

Volume 1, Issue 1

Research Article

Date of Submission: 28 Aug, 2026

Date of Acceptance: 24 Sep, 2026

Date of Publication: 02 Oct, 2026

Establishing a Romania–Bessarabia Centre for Unification Foresight and Strategic Preparedness

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Citation: Ilcus, C. (2026). Establishing a Romania–Bessarabia Centre for Unification Foresight and Strategic Preparedness. *World J Law Govern Pub Policy*, 1(1), 01-170.

Abstract

This research explores the complexities surrounding the potential unification of Romania and Moldova within the European Union framework. The aim is to assess the feasibility of unification by examining historical, cultural, economic, and geopolitical factors that influence public sentiment and policy decisions. The central research question guiding this study is: What conditions must be satisfied for Romanian-Moldovan political unification to become feasible and sustainable? To address this question, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Historical analysis was conducted to understand the shared past of both nations, while public opinion surveys were utilized to gauge attitudes towards unification among citizens in Romania and Moldova. Economic impact assessments were performed to evaluate the potential benefits and challenges of integration, and geopolitical analyses were conducted to explore the implications of unification on regional stability and international relations. The findings reveal a complex landscape of perspectives on unification. Historical ties and cultural similarities foster a sense of shared identity among many Romanians, while some Moldovans express concerns about losing their national identity. Economically, unification presents opportunities for growth and development, but significant disparities between the two countries raise questions about sustainability. Geopolitically, unification could enhance Romania's position within the EU but may also provoke tensions with external actors, particularly Russia. Overall, the research concludes that while the aspiration for unification exists, several critical conditions must be met to ensure its feasibility and sustainability. These include fostering mutual understanding, addressing economic disparities, and navigating the geopolitical landscape carefully. Engaging in open dialogue and collaborative efforts will be essential for both nations to explore the potential for a shared future while respecting their distinct identities and aspirations. This is the divided unity of the RO-MD *pas de deux*. Unification is not ripe, but there are quite a few things they could undertake to be better prepared for such a monumental event.

Keywords: Romanian-Moldovan Unification, European Union, Historical Ties, Cultural Identity, Economic Integration, Geopolitical Implications, Public Opinion, Feasibility, Sustainability, Regional StabilityGeopolitical Implications, Public Opinion, Feasibility, Sustainability, Regional Stability

Introduction

There are moments in the life of nations when history seems to stand quietly at the door. It does not announce what will happen. It simply reminds us that some questions, once opened, cannot easily be put away.

For Romania, the relationship with the Republic of Moldova is one of those questions. Across the Prut lie two states, but between them run older roads: a common language, memories, families, traditions, and a cultural landscape that has survived the changing borders of history. At the same time, Moldova has developed its own institutions, political experience, and civic identity. Its future is increasingly connected to the European Union, while its security environment remains shaped by the war in Ukraine and the unresolved Transnistrian question. Between this past and this uncertain future lies the possibility of a closer political relationship—including, one day, reunification.

That possibility should neither be proclaimed as inevitable nor dismissed as merely historical. It should be studied seriously. For this reason, Romania should establish a permanent Centre for Romania–Bessarabia Unification Foresight and Strategic Preparedness: an institution whose task would not be to decide the future, but to make sure that Romania is capable of understanding it when it arrives.

The Centre would study the legal, constitutional, economic, institutional, social and security consequences of possible unification. It would examine questions that cannot be answered by emotion alone: How would public administration be integrated? What would happen to fiscal systems, infrastructure, citizenship, pensions and public services? How would European Union law apply? How could democratic institutions be protected? And, above all, what would the citizens of Moldova themselves choose?

For history teaches a simple lesson: when great political changes occur, nations rarely have the luxury of beginning their preparations on the day the decision is made. The work must come earlier, quietly and patiently, while the outcome is still uncertain.

Preparation, therefore, is not predetermination. To prepare for unification is not to declare that unification must happen. It is to ensure that, if a legitimate and democratic opportunity ever emerges, Romania will not meet it with improvisation, confusion or wishful thinking, but with knowledge, capable institutions and a clear understanding of the choices before it.

The purpose of such a Centre would ultimately be modest, but important: to make Romania ready for a future that nobody can yet predict, while ensuring that whatever future is chosen remains grounded in democratic consent, evidence and the dignity of the people on both banks of the Prut.

The proposed Centre would also strengthen Romania's wider Moldova policy. Its mandate would include systematic data collection, scenario development, monitoring of political and socioeconomic trends, assessment of institutional and fiscal capacities, and analysis of different models of cooperation and integration. In this sense, the Centre would not focus exclusively on the question of unification; it would provide a broader strategic capability for understanding Romania–Moldova relations and evaluating the consequences of alternative future trajectories.

The underlying principle is therefore one of strategic preparedness without political presumption. Romania should not assume that unification is inevitable, nor should it attempt to determine when or whether it will occur. However, it should avoid a situation in which a historically and democratically legitimate opportunity emerges and the necessary institutional, economic, and legal preparations have not been undertaken. The proposed Centre would function as a form of strategic insurance, enabling Romania to replace ad hoc responses with informed planning and long-term preparedness.

Ultimately, the objective is not to predict unification, but to ensure that Romania is prepared for the possibility. If the citizens of Romania and the Republic of Moldova were to democratically express a desire for political unification and the relevant legal and international conditions were to permit it, Romania should be capable of responding with a coherent, peaceful, lawful, economically sustainable, and institutionally credible strategy. Establishing such a capability now would allow Romania to prepare for that possibility without prejudging its timing, form, or eventual outcome.

The concept emphasized for the project is “unification readiness” rather than “unification preparation.” This distinction frames the project around strengthening the institutional, economic, infrastructural, demographic, and social conditions that would enable Romanian–Moldovan unification to be pursued effectively, democratically, and lawfully, should the political conditions for such a development emerge. The objective is therefore not to predetermine the timing or political outcome of unification, but to ensure that the regions most directly affected are prepared to manage its potential opportunities, challenges, and institutional consequences.

In RO21 (North-Eastern Romania) and RO22 (South-Eastern Romania), unification readiness should be understood as a measurable condition rather than an abstract political objective. A central dimension is institutional readiness, which concerns whether public institutions have the legal, administrative, financial, technological, security, and human-resource capacity required to manage a potential unification process effectively. This includes the existence of comprehensive legal frameworks capable of supporting closer institutional integration, as well as the administrative interoperability necessary for institutions to cooperate across different levels of government and sectors.

Institutional readiness also depends on fiscal capacity. Regional and national institutions require sufficient and sustainable financial resources to support integration-related investments, maintain public services, and manage the additional responsibilities that could arise during a transition. Fiscal readiness should therefore consider not only available funding but also the capacity of institutions to plan, absorb, administer, and account for domestic and EU resources.

Digital compatibility represents another critical component. Public institutions on both sides of the Prut need increasingly compatible digital systems, standards, and administrative platforms that facilitate secure communication, data exchange,

service delivery, and interoperability. Strengthening digital administration and procurement expertise in RO21 and RO22 would therefore contribute directly to the region's ability to support a potential unification process.

Security coordination should likewise form part of the readiness assessment. Effective cooperation among relevant security and emergency-management institutions would be necessary to maintain stability, public safety, critical infrastructure protection, and continuity of essential services during any major institutional transition. Readiness should consequently include the existence of mechanisms for interagency coordination, information sharing, and joint contingency planning.

Personnel capacity is equally important. Unification readiness requires sufficient numbers of trained and skilled civil servants, project managers, technical specialists, digital experts, legal professionals, and other personnel capable of designing and implementing complex institutional and infrastructure programmes. Strengthening professional civil services and regional administrative expertise should therefore be treated as a core investment in readiness.

Finally, institutions should have contingency procedures capable of addressing disruptions, unexpected administrative challenges, and transitional pressures while maintaining continuity of public services. These procedures should cover critical infrastructure, public administration, essential services, emergency response, and other areas where institutional disruption could have significant social or economic consequences.

Beyond institutional capacity, unification readiness in RO21 and RO22 requires stronger connectivity. The eastern regions need more effective connections to Bucharest, Transylvania, the Black Sea, Ukraine, Moldova, and the wider European transport network. Improving transport, logistics, digital, and energy infrastructure would reduce regional isolation and provide the physical foundations necessary for closer economic and institutional links between Romania and Moldova.

Cross-border economic integration should be strengthened through infrastructure and economic networks linking eastern Romania with Moldova and Ukraine and improving access to EU markets. These connections would support convergence in markets, supply chains, labour mobility, logistics, investment, and business activity, creating practical conditions for closer economic and territorial integration.

Strategic redundancy should also be developed by establishing alternative centres of economic, administrative, energy, logistics, and technological capacity outside București-Ilfov. Strengthening these capacities in eastern Romania would increase national resilience while ensuring that the region is better positioned to absorb and manage the additional responsibilities and opportunities associated with potential unification.

The development of interconnected urban and regional growth poles is equally important. Iași, Suceava, Bacău, and Galați can serve as complementary centres of economic activity, administration, innovation, logistics, and human capital. Strengthening connections among these cities would create a more integrated regional system capable of supporting both national development and deeper links with Moldova.

Demographic resilience is another fundamental element of unification readiness. Persistent outmigration, population ageing, and the loss of skilled workers could constrain the capacity of the eastern regions to benefit from closer integration. Addressing these trends requires stronger employment opportunities, improved public services, investment in education and skills, and policies capable of attracting, retaining, or reconnecting skilled people with the region.

Finally, innovation and human capital should be strengthened to improve long-term regional competitiveness. Universities, research institutions, businesses, vocational education, and public authorities should be better connected so that the region can develop higher-value economic activities, attract investment, and participate more effectively in European and cross-border value chains.

Taken together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for assessing unification readiness. Institutional readiness can be measured through legal frameworks, administrative interoperability, fiscal capacity, digital compatibility, security coordination, personnel capacity, and contingency procedures, while broader regional readiness depends on connectivity, cross-border economic integration, strategic redundancy, growth poles, demographic resilience, innovation, and human capital. The purpose is to establish whether the eastern regions of Romania possess the practical capabilities and resilient systems necessary to support a potential Romanian-Moldovan unification in a democratic, lawful, economically sustainable, and administratively manageable manner.

Scientific Argument

The integration of Romania and Moldova presents a unique opportunity to enhance regional stability, economic growth, and democratic governance. However, the feasibility of such integration hinges on a thorough understanding of the institutional readiness of both nations. This readiness is not merely a function of political will but requires a robust framework that encompasses legal, administrative, fiscal, and social dimensions. By employing a multidimensional approach to assess institutional readiness, we can identify critical constraints and opportunities that will inform policy decisions and strategic planning.

Scope

The scope of this research will focus on several key areas. First, it will involve institutional analysis, evaluating the existing legal frameworks, administrative structures, and fiscal capacities of both Romania and Moldova. Second, it will investigate public opinion and social readiness by examining public attitudes towards integration, including identity, trust, and social cohesion. Third, the research will analyze the geopolitical context, considering external factors influencing integration, such as EU policies, regional security dynamics, and relations with neighboring countries. Additionally, it will assess economic convergence by evaluating the conditions necessary for integration, including infrastructure, investment, and market compatibility. Finally, the research will develop potential scenarios for integration based on varying geopolitical and economic conditions.

Objectives

The primary objective is to assess institutional readiness by measuring the legal, administrative, fiscal, and social dimensions relevant to integration between Romania and Moldova. This includes identifying constraints and opportunities that may hinder or facilitate the integration process, providing a clear understanding of the current landscape. Engaging stakeholders is also crucial, as it involves policymakers, civil society, and the public in discussions about integration to ensure diverse perspectives are considered. The research aims to develop actionable insights and recommendations for enhancing institutional readiness and facilitating a sustainable integration process. Furthermore, it will establish a framework for ongoing assessment of institutional readiness, allowing for adaptive strategies as conditions evolve.

Research Questions

- What are the current legal, administrative, fiscal, and social frameworks in Romania and Moldova that impact their institutional readiness for integration?
- How do public attitudes towards integration vary among different demographics in both countries, and what factors influence these attitudes?
- What external geopolitical factors, including EU policies and regional security dynamics, affect the integration process between Romania and Moldova?
- What economic conditions must be met for successful integration, and how do existing infrastructures and market compatibilities influence these conditions?
- What potential scenarios for integration can be developed based on varying geopolitical and economic conditions, and how can these scenarios inform policy decisions?

Significance

The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of the institutional readiness for the integration of Romania and Moldova. By addressing the research questions, the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on regional integration processes and offer valuable insights for policymakers.

Understanding the legal, administrative, fiscal, and social frameworks will help identify gaps and areas for improvement, facilitating a more effective integration strategy. Investigating public attitudes will ensure that the voices of citizens are considered, promoting a democratic approach to integration.

Analyzing external geopolitical factors will provide context for the integration process, allowing for informed decision-making that aligns with broader regional dynamics. Assessing economic conditions will highlight the practical implications of integration, ensuring that strategies are grounded in reality.

Finally, developing potential scenarios will equip stakeholders with the tools needed to navigate uncertainties and adapt to changing circumstances. Overall, this research aims to foster a sustainable and democratic integration process that benefits both Romania and Moldova, ultimately contributing to regional stability and growth.

Literature Review

This comprehensive approach aims to create a solid foundation for informed decision-making regarding the potential integration of Romania and Moldova, ensuring that it is pursued in a democratic and sustainable manner.

How were territorial, national, and cultural claims to Bessarabia produced, contested, and institutionalised?"

This is particularly visible in the contrast between the older Romanian and Russian national historiographies and the more recent approaches of King, Basciani, and especially Suveica. (Iris)

National-Historical and Territorial Approaches

The oldest layer of the literature approaches Bessarabia primarily through the question of historical entitlement. In this tradition, the central analytical problem is whether Bessarabia should be understood as historically Romanian/Moldavian or as a territory legitimately incorporated into the Russian imperial sphere.

de Martonne (1919), Babel (1926), Brătianu (1943), Iorga (1937–44), Nistor (1991), Cernovodeanu (1993), Ciobanu (1923), and Ciorănescu (1985) belong, in different ways, to a historiographical tradition that places considerable emphasis on historical continuity, language, culture, and the legitimacy of Romanian claims [1-8].

The great strength of this literature is that it preserves an important body of evidence concerning language, historical memory, political institutions, cultural practices, and Romanian arguments for the 1918 union. It is indispensable for understanding how Romanian historical legitimacy was constructed.

Its principal weakness is methodological: historical continuity can easily become conflated with modern national identity. The existence of a Romanian-speaking population and historical connections with Moldavia does not, by itself, establish that nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century inhabitants possessed a homogeneous modern Romanian national consciousness. Consequently, these works should be read not only as histories of Bessarabia but also as evidence of the construction of Romanian historical memory and territorial legitimacy.

This is particularly important with Nistor and Brătianu. Their value is considerable, but their arguments should be situated within the political context in which Romanian claims to Bessarabia were being articulated and defended.

Imperial and Geopolitical Approaches

A second approach treats Bessarabia primarily as a strategic borderland between competing imperial and national powers.

Clark (1927), Hitchins (1994), Bruhis (1992), Meltyukhov (2010), and, in a different way, Treptow (1994), are particularly useful here [9-13].

The principal analytical question becomes not simply "Who lived there?", but "Who possessed sovereignty, and how was that sovereignty transformed?"

This approach places the 1812 Russian annexation, the 1856 and 1878 territorial changes, the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, the Romanian union of 1918, the Soviet refusal to recognise that settlement, and the Soviet annexation of 1940 within a larger history of imperial collapse and geopolitical competition.

Its strength is that it prevents Bessarabia from being treated as an isolated ethnic or cultural question. The region was also strategically important because of its position between the Prut and Dniester and its relationship to the Black Sea, the Balkans, Romania, Russia, and later the Soviet Union.

The weakness of a purely geopolitical interpretation is the tendency to reduce local society to an object of great-power competition. The population can become something that states claim rather than a collection of actors capable of generating their own political projects.

This is one of the principal limitations that later scholarship seeks to overcome.

The State-Building and Integration Approach

Basciani's *La difficile unione* represents an important development because it shifts attention from the legitimacy of the 1918 union to the much more complicated question of what happened after the union.

Basciani reconstructs the process through which Bessarabia was incorporated into Greater Romania, using archival material and a substantial bibliography. The work explicitly addresses the complex integration of the region into the Romanian state and the reasons why Romania was unable effectively to defend it in 1940. (Iris)

The key analytical contribution is therefore the distinction between: territorial unification ≠ political integration ≠ social integration.

This is crucial. A territory can be incorporated into a state without its population becoming politically or culturally integrated into that state to the degree anticipated by national ideology.

The strength of Basciani's approach is that it makes administration, institutions, elites, political conflict, and state capacity central to the analysis.

The limitation is that the state remains the principal analytical actor. Bessarabia is examined largely through the relationship between the Romanian state and the region. This leaves room for a more bottom-up analysis of peasants, minorities, local political actors, and competing forms of identity.

Identity and the Politics of Culture

Charles King's *The Moldovans* represents a major historiographical shift.

King deliberately moves the analysis away from the assumption that identity is simply inherited from language, ethnicity, or medieval history. His central concern is how political elites and states use language, history, education, and cultural institutions to construct political identities. The book explicitly examines the competing Russian, Romanian, and Soviet projects of culture-building. (Google Books)

This allows King to reformulate the Bessarabian question.

Instead of asking:

Was Bessarabia Romanian or Russian?

the question becomes:

How did Romanian, Russian, and Moldovan identities acquire political meaning?

This is a much more analytically sophisticated approach because it recognises identity as historically contingent and politically constructed.

King's approach is particularly valuable for understanding why linguistic similarity does not necessarily produce identical political identities. It also demonstrates how state institutions can transform cultural categories into political ones.

The limitation is that the emphasis on political construction can sometimes risk making identity appear excessively instrumental—as though elites simply manufacture identities from above. Local attachment, inherited cultural practices, religious affiliation, and ordinary people's choices also need to be considered.

Nevertheless, King's work is an essential bridge between traditional national historiography and newer approaches to identity and borderlands. Contemporary descriptions of the book similarly emphasise its examination of the political uses of culture and the construction of identity through language and history. (Observer Cultural)

The Transnational and Post-Imperial Approach

Suveica's *Post-Imperial Encounters* represents perhaps the most significant methodological departure in the bibliography.

Rather than treating Bessarabia simply as a territory contested between Romania and Russia, Suveica examines the region through transnational networks, post-imperial political actors, international diplomacy, and the Paris Peace Conference.

Her analysis pays particular attention to the Bessarabian political elite and its attempts to influence the international settlement after the collapse of the Russian Empire. A recent scholarly review stresses her attention to local agency, transnational networks, and the interaction between Bessarabian actors, the Romanian state, and Western powers. (CEU Review of Books)

This is analytically important because it challenges the conventional assumption that the history of Bessarabia can be written exclusively through the actions of Bucharest and Moscow.

Bessarabia becomes instead a post-imperial borderland in which multiple political projects competed simultaneously.

The major strength of this approach is therefore its ability to connect:

- Local political agency;
- Imperial collapse;
- Romanian nation-building;
- International diplomacy;
- Minority and elite politics;
- Competing territorial projects.

The principal limitation is one of emphasis. Suveica's focus on political elites and transnational networks necessarily leaves less space for the everyday social history of the broader population. Nevertheless, this is precisely the kind of methodological shift that allows the historiography to move beyond the older Romanian–Russian binary. Recent reviews explicitly identify the book's treatment of Bessarabia through multiple perspectives and its emphasis on actors who did not simply accept the political settlement imposed by the Romanian state. (Chapman University Digital Commons)

The Russian/Soviet Counter-Narrative

The Russian-language literature, particularly Meltyukhov and Kopanskii, is essential not simply because it offers a different interpretation, but because it demonstrates that the Bessarabian question itself was historiographically contested.

Meltyukhov's *Бессарабский вопрос между мировыми войнами, 1917–1940* places the issue within the interwar confrontation between Romania and the Soviet Union.

This literature tends to give greater weight to:

- Soviet/Russian territorial claims;
- the geopolitical consequences of 1918;
- the legitimacy of Romanian control;
- Soviet diplomacy;
- The strategic significance of the region.

Its major contribution is therefore corrective: it prevents a bibliography dominated by Romanian sources from presenting the Romanian interpretation as self-evident.

Its limitation is the mirror image of the Romanian nationalist literature. A geopolitical and Soviet-centred narrative can similarly reduce Bessarabia's population to an object of interstate competition and may privilege the territorial claims of the Soviet/Russian state.

The analytical value of these works consequently lies partly in reading them against Romanian historiography rather than choosing one national narrative as definitive.

Comparative Historiographical Assessment

The literature can therefore be organised into the following progression:

Scholarly approach	Principal question	Main analytical contribution	Principal limitation
National-historical	Was Bessarabia historically Romanian/Moldavian?	Language, culture, historical continuity	Risks anachronistic nationalism
Imperial/geopolitical	Who controlled Bessarabia and why?	Sovereignty, borders, strategic interests	Underplays local agency
State-building	How was Bessarabia integrated into Romania?	Administration, institutions, political integration	State-centred
Identity/cultural	How were Romanian/Moldovan identities constructed?	Language, culture, identity formation	Can overemphasise elite construction
Transnational/post-imperial	How were political projects constructed across borders?	Local agency, international networks, post-imperial transition	Greater emphasis on elites than society
Russian/Soviet	How was the Bessarabian question understood from Moscow?	Counter-narrative, geopolitics, Soviet claims	State/geopolitical bias

The Principal Historiographical Critique

The most important criticism of the existing literature is that Bessarabia has too often been treated as an object of competing national claims rather than as an historical space in which different political and cultural identities were produced.

Older Romanian scholarship tends to begin with the premise of Romanian historical continuity.

Russian and Soviet scholarship tends to begin from territorial sovereignty and geopolitical legitimacy.

Both approaches can therefore reproduce, in different forms, the very categories whose historical construction requires investigation.

King moves beyond this binary by examining the politics of culture and identity. (Google Books) Basciani then demonstrates that even after the 1918 territorial settlement, the practical construction of Greater Romania remained contested and difficult. (Iris) Suveica goes further by relocating the analysis within a transnational and post-imperial framework, recovering actors and political projects that do not fit neatly into the Romanian–Russian opposition. (CEU Review of Books)

The historiographical trajectory can therefore be represented as:

territorial claim → geopolitical dispute → national integration → identity construction → transnational/post-imperial history.

That progression provides a strong intellectual structure for your literature review.

The Gap the Review can Identify

The strongest research gap is not that Bessarabia has been “understudied”—it clearly has not. The gap is fragmentation between approaches.

There is substantial scholarship on:

- Romanian historical claims;
- Russian/Soviet territorial claims;

- The 1918 union;
- Romanian interwar administration;
- Moldovan identity;
- International diplomacy.

What is less fully integrated is an analysis that brings these dimensions together and asks how territory, identity, state-building, and international recognition mutually constituted one another.

That Gives you a Much Stronger Scholarly Proposition

The historiography of Bessarabia has progressively moved from competing national narratives of territorial entitlement towards more complex analyses of state-building, identity construction, and transnational political agency. Yet these approaches remain insufficiently integrated. A comprehensive interpretation should therefore treat Bessarabia simultaneously as a contested territory, a post-imperial borderland, a site of competing identity projects, and an arena in which local and international actors negotiated the meaning of sovereignty.

Unification Theory

The theory of unification of divided nations examines how separated parts of a nation can become a single political entity. It focuses on the historical, political, social, economic, and international conditions that make unification possible. A central assumption is that political division does not necessarily eliminate a shared national identity. National identity can remain strong despite different political systems and decades of separation. Germany provides an important example of successful national reunification, as German reunification in 1990 followed the collapse of the communist regime in East Germany. The process was supported by domestic political change as well as favorable international conditions. Yemen offers a different example, as North and South Yemen formally unified in 1990. However, political and regional divisions remained after unification, demonstrating that territorial unity does not automatically create social or political integration. Korea represents a divided nation where reunification has not yet occurred because of competing political systems, security concerns, and international interests. Economic differences between North and South Korea also create significant challenges for potential reunification. Integration theory therefore emphasizes the need to combine political institutions, economies, and societies after unification. Conflict-resolution theory focuses on overcoming political, territorial, and identity-based disagreements between the divided sides. State-building theory emphasizes the creation of legitimate and effective institutions capable of governing the unified state. International relations are also important because external powers can either facilitate or prevent national unification. The experiences of Germany, Yemen, and Korea demonstrate that each unification process is shaped by its particular historical circumstances. They also show that achieving formal political unity is different from achieving lasting national integration. Unification therefore should be understood as a long-term process rather than simply the removal of a political border. Its success depends on political legitimacy, economic integration, social acceptance, and effective institutions. The comparison of these cases helps explain why some divided nations achieve sustainable unity while others experience instability or remain divided. This theoretical approach can also be applied to other cases of divided nations and contested territorial unification.

Of course, such theoretical insight carries weight in the work of a center of unification, reflecting the overwhelming hope of the majority of all Romanians on both sides of Prutul.

In summary, existing research on Romania and Bessarabia/Moldova is extensive but fragmented across history, identity, politics, economics, institutions, and geopolitics. A major theoretical gap is the absence of a comprehensive theory of "unification readiness." Existing theories also tend to treat Romanian/Moldovan identity as binary rather than multidimensional and dynamic. There is insufficient research connecting identity, institutional convergence, economic integration, and political support for unification. A further gap is the limited theorisation of unification compared with better-developed theories of European integration, federalism, secession, and irredentism. Empirically, there is no widely accepted multidimensional index measuring Romania–Moldova unification readiness. Economic research has not sufficiently modelled the long-term fiscal costs, benefits, transfers, and convergence effects of possible unification. Public-opinion research often measures identity or political preferences separately rather than explaining what determines support for actual political union. Institutional research has insufficiently examined the compatibility of Romanian and Moldovan constitutional, legal, administrative, fiscal, and security systems. Geopolitical research needs to better integrate the roles of Russia, Ukraine, the EU, NATO, Transnistria, and Gagauzia. Transnistria and Gagauzia are particularly important because their political and constitutional status complicates simple Romania–Moldova models. Historical research is extensive but remains divided among Romanian, Moldovan, Russian, Ukrainian, and Western historiographical traditions. There is therefore a need for genuinely comparative research using sources from these different historiographies. Methodologically, the field relies heavily on historical narrative, political analysis, and polling rather than integrated mixed-method research. A major research gap is therefore the lack of a model combining historical evidence, survey data, institutional analysis, economic modelling, and geopolitical scenarios. Such a model could distinguish between desire for unification, capacity for unification, institutional feasibility, and geopolitical feasibility. The proposed research could operationalise these concepts through a seven-dimensional Unification Readiness Framework. The framework could measure political, economic/fiscal, institutional/legal, social/identity, historical, geopolitical, and data/monitoring dimensions. Comparative cases such as German and Yemeni reunification could then be used to identify conditions associated with successful or unsuccessful unification. The central contribution would therefore be

an empirically testable framework for assessing when, why, and under what conditions Romanian–Moldovan political unification would be feasible.

Underlying Assumptions of Histiographic School

Science is about being conscious about what you are doing , whereas theories constitute the social world into which people interact, make meaning and shape policy. Those views and educational conditioning can never fully harmonise with each other, since we live in a pluralist world.

Dimension	Romanian historiographic tradition	Ukrainian historiographic tradition	Russian historiographic tradition	“Unification” theory
Basic historical unit	Romanian/Moldavian people and their continuity	Ukrainian people and their distinct historical development	Russian/Rus’ people and the broader Russian state-civilizational continuum	A larger common historical community transcending later national borders
Medieval Rus’	Relevant mainly through Moldavia’s later relations with Rus’/Polish-Lithuanian and steppe worlds	Kyivan Rus’ as a principal foundation of Ukrainian history	Kyivan Rus’ as the common/originating state of the Russian historical nation	Shared inheritance rather than exclusive national property
Moldavia	Romanian historical formation; Moldavians are part of the Romanian ethnolinguistic continuum	Historically intertwined with Ukrainian/Polish-Lithuanian/steppe regions	Often situated within a broader East European/Russian sphere, particularly in imperial historiography	Moldavia as a frontier/bridge within a larger interconnected historical system
Language	Romanian continuity is central evidence for national continuity	Ukrainian linguistic development demonstrates distinct nationhood	Russian and closely related East Slavic development supports a broader Russian historical community	Linguistic differences do not necessarily imply separate primordial nations
Nation	Often treated as having deep historical continuity	Nation is historically constructed but possesses substantial historical depth	Traditional imperial/Soviet variants tend toward a larger Russian historical nation; modern Russian narratives vary	Nations are later political crystallizations of older populations and networks
Territory	Territorial continuity matters strongly	Territorial homeland is central to national sovereignty	State formation and imperial political space have considerable historiographic weight	Political borders are contingent; historical interaction zones matter more
Religion	Orthodoxy and Latin/Western influences coexist in the Romanian story	Orthodoxy, Greek Catholicism and European orientation complicate a single civilizational model	Orthodoxy is often treated as a major component of Russian civilization	Religious affiliation can be a connective rather than exclusive identity
Causality	Foreign domination interrupted but did not erase Romanian continuity	External domination shaped but did not determine Ukrainian identity	Political integration is frequently presented as reunification or restoration of a wider historical unity	Separation and integration are alternating historical processes

Modern state implication	Supports Romanian national sovereignty and, historically, Romanian-Moldovan unity	Supports Ukrainian sovereignty and resistance to incorporation into Russian political space	Can support claims of special Russian-Ukrainian historical affinity or, in maximalist versions, deny full separateness	Encourages political projects aimed at reconstructing or institutionalizing historical interconnectedness
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The Crucial Disagreement

The deepest disagreement isn't really "who owned territory X?" It is:
What is the appropriate historical unit of analysis?

A national historiography begins with a people and reconstructs its past toward the present. A unification/integration theory starts from networks, political systems, migrations, dynastic structures, religious communities and economic zones, and asks why those eventually became separate national states.

That distinction produces radically different political conclusions.

Romanian Model → Sovereignty Through Continuity

The Romanian narrative generally places considerable weight on ethnolinguistic and cultural continuity: Daco-Roman continuity, medieval principalities, Moldavia/Wallachia, and eventually modern Romanian national consolidation.

Politically, this can generate the proposition:
historical-cultural unity → legitimate political solidarity/unification.

The obvious contemporary application is the relationship between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. But the same logic can become problematic if historical-cultural continuity is treated as automatically overriding the political preferences of people living in the territory today.

Ukrainian Model → Distinct Nationhood Through Historical Continuity

The Ukrainian historiographic tradition puts particular weight on Kyiv and Kyivan Rus', the Cossack Hetmanate, Ukrainian territorial development, and the persistence of a Ukrainian political/cultural tradition despite incorporation into larger empires.

Its political logic is approximately:
historical distinctiveness → right to independent political development.

This is fundamentally incompatible with a strong version of the Russian "reunification" interpretation. If Kyiv is understood as the starting point of a distinctly Ukrainian historical trajectory, then Russian claims to a privileged political relationship with Ukraine become much harder to justify historically.

Russian Model → Unity/Reintegration

Russian historiography has historically contained several versions, but the powerful imperial/Soviet and some contemporary nationalist variants emphasize:

Kyivan Rus' → later Russian statehood → a historically interconnected Russian/Ukrainian people or civilization.

The political implication can therefore become:
historical unity → legitimate special political relationship.

This is where historiography can become politically dangerous. The inference
"these populations shared a historical civilization"
does not logically entail
"they should belong to the same contemporary state."
A shared medieval history can support cultural affinity without establishing modern sovereignty.

What the "Unification" Theory Changes

If we take "unification" in the stronger theoretical sense—not simply Russian reunification, but a general theory of how historically interconnected populations become politically unified—then it makes a useful distinction:

Historical integration ≠ political unification ≠ modern state sovereignty.

For example:
shared ancestry/culture

↓
economic and religious interaction
↓
political institutions
↓
imperial incorporation
↓
national differentiation
↓
modern statehood

There is no necessity that this sequence culminate in a single state.

Indeed, historical integration can eventually produce political separation. Common institutions can create the linguistic, administrative and economic conditions through which distinct national identities subsequently emerge.

Scholarly Contribution

This research aims to make a significant scholarly contribution to the fields of political science, international relations, and regional studies by providing a comprehensive analysis of the potential unification of Romania and Moldova within the European Union framework.

The study will integrate historical, cultural, economic, and geopolitical perspectives, offering a holistic understanding of the complexities surrounding Romanian-Moldovan unification. This interdisciplinary approach can serve as a model for future studies on regional integration and state-building.

Additionally, the research will engage with existing historiography on Romanian and Moldovan relations, examining how historical narratives shape contemporary attitudes towards unification. By linking these narratives to unification theory, the study will explore how historical context influences the feasibility and desirability of political integration, thereby enriching theoretical discussions on state unification.

The use of public opinion surveys and economic assessments will provide empirical data that enriches the existing literature on Romanian-Moldovan relations. This data can help policymakers and scholars better understand the sentiments and concerns of citizens in both countries regarding unification.

Furthermore, the findings of this research will yield actionable policy recommendations aimed at fostering cooperation and addressing the challenges of integration. These recommendations can guide both Romanian and Moldovan policymakers in their efforts to navigate the unification process while respecting national identities and aspirations.

The study will also examine the geopolitical implications of unification, contributing to the discourse on regional security and international relations in Eastern Europe. It will highlight the importance of considering external influences, particularly from Russia, in discussions of national integration.

Finally, the research emphasizes the need for a longitudinal perspective on unification, encouraging ongoing dialogue and collaboration between Romania and Moldova. This contribution underscores the dynamic nature of political relationships and the necessity for adaptive strategies in response to changing circumstances, comparable the shared perception on both sides that national aspiration for unification need to be more than a con amore study object examined sub specie aeternitate.

Overall, this study aims to advance the academic discourse on Romanian-Moldovan unification, providing a nuanced understanding of the factors at play and offering insights that can inform both scholarly inquiry and practical policymaking. By bridging historiography with unification theory, the research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how historical narratives shape contemporary political realities and aspirations for integration.

Methodology

The methodology for this research will focus on a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and secondary data sources, as no qualitative data has been collected through interviews or public opinion surveys.

First, a thorough literature review will be conducted to gather existing scholarly work on Romanian-Moldovan relations, unification theory, and relevant historical narratives. This review will help identify gaps in the current literature and provide a theoretical framework for the study.

Second, the research will analyze secondary data from reputable sources, including governmental reports, academic articles, and statistical databases. This data will provide insights into economic indicators, demographic trends, and historical contexts relevant to the unification discourse.

Additionally, the research will incorporate a geopolitical analysis to examine the external factors influencing the unification process. This will involve monitoring regional developments, particularly concerning Russia and the European Union, and assessing how these factors may affect the feasibility of unification.

Overall, this methodology will provide a robust framework for understanding the complexities of Romanian-Moldovan unification, ensuring that the research is grounded in empirical data while also considering historical and theoretical perspectives.

Structure

The practical purpose of this monograph determines the exposés structure:

Romania and Bessarabia

The relationship between Romania and Bessarabia is rooted in a history in which questions of territory, identity, sovereignty, and great-power competition have been closely intertwined. Understanding this historical relationship is essential to any contemporary assessment of Romania–Moldova relations, because the question of unification cannot be separated from the historical experience of Bessarabia, its incorporation into different political structures, and the competing interpretations of national self-determination that emerged from these developments.

The Russia–Romania–Moldova Conflict: A Nationality Conflict with Geopolitical Dimensions

The relationship between Russia, Romania, and Moldova cannot be understood solely as a territorial or bilateral dispute. It combines a nationality question with a broader geopolitical competition involving Russia’s regional influence, Romania’s European and Euro-Atlantic orientation, and Moldova’s efforts to preserve sovereignty while defining its strategic future. This section examines how these overlapping dimensions have shaped the political choices available to Moldova and the wider strategic environment surrounding the question of unification.

The Diplomatic Struggle over Bessarabia and Moldova

The history of Bessarabia is also a history of diplomacy: treaties, international recognition, competing claims, and efforts by successive powers to determine the political status of the territory. This section examines the diplomatic struggle surrounding Bessarabia and Moldova, focusing on how international agreements and great-power interests affected the legitimacy and durability of competing territorial settlements.

Overview of Romanian–Moldovan Relations during the Cold War and Post-Communist Period

Romanian–Moldovan relations underwent a fundamental transformation with the collapse of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, the relationship was constrained by ideological division and Soviet control; after 1991, it became a question of bilateral state relations, national identity, European integration, and competing visions of Moldova’s future. This section traces that evolution and identifies the principal continuities and breaks between the two periods.

History and Evolution of Romania–European Relations Since 1990

Romania’s relationship with the European project has fundamentally reshaped its strategic position. From the early post-communist period through NATO membership and accession to the European Union, Romania progressively embedded its political, economic, and security interests within European and transatlantic institutions. This section provides the European context necessary for understanding how Romania’s relationship with Moldova has increasingly become part of a wider EU strategic framework.

History and Evolution of Moldova–EU Relations

For Moldova, European integration has evolved from a foreign-policy aspiration into a central component of national strategy. The development of relations with the European Union has affected Moldova’s institutions, economy, security environment, and domestic political debate. This section examines the principal stages of that relationship and considers how the prospect of EU membership changes the strategic meaning of the Romania–Moldova question.

Moldova: Assessment to 2035

Looking beyond immediate political cycles requires an assessment of Moldova’s likely trajectory over the coming decade. Demography, economic development, institutional capacity, European integration, security vulnerabilities, and relations with Russia will all influence the country’s strategic choices. This section therefore evaluates Moldova’s possible development through 2035 and identifies the factors that could either strengthen its independent statehood or alter the political conditions surrounding unification.

Revisiting the Bessarabian Question

The Bessarabian question remains relevant not because history mechanically determines contemporary politics, but because historical memory continues to influence identity, political legitimacy, and perceptions of sovereignty. Revisiting the question therefore requires distinguishing historical claims from present-day political realities while examining how the legacy of Bessarabia continues to shape Romanian, Moldovan, Russian, and European perspectives.

What is Actually at Stake?

The debate over Romanian–Moldovan unification is ultimately about more than the formal alteration of a state border. It raises questions concerning citizenship, constitutional order, economic convergence, security, territorial integrity, European membership, institutional capacity, and the political identity of millions of people. This section identifies the principal interests and risks at stake and establishes the criteria by which different strategic options should be evaluated.

State of Play: Romania–Moldova Unification

The contemporary debate over unification has moved between periods of high political visibility and periods of relative marginality. Recent developments in Moldova's European orientation, Romania's regional role, and the changing security environment have nevertheless given the question renewed strategic relevance. This section assesses the current political position of the two states, the level of public and institutional support for unification, and the principal legal and political obstacles that remain.

The Strategic Problem

The central strategic problem is how Romania, Moldova, and their European partners can prepare for fundamentally different future scenarios without prematurely assuming that any single outcome is inevitable. Unification may remain politically distant, while deeper European integration may progressively reduce the practical significance of the existing border. This section therefore frames the problem as one of strategic preparedness, resilience, and optionality rather than prediction.

The Centre's Core Function: Maintain the "Unification Readiness System"

If unification is to be treated as a potential strategic contingency rather than simply a political slogan, preparation requires institutional capacity, evidence, and systematic analysis. The proposed Centre would therefore serve as a mechanism for maintaining what may be termed a "Unification Readiness System": a continuously updated assessment of legal, economic, administrative, demographic, infrastructural, security, and political conditions relevant to any future decision. Its purpose would be preparedness rather than advocacy.

EU–Moldova Strategy to Level the Playing Field

The European Union has an important role in ensuring that Moldova's strategic choices are made under conditions of economic and institutional convergence rather than structural vulnerability. A strategy aimed at "levelling the playing field" would reduce disparities in infrastructure, productivity, governance, human capital, and regional development while strengthening Moldova's resilience. This section considers how EU instruments and Member State initiatives could contribute to that objective.

The "Day After Union" Programme

Any serious examination of unification must consider not only how a union might occur, but what would happen immediately afterwards. The "Day After Union" programme is therefore conceived as a framework for examining the practical consequences of institutional integration, including public administration, social protection, taxation, infrastructure, education, public finances, security, and regional development. Its purpose is to transform an abstract political scenario into a concrete governance problem that can be analysed in advance.

How Unification Studies Calculate the Costs of State Unification: Lessons for Romania–Moldova

The economic consequences of political unification cannot be reduced to a single headline figure. Previous cases demonstrate that the costs and benefits of state unification depend on fiscal transfers, institutional integration, wage and productivity differentials, infrastructure gaps, social protection systems, taxation, and the time horizon considered. This section develops a methodological framework for assessing these factors in the specific context of Romania and Moldova.

Comparative Lessons from Germany, Vietnam, Yemen and Korea

Historical comparisons can illuminate the opportunities and dangers associated with state unification, but they must be used carefully because no precedent is identical. Germany demonstrates integration between unequal but highly compatible political and economic systems; Vietnam illustrates unification after prolonged conflict; Yemen demonstrates the difficulties of political integration under weak institutional conditions; and Korea represents the extreme economic and institutional asymmetry of a hypothetical future unification. Together, these cases provide a comparative framework for understanding both the costs and the requirements of successful integration.

The Recapitalisation of the State of Play: Romania–Moldova

The evidence presented in the preceding sections suggests that the central question is not simply whether Romania and Moldova should unite, but whether the conditions can be created under which such a decision, if democratically chosen, could be implemented peacefully, legally, and sustainably. This section brings together the historical, geopolitical, European, economic, and institutional arguments and identifies the principal conclusions for Romanian and Moldovan policymakers.

Framework of Inquiry of the Centre for Unification Readiness

A credible institutional approach requires a structured framework capable of separating evidence from political preference. The Centre's framework of inquiry would therefore bring together historical research, public-opinion analysis, constitutional and international law, economics, regional development, security studies, demography, and European policy. The objective is to create a permanent analytical capacity capable of evaluating changes in the conditions surrounding the unification question.

Contingency Planning at the Institutional Level in Romania

Strategic preparedness requires institutions to examine scenarios before they become immediate political crises. For Romania, contingency planning would involve assessing the constitutional, administrative, fiscal, security, diplomatic, and European implications of a potential decision by Moldova to pursue unification. This section considers how such planning could be conducted while remaining compatible with democratic procedures and Romania's obligations as an EU and NATO member.

Actul Unirii II

A contemporary "Actul Unirii II" would need to be understood not simply as a symbolic declaration but as a possible political and legal framework for a future act of democratic self-determination. Any such framework would have to address constitutional legitimacy, popular consent, international law, institutional continuity, citizenship, territorial administration, and Romania's obligations under European and international treaties. This section explores the conceptual requirements for such an instrument without presupposing that its political conditions currently exist.

Regional Competitiveness Index: North-Eastern and South-Eastern Regions

Regional disparities are central to the practical implications of Romanian–Moldovan integration. The North-Eastern Region of Romania and the regions of Moldova, particularly areas facing persistent development and connectivity challenges, require comparative measurement if policymakers are to identify where investment would produce the greatest convergence. This section introduces a Regional Competitiveness Index intended to provide an empirical basis for measuring productivity, infrastructure, human capital, innovation, governance, and investment conditions.

Joint EU–Member State–Moldova Investment and Cohesion Programme for Bălți and Southern Moldova (Gagauzia)
The final section translates the preceding analysis into a concrete regional-policy proposition. A joint EU–Member State–Moldova investment and cohesion programme could focus on Bălți and southern Moldova, including Gagauzia, with the objective of reducing regional disparities, strengthening economic connectivity, and demonstrating the practical benefits of European integration. Such a programme would also provide a test of whether targeted investment can improve convergence while strengthening Moldova's resilience and strategic autonomy.

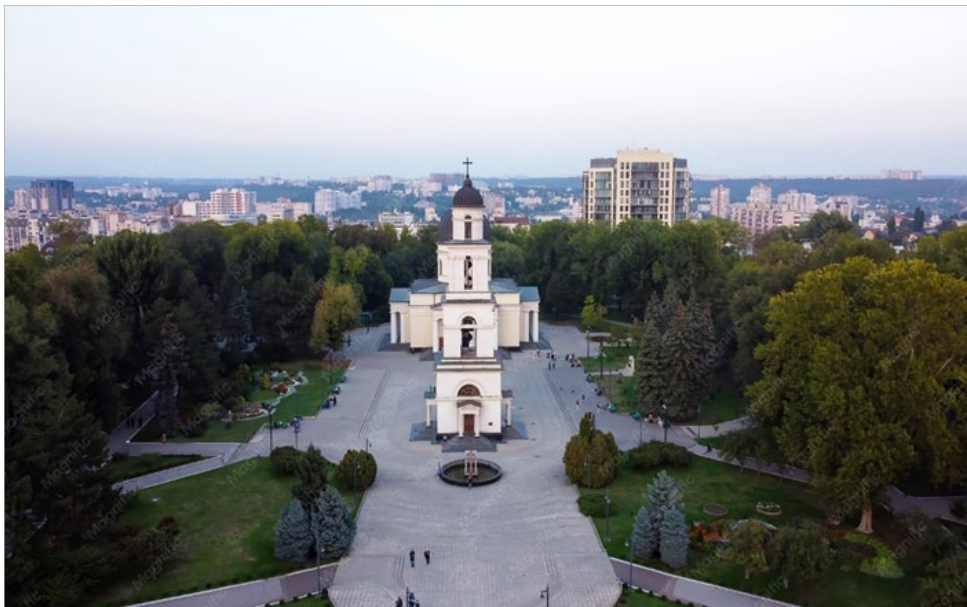
In the conclusions, we summarise our findings and recommendations.

Romania si Bessarabia

Bessarabia and the Question of Romanian Historical and Cultural Identity

The question of whether Bessarabia was historically and culturally Romanian cannot be answered adequately through a simple binary distinction between Romanian and non-Romanian identity. Before 1812, most of the territory subsequently designated as Bessarabia formed part of the Principality of Moldavia, whose political institutions, religious traditions, and vernacular culture were closely connected to the wider Romanian-speaking world. Nevertheless, projecting the modern category of Romanian national identity retrospectively onto the medieval and early modern period risks imposing nineteenth-century nationalist concepts upon earlier forms of political and cultural belonging. Moldavian identity possessed its own historical specificity, and political allegiance to the Moldavian principality did not necessarily correspond to modern Romanian nationalism. The Russian annexation of Bessarabia in 1812 constituted a decisive rupture in the region's political and institutional development. Incorporation into the Russian Empire introduced new administrative structures, demographic movements, educational policies, and cultural influences that progressively differentiated Bessarabia from the Romanian principalities west of the Prut. Russian imperial policy did not, however, eliminate Romanian-language cultural practices or the region's historical connections with Moldavia and the Romanian intellectual sphere. During the nineteenth century, therefore, Bessarabian identity developed through the interaction of inherited Moldavian traditions, Romanian cultural nationalism, Russian imperial structures, and increasingly complex demographic realities. The emergence of Romanian nationalism subsequently transformed earlier linguistic and cultural continuities into claims concerning national belonging. By the revolutionary period of 1917–1918, these competing interpretations acquired an explicitly political character. The creation of the Sfatul Țării and its decision in 1918 to unite Bessarabia with Romania represented a major reconfiguration of the region's political status, but it should not be interpreted simply as the inevitable expression of an immutable Romanian identity. The subsequent incorporation of Bessarabia into Greater Romania involved substantial processes of administrative, educational, linguistic, and institutional integration. As Basciani demonstrates, the difficulties encountered by the Romanian state reveal the distinction between claiming a territory as nationally Romanian and successfully integrating its population into the political structures of the Romanian state. At the same time, Romanian cultural policies strengthened the institutional presence of the Romanian language and national historical narrative. Yet these policies coexisted with significant ethnic, linguistic, religious, and political diversity. The Soviet annexation of Bessarabia in 1940 initiated another profound transformation of the region's institutional and

cultural landscape. Soviet authorities subsequently promoted a distinct Moldovan identity, thereby challenging the Romanian interpretation of Moldavian historical continuity. As King has demonstrated, the category of Moldovan identity cannot therefore be understood merely as an artificial Soviet invention, since its political meaning developed through a longer interaction between local identities, Romanian nationalism, Russian imperialism, and Soviet state-building. More recent scholarship, particularly Suveica's transnational approach, further complicates the older historiographical opposition between Romanian and Russian claims. From this perspective, Bessarabia should be understood not merely as territory contested between states but as a post-imperial space in which competing political communities sought to define national belonging. The historiographical dispute is consequently not only about what Bessarabia objectively "was," but also about how historical actors constructed, institutionalised, and contested its identity. Romanian scholarship has made a substantial case for the region's linguistic, cultural, and historical connections with the Romanian world, but this interpretation must be situated alongside Moldavian, Russian, Soviet, and transnational perspectives. The most defensible scholarly conclusion is therefore that Bessarabia possessed profound historical and cultural connections with the Romanian/Moldavian world while its modern national identity remained historically contingent and politically contested. This distinction permits recognition of genuine Romanian cultural continuities without reducing the complex history of Bessarabia to an uncomplicated narrative of national ownership.



The Geopolitical and Territorial Status of Bessarabia

The geopolitical and territorial status of Bessarabia was never entirely stable, but was repeatedly transformed by the interaction of imperial expansion, territorial sovereignty, national claims, and international diplomacy. Before 1812, most of the territory later designated as Bessarabia belonged to the Principality of Moldavia, which exercised political sovereignty while existing within the wider geopolitical sphere of the Ottoman Empire. The Treaty of Bucharest of 1812 transferred Bessarabia to the Russian Empire, establishing the first major modern rupture in the territory's political status. Russian annexation transformed Bessarabia from a Moldavian principality territory into an imperial borderland situated between the Russian and Ottoman worlds. Its strategic significance derived from its position between the Dniester and Prut rivers and from its proximity to the Black Sea and the Balkans. During the nineteenth century, Russia regarded Bessarabia principally as a strategic frontier, while Romanian political thought increasingly interpreted the territory through the language of historical, linguistic, and national continuity. The Russo-Turkish War of 1853–1856 temporarily altered the territorial configuration of the region, with the southern districts of Bessarabia being transferred to Moldavia under the Treaty of Paris. This arrangement was reversed in 1878, when Russia regained southern Bessarabia following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. The oscillation of sovereignty demonstrated that the territory's status remained closely dependent upon the wider balance of power in Eastern Europe. The collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 created another fundamental geopolitical opening. The emergence of the Moldavian Democratic Republic and the subsequent vote for union with Romania in 1918 transformed Bessarabia into part of Greater Romania. Romania subsequently sought international recognition of the union, while Soviet Russia refused to accept the territorial settlement and continued to regard Bessarabia as disputed territory. The absence of Soviet recognition was central to the persistence of the so-called Bessarabian question throughout the interwar period. Bessarabia consequently occupied an ambiguous position between de facto Romanian administration and contested international legitimacy. The 1920 Treaty of Paris recognised the union of Bessarabia with Romania among the Allied powers that signed it, but the Soviet Union did not accept the settlement. The dispute therefore remained embedded within the broader geopolitical rivalry between Romania and the Soviet Union. During the interwar period, Bessarabia also acquired significance as Romania's eastern frontier and as a strategic buffer between Romania and the Soviet state. The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 fundamentally altered this geopolitical context by placing Bessarabia within the sphere of Soviet strategic interest. In June 1940, following Soviet diplomatic pressure and an ultimatum, Romania ceded Bessarabia to the Soviet Union. Soviet annexation again

transformed the territory's international and administrative status, incorporating most of Bessarabia into the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic while other areas were attached to the Ukrainian SSR. The territorial division established in 1940 became particularly consequential because it separated historical Bessarabian territories among different Soviet administrative units. Following the Second World War, Soviet sovereignty over the region became consolidated and was incorporated into the post-war European territorial order. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the central part of historical Bessarabia became part of the independent Republic of Moldova, while northern and southern territories remained within Ukraine. The geopolitical history of Bessarabia is therefore characterised by successive transitions between Moldavian, Ottoman, Russian, Romanian, Soviet, and post-Soviet frameworks of sovereignty. Its territorial status cannot consequently be understood solely through the competing national claims of Romania and Russia. Rather, it must be situated within the larger history of imperial dissolution, European diplomacy, border-making, and the transformation of political sovereignty in Eastern Europe. The enduring significance of the Bessarabian question lies precisely in the fact that territorial boundaries repeatedly preceded, followed, and reshaped competing conceptions of national identity.

How Was the Territorial Dispute Constructed and Resolved Internationally?

The international construction of the Bessarabian dispute emerged from the collapse of the Russian Empire, the transformation of European borders after the First World War, and competing principles of territorial sovereignty and national self-determination. Before 1917, Bessarabia was internationally recognised as part of the Russian Empire, following the Russian annexation of 1812. The collapse of imperial authority in 1917 transformed the question from an internal imperial matter into an international problem concerning the legitimacy of new states and borders. The proclamation of the Moldavian Democratic Republic and the subsequent union of Bessarabia with Romania in March 1918 provided the Romanian government with a political and constitutional basis for asserting sovereignty over the territory. Romania subsequently sought international recognition by presenting the union as an expression of local self-determination and historical and cultural continuity. Soviet Russia, by contrast, rejected the Romanian interpretation and maintained that the transfer of Bessarabia had occurred without a legitimate bilateral settlement with Russia. The dispute was therefore constructed internationally through competing claims concerning sovereignty, self-determination, historical rights, and the legitimacy of the 1918 political process. The Paris Peace Conference provided the principal diplomatic framework within which the question was considered after the First World War. Romania attempted to transform its *de facto* control into internationally recognised sovereignty, while the Allied powers considered the Bessarabian question alongside the wider redrawing of Eastern European borders. The Treaty of Paris of 1920 recognised the union of Bessarabia with Romania on behalf of the principal Allied and Associated Powers that signed the settlement. This represented an important diplomatic victory for Romania and provided substantial international recognition of its territorial claim.

Nevertheless, the settlement did not produce universal acceptance. Soviet Russia did not participate in the treaty and did not recognise Romanian sovereignty over Bessarabia. Consequently, the international resolution was incomplete in both diplomatic and geopolitical terms. The dispute therefore persisted throughout the interwar period despite Romania's effective administration of the territory and its recognition by several major European powers. The absence of Soviet recognition meant that the Bessarabian frontier remained a potential point of conflict between Romania and the Soviet Union. International diplomacy consequently transformed the dispute from an immediate post-imperial question into a longer-term problem of contested territorial legitimacy. The situation changed radically in 1939 with the conclusion of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, whose secret protocol placed Bessarabia within the sphere of Soviet interest. In June 1940, the Soviet Union used this geopolitical opportunity to demand Romania's withdrawal from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. Romania, facing overwhelming Soviet military superiority and lacking effective external support, accepted the ultimatum and evacuated the territories. The 1940 Soviet annexation therefore overturned the interwar settlement through coercion rather than through a negotiated international treaty between Romania and the Soviet Union. During and after the Second World War, the Soviet territorial settlement became incorporated into the emerging post-war European order, and Bessarabia ceased to function as an active international territorial dispute between the major victorious powers. The Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 confirmed Romania's post-war borders with the Soviet Union, thereby consolidating the territorial consequences of the Soviet annexation. From this perspective, the dispute was not resolved through a single definitive act but through successive stages of imperial collapse, Romanian state-building, Allied recognition, Soviet non-recognition, geopolitical revision, and post-war consolidation. The international history of Bessarabia therefore illustrates the limits of self-determination when confronted with great-power politics. Romanian diplomacy successfully obtained significant international recognition in 1920, but that recognition lacked the participation of the very power that contested the settlement most directly. The Soviet Union subsequently overturned the interwar arrangement when the European balance of power permitted it to do so. The eventual settlement was therefore less the product of an uncontested legal resolution than of the consolidation of a new post-war balance of power. For this reason, the Bessarabian question is particularly revealing of the tension between international law, national self-determination, historical claims, and great-power geopolitics in twentieth-century Eastern Europe.

How were Identities, Borders, and Political Projects Constructed Across Imperial and National Boundaries?

The construction of identity, borders, and political projects in Bessarabia was a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of Moldavian traditions, Russian imperial rule, Romanian nationalism, Soviet state-building, and broader European diplomatic transformations. Rather than possessing a single fixed identity, the region functioned as a borderland in which political and cultural identities were continuously negotiated. Before 1812, inhabitants of the Principality of Moldavia

shared linguistic, religious, and cultural traditions with populations in the other Romanian principalities, but these affiliations did not necessarily constitute a modern Romanian national identity. The Russian annexation of 1812 introduced a new imperial framework in which administrative institutions, education, migration, and language policies gradually altered the social and political environment. The border between the Russian Empire and the Romanian principalities subsequently became not merely a territorial boundary but also a site through which competing conceptions of political and cultural belonging were produced. Romanian intellectuals increasingly interpreted linguistic and cultural continuities across the Prut as evidence of a broader Romanian national community. Russian imperial authorities, meanwhile, sought to integrate Bessarabia administratively and culturally into the imperial state, producing competing understandings of what constituted legitimate political belonging. The revolutionary crisis of 1917 transformed these cultural debates into competing political projects. Some Bessarabian political actors advocated autonomy, others supported independence, while others increasingly favoured union with Romania. The creation of the Moldavian Democratic Republic and the Sfatul Țării therefore represented not simply a change of government but an attempt to construct a new political community from the ruins of empire. The 1918 union with Romania subsequently provided a framework within which Romanian national institutions, education, administration, and historical narratives were extended into Bessarabia. Yet the process was not simply one of cultural reunification, since the Romanian state itself had to negotiate substantial regional, ethnic, linguistic, and political diversity. As Basciani demonstrates, the difficulty of integrating Bessarabia into Greater Romania reveals the gap between territorial unification and social or political integration. Soviet rule after 1940 introduced a radically different project of identity construction. Soviet authorities reorganised the territory administratively and promoted a distinct Moldovan national identity, thereby challenging Romanian claims concerning linguistic and historical continuity. Language became particularly important because the distinction between Romanian and Moldovan could be transformed from a linguistic question into a political instrument of state legitimacy. The Soviet approach therefore demonstrates how states can actively produce categories of identity through institutions, education, territorial administration, and historical narratives. King's analysis is particularly valuable in this respect because it treats Moldovan identity not simply as an inherited ethnic category but as a political and cultural formation shaped by competing state projects. Suveica's transnational approach further complicates the picture by demonstrating that Bessarabia's political future was discussed and constructed beyond the territory itself, particularly through international networks and post-imperial negotiations in Paris and elsewhere. Political projects were consequently generated simultaneously at the local, national, imperial, and international levels. Borders themselves were therefore not merely lines separating pre-existing communities; they helped produce the categories of belonging that they purported to delimit. The Prut and Dniester, for example, acquired different political meanings as they became imperial, national, and eventually Soviet administrative boundaries. The history of Bessarabia consequently demonstrates that identity and territory were mutually constitutive rather than independent variables. National movements used historical and cultural arguments to legitimise territorial claims, while states used territorial control to institutionalise particular interpretations of identity. The resulting political projects were therefore neither entirely imposed from above nor spontaneously generated from below. They emerged from continuous negotiation among local actors, intellectuals, political elites, imperial administrations, national governments, and international institutions. Bessarabia can consequently be understood as a laboratory of post-imperial state formation, in which competing actors repeatedly attempted to transform a heterogeneous borderland into a coherent political community. This perspective moves the historiography beyond the question of whether Bessarabia was intrinsically Romanian, Russian, or Moldovan and instead asks how these categories themselves acquired political meaning. It also explains why the territorial dispute proved so persistent: competing claims to the territory were simultaneously claims about the identity and historical legitimacy of the population living within it. The history of Bessarabia therefore illustrates the broader problem of twentieth-century Eastern Europe, where the collapse of empires created not simply new borders but an enduring struggle over who had the authority to define the nations that those borders were supposed to contain.

DE Russification

De-Russification in Moldova, understood *de profundis*, would entail a comprehensive transformation of the country's linguistic, cultural, educational, institutional, economic, and geopolitical orientations. At its linguistic core, it would require the consolidation of Romanian as the principal language of public administration, education, political communication, and cultural production, while preserving the legitimate linguistic rights of Russian-speaking and other minority communities. In the educational sphere, it would involve a critical reappraisal of Soviet historiography and the development of curricula capable of situating Moldovan history within its broader Romanian, Eastern European, and European contexts, without collapsing the complexity of Moldovan identity into a single ethnonational narrative.

Such a process would also necessitate the gradual reconfiguration of Moldova's information and cultural space, particularly through the strengthening of independent domestic media and the development of cultural institutions less dependent upon Russian intellectual and symbolic production. At the institutional level, de-Russification would imply dismantling residual Soviet administrative practices and informal networks of influence, alongside greater transparency concerning foreign political and financial influence. Economically and strategically, it would require reducing structural dependence upon Russia through diversification of energy supplies, trade relations, infrastructure, and investment.

