presidency will become isolated and face a hostile majority, leading to a radicalisation of relations between the coalition and a PAS-led opposition rallying around Maia Sandu. Using the precedents set in 2021-2025, the new coalition majority will initiate criminal investigations linked to controversies involving the PAS regarding decisions and laws on judiciary, energy resources and military procurements, the organization and validation of the referendum on EU vector, etc. Various measures aimed at controlling external financing for the media and NGOs, inspired by the “Georgian example”, will be implemented. The outcome of the referendum that inserted EU accession provisions into the Constitution could be reviewed. Early elections remain likely due to the contradictory political objectives of the governing coalition.
- Due to actions targeting the PAS-led opposition, the role of the Presidency (Maia Sandu), civil society and the EU will become more critical. The EU will need to decide whether to side with the opposition and suspend Moldova’s candidate status or to pursue a pragmatic dialogue with the coalition government and activate conditionality on its financial aid to Moldova.
- Dialogue with the Transnistrian region will be reinitiated, with trade and energy cooperation taking centre stage. The coalition may utilise international forums to promote the idea of constitutional neutrality and territorial integrity, reiterating that Transnistria is part of Moldova and should be protected from the consequences of military strategies related to Ukraine.
- The attempts to implement a “multi-vector foreign policy” will result in hedging strategies that involve fostering warmer relations with Russia, which will naturally necessitate more pragmatic ties with the EU. In exchange for lifting the sanctions, Russia will relax its hard stance on the gas debt issue, allowing for the resumption of direct gas supplies at a lower price and reducing tariffs for consumers. Closer ties with Russia will raise suspicions towards Moldova in Ukraine relating to security threats associated with Russia's full-scale war.

### **Scenario 4: Cancellation of the elections on grounds of Russian interference (“Romanian Scenario”) – Unlikely**

- Under this scenario, the Supreme Security Council (SSC), chaired by the President (Maia Sandu), can invoke the decision to invalidate the elections, citing Russian interference. The recently adopted legislation grants the SSC executive powers, which can be activated in cases of security emergencies. This may ignite mass anti-government protests, plunging the country into a political crisis similar to April 2007 (the youth riots against the victory of the Communist Party in the



legislative elections deemed as rigged)<sup>31</sup> and 2018 (the cancellation of the results of the local elections in Chişinău).<sup>32</sup>

- The EU will be obliged to provide mediation to resolve the political crisis and support PAS in finding a solution that can prevent the EU accession process from stalling.
- Due to political instability in Chisinau, the Transnistrian conflict could become a new source of insecurity, depending on the situation on the frontline in Ukraine and the perception of Russian military operations involving the breakaway region.
- Russia will seek to exploit the political crisis in Moldova by aligning with the opposition against EU-supported PAS, which will continue to govern until preparations are made for new elections.

## Conclusions

Moldova may experience significant political changes after the parliamentary elections. Among the four major scenarios, the most probable are (1) “Staying on the pro-EU track” and (2) “Hedging foreign policy”. The first, the more likely scenario, would involve a coalition with the PAS as “senior partner”, while the second scenario would see the PAS in opposition. Domestic political stability is expected to be greater under the “multi-vector foreign policy” coalition of the second scenario. This coalition would seek pragmatic relations with Russia, which could create strains in the dialogue with the EU, which would appear to be aligned with the PAS-led opposition and President Maia Sandu.

The coalition that keeps the PAS in power might require a “junior party,” one that may attempt to moderate the PAS’s policies on foreign and domestic issues, exposing fault-lines in the coalition to the EU and making accession negotiations more complex. If the PAS retains power within such a coalition, progress in EU talks will depend on Hungary’s veto over Ukraine. Any restrictive policies towards civil society, like those in Georgia and those proposed in the “multi-vector foreign policy” scenario, could slow down the EU accession process, possibly involving conditionalities or sanctions.

The other two scenarios are less likely. The PAS suffers from a low level of public trust, which hampers its ability (though not yet impossible) to secure a majority like in 2021. The cancellation of the elections (“Romanian Scenario”) cannot be ruled out if the government obtains evidence that Russian interference compromised the elections. Such a scenario will depend on the votes obtained by PAS and its political rivals.

Lastly, each of the individual scenarios examined by this policy brief will be strongly influenced by both internal factors – social-economic struggles (poverty, etc.) and reform-related dissatisfaction (e.g., justice reform) – and external factors (concerning the EU and Russia strategies towards Moldovan political forces: sanctions and political support versus hybrid interferences). The outcome of the elections will be determined by voters’ attitudes towards competing geopolitical projects for Moldova. In a way never seen before, voters’ willingness to rally around the EU flag against the perceived Russian threat (or their failure to do so) will determine the country’s direction over the next four years and beyond.

<sup>31</sup> <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/04/121816.htm>

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0303\\_RO.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0303_RO.html)

**Table: The four key scenarios and their effects**

	<b>Scenario 1: Preserving the status quo: “A continuing PAS- majority”</b>	<b>Scenario 2: Governing coalition: “Staying on the pro-EU track”</b>	<b>Scenario 3: Governing coalition: “Hedging foreign policy”</b>	<b>Scenario 4: Cancellation of the elections on grounds of Russian interference  (“Romanian Scenario”)</b>
<i>Likelihood</i>	<b>Somewhat unlikely</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>
<i>Internal stability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stable</li> <li>- One-party decision making</li> <li>- Further power consolidation</li> <li>- No revision of the reforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moderately stable/poss. of early elections</li> <li>- Multi-party decision making</li> <li>- Power sharing</li> <li>- Targeted revision of some reforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unstable/ poss. of early elections</li> <li>- Multi-party decision making</li> <li>- Power-sharing</li> <li>- Contestation and serious revision of earlier reforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unstable/ poss. of early elections</li> <li>- Deep political crisis</li> <li>- Mass protests</li> <li>- Arrest of opposition forces, resulting in political destabilisation</li> </ul>
<i>The dialogue with the EU</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Idealistic</li> <li>- More intensive efforts in the EU accession process (opening of the first clusters)</li> <li>- Full alignment on sanctions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Optimistic</li> <li>- Cautious efforts towards EU accession</li> <li>- Some alignment on sanctions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pragmatic</li> <li>- Eurosceptical EU accession/“Serbian scenario”</li> <li>- Gradual withdrawal from costly sanctions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The EU’s mediation becomes necessary to resolve the political crisis between PAS and the opposition forces</li> <li>- The EU accession process is temporarily halted.</li> </ul>
<i>Transnistrian settlement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Customs rules standardization and energy supply control through legal and infrastructure leverage</li> <li>- The EU gradually replaces other international organizations</li> <li>- “5+2” format frozen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Softening of reintegration policies through growing sectoral dialogue</li> <li>- More politically unconditioned support from the EU</li> <li>- gradual unfreezing of “5+2” format</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gradual removal of customs restrictions and restoring of the Russian gas supply</li> <li>- relaunch of the “5+2” format with equal participation of the EU and other actors, primarily Russia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Due to instability in Chisinau, the Transnistrian conflict may attract increasing attention from Ukraine, which sees it as a Russian enclave.</li> </ul>
<i>Relations with Russia</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unfriendly</li> <li>- Sanctions policy synchronized to those of the EU and Ukraine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Certain degree of antagonism</li> <li>- Sanctions revised, but overall maintained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Friendly</li> <li>- Sanctions are lifted to secure geoeconomic benefits</li> <li>- Political and sectoral dialogue resumed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Russia will provide informational support to opposition forces against PAS and the EU mediation intervention.</li> </ul>

Source: Author’s estimates derived from the scenario-building methodology