The geopolitical dimension would be inseparable from this transformation. Moldova would need to reinforce its sovereign capacity in the security sphere, reduce Russian military and political leverage, and address the unresolved Transnistrian conflict within a framework centred upon territorial integrity and democratic legitimacy. More broadly,

European integration would provide the principal institutional and geopolitical alternative to the historical Russian sphere of influence.

Yet a genuinely *de profundis* process of de-Russification could not simply consist of replacing Russian cultural dominance with an exclusionary ethnic nationalism. Its deeper objective would be the construction of an autonomous Moldovan civic order in which historical memory, language, political institutions, and foreign relations are no longer structurally conditioned by Russian power, while Russian-speaking citizens remain fully incorporated into the political community. In this sense, de-Russification would concern not the eradication of Russian identity from Moldova, but the emancipation of the Moldovan state and society from asymmetrical dependence upon Russian political, cultural, and geopolitical influence.

Figure Moldova Russificate – O sa fie Tartar!



Moldova's de Russification pillars form a single operational front, where language, education, and media are not cultural ornaments but instruments of state survival. The restoration of Romanian as the civic language is the first line of defense, because a nation that cannot speak itself cannot defend itself. Educational reform follows as the strategic re arming of memory, replacing the passivity of Soviet narratives with the dignity of national history. The information sphere must be secured like a contested battlefield, for propaganda is simply the enemy's artillery fired into the citizen's mind. Culture becomes a mobilizing force, binding the population to a shared moral horizon rather than to inherited habits of submission. State institutions must be rebuilt with the discipline of an officer corps, purging the residues of Soviet bureaucracy that corrode authority from within. Economic independence is not a market preference but a matter of sovereignty, because dependence is merely occupation by other means. Security, European integration, and civic cohesion together form the shield of the republic, ensuring that every citizen stands inside the same national line.

The three conceptual variants may be regarded not as mutually exclusive alternatives, but as successive dimensions of a single strategic problem: the consolidation of Moldova as a sovereign, resilient, and European state. Their distinction lies principally in the level at which the process of de-Russification is conceived—within the machinery of the state, within Moldova's geopolitical orientation, or within the inherited structures of power that continue to condition the exercise of sovereignty.

The State-Capacity Variant

The state-capacity approach begins from a fundamental proposition: sovereignty is meaningful only to the extent that the state possesses the institutional capacity to exercise it. From this perspective, de-Russification should not be reduced to a question of language or cultural preference, but understood as the gradual emancipation of public institutions from inherited dependencies, informal networks, and administrative practices originating in the Soviet system. Civil-service professionalization, judicial independence, administrative competence, institutional accountability, and the rule of law therefore become instruments of strategic sovereignty.

The merit of this approach is precisely its restraint. It avoids transforming de-Russification into an instrument of cultural exclusion and instead places the emphasis upon the modernization and consolidation of the Moldovan state. Its weakness is equally apparent: institutional modernization alone cannot resolve the deeper historical and symbolic dimensions of Russian influence. A state may reform its administration while leaving untouched the narratives, identities, informational structures, and historical memories through which external influence continues to reproduce itself.

The Geopolitical Variant

The geopolitical approach proceeds from the recognition that Moldova's internal sovereignty cannot be separated from its external strategic environment. For decades, Russian influence has been sustained not merely through political instruments, but through energy dependence, economic interconnection, informational penetration, security structures, and the unresolved question of Transnistria. Consequently, the reduction of Russian influence requires a corresponding diversification of Moldova's external dependencies and a progressive anchoring of the country within the European political, economic, and security space.

In this conception, European integration is not simply a foreign-policy preference. It constitutes an instrument of state consolidation. The diversification of energy supplies, expansion of European markets, strengthening of institutional cooperation, and development of independent security capabilities progressively enlarge Moldova's room for sovereign manoeuvre. The danger, however, lies in presenting this transformation as a crude geopolitical substitution—Russia for Europe—rather than as the construction of genuine strategic autonomy. Nor should Moldova's Russian-speaking citizens be made to perceive Europeanization as directed against their linguistic or cultural identity.

The Hardline Institutional Variant

The hardline institutional approach takes as its point of departure the persistence of entrenched networks capable of reproducing external influence even after formal political change. From this perspective, the problem is not simply one of institutional weakness but of institutional capture: security services, political financing, bureaucratic networks, media structures, and elements of the judiciary may preserve patterns of influence long after the political environment in which they emerged has changed.

The appropriate response, therefore, would involve systematic vetting, institutional accountability, transparency of political financing, and the dismantling of demonstrably compromised networks. Yet the distinction between institutional purification and political purging is fundamental. A sovereign democratic state cannot strengthen itself by abandoning the very principles of legality and due process upon which its sovereignty rests. Any such transformation must consequently remain subordinated to constitutional guarantees, judicial review, and clearly established legal standards.

Strategic Synthesis

The three approaches ultimately address different manifestations of the same historical problem. State capacity provides the internal foundation of sovereignty; geopolitical reorientation provides its external framework; institutional reform addresses the networks capable of obstructing both. The strategic objective should therefore not be an indiscriminate "de-Russification" of Moldovan society, but the progressive elimination of structural dependencies that restrict the Republic of Moldova's freedom of political choice.

Such a policy would distinguish carefully between Russian influence and the Russian-speaking population; between Soviet institutional legacies and individual historical memory; and between European integration and cultural homogenization. The objective would be neither the eradication of a language nor the repudiation of a community, but the establishment of a state whose institutions, strategic choices, and political loyalties are determined in Chişinău rather than conditioned elsewhere.

In this sense, the deepest form of de-Russification would ultimately be measured not by how much Russian influence Moldova has removed, but by how fully Moldova has acquired the institutional capacity, political cohesion, and strategic autonomy to determine its own future.

Figure Stone formation in Dobrogea



Dobrogea is a land where the wind seems older than memory, sweeping across endless steppes scorched by the sun and bending the silver reeds of the Danube Delta. Between the quiet waters that lose themselves among birds and willows and the ancient, worn-down backs of the Măcin Mountains, the earth unfolds with a grave and untamed beauty. To the east, the Black Sea breathes its salt and light over lonely shores, while the vast horizon, always open, gives the traveler the feeling that the world has not yet ended and perhaps never will.

The sheep farmer of Dobrogea walks slowly beneath the immense sky, as if he has borrowed his patience from the steppe itself. His face is darkened by the sun and carved by the wind, and his eyes, fixed on the wandering flock, seem to carry the silence of distant horizons. From dawn until dusk, he follows his flock through sun-drenched grasses and along the slopes of the sunken mountains, accompanied only by the barking of dogs and the distant music of bells carried by the wind. He belongs to the land as much as the thorn bushes, the reeds, and the restless wind; and when he speaks, his words come sparingly, seasoned with solitude, hardship, and a quiet pride that no storm has ever managed to bend. On the roads less travelled, winding toward the Danube, the shepherd moves through a land that feels close enough to touch, yet distant from the world beyond it, as we are racing past him on the Autostrada Soarelui towards the seaside.

The Russia–Romania–Moldova Conflict: a Nationality Conflict with Geopolitical Dimensions

The Bessarabian question began as a territorial and imperial conflict, but it progressively became a nationality conflict. The decisive turning point was the Russian annexation of eastern Moldavia in 1812. From that point onward, two competing processes developed: the incorporation of Bessarabia into the Russian imperial political and cultural space, and the gradual emergence of a Romanian national consciousness among part of the Moldavian population. The Russian administration initially preserved some local institutional and linguistic particularities, but Bessarabia was progressively incorporated into the imperial system, while Romanian/Moldavian national mobilisation developed particularly strongly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The important point is that the nationality conflict did not begin simply as “Russians versus Romanians.” It evolved around a more complicated question: Were the inhabitants of Bessarabia a distinct Moldovan nationality, or were they part of the broader Romanian nation separated by an imperial border? That question subsequently acquired enormous political significance.

The Historical Nationality Conflict

Between 1812 and 1918, Bessarabia developed separately from the Romanian state west of the Prut. Russian imperial rule created a different institutional, educational, demographic and cultural environment. At the same time, Romanian national ideas increasingly penetrated Bessarabia, particularly among sections of the educated elite. The emergence of Romanian nationalism therefore challenged the imperial conception of Bessarabia as an integrated Russian province. (limbaromana.md)

The 1917–1918 period transformed this cultural dispute into a question of political sovereignty and national self-determination. The Sfatul Țării initially proclaimed the Moldavian Democratic Republic and subsequently voted for union with Romania on 27 March 1918. (nationalmuseum.md)

The Romanian period of 1918–1940 consequently represents another stage in the nationality conflict. Romanian state institutions attempted to integrate Bessarabia into Greater Romania, but the process was not socially or politically uniform. The period produced competing interpretations of identity, including Romanian nationalisation, regional Moldovan identity, and memories of the preceding Russian period. (Ciccre)

The Soviet annexation of 1940 fundamentally changed the balance again. The USSR promoted a distinct Moldovan national identity, separate from Romanian identity, and incorporated Moldova into a Soviet institutional, linguistic and geopolitical framework. This created the institutional foundations for the modern distinction between “Moldovan” and “Romanian” as competing political identities. (Origins)

The Contemporary Nationality Conflict

After 1991, the nationality question did not disappear. It was transformed.

The central question became:

Is Moldova an independent Moldovan nation-state whose population has a distinct national identity, or is Moldova a Romanian-speaking part of the broader Romanian nation whose political separation is historically contingent?

This produces three principal identity positions.

- **Moldovan Civic Nationalism** argues that Moldova is a sovereign nation-state and that Moldovan identity should not be subordinated to Romanian identity.
- **Romanian Unionism** argues that Moldovans and Romanians constitute essentially one nation divided by historical circumstances and that political union is therefore a legitimate national objective.
- **Hybrid or Layered Identity** allows individuals to identify simultaneously as Moldovan and Romanian, treating Moldovan identity as territorial/civic and Romanian identity as linguistic or cultural.

This third position is particularly important. Research on everyday identity in Moldova shows that people do not necessarily fit neatly into mutually exclusive Romanian/Moldovan categories. Kin-state identification can coexist with attachment to the home state. (Wiley Online Library)

Thus, the nationality conflict is real but not necessarily binary.

Russia’s Nationality Interest

Russia’s interest in the nationality question goes beyond territorial control.

A distinct Moldovan identity has historically served as an alternative to the idea that Moldova is inherently part of the Romanian nation. From a Russian strategic perspective, this distinction has important consequences.

If:

Moldovan = Romanian

then Romanian political integration becomes easier to justify.

If:

Moldovan = distinct national identity

then Moldovan statehood possesses a stronger independent national legitimacy.

Consequently, the nationality question has geopolitical implications.

Russia has therefore had an interest in maintaining political and cultural space for a distinct Moldovan identity, particularly where that identity is associated with neutrality, Russian linguistic/cultural links, or resistance to unification with Romania.

But this should not be reduced to the claim that every Moldovan identity is “Russian-created.” Moldovan identity has its own historical and social dimensions, and many citizens can hold it without being pro-Russian.

The analytical point is subtler:

Russia benefits geopolitically when Moldovan national identity is sufficiently distinct from Romanian identity to make political union less attractive.

Romania’s Nationality Interest

Romania approaches the issue from the opposite direction.

The Romanian national narrative emphasises the linguistic and historical continuity between the population of Moldova and the Romanian nation. From this perspective, the 1812 separation and subsequent Russian/Soviet rule are seen as historical processes that interrupted an existing Romanian/Moldavian unity.

This produces what can be called a kin-state relationship: Romania sees itself not merely as a neighbouring state but as the principal external homeland associated with Moldova’s Romanian-speaking population.

The stakes are therefore both cultural and political.

Romania has an interest in:

- preserving Romanian language and culture;
- strengthening Moldovan–Romanian societal links;
- supporting Moldova’s European integration;
- reducing Russian influence;
- strengthening Moldovan state resilience;

and, for the unionist camp, keeping open the possibility of eventual political unification.

The strategic innovation is that Romania can increasingly pursue most of these objectives without formally demanding unification.

Moldova: The Nationality Conflict is Fundamentally Internal

This is where the analysis needs to go beyond a simple Russia–Romania framework. The nationality conflict today is fundamentally within Moldova itself.

Moldovan citizens disagree over how to interpret their history, language and national identity. Some see Romanian identity as fundamental; others insist on a distinct Moldovan identity; others combine the two; and different communities have additional linguistic and regional identities.

This means that Russia and Romania are not simply competing over an external territory. They are interacting with competing identity constituencies within Moldova.

That is why the nationality question can become politically explosive even without an interstate territorial claim.

The experience of the early 1990s illustrates this dynamic particularly clearly. The rise of a strongly pro-Romanian national movement and discussion of union contributed to political mobilisation in Transnistria and Gagauzia, where fears about the future status of their communities became intertwined with opposition to Chisinau's national project. (Origins)

Transnistria is Partly a Nationality Conflict

Transnistria should therefore not be treated solely as a Russian military/security problem. It also has a nationality and identity dimension.

The region developed a distinct political identity shaped by its Soviet institutional heritage, Russian and Ukrainian cultural influences, and opposition to the national-language policies associated with Moldova's independence period. Research indicates that a distinct Transnistrian identity subsequently consolidated, particularly among younger generations. (ResearchGate)

This creates a crucial feedback mechanism:

Romanianisation fears → Moldovan nationalist mobilisation → Transnistrian resistance → Russian involvement → reinforcement of Moldova's geopolitical vulnerability.

The nationality question therefore became part of the security conflict.

Ukraine's Position

Ukraine has a particularly delicate position because it is simultaneously a neighbour, security actor and multiethnic state.

Ukraine has a strong interest in:

Moldovan territorial integrity;

Moldovan sovereignty;

European integration;

limiting Russian influence;

and preventing another destabilising territorial conflict on its western flank.

At the same time, Ukraine contains Romanian-speaking and other national minorities. Consequently, Kyiv has a strong interest in ensuring that the Romanian–Moldovan question does not evolve into a general principle that ethnic or linguistic kinship automatically justifies territorial revision.

Ukraine therefore has an incentive to support:

Romanian–Moldovan cultural integration, minority rights and European integration, while resisting any automatic linkage between ethnic identity and territorial sovereignty.

That distinction is strategically important for Kyiv.

Hungary's Position

Hungary is relevant for a similar reason.

Hungary's interest is less about Bessarabia itself and more about the precedent created by nationality-based political arrangements.

Hungary has major interests in the rights and political status of Hungarian communities outside Hungary, particularly in Romania and Ukraine.

Consequently, Budapest would likely examine a Romanian–Moldovan settlement through questions such as:
Can national identity cross state borders without challenging territorial integrity?
Can a kin-state deepen cultural and political relations with its external national community?
What rights should minorities possess?
Can dual or layered identities coexist with sovereign statehood?
This makes Hungary potentially supportive of Europeanised minority-rights solutions, but cautious about any precedent in which ethnic affinity automatically produces territorial revision.

The EU Changes the Nationality Conflict

This is perhaps the most important strategic development.

European integration offers a way to separate nationality from sovereignty.
Within the EU, a Romanian in Romania and a Romanian-speaking Moldovan in Moldova can share language, culture, mobility, education, business networks and political values without necessarily living in the same state.

That creates a fundamentally different model from nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism.
Instead of:
one nation → one territory → one state
the European model can increasingly allow:
shared identity → shared rights → shared institutions → open borders → potentially separate states.
This is why Moldova's EU integration can actually reduce the intensity of the nationality conflict.

It does not require Moldovans to abandon Romanian identity.
Nor does it require Moldovans who insist on a distinct national identity to abandon their sovereignty.

The Strategic Triangle

The conflict can therefore be represented as a triangle:

Russia

- distinct Moldovan identity
- geopolitical influence
- preservation of strategic ambiguity

Romania

- Romanian linguistic/cultural identity
- European integration
- deep bilateral integration
- potential future union

Moldova

- sovereign statehood
- European integration
- management of competing identities
- preservation of democratic choice

And surrounding this triangle:

EU → de-territorialise the conflict through integration

Ukraine → preserve territorial integrity and regional security

Hungary → protect minority/national-community principles and avoid destabilising precedents.

The conflict can therefore be understood as a triangle of competing, and at times overlapping, interests. Russia seeks to reinforce a distinct Moldovan identity, maintain geopolitical influence, and preserve a degree of strategic ambiguity. Romania, by contrast, emphasises the Romanian linguistic and cultural dimension of Moldova, supports European integration and deep bilateral ties, while leaving open the possibility of a future union. Moldova itself occupies the centre of this tension, seeking to preserve sovereign statehood while pursuing European integration, managing competing identities, and, above all, maintaining the democratic freedom to determine its own political future.

Surrounding this triangle are the wider regional and European actors, whose interests further shape the space in which Moldova must operate. The European Union seeks to transform the nature of the conflict by making borders and geopolitical divisions less consequential through integration. Ukraine's priority is the preservation of territorial integrity and regional security, particularly in the context of wider Russian pressure. Hungary, meanwhile, approaches the issue through the lens of minority and national-community rights, while remaining attentive to the potentially destabilising precedents that questions of identity and territorial change may create.

Taken together, these dynamics reveal that the Moldovan question is not simply a contest between competing national identities or geopolitical orientations. It is a struggle over the meaning of sovereignty, belonging, and political choice in a contested borderland. Moldova's position is therefore both the most vulnerable and the most consequential: its ability to reconcile identity with sovereignty, and European integration with internal pluralism, will determine whether the competing pressures surrounding it produce confrontation, accommodation, or a gradual transformation of the conflict itself.

Figure Sarmizegetusa



The Diplomatic Struggle over Bessarabia and Moldova

The Bessarabian question evolved considerably between the eighteenth century and the twentieth century. It was not simply a territorial dispute between Russia and Romania. At different moments, it involved the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, Moldavia, Romania, Ukraine, the inhabitants of Bessarabia, and the wider European powers. The objectives defended by these actors changed as the political and national character of the region developed.

During the eighteenth century, the territory that later became known as Bessarabia was principally connected with the Principality of Moldavia. The term "Bessarabia" originally referred mainly to the southern part of the region around the Danube and Dniester estuaries, rather than to the entire territory between the Prut and Dniester. The central strategic struggle was therefore not yet a dispute over an independent "Bessarabia," but part of the broader rivalry between the Ottoman and Russian Empires over Moldavia, the Black Sea and the Danube.

Russia's principal objective was to push its frontier south and west, secure access to the Black Sea, weaken Ottoman power and establish a stronger strategic position along the Dniester and Danube. Russian rulers also presented themselves as protectors of Orthodox Christians living under Ottoman rule. This religious justification complemented much more concrete strategic interests: control of territory, military security, commercial access and the expansion of Russian influence into southeastern Europe. For Russia, Moldavia and the lands that later became Bessarabia were therefore valuable both as a defensive frontier and as a route toward the Danube and Balkans.

Moldavia had a fundamentally different interest. Its political elite sought to preserve the principality's territorial integrity and internal autonomy while avoiding domination by either Russia or the Ottoman Empire. Moldavia was an Ottoman vassal rather than an ordinary Ottoman province, and its rulers retained considerable internal institutions and political traditions. Russian intervention therefore posed a serious threat to Moldavian territorial integrity even when Russia claimed to be defending Orthodox Christians. The Russo-Ottoman wars of the eighteenth century progressively brought Russian power closer to Moldavia, and the Treaty of Jassy in 1792 established the Dniester as Russia's frontier, greatly increasing Russian strategic influence in the region.

The decisive transformation came during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1806–1812. Russia occupied Moldavia and ultimately secured the territory between the Prut and Dniester in the Treaty of Bucharest of 1812. The Ottoman government ceded this territory to Russia even though it had previously formed part of Moldavia. Russia subsequently expanded the geographical meaning of the name "Bessarabia" so that it referred to the entire territory acquired in 1812. The Prut consequently became a new political frontier, dividing Moldavian territory between the Russian Empire and the remaining Ottoman-controlled principality.

For Russia, the 1812 settlement achieved several strategic objectives at once. It moved the imperial frontier westward, strengthened Russia's position on the lower Danube, increased its security against the Ottoman Empire and gave it a stronger position from which to influence the Balkans. For Moldavia, however, the settlement represented a major territorial loss and the division of a historically connected political territory. This division subsequently became one of the foundations of Romanian claims to Bessarabia.

The Crimean War transformed the diplomatic situation again. Russia's defeat resulted in the Treaty of Paris of 1856, under which Russia was forced to surrender southern Bessarabia to Moldavia. This was significant not only because Moldavia recovered territory, but also because the European powers deliberately sought to restrict Russian access to the Danube. The settlement therefore reflected the wider European balance of power as much as Moldavian or Romanian nationalism.

The creation of the Romanian state in 1859 changed the character of the dispute further. With the union of Moldavia and Wallachia, and the subsequent consolidation of Romania, Bessarabia increasingly came to be viewed by Romanian political elites as part of the historic territory of the Romanian/Moldavian nation. Romania's interest was no longer simply the preservation of Moldavian autonomy. It increasingly involved national consolidation and the recovery of territories historically associated with Moldavia.

This objective came into direct conflict with Russia again in 1878. After the Russo-Turkish War, the Congress of Berlin returned southern Bessarabia to Russia, while Romania received Northern Dobruja as compensation. Romania regarded this settlement as deeply unjust, particularly because it had participated in the war alongside Russia. Romanian political arguments increasingly combined historical claims with national principles: Bessarabia had been part of Moldavia before 1812, and therefore its population and territory were considered connected to the Romanian national state.

The Ukrainian dimension became particularly important only with the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917. It would be anachronistic to attribute a modern Ukrainian state policy toward Bessarabia to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, because there was no independent Ukrainian state conducting diplomacy over the region during most of that period. After the Russian Revolution, however, Ukrainian political organizations began to advance claims concerning areas of Bessarabia containing substantial Ukrainian populations, particularly in the north and south.

The Ukrainian position increasingly emphasized national self-determination and the protection of Ukrainian communities. Ukrainian political leaders objected to the possibility that Romanian control would encompass Ukrainian-populated districts without those populations being allowed to determine their own political future. Thus, after 1917, the Bessarabian question was no longer simply about which great power should possess a particular territory. It had also become a question of whether different ethnic and national communities possessed a right to political self-determination.

The inhabitants of Bessarabia themselves cannot, however, be treated as a single political group. The region was ethnically and linguistically diverse, containing Moldovans/Romanians, Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Jews, Germans and other communities. Their political preferences were therefore not uniform. Some favored Moldavian or Romanian national development, some supported Ukrainian or Russian political orientations, while others emphasized regional autonomy, social reform or local self-government.

The revolutionary period of 1917–1918 was particularly important because it produced institutions through which Bessarabians could express political demands. The Sfatul Țării became the principal representative institution of the region, and in December 1917 it proclaimed the Moldavian Democratic Republic, initially within a federal relationship with revolutionary Russia. The subsequent intervention of Romanian troops fundamentally altered the political situation. In March 1918, the Sfatul Țării voted for union with Romania. The Romanian interpretation was that this represented the legitimate political decision of Bessarabia's representative institutions. Soviet Russia, and Ukrainian political forces in particular, disputed this interpretation and raised questions about the legitimacy of the process and the rights of non-Romanian populations.

The central disagreement therefore concerned not only territory but also the principle by which territorial sovereignty should be determined. Romania emphasized historical continuity, the Moldavian connection and the decision of the Sfatul Țării. Soviet Russia rejected the Romanian annexation and argued that Romania had taken advantage of the collapse of Russian authority. Ukrainian political forces emphasized the rights of Ukrainian-populated districts. Within Bessarabia itself, different groups had different visions of autonomy, union, independence and national affiliation.

The interwar dispute consequently represented a collision between several competing principles. Romania defended the principle of historical and national unity. Soviet Russia defended its territorial and strategic interests and rejected the Romanian settlement. Ukrainian political movements defended the interests of Ukrainian communities and, in some cases, territorial incorporation into Ukraine. Bessarabian regionalists and minority groups sought varying forms of autonomy and protection. The Western powers, meanwhile, were concerned with the broader European balance of power and the containment of Soviet influence.

Dobrinescu examines the diplomatic struggle over Bessarabia following its union with Romania in 1918. The Soviet Union refused to recognize Romanian sovereignty over the region, making Bessarabia a major source of tension in Romanian-Soviet relations. Romania sought international recognition and relied on European diplomatic support to defend its territorial position. The League of Nations became an important forum for Romania's efforts to preserve the postwar settlement. Romanian foreign policy also emphasized collective security and cooperation with European powers. Nicolae Titulescu played an important role in these diplomatic efforts. However, Soviet claims over Bessarabia remained

unresolved throughout the interwar period. The rise of Nazi Germany and the weakening of European collective security gradually isolated Romania. The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 further strengthened the Soviet position in Eastern Europe. In June 1940, the Soviet Union issued an ultimatum demanding Bessarabia, and Romania was forced to withdraw. Dobrinescu therefore presents the loss of Bessarabia as the result of both Soviet pressure and the wider collapse of the European diplomatic system.

The Soviet position became decisive again in 1940. The Soviet Union issued an ultimatum to Romania demanding the evacuation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Romania withdrew, and the Soviet Union incorporated Bessarabia into its political and administrative system. The territory was subsequently divided between the Moldavian SSR and the Ukrainian SSR. The postwar settlement confirmed Soviet control, and Romania's claim to Bessarabia was effectively suppressed within the Soviet international order.

The long-term history can therefore be understood as a transformation from an imperial struggle into a national and self-determination dispute. In the eighteenth century, the principal question was whether Russia or the Ottoman Empire would dominate the Moldavian frontier and the lower Danube. After 1812, the central issue became the division of Moldavia and Russian possession of Bessarabia. After the creation of Romania, the dispute increasingly acquired a Romanian national dimension. After 1917, Ukrainian and specifically Bessarabian political claims became much more significant because the collapse of empire opened the question of national self-determination. After 1940, the issue became principally a Romanian–Soviet territorial dispute.

The most important point is therefore that no single actor defended the same objective throughout the entire period. Russia's objectives shifted from imperial expansion and strategic security to the preservation of its western and southwestern frontier. Moldavia's original objective was primarily territorial integrity and autonomy; Romania later transformed this into a broader project of national unification and recovery of Bessarabia. Ukrainian interests emerged politically much later and centered particularly on Ukrainian-populated territories and national self-determination. The inhabitants of Bessarabia themselves had diverse and changing interests, including autonomy, land reform, cultural rights, security and different forms of national affiliation. Meanwhile, the Ottoman and European powers repeatedly intervened because control of Bessarabia was connected to the much larger strategic question of who would dominate the Black Sea, Danube and southeastern European balance of power.

The history of Bessarabia and Moldavia is closely connected to the long-term rivalry between the Russian and Ottoman Empires and, later, to the emergence of the Romanian state and the competing territorial claims of Romania and Russia. The region was strategically important because of its position between the Prut and Dniester rivers, its proximity to the Danube and Black Sea, and its role as a corridor between Eastern Europe and the wider Black Sea region. For much of the eighteenth century, Moldavia remained under Ottoman suzerainty, while Russia increasingly sought to expand its influence south and west toward the Danube.

Russian intervention intensified during the eighteenth century. The Treaty of Pruth in 1711 demonstrated Russia's ambitions in Moldavia, although Russia failed to establish permanent control. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774 was particularly important because it strengthened Russia's diplomatic justification for intervening in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire's Orthodox Christian populations, including those in Moldavia and Wallachia. The Treaty of Jassy in 1792, which established the Dniester as Russia's western frontier, brought the Russian Empire directly alongside Moldavia.

The decisive territorial transformation came with the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812. Following the Russo-Ottoman War, Russia obtained the territory between the Prut and Dniester, which subsequently became known as Bessarabia. This acquisition fundamentally changed the geopolitical position of the region and created the territorial question that would dominate relations between Russia, Moldavia and, increasingly, Romania for more than a century. Russia progressively integrated Bessarabia into its imperial administrative system, while the emergence of Romanian national consciousness gave the territory a new political significance.

Russia temporarily lost part of Bessarabia following the Crimean War. Under the Treaty of Paris in 1856, southern Bessarabia was returned to Moldavia, weakening Russia's position on the lower Danube. The subsequent Union of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859 created the foundations of modern Romania and strengthened the connection between Bessarabia and Romanian national aspirations. However, the Congress of Berlin in 1878 returned southern Bessarabia to Russia, while Romania received Northern Dobruja as compensation. This contributed to growing Romanian-Russian diplomatic tension.

The collapse of the Russian Empire during the First World War and the Russian Revolution of 1917 created a major political opening. Bessarabia declared itself the Moldavian Democratic Republic, initially seeking autonomy within a federal Russia. Amid revolutionary instability, Romanian forces entered the region, and on 27 March 1918, the Bessarabian representative assembly, Sfatul Țării, voted for union with Romania. The union was subsequently confirmed without the original conditions attached to it.

During the interwar period, Romania sought international recognition of its control over Bessarabia, while the Soviet Union consistently rejected the Romanian claim. The creation of the Moldavian ASSR in 1924, east of the Dniester, provided the Soviet Union with an additional institutional basis for maintaining its political claim to the region. The question remained unresolved throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The decisive reversal came in 1940, following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 and the collapse of France, which altered the European balance of power. The Soviet Union issued an ultimatum to Romania demanding Bessarabia, and Romania withdrew. Most of Bessarabia was incorporated into the Moldavian SSR, while northern and southern parts were transferred to the Ukrainian SSR. Romania temporarily reoccupied the region in 1941 during the German invasion of the Soviet Union, but Soviet forces reconquered Bessarabia in 1944. The postwar settlement of 1947 confirmed the new eastern border of Romania.

Thus, the Bessarabian question evolved from an Ottoman-Russian struggle for influence in Moldavia, into a Russian-Romanian territorial dispute, and ultimately into a Soviet-Romanian geopolitical conflict. Across these different phases, the strategic importance of Bessarabia remained remarkably consistent: control of the territory affected access to the Danube and Black Sea, the security of the Russian and Romanian frontiers, and the broader balance of power in Eastern Europe.

Table

Date	Event	Significance
1711	Treaty of Pruth	Russia failed to establish lasting control over Moldavia; Ottoman influence remained.
1774	Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca	Russia gained a stronger basis for intervention in Moldavia and Wallachia.
1792	Treaty of Jassy	The Dniester became Russia's western frontier.
1812	Treaty of Bucharest	Russia acquired territory between the Prut and Dniester , creating the Bessarabian territorial question.
1856	Treaty of Paris	Russia surrendered southern Bessarabia to Moldavia.
1859	Union of Moldavia and Wallachia	Formation of the Romanian state strengthened Romanian interest in Bessarabia.
1878	Congress of Berlin	Russia regained southern Bessarabia ; Romania received Northern Dobruja.
1917	Russian Revolution	Collapse of Russian authority opened the way for Bessarabian autonomy.
1918	Union with Romania	Sfatul Țării voted for union; Bessarabia became part of Romania.
1920	Treaty concerning Bessarabia	Several Western powers recognised Romanian sovereignty, although the treaty did not fully enter into force.
1924	Moldavian ASSR	The USSR created a Moldavian autonomous republic east of the Dniester, reinforcing its claim.
1939	Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact	Bessarabia fell within the Soviet sphere of strategic interest.
1940	Soviet annexation	USSR occupied Bessarabia; most became part of the Moldavian SSR, with some areas transferred to Ukraine.
1941	Romanian reoccupation	Romania temporarily regained Bessarabia during the German-Soviet war.
1944	Soviet reconquest	Soviet control was restored.
1947	Paris Peace Treaty	Romania's eastern border was confirmed along the Soviet settlement.

Key Takeaways and Insight for Bessarabians and Romanians

The history of Bessarabia demonstrates that territorial control depends not only on military strength, but also on political organisation, diplomatic recognition and the wider balance of power. The region repeatedly changed political status because larger powers were able to impose settlements when local actors lacked sufficient leverage.

The first major insight is that geography creates both opportunity and vulnerability. Bessarabia's position between the Prut and Dniester, and close to the Danube and Black Sea, made it strategically valuable. This explains why Russia, the Ottoman Empire and later Romania and the Soviet Union consistently treated the region as a matter of strategic importance.

A second insight is the importance of state capacity and political institutions. The creation of Romania in 1859 gave the Romanian population a stronger political framework through which territorial and national interests could be pursued. Similarly, the emergence of the Moldavian Democratic Republic in 1917–1918 demonstrated that political organisation could transform a period of imperial collapse into an opportunity for self-determination.

A third insight is that military power alone is insufficient. Romania's union with Bessarabia in 1918 could not by itself guarantee the permanence of the settlement. International recognition was essential, yet recognition remained incomplete and contested. By contrast, the Soviet Union was able to combine military power, diplomacy and geopolitical opportunity in 1940 to reverse the 1918 settlement.

The fourth insight is the importance of alliances and the international balance of power. Bessarabia's fate was repeatedly determined not simply by relations between Romania and Russia, but by wider European conflicts such as the Crimean War, the First World War and the Second World War. Romania's position was strongest when its interests were compatible with those of powerful external partners and weakest when it faced a major power largely in isolation.

The fifth insight is that political legitimacy and territorial control are not always the same thing. Romania controlled Bessarabia after 1918 and obtained substantial international recognition, while the Soviet Union continued to reject the settlement. After 1940, Soviet military control established a new reality even though the earlier Romanian claim did not simply disappear from historical and national consciousness.

For Bessarabians and Romanians, the broader experience is therefore that national aspirations require institutions, economic strength, military security, diplomatic alliances and international legitimacy to reinforce one another. Territorial questions cannot be secured permanently through nationalism or military force alone.

Finally, the history of Bessarabia demonstrates the danger of strategic dependence on the decisions of larger powers. The region repeatedly became vulnerable when great-power rivalries changed the surrounding geopolitical environment. The most durable form of security therefore requires not only territorial control, but the capacity to maintain political cohesion, economic resilience, defensive capability and strong international partnerships.

Core Lessons

Bessarabia's History can Therefore be Reduced to Six Strategic Lessons:

- **Geography Matters** — strategically located territories attract competition from larger powers.
- **Political Organisation Matters** — national aspirations become effective only when supported by functioning institutions.
- **Military Power Matters, but is Insufficient** — control must be supported by diplomacy and legitimacy.
- **Alliances Matter** — smaller states are heavily affected by the wider balance of power.
- **International Recognition Matters** — territorial settlements are more durable when supported by major external powers.
- **Resilience Matters** — long-term security requires political, economic, military and diplomatic strength working together.

The central lesson is that Bessarabia's fate was never determined by one factor alone. It was determined by the interaction of geography, power, institutions, diplomacy, nationalism and the international balance of power.

The Diplomatic Evolution in Five Phases

- **1711–1812: Imperial Competition.** Russia and the Ottoman Empire were the principal strategic actors. Moldavia's fundamental interest was preserving its autonomy and territorial integrity.
- **1812–1856: Russian Possession.** The Treaty of Bucharest transformed Bessarabia into a distinct international territorial issue. Russia sought consolidation, while Moldavian political interests increasingly focused on the loss of territory.
- **1856–1878: European Balance of Power.** The Crimean War temporarily removed southern Bessarabia from Russia. The great powers treated the region not merely as a Romanian question but as part of the strategic balance around the Black Sea and Danube.
- **1878–1918: Romanian National Claim.** After the Congress of Berlin returned southern Bessarabia to Russia, Romanian diplomacy increasingly linked Bessarabia to the historical unity of Moldavia and the Romanian national project.
- **1917–1947: Self-Determination Versus Competing Territorial Claims.** The Russian Revolution introduced new possibilities for autonomy and national self-determination. Moldavian, Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian and regional interests competed. The 1918 union with Romania was internationally disputed by Soviet Russia, and the USSR ultimately restored its territorial claim in 1940 and retained Bessarabia after the Second World War.

The core diplomatic contradiction throughout the period was that different actors used different principles to justify their claims: Russia emphasized strategic security and imperial sovereignty; Moldavia emphasized territorial integrity and autonomy; Romania increasingly emphasized historical and national unity; Ukrainian movements emphasized ethnic self-determination; and Bessarabian representatives increasingly emphasized local autonomy and political representation.

The European powers repeatedly intervened because the fate of Bessarabia affected the much larger balance of power in the Black Sea, Danube and Balkans.

Overview of Romanian–Moldovan Relations During the Cold War and Post-Communist Period

Romanian–Moldovan relations have been shaped by a fundamental tension between shared historical and linguistic identity and separate political statehood. The relationship can broadly be divided into the Soviet/Cold War period, the transition after 1991, and the more recent European integration period.

Cold War: 1945–1989

During the Cold War, relations between Romania and the territory that became Moldova were primarily relations between two parts of the Soviet bloc, rather than normal bilateral relations. After the Soviet reoccupation of Bessarabia in 1944, the territory was incorporated into the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), while Romania remained a separate communist state.

The Soviet authorities promoted the development of a distinct Moldavian national identity, particularly through the use of the Moldavian language written in Cyrillic and through the separation of Moldavian historical narratives from those promoted in Romania. At the same time, Soviet policy limited direct cultural and political interaction with Romania.

Romania itself remained communist, but under Nicolae Ceaușescu it pursued a relatively independent foreign policy within the Warsaw Pact. Bucharest maintained diplomatic relations with Moscow while occasionally challenging Soviet policy. This created some space for Romania to raise historical and cultural issues concerning Moldavians, although it did not openly pursue the reunification of Moldova with Romania.

The central Cold War reality was therefore that the Prut River functioned as both a political and ideological frontier. Cultural and linguistic connections persisted, but political integration was impossible under the Soviet system.

1989–1991: Collapse of Communism and Independence

The collapse of communism transformed the relationship dramatically. Romania's communist regime fell in December 1989, while the Soviet system began to disintegrate soon afterward.

Moldovan national movements became increasingly powerful. The Moldovan language, Latin alphabet, Romanian cultural identity and historical relationship with Romania became major political issues. In 1991, Moldova declared independence from the Soviet Union.

Romania was among the first states to recognise independent Moldova, establishing diplomatic relations very rapidly. This created a new relationship based on two sovereign states, rather than the previous relationship between Romania and a Soviet republic.

However, independence immediately created a difficult question: Was Moldova a separate national state or part of a broader Romanian national space?

Some political forces in Moldova supported closer relations or even reunification with Romania, while others defended Moldovan statehood and a distinct Moldovan identity.

1990s: Independence, Identity and the Transnistrian Conflict

The 1990s were characterised by both close Romanian-Moldovan relations and considerable political uncertainty.

Romania strongly supported Moldova's independence and provided economic, political and cultural assistance. It also promoted Moldova's integration into European institutions and supported its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

At the same time, Romanian politics contained significant support for the idea of Romanian-Moldovan reunification. This was controversial in Moldova, where many political groups feared that closer integration with Romania could undermine Moldova's independent statehood.

The Transnistrian conflict of 1992 became another major factor. Moldova's attempt to maintain control over Transnistria resulted in armed conflict, with Russian forces and Russian military interests playing an important role. Romania supported Moldova's territorial integrity but avoided direct military involvement.

Consequently, by the end of the 1990s, Romania generally pursued two objectives simultaneously: supporting Moldova as an independent state while maintaining close cultural and historical ties.

2000s: From Identity Politics Toward European Integration

During the 2000s, the relationship increasingly shifted from the question of historical identity toward European integration.

Romania supported Moldova's closer relationship with the European Union and increasingly acted as an advocate for Moldova in European institutions. Cross-border cooperation, education, infrastructure, trade and cultural exchanges expanded.

The accession of Romania to the European Union in 2007 was particularly significant. It created a new geopolitical situation: Romania became an EU member while Moldova remained outside the EU.

The Romanian-Moldovan relationship therefore became partly a relationship between an EU member state and a neighbouring Eastern European state seeking closer European integration.

2009–2014: European Orientation

After the political changes in Moldova in 2009, relations with Romania became increasingly connected to Moldova's European orientation.

Romania strongly supported Moldova's participation in the Eastern Partnership and its negotiations with the EU. The EU–Moldova Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, signed in 2014, marked a major step toward European integration.

Romania also became one of Moldova's most important political and economic partners.

At the same time, the identity question remained politically sensitive. Some Moldovans continued to identify strongly as Romanian, while others maintained a distinct Moldovan identity. Romania increasingly avoided making reunification the central element of state policy and instead emphasised European integration as a framework capable of bringing the two countries closer without requiring immediate political unification.

2014–2021: EU Integration and Russian Pressure

After Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the conflict in eastern Ukraine, Moldova's strategic position became more important.

Romania increasingly viewed Moldova through the lens of European security and resilience. Support expanded in areas such as energy, infrastructure, cybersecurity, governance and economic integration.

Romania also became an important alternative energy and transport partner for Moldova, reducing its dependence on Russian-controlled infrastructure and energy supplies.

The relationship therefore evolved from primarily a historical and cultural relationship into an increasingly strategic one.

2022–Present: Security Partnership and European Integration

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 fundamentally changed the strategic environment.

Romania became one of Moldova's most important security and political partners. Moldova faced increased pressure from Russia, particularly concerning energy, disinformation, political destabilisation and the unresolved Transnistrian issue.

Romania strongly supported Moldova's EU candidacy and accession process. Moldova formally received EU candidate status in 2022, and accession negotiations subsequently opened.

The relationship has consequently become increasingly based on a common European strategic orientation. Romania supports Moldova's sovereignty and European integration while maintaining exceptionally close cultural and linguistic links.

Overall Evolution

The relationship can therefore be understood as a transition through four major stages:

- **Cold War:** Romania and Soviet Moldavia were separated by the Soviet political system, despite their close linguistic and historical connections.
- **1991–2000:** Independence created a new relationship between two sovereign states, but questions of identity, reunification and Transnistria dominated the agenda.
- **2000–2014:** The relationship increasingly shifted toward European integration, economic cooperation and institutional convergence.
- **2014–Present:** Romanian-Moldovan relations have become increasingly strategic, centred on EU integration, energy security, infrastructure, resilience and regional security, particularly following Russia's war against Ukraine.

The Central Dynamic

The fundamental paradox of Romanian–Moldovan relations is that the countries are culturally very close but politically

separate.

Romania has increasingly chosen to strengthen the relationship not primarily through a direct reunification agenda, but by making the border between the two countries less economically, institutionally and strategically significant.

In this sense, the EU has become a particularly important framework. Instead of asking only whether Moldova should become part of Romania, the strategic question has increasingly become whether Moldova can become part of the same European political, economic and security space as Romania.

That makes contemporary Romanian–Moldovan relations considerably broader than the historical Bessarabian question: they now encompass identity, sovereignty, European integration, energy security, economic interdependence and the wider geopolitical competition between Russia and Europe.

History and Evolution of Romania–European Relations Since 1990

Romania's relationship with Europe since 1990 can be understood as a gradual transformation from post-communist isolation and uncertainty toward European integration, EU membership and increasingly active participation in European strategic affairs. The process was driven by Romania's desire to consolidate democracy, modernise its economy, secure its geopolitical position and anchor itself firmly in the European political order.

1990–1995: Reconnecting with Europe

The fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's communist regime in December 1989 fundamentally changed Romania's foreign policy. The new political leadership sought to break with the country's communist isolation and establish Romania as a democratic European state.

Romania quickly developed relations with the European Community, the Council of Europe and other European institutions. The central objective was to demonstrate that Romania belonged politically and culturally to Europe.

A major milestone came in 1993, when Romania signed the Europe Agreement with the European Community. This created a framework for political dialogue, economic cooperation and gradual integration with the European market.

Romania also joined the Council of Europe in 1993, reinforcing its commitment to democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law.

The main challenge during this period was that Romania's political and economic transition was considerably slower and more unstable than hoped. The country had to simultaneously build democratic institutions, reform its economy and establish a functioning market economy.

1995–2000: The EU Membership Objective

By the mid-1990s, European integration had become a central strategic objective of Romanian foreign policy.

Romania formally applied for European Union membership in 1995. The decision reflected the belief that EU accession would provide political stability, economic modernisation and long-term security.

The 1997 Luxembourg European Council formally launched the first major wave of EU enlargement negotiations, but Romania was not included among the countries invited to begin negotiations at that stage. This was a significant disappointment for Bucharest.

The exclusion demonstrated that political declarations of European commitment were insufficient. Romania needed substantial reforms in areas such as economic competitiveness, public administration, judicial independence and democratic governance.

At the same time, Romania increasingly sought integration into Western security structures. It joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994 and gradually moved toward full NATO membership.

2000–2004: Acceleration Toward the West

The geopolitical environment after 11 September 2001 strengthened Romania's strategic importance to the United States and Europe.

Romania was invited to join NATO in 2002 and became a full member in 2004. NATO membership reinforced Romania's position within the Euro-Atlantic system and complemented its EU ambitions.

EU accession negotiations accelerated during the early 2000s. Romania undertook extensive reforms to align its legislation, institutions and economy with the European acquis.

This period represented an important strategic transformation:

Romania was no longer simply seeking recognition as a European democracy; it was becoming institutionally embedded in the Euro-Atlantic system.

2005–2007: EU Accession

Romania signed its EU Accession Treaty in 2005 and became a member of the European Union on 1 January 2007, alongside Bulgaria.

EU membership was the culmination of more than a decade of political and economic transformation.

Accession brought Romania into the EU's single market and institutional system and provided access to European funds, investment and freedom of movement. It also gave Romania a formal role in European decision-making.

However, accession was not the end of the integration process. The EU continued to monitor Romania's judicial and institutional reforms through the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM).

2007–2014: From Integration to Consolidation

After accession, Romania's relationship with Europe changed fundamentally. The question was no longer whether Romania belonged to the EU, but how effectively Romania could use EU membership to modernise the country and advance its interests.

EU structural and cohesion funds became an important source of infrastructure and development investment. Romanian citizens gained full freedom of movement, while Romanian companies became increasingly integrated into European supply chains.

At the same time, Romania became more active in European foreign and security policy.

Relations with Moldova became an important dimension of Romanian European policy. Romania increasingly presented itself as a bridge between Moldova and the EU, supporting Moldova's European integration while maintaining close cultural and historical ties.

2014–2021: Security and Strategic Reorientation

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014 significantly changed Romania's perception of its European role.

Romania became increasingly focused on NATO's eastern flank, Black Sea security and European energy security.

The Black Sea became strategically more important because Romania increasingly found itself at the intersection of EU, NATO and Russian geopolitical interests.

Romania also became a stronger advocate for European and transatlantic support for Moldova and Ukraine.

This period therefore saw a gradual transition from a primarily economic conception of European integration toward a broader conception of European strategic security.

2022–Present: Romania as a Strategic EU Member

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 fundamentally transformed Romania's position within Europe.

Romania became a crucial frontline EU and NATO state because of its geographic proximity to Ukraine, its Black Sea coastline and its position on major transport and energy routes.

Romania has played an important role in supporting Ukraine, facilitating the movement of Ukrainian exports, strengthening regional infrastructure and supporting Moldova.

At the same time, Romania has increasingly argued for stronger European investment in:

- Black Sea security
- European defence
- Energy independence
- Transport infrastructure
- Eastern enlargement
- Moldova's European integration
- Ukraine's European future

The relationship with the EU has therefore evolved from one of aspiration and conditionality into one of participation and strategic influence.

Overall Evolution

Romania's European trajectory since 1990 can be summarised as:

1990–1995 — Reconnection:

Romania re-established itself as a democratic European state after communism.

1995–2000 — Aspiration:

EU membership became the central strategic objective, but reform weaknesses slowed integration.

2000–2007 — Integration:

Romania accelerated democratic, economic and institutional reforms and joined NATO and then the EU.

2007–2014 — Consolidation:

Romania learned to use EU membership for economic development, institutional modernisation and regional influence.

2014–2021 — Strategic adaptation:

The Ukraine crisis and Russian assertiveness shifted attention toward security, the Black Sea and NATO's eastern flank.

2022–present — Strategic importance:

Romania has become increasingly important to European security because of its geography, NATO membership, Black Sea position and role in supporting Ukraine and Moldova.

OECD and Romania

Romania is becoming a member of the OECD, something that would constitute not merely an institutional milestone in the country's post-communist and European transformation, but a further stage in the convergence of its public institutions, regulatory frameworks and policy practices with the standards of the advanced industrial democracies. The accession process, which entails an extensive technical examination of Romanian legislation, policies and administrative practices across a broad range of policy domains, provides an important external framework for consolidating structural reforms and strengthening the capacity of the Romanian state¹. As EU member Romania already benefits from different schemes of cooperation between the EU Commission and OECD such as the Sigma program on governance and coordination that remains relevant. In addition, Romania has participated in EU-funded reform initiatives implemented with OECD support, notably the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP), which preceded the current Technical Support Instrument (TSI). Through the TSI, the European Commission and the OECD have supported Romania in areas including public administration reform, digitalisation, business licensing and regional development. Romania has also benefited from OECD expertise in projects aimed at improving the business environment and simplifying administrative and licensing procedures. Cooperation has extended to education reform, including support for the "Educated Romania" initiative through EU and OECD expertise. More broadly, Romania has been actively engaged in the OECD South East Europe Regional Programme, which promotes policy dialogue, peer learning and the exchange of good practices. Romania's growing engagement with the OECD has also been reinforced by its accession process, which formally began with its designation as an OECD accession candidate in 2022. These existing mechanisms provide a strong basis for further EU–OECD cooperation with Romania and for using OECD expertise to support the implementation of national reforms aligned with EU priorities.

This development is particularly significant in the field of education, where OECD accession places Romania within an increasingly demanding comparative framework for assessing the effectiveness, equity and quality of its education system. Its PISA profile consequently assumes significance beyond the measurement of student attainment: it provides an empirical indicator of the extent to which Romania has succeeded in converting expanded educational participation into broadly distributed human-capital formation. The persistence of below-OECD-average attainment, substantial socio-economic disparities and a relatively narrow upper tail of high achievement therefore constitutes an important reform frontier as Romania moves towards OECD membership.

Romania's performance in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveals a persistent structural deficit in educational attainment relative to the OECD average, compounded by pronounced inequalities in the distribution of learning outcomes. The country's 2022 results indicate substantially below-average performance across mathematics, reading and science, with the principal concern residing not merely in the level of mean achievement but in the large proportion of students who fail to attain the baseline threshold of proficiency and the comparatively narrow proportion attaining the highest levels of cognitive performance. This pattern suggests an education system characterised simultaneously by a relatively weak lower tail of attainment and a constrained upper tail, thereby limiting both the breadth and the depth of human-capital formation.²

Equally significant is the pronounced socio-economic and institutional stratification of educational outcomes. In Romania, socio-economic status is unusually strongly associated with student performance, while inter-school variation accounts for a substantial proportion of the observed variance in achievement. Educational opportunity is consequently mediated to an important degree by family background, locality and school context. The resulting distribution of outcomes points to an underlying problem of educational equity and institutional capacity rather than to a simple deficiency in aggregate student achievement. In this respect, Romania's PISA profile may be understood as reflecting an incomplete transition from an education system characterised by relatively uneven access and quality towards one capable of delivering broadly distributed foundational competencies.

Nevertheless, the Romanian trajectory should not be characterised exclusively in terms of underperformance. The country has experienced significant expansion in educational participation and has demonstrated comparatively favourable longer-term developments in reading achievement. The principal policy challenge is therefore one of converting increased participation into more universal acquisition of foundational skills while simultaneously strengthening the system's capacity to cultivate advanced competencies. Romania's PISA performance consequently presents a dual reform agenda: the reduction of educational disadvantage and the expansion of high-level human capital.

In the context of Romania's accession to the OECD, this profile assumes particular analytical significance. OECD membership does not imply conformity to an abstract educational norm, but entails participation in a policy community in which comparative performance data constitute instruments of institutional learning and reform. Romania's PISA results therefore identify a significant domestic reform frontier: narrowing socio-economic and inter-school disparities, strengthening foundational literacy, numeracy and scientific competence, improving the quality and distribution of teaching, and expanding the country's relatively limited pool of high-performing students. The relevant benchmark is consequently not merely an improvement in Romania's mean PISA score, but the construction of an education system in which socio-economic origin and geographical location become progressively less determinative of educational attainment.

Romania's PISA performance presents a paradox characteristic of an education system undergoing structural transformation: significant advances in participation and selected dimensions of educational attainment coexist with persistent deficits in foundational competencies and unusually pronounced inequalities in educational opportunity. The policy imperative is therefore not reducible to the pursuit of higher aggregate scores. It concerns the capacity of the education system to transform expanded access into substantively equal educational opportunity, while simultaneously developing the advanced cognitive capabilities upon which productivity, innovation and institutional modernisation depend. In this respect, PISA should be understood not as a league table of national educational success, but as an empirical indicator of the extent to which an education system succeeds in converting social potential into broadly distributed human capital.

The most important transformation is that Romania's relationship with Europe has moved from seeking entry to seeking influence.

In 1990, the central question was:

"How can Romania return to Europe?"

After 2007, the question became:

"How can Romania make effective use of its place inside Europe?"

Today, the strategic question is increasingly:

"How can Romania help shape Europe's eastern, Black Sea and security policies?"

Romania has therefore moved from being primarily a recipient of European integration to becoming an increasingly important actor within the European strategic system.

History and Evolution of Moldova–EU Relations

Moldova's relationship with the European Union has evolved from post-Soviet independence and limited cooperation into a strategic project of European integration. Unlike Romania, Moldova did not begin the 1990s with a clear consensus about its geopolitical orientation. Its European trajectory has therefore been closely connected to domestic political struggles, relations with Russia, the unresolved Transnistrian conflict and, more recently, the war in Ukraine.

1991–1998: Establishing Relations with Europe

Moldova became independent from the Soviet Union in August 1991. One of its immediate foreign-policy priorities was establishing relations with European institutions while maintaining links with Russia and the former Soviet space.

The EU gradually developed political and economic relations with Moldova. A major milestone was the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which entered into force in 1998. It established the basic framework for political dialogue, trade and economic cooperation.

During this period, however, Moldova remained broadly balanced between European and post-Soviet orientations. The country was economically dependent on the former Soviet space, particularly Russia, while its political institutions and economy were still undergoing post-communist transformation.

1998–2004: Limited European Integration

During the early 2000s, the EU became increasingly important to Moldova, particularly through economic assistance, governance programmes and cross-border cooperation.

The EU's 2004 enlargement brought the Union directly to Moldova's western border. Romania's future EU membership was particularly significant because it created the prospect of Moldova sharing a border with the EU.

Moldova subsequently became part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which provided a framework for closer political and economic cooperation without offering immediate EU membership.

2004–2009: The European Choice Becomes More Political

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and growing European engagement in Eastern Europe influenced Moldovan politics.

Moldova increasingly sought closer relations with the EU while remaining within Russia's political and economic sphere of influence. The unresolved Transnistrian conflict remained a major obstacle to Moldova's security and territorial consolidation.

The EU became increasingly involved in the conflict through the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM), launched in 2005.

This marked an important transition: the EU was no longer simply an economic partner but increasingly a security and governance actor in Moldova.

2009–2014: The European Integration Project

The decisive shift occurred after Moldova's political changes in 2009. A coalition of pro-European parties came to power and made European integration the central foreign-policy objective.

Moldova became one of the principal participants in the EU's Eastern Partnership, launched in 2009.

The relationship accelerated rapidly. Moldova negotiated an Association Agreement with the EU, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).

In 2014, Moldova signed the Association Agreement, creating much deeper economic and political integration with the EU.

The agreement was strategically important because it moved Moldova from simple cooperation toward institutional approximation with the EU.

2014–2020: Economic Integration but Political Difficulties

After 2014, Moldova became increasingly economically connected to the EU. The DCFTA expanded access to the European market, while EU assistance supported infrastructure, governance and institutional reform.

At the same time, Moldova experienced serious political problems, including corruption, weak institutions and political instability. The European integration process therefore became closely connected to demands for judicial reform, anti-corruption measures and stronger democratic institutions.

Relations with Russia also remained difficult. Russia opposed Moldova's deeper integration with the EU and maintained significant economic, political and military influence, particularly through Transnistria.

Moldova was therefore caught between two geopolitical environments:
EU integration to the west and Russian influence to the east.

2020–2022: Renewed European Orientation

The election of Maia Sandu in 2020 represented an important political shift. Her government placed stronger emphasis on combating corruption, strengthening democratic institutions and accelerating European integration.

Moldova increasingly sought to align itself with the EU politically and economically.

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 dramatically transformed Moldova's strategic environment. Moldova's geographic position between Romania and Ukraine, combined with the unresolved Transnistrian conflict, made the country's security particularly vulnerable.

2022–Present: Candidate Status and Accession

The war in Ukraine transformed Moldova's relationship with the EU from a long-term association project into a strategic accession process.

Moldova submitted its EU membership application in March 2022. In June 2022, the European Council granted Moldova candidate status.

The EU subsequently decided to open accession negotiations, marking the most significant step yet toward membership.

European integration has since become increasingly connected to Moldova's security, energy independence and state resilience. The EU has supported Moldova in reducing its dependence on Russian energy, strengthening institutions, countering disinformation and addressing security pressures related to Transnistria and Russia.

Romania has played a particularly important role by acting as Moldova's principal EU advocate and by providing energy, infrastructure, economic and political support.

Accession Partnership and Enlargement Reports

The European Commission's Republic of Moldova 2025 Report presents a nuanced assessment of Moldova's progress towards European Union membership, portraying the country as a state that has made substantial advances in institutional reform and European integration while continuing to face significant structural, administrative, and geopolitical constraints. The report, covering the period from September 2024 to September 2025, situates Moldova's accession trajectory within an exceptionally challenging security environment characterised by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, persistent attempts at foreign interference and destabilisation, and vulnerabilities in the country's energy and security systems. Despite these pressures, the Commission identifies a sustained political commitment to European integration and considers Moldova's accession process to have acquired considerable institutional and constitutional momentum.

At the political level, Moldova's democratic institutions are assessed as providing a broadly adequate foundation for competitive elections. The 2024 presidential elections, the constitutional referendum on European integration, and the 2025 parliamentary elections were generally well administered and competitive. Nevertheless, the Commission highlights the increasingly complex interaction between democratic governance and external interference. Foreign interference, extensive disinformation, information manipulation and partisan media coverage constrained the capacity of voters to make fully informed political choices. Moreover, frequent amendments to electoral legislation generated concerns regarding legal certainty and institutional predictability. The report therefore identifies a central tension in Moldova's democratic development: while the state has become more capable of defending its political system against external destabilisation, these countermeasures must themselves remain compatible with European standards of pluralism, freedom of expression and due process.

The report attaches particular importance to the quality and capacity of Moldova's public administration. Although institutional mechanisms for coordinating European integration are largely established, the administrative state remains constrained by insufficient human and institutional capacity. The adoption of the 2025–2029 National Programme for Moldova's Accession to the EU represents an important step towards systematically translating accession obligations into domestic policy. However, the Commission stresses that the effectiveness of European integration will ultimately depend not merely upon the adoption of legislation and strategic documents but upon the state's capacity to implement them consistently. Weaknesses in policy coordination, monitoring, local government capacity and administrative resources therefore constitute a significant bottleneck in the accession process.

It States:

The October 2024 constitutional referendum anchored EU integration in the Moldovan Constitution. The country held parliamentary elections on 28 September. Moldova has continued to face unprecedented challenges as a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, attempts by Russia and its proxies to destabilise the country, and threats to its energy supply and security. Despite this, Moldova has shown resilience and commitment to reforms. The first ever EU-Moldova Summit was held in Chişinău on 4 July 2025, highlighting the strategic importance of Moldova's future within the EU. As part of the Moldova Growth Plan to support economic transformation and EU integration, the EU has committed a substantial support package of EUR 1.9 billion from 2025-2027 through the Reform and Growth Facility for Moldova¹, adopted in March 2025. Moldova continues to implement the EU-Moldova Association Agreement (AA), including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The EU remains fully committed to Moldova's territorial integrity and to the peaceful resolution of conflict, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova within its internationally recognised borders. The DCFTA applies to the entire territory of Moldova.³

The Moldovan Government's interpretation of the European Commission's 2025 Enlargement Report is characterised by a strongly positive and ownership-oriented narrative of European integration. At the national conference dedicated to analysing the report, the Government presented Moldova's progress as evidence of an accelerating accession process and emphasised that European integration should be understood primarily as a project of domestic transformation. This position is particularly evident in the statement that Moldova is "preparing for EU accession for ourselves, not for Brussels." The formulation is significant because it frames accession not simply as a response to European Union conditionality, but as an internally driven process of institutional modernisation and state-building. In this sense, the Government seeks to construct European integration as serving Moldova's own developmental interests rather than being perceived exclusively as compliance with externally imposed requirements.

This discourse is reinforced by the Government's description of the scale and speed of reform undertaken during the reporting period. The claim that "Moldova has achieved four times more progress in one year" represents a particularly emphatic interpretation of the Commission's assessment and serves to portray 2025 as a period of exceptional acceleration in the accession process. While such a statement should be understood as a political characterisation rather than as an independent quantitative assessment, it demonstrates the extent to which the Government uses the Enlargement Report to legitimise its reform agenda and communicate the effectiveness of its European integration policy.

The Government further conceptualises European integration as a process of Europeanisation extending beyond the formal acquisition of EU membership. The assertion that Moldova is "not just going to Europe" but is instead "bringing Europe home" encapsulates this approach. Europeanisation is consequently presented as a transformation of domestic institutions, governance practices, economic structures and societal standards according to European norms. This framing is particularly important because it attempts to establish a direct relationship between the accession process and improvements in the everyday functioning of the Moldovan state, thereby strengthening the domestic legitimacy of EU-oriented reforms.

At the same time, the Government's interpretation is supported by the positive assessment articulated by European Commission officials. Enlargement Commissioner Marta Kos described Moldova as having made the "greatest annual progress among the candidate countries" and indicated that the country was ready to advance towards the opening of negotiations on the first groups of accession chapters. These statements provide external validation for the Government's narrative of accelerated progress and demonstrate that its positive interpretation is not entirely detached from the Commission's own assessment. Nevertheless, the Commission's broader report also makes clear that substantial challenges remain, particularly in relation to implementation capacity, judicial reform, anti-corruption, administrative effectiveness and economic competitiveness.

The contrast between these dimensions is analytically important. Whereas the Government emphasises the speed, ownership and transformative character of the accession process, the Commission's assessment places greater emphasis on the quality, sustainability and implementation of reforms. The Government's discourse therefore performs an important political function: it transforms an external assessment of institutional preparedness into a narrative of national achievement and mobilisation. At the same time, its recognition that further reforms are necessary indicates an awareness that the next phase of accession will require Moldova to move beyond legislative approximation towards demonstrable institutional performance.

The Moldovan Government's response can therefore be understood as an attempt to reconcile two dimensions of European integration: external conditionality and internal ownership. By asserting that Moldova is undertaking accession "for ourselves," the Government seeks to portray EU integration as compatible with national sovereignty and domestic development, while the notion of "bringing Europe home" presents Europeanisation as a process through which European standards become embedded within Moldova's own institutional and socio-economic structures. The 2025 Enlargement Report is consequently used not only as an assessment of progress but also as a political instrument for consolidating domestic support for continued European integration.⁴

Judicial reform constitutes one of the areas in which Moldova has demonstrated particularly significant progress. The Commission recognises substantial advances in the vetting and appointment of judges and prosecutors, including reforms affecting the country's highest judicial and prosecutorial institutions. These measures are intended to strengthen judicial integrity and reduce the influence of entrenched interests within the justice system. Nevertheless, the reform process remains incomplete. Vacancies, delays in appointments, insufficient institutional resources and low judicial clearance rates continue to undermine the efficiency of the courts. Consequently, Moldova's principal challenge is increasingly one of institutional consolidation: the establishment of integrity mechanisms must be accompanied by the development of a sufficiently capable judiciary able to deliver timely and effective justice.

A similar pattern is evident in the fight against corruption. The Commission acknowledges an improved record of anti-corruption activity and notes legislative measures strengthening the National Integrity Authority's capacity to verify declarations of assets and personal interests and to pursue confiscation. Yet the institutional architecture remains fragmented, while coordination between anti-corruption bodies requires further strengthening. The Commission places particular emphasis on the need for investigations to produce a more consistent record of prosecutions and final judicial decisions. Thus, the central issue is no longer simply the existence of anti-corruption legislation, but the capacity of institutions to apply it independently, systematically and effectively. Moldova's future progress in this field will therefore depend heavily upon institutional independence, adequate resources, inter-agency cooperation and demonstrable enforcement outcomes.

Fundamental rights and media freedom present a more mixed picture. Moldova possesses a largely established legislative and institutional framework for the protection of fundamental rights, and the Commission acknowledges progress concerning access to information, media regulation and the protection of journalists. However, significant implementation deficits remain, particularly with respect to detention conditions, the treatment of persons with disabilities, gender-based violence and the practical protection of journalists. The concentration of media ownership and continuing political

influence over the media environment are also identified as concerns. Particularly significant is the challenge posed by foreign information manipulation: Moldova has intensified efforts to counter disinformation and foreign interference, but the Commission stresses that such measures must not themselves compromise freedom of expression. This reflects a broader accession dilemma in which the protection of democratic resilience must be reconciled with the preservation of liberal democratic rights.

Economically, the Commission characterises Moldova as having made good progress towards establishing a functioning market economy, although the country remains vulnerable to structural weaknesses and external shocks. Macroeconomic stability has generally been maintained, and the banking sector remains relatively well capitalised. Nevertheless, economic growth stagnated in 2024, the current-account deficit widened, and structural vulnerabilities remain significant. These include a large informal economy, weak financial intermediation, limited foreign direct investment, a narrow export base and insufficient progress in reforming state-owned enterprises. Moldova's capacity to withstand competitive pressures within the EU also remains constrained by labour shortages, skills mismatches, low levels of innovation and inadequate infrastructure. Consequently, economic convergence with the EU will require not merely regulatory alignment but sustained investment in productivity, human capital, infrastructure, innovation and institutional quality.

Energy security constitutes a particularly important dimension of Moldova's economic and geopolitical transformation. The country's vulnerability to external energy pressures has been intensified by the regional consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine. Moldova has therefore accelerated efforts to diversify energy supplies, develop renewable energy capacity and strengthen its connections with European energy infrastructure. The Commission regards these measures as important not only from an economic perspective but also as instruments of national resilience and strategic autonomy. Energy diversification thus functions simultaneously as an element of Moldova's economic modernisation, security policy and European integration strategy.

Moldova has also continued to deepen its integration into the European single market through progressive alignment with the EU acquis in areas including the free movement of goods, services and capital, competition, financial services, taxation, customs, digitalisation and consumer protection. Nevertheless, the breadth of the acquis means that considerable legislative and administrative work remains. The principal challenge is therefore the gradual transformation of Moldova's domestic regulatory and institutional environment so that formal legal approximation is accompanied by effective enforcement and administrative implementation.

The external-relations dimension of the accession process is comparatively favourable. Moldova has demonstrated a strong commitment to alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and has intensified cooperation with EU Member States and institutions. Its alignment with European positions concerning Russia and other security challenges, together with its participation in European security initiatives, has strengthened its strategic relationship with the Union. The Commission's assessment consequently suggests that Moldova's geopolitical orientation is no longer ambiguous: European integration has become a central component of the country's foreign-policy and national-security strategy.

Overall, the 2025 Report portrays Moldova as a candidate country undergoing a profound process of political, institutional and economic transformation. Its trajectory is characterised by a notable asymmetry: political commitment and legislative approximation are advancing more rapidly than administrative capacity and implementation. The country has established many of the formal structures necessary for accession, but the consolidation of these reforms into durable, effective and independent institutions remains incomplete. The Commission consequently places particular emphasis on judicial vetting, anti-corruption enforcement, public-administration capacity, democratic resilience, economic competitiveness, energy security and the effective implementation of EU-related reforms.

From an analytical perspective, the report therefore suggests that Moldova's accession process has entered a qualitatively different phase. The central question is no longer whether Moldova possesses the political will to pursue European integration, but whether it can translate that political commitment into sustainable institutional capacity. The success of accession will consequently depend upon the extent to which Moldova can bridge the gap between formal compliance and substantive implementation. The European Commission's assessment is cautiously positive: Moldova has demonstrated resilience and meaningful reform momentum, but its progression towards membership will require the consolidation of institutional integrity, administrative effectiveness and economic convergence under conditions of continuing geopolitical pressure.

The Danube Delta as a Shared Strategic Space

The Danube Delta is one of the few spaces where the strategic interests of Romania, Moldova, Ukraine and the European Union directly intersect. Although Moldova does not have territory within the Delta itself, it is connected to this strategic space through the Prut River, Giurgiulești and its wider transport, energy and trade networks.

For Romania, the Delta and Lower Danube provide a gateway between the EU, Moldova, Ukraine and the Black Sea. Its interest is therefore to strengthen transport infrastructure, navigation, energy connectivity and regional economic development while protecting the Delta's exceptional ecological value.

For Ukraine, the Danube has become even more important because of the war. Its Danube ports provide an alternative route for trade and exports, reducing dependence on Black Sea routes exposed to Russian military pressure. The Ukrainian Danube ports are consequently part of the country's broader economic and security resilience.

Figure



For Moldova, the strategic connection is Giurgiulești–Prut–Danube. Moldova's access to the Danube gives it a direct link to European maritime and commercial networks. Improving connections between Moldova, Romania and Ukraine could transform this corridor into an important route for trade, energy and logistics.

For the EU, the Lower Danube is simultaneously a transport corridor, energy corridor, security frontier and ecological asset. Greater connectivity between Romania, Moldova and Ukraine can strengthen European resilience while bringing Moldova and Ukraine closer to the European economic space.

The common interest can therefore be represented as:

Romania + Moldova + Ukraine + EU

↓

Lower Danube / Danube Delta

↓

Connectivity • Trade • Energy • Security • Environment • European integration

The strategic opportunity is to develop the Danube not as a dividing frontier, but as a shared European corridor connecting Romania, Moldova and Ukraine to the Black Sea and the wider EU market. This makes the Delta and Lower Danube highly relevant to any long-term Romanian strategy towards Moldova and Bessarabia.

Romania, Moldova, Ukraine and the European Union increasingly share a common interest in integrated governance of the Danube–Black Sea space. This interest is expressed through overlapping European and regional institutions, particularly the Danube Commission, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the EU Strategy for the Black Sea Region.

The Danube Commission provides an established multilateral framework for navigation and cooperation along the Danube. For Romania and Ukraine, as major Danube states, this has direct strategic importance; for Moldova, access through the Prut and its Danube port at Giurgiulești gives the river system an important economic and connectivity dimension.

The Danube macro-region provides a broader framework in which infrastructure, transport, energy, environmental protection, economic development and institutional cooperation can be addressed together. Moldova and Ukraine's increasing participation in European programmes gives this framework additional strategic significance.

The Black Sea adds a second layer. The Danube is not simply a river system ending at the sea; it is a European corridor connecting Central Europe to the Black Sea and, through the Black Sea, to Ukraine, Moldova and the wider region. The interaction between Danube governance and Black Sea security has consequently become more important since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

This creates a significant area of shared interest:

Danube Commission → Danube governance → Moldova–Romania–Ukraine connectivity → Black Sea → European security and economic integration.

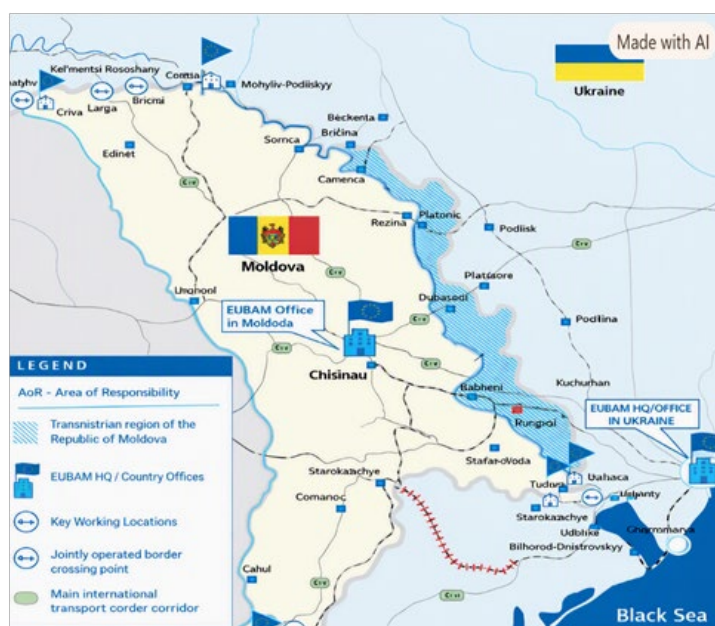
For Romania, this offers an opportunity to position itself not merely as Moldova's closest partner, but as a regional platform connecting Moldova and Ukraine to the European transport, energy, economic and institutional space.

And this is particularly relevant to a unification-readiness strategy: many of the investments required for closer Romania–Moldova integration—transport, energy, digital connectivity, customs cooperation, environmental management and

institutional interoperability—are already legitimate European regional-development objectives. They therefore need not be presented as preparations for unification; they can be pursued as part of the broader European governance of the Danube–Black Sea region.

Attention Points

Strengthening the Security and Defence Partnership requires ending fragmented decision making and replacing it with a single coordination unit that links Moldovan authorities and EU partners in real time. Border and customs systems must be merged into one digital platform so every cargo check, migration entry, and risk alert is visible to all relevant institutions, closing the loopholes that corrupt actors rely on. The partnership must have the power to halt and review any high risk customs decision before it is executed, especially when sensitive goods or suspicious networks are involved. Investigators and analysts need protected positions so they cannot be quietly replaced during ongoing cases, and border officers must rotate posts frequently to break local capture and dismantle entrenched relationships. These steps turn the partnership from a loose framework into a disciplined, corruption resistant security instrument.



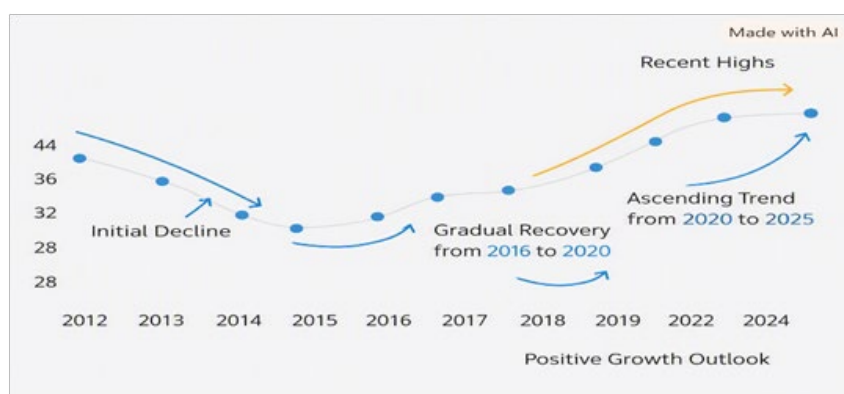
EUBAM Moldova and the EU must shift from observing to intervening. Pre clearance authority over high risk customs decisions should allow EUBAM to block compromised actions before they happen. Joint EU–Moldova audit teams must examine major contracts in border management and logistics to expose irregularities and close procurement channels vulnerable to influence. A secure logistics corridor must be built to bypass infrastructure controlled by Sheriff, ensuring that sensitive goods move through routes free from oligarchic pressure. Cross border investigative teams should be expanded so corrupt networks cannot hide behind jurisdictional gaps, and these teams must share intelligence, coordinate operations, and align prosecution strategies. EUBAM should train Moldovan officers in document fraud detection, cargo risk profiling, and oligarchic network mapping, giving them the tools to identify and disrupt corruption rather than simply record it.

EUBAM must also establish a permanent joint intelligence cell with Moldovan and Ukrainian counterparts to fuse customs, financial, and law enforcement data into actionable insights. Real time data exchange protocols should be codified so that alerts on suspicious cargo or entities trigger immediate cross border verification. A dedicated risk analysis unit should continuously profile trade flows and identify anomalies linked to smuggling or sanctions evasion. EUBAM's mandate should include technical assistance for digital customs integration, ensuring both countries operate on interoperable platforms. Periodic integrity audits of border personnel must be introduced to detect patterns of collusion and prevent insider facilitation of illicit trade. The mission should coordinate with Europol and OLAF to trace transnational corruption networks extending beyond the region. Joint simulation exercises should test crisis response capacity for border incidents involving high risk goods or organized crime. EUBAM must advocate for legislative harmonization between Moldova and Ukraine to close regulatory gaps exploited by traffickers. Public transparency dashboards should publish anonymized data on customs performance and enforcement outcomes to build trust. Finally, EUBAM should evolve into a regional governance hub that not only monitors compliance but actively shapes anti corruption standards across the eastern frontier.

Anti corruption instruments must be sharpened. Financial tracing units need direct access to bank level transaction data for companies operating in Transnistria so investigators can follow money flows without delay or obstruction. Procurement must be fully digital and fully public, with every tender, bidder, price, and contract amendment automatically published. Continuous tax audits should target companies with cross border operations linked to high risk networks, ensuring irregularities are caught early. Firms with dominant market positions in strategic sectors must file regular transparency reports and disclose ownership structures in detail. Civil society must be embedded in oversight processes so monitoring

is not confined to state institutions that can be pressured or influenced. These measures make corruption harder to hide, easier to detect, and far more dangerous to sustain.

Figure Rank 80 on Transparency International Perception of Corruption



Source: <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/moldova>

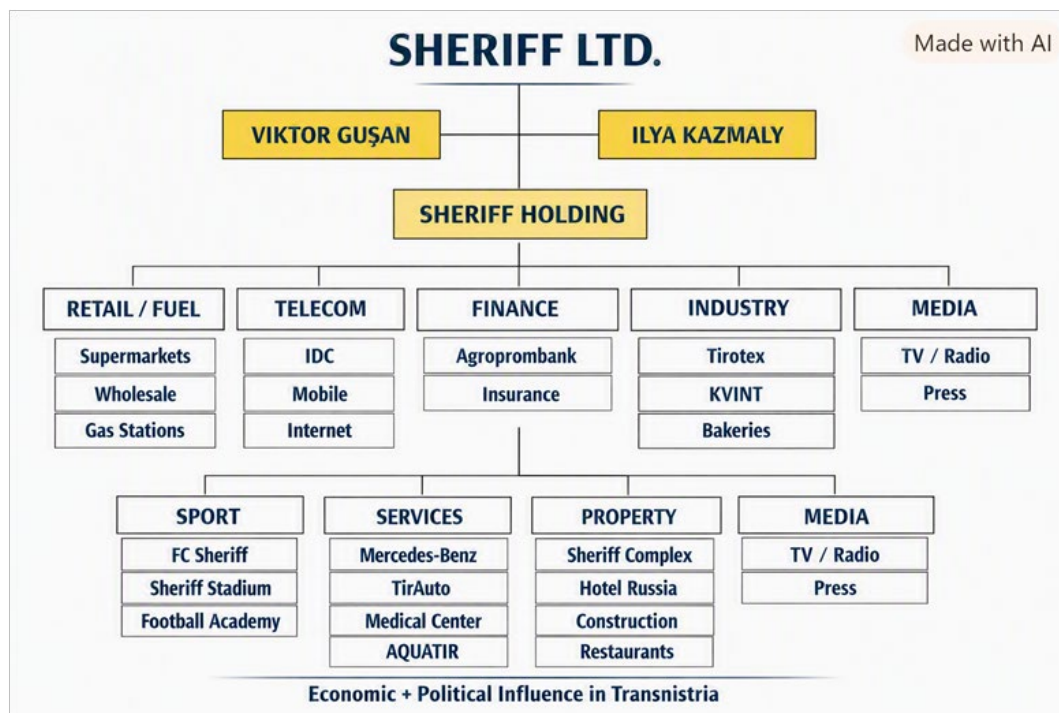
Moldova can climb toward a top 50 ranking through a tightly sequenced reform surge. First, it must complete deep judicial vetting to rebuild trust in courts. Second, anti corruption enforcement needs to shift from formal strategies to visible convictions. Third, public procurement should become fully digital and transparent. Fourth, civil service professionalisation must raise competence and reduce political interference. Fifth, digital government should streamline services and cut bureaucratic friction. Sixth, Moldova must upgrade infrastructure to attract investment and integrate economically. Seventh, regulatory agencies need insulation from party politics. Eighth, border and customs systems should align with EU standards to reduce illicit flows. Ninth, Moldova must accelerate adoption and implementation of EU acquis chapters. Tenth, a coherent national communications strategy is required to sustain public support for reforms.

Constraining Sheriff's structural power requires direct, sustained pressure. Beneficial ownership for all Sheriff linked firms must be publicly disclosed so hidden control structures are exposed. Competition authorities must map Sheriff's market power and identify where it blocks fair access, then impose remedies that reduce monopolistic behaviour. Tax authorities must run continuous audits on cross border transactions involving Sheriff connected entities to prevent financial evasion. A joint EU–Moldova task force must track the flow of goods entering Transnistria to identify leakage points and shut down diversion routes that feed Sheriff's dominance. Parliament must require public reporting of enforcement actions against high risk companies so accountability cannot be buried. Governance rules must include safeguards that prevent reforms from being quietly reversed by actors seeking to restore oligarchic control. These measures tighten institutional constraints around Sheriff through transparency, competition, and relentless enforcement, restoring the state's ability to act for the public good.

Counteracting illicit practices in an organisation like Sheriff Ltd requires more than controls; it demands a transformation of how the organisation perceives itself. Governance transparency becomes an epistemic discipline: the institution learns to see its own internal processes with clarity, reducing the ambiguity in which misconduct thrives. Oversight bodies shift from passive auditors to interpretive actors who read behavioural patterns, not just documents, creating a cognitive environment where illicit networks cannot hide.

Procedural vigilance evolves into a system of friction. Instead of static compliance checklists, the organisation deploys dynamic risk sensing, behavioural analytics, and relational mapping that reveal clusters of influence and potential convergence points for misconduct. Financial traceability becomes a temporal reconstruction capability, allowing investigators to replay organisational behaviour and understand not only what happened but how it unfolded.

Figure



Ethical culture becomes a form of moral gravity. Integrity is reinforced through ritualised practices, symbolic gestures, and leadership performances that make corruption socially costly. Whistleblowing is reframed as an act of institutional guardianship, turning truth telling into a heroic narrative rather than a betrayal. The organisation cultivates a shared sense of dignity that illicit behaviour would violate.

External oversight expands into a political ecology. Regulatory cooperation becomes co governance, with shared intelligence and joint investigations. Third party audits act as external mirrors, allowing the organisation to see itself through eyes unburdened by internal loyalties. Engagement with civil society and media creates reputational scaffolding, embedding the organisation within a broader public sphere that constrains misconduct through visibility and expectation.

When these layers interact, they form a living counter illicit ecosystem. Governance provides clarity, procedures create friction, culture generates gravity, and external oversight supplies ecological pressure. Misconduct becomes structurally improbable, socially undesirable, and politically risky — not because it is forbidden, but because the organisation's entire architecture pushes behaviour toward integrity.

OSCE-Mission

The OSCE Mission to Moldova was established in 1993 to promote peace and stability in the country. Its main focus is the Transnistrian conflict, which has divided Moldova for decades. The Mission works with both Chisinau and Tiraspol to encourage dialogue and cooperation. It supports efforts to achieve a peaceful and lasting political settlement. The OSCE also promotes confidence-building measures between the two sides. Its work covers practical issues such as freedom of movement, education, and security. The Mission monitors developments and reports on issues affecting stability and human rights. It also supports democratic institutions and the rule of law. Based in Chisinau, the Mission maintains contacts and activities in the Transnistrian region. Rather than imposing a solution, it helps the parties communicate and negotiate. The Mission works alongside other international organizations involved in the peace process. Its activities aim to reduce tensions and build trust between communities. The OSCE encourages respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also supports greater cooperation between the two banks of the Dniester River. Through dialogue and confidence-building, it seeks to create conditions for reconciliation. The Mission's work is particularly important because the conflict remains unresolved. Its presence provides an international framework for continued negotiations. Overall, the OSCE Mission to Moldova plays an important role in supporting stability and peaceful conflict resolution. Its ultimate goal is to contribute to a peaceful settlement and a secure, united Moldova.⁵

The EU cooperates with the OSCE Mission to Moldova by supporting conflict-resolution efforts, promoting dialogue between Chisinau and Tiraspol, and providing political, financial, and technical assistance. It also works with the OSCE to strengthen stability, security, democratic institutions, and respect for human rights in Moldova.

The 5+2 format brings together Moldova and Transnistria as the two sides, with the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine as mediators, and the EU and United States as observers. Its goal is a comprehensive settlement that respects Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity while providing Transnistria with a special status.

However, the 5+2 negotiations are currently on hold, largely because the war in Ukraine has made the participation of Russia and Ukraine in the format extremely difficult. The OSCE has therefore increasingly focused on facilitating direct 1+1 talks between Chisinau and Tiraspol. In May 2026, the OSCE facilitated the first in-person meeting of the two chief negotiators in more than a year, showing that dialogue is still continuing despite the wider deadlock. The EU is trying to play a more active role by supporting Moldova politically and financially and by encouraging dialogue and the peaceful reintegration of Transnistria. At the same time, Moldova's advancing EU accession process is changing the wider context: in June 2026, the EU and Moldova opened their first accession negotiating cluster, covering rule of law, fundamental rights and democratic institutions. In short: the formal 5+2 process remains stalled, but OSCE-facilitated direct Moldova–Transnistria dialogue continues, while the EU is increasingly supporting Moldova's resilience, European integration and eventual peaceful reintegration.

Council of Europe

Moldova has been a member of the Council of Europe since 1995. The Council of Europe works with Moldova to strengthen democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. It supports reforms to Moldova's justice system and democratic institutions. The country also cooperates with the European Court of Human Rights. Moldovan citizens can bring cases to the Court after exhausting domestic legal remedies. The Council of Europe helps Moldova improve its laws and protect fundamental freedoms. It also supports measures against corruption and promotes judicial independence. Another important area is protecting minorities and vulnerable groups. The Council of Europe works with Moldovan authorities and civil society organizations. It provides legal expertise, training, and technical assistance. Moldova has also ratified many Council of Europe conventions. These conventions cover areas such as human rights, corruption, and criminal justice.

A major concern is the protection of ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities.

Moldova has a diverse population, including Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, and Roma. One weakness is the limited use and protection of minority languages in public life.

Russian-speaking communities have sometimes faced tensions over language policy. The Gagauz minority also has concerns about maintaining its language, culture, and autonomy.

The Roma community faces particularly serious problems.

Roma people can experience discrimination and social exclusion. They also face disadvantages in education, employment, healthcare, and housing. The Council of Europe has repeatedly encouraged Moldova to improve Roma inclusion. Another issue is the need for stronger measures against discrimination. Minority communities may not always have effective access to remedies when discrimination occurs. The Council of Europe therefore supports legal and institutional reforms. It also encourages Moldova to strengthen minority-language education.

Protection of cultural identity is another important area of concern. Authorities are encouraged to consult minority communities when developing policies that affect them. The situation in Transnistria creates additional difficulties for human-rights protection. The Council of Europe therefore works with Moldova to improve standards and implementation. Overall, Moldova has made progress, but gaps remain between legal protections and their implementation in practice. The main challenge is ensuring that minority rights are effectively protected for all communities.

The organization monitors Moldova's progress in implementing its commitments. It can also make recommendations for further reforms. The Council of Europe is separate from the European Union. However, the two organizations cooperate closely on reforms in Moldova. Their cooperation helps Moldova strengthen European democratic standards. The Council of Europe also supports efforts to promote social cohesion and stability. Its work is particularly important as Moldova continues its European integration process. Overall, the Council of Europe plays an important role in strengthening democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Moldova.

For Moldova, the EEAS can use the EU's political dialogue and accession process to encourage reforms, while the Council of Europe provides expertise, monitoring and legal standards. This is particularly relevant for minority protection: the Council of Europe works directly with Moldova on non-discrimination, minority rights and implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The EEAS itself has identified remaining gaps in Moldova, including the fact that Moldova has not yet completed ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and Protocol No. 12 to the ECHR, and that implementation of European human-rights standards remains an issue⁶. So, in simple terms: the EEAS uses EU political leverage and the EU accession process, while the Council of Europe provides the specialist human-rights and minority-protection framework. They complement each other rather than one being subordinate to the other.

Overall Evolution

Moldova's relationship with the EU can be divided into six stages:

1991–1998 — Establishment:

Moldova became independent and established formal relations with the EU.

1998–2004 — Cooperation:

Relations centred on economic assistance, political dialogue and gradual integration.

2004–2009 — European Neighbourhood:

EU enlargement brought the Union directly closer to Moldova and increased European involvement.

2009–2014 — Europeanisation:

A pro-European government made EU integration a central strategic objective, culminating in the Association Agreement.

2014–2021 — Integration and conditionality:

Moldova became increasingly integrated economically with the EU, while struggling with corruption and institutional weaknesses.

2022–present — Accession:

Russia's invasion of Ukraine accelerated Moldova's European orientation, leading to candidate status and the opening of EU accession negotiations.

The Strategic Significance

The most important change is that the EU has gradually moved from being an external economic partner to becoming Moldova's principal strategic anchor.

In the 1990s, the fundamental question was:

"How can Moldova establish itself as an independent European state?"

In the 2000s:

"How closely should Moldova integrate with the EU?"

Since 2022, the question has increasingly become:

"How can Moldova become a secure and fully integrated member of the European political and economic system?"

For Moldova, European integration is therefore no longer simply an economic development strategy. It increasingly represents a state-building, security and geopolitical strategy designed to strengthen sovereignty, reduce dependence on Russia and anchor Moldova within the European system.

Moldova: Assessment to 2035

Looking toward 2035, Moldova is likely to undergo the most consequential strategic transformation since independence in 1991. The central question is no longer whether Moldova will remain between Russia and Europe, but whether it can consolidate itself as a functioning European state and ultimately become an EU member.

As of 2026, this trajectory has already moved considerably beyond the earlier Association Agreement framework. Moldova completed the EU accession screening process in September 2025, opened the fundamentals cluster in June 2026, and opened the external relations/security cluster in July 2026. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

Most Likely Trajectory: European Integration

The most probable scenario by 2035 is that Moldova will be deeply integrated into the EU and potentially a full member.

Moldova applied for membership in March 2022, received candidate status in June 2022 and formally opened accession negotiations in June 2024. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

The pace is significant. The European Commission reported in 2025 that Moldova had completed screening and that the government was targeting provisional closure of negotiations by early 2028, while stressing that this was ambitious and dependent on accelerating reforms. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

This makes 2028–2032 a plausible window for completion of negotiations and potentially early-to-mid-2030s EU membership, although accession cannot be treated as automatic. It depends on reforms, unanimous approval by Member States and the wider political evolution of the EU.

By 2035, therefore, three broad possibilities exist:

Most likely: EU member or in the final stage of accession.

Intermediate: very deeply integrated with the EU but accession delayed by institutional or political obstacles.

Negative: accession stalled because of domestic reform problems, geopolitical destabilisation or a major deterioration in the European security environment.

The first two scenarios are considerably more plausible than a return to Moldova's pre-2022 geopolitical balancing.

The Fundamental Transformation: From Buffer State to European Frontier State

Moldova historically functioned as a buffer between competing geopolitical spaces. By 2035, this is likely to change.

Instead of being positioned ambiguously between Russia and Europe, Moldova is likely to become part of Europe's eastern political, economic and security frontier.

The EU has already moved beyond a purely economic relationship. In 2024 it established a Security and Defence Partnership with Moldova, explicitly addressing resilience and common security challenges. (EUR-Lex)

This suggests that the future relationship will increasingly encompass:

EU membership → economic integration → energy security → infrastructure → defence cooperation → resilience → political integration.

The significance is considerable. Moldova's security will increasingly be treated as part of European security, rather than solely as a domestic or post-Soviet issue.

Transnistria Remains the Greatest Territorial Uncertainty

The most important unresolved question is Transnistria.

Moldova can integrate economically and institutionally with the EU without immediately resolving the territorial dispute, but long-term EU membership would create pressure to address the question of Moldova's territorial integrity and the presence of Russian forces.

By 2035, several outcomes are possible.

The most favourable would be a peaceful reintegration of Transnistria, particularly if Russia's ability to sustain its military and political presence deteriorates.

A second possibility is continued de facto separation, but with Transnistria increasingly surrounded by an EU-oriented Moldova and Ukraine.

The most dangerous scenario would be renewed military confrontation or an attempt by Russia to use Transnistria as a strategic instrument against Moldova or Ukraine.

For Moldova, therefore, the objective should not necessarily be to force an immediate territorial settlement. It should be to make the Moldovan state sufficiently strong and attractive that eventual reintegration becomes economically and politically viable.

Demography May be the Greatest Internal Constraint

Moldova's most difficult long-term problem may ultimately be demography rather than geopolitics.

Large-scale emigration has reduced the domestic labour force and weakened the country's demographic base. Even successful EU integration will not automatically reverse this.

The 2035 challenge will therefore be to transform Moldova from a country characterised by outward migration into one capable of attracting back capital, skills and people from its diaspora.

EU membership could help considerably by increasing investment, wages, infrastructure and institutional quality. But it could also initially accelerate emigration by making mobility within the European labour market easier.

This creates a fundamental paradox: European integration can build Moldova's prosperity while simultaneously emptying it of the people whose labour, knowledge, and ambition make that prosperity possible. The closer Moldova moves toward Europe, the wider the horizon becomes—and the easier it becomes for its citizens to cross it. Integration opens doors, but open doors do not guarantee that people will come back through them.

The strategic objective should therefore be not to close those doors, but to make return a rational choice. Not to prevent mobility, but to give mobility a destination at home; not to stop departure, but to make return economically compelling; not to build a Moldova that people must remain in, but a Moldova they can afford to come back to. The challenge is ultimately to transform the Europeanisation of Moldova from a one-way flow of people into a circulation of people, capital, skills, and ideas—so that Europe becomes not only a place Moldovans leave for, but a wider economic space from which they can return and rebuild at home.

The Economy: From Remittances to Productive Integration

By 2035, Moldova has the opportunity to shift from an economy heavily dependent on remittances and external transfers toward a more integrated European production and services economy.

The EU's current Growth Plan provides €1.9 billion in support for Moldova for 2025–2027, illustrating the scale of European financial engagement. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

The critical issue is how effectively Moldova converts this support into productive capacity.

The strongest opportunities are likely to be:

- Food processing and agriculture;
- Logistics and transport;
- ICT and digital services;
- Renewable energy;
- Manufacturing integrated into Romanian and EU supply chains;
- Pharmaceuticals and specialised industrial production;
- Business and professional services.

The relationship with Romania will be particularly important. Romania can function as Moldova's gateway into the EU economy, providing infrastructure, energy connections, investment, supply-chain integration and access to European institutions.

Energy Independence will Become a Strategic Asset

Energy is another area where the 2035 outlook could be dramatically different from the past.

Moldova has historically been vulnerable to Russian energy pressure. European integration creates the possibility of transforming this vulnerability into energy resilience through interconnection with Romania and the wider European energy system, diversification of supply and renewable generation.

This is strategically important because energy independence is not merely an economic question. It reduces the ability of external powers to use energy as an instrument of political influence.

By 2035, a successful Moldova should therefore be physically and commercially integrated into the European energy market.

Romania Becomes Moldova's Most Important Strategic Partner

The Romanian-Moldovan relationship is likely to deepen considerably by 2035.

Romania is uniquely positioned to provide Moldova with:

European access + infrastructure + energy + investment + political advocacy + cultural links + security cooperation.

This does not necessarily mean political reunification.

Indeed, the more likely strategic model is functional integration without immediate political unification: Moldova remains a sovereign state while becoming increasingly integrated with Romania and the EU.

In practical terms, the difference between the two countries could become progressively less significant in economic, infrastructure and institutional terms even if the political border remains.

Figures



The Identity Question will Gradually Become Less Decisive

The Romanian/Moldovan identity question will probably remain politically relevant, but its strategic importance may decline.

If Moldova becomes an EU member, the question of whether Moldovans are culturally Romanian or distinctly Moldovan becomes less consequential for everyday political and economic life.

A Moldovan citizen could simultaneously possess:

Moldovan national identity + Romanian cultural identity + European political identity.

The EU framework makes these identities increasingly compatible rather than mutually exclusive.

Russia's Influence will Probably Decline—But not Disappear

By 2035, Russian influence in Moldova is likely to be smaller than it was before 2022, but it will not necessarily disappear.

Russia can continue to exert influence through:

- Transnistria;
- Political networks;
- Disinformation;
- Economic relationships;
- Cultural and linguistic ties;
- Cyber operations;
- Attempts to influence elections.

The critical difference is that Moldova will increasingly possess stronger institutional and external support for resisting such pressure.

The EU's own assessment already describes Moldova as facing continued Russian interference and destabilisation attempts while highlighting the country's resilience and commitment to reforms. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

The Decisive Variable: State Capacity

Ultimately, Moldova's 2035 outcome will depend less on geography than on state capacity.

The country needs to convert European assistance and geopolitical opportunity into:

better institutions → rule of law → investment → productive employment → higher incomes → population retention → stronger state capacity → greater resilience.

The greatest risk is therefore not simply Russian pressure. It is the possibility that Moldova receives substantial European support without sufficiently strengthening its institutions and productive economy.

The EU accession process itself is designed to address precisely this problem. The first negotiating cluster focuses on fundamentals such as democratic institutions, public administration and economic criteria, and these areas must progress before the accession process can move forward fully. (Consilium)

Moldova in 2035: overall assessment

My central assessment would be:

By 2035, Moldova is likely to be substantially more European, more economically integrated with Romania and the EU, more energy-independent and more resilient to Russian pressure than it is today. The principal uncertainty is whether it will be a full EU member or a deeply integrated accession country.

The biggest opportunities are EU membership, Romanian economic integration, infrastructure development, energy diversification and diaspora return.

The biggest risks are demographic decline, weak institutions, corruption, political polarisation, Transnistria and continued Russian hybrid pressure.

The strategic objective for Moldova should therefore be understood not simply as "joining the EU", but as building a state capable of surviving and prospering inside the European system.

The 2035 Strategic Picture

Dimension	2026 position	Likely 2035 position
EU	Accession negotiations underway	Member or very advanced accession
Romania	Close strategic partner	Principal economic/security gateway
Russia	Significant residual influence	Reduced but persistent influence
Transnistria	Frozen conflict	Either reintegration process or managed separation
Economy	Developing, EU-oriented	More deeply integrated into EU supply chains
Energy	Vulnerable	Much greater diversification and EU integration

Security	Vulnerable buffer state	European security partner/frontier
Demography	Major structural weakness	Still a major challenge, but potentially stabilised
Identity	Moldovan/Romanian debate	Increasingly compatible with a European identity
Strategic position	Between geopolitical blocs	Increasingly inside the European system

The decisive strategic shift is therefore from “Moldova between Russia and Europe” to “Moldova inside Europe, with Russia remaining an external source of pressure.”

Revisiting the Bessarabian question

The central lesson of the Bessarabian question is that territorial disputes become most dangerous when historical memory, security interests, national identity, local self-determination, and great-power competition are treated as mutually exclusive claims rather than as interconnected interests requiring negotiation.

Historically, Russia viewed Bessarabia primarily through the lenses of strategic security, imperial expansion, and access to the Black Sea and Danube and as the gateway to the Balkans. Moldavia and later Romania viewed it through territorial continuity, national identity, and political sovereignty. Ukrainian movements increasingly emphasized ethnic identity and self-determination, while the inhabitants of Bessarabia themselves had diverse interests involving autonomy, land, representation, cultural rights, and security.

The repeated diplomatic crises—from 1812 to 1856, 1878, 1918, 1940 and 1947—show that suppressing one dimension of the dispute rarely eliminated the others. A settlement could resolve the question of who controlled the territory while leaving unresolved questions of identity, legitimacy, minority rights, or the security concerns of neighbouring powers.

Thus, the durable diplomatic lesson for Bucharest, Chişinău and Moscow is not simply that one side was historically right and another wrong. It is that a stable settlement must address territory, security, identity, historical memory and the political agency of the local population simultaneously. When one of these dimensions is imposed through force or excluded from negotiations, the dispute may be temporarily frozen but remains politically vulnerable to re-emergence.

The intersections among Romania, Russia, and the Republic of Moldova can be understood as overlapping interests rather than as three completely separate positions. The historical dispute over Bessarabia connected territorial continuity, national identity, political sovereignty, security, and competing interpretations of history.

For Romania, Bessarabia has historically been associated with Moldavian territorial continuity and Romanian national identity. The Romanian position therefore tends to connect the historical fact that Bessarabia formed part of the Principality of Moldavia before 1812 with the later development of Romanian national consciousness. At the same time, modern Romanian policy must distinguish between cultural and historical unity and the sovereign territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova.

For Russia, the same territory has historically been viewed through a different combination of strategic security, imperial/state continuity, and geopolitical influence. From the Russian perspective, control of Bessarabia provided strategic depth, strengthened the southwestern frontier and improved Russia’s position around the Black Sea and lower Danube. In the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, these security considerations became intertwined with questions concerning Russia’s regional influence and the political orientation of Moldova.

For Chişinău, the problem is particularly complex because Moldova occupies the intersection of these competing historical narratives. Moldova possesses a strong Romanian linguistic and cultural connection, while simultaneously having a distinct modern statehood and a population with diverse historical, linguistic and political orientations. Consequently, Moldova’s central interest is not simply choosing between Romanian and Russian historical narratives, but preserving political sovereignty and territorial integrity while accommodating internal diversity.

This creates an important intersection between the three capitals. Bucharest emphasizes historical and cultural continuity; Moscow emphasizes strategic security and geopolitical continuity; Chişinău emphasizes contemporary sovereignty and statehood. These positions overlap in some areas but conflict in others. Romania and Moldova can share cultural and historical identity without necessarily sharing a territorial project. Russia and Moldova can have security and economic relationships without Moldova necessarily belonging to a Russian sphere of influence. Likewise, Moldova’s sovereign statehood does not require the rejection of its Romanian cultural heritage.

The Ukrainian dimension adds another layer. Ukrainian movements historically emphasized ethnic identity and self-determination, particularly in parts of northern and southern Bessarabia where Ukrainian communities were significant.

This demonstrates that the question cannot be reduced to a simple Romania-versus-Russia confrontation. The region's ethnic diversity produced additional claims concerning representation, language, autonomy and political affiliation.

The inhabitants of Bessarabia themselves therefore occupy a crucial position in the historical picture. Their interests included autonomy, land ownership and reform, political representation, cultural and linguistic rights, economic security and physical security. These interests did not always correspond with the objectives of Bucharest, Moscow or Kyiv. This distinction is essential: a state's territorial claim and the preferences of the people living in the territory are not necessarily the same thing.

The repeated diplomatic crises of 1812, 1856, 1878, 1918, 1940 and 1947 demonstrate the consequences of leaving these dimensions unresolved. In 1812, Russia obtained territorial control but the Moldavian territorial question was not politically extinguished. In 1856, the European powers temporarily reversed part of the Russian settlement, but this did not eliminate the Russian strategic interest. In 1878, southern Bessarabia returned to Russia, while Romanian dissatisfaction remained. In 1918, Romania achieved union with Bessarabia, but Soviet Russia rejected the settlement and questions concerning minority representation and legitimacy remained contested. In 1940, Soviet military and diplomatic power reversed the 1918 settlement. The 1947 postwar order subsequently froze the Soviet territorial settlement without eliminating the historical and identity dimensions of the dispute.

The broader lesson is therefore that territorial control can settle sovereignty without necessarily settling identity, legitimacy, memory or security. Conversely, cultural or historical affinity does not automatically determine sovereignty.

For Bucharest, the lesson is to separate support for Romanian cultural identity from territorial revisionism and to recognize Moldova's independent political agency. For Chişinău, the lesson is to protect sovereignty while allowing different historical and cultural identities to coexist within the state. For Moscow, the lesson is that security policies based primarily on territorial control or spheres of influence can generate insecurity among neighbouring states and strengthen the very national identities that Russia seeks to influence.

Bucharest — Lessons for Romania

Romania's historical experience suggests that historical legitimacy alone does not guarantee durable diplomatic outcomes. Romania repeatedly invoked the Moldavian historical connection and, after 1918, the principle of national unity. Yet the 1918 union remained vulnerable because it was contested by Soviet Russia and because not all communities in Bessarabia interpreted their political future identically.

A key lesson for Bucharest is therefore to distinguish between historical identity and contemporary sovereignty. Cultural and linguistic connections with the Republic of Moldova can be deepened without automatically turning them into territorial claims. Romania's strongest long-term influence is likely to come from economic integration, education, infrastructure, European institutions and voluntary political cooperation rather than territorial revisionism.

A second lesson is that Romania should avoid allowing its Bessarabian historical narrative to become framed as a zero-sum confrontation with Russia. The historical record demonstrates that Romanian security improves when Bucharest is embedded in strong European institutions and alliances rather than when it attempts to resolve eastern security questions unilaterally.

Chişinău — Lessons for Moldova

For Chişinău, perhaps the most important lesson is that small states survive difficult geopolitical environments by preserving maximum room for diplomatic manoeuvre.

Moldavia historically suffered when decisions concerning its territory were made by larger powers. The 1812 settlement is the clearest example: the Ottoman Empire and Russia negotiated over Moldavian territory while Moldavia itself lacked the international power to determine the outcome.

Modern Moldova therefore has a strong interest in maintaining its own political agency. Its sovereignty should not be reduced to being either a Romanian project or a Russian sphere-of-influence project. Moldova's most sustainable position is to strengthen its own institutions, territorial cohesion, economic resilience and international partnerships.

The Bessarabian experience also shows Chişinău that identity questions require internal accommodation rather than purely geopolitical solutions. Moldova contains different linguistic, cultural and political orientations. Attempts to define the country exclusively through one historical identity can deepen internal divisions. A successful Moldovan state therefore needs to make Romanian/Moldovan identity, minority rights, regional autonomy where appropriate, and civic citizenship compatible rather than mutually exclusive.

Moscow — Lessons for Russia

The historical lesson for Moscow is perhaps the most difficult: territorial control does not necessarily produce lasting political legitimacy.

Russia acquired Bessarabia in 1812, lost part of it in 1856, recovered it in 1878, lost it again in 1918, and re-established Soviet control in 1940. The repeated reversals demonstrate that military or geopolitical possession can change much faster than underlying political identities and diplomatic legitimacy.

A second lesson is that invoking historical or security interests can have the opposite effect when neighbouring states interpret them as evidence of potential territorial revisionism. Russian policy toward the region repeatedly generated fears among Moldavian and Romanian political elites that Russia's security interests could come at their territorial expense.

A third lesson is that local political agency matters. The experience of 1917–1918 demonstrates that once imperial authority collapses, previously suppressed national and regional political movements can become decisive very quickly. A great power that assumes that local populations will automatically accept its preferred geopolitical settlement can be surprised when political conditions change.

A Common Lesson for All Three Capitals

The deepest lesson of the Bessarabian question is that there is rarely one “historical truth” that automatically determines a modern border.

There are at least four different questions:

Who historically governed the territory?

Who lived there and what identities did they possess?

What did the inhabitants themselves want at a particular historical moment?

What international settlement was capable of surviving the wider balance of power?

Those questions produced different answers in 1812, 1856, 1878, 1918, 1940 and 1947.

- **For Bucharest**, the lesson is that cultural influence and voluntary integration can be more durable than territorial revisionism.

- **For Chişinău**, it is that sovereignty and internal cohesion are the most valuable strategic assets of a small state.

- **For Moscow**, it is that security obtained through territorial domination can generate insecurity in neighbouring states and ultimately undermine the legitimacy of the very influence it seeks to preserve.

And for all three, the central lesson is that durable settlements require the participation and consent of the people whose territory and political future are being negotiated—not merely agreements among larger powers over their heads.

Ultimately, the Bessarabian experience suggests that a durable settlement requires five dimensions to be addressed together: territory, security, identity, historical memory, and local political agency. If one dimension is imposed while the others are ignored, the dispute may be frozen for a period, but the unresolved issues remain capable of re-emerging when the regional balance of power changes.

Table

Intersection	Romania ↔ Moldova	Moldova ↔ Russia	Romania ↔ Russia	Ukraine ↔ Moldova
Identity	Strong Romanian/ Moldavian linguistic and cultural connection	Russian-speaking and Soviet historical communities alongside Moldovan identity	Competing interpretations of Romanian and Russian historical influence	Ukrainian communities and cross-border identity
Security	Romanian support for Moldovan security	Russian security interests versus Moldovan sovereignty	NATO/EU security environment versus Russian strategic interests	Ukraine's security depends partly on Moldova's southwestern stability
Territory	Historical Bessarabian connection versus modern Moldovan sovereignty	Transnistria and broader Russian regional influence	Historical territorial dispute and competing memories	Northern/southern Bessarabian Ukrainian communities
Sovereignty	Romania formally recognizes Moldovan statehood while supporting close ties	Moldova seeks independence from Russian geopolitical dependence	Russia has historically challenged settlements unfavorable to its strategic interests	Ukraine emphasizes sovereignty and territorial integrity

Memory	1812 and 1918 are particularly important	1812, Soviet period and 1940 are particularly important	Conflicting historical narratives	Ukrainian national memory emphasizes the presence and rights of Ukrainian communities
Strategic objective	A stable, sovereign and European-oriented Moldova	A secure Russian strategic environment and continued regional influence	Security on Romania's eastern frontier	A secure southwestern Ukrainian frontier

The central cross-tab finding is that the same historical event can represent different things to each actor. For Romania, 1812 represents the division of historic Moldavian territory; for Russia, it represents a major strategic acquisition; for Moldova, it is part of the historical formation of its modern territorial problem; and for local populations, its consequences included changes in administration, identity, landholding and political representation.

That is why the Bessarabian question cannot be reduced to "Who owns the territory?" The more comprehensive diplomatic question is:

Who has sovereignty, whose identity is recognized, whose security is protected, whose historical memory is acknowledged, and—most importantly—how much political agency do the people living in the territory possess?

Those five questions form the intersection between Bucharest, Chişinău, Moscow, Kyiv and Bessarabian society.

Yes. The political compromise is the missing layer connecting those five questions. It can be formulated as a framework in which no actor is required to completely abandon its historical narrative, but each actor accepts limits on what it can demand politically.

The Political Compromise

The central cross-tab finding is that the same historical event can represent different things to different actors. For Romania, 1812 represents the division of historic Moldavian territory; for Russia, it represents a major strategic acquisition and the westward consolidation of the Russian frontier; for the Republic of Moldova, it is part of the historical formation of its territorial and identity problem; for Ukraine, the subsequent development of the region also concerns the presence and political rights of Ukrainian communities; and for the inhabitants of Bessarabia, these transformations affected administration, identity, landholding, representation and security.

The diplomatic compromise therefore cannot be based exclusively on deciding which historical narrative is correct. It must separate historical memory from contemporary sovereignty.

The first principle would be territorial sovereignty: the existing internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Moldova should be treated as the legal framework within which political disagreements are managed. Historical claims could remain part of public memory and scholarship without automatically becoming claims to territorial revision.

The second principle would be identity without territorial exclusivity. Romania could recognize and support the Romanian/Moldovan cultural and linguistic connection without requiring that cultural identity to determine sovereignty. Moldova could preserve its distinct statehood without treating Romanian cultural identity as incompatible with Moldovan citizenship. Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz and other identities would likewise receive institutional protection.

The third principle would be security without spheres of exclusive domination. Moldova's security concerns should not require it to become a buffer state permanently subordinate to one great power. At the same time, Russian security concerns should be addressed through diplomatic and confidence-building mechanisms rather than through territorial control or coercive political influence.

The fourth principle would be local political agency. The historical experience of Bessarabia demonstrates the danger of great powers negotiating over a territory while treating its inhabitants as passive objects. Political arrangements concerning Moldova and its regions should therefore give meaningful weight to democratic institutions, local representation, minority rights and the preferences of the population.

The fifth principle would be historical memory without historical revenge. Romania, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine do not need to adopt a common interpretation of 1812, 1918, 1940 or 1947. They can acknowledge that these events have different meanings in their respective national histories while agreeing that historical memory should not by itself determine contemporary borders.

The Resulting Political Formula

The compromise can therefore be expressed as:

1. Historical continuity without territorial revisionism.
2. National identity without exclusion of minorities.
3. Sovereignty without geopolitical isolation.
4. Security without spheres of domination.
5. Minority rights without territorial fragmentation.
6. Historical memory without historical revenge.
7. Local self-government without undermining the sovereignty of the state.

This creates a different conception of the Bessarabian question. Instead of asking “Which historical claim should prevail?”, diplomacy asks:

How can Romania’s historical and cultural connection, Moldova’s sovereign statehood, Russia’s legitimate security concerns, Ukraine’s minority and regional interests, and the rights of Bessarabian communities coexist without turning one actor’s security or identity into another actor’s territorial insecurity?

That is the essence of the political compromise: not eliminating competing historical narratives, but preventing any single narrative from becoming an unlimited political claim.

Where the Compromise is Fraying

“Local self-government without undermining sovereignty” is the one under the most strain. Gagauzia’s governor, Evghenia Gutsul, was convicted in August 2025 of funnelling Russian money to the banned pro-Russian Shor Party, sentenced to seven years, and formally removed from office on August 18, 2026, after Gagauzia’s own People’s Assembly — acting on the court ruling — declared the post vacant. Chişinău frames this as prosecuting illegal foreign financing of separatism; Moscow and pro-Russian Moldovan voices frame it as Chişinău dismantling an autonomy statute it never liked, with Transnistria “next.” Both readings are being made in real time, and the formula doesn’t tell you which one is right — it just describes the tension the case sits on.

“Security without spheres of domination” is being tested on Transnistria, where roughly 1,500 Russian troops still guard the Cobasna ammunition depot in defiance of the 1992 ceasefire’s withdrawal commitment. But the region’s leverage is collapsing on its own: Russia’s 2025 gas cutoff (via Ukraine’s refusal to renew transit) shrank Transnistria’s economy by 18%, and Moldova has cut its own dependence on the Cuciurgan power station from ~70-90% to 37% of its electricity needs. Chişinău drafted a formal reintegration non-paper in February 2026 proposing an international administration over the territory — the first such government plan since it rejected Russia’s Kozak Plan in 2003.

“National identity without exclusion of minorities” and “minority rights without fragmentation” are colliding in Gagauzia specifically. Most Gagauz rejected Moldova’s EU path in the 2024 referendum, and about half speak Russian as a first language — so EU integration reads to Chişinău as national consolidation, and to Comrat as exactly the “exclusion” the formula warns against. Whether removing an elected, convicted-of-corruption governor counts as protecting the state’s sovereignty or eroding minority self-government is precisely the sentence that formula can’t resolve by itself; it just names the fault line.

“Sovereignty without geopolitical isolation” is arguably the line where things are going Chişinău’s way — PAS won the September 2025 parliamentary election with 50.2%, pro-Russian parties underperformed, and EU accession talks are ongoing despite the pressure campaigns.

So: the formula describes an aspiration for balance. The reality on the ground in 2026 is a state using legal and economic tools to actively tip several of these balances toward the sovereignty/consolidation side, betting that Transnistria’s economic collapse and Gagauzia’s legal exposure let it do so without triggering the “domination” or “exclusion” backlash the formula warns against.

Immediate Corrective Interventions

Judicial Independence as the Credibility Anchor

The test case is already running. Gutsul's conviction and removal is the highest-profile use of Moldova's courts against a sitting elected official in this conflict's history, and it's being litigated in public opinion as much as in court — TASS and Russian Duma figures are framing it as ethnic persecution of the Gagauz, while Chișinău treats it as ordinary corruption enforcement. What would actually strengthen governance here isn't a single verdict; it's a track record. That means publishing case files and evidentiary standards used in Shor-network prosecutions, applying the same scrutiny to PAS-aligned figures accused of similar financing irregularities, and letting Gagauzia's own courts and People's Assembly — which is the body that actually declared the post vacant, not Chișinău directly — retain visible ownership of the process. The more this looks like Comrat's own institutions enforcing Comrat's own law, the less it plays into the "Chișinău dismantling autonomy" narrative.

Formalize the Transnistria transitional framework — now with real detail

This has moved further than I'd suggested last time. Chiveri's February 2026 non-paper, briefed to Brussels in March, actually specifies more than a vague framework:

- **No Special Status** for Transnistria post-reunification — it would be an ordinary Moldovan territory, not an autonomous one like Gagauzia. That's a deliberate break from the 2003 Kozak Plan model.
- **A Convergence Fund** (announced by Chiveri in February) intended as a trust-building economic instrument ahead of full reintegration.
- **Citizenship Guarantees and Amnesty** for Transnistrian officials not implicated in human-rights violations, with a commitment that social benefits won't fall below pre-reintegration levels.
- **EU Law Temporarily Suspended** on the left bank during Moldova's own EU accession, to avoid Transnistria becoming a legal bottleneck for the whole country's membership bid.
- A proposed international civilian mission or administration to oversee security and gradually transfer authority to Chișinău as disarmament happens — explicitly modeled as an alternative to the collapsed "5+2" format (Moldova, Transnistria, OSCE, Russia, Ukraine as mediators, EU/US as observers), which has been dead since 2022. Talks now happen in a bare "1+1" Chișinău–Tiraspol channel.
- **A Phased Timeline Stretching to 2038**, and Parliament Speaker Igor Grosu has put the annual cost of reintegration at roughly €500 million.
- As leverage, Chișinău declared the command of Russia's Operational Group of Forces — commander Dmitry Zelenkov and his deputies — persona non grata in April 2026, meaning they can't leave Transnistria through Moldovan territory without arrest. That's a direct squeeze on Russian troop rotation and morale, not just economic pressure.

The gap: Tiraspol hasn't formally responded to any of this. Chiveri said as much in January — "we haven't received any requests, and there's no such openness yet" — and Transnistria's Foreign Ministry has publicly disputed Chișinău's claim that most left-bank residents support reintegration. So the framework exists on paper; what's missing is any signal Tiraspol or Moscow will engage with it rather than simply outlast the pressure.

Rebuild Gagauzia's Institutional Legitimacy

With Gutsul removed and Ilia Uzun only acting governor, Gagauzia is functionally leaderless heading into what should be a fresh Bashkan election — and elections there have reportedly faced delays into 2026 amid the broader legal crisis. The governance risk isn't the removal itself so much as a prolonged vacancy: an extended "acting" administration with no electoral mandate is exactly the kind of gap Moscow-aligned actors can exploit rhetorically ("Chișinău won't even let us vote"). Concretely this means Chișinău has an interest in pushing for a credibly monitored election on a fixed near-term timeline, resisting any temptation to use the interim period to reshape Gagauzia's institutions unilaterally, and pairing that with visible investment — not just security enforcement — so the story in Comrat isn't only about prosecutions.

Harden Anti-Corruption and Campaign-Finance Enforcement Broadly

The through-line in the Gutsul case was money moved from a Russian criminal network to fund the (now-banned) Shor Party and pay protesters — a financing vector, not just an individual's guilt. Closing that vector generally, rather than only when it produces a high-profile separatist target, is what converts this from "the government prosecutes its enemies" into "the government enforces a rule." That's slower and less dramatic than a courtroom win, but it's the difference that determines whether Gagauz and Transnistrian audiences read the rule of law as real.



Which garden are you looking for ?

The image shows a formal group portrait in Moldova, taken in a garden setting with representatives of religious and civic institutions. Several Eastern Orthodox clergy in traditional black vestments stand alongside professionally dressed participants, reflecting cooperation and dialogue between church and public life. Surrounded by greenery and framed by an institutional building in the background, the photograph conveys dignity, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to serving Moldovan society.

Diversify Energy and Reduce Coercive Leverage

This is the area with the clearest measurable progress. Moldova cut Cuciurgan-station dependence from ~70-90% to 37% by December 2024, and the Vulcănești–Chișinău line — routed to bypass the old Soviet-era path through Ukraine and Transnistria — was slated for completion around mid-2026, with more interconnectors due in 2027 and 2029. The strategic logic: Transnistria's economy contracted 18% in 2025 and Russia's gas cutoff (via Ukraine's refusal to renew the transit deal) backfired by exposing how fragile Tiraspol's Russian patronage actually is. Every further megawatt of non-Russian capacity is one less lever Moscow has to threaten Chișinău with in a future winter.

Keep EU Accession Conditionality Tied to Institutional Reform

PAS's September 2025 election win (50.2%) gives Chișinău a mandate, but the accession process is the mechanism that keeps governance improvements from depending on any one government staying in power. The more judicial reform, decentralization, and media-pluralism benchmarks are externally verified through the EU process — rather than announced unilaterally by Chișinău — the harder it becomes for skeptical Gagauz or Transnistrian audiences to dismiss them as a purely nationalist project rather than a technical one.

The honest bottom line: Moldova has real, measurable leverage right now (energy independence, Transnistria's economic collapse, an election mandate) that it didn't have a few years ago. What it doesn't have yet is Tiraspol or Moscow's agreement to actually use any of this machinery — the plan exists, the target of the plan hasn't said yes.

What is Actually at Stake?

The deepest issue is therefore not simply:

"Who owns Bessarabia?"

It is:

"Who defines the political nation of Moldova, and does national identity necessarily determine the state's geopolitical and territorial alignment?"

That produces four competing principles:

Russian principle: distinct Moldovan identity + geopolitical pluralism.

Romanian unionist principle: Romanian national identity + eventual political reunification.

Moldovan sovereignist principle: distinct or layered Moldovan identity + independent statehood.

European principle: identity and sovereignty can coexist because integration makes borders less consequential.

The fourth principle is potentially transformative.

It allows Moldova to become increasingly Romanian in cultural and societal terms, increasingly European in institutional and economic terms, while remaining Moldovan in constitutional terms. Whether that ultimately leads to unification becomes a separate democratic question.

Bottom Line

I would therefore retain “nationality conflict” explicitly in the analytical framework. It should sit alongside, rather than underneath, the geopolitical conflict.

The historical sequence is best understood as:

territorial conflict → nationality conflict → sovereignty conflict → geopolitical competition → Europeanisation.

And the central strategic challenge today is to prevent the nationality conflict from becoming a zero-sum geopolitical conflict.

The EU–Moldova strategy we discussed outlined below could serve precisely this purpose: raise living standards, protect minority and linguistic rights, deepen Romanian–Moldovan societal links, strengthen Moldovan institutions, and integrate Moldova into the EU—without making Romanian identity, Moldovan identity, or political union mutually exclusive choices.

That would preserve the nationality question while de-securitising it: people could increasingly express Romanian, Moldovan, Russian, Gagauz, Ukrainian or hybrid identities without those identities automatically determining geopolitical allegiance or territorial status. This is arguably the most sustainable way to manage a conflict whose origins lie in 1812 but whose political form has repeatedly changed over more than two centuries.

Gateway to the Balkans

Moldova’s geopolitical significance within the contemporary European security architecture extends considerably beyond its territorial size and economic weight. Situated between Romania and Ukraine and positioned at the intersection of the European Union’s eastern neighbourhood, the Black Sea region and the wider South-Eastern European space, Moldova increasingly functions as a strategic bridge between the EU’s eastern and south-eastern dimensions. Although Moldova is not geographically part of the Western Balkans, its European integration has implications for the broader architecture of EU enlargement and regional security. It can therefore be conceptualised as a gateway between the EU’s eastern neighbourhood and the Balkans, particularly as the Union seeks to integrate the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova within a more coherent geopolitical framework.

The strategic importance of this position has increased substantially since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Black Sea has become a central theatre of European geopolitical competition, linking Europe with the South Caucasus, Central Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean. The European Commission’s 2025 Black Sea strategy explicitly identifies the region as a critical connector for transport, energy, trade and security, while emphasising that EU enlargement and the gradual integration of partner countries constitute instruments of regional resilience. Moldova consequently occupies an increasingly important position within a broader European strategy designed to strengthen connectivity between the EU and its eastern and south-eastern neighbourhoods.

From this perspective, Moldova’s importance derives partly from its connectivity function. Its geographical position between Romania and Ukraine places it along emerging transport, energy and trade corridors connecting the EU with Ukraine and, potentially, the wider Black Sea region. The deepening integration of Moldova into European infrastructure and regulatory systems therefore has consequences extending beyond the Moldovan market itself. EU initiatives concerning energy, transport, digital infrastructure, customs and payments progressively incorporate Moldova into European networks. This process transforms the country from a peripheral buffer space into an increasingly integrated component of the European economic and strategic system. The EU’s broader policy of gradual integration similarly places Moldova alongside Ukraine and the Western Balkan candidates in sectors such as energy, telecommunications, payments, customs, transport and defence.

The concept of Moldova as a gateway is particularly significant when considered in relation to Ukraine. Moldova and Ukraine have increasingly become interconnected within the EU’s eastern enlargement strategy. Both countries applied for EU membership in 2022, both subsequently received candidate status, and accession negotiations were formally launched with Moldova in 2024. Moldova completed the EU screening process in September 2025, and the first cluster was opened in June 2026. Moldova therefore forms part of an emerging geopolitical corridor through which the EU is extending its institutional, economic and security presence towards Ukraine and the Black Sea.

This position also gives Moldova significance for the European security architecture. Moldova remains militarily vulnerable, particularly because of the unresolved Transnistrian conflict and the presence of Russian military forces in the region. Its security cannot therefore be separated from the broader security environment surrounding Ukraine, Romania and the Black Sea. The country’s increasing alignment with the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy, alongside deeper cooperation in security and defence, has transformed its European integration from a predominantly economic and normative project into a strategic one. The first EU–Moldova Summit in July 2025 explicitly linked the future of Moldova to European security, stability and prosperity, while recognising the increasing regional threats associated with Russia’s

war against Ukraine.

The geopolitical significance of Moldova is also evident in the EU's changing conception of enlargement itself. Traditionally, enlargement was largely understood through the normative framework of democratisation, rule-of-law conditionality and economic convergence. Russia's war against Ukraine, however, has increasingly encouraged the EU to understand enlargement as an instrument of geopolitical strategy. The European Commission has explicitly described enlargement as a strategic investment in regional security and resilience, while its 2025 enlargement policy places Moldova, Ukraine and the Western Balkan states within a broader process of gradual integration. Moldova therefore occupies a distinctive position between two enlargement geographies: the post-Soviet Eastern Partnership space and the established Western Balkan enlargement framework.

This creates an important geopolitical bridge between the eastern and south-eastern dimensions of European integration. The Western Balkans have historically represented the EU's principal enlargement frontier in South-Eastern Europe, whereas Moldova belongs institutionally to the EU's Eastern Partnership. Yet the strategic environment created by Russia's aggression against Ukraine increasingly makes this distinction less meaningful. The EU's security, energy and connectivity interests now overlap across the Black Sea and South-Eastern European regions. Moldova consequently becomes part of a wider geopolitical continuum stretching from Central and Eastern Europe through Ukraine and Moldova towards the Black Sea and the Western Balkans.

The significance of this position can also be understood through the concept of strategic depth. A more deeply integrated Moldova would extend the EU's political, economic and regulatory presence further east while simultaneously strengthening the Union's eastern flank. Moldova's integration with European energy networks can reduce regional dependence on Russian energy; its incorporation into European transport and customs systems can facilitate trade with Ukraine and the wider region; and its alignment with EU foreign and security policy can reinforce European responses to hybrid threats. The EU's Black Sea strategy explicitly identifies energy diversification, transport corridors, military mobility and countering hybrid threats as interconnected elements of its regional approach.

Nevertheless, describing Moldova as a gateway should not obscure the vulnerabilities that accompany this geopolitical position. Moldova is simultaneously a bridge and a frontier state. Its strategic location exposes it to competing geopolitical pressures, particularly Russian influence operations, disinformation, political interference and security risks associated with Transnistria. The very characteristics that make Moldova strategically valuable to the EU also make it vulnerable to external pressure. Its Europeanisation therefore has implications not only for Moldova's domestic institutional development but also for the balance of power between Russia and the EU in the wider Black Sea region.

The unresolved Transnistrian conflict is particularly important in this regard. Moldova's European integration takes place in the presence of a territorial conflict involving a region supported politically, economically and militarily by Russia. Consequently, successful European integration would potentially alter the geopolitical balance surrounding the conflict by strengthening Moldova's institutions, economy and international partnerships. Conversely, persistent instability in Transnistria could constrain Moldova's capacity to function fully as a secure corridor between the EU, Ukraine and the wider Black Sea region. The Europeanisation of Moldova should therefore be understood simultaneously as an integration project and a security project.

Moldova's role also has implications for the Western Balkans themselves. As the EU seeks to reinvigorate enlargement, Moldova represents an example of how the Union's eastern and south-eastern enlargement agendas can increasingly converge. The European Commission has explicitly placed Moldova alongside Western Balkan partners within processes of gradual integration, including cooperation in energy, customs, payments, transport and defence. Moldova therefore contributes to the emergence of a more interconnected enlargement space in which the traditional division between "Eastern Partnership" and "Western Balkans" becomes increasingly difficult to sustain from a strategic perspective.

At the same time, Moldova should not be conceptualised as merely a passive corridor through which EU influence moves towards the Balkans or the Black Sea. Its accession process provides the country with an opportunity to exercise agency within the European geopolitical order. By aligning itself closely with EU foreign and security policy, implementing institutional reforms and integrating into European economic networks, Moldova is actively attempting to transform its geopolitical position from that of a vulnerable buffer state into that of a European security and connectivity partner. The Government's own discourse of "bringing Europe home" is particularly relevant here, because it presents European integration as a process through which Moldova seeks to redefine its geopolitical identity and institutional orientation.

The concept of Moldova as a gateway therefore has three interconnected dimensions. First, it is a geographical gateway, linking Romania and the EU to Ukraine and the Black Sea. Second, it is an institutional gateway, through which EU norms, regulations, infrastructure and economic networks are progressively extended into the eastern neighbourhood. Third, it is a geopolitical gateway, through which the EU seeks to strengthen its strategic presence in a region increasingly contested by Russia and shaped by the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

Ultimately, Moldova's geopolitical significance lies in the fact that its European trajectory can no longer be considered solely a question of national accession. Moldova has become part of a broader contest over the future political and security architecture of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Its successful integration would strengthen the EU's eastern flank, improve connectivity between the European Union and Ukraine, contribute to the resilience of the Black Sea region and reinforce the coherence of the Union's wider enlargement strategy. Conversely, instability or democratic backsliding in Moldova would create vulnerabilities within precisely the same strategic corridor.

Moldova should therefore be understood less as a peripheral candidate state and more as a strategic hinge between Europe's eastern and south-eastern geopolitical spaces. Its importance derives not from its capacity to dominate the region, but from its position within a network of increasingly interconnected security, energy, transport, economic and political relationships. In this sense, Moldova's European integration represents not only an enlargement question but also a test of the EU's capacity to transform enlargement into an instrument of geopolitical resilience.

State of Play: Romania–Moldova Unification

The question of a potential unification between Romania and the Republic of Moldova should be understood as a long-term state-building and integration scenario, rather than simply as a question of national reunification. Romania and Moldova share deep linguistic, cultural, historical, familial, and economic connections, but they have developed as separate sovereign states since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Consequently, any future unification would involve not only a political decision, but also the alignment of constitutional orders, public institutions, economies, social systems, identities, and security arrangements.

The present state of play is characterised by a paradox of increasing functional integration alongside limited political convergence on formal unification. Romania is firmly embedded in the European Union and NATO, while Moldova has pursued an increasingly ambitious European trajectory. This creates an expanding institutional and economic bridge between the two countries without automatically translating into support for a common state. The most realistic pathway at present is therefore one of progressive convergence, in which Moldova becomes increasingly integrated into European and Romanian economic, legal, infrastructural, and societal structures. Whether this convergence ultimately creates the conditions for political unification would depend on the evolution of the seven dimensions below.

(P) Political Consent

Political consent is the foundational condition for any legitimate unification process. Regardless of historical, cultural, or economic arguments, a change in Moldova's sovereign status would require democratic legitimacy and a clear expression of popular will. Support for closer relations with Romania is significant, but this should be distinguished analytically from support for the establishment of a single Romanian state. The two propositions are politically and constitutionally different.

A credible unification pathway would therefore require sustained political consent rather than a temporary majority generated by a particular political crisis or electoral cycle. This would involve political parties, civil society, local authorities, and citizens engaging in an informed debate about the institutional, economic, social, and security consequences of unification. In practical terms, constitutional procedures and potentially referendums would be central to establishing democratic legitimacy.

The key issue is consequently not whether political support for unification exists, but whether such support could become broad, stable, territorially inclusive, and resilient across successive electoral cycles. Political consent would also need to extend beyond symbolic nationalism and address concrete questions concerning taxation, pensions, public administration, citizenship, representation, territorial governance, and the distribution of political power.

At present, political consent can therefore be characterised as potentially significant but insufficiently consolidated for immediate unification. The political environment is more favourable to deepening bilateral and European integration than to initiating a formal process of state merger.

(I) Institutional Compatibility

Institutional compatibility is arguably the area in which the foundations for convergence are becoming strongest, although substantial differences remain. Romania and Moldova operate as separate constitutional systems, with different institutional capacities, administrative structures, fiscal arrangements, and levels of integration into European institutions. Romania's membership of the EU and NATO creates a fundamentally different strategic and legal environment from that of Moldova.

Nevertheless, Moldova's European integration process is progressively narrowing this institutional gap. Alignment with EU legislation, regulatory standards, governance practices, judicial reform, border management, public administration, and economic regulation is gradually bringing Moldova closer to the institutional environment in which Romania already operates.

A hypothetical unification would nevertheless require an exceptionally complex process of institutional harmonisation. Constitutional arrangements would need to determine the distribution of political authority, parliamentary representation, judicial jurisdiction, local government responsibilities, citizenship, taxation, social-security entitlements, and the application of Romanian and EU law. Public institutions would also need to absorb potentially large differences in administrative capacity.

The territorial dimension represents an especially difficult institutional question. The status of Gagauzia has implications for constitutional and regional autonomy arrangements, while Transnistria represents a far more fundamental unresolved territorial and security issue. Any credible assessment of institutional compatibility therefore needs to distinguish between the integration of the territory effectively governed by Chisinau and the unresolved status of Transnistria.

Overall, institutional compatibility is improving through Europeanisation and bilateral cooperation, but it remains insufficient for an immediate transition to a unified state.

(E) Economic Convergence

Economic convergence constitutes simultaneously one of the strongest potential benefits and largest practical costs of unification. Romania's economy is considerably larger and more deeply integrated into European production networks and the EU single market. Moldova, by contrast, has lower average incomes, lower productivity, a smaller domestic market, and significant infrastructure and investment needs.

Integration could generate substantial benefits. Greater economic integration could increase cross-border investment, facilitate labour mobility, reduce transaction costs, expand access to capital, strengthen supply chains, and accelerate infrastructure development. Moldova could benefit from deeper integration with Romania's transport, energy, financial, telecommunications, and business networks. The removal or reduction of institutional barriers could also make Moldova more attractive to investors seeking access to the EU market.

However, convergence should not be confused with automatic economic equalisation. A unified state would have to confront differences in wages, pensions, public-sector remuneration, healthcare, education, infrastructure, regional development, and social protection. Closing these gaps would require significant public investment and potentially long-term fiscal transfers.

The economic challenge is therefore essentially one of absorptive capacity and sequencing. Rapid integration without sufficient institutional preparation could generate fiscal pressure, migration imbalances, inflationary effects, or pressure on public services. A gradual convergence strategy would allow productivity and institutional capacity to increase before the most demanding forms of integration were undertaken.

Economic convergence is thus technically feasible but financially demanding, and its success would depend on sustained investment, productivity growth, institutional reform, and access to European financial mechanisms.

(S) Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is strengthened by the exceptionally close cultural and human links between Romania and Moldova. The shared Romanian language, historical experience, family connections, migration patterns, education links, media environment, and extensive interpersonal networks create a substantial social foundation for closer integration.

However, cultural proximity does not eliminate political or social differences. Moldova remains a pluralistic society with different conceptions of national identity, geopolitical orientation, language, history, and the country's relationship with Romania, Russia, Ukraine, and the European Union. These differences are particularly important when assessing whether social cohesion would survive the institutional disruption associated with unification.

A successful process would therefore need to avoid treating Moldovan society as socially homogeneous. Regional identities and minority communities would require meaningful political, linguistic, cultural, and institutional guarantees. In particular, the interests and perceptions of communities in Gagauzia and other linguistically or culturally distinct areas would need to be incorporated into any settlement.

Social cohesion would also depend on material equality. If citizens perceived that integration produced unequal access to employment, housing, public services, pensions, or political representation, cultural affinity alone would not guarantee support. Conversely, visible improvements in living standards and opportunities could reinforce support for deeper integration.

The social dimension can therefore be assessed as relatively favourable in terms of cultural proximity but more uncertain in terms of political identity and distributional consequences.

(G) Geopolitical Permissiveness

Geopolitical permissiveness is perhaps the dimension over which Romania and Moldova have the least direct control.

Moldova's position at the intersection of EU, NATO, Ukrainian, and Russian security interests makes any discussion of constitutional change inseparable from the wider European security environment.

Romania's EU and NATO membership provides a powerful institutional anchor. Moldova's movement towards the EU similarly creates a progressively stronger European framework for its political, economic, and security orientation. This trajectory potentially reduces the strategic distance between the two countries.

At the same time, the unresolved Transnistrian conflict remains a fundamental complication. Any change in Moldova's constitutional status would have to consider territorial control, security guarantees, population interests, and the possibility of external destabilisation. Russian political, economic, informational, and security influence also represents a significant factor in the strategic environment.

Consequently, geopolitical permissiveness should not be interpreted simply as whether external actors would "allow" unification. The more relevant question is whether a regional and international environment could emerge in which unification could occur without generating unacceptable security risks or destabilising Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, or the wider European security order.

At present, the geopolitical environment is therefore more permissive for Moldova's European integration than for formal unification. The distinction is critical.

(Y) Inclusive Identity

Identity is one of the most politically sensitive dimensions of the entire question. The historical and linguistic relationship between Romania and Moldova provides a powerful basis for Romanian–Moldovan affinity, but identity in Moldova cannot be reduced to a single national narrative.

Some citizens understand their identity primarily through a Romanian cultural and linguistic framework, while others attach greater importance to a distinct Moldovan national identity. There are also citizens whose political and cultural identities are shaped by Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian, or other traditions.

For unification to become politically sustainable, it would therefore need to move beyond an exclusively ethnic conception of nationhood. A successful model would have to construct an inclusive civic framework in which existing Moldovan identities could coexist with Romanian national identity. This would require constitutional guarantees for minority rights, cultural autonomy where appropriate, linguistic rights, political representation, and equal citizenship.

The objective would not necessarily be to eliminate Moldovan identity, but to establish a political framework in which different layers of identity could coexist. In this respect, identity should be treated as an institutional resource for integration rather than simply a cultural prerequisite for unification.

The prospects in this dimension are therefore mixed: linguistic and cultural proximity are strong, while the political interpretation of identity remains contested.

(R) Resilience and Risk-Management Capacity

Resilience determines whether the political and economic system could withstand the shocks associated with a major constitutional and institutional transformation. Even if political consent and geopolitical conditions became favourable, unification would represent an extraordinarily complex administrative undertaking.

The principal risks would include fiscal pressures, institutional overload, migration pressures, uneven regional development, social-service disparities, political polarisation, cybersecurity threats, disinformation, energy vulnerability, and external interference. These risks would be compounded by the need to integrate two public administrations and align different regulatory, legal, and economic systems.

Risk management would therefore require phased implementation, strong institutional coordination, fiscal planning, transparent communication, and external European support. Rather than treating unification as a single event, a resilient approach would view it as a sequence of integration stages, each with measurable institutional and economic benchmarks.

Energy security and infrastructure resilience would be particularly important. Greater integration of electricity, gas, transport, digital infrastructure, and communications could simultaneously strengthen Moldova's resilience and reduce vulnerabilities to external pressure.

The resilience dimension is therefore closely connected to all the others. Strong institutions can improve economic convergence; economic convergence can reinforce social cohesion; social cohesion can strengthen political consent; and geopolitical stability can make the entire process more manageable.

Overall Assessment

Taken together, the seven dimensions suggest that Romania–Moldova unification is not primarily constrained by cultural distance, but by the political, institutional, economic, territorial, and geopolitical complexity of transforming two sovereign states into one.

The strongest enabling factors are the shared linguistic and cultural space, expanding economic interdependence, Romania's EU membership, Moldova's European trajectory, and increasingly dense institutional cooperation. The principal constraints are the absence of a clearly consolidated political mandate for unification, institutional differences, economic disparities, Moldova's internal identity pluralism, the unresolved Transnistrian question, and the broader geopolitical environment.

The most plausible short- to medium-term trajectory is therefore progressive integration rather than immediate political unification. Moldova's European integration can function as a form of convergence infrastructure: by aligning legislation, institutions, markets, infrastructure, and standards with the EU, Moldova simultaneously moves closer to Romania. This creates the possibility of increasing functional integration without requiring an immediate decision on statehood.

From this perspective, the seven dimensions can be understood as a sequenced feasibility framework. Political consent (P) provides democratic legitimacy; institutional compatibility (I) provides the machinery for integration; economic convergence (E) provides material sustainability; social cohesion (S) provides societal acceptance; geopolitical permissiveness (G) provides the external operating space; inclusive identity (Y) provides the basis for legitimate nation-building; and resilience (R) determines whether the system can absorb the costs and shocks of transformation.

The decisive question is therefore not simply "Can Romania and Moldova unite?", but rather "Under what conditions could unification become democratically legitimate, institutionally workable, economically sustainable, socially cohesive, geopolitically viable, identity-inclusive, and resilient?" On the current evidence, those conditions are developing unevenly rather than being simultaneously present. The strategic significance of the present period therefore lies less in the immediate prospect of formal unification and more in whether continued European and bilateral integration can progressively create the institutional, economic, social, and political conditions under which the question could eventually be revisited.

Figure I am Sure I Deserve it



The Strategic Problem

Romania's relationship with the Republic of Moldova is currently supported by substantial financial, institutional and political engagement. The Romanian state provides hundreds of millions of euros in support and has developed extensive cooperation across infrastructure, energy, education, health, culture, trade and public administration.

Yet financial assistance alone does not constitute a strategy for eventual unification.

The central question should therefore shift from:

How much money does Romania transfer to Moldova?

to:

What strategic capabilities and conditions are being built through Romania's engagement, and how do they affect the long-term possibility of unification?

A substantial assistance programme can produce immediate benefits while failing to create the institutional, economic, social and political conditions necessary for eventual political integration.

The Centre should therefore introduce a concept of strategic return on assistance.

Not merely:

$$\left[\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{Economic benefit}}{\text{Money spent}} \right]$$

but:

$$\left[\text{SROI} = f(P, I, E, S, G, Y, R) \right]$$

where:

(P) = political consent,

(I) = institutional compatibility,

(E) = economic convergence,

(S) = social cohesion,

(G) = geopolitical permissiveness,

(Y) = inclusive identity,

(R) = resilience and risk-management capacity.

The objective is to determine whether Romania's policies are increasing the underlying feasibility of future unification.

The Centre's Raison D'être

The founding mandate should be unusually clear:

The Centre exists to prepare the Romanian state for the eventuality of the democratic and lawful unification of Romania and the Republic of Moldova by continuously monitoring the conditions relevant to unification, developing strategic options, strengthening Romanian institutional preparedness, and identifying policies that can increase the probability of a peaceful, legitimate and sustainable union.

This mandate has four implications.

- First, unification is an explicit strategic scenario rather than something the Centre avoids discussing.
- Second, timing is deliberately left open. The Centre does not predict when a window will arise.
- Third, democratic consent is a precondition, not an obstacle to be circumvented.

Fourth, the Centre should prepare Romania even if unification does not occur. Better infrastructure, economic convergence, institutional interoperability, energy security, administrative capacity and societal links have independent strategic value. The Centre should therefore operate according to the principle:

Prepare for unification without requiring unification to justify the preparation.

From Assistance to Strategic Investment

Romania's annual financial support to Moldova should increasingly be evaluated through a strategic framework.

This does not mean conditioning assistance on political support for unification. That would be both ethically problematic and strategically counterproductive.

It means asking whether programmes generate durable capabilities.

For every major Romanian-funded programme, the Centre should assess:

What problem does it solve?

What capability does it create?

How durable is that capability?

Does it increase Romania-Moldova interoperability?

Does it reduce the costs of future integration?

Does it increase Moldova's resilience?

Does it strengthen democratic legitimacy?

Does it create unintended political or distributional effects?

How will its impact be measured five or ten years later?

This would allow Romania to move from an assistance model toward a strategic investment model.

The Centre's Core Function: Maintain the "Unification Readiness System"

The Centre should maintain a permanent national database and analytical dashboard measuring the conditions relevant to eventual unification. This should function not as a temporary research programme but as a permanent strategic capability, providing Romania with a continuously updated, evidence-based assessment of the political, institutional, economic, social, demographic, legal, administrative, European, and security conditions that would shape any future process of integration.

The purpose of the system should not be to predetermine the political outcome. Its purpose should be to establish objectively the conditions under which different forms of integration could become feasible, sustainable, and democratically legitimate. It should provide a common evidence base for government institutions, Parliament, researchers, and other authorised decision-makers, allowing them to distinguish long-term structural trends from short-term political fluctuations and to identify where convergence is accelerating, stagnating, or reversing.

The system should track seven principal dimensions within a single analytical framework while maintaining detailed sectoral datasets. The Centre should preserve historical data so that policymakers can examine developments over five, ten, fifteen, or more years, while also maintaining forward-looking scenarios showing how political, economic, demographic, institutional, and geopolitical developments could affect future integration readiness.

Democratic Consent

The first dimension should be democratic consent. The Centre should systematically measure public support in both Moldova and Romania for closer bilateral relations, European integration, different forms of association, deeper institutional cooperation, and ultimately political union. The analysis should clearly distinguish support for closer cooperation from support for political union and should never assume that support for one automatically translates into support for the other.

The Centre should therefore maintain separate indicators for each stage of integration and update them regularly using comparable methodologies in both countries. The system should measure not only average national support but also the distribution and intensity of public opinion across society, including regional and urban-rural variation, age, education, income, occupation, language, identity, political affiliation, Romanian citizenship, EU orientation, and other relevant socioeconomic characteristics.

The database should identify generational differences and establish whether support for integration is becoming stronger among younger citizens or remains concentrated among older generations. It should also examine the relationship between identity and political preferences, distinguishing civic, national, cultural, and European identities and measuring how these relate to attitudes toward Romanian and Moldovan statehood.

The Centre should identify whether citizens view closer integration primarily through economic, cultural, security, European, or national considerations. It should also measure the level of public knowledge concerning Romania-Moldova relations, distinguishing limited knowledge or uncertainty from active opposition. This would prevent the dashboard from reducing complex public attitudes to a single percentage supporting or opposing unification.

The objective should be to know where support exists, why it exists, how strong it is, how durable it is, and what causes it to change. The Centre should therefore track public opinion continuously rather than relying on isolated opinion polls. It should analyse whether changes represent temporary reactions to elections, economic conditions, security developments, migration, major bilateral agreements, or changes in European integration, or whether they reflect deeper structural shifts.

The Centre should also measure public confidence in the institutions that would be responsible for managing deeper integration, including governments, parliaments, courts, local authorities, and European institutions. It should determine whether public support for integration is accompanied by sufficient institutional confidence to sustain a complex political process.

Public opinion should be monitored simultaneously in Moldova and Romania so that divergences can be identified at an early stage. The system should also distinguish between mild support for closer cooperation and strong support for political union. The Centre should periodically publish a transparent and methodologically rigorous democratic-consent index while preserving the underlying data for detailed analysis.

Institutional Interoperability

The second dimension should be institutional interoperability. The Centre should maintain a detailed and continuously updated map of the compatibility of Romanian and Moldovan institutions, with the objective of determining how easily existing systems could operate together under different forms of integration.

The analysis should cover constitutional law, public administration, the judiciary, taxation, social security, healthcare, education, pensions, digital government, financial regulation, customs, competition policy, energy, local government, and EU regulatory alignment. It should also cover public procurement, statistics, civil registration, land administration, environmental regulation, transport, telecommunications, agriculture, banking supervision, financial markets, consumer protection, labour regulation, and emergency management.

For every sector, the Centre should compare the existing legal frameworks, institutional structures, administrative responsibilities, regulatory standards, financing mechanisms, information systems, staffing requirements, and implementation capacity of the two countries. It should identify where legislation is already broadly compatible and

where substantial legal or administrative differences remain.

The Centre should distinguish between differences that could be resolved relatively easily and differences that could require major institutional restructuring. It should identify overlapping responsibilities, duplicated institutions, incompatible administrative systems, and areas where transitional arrangements would be necessary.

The central question should be: If political unification became possible tomorrow, where would institutional integration be easy, where would it require a managed transition, and where would it be difficult?

The Centre should be able to answer this question at sectoral and institutional level. It should identify the specific laws, regulations, agencies, databases, budgets, administrative procedures, and information systems that would need to be harmonised. Each major sector should receive an institutional-readiness assessment identifying its current level of compatibility, principal obstacles, estimated transition requirements, and resources needed for convergence.

The Centre should maintain a permanent database of legislative convergence, allowing policymakers to see which areas are already being aligned through European integration and which remain substantially different. Particular attention should be given to Moldova's EU accession process because the progressive adoption of European legislation and standards could significantly increase interoperability with Romania.

The Centre should distinguish between bilateral convergence and convergence occurring through the European Union framework. This distinction is essential because Moldova's European integration could progressively reduce the institutional differences that would otherwise complicate deeper integration with Romania.

Legal compatibility should also be assessed separately from administrative capacity. Compatible legislation does not guarantee effective interoperability if institutions lack sufficient personnel, infrastructure, financing, information technology, or implementation capacity. The dashboard should therefore measure both formal compatibility and practical readiness.

Economic Convergence

The third dimension should be economic convergence. The Centre should maintain a live economic convergence model covering income, productivity, wages, employment, infrastructure, energy, public finances, pensions, healthcare, education, regional inequality, demography, trade, investment, and fiscal transfers.

The purpose should not merely be to calculate the immediate fiscal "cost" of unification. A serious assessment must distinguish between short-term transition costs and longer-term economic gains. The model should therefore examine multiple integration scenarios and estimate transition costs, long-term fiscal effects, economic gains, regional redistribution, EU funding, labour-market effects, infrastructure requirements, productivity gains, investment effects, and changes in the tax base.

The model should measure the effects of greater market integration, including the removal of administrative barriers, greater labour mobility, improved infrastructure connectivity, increased investment, and stronger integration of supply chains. It should estimate how these changes could affect productivity, wages, employment, business formation, investment, and regional development in both countries.

The analysis should distinguish between national and regional effects because the benefits and adjustment costs of integration would not necessarily be distributed evenly. The Centre should therefore maintain detailed regional economic models covering income, employment, productivity, infrastructure, demographic trends, industrial structure, and public-service provision.

Fiscal convergence should form a central part of the model. The Centre should assess the implications for taxation, public expenditure, social protection, pensions, healthcare, education, public investment, and fiscal transfers. Romania should know what different forms of integration would mean for its public finances before a referendum or political agreement makes the question urgent.

The analysis should also examine Moldova's fiscal capacity and the evolution of its public finances. It should identify where fiscal convergence is already occurring and where substantial differences remain. Potential fiscal transfers should be modelled under different scenarios and assessed alongside the economic benefits generated by deeper integration rather than presented simply as costs.

The model should incorporate EU funding and account for the potential effects of Moldova's integration into European programmes and eventual EU accession. The database should track EU funds available to Moldova, Romania, and cross-border programmes, as well as the effectiveness with which these resources are absorbed and the infrastructure and institutional improvements they finance.

Infrastructure should be treated as a major component of economic convergence. The Centre should monitor roads, railways, bridges, energy interconnections, telecommunications, logistics infrastructure, border crossings, water systems, and digital infrastructure. It should identify major infrastructure gaps and estimate the investment required to close them.

Energy should receive particular attention. The Centre should monitor electricity generation, transmission capacity, interconnection, energy security, gas infrastructure, renewable energy, energy prices, and dependence on external suppliers. The objective should be to determine how quickly the two energy systems could operate within an integrated European framework.

The Centre should also model labour-market integration by tracking employment, unemployment, wages, labour shortages, migration, qualifications, social-security contributions, and labour mobility. It should estimate how greater labour mobility could affect both economies and incorporate the resulting demographic consequences into its wider economic model.

If integration accelerates migration toward Romania or other EU countries, this could produce short-term labour-market benefits while creating longer-term demographic pressures for Moldova. The Centre should therefore treat migration as a core variable rather than as a secondary consequence.

Demographic Convergence

The fourth dimension should be demographic convergence. The Centre should maintain a permanent demographic model covering population size, fertility, mortality, life expectancy, migration, age structure, household formation, urbanisation, regional depopulation, and population projections.

The objective should be to understand how demographic change could affect the feasibility and sustainability of deeper integration. Moldova's demographic trajectory should be analysed alongside Romania's own demographic challenges, with particular attention to regions experiencing rapid population decline and areas where population or economic activity is increasing.

The database should monitor migration between Moldova, Romania, the wider European Union, and other destinations. It should distinguish permanent migration from temporary labour mobility and analyse how different migration patterns could affect labour supply, public finances, pensions, healthcare, education, and regional development.

The Centre should also monitor the number and characteristics of Moldovan citizens acquiring Romanian citizenship. Romanian citizenship should be treated as an important indicator of mobility and institutional integration, while recognising that citizenship acquisition does not by itself indicate support for political union.

The demographic model should estimate future population structures under different migration and fertility scenarios. It should assess the implications for pensions, healthcare, education, employment, infrastructure, and public finances and provide regional forecasts capable of identifying where schools, hospitals, transport systems, and local administrations may face growing or declining demand.

Legal and Constitutional Convergence

The fifth dimension should be legal and constitutional convergence. The Centre should maintain a permanent comparative database of Romanian and Moldovan constitutional, legislative, and regulatory systems.

It should identify provisions that could facilitate deeper integration and provisions that could create legal obstacles. The analysis should include constitutional provisions concerning sovereignty, territory, citizenship, representation, public institutions, local government, elections, and international commitments, together with relevant international obligations and European legal requirements.

The Centre should distinguish legal incompatibility from political difficulty. Some differences may be technically straightforward to resolve but politically sensitive, while others may appear politically manageable but require complex constitutional or legislative amendments.

The database should therefore provide both legal and institutional assessments and identify the likely legislative sequence required for different forms of integration. This should include laws that would need to be amended, repealed, harmonised, or newly adopted.

A legal-readiness assessment should be maintained for each major policy area, allowing policymakers to identify where convergence is already advanced and where substantial legal work remains.

Moldova in Our Hearts

The relationship between Romania and the Republic of Moldova cannot be understood solely through the political

borders established during the twentieth century. It is sustained by historical, cultural, linguistic, and family ties that have continued despite major geopolitical changes. For many Romanians, Moldova is not simply a neighboring state and strategic partner, but also a space deeply connected to Romania's historical memory. In this sense, the expression "Moldova is in our hearts" reflects an emotional dimension of the relationship that complements its political and institutional dimensions.

Historical memory plays an important role in shaping collective identities. The history of Bessarabia, the union of 1918, the interwar period, and the political separation that followed the events of 1940 remain important elements of Romanian historical consciousness. These experiences are interpreted differently across generations and on the two sides of the Prut, but they continue to influence how Romania and the Republic of Moldova understand their relationship.

The connections between the two sides of the Prut are not merely historical. They are expressed through families, education, culture, religion, economic relations, and human mobility. Students, professionals, researchers, entrepreneurs, and families regularly maintain connections across the border. These interactions have created a form of social interdependence that cannot be reduced to formal relations between governments.

At Voroneț, the distinction between outside and inside is very meaningful.

On the outside, the painted walls communicate Christianity to the world. The enormous Last Judgment on the western façade is almost like a public theological statement. Anyone approaching the monastery can see the story: Christ judges humanity, the dead rise, the righteous enter Paradise, and sinners face Hell. The exterior paintings therefore speak to people before they enter the sacred space.

Figure



Once you go inside, the imagery becomes more intimate and directly connected to worship. The icons, saints, Christ, the Virgin Mary and biblical scenes surround the congregation. Rather than simply telling the story of Christianity, the interior creates the sense that the worshipper is inside that sacred story. The iconostasis is especially important because it sits between these two experiences. It separates the nave from the sanctuary, but its icons also visually connect the earthly congregation with the heavenly world. The doors open and close during the liturgy, so the boundary is sometimes visible and sometimes temporarily opened.

You can therefore think of the church almost as a progression:

outside → entering → inside → sanctuary → heaven

The outside paintings announce and explain the Christian cosmos. The interior paintings surround the believer with Christ, the Virgin and the saints. The iconostasis then acts as a threshold between the visible world of the congregation and the mysterious sacred space of the altar. At Voroneț, this creates a particularly powerful relationship between the Last Judgment outside and the liturgical world inside. Outside, you see humanity being judged. Inside, you participate in the worship that, according to Orthodox theology, connects earthly worshippers with the heavenly kingdom. So the

paintings aren't merely decoration. The architecture and the icons guide you physically and spiritually from the ordinary world toward the sacred one.

The Last Judgment fresco at Voroneț Monastery is essentially a huge medieval visual explanation of what Christians believed would happen at the end of time. It was designed to be read as a unified scene, with the entire human story culminating in divine judgment.

At the top-center is Christ as Judge, surrounded by angels and heavenly figures. His position establishes the central message: history ultimately ends in divine judgment. The composition radiates outward from Christ, emphasizing his authority over the entire universe.

The mural presents two opposing destinies. On one side, the righteous appear among saints and heavenly beings, representing salvation, harmony, and eternal life. On the other, sinners are driven toward Hell, where demons punish them for their sins. The message is not simply about death, but about a choice between two eternal destinies.

Angels and demons participate in the cosmic courtroom as human beings are judged according to their lives. For a medieval viewer, this carried a powerful message: everyone, regardless of wealth or social position, ultimately stands before God.

The dead are shown rising from their graves, representing the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. Death is therefore not the end. Humanity will be restored and brought before God for the final judgment.

Paradise is portrayed as an ordered and beautiful world. The righteous appear alongside saints and heavenly figures, evoking the Garden of Eden and the restoration of humanity's relationship with God.

Hell, by contrast, is chaotic and frightening. Demons torment the condemned, and different punishments symbolically correspond to different sins. The purpose was partly moral: medieval viewers were being reminded that earthly actions have eternal consequences.

One fascinating feature is the representation of different peoples and religious traditions within the judgment scene. The mural presents the whole of humanity as part of the same cosmic drama and as subject to divine judgment.

Perhaps the most significant feature is that the Last Judgment covers the western exterior wall of the church. In Christian symbolism, the west, where the sun sets, can evoke the end of earthly life. People approaching the monastery would therefore encounter a monumental reminder that life is temporary, death is followed by resurrection, and every person will ultimately face judgment.

Yet the extraordinary Voroneț blue makes the scene remarkably beautiful rather than purely terrifying. The fresco combines warning with hope: judgment exists, but so do Paradise and salvation.

In this sense, the mural is not simply a picture of the end of the world. It is a medieval map of how to live one's life.

At the same time, closer relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova must respect political freedom and the democratic choices of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova. Historical or cultural attachment, by itself, cannot constitute a justification for changing the political status of a state. Any future discussion of unification must be grounded in democracy, legality, popular consent, and respect for the rights and dignity of citizens.

From this perspective, affection for Moldova should not become an instrument of political pressure. Instead, it can provide the foundation for a long-term policy of cooperation. Romania can contribute to the development of the Republic of Moldova through education, infrastructure, investment, energy, healthcare, public administration, and the strengthening of democratic institutions. A strong relationship should be built through tangible results and by expanding opportunities for citizens.

This approach is particularly important for younger generations. For young people in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, closer relations should not be merely a question of historical memory but also an opportunity for the future. Universities, academic exchanges, cultural cooperation, and professional networks can contribute to the emergence of a community of interests that transcends administrative borders.

In this context, unification should be understood as a historical possibility rather than a predetermined outcome. Political, economic, and international conditions can change, and societies can develop different priorities over time. Romania nevertheless has a strategic interest in understanding these developments and preparing for different possible scenarios. Preparation does not mean imposing an outcome; it means developing the capacity to respond responsibly if a legitimate democratic opportunity emerges.

A modern policy toward Moldova should therefore combine historical memory with strategic pragmatism. History helps explain why deep connections exist between the two societies, but the future must be built through institutions, prosperity, trust, and democratic choice. Emotion can inspire policy, but public policy must ultimately be based on evidence, analysis, and responsibility.

In this sense, “Moldova in Our Hearts” can become more than a symbolic expression. It can represent the principle of a policy that recognizes the historical and cultural connections between the two societies while respecting the freedom, dignity, and democratic choices of the people of the Republic of Moldova. Lasting closeness cannot be created through declarations alone; it must be built through institutions, opportunities, cooperation, and trust.

Ultimately, whatever form the relationship between Romania and the Republic of Moldova takes in the future, the fundamental objective should remain the same: to build a relationship so strong that the Prut River no longer represents a barrier between people, but simply a border that can be crossed freely within a space of cooperation and shared prosperity. If, one day, the citizens of both states freely and democratically decide that unification represents their common choice, Romania should be prepared to transform that decision into a peaceful, lawful, sustainable, and institutionally credible process.

European Integration

The sixth dimension should be European integration. The Centre should track Moldova’s progress toward EU membership alongside Romania’s continuing participation within the European Union.

This dimension is critical because any future process of deeper integration would take place within a broader European legal, economic, and institutional framework. The database should therefore monitor Moldova’s progress across the EU accession process, including legislative alignment, institutional reforms, administrative capacity, judicial reform, economic convergence, border management, customs, competition policy, financial regulation, environmental standards, and other relevant areas.

The Centre should assess how each stage of European integration affects Romania-Moldova interoperability. EU accession should not be treated merely as a separate geopolitical objective but also as a mechanism that could progressively reduce institutional differences between Moldova and Romania.

A dedicated EU-convergence dashboard should therefore show where Moldova’s legislation, institutions, and regulatory systems are approaching Romanian and EU standards and identify areas where convergence remains slow.

Strategic and Security Conditions

The seventh dimension should be strategic and security conditions. The Centre should monitor the external environment affecting the feasibility and sustainability of deeper integration.

This should include regional security, Moldova’s territorial situation, border security, energy security, cyber resilience, defence cooperation, critical infrastructure, disinformation, and foreign political and economic influence.

The purpose should not be to predict individual crises but to identify structural developments that could materially affect the political, economic, or institutional conditions surrounding integration.

The Centre should maintain scenario models covering different regional security environments and assess how changes in those environments could affect public opinion, migration, investment, fiscal requirements, infrastructure, and political decision-making.

Security analysis should also examine the resilience of critical infrastructure, including energy networks, telecommunications, transport infrastructure, financial systems, and digital government, and assess their capacity to withstand disruption.

Integrated Readiness Dashboard

All seven dimensions should feed into a single national integration-readiness dashboard. The dashboard should allow decision-makers to see the current position of each dimension, how it has changed over time, and where the principal gaps and opportunities are located.

The dashboard should provide both a high-level national assessment and detailed sectoral, institutional, and regional analysis. A single headline score should never replace the underlying evidence. Instead, the Centre should provide a transparent set of indicators showing where readiness is high, where it is developing, and where substantial gaps remain.

Users should be able to move from national indicators to regional and sectoral data. A policymaker should, for example, be able to move from an overall institutional-readiness assessment to the specific situation in taxation, healthcare,

pensions, education, digital government, or energy.

The system should provide trend analysis showing whether convergence is accelerating, remaining stable, or deteriorating. The Centre should establish early-warning indicators for areas in which convergence is weakening while also identifying areas in which rapid progress creates new opportunities for integration.

Economic and Fiscal Scenario Model

The Centre should maintain a dedicated economic and fiscal scenario model capable of testing different assumptions about integration. It should compare deeper cooperation, partial institutional integration, extensive economic integration, and eventual political union.

Each scenario should incorporate assumptions regarding public expenditure, taxation, investment, migration, economic growth, EU funding, infrastructure, pensions, healthcare, and social protection. The model should calculate both short-term and long-term effects and show their distribution across regions, sectors, households, businesses, and demographic groups.

The central question should not simply be whether national GDP rises or falls. The Centre should determine where the largest gains and adjustment pressures would occur and what transitional measures might be required.

Romania should therefore have a credible estimate of the fiscal, economic, and distributional implications of different forms of integration long before any referendum or political agreement makes such calculations urgent.

Institutional Readiness Mapping

The Centre should maintain a corresponding institutional readiness map in which every major public institution and policy sector has a defined convergence profile. Each profile should identify the relevant legislation, administrative structures, budgets, digital systems, personnel requirements, institutional relationships, and transition requirements. The map should distinguish between institutions that could be integrated immediately, those requiring legal or administrative harmonisation, and those requiring transitional arrangements or substantial restructuring.

This would transform the question of institutional integration from a political abstraction into a practical administrative exercise. It would allow policymakers to identify not merely whether two systems are compatible, but precisely what would have to change, how long the process might take, and what resources would be required.

Data Governance and Independence

The database should operate according to strict methodological standards. Definitions should be consistent across both countries, data should be comparable over time, and methodologies should be documented and periodically reviewed.

Where official statistics differ between Romania and Moldova, the Centre should establish harmonised methodologies rather than simply selecting one source. It should also identify gaps in the available evidence and, where reliable data do not exist, commission additional surveys, administrative-data analysis, fieldwork, or other appropriate research. The Centre should maintain a clear distinction between factual indicators, analytical estimates, scenario assumptions, and political judgments. This distinction will be essential to preserve the credibility of the system across different governments and political cycles.

The Centre should also establish independent methodological review mechanisms to ensure that indicators cannot be altered for short-term political purposes. Major methodological changes should be documented and their effects on historical comparisons clearly identified.

Long-Term Strategic Purpose

The Centre should ultimately create a permanent institutional memory for the question of Romanian-Moldovan integration. Governments change, political priorities change, and public opinion changes, but the underlying analytical capability should not disappear with each political cycle.

The Centre should therefore preserve historical datasets, methodological documentation, scenario models, institutional assessments, and analytical reports. It should publish regular national assessments while maintaining a secure analytical system for authorised government users.

The annual assessment should identify progress, stagnation, emerging risks, and new opportunities. It should also identify the specific areas in which additional policy action could accelerate convergence or reduce future transition costs.

The Centre should not advocate a predetermined timetable for unification. Its role should be to ensure that, if the political conditions for such a decision emerge, Romania possesses the information necessary to make that decision responsibly.

The central principle should be preparedness without presumption.

Romania should know what deeper integration would require before it becomes politically urgent. It should know which institutions are ready, which require reform, which regions would require investment, what the fiscal implications would be, how public opinion is evolving, how demographic pressures are changing, and how European integration is altering the underlying conditions.

The ultimate objective is to ensure that any future decision concerning the constitutional relationship between Romania and Moldova is based not on improvisation, emotion, or incomplete information, but on a permanent body of rigorous, transparent, comparable, and continuously updated national analysis.

Figure



EU–Moldova Strategy to Level the Playing Field

Strategic Objective

The central objective should be to reduce the structural gap between Moldova and the EU—particularly Romania—before political integration is considered. Rather than approaching the Romania–Moldova relationship primarily through the binary question of unification versus separation, the EU and Moldova should pursue a strategy of accelerated convergence in which Moldova progressively acquires the institutional capacity, economic productivity, infrastructure, social standards, security resilience, and European market access characteristic of an EU member state.

The underlying principle should be simple: Moldova should increasingly experience the practical benefits of EU membership before formal accession, while remaining fully sovereign and democratically responsible for its own political choices.

This would transform the debate from one centred on borders and constitutional status into one centred on living standards, institutional quality, economic opportunity, security, and individual freedom. It would also create the conditions under which any future decision concerning Romania–Moldova relations could be taken from a position of greater equality rather than structural asymmetry.

From Financial Assistance to a Convergence Investment Strategy

The existing €1.9 billion Growth Plan for 2025–2027 should be treated as the first phase of a much larger convergence strategy rather than as a stand-alone financial package. The EU should establish a Moldova Convergence Facility for the period 2028–2035, designed explicitly around measurable reductions in the development gap with Romania and the EU.

Funding should be linked not only to legal reforms but also to measurable improvements in productivity, household incomes, infrastructure quality, public-service delivery, judicial effectiveness, energy security, and regional development.

The objective should be to move from a model of “funding projects” to “financing convergence.”

Every major EU investment should therefore answer a common question: does it measurably reduce Moldova’s structural distance from the EU?

A Romania–Moldova Economic Convergence Corridor

Romania should become the principal economic bridge between Moldova and the EU single market.

The EU, Romania, and Moldova should establish a dedicated Romania–Moldova Economic Convergence Corridor, concentrating investment on transport, energy, logistics, digital infrastructure, industrial production, agriculture, and services.

The corridor should connect Chişinău with Iaşi, Galaţi, Bucharest, and the wider European transport network. Border crossings should be expanded and digitised, customs procedures simplified, and freight infrastructure modernised.

The objective would be to transform the Prut from an economic frontier into an increasingly low-friction internal European economic space.

Infrastructure Equalisation

The infrastructure gap should become a strategic EU priority.

Investment should focus on roads, railways, bridges, logistics centres, water systems, wastewater treatment, broadband, digital public infrastructure, and energy networks.

The EU should adopt a principle of infrastructure parity, whereby strategic infrastructure in Moldova is progressively brought towards EU standards rather than merely financed at minimum development levels.

Romania should be used as the principal reference market for cross-border infrastructure planning, ensuring interoperability between Moldovan and Romanian transport, electricity, telecommunications, customs, and digital systems.

This would generate immediate economic benefits while simultaneously preparing Moldova for eventual EU membership.

Energy Integration and Strategic Autonomy

Energy should be treated as a core element of both economic convergence and national security.

Moldova should be progressively integrated into the Romanian and European electricity markets, with accelerated investment in interconnections, renewable generation, storage, grid modernisation, and energy efficiency.

The strategy should aim to make Moldova structurally less vulnerable to external energy pressure.

A long-term objective should be the emergence of a Romania–Moldova integrated energy space, embedded within the wider EU energy system.

This would reduce costs, increase resilience, attract investment, and limit the ability of external actors to use energy dependence as a political instrument.

Industrial Policy and Productivity

The greatest long-term challenge is not simply raising Moldova's consumption levels but increasing its productive capacity.

The EU should therefore establish targeted industrial-development programmes for sectors in which Moldova can integrate into European value chains: automotive components, electronics, agri-food, textiles, pharmaceuticals, information technology, business services, renewable energy equipment, and advanced manufacturing.

EU and Romanian investment guarantees should reduce the risk of locating production in Moldova.

The strategy should prioritise productive investment over consumption subsidies.

The ultimate measure of success should be the increase in Moldovan productivity and wages, not simply the amount of EU money disbursed.

SME and Entrepreneurship Equalisation

Moldovan small and medium-sized enterprises should receive substantially greater access to European finance.

The EU should expand guarantees through European financial institutions so that viable Moldovan firms can obtain credit on terms increasingly comparable to firms operating in Romania.

A dedicated EU–Moldova SME Facility could provide credit guarantees, venture capital, export financing, digitalisation grants, management support, and access to Romanian and European business networks.

The goal should be to allow Moldovan companies to compete within the EU market before accession rather than waiting until accession to begin building competitiveness.

Labour-Market Convergence

The most immediate form of economic convergence is through people.

Moldovan citizens already participate substantially in European labour markets. The strategic objective should be to ensure that migration becomes increasingly a choice rather than an economic necessity.

EU and Moldovan policies should therefore prioritise wage convergence, skills development, recognition of qualifications, vocational education, apprenticeships, and high-productivity employment inside Moldova.

Romanian universities and vocational institutions could become partners in a large-scale Moldova Skills Initiative.

The aim should be to create a virtuous cycle: skills → investment → productivity → higher wages → reduced forced emigration → stronger domestic human capital.

Human Capital and Education

A genuine level playing field cannot be achieved without narrowing the education and skills gap.

Moldovan students should receive dramatically expanded access to Erasmus+, European research programmes, vocational exchanges, Romanian universities, and EU professional networks.

A bilateral Romania–Moldova education area could provide joint degrees, university partnerships, teacher exchanges, research programmes, and technical education.

Particular emphasis should be placed on engineering, medicine, ICT, energy, public administration, law, finance, and advanced manufacturing.

The objective should be to build a generation of Moldovan professionals capable of operating seamlessly within European institutions and markets.

Institutional Equalisation

Economic convergence will fail without institutional convergence.

The EU should create long-term partnerships between Moldovan institutions and their Romanian and European counterparts.

Rather than providing short-term technical assistance, the EU should finance institutional twinning at scale, allowing Moldovan ministries, courts, regulators, municipalities, tax authorities, customs services, competition authorities, and audit institutions to work alongside established European institutions.

The emphasis should be on institutional capability rather than formal legislative approximation.

The measure of success should be whether a Moldovan citizen receives a public service with a quality approaching that available to a Romanian or other EU citizen.

Rule of Law and Judicial Capacity

The rule of law should remain a non-negotiable foundation of convergence.

EU support should focus on judicial independence, transparent appointments, case management, digitalisation, asset recovery, anti-corruption enforcement, public procurement, and the capacity of prosecutors and investigative institutions.

The objective should not be to create institutions that merely satisfy accession benchmarks, but institutions capable of functioning independently after accession.

The EU should therefore establish long-term monitoring mechanisms that continue beyond the formal completion of individual reform milestones.

Digital Single-Market Integration

Moldova should be integrated into the European digital economy as rapidly as technically and legally possible.

The strategy should include affordable high-speed broadband, interoperable digital identification, digital public services, electronic signatures, cybersecurity infrastructure, cloud systems, and cross-border digital payments.

Where legally possible, Moldovan businesses should gain early access to EU digital programmes and markets.

Digital integration has the advantage of being relatively inexpensive compared with physical infrastructure while producing immediate economic and institutional convergence.

Agricultural and Rural Transformation

Agriculture should move from a low-productivity sector towards a modern export-oriented industry.

EU assistance should prioritise irrigation, agricultural technology, food processing, cold-chain logistics, certification, cooperatives, precision agriculture, and access to European value chains.

The objective should be to capture more value inside Moldova rather than exporting predominantly low-value agricultural commodities.

Rural development should also be integrated into regional infrastructure, education, healthcare, and digitalisation programmes so that convergence is not concentrated exclusively around Chişinău.

Regional Development and Territorial Balance

The strategy must avoid creating a Moldova in which one prosperous capital region is surrounded by structurally weaker regions.

EU cohesion-style investment should therefore progressively develop secondary cities and regional economic centres.

Investment should be allocated according to indicators of deprivation, productivity potential, infrastructure deficits, and employment rather than political considerations.

This would establish a Moldovan equivalent of European cohesion policy before full EU membership.

Social Convergence

The level playing field must also include social protection.

EU and Moldovan policy should progressively improve healthcare, education, pensions, childcare, disability support, and unemployment protection.

However, social convergence should be accompanied by productivity growth. The objective should not be to replicate EU expenditure levels immediately, but to build the institutional and economic capacity necessary to sustain them.

The long-term benchmark should be convergence in outcomes rather than convergence in spending.

Diaspora as a Development Asset

Moldova's diaspora should be treated as a strategic economic asset.

The EU and Moldova should establish mechanisms that encourage diaspora investment, entrepreneurship, professional return, knowledge transfer, and temporary circular migration.

A European–Moldovan Diaspora Investment Platform could provide matching finance for businesses established by returning Moldovan professionals.

The objective should be to convert diaspora networks from a consequence of economic weakness into an instrument of economic convergence.

Security and Resilience

Economic convergence cannot be separated from security.

The EU should substantially deepen Moldova's resilience against cyberattacks, disinformation, political interference, economic coercion, and critical-infrastructure disruption.

Moldovan institutions should receive sustained European assistance in cybersecurity, strategic communications, crisis management, civil protection, border management, and critical infrastructure protection.

Romania should function as Moldova's principal operational partner while the EU provides the broader institutional and financial framework.

Transnistria and Territorial Risk

The convergence strategy should not be held hostage by the unresolved Transnistrian question.

At the same time, economic and institutional integration should be designed to maximise the future benefits available to populations on both banks of the Dniester.

Infrastructure, trade, mobility, social services, and economic opportunities should be developed in ways that preserve the possibility of peaceful reintegration.

The guiding principle should be integration through attractiveness rather than coercion.

A Moldova–Romania Social Space

Beyond institutions and markets, the EU should encourage the creation of a dense social space linking Moldova and Romania.

This could include university networks, cultural programmes, professional associations, municipal partnerships, youth exchanges, healthcare cooperation, research networks, and civil-society partnerships.

The objective would be to make cooperation increasingly normal at the level of citizens, businesses, municipalities, universities, and professional communities.

This would deepen integration without requiring an immediate constitutional decision.

A “Level Playing Field” Scoreboard

The EU should establish an annual Moldova Convergence Scoreboard, comparing Moldova with Romania and the EU average across a common set of indicators.

The scoreboard should measure GDP and productivity, wages, infrastructure quality, energy prices, broadband coverage, judicial efficiency, corruption indicators, public-service quality, education outcomes, healthcare access, investment, employment, regional inequality, and business formation.

This would replace vague political assessments with measurable convergence.
The central political message would become:

Every year, Moldova should be demonstrably closer to the European standard than the year before.

EU-Moldova DCFTA

The EU could ease trade restrictions on Moldovan goods by building on the existing EU–Moldova Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) rather than waiting for full EU membership. The DCFTA already removes import duties on most goods traded between Moldova and the EU, but important restrictions remain, particularly in sensitive agricultural sectors, where tariff-rate quotas and other market-access conditions can limit the volume of Moldovan exports.

A particularly useful model would be to progressively expand or eliminate tariff-rate quotas for Moldovan agricultural products, especially where Moldovan producers can meet EU standards. The EU has already demonstrated that it can temporarily provide broader market access: exceptional measures introduced in 2022 temporarily liberalised Moldovan agricultural exports, showing that the EU has the legal and policy instruments to go beyond the normal DCFTA regime when circumstances justify it.

The next step could therefore be a permanent or multi-year autonomous trade-liberalisation package for Moldova, with quotas progressively increased according to predefined benchmarks. Rather than opening the market completely overnight, the EU could establish a five- or ten-year pathway in which quotas for sensitive products increase annually, provided that Moldovan exports do not cause serious disruption to EU producers.

This approach could be particularly relevant for fruit, vegetables, cereals, wine, meat and other agricultural products, where Moldovan producers have significant export potential but where EU agricultural policy creates political sensitivities. The EU already uses tariff-rate quotas and other preferential arrangements with neighbouring countries, demonstrating that differentiated market access can be designed while retaining safeguards for European producers.

The EU could also reduce non-tariff barriers, which may be more important than tariffs for many Moldovan exporters. This would involve accelerating the recognition of Moldovan sanitary and phytosanitary controls, veterinary certificates, conformity assessments, laboratory testing and product standards where Moldova has demonstrated sufficient alignment with EU legislation. The existing DCFTA already uses regulatory approximation as a mechanism for widening access to the EU market.

Another important measure would be to simplify rules of origin and customs procedures. If Moldovan companies can demonstrate that their products satisfy agreed EU origin requirements, customs procedures could be increasingly digitised, simplified and automated. This would reduce the cost and time involved in exporting, which can be particularly significant for small Moldovan companies.

The EU could also provide sector-specific trade facilitation, rather than treating all Moldovan exports identically. Products where Moldova is already competitive and where the risk to EU producers is relatively low could receive faster liberalisation, while highly sensitive products could remain subject to staged quotas and safeguards.

A useful institutional mechanism would be an EU–Moldova Trade Convergence Council that reviews market access annually and identifies restrictions that can be removed as Moldova completes the relevant *acquis* requirements. This would transform trade liberalisation into a measurable convergence process: regulatory alignment → increased quota → greater market access → investment → higher exports → further alignment.

Safeguards would nevertheless be important politically. The EU could allow additional imports while retaining the ability to reintroduce temporary restrictions if imports suddenly increase to levels that cause serious injury to European producers. EU trade policy already provides safeguard mechanisms that can impose quantitative restrictions or tariff-rate quotas when defined conditions are met.

The most ambitious option would be to create a “pre-accession single-market corridor” for Moldova, under which Moldova would progressively obtain market access approaching that of an EU member state in selected sectors before formal accession. This would be consistent with the broader logic of using economic integration to accelerate convergence rather than making businesses wait until the end of the accession process.

This is particularly relevant to your Romania–Moldova argument because Romania could advocate within the EU for deeper Moldovan market access as a convergence instrument, rather than presenting it simply as preferential treatment for Moldova. The objective would be to use trade policy to increase Moldovan production, investment, wages and employment while gradually integrating Moldovan firms into European supply chains.

The argument could therefore be framed as follows: if the EU wants Moldova to converge economically with Romania and the rest of the Union, it should progressively remove the trade barriers that prevent Moldovan producers from accessing the very market toward which convergence is directed.

There is already a political precedent for such an approach. In July 2025, the EU and Moldova agreed to review and update the terms of their DCFTA, explicitly signalling a move toward a modernised trade relationship.

For your model, I would therefore treat EU trade liberalisation as one of the policy variables affecting the cost of convergence. Greater access for Moldovan exports could reduce the amount of fiscal support required from Romania and the EU because part of convergence would be generated through private-sector expansion, investment, productivity and employment rather than public transfers.

In simplified form, the mechanism would be:

Greater EU market access → higher Moldovan exports → investment → productivity → higher wages and employment → larger tax base → lower relative fiscal-transfer requirement.

That makes trade liberalisation potentially much more than a commercial concession: it could become a core instrument of the economic convergence strategy between Moldova, Romania and the EU.

FDI Needs of Moldova

By FDI “needs of Moldova” we refer to the priorities that should form the basis of a Romania–Moldova convergence or unification model, I would organise them around several major areas. Moldova’s own 2025–2027 Reform Agenda identifies economic competitiveness, digital and physical connectivity, economic governance, social capital, the green transition, energy security and fundamental values as its principal reform pillars. (Government of Moldova)

The most immediate need is economic growth and productivity. Moldova needs to move from a relatively low-productivity, consumption- and remittance-dependent economy toward a more diversified economy based on productive investment, exports, manufacturing, services, technology and higher-value agriculture. The World Bank specifically identifies private-sector competitiveness, investment attraction, business-environment reform and workforce skills as central to Moldova’s transition toward a stronger growth model. (World Bank)

A second major need is infrastructure convergence with Romania and the EU. This includes roads, railways, bridges, water and sanitation, hospitals, schools, logistics facilities and digital infrastructure. Moldova’s EU Growth Plan explicitly identifies transport, spatial development and digital connectivity as areas where the country’s connectivity gap needs to be closed. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

Energy security is particularly important because Moldova remains highly exposed to external energy shocks. The priority should be deeper electricity interconnection with Romania and the European grid, renewable generation, energy efficiency, storage, district heating and diversification of energy supplies. The EU has already made energy resilience a central element of its support, including a two-year strategy backed by up to €250 million in 2025.

Moldova also needs institutional convergence. This means strengthening the judiciary, public administration, competition policy, customs, taxation, public procurement, financial supervision and anti-corruption institutions. These are not simply political reforms; they determine whether investment actually translates into productivity and whether public money can be used efficiently. The EU’s current Growth Plan therefore links financial support directly to measurable reforms in governance, justice, anti-fraud, public administration and budget transparency. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

Another major need is human capital. Moldova faces demographic pressures and substantial outward migration, so convergence requires better schools, vocational training, universities, healthcare, childcare and mechanisms for recognising professional qualifications. The objective should not only be to stop emigration but to make Moldova attractive enough for skilled Moldovans abroad to return or invest.

This connects directly to the labour market. Moldova needs higher wages and more productive employment rather than simply higher public transfers. Investment in skills, dual education, technology and productive companies can allow wages to rise through productivity rather than through unsustainable fiscal spending. The World Bank has specifically highlighted employability, education and practical training as priorities.

Moldova also has a major agricultural and rural-development need. Agriculture remains vulnerable to drought, climate change and low productivity, meaning that investment should focus on irrigation, storage, food processing, logistics, modern farming technology and access to European supply chains. The World Bank has identified Moldova's dependence on drought-prone agriculture as a structural source of economic vulnerability.

Another priority is trade and market integration. Moldova needs easier access to the EU Single Market, lower non-tariff barriers, better customs procedures, stronger certification capacity and deeper integration into Romanian and European supply chains. The EU Growth Plan explicitly seeks to facilitate the free movement of goods, trade and transport connections and integration into EU supply chains.

Finally, Moldova needs greater resilience and security, including cybersecurity, protection of critical infrastructure, emergency response capacity, energy resilience and stronger institutions capable of resisting external pressure and hybrid threats. This has become increasingly important because economic vulnerability and security vulnerability are closely connected.

For a Romania–Moldova convergence model, I would therefore define Moldova's needs as seven investment gaps: infrastructure, energy, institutions, human capital, productive enterprises, agriculture and security. The purpose of Romanian and EU assistance should not simply be to finance Moldova's existing expenditure, but to close these structural gaps so that Moldova becomes progressively more productive, resilient and economically integrated with Romania and the EU. This is broadly consistent with the EU's €1.9 billion Growth Plan for 2025–2027, which is explicitly designed to accelerate socioeconomic convergence, improve access to the Single Market and mobilise investment for jobs and growth. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

Yes — if you mean estimate what share of Moldova's development and convergence needs could realistically be financed by the EU, rather than simply listing Moldova's needs, I would frame it this way.

The EU is already committing up to €1.9 billion for Moldova for 2025–2027 through the Growth Plan, although this is a mixture of grants and loans rather than €1.9 billion of pure grants. The EU also says that this package is expected to mobilise around €2.5 billion of additional investment in transport, energy, agriculture, irrigation, schools and hospitals. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

For a longer-term Romania–Moldova convergence model, however, the €1.9 billion should be treated as a starting contribution rather than the full EU financing requirement. My rough modelling assumption would be that the EU could reasonably finance around 40–50% of Moldova's eligible convergence investment requirements, with Romania covering another significant share and the remainder coming from Moldova itself, the EIB/EBRD and private investment.

A useful working assumption would therefore be 45% EU, 20% Romania, 15% Moldova, and 20% private/international financial institutions for the investment component. This is not an official EU allocation; it is a modelling assumption that would allow you to estimate the potential financing structure of convergence.

For example, if you estimated that Moldova required €20 billion of additional investment over 10 years to converge substantially with Romania in infrastructure, energy, healthcare, education, digitalisation and productive capacity, an EU share of 45% would imply approximately €9 billion of EU-supported financing. Romania's contribution would be around €4 billion, Moldova around €3 billion, and private/international financing around €4 billion.

The EU's existing programme makes such an assumption reasonably defensible. The current Growth Plan represents roughly €633 million per year over three years, and the EU has already allocated more than €1.2 billion in grants to Moldova during 2021–2025. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood) Moreover, the EU has mobilised €1.7 billion for projects in Moldova together with international financial institutions since 2021, showing that EU funding is intended to leverage substantially larger investment flows. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

I would therefore distinguish between EU grants and EU-supported investment in your model. The EU's direct fiscal contribution could be considerably smaller than 45%, while its contribution to total investment could be much larger because EU grants can be used to leverage EIB, EBRD and private-sector financing. This distinction is particularly important because the current Growth Plan itself combines grants, loans and investment mobilisation. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

For a Romania–Moldova unification/convergence scenario, I would consequently use 40–50% as the central estimate for the EU's share of Moldova's eligible convergence investment, with 45% as the baseline assumption and perhaps 30%

and 60% as low/high scenarios.

So your model could state: "For modelling purposes, the EU is assumed to finance approximately 45% of Moldova's eligible convergence investment requirements, primarily through grants, concessional lending, guarantees and blended finance, with Romania, Moldova and private/international financing providing the remainder."

That would also fit the EU's current direction: the 2026 EU–Moldova investment programme has already announced up to €641 million in strategic investments, while the Growth Plan is explicitly designed to leverage private investment rather than have the EU finance the entire development bill itself. (Enlargement And Eastern Neighbourhood)

The 2035 Objective

The ultimate objective should be to create by 2035 a Moldova that is economically competitive, institutionally resilient, socially cohesive, deeply integrated with Romania and the EU, and capable of functioning on broadly comparable standards with neighbouring EU member states.

This does not require prejudging Moldova's constitutional future.

Indeed, maintaining that distinction is strategically important. The EU should support Moldova's convergence because convergence is valuable in itself—not because it is a disguised mechanism for unification.

If political unification ever becomes the democratic preference of the populations concerned, a high level of prior convergence would make such a decision significantly less disruptive and more economically sustainable. If unification never occurs, the same convergence strategy would nevertheless have delivered its primary objective: a more prosperous, secure, resilient, democratic, and European Moldova.

Strategic Logic

The strategy can therefore be summarised as:

EU accession → institutional convergence → infrastructure integration → productivity growth → wage convergence → social cohesion → resilience → greater political choice.

The EU should not attempt to decide the constitutional future of Romania and Moldova. Its role should be to reduce the structural asymmetry between them.

The most ambitious version of the policy would therefore be neither "unification now" nor "integration without convergence", but:

"Level the playing field first; let democratic choice determine the political destination later."

That approach is consistent with the EU's existing accession framework while making it considerably more transformative. Moldova is already negotiating accession, with the Fundamentals cluster opened in June 2026 and external-relations negotiations opened in July 2026. The existing €1.9 billion Growth Plan provides the financial foundation, but the next step should be to turn that foundation into a long-term convergence architecture extending well beyond 2027.

Figure



The circle of women of Cucuteni represents a ritual cosmology of fertility, continuity, and communal identity in the Neolithic Cucuteni–Trypillia culture (ca. 4800–3000 BCE). Your image fits perfectly into that symbolic universe: terracotta female figurines arranged in a radial, mandala like pattern.

At its heart, the circle expresses the cyclical nature of life. Fertility appears through female figurines that embody agricultural abundance, human reproduction, they daily toiling of raising children, and the generative power of the earth. The cycle of seasons is mirrored in the circular layout, echoing sowing, growth, harvest, and winter. Communal

ritual emerges in the way circles structured dance, worship, and collective rites; figurines arranged in circular formations likely reproduced these ceremonial patterns. Ancestral lineage is present in the idea of women as carriers of memory and continuity across generations.

The circle is not decorative; it is a cosmogram, a map of the world. The center functions as origin, with the small inner figurines representing the seed, the womb, the beginning. The outer ring acts as protection, with larger figures forming a boundary reminiscent of a village or maternal guardians. Radial order conveys energy, life force, and the outward spread of vitality. This structural logic aligns with Cucuteni pottery spirals, house plans, and ritual pits.

Cucuteni figurines are not portraits but archetypes. The Mother Goddess stands as the central generative force. Clan mothers represent social leaders within matrilineal households. Ritual dancers appear in figurines whose postures evoke movement and ceremony.

The circle of terracotta women evokes a ritual gathering, a symbolic assembly of women. It forms a cosmological wheel in which life emerges from a sacred center. It also creates a protective ring, the community encircling its generative core. Taken together, it becomes a miniature ritual landscape.

The "Day After Union" Programme

The "Day After Union" Simulation Programme

One of the Centre's most important long-term programmes should be a permanent "Day After Union" Simulation, designed to test Romania's institutional, economic, legal and administrative capacity under a hypothetical scenario of Romanian-Moldovan political unification. The programme should not assume that unification will occur, nor should it advocate for such an outcome. Its purpose would be to ensure that, if a democratically legitimate political decision were ever taken, Romanian institutions would not have to design the entire architecture of integration under conditions of political urgency or geopolitical crisis.

The central principle should be simple:

A state should not wait for a constitutional moment to begin thinking about the institutional consequences of that moment.

The simulation would therefore function as a permanent institutional stress test. It would periodically reconstruct the first day, first month, first year, five-year transition and longer-term consolidation following hypothetical political union. Each iteration would incorporate new economic data, legislation, EU developments, institutional reforms, demographic changes and geopolitical conditions.

Constitutional and Legal Transition

The simulation should first establish the constitutional and legal architecture of the hypothetical transition. It would examine how the constitutional relationship between Romania and Moldova would change, what legislative acts would be required, how existing Moldovan laws would be treated during the transition, and which areas could be harmonised immediately or would require transitional arrangements.

The simulation should examine the treatment of contracts, property rights, court decisions, administrative acts, professional licences, business registrations and existing legal obligations. It should identify areas in which automatic legal continuity would be possible and areas requiring new legislation.

The objective would be to produce a legal transition map, identifying what would have to change immediately, what could remain temporarily unchanged and what would require long-term harmonisation.

Pensions and Social-Security Entitlements

The treatment of Moldovan pensions and social-security entitlements would require particularly detailed modelling. The simulation should determine how existing contribution histories would be recognised, how pension liabilities would be transferred or shared, how pension levels would be harmonised and how future contributions would be incorporated into the Romanian social-security system.

The same analysis should apply to unemployment benefits, disability benefits, family benefits and other social-protection entitlements. The simulation should calculate the fiscal implications under different convergence speeds rather than assume immediate equalisation.

Public-Sector Salaries and Employment

The simulation should model how Moldovan public-sector salaries would be integrated with Romanian pay structures. This would require analysis of wage differentials, employment numbers, occupational classifications, pension obligations and public-sector productivity.

A key issue would be whether equalisation should occur immediately or progressively. Rapid equalisation could generate substantial fiscal costs, while slow adjustment could produce dissatisfaction and labour-market distortions. The simulation should therefore identify the fiscal and political consequences of alternative salary-convergence pathways.

Taxation and Public Finance

A unified fiscal system would require the integration of taxation, customs, budgetary institutions, accounting systems and public financial management. The simulation should examine the treatment of income taxation, corporate taxation, VAT, excise duties, property taxation and local-government revenues.

It should also model the consequences for the Romanian state budget, including additional expenditure, additional tax revenue, transfers between regions and the financing of local government.

The central question would be:

How would the integrated fiscal system remain sustainable during the transition while preventing either excessive fiscal extraction or unsustainable transfers?

Public Debt and Financial Obligations

The simulation should address the treatment of Moldova's public debt and other financial obligations. Different legal and financial arrangements could produce substantially different fiscal outcomes. The model should therefore examine alternative approaches to debt assumption, restructuring, refinancing and integration into Romania's public-finance framework.

This should be linked to scenarios concerning interest rates, economic growth, fiscal deficits and EU financing.

Local Government and Municipal Integration

The integration of Moldovan municipalities would require one of the most detailed institutional simulations. The Centre should examine territorial administration, municipal finances, public employment, local taxation, public utilities, procurement, planning and relations between central and local government.

Rather than assuming immediate administrative uniformity, the simulation should test transitional arrangements under which existing Moldovan municipalities could continue operating while progressively adopting Romanian institutional and legal standards.

Healthcare Integration

Healthcare would require analysis of hospitals, primary care, medical professionals, insurance arrangements, pharmaceutical procurement, health records, emergency services and public-health institutions.

The simulation should estimate both the fiscal cost of extending Romanian healthcare standards and the potential efficiency gains from larger-scale procurement, integrated specialist networks and improved infrastructure.

Education and Universities

The simulation should examine the incorporation of Moldovan schools and universities into the Romanian education system, including teacher salaries, curricula, accreditation, qualifications, university financing and student mobility.

It should also model the consequences of integrating research institutions and universities into Romanian and European research networks.

Property and Land Law

Property rights would require particularly careful treatment because institutional integration could affect land registration, cadastral systems, mortgages, inheritance, agricultural property and historical ownership claims.

The Centre should therefore construct a property and cadastral transition model that identifies legal conflicts, administrative requirements and potential disputes before they become political or economic problems.

Citizenship and Political Representation

The simulation should model the transition of citizenship and political rights, including voting rights, electoral registration, parliamentary representation, local government representation and eligibility for public office.

It should examine how the population of Moldova would be represented within Romanian political institutions and how electoral districts and administrative representation might be organised.

Police, Justice and Rule of Law

The integration of police, prosecutors, courts, prisons and other justice institutions would require a dedicated institutional simulation. The Centre should assess personnel integration, professional standards, databases, criminal-procedure rules,

judicial jurisdiction and institutional accountability.

The objective should be to avoid an assumption that legal integration automatically produces operational integration. Institutional cultures, personnel capacity and information systems would all require consideration.

Elections and Democratic Transition

The simulation should model how elections would be organised during the transition. Questions would include voter registration, electoral administration, political representation, electoral districts, campaign regulation and the application of Romanian electoral law.

The simulation should also examine how democratic legitimacy would be preserved during a period of profound institutional change.

Transnistria

The Transnistrian question would require a separate scenario module. It cannot simply be incorporated into the general administrative model because the region presents distinctive legal, political, security and geopolitical challenges.

The Centre should therefore model multiple possibilities, including resolution before integration, negotiated settlement during a transition, prolonged unresolved status and adverse security scenarios. The purpose would not be to predetermine a territorial outcome but to ensure that Romanian institutions understand the administrative, fiscal, security and humanitarian implications of each pathway.

Gagauzia

Gagauzia is an autonomous territorial unit in southern Moldova. It is home mainly to the Gagauz people, a Turkic-speaking Orthodox Christian community. The Gagauz have preserved their language, traditions, and cultural identity over time. Religion plays an important role in the cultural identity of Gagauz communities. Gagauz identity is closely connected to both their Turkic heritage and Orthodox Christianity. The history of Gagauzia has been influenced by the Russian, Ottoman, and Moldovan spheres. The region received autonomous status within Moldova in 1994. Kapaló (2022) provides useful insight into the religious and cultural identity of the Gagauz people.

Figure



And so, Gagauzia should likewise receive a dedicated institutional module addressing autonomy arrangements, local governance, language, political representation, fiscal transfers and constitutional compatibility.

The simulation should assess how existing autonomy arrangements could interact with Romanian constitutional and administrative structures and identify potential areas requiring negotiated institutional solutions.

Infrastructure and Public Investment

The programme should maintain a comprehensive inventory of infrastructure requirements, including roads, railways, bridges, electricity, gas, water, telecommunications, hospitals, schools and digital infrastructure.

The model should distinguish between essential transition investment, strategic infrastructure investment and long-term development investment. It should also calculate potential returns through improved connectivity, productivity, trade and energy security.

EU Funding and European Integration

A major component should model the role of EU financing. The Centre should examine which investments could potentially be financed through existing European instruments, which would require Romanian national financing and which would require new European arrangements.

The simulation should also consider Moldova's evolving relationship with the EU and ensure that any hypothetical integration scenario remains consistent with European law and institutional procedures.

National Bank and Financial-System Integration

The status of the National Bank of Moldova and Moldova's monetary and financial institutions would require a specialised simulation. This should address monetary arrangements, banking supervision, payment systems, financial regulation, deposit protection, currency conversion and integration with Romanian and European financial institutions.

The analysis should examine alternative transition arrangements rather than assuming immediate institutional absorption.

State-Owned Enterprises and Public Assets

The Centre should construct an inventory and valuation framework for Moldovan state-owned enterprises, public utilities and other state assets. The simulation would examine which entities could be integrated, restructured, privatised or maintained as public institutions.

This would also provide an opportunity to identify contingent liabilities that might otherwise be overlooked in conventional fiscal calculations.

The Simulation as an Institutional Stress Test

The most important feature of the programme should be its iterative nature. The "Day After Union" simulation should not be conducted once and placed in an archive. It should be repeated annually as legislation, economic conditions, EU institutions, public finances, infrastructure and geopolitical circumstances change.

Each simulation cycle could produce three outputs: a 72-hour institutional response plan, a one-year transition plan, and a five-to-ten-year integration pathway.

The first would identify what institutions would need to do immediately. The second would address administrative and fiscal stabilisation. The third would examine long-term convergence and institutional consolidation.

The programme should also conduct red-team exercises, in which independent teams attempt to identify institutional failures, fiscal shocks, legal contradictions, security vulnerabilities and unintended consequences within the proposed transition arrangements.

The ultimate objective is not to produce a definitive blueprint for unification. There cannot be one, because the political, legal and geopolitical circumstances surrounding any future decision would be unique.

The objective is instead to build institutional memory, analytical capacity and strategic readiness.

A country that has spent ten years systematically modelling pensions, taxation, public debt, municipalities, healthcare, education, property, citizenship, elections, security, infrastructure, EU financing and financial institutions will be substantially better prepared than a country attempting to answer these questions for the first time during a political crisis.

The programme would therefore embody a fundamental principle of the Centre:

The purpose of the "Day After Union" simulation is not to predict the day after. It is to ensure that, if such a day ever arrives through legitimate democratic and constitutional processes, the state is prepared for it.

This makes the programme fully consistent with the Centre's broader doctrine of preparedness rather than political engineering: Romania does not manufacture the historical moment; it develops the institutional capacity to respond intelligently if history creates one.

The "Unification Cost and Benefit Observatory" Scenario-Based Strategic Planning

The Centre should maintain a portfolio of alternative scenarios rather than a single headline estimate or deterministic forecast. Romanian-Moldovan integration is subject to too many political, economic, institutional and geopolitical uncertainties for a single projection to provide a credible basis for policy. The purpose of scenario planning should therefore be to identify a range of plausible pathways, establish the conditions under which each pathway could emerge, estimate its consequences, and determine which policies would remain beneficial across several possible futures.

The scenarios should not be understood as predictions. They should function as structured analytical environments in which alternative assumptions about political decisions, economic convergence, EU integration, public opinion, institutional capacity and geopolitical developments can be tested. Each scenario should have clearly defined assumptions, trigger conditions, time horizons, indicators and potential transition pathways.

Scenario A — Gradual Convergence

Under Gradual Convergence, Romania and Moldova progressively deepen their economic, institutional and social relationship without an immediate constitutional change. Moldova continues its European integration trajectory while simultaneously increasing interoperability with Romania. Infrastructure, energy, digital systems, education, healthcare, social security, trade and public administration become progressively more integrated.

This scenario would allow the Centre to examine whether de facto integration can substantially reduce the practical barriers to eventual political union. It would also provide a baseline for assessing whether political unification becomes less economically disruptive as convergence increases.

The key analytical question would be whether the costs of integration decline as convergence proceeds. If Moldova's productivity, institutional capacity, infrastructure and public services progressively approach Romanian and EU standards, the fiscal and administrative adjustment associated with any future constitutional change could become considerably smaller.

Scenario B — EU-Mediated Convergence

Under EU-Mediated Convergence, Moldova's European integration becomes the principal mechanism through which economic, institutional and regulatory convergence occurs. The process would be driven primarily by the EU acquis, accession benchmarks, European funding, regulatory harmonisation and increasing participation in the European economic system.

This scenario is particularly important because it separates European integration from political unification. Moldova could become deeply integrated with Romania and the wider European economy while remaining a separate sovereign state. The Centre should therefore examine whether EU integration itself reduces the additional economic and institutional costs that would arise from eventual political union.

This scenario should also analyse the role of Romania as an intermediary and capacity-building partner within the EU framework, while maintaining the distinction between legitimate support for Moldova's European integration and advocacy for a particular constitutional outcome.

Scenario C — Accelerated Political Union

Under Accelerated Political Union, a significant geopolitical or domestic political window creates conditions for rapid movement towards unification. Such a window could theoretically arise from a major change in the regional security environment, a decisive shift in public opinion, substantial institutional convergence or a broader European political transformation.

This scenario should not assume that rapid political agreement automatically produces successful integration. Instead, it should stress-test Romanian institutional capacity under compressed timelines. The model would examine what happens if legal, fiscal, administrative, social and security integration must occur substantially faster than under the gradual-convergence pathway.

Particular attention should be given to transition capacity. The Centre should identify which institutions would become binding constraints under accelerated integration and which preparatory investments would significantly reduce those constraints.

Scenario D — Prolonged Association Without Union

Under Prolonged Association Without Union, Romania and Moldova achieve a very high degree of economic, institutional, infrastructural and social integration while remaining separate sovereign states.

This scenario is particularly important because it challenges the assumption that integration necessarily culminates in political union. It could involve extensive labour mobility, infrastructure connectivity, energy integration, regulatory convergence, educational cooperation, social-security coordination and economic interdependence.

The scenario would allow the Centre to determine which benefits commonly attributed to political unification could actually be achieved without changing the constitutional relationship between the two states. It therefore provides an important counterfactual against which the additional benefits and costs of formal political union can be assessed.

Common Analytical Framework

Each scenario should be subjected to the same analytical framework so that outcomes remain comparable. The Centre should estimate fiscal costs and transfers, GDP and productivity effects, domestic and foreign investment, labour mobility and migration, social expenditure, infrastructure requirements, EU financing and absorption capacity, regional distributional effects, security implications and political and institutional risks.

The economic model should additionally incorporate inflation, interest rates, public debt, exchange-rate effects where relevant, current-account dynamics, productivity growth and demographic change. The institutional model should assess administrative capacity, legal interoperability, public-sector integration and the ability of Romanian institutions to absorb additional responsibilities without compromising service quality.

The social dimension should examine changes in public opinion, identity, trust, migration intentions, social cohesion and perceived distributional effects. The geopolitical component should assess the consequences of different regional-security environments, including developments involving Ukraine, Russia, Transnistria, Gagauzia, the EU and NATO.

The scenarios should also include time horizons. A five-year horizon would capture immediate institutional and investment requirements; a ten-year horizon would capture deeper economic and administrative convergence; and a twenty-year horizon would allow the Centre to examine productivity, demographic and generational effects.

Scenario TRIPWIRES and Early-Warning Indicators

The Centre should identify trigger conditions that would cause the probability or relevance of a scenario to increase. These might include major changes in Moldovan public opinion, a significant change in electoral preferences, major progress in EU accession, resolution or escalation of the Transnistrian issue, substantial changes in Romanian public opinion, major geopolitical developments, large changes in economic convergence, or significant institutional reforms.

The purpose would not be to predict the future with false precision, but to identify when the strategic environment is moving from one scenario toward another.

The Centre could therefore maintain a Scenario Transition Matrix showing the conditions under which the probability of each pathway increases or decreases.

For example:

Institutional convergence ↑ + economic convergence ↑ + public support ↑ → greater feasibility of deeper integration.

Geopolitical risk ↑ + institutional incompatibility ↑ → lower feasibility of accelerated union.

EU integration ↑ + bilateral interoperability ↑ + public support stable → stronger probability of prolonged association or gradual convergence.

This would connect scenario planning directly to the RM-URI monitoring system.

Comparative Scenario Assessment

Each scenario should ultimately be evaluated according to four broad criteria: economic sustainability, institutional feasibility, democratic legitimacy and geopolitical feasibility.

A scenario could therefore produce strong economic benefits but remain politically infeasible. Another could have substantial political support but generate excessive fiscal or institutional costs. A third could be economically attractive but highly vulnerable to geopolitical disruption. This multidimensional assessment prevents the Centre from treating any single variable as decisive.

The Centre should consequently avoid reporting a statement such as “unification would cost €X billion.” Instead, it should report something closer to:

Under the accelerated-unification scenario, fiscal expenditure is substantially higher during the first five years but convergence occurs more rapidly; under gradual convergence, initial costs are lower but the transition extends over a longer period; under EU-mediated convergence, a larger proportion of institutional and infrastructure costs may be distributed through European financing mechanisms; while under prolonged association, many integration benefits can be achieved without incurring the full costs of political union.

This is considerably more useful for policy planning because it identifies trade-offs rather than producing a politically attractive headline figure.

From Prediction to Preparedness

The ultimate purpose of the scenario system would be to replace political speculation with prepared scenarios and measurable preparedness. Instead of asking whether unification will happen, the Centre would continuously assess what would happen if different pathways emerged, what conditions would make each pathway more or less feasible, and which preparations would improve Romania’s ability to respond.

The scenarios should therefore feed directly into the Centre’s annual “Ten Strategic Actions for the Next Five Years.” Actions that perform well across all or most scenarios would receive priority because they represent no-regrets investments. Actions that are valuable only under a particular scenario would be maintained as contingency options and activated if the relevant trigger conditions emerge.

The strategic principle would therefore be:

Do not predict a single future; prepare for several plausible futures and invest today in capabilities that preserve Romania's strategic options.

This transforms the Centre from a forecasting institution into a strategic preparedness institution. Its purpose would be to continuously connect foresight, scenario modelling, institutional readiness and policy action, ensuring that Romania is neither attempting to manufacture a political outcome nor passively waiting for circumstances to determine its future.

Geopolitical Preparedness

A future opportunity for unification cannot be considered separately from the security environment.

The Centre should therefore maintain a permanent Geopolitical Window Monitor.

It should track:

Russia;

Ukraine;

Transnistria;

Gagauzia;

EU enlargement;

NATO;

Black Sea security;

energy security;

hybrid threats;

foreign interference;

and international reactions to different forms of Romanian–Moldovan integration.

The key question would be:

Under what international circumstances could unification become both possible and sustainable?

The Centre should identify windows of opportunity as well as risks.

Identity Strategy

The Centre should also develop a long-term Inclusive Romanian–Moldovan Identity Strategy.

The objective should not be to erase Moldovan identity.

The strategic question is how a future common political community could accommodate citizens who understand themselves in different ways.

Research should therefore examine:

Romanian identity;

Moldovan identity;

European identity;

regional identity;

Gagauz identity;

Russian-speaking communities;

Ukrainian communities;

and mixed identities.

The strategic objective should be:

Maximise identification with a common political future without requiring citizens to abandon their existing cultural identities.

This is likely to be much more effective than treating identity as a binary choice.

Figure Se crapă de ziuă, fraților



The Centre Should Identify What Romania can do Now From Strategic Foresight to Actionable Policy

The Centre's most important contribution should be to convert strategic foresight into actionable policy. Its value should not lie solely in producing scenarios, indices and analytical reports, but in translating evidence into a disciplined programme of policies that Romania can implement regardless of whether political unification ultimately occurs. The Centre should therefore operate as a bridge between foresight, research, policy design and institutional implementation.

At the centre of this process should be an annual publication entitled "Ten Strategic Actions for the Next Five Years." Rather than presenting a general list of aspirations, the document should identify ten specific, measurable and costed interventions that would strengthen Romania–Moldova connectivity and interoperability. Each action should include a responsible institution, implementation timetable, estimated cost, financing mechanism, measurable indicators and assessment of expected benefits under different scenarios.

The guiding principle should be that the Centre prioritises dual-purpose policies: measures that would make eventual political integration easier while also generating substantial independent benefits for Romania, Moldova and their citizens. This would prevent the Centre from becoming an advocacy mechanism for a predetermined constitutional outcome. The test for every proposed intervention should therefore be: Would this policy still be justified if political unification never occurred? If the answer is yes, the policy represents a robust strategic investment.

The first priority could be deeper energy interconnection. Strengthening electricity and gas interconnections, developing renewable-energy cooperation and improving energy-market interoperability would increase Moldova's energy security while simultaneously deepening economic integration with Romania and the wider European energy system.

The second priority should be cross-border transport and infrastructure connectivity. Roads, railways, bridges, logistics centres and border infrastructure should be developed as components of an integrated regional network rather than as isolated national projects. The objective would be to reduce transport costs, increase trade and labour mobility, and improve Moldova's physical connection to Romania and the European market.

The third priority should be mutual recognition of professional and educational qualifications. Progressive alignment of professional standards and recognition mechanisms would facilitate labour mobility, reduce administrative barriers and strengthen the development of an integrated labour market.

The fourth priority should be digital interoperability. Romanian and Moldovan public institutions could progressively develop compatible digital identification, administrative, tax, health, business and social-protection systems. Such interoperability would reduce administrative costs and make cross-border services considerably easier to provide.

The fifth priority should be social-security portability. Citizens working, studying or living across the two countries should increasingly be able to transfer and recognise pension, employment and social-security rights. This would provide immediate benefits to citizens while simultaneously reducing one of the practical barriers to deeper integration.

The sixth priority should be university and research integration. Romanian and Moldovan universities could establish joint programmes, research centres, doctoral networks, shared laboratories and coordinated participation in European research programmes. This would strengthen human capital, scientific capacity and long-term institutional convergence.

The seventh priority should be healthcare cooperation. Cross-border healthcare agreements, compatible health-data systems, specialist training, emergency medical cooperation and shared procurement mechanisms could increase resilience and access to healthcare while creating practical institutional interoperability.

The eighth priority should be business and investment integration. Romania could support mechanisms connecting Moldovan firms with Romanian and European supply chains, investment funds, financial institutions, technology networks and business-support programmes. The objective would be to increase productivity and productive investment rather than simply increase bilateral trade.

The ninth priority should be border modernisation and mobility management. Investment in customs digitalisation, infrastructure, interoperable databases and efficient border procedures could reduce transaction costs while maintaining appropriate security standards. The long-term objective would be to make the border increasingly efficient without compromising security or the legal requirements associated with Romania's EU and Schengen obligations.

The tenth priority should be joint resilience and emergency preparedness. Romania and Moldova could develop coordinated mechanisms for responding to natural disasters, cyber incidents, energy disruptions, public-health emergencies and other cross-border crises. This would strengthen resilience independently of the eventual constitutional relationship between the two countries.

These ten priorities could be complemented by a broader programme of administrative capacity-building and coordinated European policy. Romanian institutions could provide technical assistance, training and institutional partnerships in areas such as public administration, public procurement, fiscal management, judicial capacity and EU acquis implementation. At the European level, Romania could advocate policies that strengthen Moldova's European integration and institutional convergence while remaining fully consistent with EU law and the principle that accession and constitutional decisions must follow their respective democratic and legal procedures.

The annual Ten Strategic Actions should also be explicitly connected to the Centre's seven-dimensional monitoring framework. Each action should identify which dimensions of the Romania–Moldova Unification Readiness Index (RM-URI) it affects and establish measurable indicators for evaluating its impact. For example, energy interconnection would contribute to the economic, geopolitical and infrastructure dimensions; qualification recognition would contribute to the social, institutional and economic dimensions; and digital interoperability would contribute primarily to the institutional, economic and data dimensions.

This would create a continuous policy cycle:

Monitor → Diagnose → Prioritise → Design → Implement → Measure → Reassess.

The Centre would therefore not simply report that a particular dimension of readiness has improved or deteriorated. It would identify which policy interventions could alter the trajectory, estimate their costs and benefits, monitor implementation, and feed the results back into the following year's strategic assessment.

The annual publication should consequently become more than a policy report. It could function as a five-year strategic action framework, with each recommendation assigned a measurable target. For example, the Centre could specify the kilometres of cross-border infrastructure to be completed, the proportion of compatible digital services to be achieved, the number of qualifications subject to mutual recognition, the volume of interoperable social-security records, or the number of joint research and healthcare programmes established.

The underlying strategic doctrine can therefore be expressed in a single sentence:

Do today what makes tomorrow's integration easier, while ensuring that today's investment is justified even if tomorrow's political circumstances are different.

This principle provides the Centre with a clear distinction between strategic preparedness and political engineering. It does not require Romania to predict when or whether unification will occur. Instead, it encourages Romania to build the economic, institutional, infrastructural and societal capabilities that would make a range of future relationships more effective and resilient.

The ultimate objective is therefore strategic optionality. Romania should not attempt to manufacture a future political outcome; it should ensure that, if circumstances eventually create a legitimate opportunity for deeper integration, the necessary foundations already exist. In this sense, the Centre's practical mission would be to convert uncertainty into preparedness, preparedness into capacity, and capacity into policy options.

The Centre Should Measure the Effectiveness of Romanian Assistance

The reference point should not simply be the amount of money transferred.

The Centre should create an:

Assistance-to-Integration Effectiveness Framework

Every major programme should be assessed against four questions:

Input

How much Romanian public money is committed?

Output

What was actually delivered?

Outcome

What changed in Moldova?

Strategic effect

Did the programme increase resilience, convergence, interoperability or the feasibility of future association?

This produces:

Strategic\ Effectiveness =

The Centre should publish an annual Romania–Moldova Strategic Assistance Review.

This would make the hundreds of millions of euros Romania commits annually much more strategically accountable.

The Centre Must be Prepared to say "Stop"

An institution created specifically to support the possibility of unification must not become a justification machine.

Its credibility requires an explicit power of negative assessment.

It should be able to conclude:

This programme has low strategic value.

or:

This intervention is increasing rather than reducing political polarization.

or:

This expenditure has high visibility but little long-term integration effect.

or:

Conditions for deeper integration have deteriorated.

or:

The current political environment is unsuitable for advancing this objective.

That is precisely why it should be a foresight and evaluation centre rather than a promotional body.

Institutional Architecture

I recommend a compact centre of approximately 10–15 permanent researchers and analysts, supported by a larger external network.

It should contain:

Strategic Foresight Unit

Political and geopolitical scenarios, early warning and horizon scanning.

Unification Readiness Observatory

The seven-dimensional dashboard and data system.

Economic and Fiscal Integration Unit

Cost-benefit analysis, convergence and fiscal modelling.

Institutional Integration Unit

Constitutional, legal and administrative interoperability.

Society and Identity Unit

Public opinion, identity and social cohesion.

History and Comparative Unification Unit

Historical cases and lessons from successful and failed unions.

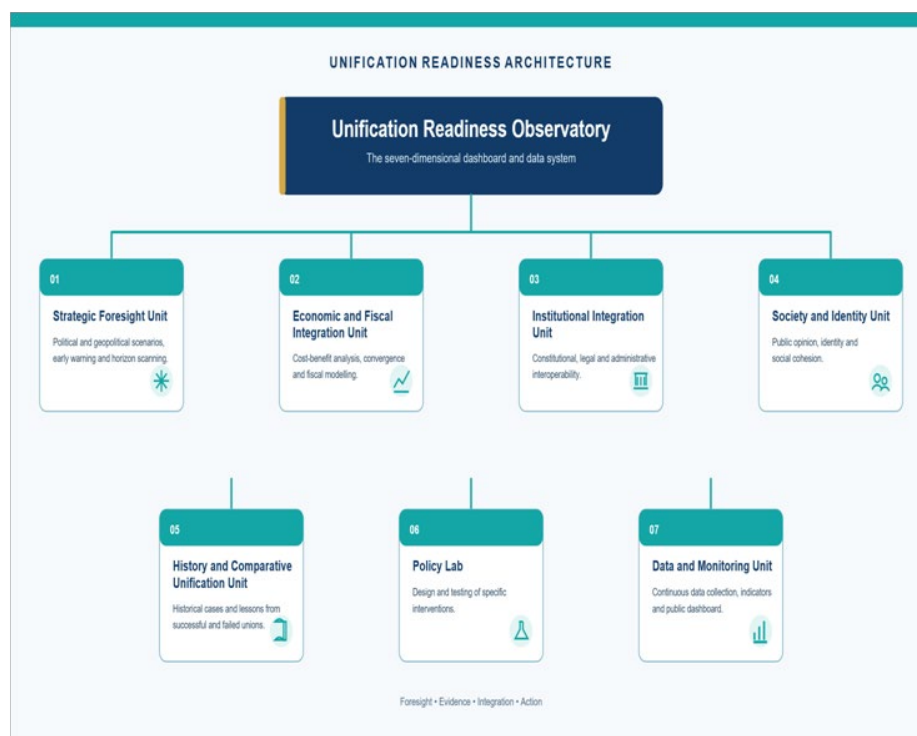
Policy Lab

Design and testing of specific interventions.

Data and Monitoring Unit

Continuous data collection, indicators and public dashboard.

Figure



The organigram presents the institutional architecture of a Unification Readiness Observatory, designed to assess Romania–Moldova unification as a possible long-term strategic scenario.

At the top of the structure is the Observatory, which functions as the central coordination, data, and strategic assessment mechanism. Its purpose is to integrate evidence from seven complementary areas and transform that evidence into a coherent assessment of readiness.

The Strategic Foresight Unit examines political, geopolitical, security, demographic, and other long-term scenarios affecting Romania and Moldova. It provides early warning and horizon scanning so that the Centre can anticipate changes rather than simply react to them.

The Economic and Fiscal Integration Unit analyses the costs, benefits, fiscal implications, and economic requirements of possible integration. It would examine issues such as GDP convergence, infrastructure, public expenditure, taxation, pensions, investment, and regional development. The Institutional Integration Unit evaluates the compatibility of Romanian and Moldovan legal, constitutional, administrative, and regulatory systems.

Its task is to determine what practical institutional changes would be necessary if political integration were ever pursued.

The Society and Identity Unit studies public opinion, national identity, social cohesion, demographic trends, and attitudes toward European integration and unification. This unit is essential because any legitimate political decision concerning unification would ultimately require democratic consent. The History and Comparative Unification Unit studies previous cases of state integration, including Germany, Vietnam, Yemen, and other relevant historical experiences. Its purpose is to identify lessons that can inform Romania and Moldova while recognising that each historical case has unique circumstances. The Policy Lab converts research findings into practical policy proposals and can design, test, and evaluate specific interventions.

These interventions could include investment programmes, institutional cooperation, infrastructure projects, economic-convergence measures, and cross-border initiatives.

The Data and Monitoring Unit provides continuous data collection, indicators, statistical analysis, and public dashboards for all the other units. It ensures that the Observatory's conclusions are based on measurable evidence rather than political assumptions or isolated events. Together, the seven dimensions allow the Centre to examine unification from political, economic, institutional, social, historical, policy, and quantitative perspectives. The architecture therefore does not necessarily assume that unification will occur, but instead seeks to maintain strategic preparedness for several possible futures. Its overarching principle is captured by the four words at the bottom of the organigram: "Foresight • Evidence • Integration • Action."¹⁴ A five-year strategic programme

Year 1 — Know Where We are

Establish the baseline.

Create the database.
Map all Romanian expenditure and programmes in Moldova.
Establish the seven-dimensional readiness framework.
Conduct high-quality public-opinion research.
Produce the first Unification Readiness Report.

Year 2 — Understand the Gaps

Identify the institutional, economic, social and political obstacles to integration.
Begin fiscal modelling.
Produce the first Day After Union simulation.

Year 3 — Test Strategies

Model alternative policies.
Conduct scenario exercises.
Evaluate the strategic effectiveness of Romanian assistance.
Develop regional and sectoral integration strategies.

Year 4 — Build National Preparedness

Develop Romanian institutional plans for possible rapid integration.
Identify legal and administrative bottlenecks.
Develop transition scenarios.

Year 5 — Establish Strategic Readiness

Produce a comprehensive:
Romania–Bessarabia Unification Preparedness Plan
with continuously updated contingency scenarios.

The Centre's Most Important Output

The Centre should ultimately maintain a classified/internal document and a public version of:

The Romanian Unification Readiness Plan

It should answer five questions.
What would have to be true for unification to become feasible?
How far are we from those conditions?
Which conditions can Romanian policy influence?
Which conditions cannot be controlled by Romania?
What should Romania do now to maximise the probability of a successful outcome if a window opens?
This makes the institution fundamentally different from an academic centre.

It becomes a state capacity for strategic preparedness.

Comparative Study

The historical relationships among Moldavia, Bessarabia, Transnistria, Bukovina, Galicia, and Kyivan Rus' constitute an especially revealing field for the comparative study of Romanian, Ukrainian, and Russian historiographical traditions, as well as for the development of a broader theory of historical unification. These cases are not simply disputed territories or competing objects of national memory. They represent successive zones of political integration, demographic transformation, cultural exchange, imperial incorporation, national differentiation, and state formation. Their significance lies precisely in the fact that none can be adequately understood through the retrospective application of a single modern national category.

A comparative study of these cases therefore requires moving beyond the question of which historiographical tradition possesses the most legitimate claim to the past. The more fundamental question is how different historiographical schools construct the historical subject itself. Romanian historiography has generally privileged the continuity of Romanian ethnolinguistic and cultural development across the medieval principalities and the modern Romanian state. Ukrainian historiography has emphasized the distinct historical development of Ukrainian political and cultural identity, particularly through Kyivan Rus', the Ruthenian and Cossack traditions, and the experience of Polish-Lithuanian, Habsburg, Russian, and Soviet rule. Russian historiography, in its imperial, Soviet, and contemporary variants, has often placed greater emphasis on the continuity of a wider East Slavic or Russian historical space, within which the histories of Ukraine, Belarus, and neighbouring territories are interpreted as interconnected dimensions of a broader political and civilizational development. A theory of unification, by contrast, need not begin with any one national claimant. It can treat these territories as historically constituted through successive processes of integration and differentiation.

The comparative value of the six cases derives from their different positions within these processes. Kyivan Rus' represents the foundational medieval problem: a political and religious formation that predates modern nations but

whose legacy has subsequently been nationalized by Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian historiographies. Galicia and Bukovina demonstrate how the incorporation of East European populations into Polish, Habsburg, Romanian, and Soviet institutional frameworks contributed to the emergence and consolidation of modern national identities. Moldavia and Bessarabia illuminate the relationship between medieval principality, ethnolinguistic continuity, imperial annexation, Romanian national integration, and Soviet territorial restructuring. Transnistria presents an even more complex case, in which Russian and Ukrainian settlement, Moldavian and Romanian historical connections, Soviet industrialization, migration, and post-Soviet state formation produced a political community that cannot be satisfactorily reduced to a single national genealogy.

Taken together, these cases permit a comparison between two fundamentally different ways of conceptualizing historical unity. The first understands unity primarily through the continuity of a people, language, territory, or political nation. The second understands unity as the product of historical interaction: dynastic relationships, religious institutions, migration, economic networks, imperial administration, warfare, cultural exchange, and successive forms of political integration. The distinction is consequential because the first approach tends more readily to transform historical continuity into a claim about political legitimacy, whereas the second treats historical integration and contemporary sovereignty as analytically distinct.

The study consequently proceeds from the proposition that historical unity, national identity, and political sovereignty are related but non-identical phenomena. The existence of a common historical formation does not necessarily entail the persistence of a single nation, just as the emergence of distinct national identities does not erase earlier forms of political and cultural interconnectedness. This distinction is particularly important in the cases examined here because the modern political map is itself the cumulative product of multiple historical integrations and separations. The borders separating Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia cannot simply be projected backward onto medieval or early modern populations without obscuring the transformations through which those borders and identities were subsequently produced.

The comparative study therefore asks not only how Romanian, Ukrainian, and Russian historiographies interpret the same historical territories differently, but also what political assumptions are embedded within those interpretations. When a medieval polity is represented as the ancestor of a contemporary nation, what follows concerning territorial entitlement? When imperial incorporation is interpreted as reunification rather than conquest, what conception of sovereignty is implied? When linguistic or cultural continuity is taken as evidence of national unity, to what extent does that continuity establish a legitimate political project? And, conversely, when historical differentiation is emphasized, does it risk obscuring the enduring networks of cultural and institutional interdependence that connect neighbouring societies?

The central analytical problem is therefore the passage from historical description to political prescription. A claim that two populations share a common historical inheritance is descriptive; the proposition that they consequently ought to form a single political community is normative. The latter requires additional premises concerning sovereignty, consent, territoriality, citizenship, national self-determination, and the political status of historical memory. By placing Romanian, Ukrainian, and Russian historiographies alongside a more general theory of unification, the study can identify precisely where those additional premises enter the argument.

The cases of Moldavia, Bessarabia, Transnistria, Bukovina, Galicia, and Kyivan Rus' thus provide more than a collection of regional examples. Together they constitute a comparative laboratory for examining how historical interconnectedness becomes transformed into competing conceptions of nationhood, territory, and political order. Their study makes it possible to move beyond the binary opposition between narratives of primordial national separation and narratives of an enduring common civilization. The more historically adequate possibility is that integration and differentiation have operated simultaneously: populations have shared institutions while developing distinct identities, experienced common political rule while acquiring divergent political orientations, and inherited overlapping historical memories while constructing competing claims to sovereignty.

On this basis, the study approaches "unification" not as a predetermined political outcome but as a historical process whose forms and consequences must themselves be investigated. Political unification may produce common identities, just as political separation may consolidate them; imperial integration may create the conditions for later national differentiation, while national movements may seek to reverse earlier territorial divisions. The principal objective is therefore not to establish which nation can claim an exclusive ownership of the past, but to determine how competing historical narratives construct different relationships between common inheritance, national differentiation, territorial legitimacy, and political action.

Table Eu Sint Roman

Case	Romanian historiography	Ukrainian historiography	Russian historiography	Integration / "unification" reading	Political implication
Moldavia	Medieval Moldavia is a Romanian-speaking historical polity; Moldavian identity is generally interpreted as part of the broader Romanian ethnocultural formation.	Moldavia is understood as a distinct medieval polity deeply connected to Ukrainian, Polish-Lithuanian and steppe worlds; emphasis is usually on regional interaction rather than Romanian exclusivity.	Often emphasizes Moldavia's later incorporation into the Russian imperial sphere and Orthodox/East European connections.	A frontier polity cannot easily be assigned retrospectively to one modern nation; Moldavia was an intersection of Romanian, Slavic, steppe, Ottoman and Central European systems.	Romanian interpretation can support Romanian-Moldovan cultural/political unity; integrationist interpretation favors cooperation without automatic annexation/unification.
Bessarabia	Bessarabia is generally framed as historically Moldavian/Romanian territory separated from the Romanian principalities by Russian annexation in 1812.	Emphasizes its multiethnic borderland character and connections with Ukrainian lands, while recognizing substantial Romanian/Moldovan population.	Russian historiography emphasizes the legitimacy and historical importance of the Russian imperial acquisition and subsequent Russian/Soviet development.	Bessarabia illustrates how imperial border-making can create a new political geography without erasing older demographic identities.	Romanian continuity can support reunification arguments; Russian/Soviet continuity can support competing claims; sovereignty/consent approaches privilege contemporary political choice.
Transnistria	Often treated as outside the core historical territory of medieval Moldavia/Romania and as a region whose Soviet-era political incorporation was decisive in its modern identity.	Strong Ukrainian historical relevance: Ukrainian settlement and population, economic links and proximity to Ukrainian lands are important.	Russian narratives emphasize Russian/Soviet settlement, industrialization, Orthodox/cultural ties and the region's incorporation into the Russian/Soviet political space.	Perhaps the clearest example of a composite borderland: no single national narrative captures its entire historical formation.	Strongly undermines the assumption that ethnic history alone determines sovereignty. Conflict resolution requires contemporary consent and institutional arrangements, not simply historical ownership claims.
Bukovina	Northern and southern Bukovina are distinguished, but Romanian historiography emphasizes the historical Romanian/Moldavian presence and the integration of southern Bukovina into Romania after 1918.	Northern Bukovina is strongly incorporated into the Ukrainian historical-geographical narrative; Ukrainian settlement and its development under Austrian and later Soviet rule are emphasized.	Imperial Russian/Soviet narratives emphasize the region's incorporation into the Soviet Ukrainian republic after WWII rather than Romanian historical claims.	Bukovina demonstrates how one historical region can acquire different national identities through successive imperial administrations.	Historical claims alone cannot easily determine present borders; minority rights and self-government become more important.

Galicia	Romanian historiography generally treats Galicia as outside the central Romanian historical trajectory, though Moldavia's relations with Galicia matter.	Galicia is a major component of modern Ukrainian historical consciousness, particularly through the Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia, Habsburg Galicia and western Ukrainian nationalism.	Russian historiography has historically emphasized the region's East Slavic/Ruthenian and Orthodox heritage and, in some versions, its separation from Polish/Austrian domination.	Galicia is an excellent example of how Ruthenian/Ukrainian identity developed through interaction with Polish, Austrian, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and Russian worlds.	The modern Ukrainian political identity cannot be reduced either to Russian imperial history or to a timeless Ukrainian nation; it emerged through layered institutions and experiences.
Kyivan Rus'	Usually treated as part of the wider medieval East European context rather than the direct exclusive ancestor of Romania.	Central to Ukrainian historical identity: Kyiv and Rus' are presented as foundations of Ukrainian state and cultural history.	Traditionally central to the Russian historical narrative as the common origin of Russian statehood and civilization.	Best understood as a shared medieval political-cultural formation whose legacy was subsequently appropriated and nationalized by several modern peoples.	If Rus' is treated as exclusive property, it becomes an instrument for territorial/political claims. If treated as shared inheritance, it supports cultural cooperation rather than territorial entitlement.

What becomes especially revealing, when the comparison is confined to Moldavia, Bessarabia, Transnistria, Bukovina, Galicia, and Kyivan Rus', is that the divergence between Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, and integrationist historiographies is not principally a disagreement over isolated facts. It is a disagreement over the proper historical subject. Each historiographical school implicitly answers a prior question: whether history should be reconstructed through the continuity of a people, the continuity of a territory, the continuity of political institutions, the continuity of a civilization, or the interaction of several such processes. The political conclusions that follow are consequently not external to historiography. They are embedded in the very categories through which the past is organized.

In the Romanian historiographical tradition, Moldavia occupies a particularly important position because it allows the question of ethnocultural continuity to be connected to the formation of the modern Romanian nation. The medieval Principality of Moldavia is generally understood as a Romanian-speaking polity whose inhabitants participated in a broader Romanian historical and linguistic formation, despite the persistence of the name "Moldavian" as a historical and regional designation. The essential historiographical move is therefore to distinguish between a medieval political identity, Moldavian, and the later national category, Romanian, without treating the former as evidence of an entirely separate modern nation. Within this interpretation, the political division of the Romanian-speaking lands is principally the consequence of historical contingencies, dynastic arrangements, imperial expansion and divergent administrative trajectories rather than the expression of fundamentally separate national origins.

The Ukrainian historiographical perspective approaches Moldavia from a different geographical and civilizational angle. Moldavia appears not simply as an embryonic component of Romanian national history but as a frontier polity situated within an extensive East European zone of interaction encompassing Ruthenian, Polish-Lithuanian, steppe, Ottoman and Romanian-speaking populations. The significance of this interpretation is methodological. It resists retrospective nationalization of the medieval political landscape. A medieval principality need not correspond neatly to the territorial or national categories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moldavia can therefore be simultaneously relevant to Romanian history and deeply embedded in a wider East European system without one proposition logically cancelling the other.

Russian historiography, particularly in its imperial and later nationalist forms, introduces another principle: the importance of political incorporation and civilizational space. The historical significance of Moldavia and Bessarabia is consequently interpreted partly through their relationship with the Russian Empire, Orthodoxy, the Black Sea region and the wider Eastern European political order. This does not necessarily require the denial of Moldavian or Romanian particularity, but in its stronger forms it privileges the historical fact of imperial integration as evidence of a legitimate and durable relationship between the region and the Russian political world.

Bessarabia makes these competing principles substantially more consequential. The Russian annexation of the eastern half of the Principality of Moldavia in 1812 transformed what had previously belonged to a Moldavian political space into a province of the Russian Empire. Romanian historiography tends to interpret this rupture as an externally imposed interruption of a pre-existing Romanian-Moldavian historical continuity. Russian historiography, by contrast, has generally

attached greater importance to the subsequent institutional, demographic and economic development of Bessarabia under imperial rule. Soviet historiography added another layer by embedding Bessarabia within the history of Soviet nationalities, territorial administration and the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic.

An integrationist or unificationist theory alters the question entirely. Instead of asking which contemporary nation can retrospectively claim Bessarabia as its "true" historical territory, it asks how successive systems of political integration transformed the region. The relevant sequence becomes the Moldavian principality, Ottoman suzerainty, Russian imperial incorporation, Romanian state-building, Soviet territorial reorganization and post-Soviet state formation. Bessarabia is consequently not understood as a historical object possessing a single immutable national identity, but as a political and demographic formation produced by successive regimes of integration and differentiation.

This distinction is politically decisive. If historical continuity is treated as a title to territory, then the 1812 annexation becomes an argument for rectification and the 1918 union with Romania becomes an argument for restoration. If, however, history is understood as a sequence of transformations, neither 1812 nor 1918 can automatically function as a permanent political title. Historical legitimacy becomes multidimensional: demographic continuity, institutional continuity, political consent, international law and contemporary political identity acquire independent significance. The historian can therefore acknowledge the Romanian historical argument without converting it into an automatic prescription for contemporary territorial revision.

Transnistria exposes the limits of national historiography even more dramatically. Its historical formation cannot adequately be reconstructed through a single national genealogy. The region was shaped by Russian imperial expansion, Ukrainian settlement and demographic presence, Moldavian and Romanian connections, Jewish communities, Soviet industrialization, migration from throughout the USSR and the post-Soviet political disintegration of the Soviet territorial system. To describe Transnistria simply as Romanian, Ukrainian or Russian is therefore to privilege one historical layer over the others.

The significance of Transnistria for an integrationist theory is consequently profound. It demonstrates that political communities can be produced by institutions that do not correspond to the ethnic or linguistic composition of the populations over which those institutions operate. Soviet industrialization, administrative boundaries and migration generated forms of social and political interdependence that cannot be reduced to pre-Soviet national history. Transnistria therefore represents not merely a territorial dispute but a case in which several successive historical integrations have accumulated upon one another. The resulting political identity cannot be adequately explained by selecting one earlier historical layer and declaring it uniquely authentic.

Bukovina presents a related but distinct problem because its modern identity was profoundly shaped by Habsburg administration and the subsequent division of the historical region between Romania and Soviet Ukraine. Romanian historiography naturally emphasizes the Moldavian and Romanian dimensions of Bukovina, particularly the Romanian population and the incorporation of southern Bukovina into Romania. Ukrainian historiography places greater emphasis on northern Bukovina's Ukrainian population and its subsequent incorporation into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and, after 1991, independent Ukraine. The Habsburg period complicates both narratives because it created administrative, educational, religious and demographic structures that cannot be reduced to either Romanian or Ukrainian national history.

Bukovina therefore illustrates a general principle of historical development: imperial integration can generate the very territorial and institutional conditions from which later national differentiation emerges. The Austrian Empire did not merely govern an already fully formed Romanian-Ukrainian territorial division; its administrative and educational structures contributed to the crystallization of distinct political identities. The Soviet period subsequently produced another layer of institutional integration, while the post-1991 Ukrainian state transformed that inherited administrative boundary into an international frontier. A purely national historiography tends to emphasize continuity through these transformations. An integrationist historiography instead asks how the transformations themselves produced modern political identities.

Galicia makes the same point at an even higher level of complexity. Its history involves the medieval Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia, Polish political domination, Ruthenian and Ukrainian populations, the Habsburg Empire, Polish interwar rule, Soviet incorporation, the Holocaust, wartime population transfers and the subsequent consolidation of western Ukraine. Ukrainian historiography understandably places Galicia near the centre of the modern Ukrainian national narrative, particularly because nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Galicia became a major arena for the development of modern Ukrainian political consciousness. Russian historiography has historically emphasized the region's East Slavic and Orthodox dimensions while simultaneously interpreting its prolonged Polish and Habsburg history as a period of separation from the wider Russian world.

An integrationist approach would resist both simplifications. Galicia's modern Ukrainian identity is neither an immutable survival from the medieval period nor an artificial product of the twentieth century. It is the outcome of a cumulative historical process in which Ruthenian traditions interacted with Polish political culture, Habsburg institutions, Roman

Catholicism, Greek Catholicism, Jewish urban life, Ukrainian national movements and later Soviet state-building. Its Ukrainian identity is therefore historically real precisely because it was historically constructed. Construction does not mean artificiality; it means that identities acquire substance through institutions, collective memory, political mobilization and historical experience.

The deepest historiographical conflict emerges, however, with Kyivan Rus'. Here the question is not merely territorial but genealogical. Ukrainian historiography places Kyiv and Kyivan Rus' at the centre of Ukrainian historical consciousness, treating the medieval polity as a foundational component of the history of Ukraine. Russian historiography has traditionally regarded Kyivan Rus' as the common historical origin of the East Slavic peoples and, particularly in stronger formulations, as a foundational stage in the history of the Russian state and Russian civilization. Belarusian historiography introduces yet another claim to this inheritance. The fundamental problem is therefore that a medieval political formation predating modern nations is being retrospectively transformed into the ancestral property of modern nations.

An integrationist interpretation offers a different solution. Kyivan Rus' can be understood as a shared historical formation whose institutional, religious and cultural legacies subsequently differentiated across several political and linguistic communities. Kyiv can therefore be genuinely central to Ukrainian history without becoming an exclusive Ukrainian "property"; equally, Kyivan Rus' can constitute an important component of Russian historical consciousness without becoming a historical warrant for Russian political sovereignty over Ukraine. The medieval inheritance becomes common precisely because its subsequent histories diverged.

This is the point at which the distinction between historical unity and political unity becomes indispensable. The fact that Russians and Ukrainians share substantial elements of medieval political, religious and cultural history establishes historical relatedness. It does not, by itself, establish that they constitute a single modern nation, much less that they ought to constitute a single sovereign state. Conversely, demonstrating the emergence of distinct Ukrainian political consciousness does not require denying the profound historical connections between Ukrainian and Russian societies. The two propositions are perfectly compatible.

The same analytical distinction applies to Romanian and Moldovan history. Romanian and Moldovan populations can share a profound linguistic and cultural continuity while the contemporary Republic of Moldova possesses its own political institutions, citizenship, historical experiences and collective political preferences. The existence of a shared Romanian-Moldovan historical continuum therefore does not mechanically determine whether political unification is desirable or legitimate. It establishes the historical intelligibility of unionism; it does not establish its political necessity.

This is ultimately where a general theory of historical unification becomes analytically superior to a straightforward nationalist historiography. National historiographies tend to move retrospectively from the modern nation toward the past, selecting those historical structures that illuminate continuity and those that can be interpreted as periods of interruption or foreign domination. An integrationist historiography moves in the opposite direction. It begins with populations, institutions, territories and networks and examines how successive regimes of integration generated both commonality and differentiation. The same historical process can therefore be simultaneously integrative at one level and disintegrative at another.

The political consequences are substantial. If shared history is interpreted as evidence of an enduring political unity, historiography can become a legitimating instrument for territorial revision, political incorporation or claims to privileged spheres of influence. If historical separation is treated as absolute, conversely, historiography can legitimize permanent geopolitical antagonism and obscure genuine cultural and institutional interdependence. An integrationist approach rejects both conclusions. It treats historical interconnectedness as a reason for understanding, cooperation and potentially institutional integration, but it refuses to infer sovereignty from historical proximity alone.

The decisive normative transition is therefore from historical inheritance to political choice. History can establish that Moldovans and Romanians have profound linguistic and cultural connections; that Ukrainians and Russians share major elements of the Kyivan and Orthodox inheritance; that Bukovina and Galicia developed through overlapping imperial systems; and that Transnistria emerged from a uniquely complicated interaction between Moldavian, Ukrainian, Russian and Soviet histories. None of these propositions, however, supplies an automatic answer to the question of legitimate contemporary sovereignty.

A rigorous unification theory would consequently distinguish three propositions that nationalist historiographies frequently collapse into one: common historical origin, common historical development, and common political destiny. The first may be true without the second; the second may be true without the third. Populations can share origins, institutions, religions and centuries of political interaction while eventually developing separate national identities and sovereign states. Equally, political separation does not eliminate the possibility of renewed integration at cultural, economic or institutional levels.

The most consequential implication is therefore methodological as much as political: history should explain the range of politically possible relationships without being treated as a substitute for contemporary political legitimacy. A common

past can justify cultural reconciliation, institutional cooperation or voluntary political integration. It cannot, by itself, justify coercive unification. Conversely, a history of political separation cannot by itself establish that future integration is illegitimate. The central question becomes not whether peoples were “really one” or “really separate,” but under what historical and institutional conditions unity, differentiation and voluntary political association have emerged and might legitimately coexist.

Strategic Doctrine

The Centre’s Strategic Doctrine: Preparedness Rather than Activism

The Centre’s strategic doctrine could be expressed in a single principle:

Romania should not attempt to manufacture a historical moment; it should prepare the political, economic, institutional and societal conditions that would enable Romania and the citizens of the Republic of Moldova to respond effectively and democratically if such a moment arises.

This principle establishes a clear distinction between activism and preparedness. Activism seeks to accelerate, engineer or manufacture a particular political outcome. Preparedness, by contrast, seeks to ensure that institutions, economies and societies possess the capacity to respond responsibly to a range of possible futures. For a politically and geopolitically sensitive question such as Romanian–Moldovan unification, this distinction is essential for both the credibility and legitimacy of the Centre.

Romania cannot determine the evolution of Moldovan public opinion, the behaviour of Russia, the trajectory of the war in Ukraine, decisions taken by the European Union, the attitudes of other states, the conditions for international recognition, or the precise moment at which a geopolitical window might emerge. Attempting to control these variables would be both unrealistic and potentially counterproductive. They should instead be treated as external variables within the Centre’s scenario models, continuously monitored and incorporated into assessments of changing unification feasibility.

Romania does, however, possess a significant zone of strategic agency. It can influence the quality and connectivity of infrastructure between the two countries; strengthen economic and commercial links; support institutional interoperability; improve education and research cooperation; deepen energy connectivity; strengthen administrative capacity; develop compatible digital systems; improve social-security interoperability; facilitate labour mobility; and increase the effectiveness, transparency and strategic coherence of financial assistance to Moldova.

The Centre should concentrate precisely on this zone of strategic agency. Its purpose would be to identify which actions Romania can undertake today that remain valuable across multiple possible futures, including a future in which political unification never occurs. This is a crucial principle of robust policy design. Investments in infrastructure, energy security, institutional capacity, education, digitalisation, economic development and European integration should generate benefits for Moldova and Romania regardless of whether political union ultimately takes place.

This approach also provides an important ethical firewall. The Centre should not attempt to manufacture public support for unification, manipulate Moldovan political preferences, instrumentalise EU institutions, or present advocacy as neutral research. Instead, it should measure public opinion independently, analyse alternative scenarios transparently, identify risks and constraints, and provide policymakers with evidence concerning the consequences of different choices. The Centre should measure readiness, not manufacture readiness.

The distinction can therefore be expressed as follows:

Activism seeks to create the political moment. Preparedness seeks to ensure that institutions are capable of responding when the political moment—if it ever occurs—is created by legitimate historical and democratic processes.

This doctrine also implies that the Centre should adopt a no-regrets strategy. Romania should prioritise investments and reforms that are economically, socially and strategically beneficial under several possible scenarios. Improved transport connectivity, energy interconnection, digital interoperability, educational cooperation, institutional capacity and economic integration would strengthen the Romania–Moldova relationship irrespective of the eventual constitutional relationship between the two states.

The Centre would consequently operate at the intersection of strategic foresight, state capacity and democratic choice. Its task would be to monitor external developments, identify emerging windows of opportunity or risk, assess Romania’s internal capacity, and determine which investments would increase resilience and optionality. Rather than predicting that unification will occur at a particular date, it would assess whether the conditions necessary for different forms of integration are becoming more or less favourable.

The doctrine can therefore be developed into a broader institutional principle:

Prepare capabilities, preserve options, measure conditions, respect democratic choice.

Under this approach, the Centre would not be an organisation dedicated simply to achieving unification. It would be an institution dedicated to understanding and preparing for the strategic relationship between Romania and Moldova under alternative futures, including deeper European integration, enhanced bilateral integration, continued separate statehood, gradual political convergence, or eventual political union.

The ultimate objective is therefore not to manufacture history but to ensure strategic readiness when history changes. Romania's most consequential contribution may not be to determine whether a political window opens, but to ensure that if such a window does open, the necessary economic, institutional, infrastructural and societal foundations already exist to make a democratic decision implementable, sustainable and beneficial to the citizens concerned.

How Unification Studies Calculate the Costs of State Unification: Lessons for Romania–Moldova

The economic literature on state unification strongly suggests that "the cost of unification" cannot be reduced to a single fiscal figure. A serious assessment distinguishes between the immediate budgetary cost of integration, the longer-term resource transfers required to equalise living standards, the investment needed to close infrastructure and productivity gaps, the cost of institutional restructuring, the macroeconomic effects of transition, and the opportunity costs borne by the richer partner. At the same time, these costs must be assessed against the economic and strategic benefits generated by a larger integrated market, higher productivity, greater investment, labour mobility, improved infrastructure, reduced geopolitical risk, and, potentially, lower security costs.

For Romania and Moldova, this distinction is particularly important. Moldova is substantially poorer and has lower productivity than Romania, but it is also much smaller. Consequently, the absolute fiscal burden of convergence would be considerably smaller than in German reunification, while the proportional burden on the richer partner could nevertheless be significant. The correct question is therefore not simply "How much would Moldova cost Romania?", but rather "What would it cost to bring Moldova to a specified level of Romanian and EU institutional, social, infrastructure and productivity standards, over what period, and what part of that cost would be recovered through additional economic activity and revenues?"

The Fundamental Distinction: Gross Cost Versus Net Cost

The first methodological mistake in unification debates is to confuse expenditure with economic cost.

If Romania were to spend €X billion on Moldovan infrastructure, that €X billion would represent additional public expenditure, but it would not necessarily represent an equivalent permanent economic loss. The spending would create roads, electricity networks, hospitals, schools, digital infrastructure and productive capacity. It would also generate contracts, employment, tax revenues and economic activity.

Consequently, a serious model must distinguish between gross fiscal expenditure and net resource cost.

The basic accounting identity is:

Net fiscal cost = additional expenditure – additional revenues generated by integration.

The revenues could come from higher employment, greater corporate activity, increased consumption, rising wages, property values, investment and productivity. Over time, the tax base of the integrated economy could expand sufficiently to recover part of the initial expenditure.

This distinction is central to the German experience. The enormous sums transferred to eastern Germany should not all be interpreted as an economic "loss". Some represented investment in infrastructure and human capital; others represented social transfers; still others reflected the fiscal equalisation mechanisms of the unified German state.

The German experience therefore demonstrates that headline transfer figures and true economic costs are different concepts.

The German Experience: The Principal Benchmark

German reunification remains the most relevant completed case because it combined political unification with the rapid integration of two economies that had developed under radically different institutional and economic systems.

The scale of the adjustment was enormous. Eastern Germany entered the unified German state with substantially lower productivity, weaker infrastructure, obsolete industrial capacity, different social-security arrangements and a fundamentally different economic system.

Transfers were therefore required not simply to construct new infrastructure but to finance pensions, social protection, public administration, unemployment, enterprise restructuring and regional development. By 1995, net transfers to eastern Germany had reached approximately 5% of West German GDP, while the transfers amounted to roughly 41% of East German GDP. The composition of the transfers was also significant: a large share supported consumption and social expenditure, while another substantial component financed investment.

Long-term estimates of the total fiscal burden vary substantially because researchers use different definitions and time horizons. German sources have calculated very large cumulative transfer volumes extending into the trillions of euros, while emphasising that these figures should not be interpreted as the pure economic cost of reunification because they include transfers that would have existed in some form under alternative institutional arrangements.

The German case therefore gives Romania–Moldova two fundamental lessons.

First, convergence is expensive when it is accelerated.

Second, the fiscal burden persists for much longer than the political act of unification itself.

Unification can take place on one day; fiscal convergence can take decades.

Figure Bonasus-Bonasus



Source: https://bpn.com.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=67&lang=en

The German Wage Lesson

Perhaps the most important German lesson concerns the relationship between wages and productivity.

Rapid monetary and wage integration generated substantial social benefits for eastern Germans, but it also reduced the competitiveness of many eastern enterprises because wages rose much faster than productivity.

For Romania and Moldova, this creates a critical modelling question.

If Moldovan wages, pensions and public-sector salaries were immediately brought to Romanian levels, the social and political benefits would be considerable. But the fiscal cost could be very large, while Moldovan companies could face a sudden loss of competitiveness.

A more sustainable model would therefore involve sequenced convergence.

Productivity would rise first through investment, technology, management improvements, infrastructure and access to European markets. Wages would then rise as productivity increased.

This suggests that a Romania–Moldova model should calculate at least three different pathways: rapid equalisation, gradual convergence, and productivity-led convergence.

The third could generate the lowest long-term fiscal burden because it increases the productive capacity from which future wage and social convergence can be financed.

The Vietnam Experience: Political Unification is not Economic Convergence

Vietnam provides a very different but equally important lesson.

The North and South were politically unified in 1976 after prolonged conflict, but they possessed very different economic institutions, property arrangements and levels of development. Political unification therefore did not automatically generate economic integration.

The subsequent process involved the difficult incorporation of different administrative and economic systems, reconstruction after war, changes in ownership structures and eventually the abandonment of much of the central-

planning model through the Đổi Mới reforms.

The Vietnamese experience demonstrates that political unification can precede economic convergence by decades.

This matters for Romania–Moldova because it suggests that formal constitutional integration should not be treated as the starting point of economic integration.

Ideally, the opposite sequence would occur.

Moldova should first become economically and institutionally compatible with Romania and the EU. Political integration, if eventually chosen, would then occur after much of the underlying economic adjustment had already taken place.

That would substantially reduce the size of the “unification shock”.

Yemen: The Cost of Institutional Incompatibility

Yemen provides the most important warning.

North and South Yemen unified in 1990, but the two states had very different political institutions, economic structures and administrative systems. Their fiscal situations were also weak before unification. IMF analysis noted major fiscal imbalances in both countries, including exceptionally large deficits in South Yemen.

The problem was therefore not simply the cost of merging two economies. It was the difficulty of creating a functioning political and institutional system from two competing structures.

The eventual civil war of 1994 demonstrates an essential point for any unification model: political and institutional failure can impose costs vastly greater than infrastructure expenditure.

A serious Romania–Moldova model must consequently include a risk premium for failed integration.

It is not enough to calculate how much roads, hospitals and pensions would cost. The model must ask what happens if political institutions fail to integrate, if regional identities become destabilised, if Transnistria remains unresolved, or if external actors exploit the transition.

Korea: The Most Useful Hypothetical Comparator

The Korean literature is particularly valuable because researchers have spent decades modelling a hypothetical unification between two economies with an enormous productivity and income gap.

The literature generally uses two approaches.

The first is the German-transfer model, which asks how much of the richer economy’s GDP would need to be transferred to the poorer economy to produce a German-style convergence process.

The second is a development/convergence model, which calculates the investment required to raise the poorer economy to a specified percentage of the richer economy’s income and productivity.

The second methodology is much more appropriate for Moldova.

Instead of asking:

“What would it cost to make Moldova equal to Romania immediately?”

the model should ask:

“What would it cost to bring Moldova to 60%, 70%, 80% and 90% of Romanian productivity and income over 5, 10, 15 and 25 years?”

Korean research also demonstrates the importance of wage policy, investment, exchange-rate arrangements and the speed of convergence. Different assumptions produce radically different cost estimates.

This is exactly why a single headline estimate for Romanian–Moldovan unification would be analytically weak.

What the Romania–Moldova Model Should Measure

A Dynamic Romania–Moldova Convergence and Integration Model

A rigorous assessment of the economic implications of Romanian–Moldovan unification should construct a dynamic convergence model, rather than rely on a one-off estimate of the fiscal cost of incorporating Moldova into Romania. A static fiscal estimate captures only the immediate expenditure required to bring selected public services and incomes closer to Romanian levels. It does not capture the dynamic effects of investment, productivity, migration, institutional reform, infrastructure, enterprise restructuring, capital flows, demographic change or the opportunity cost of public resources. The appropriate objective is therefore to model how the two economies would evolve over time under alternative pathways of integration, and to compare those outcomes with a counterfactual in which Romania and Moldova continue to develop as separate states within the European framework.

Fiscal Equalisation

The first component should be fiscal equalisation. The model should estimate the cost of progressively aligning Moldovan pensions, healthcare, education, social protection, public-sector remuneration and local-government financing with Romanian standards. This should not assume immediate equalisation. Instead, the model should test different convergence speeds, such as five-, ten-, fifteen- and twenty-year adjustment periods. The analysis should distinguish between permanent structural expenditure and temporary transition expenditure, while also considering the possibility that higher Romanian investment and productivity growth could progressively reduce the fiscal gap.

The model should therefore calculate not simply the initial transfer requirement, but the present value of cumulative fiscal transfers over the entire convergence period, taking account of economic growth, inflation, demographic change, employment, tax revenues and productivity.

Infrastructure Convergence

The second component should be infrastructure convergence. The analysis should estimate the investment required to bring Moldova's transport, railways, bridges, electricity networks, gas infrastructure, water and sanitation systems, telecommunications, hospitals, schools, housing and digital infrastructure toward appropriate Romanian and European standards.

The crucial issue is that infrastructure expenditure should not be treated solely as a cost. Infrastructure can generate significant productive returns by reducing transport costs, increasing labour mobility, improving energy security, attracting investment and connecting firms to larger markets. The model should therefore estimate both the capital expenditure and the expected economic return on that expenditure.

Cross-border infrastructure deserves particular attention because the value of a road, railway, electricity interconnector or digital network increases when it becomes part of a larger integrated system. The analysis should therefore incorporate network effects rather than evaluating infrastructure projects individually.

Institutional Integration

The third component should be institutional integration, which is frequently underestimated in conventional cost assessments. Political union would require the integration or restructuring of tax administrations, customs, courts, cadastral systems, social-security databases, electoral institutions, regulatory authorities, local governments, public procurement systems and digital public administration.

Institutional integration would generate both costs and potential long-term savings. During the transition, Romania would incur expenditure on institutional restructuring, staff training, database integration, legal harmonisation, cybersecurity and administrative capacity. Over time, however, integration could reduce duplication, simplify regulation and lower transaction costs.

The model should therefore distinguish between institutional transition costs and long-term administrative efficiency gains.

Enterprise Restructuring and Industrial Adjustment

The fourth component should be enterprise restructuring. A unified market would expose Moldovan enterprises to stronger competition and potentially create significant productivity gains, but the adjustment would not be costless.

More productive enterprises could expand, attract investment and enter Romanian and wider EU supply chains. Less productive firms could be forced to restructure, merge or exit the market. The model must therefore incorporate potential enterprise closures, credit restructuring, unemployment, retraining costs, capital reallocation and environmental liabilities.

This is particularly important because aggregate productivity gains can coexist with significant short-term social costs. The model should therefore distinguish between the long-term efficiency effect and the short-term distributional effect of market integration.

Labour-Market Convergence

The fifth component should be labour-market convergence. This would include the evolution of wages, employment, productivity, labour mobility, professional qualification recognition, unemployment, pension portability and migration.

One of the most important potential effects would be increased movement of Moldovan workers toward higher-wage Romanian labour markets. In the short term, this could produce substantial migration and labour shortages in some sectors of Moldova. In the longer term, however, higher investment and productivity could create incentives for workers to remain in Moldova or return after acquiring skills and capital abroad.

The model should therefore incorporate both migration and return-migration scenarios, as well as the effects of labour mobility on wages, tax revenues, productivity and demographic structure.

Security and Territorial Integration

The sixth component should be security and territorial integration. This is particularly important because the Moldovan case cannot simply be modelled using the German reunification experience. The unresolved Transnistrian conflict, the status of Gagauzia, Moldova's constitutional arrangements and the wider regional security environment introduce a distinct set of risks.

The model should therefore incorporate different territorial and security scenarios, including a scenario in which territorial questions are resolved before political integration, a scenario involving prolonged unresolved territorial status, and adverse regional-security scenarios. These scenarios would affect public expenditure, infrastructure requirements, investment risk, migration, insurance costs and the fiscal burden associated with security.

Security should therefore be treated not only as a defence expenditure variable, but also as a determinant of investment confidence, infrastructure risk and long-term economic stability.

Macroeconomic Adjustment

The seventh component should be macroeconomic adjustment. A dynamic model would need to simulate the interaction between inflation, exchange-rate dynamics, interest rates, public debt, capital flows, the current account, wages, employment and productivity.

This is particularly important because a political union could generate a substantial initial demand shock. Increased public expenditure, investment and transfers could stimulate economic activity but could also create inflationary pressures or external imbalances if productive capacity does not adjust sufficiently rapidly.

The model should therefore examine whether increased investment and productivity could eventually offset these pressures. It should incorporate alternative assumptions concerning productivity growth, capital inflows, labour mobility, fiscal transfers, inflation and external balances.

Rather than assuming a single macroeconomic trajectory, the research should produce a range of scenarios, including a rapid-convergence scenario, a gradual-convergence scenario and a high-productivity scenario.

Opportunity Cost

The eighth component should be opportunity cost. This is essential because Romanian public resources are finite. Every euro allocated to Moldova-related convergence represents a resource that cannot simultaneously be allocated to infrastructure, healthcare, education, defence, regional development or debt reduction elsewhere in Romania.

The model should therefore compare the expected return from Romanian–Moldovan integration with alternative uses of the same resources. This would prevent the analysis from treating all integration expenditure as automatically economically beneficial.

The relevant question becomes:

Does each additional euro invested in Romanian–Moldovan convergence generate a higher social and economic return than the alternative uses of that euro?

This introduces a genuine counterfactual dimension into the analysis.

From a Cost Estimate to a Dynamic Convergence Model

These eight components should not be modelled independently. They are interconnected. Infrastructure investment can increase productivity; productivity growth can increase wages and tax revenues; higher wages can reduce migration; reduced migration can improve Moldova's demographic position; institutional integration can reduce transaction costs; stronger institutions can attract investment; investment can increase productivity; and higher productivity can reduce the long-term fiscal cost of convergence.

The model should therefore be structured as a dynamic system rather than a collection of independent cost estimates. A simplified representation would be:

Fiscal equalisation + infrastructure investment + institutional integration + enterprise restructuring + labour-market convergence + security integration + macroeconomic adjustment – opportunity costs → long-term net economic effect.

More formally, the research should compare two principal trajectories:

- Counterfactual A: Romania and Moldova remain separate states while Moldova continues European integration and economic convergence.
- Integration Scenario B: Romania and Moldova progressively integrate economically, institutionally and eventually politically.

The relevant outcome is then:

Net integration effect = economic and social welfare under integration – economic and social welfare under continued separate development.

This distinction is fundamental. If Moldova would experience strong growth regardless of political union because of EU accession, investment and structural reforms, that growth should not be incorrectly attributed to unification.

Alternative Integration Pathways

The model should also test different speeds and sequences of convergence. A rapid integration pathway might produce faster institutional and economic equalisation but generate greater fiscal and macroeconomic pressure. A gradual pathway could reduce adjustment costs and allow productivity to catch up before full equalisation. An EU-mediated pathway could rely heavily on Moldova's accession process and progressive regulatory convergence before any political decision.

The research should therefore estimate not one cost of unification but a distribution of possible outcomes under alternative assumptions.

This would allow the study to identify the conditions under which:

rapid integration becomes sustainable;

gradual integration produces better long-term outcomes;

fiscal transfers generate sufficient productivity gains to justify their cost;

infrastructure investment produces positive network effects;

labour mobility strengthens rather than weakens convergence;

and institutional integration reduces rather than increases long-term public expenditure.

Implication for the RM-URI

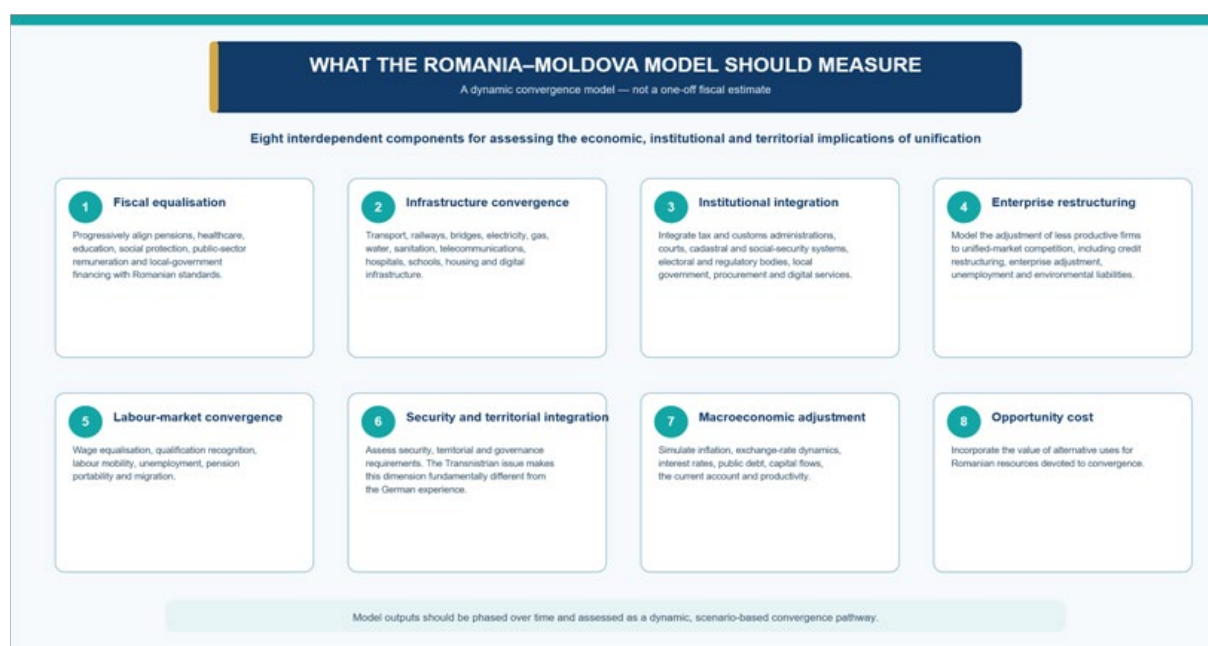
The dynamic convergence model should ultimately feed directly into the Economic and Fiscal Integration component of the Romania–Moldova Unification Readiness Index. Instead of asking simply whether Moldova is economically “ready,” the model would estimate how much convergence is required, how quickly it could realistically occur, what it would cost, what benefits it could generate, and which variables constitute the binding constraints.

The resulting research contribution would therefore move beyond the conventional question of “What would Romanian–Moldovan unification cost?” toward a much more rigorous question:

Under which economic, fiscal, institutional, demographic and geopolitical conditions would the long-term benefits of Romanian–Moldovan integration exceed the costs of convergence, and which sequence and speed of integration would maximise sustainable welfare while minimising fiscal, social and macroeconomic disruption?

That formulation makes the economic component fully consistent with the wider Seven-Dimensional Unification Readiness Framework and provides the basis for a genuinely empirical, scenario-based assessment rather than a politically predetermined estimate.

Figure



The organigramme presents a framework for measuring the economic and institutional consequences of a possible Romania–Moldova unification. Its central idea is that unification should not be reduced to a single fiscal calculation or a simple estimate of how much it would cost. Instead, it should be understood as a dynamic convergence process in which several economic, institutional and social systems interact. The model therefore examines eight interconnected dimensions: fiscal equalisation, infrastructure convergence, institutional integration, enterprise restructuring, labour-market convergence, security and territorial integration, macroeconomic adjustment and opportunity cost. Fiscal equalisation measures the resources required to bring pensions, healthcare, education, social protection and public-sector services closer to Romanian standards. Infrastructure convergence assesses the investment needed in transport, energy, water, telecommunications, healthcare, education and digital networks to create an integrated economic space. Institutional integration considers the costs and efficiency gains associated with harmonising taxation, customs, courts, social security, local government, regulation and public administration.

Enterprise restructuring recognises that firms would face both new opportunities and stronger competition, meaning that some sectors could expand while less productive companies might require restructuring. Labour-market convergence examines changes in wages, employment, migration, qualification recognition, pensions and labour mobility as economic conditions become more similar. Security and territorial integration introduce additional considerations, particularly because Moldova's geopolitical situation and the Transnistrian issue make the process different from conventional economic integration or the German reunification experience. Macroeconomic adjustment captures the broader effects of integration on inflation, interest rates, public debt, capital flows, the current account, exchange-rate dynamics and productivity. Opportunity cost adds another crucial perspective by asking what Romania and Moldova could achieve if the same financial and institutional resources were directed toward alternative policies instead of unification. These eight dimensions should not be calculated independently because developments in one area can generate significant effects in the others. For example, infrastructure investment can increase productivity, stimulate firms, influence employment and wages, expand the tax base and ultimately affect fiscal requirements and public debt. Similarly, institutional integration could improve administrative efficiency and tax collection, while security integration could generate additional public expenditure.

The model should therefore incorporate feedback effects rather than simply adding together eight separate cost estimates. It should also be dynamic, because the costs and benefits of integration would occur at different stages rather than simultaneously. Initial years could involve substantial institutional, infrastructure, fiscal and security expenditure, while later years could bring stronger productivity, employment and fiscal benefits. A scenario-based approach is consequently necessary because the final outcome would depend on the speed of integration, investment levels, productivity growth, restructuring costs and external economic conditions. The model could compare a baseline without unification with gradual convergence, accelerated integration, high-cost and high-productivity scenarios. Its objective would therefore be to estimate not only the immediate fiscal burden but also the timing and scale of adjustment costs and longer-term economic gains. Ultimately, the organigramme proposes evaluating unification as a multi-dimensional and time-dependent transformation from two separate systems into one integrated economic and institutional system.

The Benefit Side Must be Modelled with Equal Sophistication Beyond the Cost of Unification: Modelling the Full Economic Effect

An assessment of the economic consequences of Romanian–Moldovan political unification becomes misleading if it focuses primarily on the fiscal costs of convergence while treating the potential benefits of integration as secondary or qualitative. A credible cost-benefit analysis must examine both sides of the equation over an extended time horizon. The relevant question is therefore not simply "How much would unification cost?", but rather "What would be the net economic effect of alternative forms and speeds of integration?"

Political integration could generate a number of economic benefits that would not necessarily appear in a conventional short-term fiscal calculation. The creation of a larger integrated domestic market could reduce transaction costs, eliminate or simplify administrative barriers, facilitate investment, increase competition, improve resource allocation and generate economies of scale. Firms operating across the two economies could benefit from a common regulatory environment, larger consumer markets and reduced barriers to the movement of goods, services, capital and labour.

A particularly important mechanism would be the productivity effect. Romanian firms could potentially transfer capital, technology, managerial expertise, production methods and organisational capabilities into Moldova. At the same time, Moldovan firms could gain access to a considerably larger market, Romanian supply chains, European capital and institutional networks. Integration could therefore increase productivity not merely by transferring existing resources, but by improving how those resources are combined. The relevant analytical question is consequently whether productivity growth following integration would exceed the productivity trajectory that Moldova could achieve through continued independent development and EU accession.

A second mechanism would be an investment effect. An integrated Romania–Moldova economic space could potentially become more attractive to domestic and foreign investors by combining Moldova's geographic position and labour resources with Romania's larger market, EU membership, infrastructure and institutional framework. The effect could be particularly significant if integration reduced regulatory uncertainty and increased investor confidence. However, the model should not assume that all additional investment represents a net benefit. Some investment might simply

be redirected from Romania rather than newly created, while some could generate substantial public infrastructure or environmental costs. The analysis must therefore distinguish between additional investment, redirected investment and displacement effects.

A third mechanism would be a market-size and economies-of-scale effect. A larger integrated market could allow firms to spread fixed costs over a larger customer base, increase competition, support specialisation and encourage the development of industries that are difficult to sustain in a smaller market. This could be particularly relevant for sectors such as financial services, telecommunications, logistics, energy, advanced manufacturing and digital services. At the same time, the model should examine distributional consequences because economies of scale could benefit larger Romanian firms more rapidly than smaller Moldovan enterprises unless appropriate adjustment mechanisms exist.

Figure Institutul Roman, Cernauti



A fourth mechanism would be a labour-mobility effect. Deeper integration could reduce barriers to employment across the two economies, improve the allocation of labour and allow workers to move toward regions and sectors where productivity and wages are higher. In the short term, this could generate substantial migration from Moldova to Romania, potentially accelerating wage convergence but also creating labour shortages in Moldova. In the longer term, however, higher investment and productivity could create incentives for workers to remain in or return to Moldova. The model should therefore incorporate both the initial migration effect and the longer-term human-capital and productivity effects.

A fifth mechanism would be the network effect. Infrastructure does not generate value independently of the systems to which it is connected. A motorway, railway, electricity interconnector, telecommunications network or digital-government platform can generate significantly greater economic value when it forms part of a larger integrated network. Consequently, infrastructure investment should be evaluated not only according to its direct construction cost but also according to its effect on connectivity, trade flows, labour mobility, energy security and regional development. This is particularly important for the Romania–Moldova case because integration could increase the economic return on existing and planned cross-border infrastructure.

A sixth mechanism would be a fiscal and administrative efficiency effect. Political integration could potentially reduce duplication between institutions, simplify regulatory structures and lower some transaction and administrative costs. However, these savings should not be overstated. The initial phase could actually involve substantial additional administrative expenditure because institutions would need to be harmonised, personnel integrated, databases connected and public services expanded. The model should therefore distinguish between short-term integration costs and long-term institutional efficiencies.

A seventh mechanism would be a security and risk-reduction effect. A more integrated political, economic and security system could reduce some costs associated with strategic vulnerability, fragmented border management, infrastructure protection and geopolitical uncertainty. Greater integration with Romania and the EU could also reduce certain forms of investment risk and improve the resilience of critical infrastructure and energy systems. These effects are difficult to monetise, but they should not simply be excluded from the analysis. Instead, they should be modelled through scenario-based estimates and sensitivity analysis.

At the same time, the benefits of integration must not be assumed automatically. Political unification could generate significant transition costs, including institutional restructuring, legal harmonisation, pension and social-security adjustments, infrastructure investment, public-sector integration, fiscal transfers and temporary disruption to firms and households. There could also be regional distributional effects, with some regions gaining substantially more than others. The economic model therefore needs to identify winners, losers and compensation mechanisms, rather than reporting only an aggregate national figure.

The appropriate analytical framework should consequently distinguish between convergence costs, transition costs and dynamic integration benefits. A static cost calculation would capture only the immediate fiscal burden, whereas a dynamic model would estimate how integration changes investment, productivity, employment, wages, trade, infrastructure utilisation, migration and public finances over time.

The proposed formulation can therefore be strengthened as:

Net economic effect = dynamic integration benefits – convergence costs – transition costs – adjustment costs + fiscal efficiencies + productivity gains + investment gains + market-size gains + network effects + labour-mobility gains + security and risk-reduction benefits.

The model should also compare this outcome against a counterfactual baseline:

Net effect of unification = projected integrated Romania–Moldova economy – projected Romania + Moldova economies under continued separate-state development.

This counterfactual is essential. Without it, the analysis risks attributing to unification economic improvements that would have occurred anyway through Moldova's EU accession, Romanian investment, demographic change, technological development or broader European economic growth.

The analysis should therefore employ several alternative scenarios, including continued separation with EU integration, gradual economic convergence, accelerated institutional integration, gradual political integration and accelerated political unification. Each scenario would have different assumptions concerning investment, productivity, migration, fiscal transfers, infrastructure expenditure, wage convergence, exchange-rate effects and institutional adjustment.

The most important methodological implication is that the "cost of unification" is not a single number. It is a range of possible fiscal and economic outcomes that depends on the speed, sequencing, institutional design and geopolitical environment of integration.

For the proposed Romania–Moldova Unification Readiness Framework, the central economic question should therefore be formulated as:

Under what assumptions, time horizons and integration pathways would the dynamic economic, productivity, investment, market, infrastructure, fiscal and security benefits of Romanian–Moldovan integration outweigh the fiscal, institutional and adjustment costs of convergence?

This approach transforms the economic component from a simple cost estimate into a genuine dynamic cost-benefit and convergence model, allowing the research to identify not only whether unification could be economically sustainable, but also which pathway and speed of integration would produce the most favourable economic outcome.

The Counterfactual is Absolutely Essential

The single most important methodological improvement would be to stop comparing "unification" with "no policy change."

That is not a realistic counterfactual.

A serious study should compare at least four trajectories.

- **Scenario A:** Status Quo. Moldova remains independent and continues its existing development path.
- **Scenario B:** EU Convergence Without Unification. Moldova joins the EU and gradually converges economically and institutionally with Romania.
- **Scenario C:** Deep Integration Without Political Union. Romania and Moldova establish very deep infrastructure, energy, labour-market, financial and institutional integration while remaining separate states.
- **Scenario D:** Unification After Convergence. Moldova first reaches substantial EU and Romanian convergence and subsequently unifies with Romania.
- A fifth scenario can be added:
- **Scenario E:** Rapid Political Unification. Constitutional integration takes place before significant convergence.

The crucial analytical question then becomes:

What is the incremental benefit of political unification once Moldova has already achieved deep economic and institutional integration with Romania and the EU?

This is much more sophisticated than asking for the gross cost of unification.

Figure



Why the Timing of Unification Changes the Cost

This produces a particularly important insight.

Suppose Moldova remains substantially poorer than Romania at the moment of unification. Romania would inherit a large convergence obligation.

But suppose Moldova first spends 10–15 years integrating with the EU, raising productivity, improving institutions, expanding infrastructure and increasing wages.

The same constitutional act could then have a dramatically lower incremental economic cost.

The logic can be represented as:

Low convergence → high unification adjustment

Medium convergence → moderate adjustment

High convergence → relatively low incremental adjustment

This is why the EU–Moldova convergence strategy we discussed earlier is directly relevant to the unification question.

It effectively acts as a pre-unification cost-reduction mechanism.

A Proposed Romania–Moldova Unification Cost Model

I would structure the study around a Romania–Moldova Unification and Convergence Model (RMUCM).

The model should have a 25-year horizon, because the German experience demonstrates that convergence costs do not disappear after the first budget cycle.

The model should produce annual estimates for public expenditure, transfers, investment, productivity, wages, tax revenues, migration, employment, GDP, public debt and infrastructure.

The central equation could be expressed conceptually as:

Net Cost of Unification =

Fiscal Equalisation

+ Infrastructure Gap

+ Institutional Integration

+ Enterprise Restructuring

+ Social Convergence

+ Security and Territorial Costs

+ Macroeconomic Transition Costs

+ Opportunity Costs

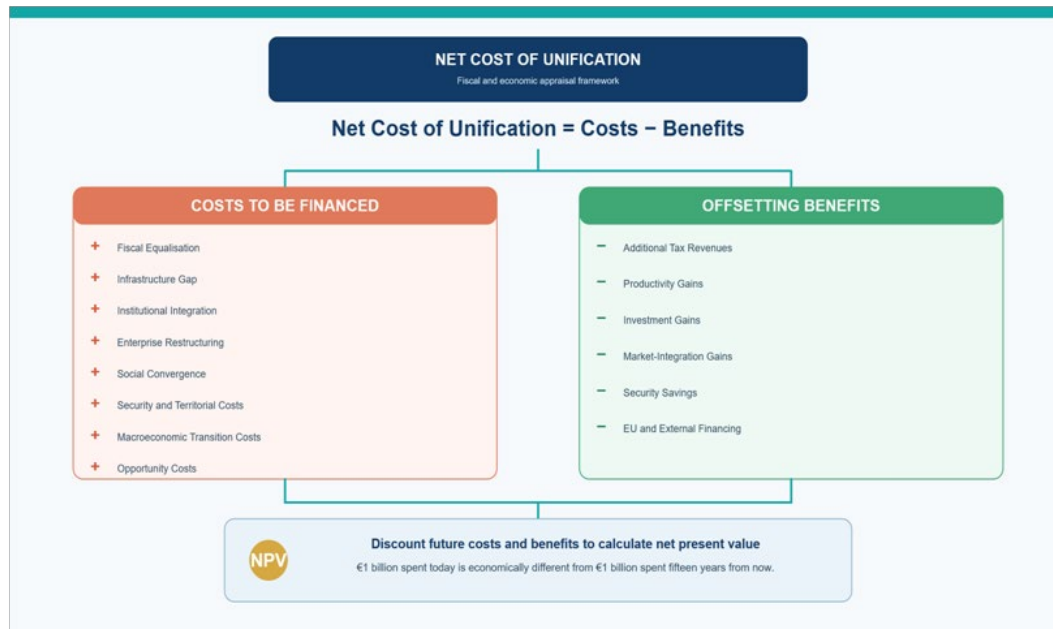
– Additional Tax Revenues

- Productivity Gains
- Investment Gains
- Market-Integration Gains
- Security Savings
- EU and External Financing.

The model should then discount future costs and benefits to calculate their net present value.

That is important because €1 billion spent today is economically different from €1 billion spent fifteen years from now.

Figure



The Net Cost of Unification framework offers a structured method for assessing the fiscal and economic implications of political or territorial unification. It begins from a simple macro principle: unification generates both costs and benefits, and only their discounted balance over time reveals the true burden or gain. The model identifies eight major cost clusters, from fiscal equalisation and infrastructure gaps to institutional integration and macroeconomic transition. These are offset by six benefit channels, including tax base expansion, productivity gains, investment flows, and security savings. By applying NPV discounting, the framework translates future fiscal effects into present value terms, allowing policymakers to compare scenarios on a consistent temporal basis. Its purpose is not prediction but disciplined appraisal: a way to map complexity, quantify trajectories, and expose the strategic trade offs embedded in any unification project. The framework's strength lies in its ability to decompose an otherwise politically charged question into analytically separable components. Each cost category captures a distinct transformation pressure that emerges when two previously divergent systems are merged into one.

By contrast, each benefit channel reflects the long run economic dynamism that unification can unlock once initial frictions are resolved. The model encourages policymakers to treat unification not as a single fiscal event but as a multi decade trajectory with evolving burdens and payoffs. It also highlights that costs and benefits rarely mature at the same pace: institutional and infrastructure costs arrive early, while productivity and market integration gains accumulate slowly. This temporal asymmetry makes discounting essential, preventing short term fiscal shocks from obscuring long term strategic value. The framework is deliberately neutral on political desirability; its purpose is to illuminate consequences, not advocate outcomes. It can be adapted to different territorial contexts by adjusting cost structures, benefit assumptions, and discount rates. In doing so, it becomes a comparative tool for evaluating alternative unification pathways and sequencing strategies. Ultimately, the model provides a disciplined lens through which governments can judge whether unification is fiscally sustainable, economically rational, and strategically coherent. It also serves as a communication device, helping decision makers explain complex fiscal dynamics to stakeholders in clear, non technical terms. By foregrounding both burdens and opportunities, the framework ensures that unification debates remain anchored in economic reality rather than political symbolism. And by insisting on temporal consistency through NPV analysis, it reinforces the principle that long term strategic gains must be weighed against short term fiscal pressures with methodological rigor.

The EU plays a stabilising and enabling role in unification efforts by providing a predictable institutional framework that reduces uncertainty for both governments and markets. It lowers fiscal pressures through cohesion funding, investment instruments, and targeted support for infrastructure and administrative convergence. It amplifies long term economic

gains by embedding the unified territory into the Single Market, unlocking productivity, investment, and trade effects that no national policy could generate alone. It reduces security costs by replacing bilateral defence dilemmas with multilateral guarantees under the EU's security architecture. It strengthens legitimacy by framing unification within a recognised European normative order grounded in democracy, rights, and the rule of law. It offers technical expertise and regulatory templates that accelerate institutional harmonisation and reduce administrative burdens. It enforces macroeconomic discipline, ensuring that unification does not destabilise fiscal fundamentals or investor confidence. It supports phased sequencing of reforms, aligning domestic transitions with multi annual EU budget cycles. It acts as a political mediator, helping manage domestic tensions and facilitating consensus building. Overall, the EU functions as both a cost reducer and benefit multiplier, shifting the entire unification trajectory toward greater fiscal sustainability and strategic coherence.

The "Convergence Threshold" Concept

I would introduce an additional concept that could become particularly valuable in a Romania–Moldova study:

The Unification Readiness Threshold

Rather than asking whether Moldova can afford unification today, the model should identify the conditions under which the economic and institutional costs become manageable.

For example, the model could test what happens if Moldova reaches:

60% of Romanian GDP per capita;
70%;
80%;
90%.

It could simultaneously test institutional, infrastructure, social and productivity thresholds. The result would be a unification cost curve.

The curve would show how the net cost of political integration changes as Moldova converges.

This would allow policymakers to say:

At today's level of convergence, unification would require X.

At 70% convergence, it would require Y.

At 80% convergence, it would require Z.

This is much more informative than a single headline figure.

Linking the Economic Model to the P–I–E–S–G–Y–R Framework

The model Could also integrate the seven dimensions we developed earlier.

- **Political consent (P)** determines whether the fiscal burden has democratic legitimacy and whether political institutions can sustain it.
- **Institutional compatibility (I)** determines how expensive administrative integration will be.
- **Economic convergence (E)** determines the size of the fiscal and productivity gap.
- **Social cohesion (S)** determines the risk of migration pressures, regional inequality and political resistance.
- **Geopolitical permissiveness (G)** determines security expenditure and external-risk premiums.
- **Inclusive identity (Y)** determines whether integration produces a stable political community or intensifies nationality conflict.
- **Resilience (R)** determines the ability to absorb economic and institutional shocks.
- This means that the economic model should not operate independently of the political model.

A €20 billion infrastructure requirement might be manageable under conditions of high political consent, strong institutions and EU financing.

The same €20 billion could become politically destabilising under conditions of low social cohesion, weak institutions and geopolitical confrontation.

Comparative Lessons from Germany, Vietnam, Yemen and Korea

The four comparative cases provide four distinct but complementary lessons for assessing the feasibility and sustainability of Romanian–Moldovan political unification. They should not be treated as direct historical analogies, since each case emerged from a different political, economic, institutional and geopolitical context. Their value lies instead in identifying mechanisms, risks, adjustment costs and sequencing effects that can inform the Romania–Moldova model.

Germany demonstrates the costs and potential benefits of rapid economic equalisation. German reunification illustrates that political integration can generate very large and persistent fiscal transfers from the more prosperous part of the union to the less prosperous part. The experience demonstrates that economic convergence cannot be assumed to occur automatically following political unification and that substantial public investment, infrastructure development,

labour-market adjustment and fiscal redistribution may be required over an extended period. At the same time, Germany demonstrates that sustained transfers and institutional integration can contribute to long-term convergence when supported by strong institutions, investment capacity and a stable political framework. For Romania and Moldova, the German case therefore raises the question of whether the Romanian state and the EU could sustain the scale and duration of transfers necessary to reduce regional disparities without generating excessive fiscal or political pressures.

Vietnam demonstrates that political unification does not automatically produce economic convergence. The Vietnamese experience shows that bringing two politically divided territories into a single state does not by itself eliminate institutional, economic or developmental differences. Economic integration may require substantial restructuring of institutions, markets, property relations, production systems and state capacity. The case is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that the formal creation of a unified state can precede genuine economic integration by many years. For Romania and Moldova, this suggests that the legal act of unification should not be regarded as synonymous with economic convergence. The research must therefore distinguish between formal political integration and substantive economic integration, while assessing the institutional reforms and productivity improvements necessary to make the latter sustainable.

Yemen demonstrates the dangers of institutional incompatibility and incomplete political integration. The Yemeni case is particularly important because political unification occurred without the full integration of competing political, military and institutional structures. Rather than eliminating existing divisions, the creation of a common state left significant disagreements concerning political power, economic resources, security institutions and territorial authority. Subsequent instability illustrates how the costs of unresolved institutional incompatibility can become substantially greater than the initial costs of economic adjustment. For Romania and Moldova, the lesson is that institutional interoperability must be assessed before, and not merely after, any political union. Constitutional arrangements, public administration, security structures, judicial systems, fiscal institutions and regional governance would need to be capable of operating within a common framework.

Korea demonstrates the importance of scenario modelling and alternative pathways of convergence. The Korean case is particularly useful because the economic consequences of hypothetical integration vary enormously according to assumptions concerning the speed and structure of convergence. Different pathways involving rapid or gradual wage adjustment, productivity growth, infrastructure investment, exchange-rate arrangements, labour mobility and fiscal transfers generate radically different estimates of the costs and benefits of integration. Korea therefore demonstrates the danger of presenting a single estimate of the “cost of unification” as if it were an objective and predetermined figure. For Romania and Moldova, the appropriate approach is to construct multiple scenarios ranging from gradual convergence to accelerated integration and to identify the economic, fiscal and institutional consequences associated with each pathway.

Taken together, the four cases suggest that the sequencing of integration may matter more than the legal act of unification itself. Political union is not necessarily the beginning of integration; it can instead represent the culmination of a much longer process of economic, institutional, social and political convergence. Germany demonstrates the fiscal consequences of rapid equalisation; Vietnam demonstrates the persistence of economic divergence after political union; Yemen demonstrates the potentially severe consequences of unresolved institutional incompatibility; and Korea demonstrates the importance of modelling different speeds and pathways before making assumptions about the costs of integration.

For the Romania–Moldova research framework, these lessons lead to a central proposition:

The feasibility and sustainability of Romanian–Moldovan unification would depend less on the formal legal act of creating a common state than on the degree to which economic, fiscal, institutional, social and geopolitical convergence had already been achieved—or could realistically be achieved—before and during the transition.

This implies that the research should not model “unification” as a single event, but rather as a sequence of stages: institutional interoperability → economic convergence → social and political convergence → legal integration → political union → post-unification consolidation.

The comparative cases also imply that there is no single optimal pathway. A rapid-unification scenario could potentially generate substantial political momentum but would carry greater fiscal, administrative and institutional risks. A gradual-integration scenario would allow institutions and economies to converge before political union but could require a longer period of political commitment. An EU-mediated convergence scenario would place European legal, regulatory and financial integration at the centre of the process, potentially reducing some adjustment costs while creating a more complex institutional pathway.

Consequently, the Romania–Moldova model should estimate not one “cost of unification,” but a range of costs, benefits, risks and timelines under alternative integration pathways. This comparative perspective strengthens the proposed Unification Readiness Framework by demonstrating that the central policy question is not simply whether unification

is possible, but which sequence and speed of integration would minimise institutional disruption, fiscal stress and geopolitical risk while maximising long-term convergence and social legitimacy.

Table

Case	Model	Main lesson
Germany	Negotiated/institutional reunification	External geopolitical conditions can make peaceful unification possible.
Korea	Continuing division	Shared identity is insufficient when political systems and security interests remain incompatible.
Yemen	Negotiated unification followed by conflict	Formal unification can fail without genuine institutional and political integration.
Vietnam	Military reunification	Military superiority and state capacity can produce unification, but at enormous human and political cost.
Romania–Moldova	Potential future integration	Cultural proximity exists, but sovereignty, institutions, geopolitics and European integration determine the feasible pathway.

The history of national unification demonstrates that shared cultural or national identity does not automatically lead to political unity; successful unification requires institutions, political leadership, economic capacity and favourable geopolitical conditions. Germany shows how peaceful reunification can occur when political will, economic strength and the international environment converge, while Korea demonstrates that shared history, language and ethnicity may remain insufficient when political systems and security interests are fundamentally incompatible. Yemen provides another warning, showing that formal unification does not necessarily produce stable political integration, whereas Vietnam illustrates how military power and state capacity can achieve reunification, but at enormous human and political cost. Romania's own experience similarly highlights the importance of political organisation, elite coordination and international circumstances in transforming national aspirations into state-building projects.

The Moldova–Romania case is distinctive because both societies are increasingly embedded in a common European framework. Rather than requiring immediate political unification, European integration can progressively reduce the economic, institutional and strategic significance of the border between the two countries. By 2035, Moldova's trajectory will depend primarily on its institutional capacity, economic convergence with Romania and the EU, demographic resilience, security environment and the management or resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. The broader lesson from comparative unification is therefore that identity provides an important foundation, but durable political integration depends on the ability to convert identity, economic resources and political opportunity into effective institutions, legitimacy and sustainable strategic arrangements.

The Central Conclusion for Romania–Moldova

The most sophisticated conclusion is therefore not that Romanian–Moldovan unification would cost a particular number of billions of euros.

It is that the Cost is Endogenous to the Degree of Prior Convergence.

If Romania and Moldova attempted immediate political and economic equalisation, the adjustment would be expensive and potentially disruptive.

If Moldova first achieves deep EU integration, raises productivity, modernises infrastructure, strengthens institutions, increases wages and reduces the economic gap with Romania, then the incremental cost of political unification could fall substantially.

This leads to a fundamentally different strategic proposition:

The economic question is not "Can Romania afford Moldova?" but "How can the EU and Romania reduce the convergence gap before any decision on political unification is taken?"

That is why an EU–Moldova convergence strategy is not merely an alternative to unification. It can be understood as a risk-reduction and cost-reduction strategy for either future.

If Moldova never unifies with Romania, the investment still produces a richer, more resilient EU member state.

If Moldova eventually chooses unification, the same investment reduces the fiscal, institutional and social shock of that decision.

In both cases, the economically rational strategy is to maximise convergence before making the constitutional decision.

The ultimate research product should therefore not be a report titled “The Cost of Romanian–Moldovan Unification.” It should be a 25-year Romania–Moldova Convergence and Unification Impact Assessment, producing a range of outcomes under different assumptions about political consent, EU accession, productivity growth, wage convergence, migration, infrastructure investment, Transnistria, security conditions and the speed of integration.

That would put the Romania–Moldova question on the same analytical footing as the most serious German and Korean unification studies, while accounting for the very different institutional and geopolitical circumstances of Moldova.

Figure



The Views of Foreign Powers

This chapter can seem superfluous since the Romanians have the right of national self-determination. Russia and Ukraine approach the question of Moldova and possible Romanian–Moldovan reunification from fundamentally different strategic positions. For Russia, the central objective is to preserve political and strategic influence over Moldova and to prevent the country from moving irreversibly into the European Union and NATO security space. Moldova represents an important area of influence on Russia’s western Black Sea flank, while Transnistria provides Moscow with an enduring source of political, military and geopolitical leverage. A reunification of Moldova with Romania would therefore represent a major strategic loss for Russia, removing Moldova as a separate geopolitical space and bringing its territory more firmly into the Euro-Atlantic framework. Moscow would consequently be expected to oppose such a development and to emphasise the preservation of Moldova’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, while seeking to retain its influence over the Transnistrian settlement.

Ukraine’s interests are substantially different. Kyiv’s primary concern is the preservation of Moldova’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and political stability, particularly given the proximity of Transnistria to Ukraine and the wider security implications of the war with Russia. Ukraine has a strong interest in the withdrawal of Russian military forces from Transnistria and in preventing the region from becoming a permanent platform for Russian pressure against Ukraine. Moldova’s European integration is therefore broadly compatible with Ukraine’s own strategic interests, as it contributes to a more secure and resilient European neighbourhood.

Ukraine’s position on possible reunification with Romania would therefore be more conditional than Russia’s. Kyiv would have strong reasons to oppose any externally imposed or coercive change, but a peaceful reunification resulting from a clear and democratically expressed choice by the citizens of Moldova would represent a different question. In such circumstances, Ukraine’s principal concern would be whether the process respected international law, avoided destabilisation, resolved the Transnistrian question peacefully, and did not create additional security risks along Ukraine’s western frontier.

The fundamental distinction is therefore clear: Russia seeks to preserve strategic influence, while Ukraine seeks to reduce Russian influence and preserve regional stability. For Romania, this difference is strategically important. A policy of preparedness for possible reunification should therefore be presented not as an instrument of geopolitical confrontation with Russia, but as preparation for a potential democratic choice, grounded in sovereignty, constitutional legality, European integration and regional security.

Italy, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States

Italy, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States share a broad interest in a stable, sovereign and democratic Moldova, but their policies do not amount to an endorsement of reunification with Romania. Their common strategic concern is to prevent further Russian destabilisation in Moldova and the wider Black Sea region, while supporting Moldova's European orientation and democratic resilience.

France places particular emphasis on European sovereignty, Moldova's territorial integrity and the strengthening of European security. Paris has supported Moldova's European integration and has developed a closer bilateral security relationship with Chisinau. A possible reunification would therefore be viewed primarily through the principles of democratic consent, international law and regional stability.

Germany is likely to approach the question through the lens of European integration, institutional reform and economic stability. Berlin has a strong interest in Moldova becoming a resilient democratic state capable of resisting external pressure. It would therefore favour gradual convergence with European institutions rather than actively promoting a particular constitutional outcome.

Italy has a strong interest in stability, economic connectivity and Moldova's European integration. Rome's approach is likely to be pragmatic: supporting Moldova's sovereignty and European path while avoiding unnecessary geopolitical escalation. Italian interests would also favour stronger transport, energy and economic links between Moldova and the EU.

The United Kingdom approaches Moldova principally through the security consequences of Russian activity in Eastern Europe. London has supported Moldova's sovereignty, resilience and ability to resist Russian interference. It would therefore be attentive to any reunification scenario that strengthened European security, while insisting that any political change must be democratic and peaceful.

The United States has a particularly strong interest in preventing Russia from using Moldova and Transnistria as instruments of regional destabilisation. Washington supports Moldova's sovereignty, democratic institutions and European aspirations. A possible reunification with Romania would therefore not necessarily be the central American concern; the decisive questions would be whether it resulted from democratic choice, complied with international law and reduced rather than increased the security risks associated with Russian influence.

Taken together, these five countries would probably form a cautious but potentially receptive European–Atlantic environment for a democratically chosen reunification. None has an established policy of advocating such an outcome. Their likely threshold would be whether reunification was freely chosen, constitutionally legitimate, peaceful, compatible with EU and international law, and stabilising rather than destabilising.

For Romania, this creates an important strategic opportunity. Rather than asking these partners to endorse reunification in advance, Romania could seek support for the conditions that would make any future democratic choice manageable: economic convergence, infrastructure, institutional interoperability, energy security, rule-of-law reform and the peaceful resolution of Transnistria. This approach would allow Romania to prepare for a possible future without asking its allies to prejudge that future.

Table

Actor	Sovereignty & consent	EU integration	Security / Transnistria	Likely position on reunification	Core strategic interest
Moldova	Decisive — any change would require democratic consent	Strongly pro-EU	Peaceful reintegration; Russian forces withdrawn	Open but politically sensitive; dependent on Moldovan democratic choice	Preserve sovereignty while moving towards Europe and strengthening security
Romania	Supports Moldova's sovereignty and democratic choice	Strongly supportive	Strong interest in stability and Transnistrian settlement	Most receptive external actor; reunification is part of legitimate public/political debate	Stronger Romanian/ Moldovan security, economic and cultural integration

Ukraine	Strong defender of internationally recognised borders	Strongly pro-European	Particularly sensitive to Transnistria and Russian military presence	Likely conditional: democratic, peaceful and non-destabilising	Prevent Russian strategic gains and secure Ukraine's western/southwestern flank
Russia	Strongly opposed to loss of Moldova as a separate state	Opposes Moldova's Western integration	Seeks to retain leverage, especially through Transnistria	Opposed; would portray reunification as a threat to Moldovan statehood	Preserve regional influence and prevent further Western/NATO consolidation
EU	Supports Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity	Very Supportive of Moldova's accession	Supports peaceful Transnistrian settlement and withdrawal of Russian forces	Neutral on the outcome, provided it is democratic, lawful and peaceful	Europeanise Moldova, strengthen resilience and regional stability
France	Strong emphasis on sovereignty and international law	Strong supporter of Moldova's European path	Strong interest in European security	No official endorsement; likely to insist on democratic legitimacy and legality	European security and strategic autonomy
Germany	Strong emphasis on sovereignty, rule of law and democratic consent	Strong supporter of EU enlargement	Stability and economic resilience	No official endorsement; likely cautious about geopolitical disruption	Stability, European integration and institutional reform
Italy	Supports Moldova's sovereignty and European integration	Supportive	Interested in Black Sea and European stability	No official endorsement; likely pragmatic and legality-focused	Stability, connectivity and European economic integration
United Kingdom	Strong emphasis on sovereignty and democratic choice	Supports Moldova's Euro-Atlantic orientation	Particularly concerned with Russian destabilisation	No official endorsement; likely supportive only if democratically mandated and stabilising	Contain Russian influence and strengthen European security
United States	Strong emphasis on sovereignty, territorial integrity and democratic choice	Supports Moldova's European aspirations and democratic reforms	Strong interest in removing Russian military influence and preventing destabilisation	No official endorsement; likely conditional on democratic consent, legality and regional stability	Counter Russian influence, strengthen Moldova's resilience and protect European/Black Sea security

The question before us is not merely where a frontier may one day be drawn, but what kind of Europe we wish to build in the lands between the Carpathians and the Black Sea. Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, the great European states and the European Union each look upon this question from a different shore, because each carries different memories, interests and responsibilities.

For Moldova, the first principle must be the freedom of its people to determine their own future. Its European course offers the possibility of stronger institutions, greater prosperity and a more secure place within Europe. Romania, bound to Moldova by language, history and culture, has a particular responsibility to support that course while respecting the sovereignty and democratic choice of its neighbour.

Ukraine has an equally vital interest in the outcome. For a country fighting to preserve its own sovereignty, the principle that borders cannot be changed by force is not an abstraction. A peaceful and democratic decision by Moldova would therefore be fundamentally different from any attempt to alter the political map through coercion.

For the European Union, France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, the essential question is one of order: whether change, if it comes, strengthens rather than weakens the European system. Their interest is therefore likely to rest upon the same foundations—democratic consent, constitutional legality, territorial stability, the rule of law and the avoidance of conflict.

Russia sees the matter differently. It has traditionally regarded Moldova as lying within a sphere of strategic influence and is likely to resist any development that brings Moldova permanently into the Western political and security space. Transnistria remains the most tangible expression of this geopolitical difficulty.

Yet Europe should not confuse caution with paralysis. The future cannot be secured by refusing to contemplate it. If the peoples of Romania and Moldova should freely choose a closer political union, Europe's task would not be to choose for them, but to ensure that their choice could be made peacefully, democratically and within a stable legal order.

The statesman therefore prepares without presuming. He strengthens institutions before they are tested, builds roads before they are needed, creates understanding before disagreement arises, and preserves options before history closes them. The wisest policy for Romania is thus neither to proclaim that union is inevitable nor to behave as though it were impossible, but to build the conditions under which the people themselves may one day decide their future with confidence.

The Strategic Dividing Line

The most useful way to interpret the matrix is not as "for or against reunification." The real dividing lines are:

- **Democratic Consent:** Almost any European position would become substantially more accommodating if reunification were the result of a clear, constitutional and democratic choice by Moldovan citizens.
- **International Law and Sovereignty:** The EU, UK, France, Germany, Italy and Ukraine are likely to attach great importance to the process being lawful and consensual rather than unilateral or coercive.
- **Transnistria:** This is the largest practical complication. The EU currently supports Moldova's territorial integrity and a peaceful settlement, while also insisting on the withdrawal of Russian military personnel and ammunition. (Council of the European Union)
- **Russian Reaction:** Moscow is likely to view reunification as a strategic loss, particularly because Romania is an EU and NATO member. This makes the security dimension inseparable from the constitutional question.
- **EU Accession Changes the Equation:** Moldova's accelerating EU integration is gradually reducing the economic and institutional distance between the two countries. The EU explicitly describes Moldova's accession as merit-based, while supporting gradual integration into the EU internal market. (European External Action Service)

There must be referendum consent in Moldova, not imposition from Bucharest. The core interests is the historical unification of Romanian lands, and expansion of NATO something can only be taken for granted in the context of a voluntary expression of popular will. Analysts note Bucharest recognizes Moldova's sovereignty and none of Romania's main pro-EU parties currently campaign on unification as an active goal, treating it as a longer-term prospect tied to regional security rather than a live policy. After all, the EU was always ready to despatch Peacekeeping Forces to Transnistria, something was examined with an increasing amount of gravity as of 2004, when Putin agreed to pull out the Russian colonialists, overthere. The European Deployment Capability indicates this option remains open.

The Emerging European Consensus Could Therefore be Characterised as:

No external actor should predetermine reunification; but neither should a democratic choice for reunification be prejudged, provided it is peaceful, constitutional, internationally lawful and freely expressed by the people concerned.

That distinction is potentially the most useful foundation for a Romanian strategy of "preparedness without predetermination." Romania can deepen economic, infrastructural, institutional and security integration with Moldova now, without asking European partners to endorse a future constitutional outcome that has not yet been democratically decided.

A few things worth noting: this is a fast-moving and contested topic, actual reunification would require separate referendums in both countries plus resolution of Transnistria and Gagauzia's status, and most Western governments are deliberately avoiding a formal position — treating it as a domestic Romanian-Moldovan matter rather than something to endorse or oppose. Public opinion is skeptical as well given the geopolitical situation.

The political consensus reaffirmed:

Framework of Inquiry of the Center for Unification Readiness

The central research problem is to determine when, why, and under what conditions political unification between Romania and the Republic of Moldova would be feasible, sustainable, and democratically legitimate. Rather than treating unification as a binary question of political preference, this research conceptualises it as a multidimensional process involving political legitimacy, economic and fiscal capacity, institutional compatibility, social and identity convergence, historical relationships, and geopolitical conditions. The framework therefore distinguishes between desire for unification, capacity for unification, institutional feasibility, and geopolitical feasibility.

The first dimension is political readiness. The relevant question is whether there is sufficient, sustained and democratically legitimate political support for unification in both Romania and Moldova. Recent evidence indicates a substantial asymmetry between the two countries. In Romania, an INSCOP survey conducted in April 2026 found that 71.9% of respondents would vote in favour of unification, while 21.4% would vote against it. However, only a small minority expected unification to occur in the immediate future, while 34.7% believed it would never happen. This distinction between support for unification and perceived feasibility of unification is theoretically important. In Moldova, support is more divided and appears strongly associated with identity, political orientation, European integration and Romanian citizenship. Consequently, political readiness cannot be measured through a single referendum question; it requires longitudinal analysis of the intensity, stability and determinants of public support in both countries.

The second dimension is economic and fiscal readiness. The central question is whether Romania and Moldova could absorb the costs of integration while generating sufficient long-term economic benefits to make unification sustainable. Existing economic relations provide a favourable foundation, with Romania already playing a major role in Moldova's trade, investment, infrastructure, energy connectivity and European integration. Moldova's increasing economic and regulatory convergence with the European Union further strengthens the potential for integration. However, economic integration should not be confused with fiscal unification. A genuine assessment must model the costs of pension harmonisation, public-sector salaries, social protection, infrastructure, healthcare, education, public administration, regional development and fiscal transfers alongside potential benefits from increased investment, productivity, labour mobility, market integration and economies of scale. The research should therefore develop alternative fiscal scenarios rather than assume that either costs or benefits will automatically dominate.

The third dimension is institutional and legal readiness. Political union would require the integration of two existing systems of constitutional government, legislation, courts, public administration, taxation, social security, local government and public services. Moldova's EU accession process is already accelerating legislative and institutional convergence with European standards, creating an important foundation for compatibility with Romania. The European Commission reports significant progress in Moldova's accession process, although institutional capacity, rule-of-law reform and administrative effectiveness remain areas requiring continued development. The research should therefore examine which institutional differences are already being reduced through European integration and which would remain significant barriers to political union. Institutional readiness should be measured through a systematic Romania–Moldova Institutional Interoperability Assessment rather than through general assessments of political similarity.

The fourth dimension is social and identity readiness. This dimension requires moving beyond the conventional binary question of whether Moldovans are "Romanian" or "Moldovan". Romanian, Moldovan, European, regional, linguistic and civic identities can coexist and may influence political preferences in different ways. Recent survey evidence indicates significant support for shared Romanian identity among the Romanian population, while attitudes in Moldova are substantially more heterogeneous. The research should therefore distinguish between shared cultural identity, linguistic identity, Romanian citizenship, European identity, territorial identity and support for political union. The key empirical question is not simply whether a shared identity exists, but under what conditions that identity is translated into support for a common state. Trust, perceptions of economic benefits, perceptions of security, historical memory and expectations concerning political equality should be incorporated into the model.

The fifth dimension is historical readiness. The historical relationship between Romania and Bessarabia/Moldova provides both resources for integration and sources of political contestation. The Russian annexation of Bessarabia in 1812, the political transformation of 1917–1918, the union with Romania in 1918, Romanian administration between 1918 and 1940, Soviet incorporation, the development of Soviet Moldovan identity, and the establishment of independent Moldova after 1991 have all contributed to contemporary perceptions of identity and legitimacy. Historical analysis should therefore not be used simply to establish a normative territorial claim. Instead, it should be incorporated into the causal model as an explanation of contemporary identity, political attitudes, institutional memories and perceptions of legitimacy. The historical dimension thus becomes an explanatory variable rather than merely a chronological background chapter.

The sixth dimension is geopolitical and security readiness. This may constitute the most important external constraint on unification. Romania's membership of the European Union and NATO, Moldova's European integration process, Russia's war against Ukraine, the unresolved Transnistrian conflict, the political status of Gagauzia and the wider Black Sea security environment create a complex strategic context. Moldova's increasing European orientation creates opportunities for convergence with Romania, but it also places unification within a broader European and regional security framework. The research should therefore use scenario analysis rather than a single geopolitical forecast. Different scenarios could examine unification under conditions of continued European integration, a major regional security crisis, resolution of

the Transnistrian conflict, prolonged geopolitical confrontation, or deeper EU integration without political union.

The seventh dimension is data and monitoring readiness. This dimension represents the principal methodological innovation of the proposed framework. Existing research measures individual components of the Romanian–Moldovan relationship, including identity, public opinion, economic integration, historical relations and geopolitical developments, but does not adequately combine them into a longitudinal measure of overall unification readiness. The proposed research could therefore construct a Romania–Moldova Unification Readiness Index (RM-URI) composed of seven sub-indices covering political, economic and fiscal, institutional and legal, social and identity, historical, geopolitical and data-monitoring dimensions. The purpose would not be to reduce a complex political process to a single number, but to identify where readiness is increasing, where it is declining, and which dimensions constitute the principal constraints on unification.

The resulting analytical model can be expressed as:

Historical conditions → identity and social cohesion → political demand → economic and fiscal capacity → institutional and legal compatibility → geopolitical feasibility → overall unification readiness.

The model should also recognise that the relationship between these variables is potentially reciprocal. Economic integration can increase social interaction; social interaction can strengthen identity convergence; identity convergence can increase political support; political support can encourage institutional integration; and institutional integration can further reduce the practical costs of eventual political union. Unification readiness should therefore be understood as a dynamic process rather than a static condition.

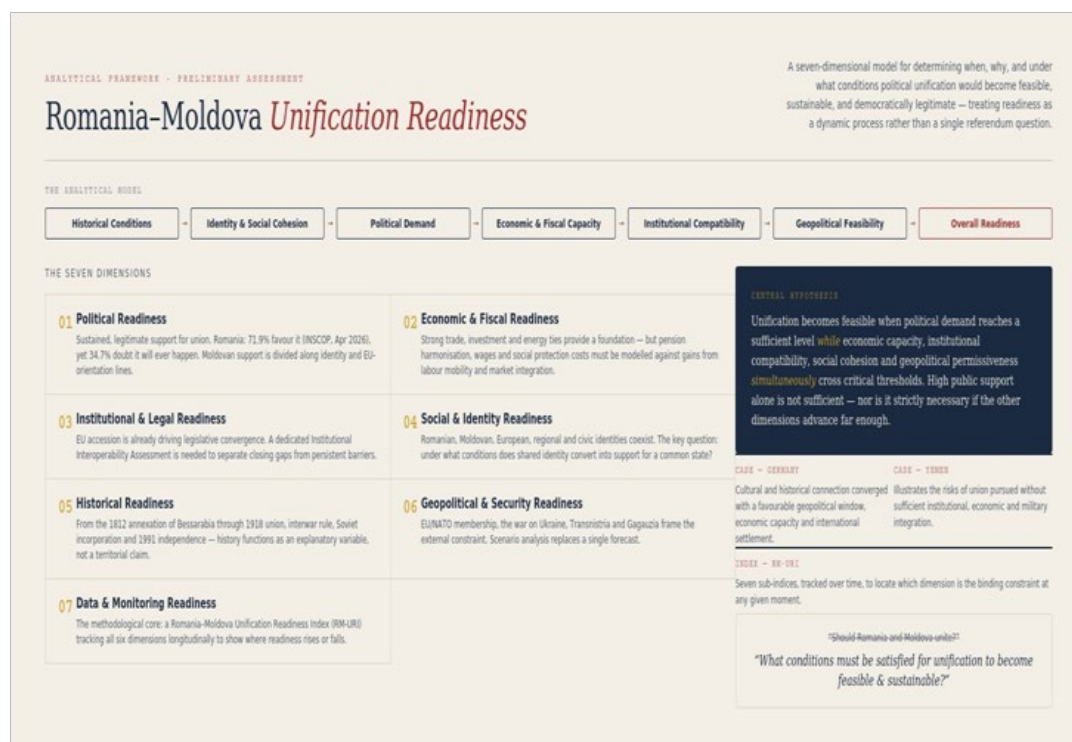
Figure



Source: <https://dininima.md/brands/valentina-vidrascu>

A central hypothesis of the research is consequently that Romanian–Moldovan political unification becomes feasible when political demand reaches a sufficient level while economic and fiscal capacity, institutional compatibility, social cohesion and geopolitical permissiveness simultaneously reach critical thresholds. High public support alone would therefore be insufficient if institutional integration remained weak, fiscal costs were unsustainable, or geopolitical risks were prohibitive. Conversely, increasing economic and institutional integration could gradually make political union more feasible even if immediate public support remained below a majority.

This framework also provides a basis for comparative analysis. German reunification offers a case in which political union followed substantial cultural and historical connection but also depended on a particular geopolitical window, economic capacity and international settlement. Yemeni unification, by contrast, illustrates the risks associated with political union without sufficient institutional, economic, military and political integration. The comparative analysis would therefore identify the conditions under which political unification becomes sustainable rather than merely examining whether unification occurred.



The principal contribution of the research would thus be to move the debate from the normative question “Should Romania and Moldova unite?” toward the empirically testable question “What conditions would have to be satisfied for Romanian–Moldovan political unification to become feasible and sustainable?” The proposed Seven-Dimensional Unification Readiness Framework would provide a mechanism for answering that question by integrating historical evidence, longitudinal public-opinion surveys, institutional analysis, economic and fiscal modelling, and geopolitical scenario analysis. Its ultimate objective would be to determine not only whether unification is desired, but when it becomes feasible, why its feasibility changes over time, and which constraints must be overcome for a politically legitimate and sustainable common state to emerge.

Operationalising the Romania–Moldova Unification Readiness Index

The Centre’s principal function would not be to produce a single Unification Readiness Index (RM-URI) at periodic intervals, but to maintain a continuous analytical and data pipeline that feeds, validates, and updates its seven component indices. The RM-URI should therefore be conceived as a living monitoring system rather than a static academic measure. Each dimension would have its own data sources, update frequency, analytical methodology, and specialist research responsibility, while a central methodological team would ensure consistency and comparability across the seven dimensions.

The data-intake cycle would vary according to the nature of each dimension. Political and social/identity indicators would rely primarily on public-opinion surveys and would normally be updated quarterly, with additional measurements following elections, referenda, major political developments, significant unification-related events, or substantial changes in public discourse. Economic and fiscal indicators would follow the publication schedules of national statistical agencies, central banks, ministries of finance, Eurostat and other authoritative sources, allowing monthly or quarterly updates depending on the indicator. Institutional and legal indicators would be updated in response to measurable developments such as constitutional reforms, legislative changes, administrative reforms, EU accession milestones, changes in the acquis alignment process, and European Commission assessments. Geopolitical and security indicators would require much more frequent monitoring, potentially on a near-real-time basis, particularly concerning developments involving Transnistria, Gagauzia, Ukraine, Russia, the Black Sea and Moldova’s European and security trajectory. Historical indicators would be comparatively stable, but the historical component would be periodically reassessed when new archival evidence, historiographical developments or major reinterpretations alter the empirical understanding of Romanian–Moldovan relations.

The Centre would therefore require a multidisciplinary analytical structure corresponding to the seven dimensions of the framework. The political component would be managed by a political scientist and survey analyst responsible for electoral behaviour, political elites, referendum preferences and democratic legitimacy. The economic and fiscal component would require economists capable of modelling convergence, fiscal transfers, public expenditure, pensions, taxation, productivity and alternative integration scenarios. The institutional and legal component would be responsible for monitoring constitutional compatibility, legislative convergence, public administration, judicial systems and EU accession-related reforms. The social and identity component would combine sociology, political psychology and survey

research to examine identity, language, trust, social cohesion and attitudes towards a common state. The historical component would maintain systematic engagement with Romanian, Moldovan, Russian, Ukrainian, French, Italian and English-language historiography and archival evidence. The geopolitical and security component would monitor regional strategic developments, including Russia, Ukraine, Transnistria, Gagauzia, the EU, NATO and the Black Sea. Finally, a dedicated data, methodology and monitoring team would manage the underlying database, indicator construction, weighting system, statistical validation and aggregation of the RM-URI.

The Centre would operate according to a three-level production rhythm. The first level would be a standing quarterly RM-URI update, in which each of the seven sub-indices is reassessed, validated and incorporated into the overall framework. Each quarterly publication would explain not only the new scores but also the principal changes since the previous assessment, identifying which indicators moved, why they moved, and whether the change is temporary or structural. The second level would be an event-driven rapid assessment mechanism. Major developments should not have to wait for the next quarterly publication. A significant change in the Transnistrian security environment, a Moldovan parliamentary or presidential election, a major constitutional development, a substantial change in Romanian or Moldovan public opinion, or a major EU accession milestone could trigger a rapid RM-URI update. The third level would be an annual strategic assessment, providing a comprehensive review of the methodology, weighting system, survey instruments, indicators, data quality and geopolitical scenarios, together with a reassessment of whether the seven dimensions remain theoretically and empirically appropriate.

The Centre's most important operational function would be its threshold and early-warning mechanism. The RM-URI should not be designed simply to report that, for example, public support for unification has reached 72%. Such a number would provide an incomplete picture of actual feasibility. The more useful analytical output would identify the interaction between dimensions and reveal where the principal constraints lie. A possible quarterly assessment might therefore conclude that political and social readiness have exceeded their defined thresholds, while institutional interoperability and fiscal capacity remain below the level required for sustainable unification. In another scenario, geopolitical conditions might deteriorate sufficiently to prevent otherwise favourable political and economic conditions from translating into overall feasibility. The system would therefore identify binding constraints, emerging opportunities and critical risks, rather than merely producing a headline score.

This approach also requires distinguishing between thresholds and rankings. The objective should not be to rank Romania and Moldova against other countries or to imply that a single numerical score can determine whether political union should occur. Instead, thresholds would represent empirically justified levels of readiness associated with particular conditions of feasibility. The model could therefore distinguish between low, emerging, substantial and critical readiness, while retaining the underlying continuous scores and confidence intervals. This would allow policymakers and researchers to see both the overall trajectory and the specific components driving it.

The Centre would also need a strong quality-control and methodological independence system. Because Romanian–Moldovan unification is politically and geopolitically sensitive, the Centre should explicitly separate measurement from advocacy. Its purpose would be to determine the empirical state of readiness, not to recommend whether Romania and Moldova should unite. Each score should therefore be traceable to publicly documented data, a transparent methodology, reproducible calculations and clearly stated assumptions. Where evidence is uncertain or contested, the Centre should report uncertainty rather than conceal it. Alternative weighting schemes and sensitivity analyses should be published so that researchers can determine whether changes in the overall RM-URI result from genuine changes in underlying conditions or from methodological choices.

The geopolitical dimension would require an additional scenario-based approach because geopolitical feasibility cannot be reduced to a static indicator. The Centre could maintain several alternative scenarios, ranging from continued European integration without political union to accelerated integration followed by a political settlement, prolonged geopolitical confrontation, a major regional security crisis, or a resolution of the Transnistrian question. Each scenario would generate different implications for the seven dimensions. This would allow the Centre to answer not simply whether unification is feasible under current conditions, but how feasibility would change if the surrounding political and security environment changed.

The resulting system would therefore function as a permanent strategic-monitoring capability rather than a one-off academic exercise. Its core output would consist of the RM-URI dashboard, quarterly analytical updates, event-driven alerts, annual strategic assessments, scenario reports and methodological documentation. The dashboard would allow users to distinguish between the overall readiness trajectory and the individual dimensions driving that trajectory.

The underlying principle is that unification readiness is dynamic, multidimensional and path-dependent. Political support can increase without institutional capacity increasing at the same pace; economic integration can deepen while social identities remain divided; institutional convergence can accelerate through EU accession while geopolitical risks simultaneously increase. The Centre's task would therefore be to monitor these processes continuously and determine whether they are converging toward, or diverging from, the conditions required for sustainable political union.

In this sense, the Centre would provide an early-warning and strategic decision-support system for Romania–Moldova integration, rather than an advocacy instrument. Its central analytical question would remain: Which dimensions are approaching the conditions necessary for unification, which remain binding constraints, and how are changes in one dimension affecting the others? This would transform the RM-URI from a static academic index into a continuously updated empirical infrastructure capable of supporting rigorous research, scenario planning and informed public policy.

Contingency Planning at the Institutional Level in Romania

If the objective is to assess institutional readiness for a potential Romania–Moldova political union, contingency planning should examine how Romanian state institutions would respond under different integration scenarios. The purpose is not to assume that unification will occur, but to determine what institutional capabilities, legal arrangements, financial resources and administrative mechanisms would be required if a legitimate political decision were taken.

Constitutional and Legal Contingency Planning

Romania would need a comprehensive assessment of the constitutional and legal implications of political integration, including the legal pathway for incorporating the territory and population of the Republic of Moldova, the representation of Moldovan citizens, the status of existing Moldovan legislation, and the establishment of transitional legal arrangements. Particular attention would need to be given to constitutional amendments, citizenship, electoral rights, parliamentary representation, property rights, contracts, judicial jurisdiction and the gradual harmonisation of legislation. The Romanian Parliament, Constitutional Court, Ministry of Justice, Legislative Council and Presidential Administration would constitute the principal institutional actors.

Public Administration and Governance Planning

Administrative integration would require a detailed assessment of the compatibility of Romanian and Moldovan systems of central and local government. Contingency planning would need to address the integration of ministries and public agencies, territorial-administrative organisation, public-sector employment, administrative records, digital government systems, public procurement and continuity of essential public services. The objective would be to prevent institutional disruption during a transition and ensure that citizens continue to receive public services without interruption. The General Secretariat of the Government and the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration would have central coordinating responsibilities.

Fiscal and Budgetary Planning

Fiscal integration would represent one of the most important institutional challenges. Romania would need multi-year scenarios estimating the costs of integrating Moldova into the Romanian fiscal and social-security system, including pensions, public-sector wages, healthcare, education, infrastructure, regional development and social transfers. The analysis would also need to examine tax harmonisation, public debt, budget deficits, fiscal equalisation and the distribution of revenues and expenditures. The Ministry of Finance, National Bank of Romania, Fiscal Council and Court of Accounts would be central to this process. The objective should be to establish the fiscal conditions under which integration could remain sustainable rather than simply estimating the initial cost of unification.

Social Protection and Welfare Planning

The integration of social protection systems would require detailed contingency planning for pensions, healthcare, unemployment benefits, social assistance, disability benefits, education and child protection. Romanian institutions would need to establish mechanisms for recognising existing entitlements, transferring contribution records, harmonising eligibility criteria and gradually aligning benefit levels. The Ministry of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Health would be particularly important in developing these transition arrangements.

Internal Security and Public Order Planning

The Ministry of Internal Affairs would need to develop contingency arrangements covering policing, organised crime, border management, civil protection, emergency response, migration management and public-order continuity. Particular attention would need to be given to differences between Romanian and Moldovan law-enforcement structures, databases, investigative procedures and institutional cultures. Integration would also require mechanisms for preventing organised crime networks from exploiting institutional transitions. Cybersecurity and disinformation would need to be incorporated into the internal-security planning framework.

Defence and National Security Planning

Defence planning would constitute one of the most sensitive elements of institutional contingency planning. Romanian authorities would need to evaluate the implications for territorial defence, military structures, intelligence cooperation, critical infrastructure, cyber defence and NATO commitments. The Ministry of National Defence, Supreme Council of National Defence, Romanian Intelligence Service, Foreign Intelligence Service and Presidential Administration would have important responsibilities. Planning would need to consider both normal integration and scenarios involving heightened regional tensions or hybrid threats.

Foreign Affairs and Diplomatic Planning

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs would need to develop alternative diplomatic scenarios addressing the European Union,

NATO, Ukraine, Russia, neighbouring states and international organisations. The objective would be to determine how different international responses could affect the feasibility and timing of integration. Contingency planning should therefore distinguish between a favourable geopolitical environment, a contested international environment and a serious regional-security crisis. The diplomatic dimension would also need to consider international law, recognition, treaty obligations and the consequences for Romania's existing international commitments.

Economic Integration Planning

Economic contingency planning would need to examine labour-market integration, business regulation, banking and financial systems, energy markets, transport infrastructure, telecommunications, investment, competition policy and regional development. Particular attention should be given to sectors in which institutional or regulatory differences could create significant transition costs. The Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Energy, Competition Council, National Bank of Romania and relevant regulatory authorities would need to coordinate their assessments.

Education, Culture and Social Cohesion Planning

Education and cultural policy would be essential to the long-term sustainability of institutional integration. Planning would need to address recognition of educational qualifications, curriculum compatibility, university integration, cultural institutions, language policy, historical education and civic integration. The objective should not be forced cultural homogenisation but the development of a common civic framework capable of accommodating different regional and identity experiences.

Digital and Data Integration Planning

A modern integration process would depend heavily on the interoperability of state information systems. Romania would need contingency plans covering population registers, tax databases, health records, land and property registries, business registers, electoral databases, social-security records and government digital platforms. Cybersecurity would be particularly important because the integration of databases could create significant vulnerabilities during a period of institutional transition. The relevant digital-government and telecommunications institutions would therefore need to conduct interoperability and security assessments well in advance.

Institutional Coordination Architecture

Romania could establish a National Commission for Romania–Moldova Institutional Integration as a contingency-planning mechanism rather than as an institution assuming that political union will occur. The Commission could report to the Government and Parliament, with appropriate involvement of the Presidential Administration, and coordinate specialised working groups covering constitutional and legal affairs, public administration, economic and fiscal integration, social policy, security and defence, foreign affairs and European relations, and digital and data systems.

The Commission's purpose would be to maintain institutional readiness without creating a presumption of political outcome. This distinction would be essential for maintaining administrative neutrality and international credibility.

Scenario-Based Contingency Planning

The institutional framework should prepare for several possible trajectories. The first would be deep integration without political unification, in which Romania and Moldova progressively harmonise economic, legal, administrative and infrastructure systems while remaining separate states. The second would be gradual political integration, in which extensive institutional convergence precedes any decision on political union. The third would be accelerated unification, in which a legitimate political decision creates a compressed transition period requiring rapid institutional implementation. The fourth would be crisis-driven integration, in which a regional security crisis produces an urgent need for institutional coordination. The fifth would be continued status quo, in which cooperation continues but political union does not become a realistic option.

The advantage of scenario planning is that Romanian institutions can prepare capabilities that are useful under several possible futures rather than creating a plan dependent upon a single political prediction.

Institutional Readiness as a Core Component of the RM-URI

The contingency-planning framework should ultimately feed directly into the Institutional and Legal Readiness component of the Romania–Moldova Unification Readiness Index (RM-URI). Institutional readiness should be measured through the existence of legal frameworks, administrative interoperability, fiscal capacity, digital compatibility, security coordination, personnel capacity and tested contingency procedures.

The central institutional question therefore becomes:

Can Romanian state institutions absorb, administer, finance, secure and integrate the population and territory of the Republic of Moldova while maintaining constitutional legitimacy, administrative effectiveness, fiscal sustainability, social cohesion and compliance with Romania's European and international obligations?

This reframes contingency planning from a theoretical exercise into a measurable component of the broader Unification Readiness Framework. It also ensures that the research does not assume that political agreement automatically produces

successful integration. Instead, it tests whether the institutional capacity required to implement and sustain such an agreement actually exists.

Figure Haidets ?



Actul Unirii II

The Five Interconnected Constitutional Principles

The Romanian constitutional framework can be reduced to five interconnected principles when considering any hypothetical future union with the Republic of Moldova:

- **Sovereignty — Article 2:** Sovereignty belongs to the Romanian people, exercised through representative institutions and referendum. A fundamental change such as union could therefore not legitimately be imposed by the executive alone; it would require democratic authorization.
- **National and State Identity — Article 1:** Romania is defined as a sovereign, independent, unitary and indivisible state. Any union would therefore have to preserve the constitutional identity and continuity of the Romanian state rather than dismantle it.
- **Territorial Integrity — Article 3:** Romanian territory is constitutionally protected as inalienable. This prevents unilateral territorial concessions and means that any alteration of Romania's territory would require an exceptionally strong constitutional and international-law basis.
- **European/International Commitments — Articles 11 and 148:** Romania's constitutional order operates within its international obligations and EU membership. A future union with Moldova would therefore have to be compatible with Romania's treaties, EU law and the rights and obligations arising from European integration.
- **Constitutional Limits — Article 152:** The Constitution places the national, independent, unitary and indivisible character of the state and the integrity of its territory among the principles that cannot simply be abolished through ordinary constitutional revision.

The Intersection

Taken together, these five principles produce an important distinction:

The Romanian Constitution does not provide an automatic mechanism for union with Moldova, but neither should the possibility of a future democratic union be confused with a unilateral Romanian territorial claim.

The constitutional logic is therefore:

Romanian people decide → Romanian state remains constitutionally continuous → territorial change cannot be unilateral → international/EU obligations must be respected → protected constitutional principles cannot simply be abolished.

For a hypothetical Romania–Moldova union, the decisive additional element would be Moldovan democratic consent and lawful constitutional procedure. Thus, the strongest formulation is:

The constitutional framework preserves Romanian sovereignty and territorial integrity while leaving the possibility of a future, voluntary and democratically authorized political settlement open—provided that such a settlement is compatible with constitutional law, international law and EU obligations.

The Romanian Constitution does not currently establish a constitutional right or automatic mechanism for the reunification of Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Nor does it expressly establish an absolute prohibition on a future peaceful union. Rather, the Constitution strongly protects Romania's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and places those principles among the limits on constitutional revision. Consequently, any eventual union would have to arise from a democratic and voluntary process involving both states, comply with international law and be reconciled with Romania's constitutional order and EU obligations. Romanian cultural and historical continuity does not require immediate territorial

union; Moldovan sovereignty does not require permanent separation from Romania; and EU integration does not necessarily prejudge the ultimate constitutional relationship between the two states. While NATO accession required it to relinquish any territorial demands on Chernobyl, Romania can only be united by remaining a democracy and anchored in the EU and NATO qua its right to self-determination.

Figure Maia Sandu, President of Moldova



Sandu has been the central figure pushing Moldova's EU accession bid, having co-signed the country's EU membership application in 2022 shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine — which ties directly to the "Moldova as development bridge" segment in the priorities map from earlier: she's the political figure most associated with deepening Moldova–Romania–EU integration.

The pledge to bring Moldova into the European family by the year 1930... nay, 2030, rests, as every great national undertaking must, upon foundations that cannot be improvised. It is not enough to proclaim a destiny; one must earn it through the patient labor of institutions.

The first foundation is the reform of the state itself — for no nation enters the company of civilized Europe while its courts, its administration, and its economy remain unworthy of that company. The Commission in Brussels has set forth the measures required, chapter by chapter, and it must be said, to the credit of this small and long-suffering people, that they advance with a swiftness few of their fellow aspirants can match — in energy, in digital governance, in the ordering of trade.

The second foundation, graver than the rest, is the wound of Transnistria — that fragment of the nation held apart by foreign bayonets. No state has ever crossed the threshold of Europe while a foreign garrison yet stood upon its soil, and so this must be resolved not merely by treaty but by the slow raising up of those brethren still estranged, that they might see their prosperity bound to the whole rather than to the occupier.

The third is the purging of corruption from the body of the state — for liberty without justice is a hollow thing, and though the magistracy has begun to be tested and sifted, the old networks of privilege, nurtured under men who served themselves before the nation, are not yet broken.

The fourth is vigilance against the interference of a neighboring power that has, since the birth of this state, never ceased to reach into its affairs — a vigilance that must be constant, for a nation's independence is defended as much in its institutions as on its borders.

And the last foundation is the will of the people themselves, who must be bound to this course not by the passing fortune of one government but by the constitution itself, so that no change of ministry may turn the nation from its chosen path — a path which, the polls suggest, more than half the citizenry already embrace.

Yet let it be said plainly: the appointed year has already bent under the weight of politics — promised once for 1928 in the heat of an election, now left unspoken and indefinite in the party's own program, even as 1930... 2030 remains, in word if not yet in certainty, the horizon toward which the state professes to walk. Ambitious, as all worthy things are; not yet assured, as all worthy things must be earned.

Indeed, if the objective is to prepare Romania and Moldova so that a democratically chosen unification could occur within the EU legal and institutional framework, the distinction is crucial.

Applied Institutional Approach: Promoting Integration Without Manipulating the EU Process

The European Union offers Moldova not a shortcut to any political destination, but a disciplined road towards the standards of a modern European state. Moldova is a candidate for membership, and accession negotiations were formally opened in June 2024. In June 2026, negotiations advanced to the Fundamentals cluster, embracing democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights, public administration and economic criteria; in July, negotiations extended to External Relations, including foreign, security and defence policy. These steps are significant because they place Moldova upon a clear institutional road towards Europe.

For Romania, this creates both an opportunity and a responsibility. Romania may rightly support Moldova's European integration, the strengthening of its institutions and the development of its economy, without confusing this legitimate European policy with a concealed programme of political unification. The two objectives must remain distinct. European integration must serve Moldova's own democratic choice and European future, not be employed as an instrument for achieving an outcome that has not been freely determined.

The European framework is valuable precisely because it establishes rules that stand above temporary political interests. Accession is earned through reform, through the adoption of the *acquis* and through fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria. Romania's proper role is therefore not to seek exceptions for Moldova, but to help it acquire the strength necessary to meet the same standards as every other European state.

If, in the fullness of time, the peoples of Romania and Moldova should freely choose a closer political union, that decision would then have to be considered within this European legal and institutional framework. Until such a day, the soundest Romanian policy is clear: help Moldova become stronger, more prosperous, more democratic and more European. In doing so, Romania advances Moldova's legitimate interests, strengthens Europe's eastern frontier, and prepares the conditions in which history may be left to the free decision of its peoples.

The Applied Objective could Therefore be Formulated as:

To maximise Romania–Moldova institutional interoperability within the EU framework while preserving democratic choice, Moldovan sovereignty, EU legal procedures and the neutrality of public institutions regarding the ultimate question of political unification.

That is a much more defensible research and policy formulation.

What Romania could legitimately do

Romania could promote institutional convergence by supporting Moldova's implementation of EU standards, administrative reform, judicial reform, digitalisation, public-sector capacity, infrastructure connectivity, energy integration and economic convergence. These activities are already compatible with Moldova's European trajectory because the EU accession process itself requires progressive alignment with the *acquis*. (Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood)

Romania could also develop technical interoperability plans. For example, Romanian ministries could study how taxation, social-security systems, digital identity, public administration, health records, professional qualifications and regulatory systems could eventually become interoperable. Such preparation does not itself determine whether political union will occur. It simply reduces the technical barriers should citizens and governments democratically choose deeper integration.

A particularly useful concept for your project would therefore be "integration readiness" rather than "unification preparation."

Where the Ethical Boundary Lies

The boundary would be crossed if institutional resources were used to manufacture consent rather than measure it.

For example, an institution could legitimately conduct neutral surveys asking whether citizens support unification and why. It should not manipulate sampling or question wording to manufacture a desired majority.

It could legitimately explain the economic consequences of different integration scenarios. It should not suppress unfavourable fiscal estimates.

It could legitimately communicate the benefits and costs of EU integration. It should not disguise pro-unification advocacy as neutral EU information.

It could legitimately prepare contingency plans for possible constitutional outcomes. It should not secretly prepare institutions to implement a political decision that has not been democratically taken.

It could legitimately analyse Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Moldovan and European geopolitical perspectives. It should not conduct covert influence operations designed to alter public opinion.

This distinction should become an explicit principle of your proposed Centre:
The Centre measures readiness; it does not manufacture readiness.
The EU framework actually strengthens this approach

The current EU accession architecture gives you a useful institutional model. Moldova's accession process is based on measurable reforms, benchmarks, monitoring and conditionality. The EU explicitly describes accession as merit-based, with progress depending on alignment and implementation of the acquis.

Your Centre could therefore mirror this methodology without attempting to control the political outcome.

The RM-URI could measure whether Romania and Moldova are becoming increasingly interoperable in areas such as rule of law, public administration, economic governance, fiscal systems, social policy, infrastructure, digital systems and security. These are largely areas in which Moldova is already being assessed through the EU accession process. The crucial analytical distinction would then be:

EU integration → institutional convergence → increased interoperability → increased practical feasibility of closer political integration
rather than:

EU integration → covert political engineering → predetermined unification.

A stronger formulation for your research

I would therefore revise the institutional objective of the Centre as follows:

The Centre would not seek to engineer or predetermine Romanian–Moldovan unification. Its purpose would be to monitor and strengthen the conditions under which closer integration could occur democratically and lawfully. Within the EU framework, this would involve supporting institutional interoperability, economic convergence, administrative capacity, legal compatibility, social cohesion and evidence-based policy development. The Centre would maintain a strict analytical distinction between facilitating integration and advocating political union. Its role would be to measure the evolution of the seven dimensions of unification readiness, identify institutional constraints, develop contingency scenarios, and provide transparent evidence to decision-makers and the public. Any eventual decision concerning political unification would remain a matter for the democratic institutions and citizens concerned and would have to comply with Romanian, Moldovan, EU and international law.

This gives your project a much stronger European-policy and governance dimension. It also avoids the methodological problem of building an institution whose conclusion is predetermined.

In fact, I would make this a core principle of the Centre:

"Prepare for possibilities, do not manufacture outcomes."

That principle can become the ethical and institutional firewall separating legitimate strategic foresight from political manipulation.

Regional Competitiveness Index: North-Eastern and South -Eastern Region

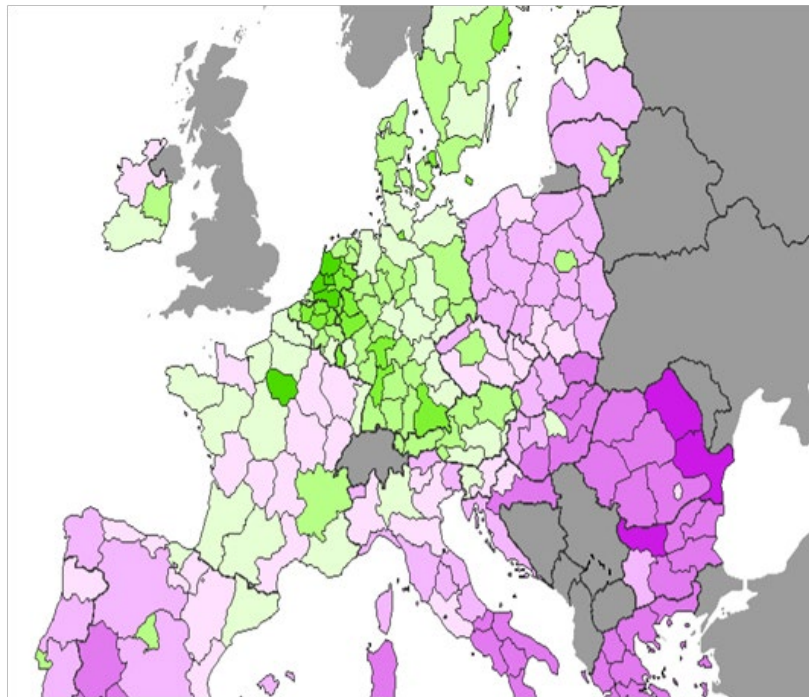
The 2022 EU Regional Competitiveness Index gives RO21 a score of 47.0 and RO22 46.1, both among the ten lowest-performing EU regions, while București–Ilfov scores 93.7.

Strengthening Governance and Growth in RO21 and RO22

Romania must be prepared for a wide range of scenarios at the national, regional, local and societal levels. This requires treating RO21 Nord-Est and RO22 Sud-Est not as peripheral regions, but as strategic regions whose economic, institutional and social resilience is directly connected to Romania's national security, competitiveness and European position. The 2022 Regional Competitiveness Index illustrates the scale of the challenge: RO21 scored 47.0 and RO22 46.1 against an EU-27 benchmark of 100, placing them respectively 233rd and 234th among EU regions. (European Commission)

The objective should not simply be to redistribute income from Bucharest toward poorer regions, but to create the conditions under which RO21 and RO22 generate substantially more productivity, investment, innovation, employment and tax revenue themselves. This requires a transition from a compensatory regional-development model toward a productive convergence model.

Figure



Source: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/assets/regional-competitiveness/index.html

Why are Nord-Est and Sud-Est Romania so Impoverished – 50% of the EU Average ?

The map shows the EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2.0 (RCI 2.0), where greener regions are relatively more competitive and purple regions are less competitive.

In the European Commission's 2022 edition, Nord-Est Romania scored 47.0 and Sud-Est scored 46.1, ranking 233rd and 234th out of 234 EU regions. They were therefore the two lowest-ranked regions in the entire European Union.

That does not mean that these regions are literally "47% as developed as the EU," nor does it represent a percentage of some theoretical maximum. The RCI is a relative index, with the EU regional average normalized to 100. A score of 47 simply indicates that the region performs substantially below the EU regional average across the dimensions captured by the index.

Why are the Scores so Low?

The explanation is not one single problem, but the interaction of several structural weaknesses that have accumulated over decades.

One of the most important factors is education and human capital. Eastern Romania has historically had weaker educational outcomes, lower levels of tertiary-education attainment and a smaller concentration of highly skilled workers than Europe's most competitive regions. This matters because regional competitiveness increasingly depends on the ability to attract and retain people capable of working in high-productivity industries, advanced services, technology and research.

Infrastructure and connectivity are another major constraint. Although Romania has invested heavily in roads and other infrastructure, accessibility remains highly uneven. The largest urban centres have improved considerably, while many smaller cities and rural areas remain relatively distant from major European markets. Rail connectivity, road accessibility and international transport connections therefore continue to influence the competitiveness of the region.

The institutional environment is also important. Competitiveness depends not only on physical infrastructure but on the ability of public institutions to provide reliable services, implement investment projects, administer EU funds and create a predictable environment for businesses and investors. Historically weaker institutional capacity has contributed to the development gap between Romania's leading metropolitan areas and its poorer regions.

Then there is innovation and technological readiness. Nord-Est and Sud-Est have relatively small concentrations of R&D, innovative firms, high-tech employment and knowledge-intensive economic activity. This creates a major difference between these regions and European innovation centres such as Île-de-France, Bavaria, Stockholm or the Dutch Randstad.

The problem becomes particularly significant when these factors interact. A region with weaker universities produces fewer highly skilled workers; fewer highly skilled workers make it harder to attract sophisticated companies; fewer sophisticated companies create less demand for advanced skills; and limited demand encourages young, educated people to move elsewhere. The result can become a negative regional-development feedback loop.

The Bucharest Effect

Romania also has an unusually strong regional polarization.

Bucharest-Ilfov is dramatically more competitive than most of the rest of the country because it concentrates a disproportionate share of Romania's high-value economic activity. The capital contains the largest concentration of multinational headquarters, financial services, professional services, universities, highly skilled workers, technology companies and international connections.

This means that Romania cannot really be understood as a country developing uniformly from west to east. It is closer to a two-speed economy: a highly productive metropolitan core centred on Bucharest, several rapidly developing regional centres, and large peripheral areas where productivity, human capital and connectivity remain considerably weaker.

Romania should therefore not be viewed as a country developing in a simple and uniform movement from west to east. The reality is more complex. Its economy increasingly resembles a two-speed system: a highly productive metropolitan core centred on Bucharest, a number of dynamic regional cities that are developing rapidly, and a much larger peripheral space where productivity, human capital and connectivity remain significantly weaker.

This distinction becomes particularly important when reading an RCI map. Regional indicators can sometimes give the impression of a level of development that is not experienced equally across the territory. A large NUTS-2 region may contain a prosperous and highly competitive city alongside rural communities and smaller towns facing very different economic and social conditions.

Mitika likes himself, but forgets about both urban development and planning principles on his own turf and the wealth and development of the rest of the country.

The regional score is therefore an average, not a portrait of every locality or every individual. Behind the number lies a much more uneven geography of opportunity: areas that are increasingly connected to European markets alongside places where infrastructure, skills and access to economic opportunity remain limited. Understanding this internal variation is essential when assessing Romania's capacity to act as an economic bridge towards Moldova and when identifying where future investment could have the greatest strategic effect.

How is the RCI Actually Constructed?

The RCI 2.0 is built from 68 indicators grouped into 11 pillars. These pillars are organized into three broad dimensions: Basic, Efficiency and Innovation.

The Basic dimension covers the fundamental conditions required for a functioning regional economy, including institutions, macroeconomic stability, infrastructure, health and basic education.

The Efficiency dimension focuses on the ability of a region to use its resources productively. It includes higher education and lifelong learning, labour-market conditions and market size.

The Innovation dimension captures the characteristics that allow more advanced economies to move beyond basic cost advantages. It includes technological readiness, business sophistication and innovation.

The weighting also changes according to the development stage of the region. For a less-developed region, the broad weighting is approximately 30% Basic, 50% Efficiency and 20% Innovation. For regions further along the development path, innovation receives a larger weight.

Conceptually, therefore, a less-developed region can be represented as:

$$RCI \approx 0.30 \times \text{Basic} + 0.50 \times \text{Efficiency} + 0.20 \times \text{Innovation}$$

This is useful for understanding the structure of the index, but it should not be confused with the complete official calculation. The European Commission's methodology includes normalization, construction of the individual pillars and other methodological procedures.

What Would it Take for Nord-Est to Move from 47 Toward 70 or 80?

The interesting question is not simply why the region is currently at 47, but what would actually move the number.

Improving one isolated indicator would have relatively little effect. A sustained increase in competitiveness would require simultaneous improvements in human capital, accessibility, labour-market performance, technological adoption, institutional capacity and business sophistication.

For example, better transport infrastructure could make cities such as Iași, Suceava or Bacău more accessible to investors. Better universities and stronger vocational education could increase the supply of skilled workers. A larger pool of skilled workers could attract higher-value companies. More high-productivity companies could raise wages and generate demand for better services. Increased economic activity could then provide the tax base needed for further infrastructure and public-service improvements.

That is the mechanism through which a region can potentially move from a low-cost peripheral economy toward a higher-productivity regional economy.

Can we Calculate an RCI for Individual Romanian Counties?

Yes, although it would have to be an estimated county-level competitiveness index, rather than an official RCI.

The official RCI operates at the NUTS-2 regional level, while Romanian counties are generally NUTS-3 units. A county-level model could nevertheless reproduce the logic of the RCI by collecting comparable data for GDP per capita, productivity, employment, unemployment, education, broadband access, transport accessibility, health, business density, foreign investment, R&D, patents, technological adoption and institutional performance.

Each variable could then be normalized against an appropriate benchmark, aggregated into the corresponding pillars and weighted according to the region's development stage.

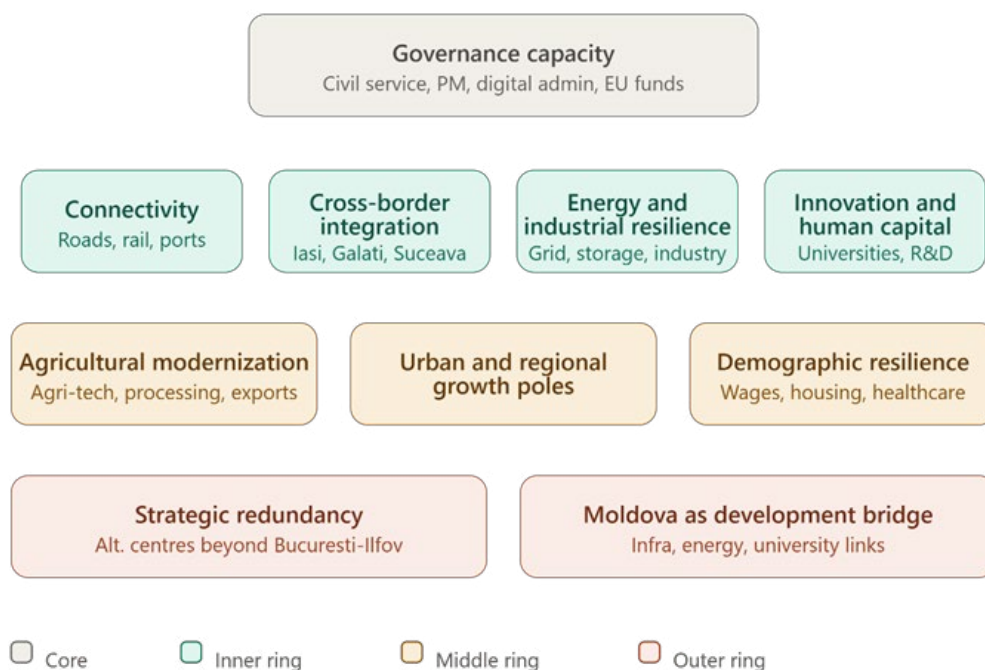
That would produce something potentially much more revealing than the existing map.

For example, Nord-Est as a whole may rank near the bottom of the EU while Iași performs substantially better than the regional average. Conversely, a relatively prosperous-looking region can contain individual counties that perform considerably worse than its headline NUTS-2 score suggests.

So the really interesting analysis would be to take all 41 Romanian counties plus Bucharest, construct a synthetic RCI-style score for each one, and then compare them with the official NUTS-2 results.

That would show where Romania's competitiveness actually comes from, which counties are pulling their regions upward, which ones are dragging them down, and what variables explain the differences.

Figure Asa da



The first priority should be governance capacity. Regional and municipal administrations need stronger professional civil services, project-management capabilities, digital administration, procurement expertise and the capacity to prepare and implement complex EU-funded investments. EU and Romanian funding is valuable only when local institutions can convert it into functioning infrastructure, productive businesses and better public services.

The second priority should be connectivity. RO21 and RO22 need to be connected more effectively to Bucharest, Transylvania, the Black Sea, Ukraine, Moldova and the wider European transport network. Roads, railways, bridges, ports, logistics centres and digital infrastructure should therefore be treated as one integrated economic system rather than as separate infrastructure projects.

The third priority should be cross-border economic integration with Moldova and Ukraine. Iași, Galați, Suceava, Bacău, Constanța and the wider Danube–Black Sea system can become gateways linking Romania’s eastern regions to Moldova, Ukraine and ultimately the EU Single Market. This gives RO21 and RO22 a strategic advantage: their geographic position, currently a constraint, can become an economic asset.

The fourth priority should be energy and industrial resilience. The eastern and southeastern regions should become major locations for renewable energy, grid modernization, storage, energy-intensive industry, logistics and manufacturing. This would simultaneously strengthen national resilience and create new regional growth poles.

The fifth priority should be innovation and human capital. The regional innovation data reinforce the competitiveness problem: RO21 is classified as an emerging innovator, while RO22 is substantially weaker, with the latter’s innovation performance declining in the relevant assessment. (European Commission) The response should therefore concentrate universities, technical education, applied research, business accelerators and technology-transfer capacity around regional economic specializations rather than concentrating innovation almost exclusively in București–Ilfov and Cluj.

The sixth priority should be agricultural modernization and value-added production. RO21 has a large agricultural base, but the strategic objective should be to move from primary production toward food processing, agricultural technology, logistics, storage, irrigation, biotechnology and branded exports. Rural development should therefore become an industrial and technological policy rather than simply a social-support policy.

The seventh priority should be urban and regional growth poles. Iași, Suceava, Bacău, Galați, Constanța and other major centres should be developed as interconnected economic hubs rather than isolated cities competing for the same limited investments. Their surrounding counties should be connected to these poles through transport, vocational education, healthcare, digital infrastructure and industrial supply chains.

The eighth priority should be demographic resilience. Outmigration, ageing and the loss of skilled workers can undermine every other investment. Regional policy should therefore focus on retaining and attracting people through better wages, housing, schools, healthcare, childcare, universities and opportunities for entrepreneurship. The objective should be to make eastern Romania a place where young people can build careers rather than merely a region from which they migrate.

The ninth priority should be strategic redundancy. Romania should deliberately develop alternative centres of economic, administrative, energy, logistics and technological capacity outside București–Ilfov. The extreme competitiveness gap between the capital region and the eastern regions creates not only a development problem but also a national resilience problem. The European Commission has similarly identified large regional differences in labour productivity and GDP per capita, with productivity in Nord-Est substantially below the capital region. (Economy and Finance)

The tenth priority should be Moldova as a development bridge, not merely as a cultural heartland. If Romania wants a strong and resilient relationship with the Republic of Moldova, RO21 in particular should become one of the principal economic interfaces between the two societies. Cross-border infrastructure, universities, energy, healthcare, logistics, trade, tourism and business networks can turn historical and cultural proximity into measurable economic convergence.

Figure Castel Hotyn



Hotin Fortress stands on the banks of the Dniester, at a place where geography and history seem almost inseparable. For centuries, the fortress guarded one of the great routes between Central and Eastern Europe, controlling movement along the river and serving as a military stronghold on the frontier.

Its importance was not simply military. Hotin became a symbol of the contested borderlands around Moldavia and Bessarabia—a place where different kingdoms, empires and peoples met. Moldavian rulers, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Ottoman Empire and later the Russian Empire all understood the strategic value of the fortress.

The Dniester itself amplified this importance. The river was simultaneously a road, a barrier and a frontier. It connected settlements and commercial routes, but it could also divide armies and political territories. Whoever controlled the crossings and strongpoints along the river could influence the movement of people, goods and armies across the region.

This gives Hotin a deeper symbolism. The fortress represents the attempt to hold together a political space against the pressures of geography and competing powers, while the Dniester represents the ambiguity of borders: a river can unite two shores through trade and communication, yet also become a line of separation.

In the context of Romania and Moldova, Hotin therefore carries a particularly evocative historical meaning. It reminds us that the landscape of the region has repeatedly outlived the political borders imposed upon it. The fortress remains fixed; the armies, rulers and borders around it have changed. The Dniester has continued to flow through all of them. That is perhaps its strongest symbolism: history changes the map, but geography remembers.

This Produces a Broader Strategic Concept

The development of RO21 and RO22 should be treated simultaneously as regional policy, national resilience policy, EU convergence policy, Black Sea policy and Romania–Moldova connectivity policy.

The central governance principle should consequently be:

Do not merely transfer resources to the East; transfer capabilities, investment, infrastructure and decision-making capacity so that the East can generate its own growth.

The ultimate objective would be to transform RO21 and RO22 from low-competitiveness peripheral regions into eastern gateways of the Romanian and European economy. That means connecting Bucharest → Iași/Bacău/Suceava → Chișinău, and Bucharest → Galați/Constanța → Danube–Black Sea → Ukraine, into a coherent economic and resilience architecture.

In this sense, strengthening RO21 and RO22 is not simply about correcting a regional inequality visible in the RCI. It is about creating a second engine of Romanian growth in the East, capable of absorbing EU investment, attracting private capital, integrating Moldova and Ukraine into European supply chains, retaining human capital and providing Romania with greater strategic depth.

The Policy Equation Becomes

Better governance → better absorption of EU funds → better infrastructure → higher private investment → higher productivity → higher wages → demographic retention → stronger regional institutions → greater national resilience.

That is the cycle Romania should seek to establish in RO21 and RO22.

If the objective is to strengthen RO21 and RO22 while simultaneously deepening Romania's links with central and southern Moldova, I would frame the geography as a three-corridor development system, rather than as isolated Romanian–Moldovan projects.

RO21–RO22–Moldova: the interconnected growth space

The strategic logic is to connect North-Eastern Romania with central Moldova, and South-Eastern Romania with southern Moldova and the Danube, while creating east–west connections that allow the Moldovan interior to reach Romanian and EU markets.

Table The EU Danubian-Carpatho Region

Romanian region	Moldovan counterpart	Main linkage	Strategic function
Iași–Vaslui	Chișinău–Ungheni	Prut crossings, road, rail, energy, digital	Main central Moldova–EU integration axis
Bacău–Neamț–Suceava	Central and northern Moldova	Road, rail, logistics, universities	Manufacturing, skills, agriculture and supply chains
Galați–Brăila	Cahul–Giurgiuilești–Comrat	Danube, road, rail, port logistics	Southern Moldova’s gateway to the EU and Danube
Constanța	Southern Moldova	Port–Danube–rail–road corridor	Export/import gateway and Black Sea logistics
Vaslui–Galați	Hîncești–Cimișlia–Comrat	North–south regional corridor	Connect central and southern Moldova to Romanian markets
Iași	Ungheni–Chișinău	Rail, road, energy, digital	Principal metropolitan and institutional bridge
Galați	Giurgiuilești	Danube port system	Agricultural exports, logistics and industrial development
Brăila–Galați	Cahul–Giurgiuilești	Danube economic basin	Cross-border industrial and agricultural cluster

The Central Moldova Axis

The Most Important Connection is Arguably Iași–Ungheni–Chișinău

This should evolve from a border-crossing relationship into an integrated economic and institutional corridor. Transport infrastructure should be accompanied by energy interconnection, customs digitalisation, logistics, university cooperation, healthcare networks and business services.

The objective should be to make Iași and Chișinău complementary economic poles, rather than competing regional capitals.

Iași can provide access to EU markets, universities, finance, technology and specialised services, while Chișinău provides a much larger Moldovan labour, consumer and entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The result would be a functional Prut metropolitan/economic space, even though the state border remains fully intact.

Southern Moldova is Different

Southern Moldova requires a different strategy.

The Cahul–Giurgiuilești–Comrat area has a natural connection to Galați–Brăila–Constanța and the Danube. This makes the south particularly suitable for agriculture, food processing, logistics, energy and trade.

The key objective should be to connect southern Moldova not only to Romania but to the Danube–Black Sea economic system.

Giurgiuilești is particularly important because it gives Moldova access to the Danube and therefore to European and Black Sea maritime trade.

A stronger:

Cahul → Giurgiuilești → Galați/Brăila → Danube → Constanța
corridor could create an entirely new economic geography for southern Moldova.
Central Moldova should connect both systems

Central Moldova should not be dependent exclusively on Chișinău.

A Hîncești–Cimișlia–Comrat–Cahul north–south axis could connect the centre of Moldova with the southern Danube corridor, while the Chișinău–Ungheni–Iași axis connects it westward to the EU.

This produces a network rather than a single dependency:

Tara de Sus-Tara de Jos Network

A Chişinău–Cernăuţi–Suceava–Iaşi road corridor would connect four major urban and cultural centres across Moldova, Ukraine and Romania, creating an important cross-border axis between the Republic of Moldova, western Ukraine and northeastern Romania. Depending on the route and border crossings, the complete circuit would cover roughly 350–450 km, although actual driving distances and travel times vary considerably.

Route connections and strategic importance

Chişinău–Cernăuţi forms a northwestern connection between the Moldovan capital and one of western Ukraine's principal cultural and regional centres. Regular international bus services operate between the two cities, demonstrating existing cross-border demand. GAL Trans

- **Chişinău–Suceava** provides a direct connection between Moldova and northeastern Romania. Bus services typically take around six hours, depending heavily on border-crossing conditions. The route is particularly significant because Suceava provides access to Romania's road network and to the wider historical region of Bukovina.
- **Suceava–Iaşi** connects two important Romanian regional centres. The road link is relatively straightforward and provides an internal Romanian connection between Bukovina and Moldavia, with onward access toward the Republic of Moldova.
- **Chişinău–Iaşi** is the most established and strategically important cross-border connection in the network. The corridor is heavily used for passenger and commercial traffic and provides Moldova's principal direct road link to the Romanian and EU transport system. Depending on traffic and border conditions, the journey generally takes around 3–4 hours.

Why the Corridor Matters

Taken together, these routes can be understood not simply as individual bus connections but as a potential regional transport corridor linking Chişinău, Iaşi, Suceava and Cernăuţi.

The corridor has particular significance because it connects:

Chişinău → Iaşi → Suceava → Cernăuţi

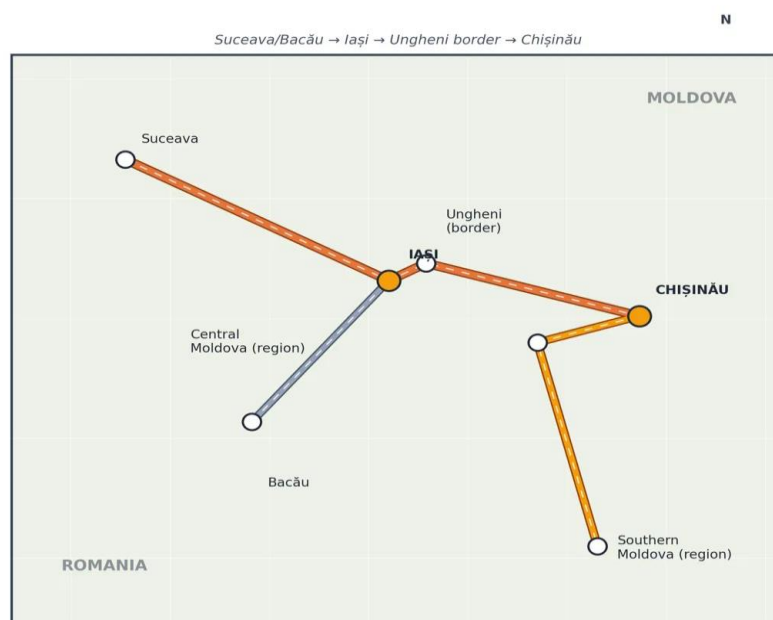
across a historically interconnected region that is today divided between three states and two major geopolitical spaces.

Improved roads, border crossings and transport infrastructure could therefore generate benefits well beyond tourism. The corridor could facilitate trade, labour mobility, tourism, university cooperation, logistics, cultural exchange and Moldova's economic integration with Romania and the wider EU.

In a longer-term perspective, improving this network would contribute to a broader strategic objective: connecting Moldova more efficiently to the European transport system while simultaneously strengthening links between northeastern Romania and western Ukraine.

The key challenge is that the physical distance is relatively modest, but border crossings, road quality and differing transport systems can make the effective travel distance much greater. Investment in roads and, especially, faster and more efficient border infrastructure would therefore have a disproportionate regional impact.

NORTHERN APPROACH



The strategic advantage is that central and southern Moldova would have multiple routes to European markets, rather than being dependent on a single corridor.

The most important missing element: cross-border economic clusters

Infrastructure alone will not transform the region.

Around Iași–Ungheni–Chișinău, the focus should be technology, education, pharmaceuticals, medical services, digital services, light manufacturing and professional services.

Around Bacău–Vaslui–central Moldova, the emphasis could be agro-processing, machinery, textiles, forestry-related industries, logistics and vocational education.

Around Galați–Brăila–Cahul–Giurgiu, the focus should be food processing, grain logistics, port services, manufacturing, renewable energy and Danube commerce.

Around Comrat–Cimișlia–Cahul, agriculture, wine, food processing, tourism and renewable energy could become the principal economic anchors.

This means that RO21 and RO22 should not merely receive infrastructure connecting them to Moldova; they should become participants in shared cross-border production systems.

Governance should follow the geography

The biggest institutional mistake would be to manage these connections exclusively at the national level.

Romania and Moldova should establish cross-border development platforms involving Romanian counties, Moldovan districts/municipalities, chambers of commerce, universities, infrastructure agencies and development agencies.

The Structure Could be

Bucharest–Chișinău: strategic coordination

RO21/RO22–Moldovan regions: implementation

Cities and counties: project delivery

EU: financing, standards and monitoring

This would allow EU funds to support projects that are genuinely regional rather than simply national projects crossing a border.

The Strategic Result

The objective should ultimately be to create a Carpathian–Prut–Danube growth system linking:

RO21 → Central Moldova → Southern Moldova → RO22 → Danube → Black Sea → EU markets.

This would give Moldova multiple European gateways while simultaneously transforming the economic geography of eastern Romania.

The political significance is also important. The relationship would no longer depend primarily on historical symbolism. Roads, railways, electricity, universities, hospitals, companies, supply chains and labour mobility would create a dense network of practical interdependence.

That is probably the strongest long-term model:

Connect RO21 with central Moldova; connect RO22 with southern Moldova; connect central and southern Moldova to each other; and connect the entire system to the Danube, Constanța and the EU Single Market.

In that configuration, Iași–Chișinău becomes the central integration axis, while Galați–Brăila–Giurgiu–Constanța becomes the southern economic and maritime axis. Together they could turn Romania's eastern regions and Moldova from a peripheral space into a European cross-border growth corridor.

A Constanța–Galați–Comrat–Chișinău motorway would create a major east–west corridor across the Black Sea region. It could run from Constanța through Medgidia toward the Brăila–Galați area. From Galați, it would continue toward Giurgiu, Moldova's key Danube connection. It would then cross southern Moldova toward Comrat.

From Comrat, the motorway would continue north toward Chișinău. The route would connect the Port of Constanța directly with Moldova's capital. It would also link Galați and southern Moldova much more closely to EU transport networks. The biggest engineering challenges would be the Danube and Prut crossings. Economically, it could substantially improve accessibility for Galați, Brăila, Tulcea and southern Moldova. For the RCI, the biggest gains would likely come through connectivity, market access, investment and regional productivity.



This is a landmark collage of Iași, Romania, one of the country's key historic and university cities. The top image shows the Palace of Culture, a neo-Gothic landmark now home to several museums. Below it are scenes from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, one of Romania's oldest universities, along with a nearby fortified stone tower. The second row features the snow-covered Metropolitan Cathedral of Moldavia and Bukovina and an autumn view of a tree-lined park, likely Copou Park. Together, the images capture Iași's blend of cultural heritage, religious architecture, academic prestige, and green public spaces.

Joint EU–Member State–Moldova Investment and Cohesion Programme for Bălți and Southern Moldova (Gagauzia)

Strategic Context and Rationale

The Joint EU–Member State–Moldova Investment and Cohesion Programme for Bălți and Southern Moldova (Gagauzia) is conceived as a flagship territorial investment initiative designed to address regional economic disparities, strengthen territorial cohesion, reinforce resilience, and contribute to Moldova's long-term stability and prosperity.

The programme should be understood as a complementary regional investment platform within the broader EU Growth Plan for Moldova, rather than as a parallel funding mechanism. The EU Growth Plan currently provides up to €1.9 billion for Moldova for 2025–2027 and is intended to accelerate economic convergence, improve access to the EU Single Market, and mobilise investment for jobs and growth.

The proposed programme would concentrate a significant and visible share of this wider investment effort in two regions whose economic potential is considerable but whose socioeconomic and political trajectories require particular attention.

The European Union's experience suggests that public attitudes toward political and economic integration are not necessarily fixed, but can evolve significantly when integration is accompanied by sustained investment, institutional attention and tangible improvements in living standards. Regions and countries that initially expressed scepticism toward European integration have, in several cases, developed substantially more positive attitudes when they experienced the concrete benefits of membership, including access to markets, infrastructure investment, regional-development funding, employment opportunities and improved public services. The experience of the United Kingdom is particularly illustrative, although it requires some historical nuance: Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland voted against continued membership of the European Communities in the 1975 referendum, despite the United Kingdom as a whole voting to remain, while their subsequent experience within the European Union demonstrated the importance of European structural funding and regional-development programmes in connecting European integration with local economic development. Ireland offers another important example, having joined the European Communities in 1973 and subsequently experiencing a profound process of economic modernisation in which European membership, structural and cohesion funding and access to the Single Market played important roles.

European integration consequently became increasingly associated with economic opportunity and convergence with Western European living standards, helping establish broad and durable public support for Ireland's place in Europe. Spain provides a further example: following its accession to the European Communities in 1986, substantial European investment contributed to infrastructure development, regional convergence and economic modernisation, while membership also became closely associated with democratic consolidation and Spain's reintegration into Western Europe after dictatorship. The experience of Greenland and the Faroe Islands is different but nevertheless relevant because both territories developed distinctive relationships with the European project rather than simply following Denmark's path, demonstrating that territorial identity, autonomy and perceptions of the distribution of political and economic benefits can profoundly shape attitudes toward integration. These cases do not demonstrate that financial transfers automatically turn Eurosceptic populations into supporters of European integration, nor that investment eliminates political disagreement. Rather, they illustrate a broader principle: political support for integration can strengthen when citizens see that integration delivers tangible benefits and that previously disadvantaged regions are receiving meaningful opportunities for development.

This is particularly relevant to the Romania–Moldova context, where the legitimacy of closer integration would depend not only on constitutional or institutional arrangements but also on whether Moldovan citizens experience a visible improvement in infrastructure, public services, incomes, employment opportunities and economic security. Investment can therefore function not simply as an economic transfer but as a mechanism for building political confidence in the integration process. The European experience suggests that when regional development is sustained over a sufficiently long period, the perception of integration can shift from being primarily about sovereignty and institutional constraints to being associated with modernisation, opportunity and improved living standards. For a potential Romania–Moldova convergence strategy, the implication is that fiscal equalisation and development investment should be viewed as part of the political economy of integration itself, rather than merely as costs appearing on the public balance sheet. The central lesson is that successful integration requires more than legal harmonisation: it requires a credible and visible process of convergence in which citizens and regions can identify themselves as beneficiaries of the new economic and institutional order.

Bălți is Moldova's principal northern industrial and economic centre, with potential in manufacturing, engineering, logistics, education, technology, and business services. Southern Moldova and Gagauzia possess significant agricultural, agro-processing, manufacturing, renewable-energy, logistics, and cross-border trade potential. Both areas nevertheless face structural constraints, including insufficient private investment, infrastructure gaps, demographic decline, outward migration, limited access to finance, and weaker integration into higher-value domestic and European supply chains.

The political context adds an important dimension. The 2024 constitutional referendum on Moldova's European integration objective demonstrated substantial regional variation in attitudes towards the country's European trajectory, including particularly strong opposition in Gagauzia and Bălți. These results should not be interpreted simplistically as opposition to modernization, investment, or improved economic opportunities. Rather, they indicate that European integration is being assessed by many citizens through the lens of economic security, identity, trust in institutions, perceived regional inequalities, and confidence that the benefits of transformation will be distributed fairly.

The programme should therefore avoid a purely political or transactional approach. Investment should not be conditional on electoral preferences, nor should communities be expected to demonstrate political support in exchange for development assistance. The stronger proposition is that all citizens should have an equitable stake in Moldova's economic transformation, including communities that remain skeptical of the country's European trajectory.

This creates a strategic opportunity. A sustained programme of visible, locally relevant investment can demonstrate that European partnership is not an abstract geopolitical project but a practical source of employment, infrastructure, business opportunities, improved public services, skills, and higher living standards.

The programme would consequently serve three mutually reinforcing purposes: economic development, territorial cohesion, and resilience. Its strategic value would extend beyond the immediate project areas by strengthening Moldova's economic base, reducing regional disparities, improving social cohesion, and increasing the resilience of communities that may otherwise remain vulnerable to economic shocks, demographic decline, political polarization, disinformation, and external influence.

Programme Objective

The overall objective is to establish Bălți and Southern Moldova, including Gagauzia, as competitive, connected, resilient and inclusive regional growth poles, generating quality employment, attracting investment, improving infrastructure and public services, strengthening human capital, and increasing participation in national and European value chains.

The programme will pursue a deliberately practical objective: citizens should be able to identify concrete improvements in their communities as a result of the programme.

These improvements should include new or modernized businesses, better roads and utilities, improved energy security, modern vocational facilities, stronger hospitals and public services, increased access to finance, new employment opportunities, improved digital connectivity, and greater opportunities for young people to build their futures locally.

Programme Duration and Geographic Scope

The proposed programme would operate over five years, with the possibility of a further extension following an independent mid-term and final evaluation.

The core geographic focus would comprise the municipality of Bălți and the Southern Development Region, with dedicated programming for the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and appropriate linkages to neighbouring districts and national infrastructure networks.

The programme should nevertheless remain flexible enough to finance projects whose economic benefits extend beyond administrative boundaries, particularly transport, energy, logistics, digital infrastructure, agricultural value chains, and labour-market initiatives.

Indicative Programme Budget

A credible initial programme envelope would be €500 million over five years, structured to leverage substantially greater total investment.

The €500 million should not be understood as €500 million in grants. A blended-finance architecture would combine EU and Member State grants with concessional loans, guarantees, technical assistance, municipal co-financing, Moldovan public resources, and private-sector capital.

An indicative allocation could be structured as follows:

Component	Indicative Allocation
Regional infrastructure and connectivity	€175 million
Private-sector investment and SME finance	€110 million
Energy, green transition and municipal resilience	€75 million
Human capital, skills and youth employment	€50 million
Agriculture, agro-processing and rural value chains	€40 million
Community development and social cohesion	€25 million
Project preparation, technical assistance and programme management	€25 million
Total	€500 million

The €500 million public and catalytic envelope could aim to mobilise an additional €500–750 million in private, commercial and international financial institution investment, producing a potential total investment impact of approximately €1.0–1.25 billion over the programme period.

This leverage target should be treated as an objective rather than a guaranteed result and should be reviewed annually according to market conditions and project maturity.

The scale is also strategically credible in the context of the existing EU investment architecture. The EU has already announced strategic investment initiatives in Moldova worth up to €641 million in 2026, covering areas including energy, digital infrastructure, education and sustainable agriculture.

Integrated Programme Approach

The programme will adopt a single integrated territorial development model rather than treating infrastructure, economic development, human capital and social cohesion as separate policy areas.

The central theory of change is straightforward:

Investment → infrastructure and productive capacity → private-sector growth → employment and income → improved public services and human capital → stronger local resilience and social cohesion → greater confidence in Moldova's future.

Bălți and Southern Moldova should be treated as complementary economic growth poles.

Bălți would be developed as a northern centre for manufacturing, engineering, logistics, technology, vocational education and business services.

Southern Moldova and Gagauzia would build on their comparative advantages in agriculture, food processing, manufacturing, renewable energy, logistics and regional trade.

The programme would deliberately strengthen economic linkages between the two areas, creating a network of regional production, logistics, skills and investment rather than two isolated development programmes.

Strategic Pillar: Inclusive Economic Development, Connectivity and Social Cohesion

The programme will be organized around one integrated strategic pillar combining economic competitiveness, infrastructure and connectivity, human capital, energy resilience, and community development.

Economic transformation will focus on attracting and retaining investment, modernizing existing industries, developing industrial and business parks, strengthening SMEs, improving access to finance, supporting entrepreneurship, and connecting local companies with European supply chains.

Infrastructure investment will provide the physical foundation for growth. Priority will be given to transport links, industrial infrastructure, municipal utilities, water and sanitation, digital connectivity, energy systems and logistics facilities.

Energy investment will have a particularly important economic and resilience dimension. Projects could include renewable generation, energy efficiency, industrial energy systems, municipal heating modernization, and distributed energy solutions for businesses and public institutions.

Human-capital investment will connect education directly to employment. Vocational schools, universities, employers and municipalities should jointly identify future skills requirements and develop training programmes accordingly. Apprenticeships, reskilling, entrepreneurship and return-of-diaspora initiatives should form part of the programme. Agricultural investment will move beyond primary production towards higher-value processing, storage, cold chains, irrigation, logistics, certification and export readiness. The objective is to ensure that more of the value generated by Moldova's agricultural sector remains within local communities.

Community development will ensure that smaller municipalities and communities benefit alongside major urban centres. Competitive community grants, municipal investment facilities and local economic-development funds can finance smaller projects with high visibility and direct citizen impact.

Indicative Outputs

During the five-year implementation period, the programme could target approximately:

€1 billion or more in total public, private and institutional investment mobilized.

150–200 major and medium-scale investment projects supported or prepared.

5,000–8,000 new or sustained quality jobs, depending on the final project portfolio.

10,000–15,000 workers and young people receiving upgraded vocational, technical or entrepreneurial skills.

500–1,000 SMEs and entrepreneurs receiving financing, guarantees, technical assistance or investment support.

Several industrial, logistics and agro-processing investment platforms established or modernized.

Major transport, municipal, digital and energy infrastructure projects completed or substantially upgraded.

Dozens of municipalities and communities receiving targeted development support.

A measurable increase in private investment in both target regions.

These figures should be finalized through a baseline study and detailed project pipeline rather than treated as fixed commitments at programme launch.

Expected Outcomes

- The immediate outcome should be a stronger and more diversified regional economy.
- Businesses should have better infrastructure, improved access to finance, greater access to skilled workers, and stronger connections to domestic and European markets.
- Municipalities should have improved infrastructure and greater capacity to deliver reliable public services.
- Young people should have improved access to vocational training, apprenticeships and locally available employment.
- Farmers and agricultural businesses should be better integrated into processing and export value chains.
- Local communities should experience measurable improvements in energy efficiency, connectivity, public services and economic opportunity.
- The programme should also increase the ability of local authorities and businesses to prepare bankable projects and attract additional international and private investment after the programme itself ends.

Longer-Term Impact

The desired long-term impact is a more balanced, prosperous and resilient Moldova in which regional economic disparities are reduced and all major regions have a credible stake in the country's development trajectory.

For Bălți, the ambition is to strengthen its role as a northern economic and industrial growth pole.

For Southern Moldova and Gagauzia, the ambition is to establish a stronger regional economy based on agriculture, agro-processing, manufacturing, energy and logistics.

At national level, the programme should contribute to increased productivity, higher employment, reduced regional inequality, improved infrastructure and stronger integration into European value chains.

At the societal level, the programme should strengthen confidence through delivery rather than political messaging. Citizens should be able to associate international partnership with tangible improvements in their communities.

This is particularly important in areas where political support for European integration remains weaker. The programme should not attempt to manufacture political support. Instead, it should create the economic and social conditions in which citizens can make informed choices about Moldova's future based on improved opportunity, security and quality of life.

Cohesion and Resilience Dimension

The programme should explicitly incorporate a do-no-harm and equal-access principle. Investment decisions should be based on socioeconomic need, economic viability, development potential and public benefit rather than political affiliation or voting behaviour.

This distinction is strategically important. The programme should avoid creating the perception that European investment is a reward for political loyalty. Its credibility will instead depend on demonstrating that the EU and Member States are willing to invest in communities because they are part of Moldova and because their prosperity contributes to the prosperity and stability of the country as a whole.

At the same time, the programme can legitimately prioritize regions where economic vulnerability and social cohesion challenges are particularly acute.

This combination of non-discrimination and strategic targeting provides a stronger foundation for the programme than a narrowly political rationale.

Flagship Projects

The programme should establish a portfolio of approximately 10–15 flagship investments capable of creating a visible regional transformation.

Figure



Potential flagship investments could include an expanded Bălți industrial and logistics platform; modernization and expansion of vocational and technical education facilities; support for the Bălți regional healthcare infrastructure already being advanced through the wider EU Growth Plan; agro-processing and food-industry investment platforms in Southern Moldova and Gagauzia; renewable-energy and energy-efficiency projects; municipal water and sanitation upgrades; regional logistics infrastructure; digital connectivity; and transport improvements linking production centres with Chisinau, Ukraine, Romania and wider European markets.

The existing EU Growth Plan already envisages a new regional hospital in Bălți, illustrating how the proposed programme could complement rather than duplicate existing EU investments.

The initiative represents a decisive shift in how European partnership is experienced in Moldova — not as a distant geopolitical aspiration but as a tangible architecture of opportunity. It concentrates investment in Bălți and Southern Moldova, including Gagauzia, regions whose economic potential has long been constrained by structural deficits and uneven development. By embedding these territories within the EU Growth Plan's €1.9 billion framework, the programme transforms cohesion into a visible instrument of modernization and trust-building.

Its logic is elegantly circular: investment generates infrastructure and productive capacity; productive capacity stimulates private-sector growth; growth creates employment and income; income strengthens public services and human capital; and these, in turn, reinforce resilience and social cohesion. The outcome is a self-sustaining territorial dynamic in which prosperity becomes the most persuasive argument for European integration.

The five-year envelope of €500 million — designed to mobilize up to €1.25 billion — is not a mere budget but a strategic signal. It demonstrates that the EU and its Member States are prepared to invest inclusively, even in regions where skepticism toward integration persists. The programme's governance model, blending grants, concessional loans, guarantees, and municipal co-financing, ensures transparency and shared ownership.

Flagship projects — industrial and logistics platforms in Bălți, agro-processing clusters in Gagauzia, renewable-energy systems, vocational modernization, and municipal infrastructure — form the visible grammar of transformation. Each project becomes a narrative fragment of Moldova's future, linking local identity to European opportunity.

Ultimately, the programme's strength lies in its refusal to politicize development. It asserts that cohesion is not conditional on loyalty but on belonging — that every community, regardless of political orientation, deserves equal access to prosperity. In doing so, it redefines resilience as both an economic and civic condition: the capacity of citizens to trust that modernization serves them directly.

Financing Architecture

- The programme should use a blended-finance model.
- EU and Member State grants would finance public goods, project preparation, technical assistance, community development and economically catalytic infrastructure.
- International financial institutions could provide concessional loans, guarantees and co-investment for commercially viable infrastructure and private-sector projects.
- Private investors would provide equity and commercial financing for industrial, agricultural, energy, logistics and technology projects.
- Moldovan central and local authorities would provide co-financing where appropriate, particularly for municipal and public infrastructure.
- A dedicated Regional Investment Facility could operate as the programme's financing platform, with separate windows for large infrastructure, SMEs, municipalities and community projects.

Governance and Implementation

The programme should be governed by a joint steering structure involving the European Commission, participating EU Member States, the Government of Moldova, relevant regional and municipal authorities, international financial institutions and independent technical experts.

A professional programme management unit should maintain a single investment pipeline, coordinate project preparation, monitor disbursement and performance, and ensure compatibility with existing EU and international programmes.

Project selection should be based on transparent criteria including economic additionality, employment potential, regional impact, financial sustainability, environmental performance, social inclusion, readiness, and contribution to territorial cohesion.

Independent monitoring and periodic public reporting should be mandatory.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

The programme should establish a baseline during its first six months and measure progress against a defined results framework.

Core indicators should include private investment mobilized, jobs created, SME turnover, exports, number of businesses financed, vocational graduates entering employment, migration and youth-retention indicators, infrastructure completed, energy savings, renewable-energy capacity added, municipal service improvements, and citizen perceptions of economic opportunity.

A mid-term evaluation should determine whether resources are reaching the intended communities and whether investment is generating sufficient additionality.

A final independent evaluation should assess not only financial performance but also the programme's contribution to regional convergence, resilience, employment, social cohesion and long-term investment mobilization.

Strategic Added Value

The principal added value of the programme is its concentration and visibility.

The wider EU Growth Plan provides a national framework for Moldova's economic convergence and European integration. The proposed programme would add a place-based regional mechanism capable of concentrating investment where socioeconomic and cohesion challenges are particularly pronounced.

It would also provide a platform through which several EU Member States could coordinate bilateral financing, technical expertise and private-sector engagement rather than pursuing fragmented projects.

The programme could therefore become a practical model for demonstrating how European investment can support not only accession-related reforms but also regional economic convergence and social cohesion.

The Joint EU–Member State–Moldova Investment and Cohesion Programme should be positioned as a flagship demonstration that European partnership is for all of Moldova and that no region should be left behind.

With an indicative five-year envelope of €500 million and an ambition to mobilize approximately €1–1.25 billion in total investment, the programme would be sufficiently substantial to create visible regional impact while remaining

complementary to Moldova's existing national and EU financing architecture.

Its central proposition is simple: economic opportunity is a foundation for resilience and cohesion.

By combining investment, infrastructure, skills, energy security, private-sector development and community-level improvements, the programme can address some of the structural conditions that contribute to regional inequality, demographic decline and political disengagement.

The programme should not be presented as an instrument for rewarding or changing political preferences. Its strategic strength lies precisely in the opposite proposition: that communities with different political views are entitled to the same opportunities for investment, prosperity and participation in Moldova's future.

If implemented effectively, the programme could become a flagship example of how the European Union and its Member States can support Moldova through visible investment, inclusive growth and territorial cohesion, while strengthening the country's resilience and creating practical conditions for deeper economic and European integration.

The Struggle over Bessarabia: Actors, Worldviews, Historical Lessons and Strategic Scenarios

The struggle over Bessarabia is best understood not as a conventional territorial dispute, but as a long-duration contest over sovereignty, identity, historical legitimacy, strategic depth and the political orientation of the territory between the Prut and the Dniester.

Historic Bessarabia is today divided principally between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The central unresolved territorial issue is Transnistria, but the larger question is much broader: What political and civilizational space should Moldova inhabit?

Three historical moments structure the competing narratives: the Russian annexation of Bessarabia in 1812, the union with Romania in 1918, and the Soviet reoccupation and incorporation in 1940. The independence of Moldova in 1991 created a fourth interpretation: that Moldova could become a sovereign state distinct from both Romania and Russia.

The contemporary struggle can therefore be understood as an interaction between Moldovan statehood, Romanian national identity, Russian geopolitical influence, Transnistrian separatism, Gagauz autonomy, Ukrainian security, European integration and American strategic balancing.

Moldova: Sovereignty as the Strategic Objective

For Chişinău, the fundamental objective is the preservation of the Republic of Moldova as a sovereign European state, combined with the restoration of territorial integrity.

Moldova's position contains an important distinction. Being culturally and linguistically close to Romania does not necessarily imply political union with Romania. The strongest contemporary Moldovan state narrative therefore seeks to reconcile three propositions that historically appeared contradictory: Moldova can be Romanian-speaking, culturally European and closely allied with Romania while nevertheless remaining an independent Moldovan state.

The Moldovan worldview is essentially that of a small state situated between competing great-power systems. Its historical experience suggests that whenever Moldova becomes strategically weak, stronger neighbours acquire the ability to determine its political destiny.

The principal historical lesson is consequently that sovereignty without external anchoring is fragile. The contemporary answer is European integration, institutional resilience, defence cooperation and economic diversification.

Moldova's strategic transformation is therefore profound. EU accession is no longer merely an economic-modernisation project. It is increasingly a mechanism for state consolidation and geopolitical emancipation.

Romania: The National Question of Bessarabia

Romania approaches Bessarabia through a national-historical rather than primarily geopolitical lens.

The Romanian historical narrative begins with the premise that Bessarabia was part of the historical Romanian space before the Russian annexation of 1812. The union of 1918 therefore represents, in Romanian national memory, a restoration of political unity. The Soviet annexation of 1940 is understood as another forced separation.

This produces two possible Romanian strategies. The maximalist interpretation is eventual political reunification. The more pragmatic contemporary interpretation is to make Moldova progressively more Romanian in cultural, economic, educational and infrastructural terms without necessarily pursuing immediate political union.

The second strategy is particularly powerful because it does not require a territorial revisionist policy. Romania can promote convergence through citizenship, education, infrastructure, energy, investment and European integration.

The underlying Romanian historical lesson is that national fragmentation creates vulnerability, while integration with the West provides security. Romania's membership of NATO and the EU fundamentally changes the meaning of the Bessarabian question: Bucharest no longer needs to recover territory militarily or through classical power politics.

The strategic formula is instead integration before reunification, and perhaps integration instead of reunification.

Russia: Strategic Depth and Sphere of Influence

For Moscow, Moldova represents something quite different.

Russia's principal objective is not necessarily the formal annexation of Moldova. A more useful formulation is that Russia seeks to prevent Moldova from becoming an uncontested Western strategic space.

The Russian preference has historically been for a Moldova whose sovereignty exists formally but whose strategic choices remain constrained by Russian influence.

Transnistria is central to this architecture. It gives Moscow a military, political and psychological instrument through which it can influence the Moldovan state without formally controlling Moldova.

The Russian worldview is fundamentally geopolitical and civilizational. Sovereignty is understood less as an absolute principle than as something conditioned by the security interests of major powers and by historical spheres of influence.

The historical lesson Moscow draws from the Soviet collapse is particularly important. From the Russian perspective, 1991 represented an enormous strategic retreat. The subsequent expansion of NATO and the EU reinforced the perception that once Russia loses strategic space, that loss can become permanent.

The Russian strategic conclusion is therefore that influence must be preserved before geopolitical realities become irreversible.

Transnistria is valuable precisely because it keeps the question of Moldova's strategic orientation open.

Transnistria: De Facto Sovereignty

Tiraspol possesses its own strategic logic and should not simply be regarded as an extension of Moscow.

Its fundamental objective is preservation of its de facto political autonomy and security system, combined with avoidance of reintegration under conditions dictated by Chişinău.

The decisive historical experience is the 1992 war. From the Transnistrian perspective, Moldovan nationalism represented an existential threat to the region's Soviet-derived identity and political autonomy.

The resulting worldview is built around three concepts: local sovereignty, Russian security protection and preservation of a distinct post-Soviet identity.

The Moldovan interpretation is almost the mirror image. Chişinău sees Transnistria as a separatist territory sustained by Russian military and political support.

The resulting problem is therefore not simply territorial. It is a conflict between two incompatible historical memories of the same war.

The strategic challenge is that the Transnistrian elite has developed political and economic interests that depend upon the continuation of this exceptional status. Reintegration therefore threatens not only ideology but established structures of power.

Ukraine: Transnistria as a Security Problem

Ukraine's position has changed fundamentally since Russia's full-scale invasion.

Before the war, Kyiv could simultaneously function as neighbour, economic partner and mediator. Since the invasion, Transnistria is increasingly understood through the security of Odesa and southwestern Ukraine.

Ukraine's fundamental objective is to prevent Transnistria from becoming a Russian military platform or strategic corridor threatening Ukrainian territory.

The Ukrainian historical lesson is now particularly stark: apparently frozen territorial conflicts can become instruments of renewed military expansion.

This makes Kyiv increasingly aligned with Chişinău. Both states have an interest in preventing Russia from maintaining military leverage on their territory and in transforming the unresolved conflict from a geopolitical instrument into a process of demilitarisation and reintegration.

Ukraine therefore gives the Transnistrian question a new strategic dimension. It is no longer only a Moldovan-Russian problem. It is also connected directly to the security architecture of the Black Sea and Odesa.

The European Union: Making the Border Less Important

The EU approaches Bessarabia through a fundamentally different theory of international relations.

Brussels does not primarily ask who should possess Bessarabia. It asks how political and economic integration can make territorial rivalry progressively less consequential.

The European worldview is therefore integrationist rather than revisionist.

The strategy is to create European Moldova through law, institutions, infrastructure, energy integration, economic interdependence, border management and eventual membership.

This represents almost the exact opposite of the Russian conception.

Moscow's strategic logic is based upon territorial depth and political control.

The EU's logic is based upon institutional integration and the declining significance of borders.

The European historical lesson, derived from the experience of European wars, is that sovereignty becomes less dangerous when states voluntarily pool elements of it within common institutions.

This gives the EU a potentially transformative strategy: rather than deciding the historical question of whether Bessarabia is Romanian, Moldovan or Russian, it can make that distinction progressively less geopolitically decisive.

The United States: Preventing a Strategic Vacuum

Washington has no equivalent Romanian historical claim and therefore approaches the issue primarily through strategic stability.

The American objective is to prevent Russia from establishing a durable strategic breakthrough in Moldova, particularly one that would threaten Ukraine, Romania or the wider Black Sea region.

The American worldview combines balance-of-power thinking with democratic resilience.

The preferred outcome is therefore a sovereign Moldova capable of resisting coercion, increasingly integrated with Europe, economically resilient and connected to Western security structures.

The United States is consequently less concerned with whether Moldova ultimately becomes closer to Romania culturally than with whether Moscow possesses the ability to determine Moldova's strategic orientation.

Gagauzia: Autonomy between Several Worlds

Gagauzia is one of the most underestimated actors.

It cannot simply be classified as Russian. Nor is it Romanian or straightforwardly Moldovanist.

Gagauzia possesses a distinct Turkic identity combined with Orthodox Christianity and a strong Soviet historical memory. Its political identity has developed partly around the fear that Moldovan national consolidation could ultimately lead to Romanianisation.

Its principal strategic objective is therefore autonomy and protection of collective identity.

The Gagauz historical lesson is that demographic majorities can potentially transform the political character of an autonomous territory.

This creates an important strategic triangle. European integration can be interpreted by Chişinău as state consolidation, by Romania as Europeanisation and by some Gagauz actors as an indirect route toward Romanianisation.

Russia can exploit that anxiety, but Gagauzia also possesses a potential alternative relationship with Türkiye because of linguistic and cultural affinity.

Gagauzia is therefore better understood as a balancing actor rather than simply a Russian proxy.

Türkiye: The Underused Alternative Pole

Türkiye is a secondary actor but potentially an increasingly important one.

Ankara has no direct territorial claim in Bessarabia, but its historical and cultural connections with the Gagauz population provide it with a distinctive form of soft power.

Türkiye can potentially offer Gagauzia something that Russia cannot fully provide: identity protection without Russian geopolitical domination.

This could become strategically significant if Chişinău and Ankara develop a broader relationship involving trade, infrastructure, education and cultural cooperation.

Türkiye could consequently become part of a strategy that reduces the binary choice between Moldova/Europe and Russia.

The Competing Worldviews

The deepest disagreement is not about borders but about the nature of political order.

Actor	Core worldview	Historical assumption	Strategic objective
Moldova	Small-state sovereignty	Great powers determine weak states	European statehood
Romania	National-cultural continuity	1812 and 1940 divided Romanian space	Deep integration with Moldova; union remains possible
Russia	Sphere of influence	Strategic retreat produces insecurity	Preserve leverage over Moldova
Transnistria	De facto sovereignty	1992 demonstrated the need for self-protection	Maintain autonomy and Russian security
Ukraine	Territorial-security realism	Frozen conflicts can become invasion platforms	Remove Russian leverage
EU	Integrationism	Interdependence makes borders less dangerous	Europeanise Moldova
United States	Balance of power	Power vacuums invite revisionism	Prevent Russian strategic expansion
Gagauzia	Autonomy and identity protection	Centralisation threatens collective identity	Preserve autonomy
Türkiye	Cultural/strategic balancing	Cultural connections create influence	Expand influence without territorial revisionism

Moldova occupies a strategic crossroads where multiple actors project competing visions of sovereignty, identity, security, and regional order. Moldova itself views the world through the lens of small-state sovereignty, shaped by the belief that great powers often determine the fate of weaker states. Its central goal is to preserve its independence and strengthen its position as a European state.

Romania approaches Moldova through a worldview of national and cultural continuity. It sees historical events such as the territorial changes of 1812 and 1940 as having divided a broader Romanian space. As a result, Romania seeks ever-deeper integration with Moldova while leaving open the possibility of eventual unification.

Russia, by contrast, views the region through the logic of spheres of influence. From this perspective, strategic retreats create insecurity and diminish great-power status. Russia therefore seeks to maintain leverage over Moldova and prevent the region from becoming fully integrated into Western political and security structures.

Within Moldova, Transnistria advances a worldview of de facto sovereignty. Drawing lessons from the 1992 conflict, it argues that self-protection requires autonomous political authority and external security guarantees. Its objective is to preserve its autonomy and maintain close ties with Russia as a source of security.

Ukraine's perspective is shaped by territorial-security realism. The experience of conflict has reinforced the belief that frozen disputes can become platforms for military coercion or invasion. Consequently, Ukraine seeks to reduce Russian influence in Moldova and eliminate sources of strategic vulnerability along its borders.

The European Union approaches the issue through integrationism. It assumes that economic interdependence, shared institutions, and political cooperation make borders less threatening and conflicts less likely. Its goal is to gradually

Europeanise Moldova through reform, integration, and accession processes.

The United States views the region primarily through balance-of-power considerations. It assumes that power vacuums invite revisionist behavior by competing powers. Accordingly, Washington's objective is to prevent further Russian strategic expansion and support a stable regional balance favorable to the West.

Gagauzia emphasizes autonomy and identity protection. Its worldview rests on the belief that excessive centralization can threaten minority communities and their cultural distinctiveness. Its principal objective is therefore to preserve self-government and protect its unique identity within Moldova.

Türkiye pursues a strategy of cultural and strategic balancing. It assumes that historical, cultural, and linguistic ties can generate influence without requiring territorial claims. Its objective is to expand its regional presence through diplomacy, economic engagement, development assistance, and cultural connections.

Taken together, these perspectives reveal that the Moldova question is not merely a territorial or political dispute. It is a meeting point of competing understandings of security, identity, sovereignty, and regional order. Moldova, the EU, and the United States largely emphasize sovereign choice and integration; Russia emphasizes influence and strategic depth; Romania stresses historical and cultural continuity; Ukraine prioritizes security concerns; while Transnistria and Gagauzia focus on autonomy and self-preservation. The interaction of these worldviews continues to shape the region's political future.

The Historical Lessons

Actor	Historical trauma	Lesson learned	Resulting strategy
Moldova	Imperial and Soviet domination; 1992 war	Sovereignty needs external anchoring	EU integration
Romania	1812, 1940 and Soviet separation	National fragmentation creates vulnerability	Romanian-Moldovan convergence
Russia	1991 collapse	Geopolitical retreat can become irreversible	Preserve strategic influence
Transnistria	1992 conflict	Political majorities can threaten autonomy	Maintain separate institutions
Ukraine	Russian territorial revisionism	Frozen conflicts can become military instruments	Demilitarisation
EU	European wars	Integration can neutralise territorial rivalry	Enlargement and integration
US	Soviet/Russian expansion	Strategic vacuums invite revisionism	Support Moldova and Ukraine
Gagauzia	Fear of Romanianisation	Identity requires institutional guarantees	Autonomy and external relationships
Türkiye	Loss of historical regional influence	Cultural ties can generate strategic influence	Engagement with Gagauzia and Moldova

A central takeaway is that each actor's current strategy is rooted in a specific historical trauma that shapes how it understands security, identity, and political order.

For Moldova, the experience of imperial rule, Soviet domination, and the 1992 conflict reinforced the belief that sovereignty is fragile unless supported by stronger institutions and external partners. This has driven Moldova toward European integration as a means of securing its independence.

Romania's historical memory is shaped by the territorial divisions of 1812 and 1940 and the subsequent separation of Moldovans from the Romanian state. The lesson drawn is that national fragmentation creates vulnerability, leading Romania to pursue closer political, economic, and cultural convergence with Moldova.

Russia views the collapse of the Soviet Union as a major geopolitical trauma. From its perspective, strategic retreats can become permanent losses of influence. Consequently, Russia seeks to preserve strategic leverage in Moldova and maintain a role in the region's security architecture.

Transnistria's worldview is rooted in the 1992 conflict. It concluded that political majorities can threaten minority interests and autonomy. As a result, it prioritizes maintaining separate institutions and preserving its de facto self-governing status.

Ukraine's experience with Russian territorial revisionism has led it to view unresolved conflicts as potential military instruments. The lesson is that frozen conflicts are not truly frozen, which explains Ukraine's emphasis on reducing military threats and limiting Russian influence.

The European Union emerged from the devastation of repeated European wars with the conviction that integration can overcome territorial rivalries. This historical lesson underpins its strategy of enlargement, institutional reform, and the gradual integration of Moldova into the European framework.

For the United States, the history of Soviet and Russian expansion reinforces the belief that strategic vacuums encourage revisionist behavior. This has led Washington to support Moldova and Ukraine as part of a broader effort to maintain regional stability and deter expansionism.

Gagauzia's political outlook is shaped by fears of Romanianisation and cultural marginalization. The lesson drawn is that identity requires institutional protection, leading it to prioritize autonomy and maintain external relationships that reinforce its distinctiveness.

Türkiye's experience of losing influence in territories once connected to the Ottoman sphere has encouraged a different approach. Rather than pursuing territorial revisionism, it seeks to transform cultural, linguistic, and historical ties into diplomatic and strategic influence through engagement with both Gagauzia and Moldova.

Overall, the key pattern is that historical traumas generate distinct lessons, and those lessons shape contemporary strategies. While Moldova, the EU, Romania, and the United States generally respond to past vulnerabilities through integration and partnerships, Russia, Transnistria, and Gagauzia place greater emphasis on influence, autonomy, and security guarantees. Ukraine's experience places security concerns at the center, while Türkiye pursues influence through cultural engagement rather than territorial claims. Together, these competing historical memories help explain the region's enduring geopolitical tensions.

The First Strategic Scenario: European Moldova

The most plausible long-term transformation is a Moldova that becomes progressively European before the territorial question is finally resolved.

The sequence would be EU integration, economic convergence, energy independence, institutional consolidation and increasing security cooperation.

Transnistria would then face a choice between remaining economically isolated and gradually reconnecting with the much larger European economic space.

The crucial strategic principle would be:

Make reintegration economically and socially attractive rather than militarily compulsory.

This is potentially more powerful than a traditional territorial strategy because it changes the incentives of the population and elites rather than merely changing the legal status of territory.

The Second Strategic Scenario: Romanian-Moldovan Union

A different trajectory would be gradual convergence culminating in political union.

This could occur through increasing Romanian citizenship, educational integration, infrastructure, economic convergence and political cooperation.

However, immediate pursuit of union would create significant risks.

Transnistria could perceive union as existential. Gagauzia could interpret it as the disappearance of its autonomous future. Russia would probably regard it as a major geopolitical defeat and could respond through destabilisation.

The strategically sophisticated Romanian approach is therefore to keep union available as a democratic possibility without making it the immediate strategic objective.

The Third Strategic Scenario: Russian Strategic Restoration

Russia could attempt to reverse Moldova's European trajectory through a combination of political influence, information operations, economic pressure, energy leverage, support for sympathetic political forces and exploitation of Transnistria and Gagauzia.

The ideal Russian outcome would not necessarily be annexation.

It would be a Moldova that remains formally independent but cannot freely determine its geopolitical orientation.

In strategic terms, this would recreate the concept of a constrained sovereignty.

The greatest vulnerability to this scenario would arise if European integration stalled while Ukraine remained under sustained Russian pressure.

The Fourth Strategic Scenario: Negotiated Reintegration

A negotiated settlement remains possible, but it would almost certainly have to differ from the pre-2022 model.

The traditional settlement logic envisaged Moldovan territorial integrity combined with special status for Transnistria and guarantees from external actors.

The problem is that Russia can no longer easily occupy the role of neutral guarantor that such an arrangement implicitly required.

A future settlement would therefore likely require a different architecture involving Chişinău, Tiraspol, Ukraine, the EU and the United States, with Russia's military role fundamentally reduced.

The central questions would concern demilitarisation, political representation, property rights, security guarantees, local administration and the status of Transnistrian institutions.

The Fifth Strategic Scenario: The Bessarabian Synthesis

The most interesting possibility is that the historical alternatives cease to be mutually exclusive.

A future Moldova could combine Moldovan political sovereignty, Romanian cultural affinity, Gagauz autonomy, Transnistrian reintegration, European institutional membership, Romanian security cooperation and Ukrainian strategic partnership.

Such an outcome would represent neither a restoration of Greater Romania nor a return to Russian influence.

It would constitute a new political synthesis in which the different historical identities remain but no longer require competing sovereign territories.

This is perhaps the deepest potential significance of European integration.

An Action-Oriented Strategy

The strategic objective should not be to decide the historical argument over Bessarabia first.

It should be to change the strategic environment in which the argument takes place.

Moldova should first become sufficiently secure and prosperous that its sovereignty is resilient. Energy independence, economic diversification, cyber resilience, border security and European institutional integration are therefore foundational.

The next priority should be the gradual removal of Russian strategic dependencies without turning this into a cultural campaign against Russian-speaking citizens. The distinction between de-Russianisation of strategic infrastructure and Russophobia is essential.

Gagauzia should be treated as an autonomy question rather than simply as a security threat. Credible guarantees for language, education, local government and cultural identity could deprive Moscow of one of its most useful instruments of political leverage.

Transnistrian reintegration should begin with practical interdependence rather than constitutional symbolism. Electricity, telecommunications, transport, pensions, customs, education, healthcare and freedom of movement are potentially more important initially than the question of flags and formal institutions.

The military dimension must ultimately be addressed through demilitarisation and the withdrawal or transformation of Russian military structures. The objective should be to replace the old security architecture with an arrangement compatible with Moldovan sovereignty.

Only after these foundations have been established should the Romanian question become politically decisive. Whether Moldova ultimately remains independent, develops an even closer union with Romania or chooses some intermediate European constitutional arrangement should be determined by democratic choice rather than geopolitical coercion.

The Central Strategic Proposition

The deepest contest over Bessarabia can therefore be expressed as competing theories of how history should determine the future.

Russia's answer is that history creates spheres of influence.

Romania's answer is that history creates nations.
Moldova's answer is that history can create an independent state.
Transnistria's answer is that historical insecurity justifies autonomy.
Gagauzia's answer is that identity requires constitutional protection.
Ukraine's answer is that unresolved territorial conflicts can become instruments of war.
The EU's answer is that integration can make historical borders progressively less consequential.

The United States' answer is that strategic vacuums must not be allowed to re-emerge.
The long-term strategic contest is consequently not simply over Bessarabia's territorial status. It is over which of these historical theories will define the political order between the Prut and Dniester.

The most stable outcome would be a sovereign and European Moldova, territorially reintegrated, securely linked to Romania and Ukraine, constitutionally protective of Gagauz identity, economically attractive to Transnistria, and sufficiently institutionalised that Russian military or political coercion is no longer decisive.

In that scenario, Bessarabia would undergo its most consequential transformation since 1812: from imperial frontier, to contested national territory, to divided Cold War space, to sovereign Moldova, and finally toward an integrated European space in which the old territorial question loses much of its strategic meaning.

Thus, the calculus of the room of maneuver is determined by Romanian and Moldovan political elites, and the time is right to explore how to move forward, given the perils of standing still on the same position on both sides of Prut. Since the conflict is about how Romania is to be defined there are some give and take to be made, and all options must be kept on the table, given the geopolitical situation, balanced by a sense of timing and the skills of negotiators, since Sandu is under pressure to make it to the 2030-deadline, i.e. the moves outlined below have to coincide with that deadline either as a mutually agreed formula for a political compromise *sub specie aeternitatis* or as a fall back in the event of either an emergency or a fall-back to the election of a pro-Moscovite government in Chisinau in the context of a failure to conclude the accession partnership by 2028 pending the ratification of the accession instrument that usually takes two years.

This is a challenging deadline nonetheless for most of the more advanced Balkan countries, and the reason for which a switch to gradual integration and a more geopolitical approach has been adopted.

Conclusions

The research demonstrates that Romanian-Moldovan unification readiness is a multidimensional condition that depends not only on political will, but also on the compatibility and capacity of institutions, the level of public support, the geopolitical environment, economic convergence, infrastructure, and the ability to manage a potential transition effectively.

Regarding the existing legal, administrative, fiscal, digital, security, and social frameworks, the analysis indicates that Romania and Moldova have developed significant areas of institutional and regulatory convergence, particularly through Moldova's European integration process and its growing alignment with EU standards. However, important differences remain in administrative capacity, fiscal resources, digital interoperability, institutional coordination, security structures, and the availability of qualified personnel. These differences represent important readiness gaps. Institutional readiness therefore depends on strengthening legal compatibility, administrative interoperability, fiscal capacity, digital compatibility, security coordination, personnel capacity, and contingency procedures before any potential unification could be implemented effectively.

The desire for union does not burn with the same flame in every heart, nor does it cross every landscape with equal strength. In some places it is nourished by the memory of a common history, by language and by the quiet familiarity of a shared culture; elsewhere, other fears speak more loudly—the fear of losing what is one's own, of entering an uncertain economy, of disturbing institutions and of awakening burdens whose weight cannot yet be measured. Between these hopes and anxieties lies the true measure of public legitimacy. No union worthy of the name can be built against the will of the people. It must grow from their consent, their understanding and their patient participation.

Yet peoples do not make their choices in an empty world. Beyond the Prut, history is surrounded by the greater movements of Europe: Moldova's journey towards the European Union, Romania's place within the Union and NATO, the war in Ukraine, Russia's influence and the unsettled security of the East. These forces form the horizon against which every future must be imagined.

There is opportunity in this changing landscape. Romania already stands within the political and security architecture of Europe, while Moldova is drawing ever nearer through its European path, bringing laws, institutions and economies gradually closer together. But alongside this promise remain the shadows of war, unresolved territorial questions and the uncertainty of a region where history has never entirely fallen silent.

Thus the future cannot be commanded. It must be prepared for. If the two countries should one day choose to walk together, that choice will have to arise not merely from the poetry of a common past, but from the free will of living generations—and from a Europe peaceful and strong enough to give that choice a lasting home.

No political union can be considered apart from the circumstances in which it would have to exist. The future of Romania and Moldova is bound to the future of Eastern Europe: to Moldova's European integration, to Romania's place within the European Union and NATO, to the war in Ukraine, to Russia's continuing influence in the region, and to the security of the lands between the Prut and the Dniester. These are not distant matters of diplomacy; they are the conditions within which any political decision must be made.

Romania possesses, through its membership of the European Union and NATO, institutions and guarantees that Moldova is progressively approaching through its own European course. With every new reform, agreement and economic connection, the two states become more closely integrated into the same European framework. Yet the unsettled security environment and the unresolved question of Transnistria demonstrate that historical aspirations alone cannot determine political outcomes. A durable union, if ever chosen, would require not only sentiment but institutions capable of carrying its weight.

The same principle applies to the economic foundations. Union cannot be secured by declarations if the roads remain weak, the energy networks divided, the digital systems incompatible and the standards of public administration unequal. Fiscal capacity, public services, infrastructure, labour markets and regulatory systems would all have to move towards a common level of functionality.

Here the eastern regions of Romania have a significance greater than their immediate economic statistics suggest. The development of RO21 and RO22 is not merely a question of correcting regional disparities. These regions can become the great bridges of the East: connecting Romania with Moldova, Moldova with Ukraine, and both with the wider European market. Roads, railways, energy corridors, ports, digital networks and industrial capacity would therefore serve two purposes at once: strengthening Romania as it exists today and creating, should history ever demand it, the material foundations upon which a closer political union could rest.

The historical relationships among Moldavia, Bessarabia, Transnistria, Bukovina, Galicia, and Kyivan Rus' constitute an especially revealing field for the comparative study of Romanian, Ukrainian, and Russian historiographical traditions, as well as for the development of a broader theory of historical unification. These cases are not simply disputed territories or competing objects of national memory. They represent successive zones of political integration, demographic transformation, cultural exchange, imperial incorporation, national differentiation, and state formation. Their significance lies precisely in the fact that none can be adequately understood through the retrospective application of a single modern national category.

A comparative study of these cases therefore requires moving beyond the question of which historiographical tradition possesses the most legitimate claim to the past. The more fundamental question is how different historiographical schools construct the historical subject itself. Romanian historiography has generally privileged the continuity of Romanian ethnolinguistic and cultural development across the medieval principalities and the modern Romanian state. Ukrainian historiography has emphasized the distinct historical development of Ukrainian political and cultural identity, particularly through Kyivan Rus', the Ruthenian and Cossack traditions, and the experience of Polish-Lithuanian, Habsburg, Russian, and Soviet rule. Russian historiography, in its imperial, Soviet, and contemporary variants, has often placed greater emphasis on the continuity of a wider East Slavic or Russian historical space, within which the histories of Ukraine, Belarus, and neighbouring territories are interpreted as interconnected dimensions of a broader political and civilizational development. A theory of unification, by contrast, need not begin with any one national claimant. It can treat these territories as historically constituted through successive processes of integration and differentiation.

Public attitudes towards unification are not uniform across either country. Support is influenced by demographic, geographic, socioeconomic, and political characteristics, as well as by national and cultural identity, perceptions of economic opportunity, attitudes towards the European Union, migration and diaspora experiences, and perceptions of security. While shared language, history, and cultural ties can provide a basis for support, concerns regarding sovereignty, economic inequality, institutional disruption, and the practical consequences of unification can limit public support. Public legitimacy must therefore remain a central component of unification readiness, with any future process requiring democratic consent and sustained public engagement. The comparative value of the six cases derives from their different positions within these processes. Kyivan Rus' represents the foundational medieval problem: a political and religious formation that predates modern nations but whose legacy has subsequently been nationalized by Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian historiographies. Galicia and Bukovina demonstrate how the incorporation of East European populations into Polish, Habsburg, Romanian, and Soviet institutional frameworks contributed to the emergence and consolidation of modern national identities. Moldavia and Bessarabia illuminate the relationship between medieval principality, ethnolinguistic continuity, imperial annexation, Romanian national integration, and Soviet territorial restructuring. Transnistria presents an even more complex case, in which Russian and Ukrainian settlement, Moldavian and Romanian historical connections, Soviet industrialization, migration, and post-Soviet state formation produced a

political community that cannot be satisfactorily reduced to a single national genealogy.

Taken together, these cases permit a comparison between two fundamentally different ways of conceptualizing historical unity. The first understands unity primarily through the continuity of a people, language, territory, or political nation. The second understands unity as the product of historical interaction: dynastic relationships, religious institutions, migration, economic networks, imperial administration, warfare, cultural exchange, and successive forms of political integration. The distinction is consequential because the first approach tends more readily to transform historical continuity into a claim about political legitimacy, whereas the second treats historical integration and contemporary sovereignty as analytically distinct.

The study consequently proceeds from the proposition that historical unity, national identity, and political sovereignty are related but non-identical phenomena. The existence of a common historical formation does not necessarily entail the persistence of a single nation, just as the emergence of distinct national identities does not erase earlier forms of political and cultural interconnectedness. This distinction is particularly important in the cases examined here because the modern political map is itself the cumulative product of multiple historical integrations and separations. The borders separating Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia cannot simply be projected backward onto medieval or early modern populations without obscuring the transformations through which those borders and identities were subsequently produced.

The comparative study therefore asks not only how Romanian, Ukrainian, and Russian historiographies interpret the same historical territories differently, but also what political assumptions are embedded within those interpretations. When a medieval polity is represented as the ancestor of a contemporary nation, what follows concerning territorial entitlement? When imperial incorporation is interpreted as reunification rather than conquest, what conception of sovereignty is implied? When linguistic or cultural continuity is taken as evidence of national unity, to what extent does that continuity establish a legitimate political project? And, conversely, when historical differentiation is emphasized, does it risk obscuring the enduring networks of cultural and institutional interdependence that connect neighbouring societies?

The central analytical problem is therefore the passage from historical description to political prescription. A claim that two populations share a common historical inheritance is descriptive; the proposition that they consequently ought to form a single political community is normative. The latter requires additional premises concerning sovereignty, consent, territoriality, citizenship, national self-determination, and the political status of historical memory. By placing Romanian, Ukrainian, and Russian historiographies alongside a more general theory of unification, the study can identify precisely where those additional premises enter the argument.

The cases of Moldavia, Bessarabia, Transnistria, Bukovina, Galicia, and Kyivan Rus' thus provide more than a collection of regional examples. Together they constitute a comparative laboratory for examining how historical interconnectedness becomes transformed into competing conceptions of nationhood, territory, and political order. Their study makes it possible to move beyond the binary opposition between narratives of primordial national separation and narratives of an enduring common civilization. The more historically adequate possibility is that integration and differentiation have operated simultaneously: populations have shared institutions while developing distinct identities, experienced common political rule while acquiring divergent political orientations, and inherited overlapping historical memories while constructing competing claims to sovereignty.

On this basis, the study approaches "unification" not as a predetermined political outcome but as a historical process whose forms and consequences must themselves be investigated. Political unification may produce common identities, just as political separation may consolidate them; imperial integration may create the conditions for later national differentiation, while national movements may seek to reverse earlier territorial divisions. The principal objective is therefore not to establish which nation can claim an exclusive ownership of the past, but to determine how competing historical narratives construct different relationships between common inheritance, national differentiation, territorial legitimacy, and political action.

In short, money talks. And there is a lot that could be undertaken to listen better to each other and understand each other's concerns and needs in the short, to medium and long-term.

History teaches that durable political achievements are prepared long before they are proclaimed. The wise task, therefore, is not to announce what the future must be, but to build the institutions, connections and prosperity that would allow the people to choose their future freely when the moment comes.

Unification has no single road. It is not a railway whose terminus has already been written on the timetable. It is a landscape of possibilities, where political will, institutions, prosperity, demography and geopolitics intersect, collide and sometimes contradict one another. One cannot know in advance which of these forces will prevail, or at what speed history will permit them to move.

This is precisely why scenarios matter. They do not predict the future; they teach us to live with its uncertainty. They allow governments to see where the fragile points lie, to prepare for shocks, to build alternatives, and—perhaps most importantly—to invest in things whose value does not depend upon the triumph of any particular political project. Read in this way, readiness for unification is not preparation for an inevitable event. It is the ability to make such an event possible, should the democratic will for it ever exist, and to make it survivable once it arrives. The wiser policy is therefore not to await history with folded arms, nor to pretend that history has already decided, but to strengthen the foundations from which several futures remain possible.

Better institutions, better roads and connections, stronger economies, greater demographic resilience, better education and human capital, and administrations capable of working together would serve Romania and Moldova even if political unification never occurred. If it did occur, however, these same investments would become its foundations. The paradox is a simple one: the best preparation for a possible union is to make both countries stronger before the question of union is ever settled.

There is sustained and significant popular support for reunification in both Romania and Moldova. This support has remained broadly stable despite political changes and shifting circumstances. There is also an emerging political consensus that reunification, if pursued, should be achieved peacefully and democratically. The main debate is therefore less about the objective than about how and when it could be achieved. This creates an opportunity to move beyond abstract discussion towards practical preparation. The priority now should be to structure and institutionalise this political consensus. Giving it an organised institutional form would allow the issue to be discussed more seriously and coherently. The present moment therefore offers an opportunity to develop the political, legal and institutional framework for a possible future reunification.

Italy, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, together with the European Union, are increasingly present in Moldova's European horizon—not as architects of its destiny, but as witnesses and partners to a transformation already taking place. Their common language is the language of sovereignty, territorial integrity and the freely chosen European future of the Moldovan people. Yet beneath this diplomatic vocabulary lies a deeper movement: Moldova is being drawn, institution by institution, law by law, into the European space, and in doing so the old question of its relationship with Romania acquires a new meaning. The border between the two countries remains political, but the space between their societies is becoming ever more difficult to distinguish. Europe need not decide this question, nor anticipate its answer. Its role is to ensure that, should the peoples of Romania and Moldova one day choose a different political form for their common future, that choice can emerge peacefully, democratically and with full respect for the sovereignty and will of the people.

This is why Romania and Moldova should begin to speak to one another not only in the language of history, but in the language of everyday life: what closer integration would mean for families, for workers, for villages and towns, for the old and the young. Such a conversation should be honest, patient and concrete. Europe, instead of telling the two countries what their future must be, can help them give this conversation a proper place and a lasting form. It can encourage the institutions on both sides to meet, to listen, to examine the difficulties and to prepare for the possibilities that history may yet bring. For if the day comes when reunification is no longer an idea spoken only in private, but a political choice supported by the people, it should not find Romania and Moldova unprepared. The road should be peaceful, orderly and democratic, built patiently through institutions and laws, and entirely at home within the European framework.

The prospect of the Republic of Moldova being incorporated into Romania would depend upon a complex convergence of domestic constitutional legitimacy, democratic consent, bilateral political agreement, territorial settlement, and European Union law. Although Romanian–Moldovan reunification remains politically contested, it represents a theoretically plausible alternative pathway to Moldova's European integration, particularly if the conventional EU accession process were to become substantially delayed or politically blocked.

The first and most fundamental condition would be the emergence of a clear and democratically expressed mandate for reunification within Moldova. Such a development would almost certainly require a referendum or another constitutionally valid mechanism capable of demonstrating broad popular consent. Given the political and societal divisions surrounding the question of union with Romania, the legitimacy of any such process would depend not merely upon a narrow electoral majority but upon a credible, transparent, and internationally recognized democratic procedure.

Second, reunification would require the consent and constitutional authorization of Romania. The process would therefore constitute not simply a bilateral political decision but a profound alteration of the constitutional and territorial order of both states. Appropriate legislation, constitutional procedures, and potentially an international treaty would be required to establish the legal basis for the incorporation of Moldovan territory into Romania.

Third, the territorial question would present a particularly difficult obstacle. The unresolved status of Transnistria complicates any straightforward conception of reunification, since the Moldovan government does not exercise effective control over that territory. A Romanian–Moldovan union would therefore have to determine whether reunification could proceed on the basis of territory effectively administered by Chişinău, whether special arrangements would be required

for Transnistria, or whether the territorial issue would have to be resolved beforehand. Gagauzia would similarly require careful consideration because of its autonomous constitutional status and the distinct political preferences prevalent within the region.

The European Union dimension is arguably the most consequential aspect of such a scenario. Moldova is currently pursuing membership through the conventional enlargement framework. However, incorporation into Romania would raise a fundamentally different legal question: rather than Moldova acceding to the European Union as a new Member State, Moldovan territory would become part of an existing Member State. Consequently, the enlargement process could, in principle, be transformed into a question of the territorial extension of an existing Member State's jurisdiction.

This distinction is important. Romanian reunification with Moldova would not necessarily constitute a conventional accession "shortcut," because EU membership would not automatically resolve the institutional, economic, legal, and administrative deficiencies associated with Moldova's present accession process. Instead, it would create a novel legal and political situation in which the Union would have to determine how the *acquis communautaire*, EU citizenship, institutional representation, budgetary arrangements, agricultural policy, customs legislation, and other elements of EU law would apply to the newly incorporated territory.

Nevertheless, the scenario could substantially accelerate Moldova's integration into the European legal and political order. Under the conventional model, Moldova must progress through the accession negotiations, satisfy the Copenhagen criteria, implement the *acquis*, and obtain the unanimous political approval of the Member States. Under a reunification scenario, by contrast, the territory would become constitutionally integrated into a state that is already a member of the Union. The central question would therefore shift from whether Moldova can accede to the EU to how the EU legal order should accommodate a territorial transformation involving an existing Member State.

The geopolitical consequences would, however, be considerable. Reunification would alter the strategic balance in Eastern Europe, potentially intensifying Russian opposition while simultaneously strengthening Romania's geopolitical position on the EU's eastern frontier. The status of Transnistria would become particularly sensitive because of its unresolved political status and Russia's military presence. Ukraine's position would also be consequential, given its direct geographic proximity and its own European integration ambitions.

Accordingly, the most plausible pathway toward reunification would not necessarily arise from an immediate rejection of Moldovan EU membership. Rather, it could emerge under conditions in which Moldova's accession process became persistently obstructed, while public support for union with Romania increased sufficiently to generate a decisive democratic mandate. In such circumstances, reunification could evolve from a primarily historical or nationalist project into an alternative mechanism of European integration.

The resulting dynamic could therefore be conceptualized as a form of "reverse enlargement." Instead of a non-member state progressively satisfying the conditions for accession to the European Union, the territory of a non-member state would become incorporated into an existing Member State and thereby enter the EU's legal and institutional sphere through that constitutional transformation. Whether such a mechanism would be accepted by all Member States would ultimately depend upon EU treaty law, political consensus, and the specific conditions under which reunification occurred.

In this sense, the relationship between Moldovan EU accession and Romanian reunification is potentially inverse: the more credible and attainable Moldova's independent path toward EU membership becomes, the weaker the strategic rationale for reunification; conversely, prolonged or politically motivated obstruction of accession could increase the attractiveness of union with Romania. The question is therefore not merely whether Moldova could become part of Romania, but under what combination of domestic political preferences, constitutional developments, geopolitical pressures, and EU-level constraints such a transformation could become both legally feasible and politically sustainable.

The question of the union of the Republic of Moldova with Romania cannot be regarded merely as an episode of sentiment or historical memory. It is, above all, a question of the political destiny of a people, of the consolidation of the Romanian state, and of the place which the territories between the Prut and the Dniester shall occupy within the European order.

Such a union could become possible only where the will of the inhabitants of Moldova were expressed with unmistakable clarity and through constitutional and democratic means. No durable political construction can rest upon coercion or upon the mere assertion of historical right. The principle must be that of national unity freely affirmed by the people themselves and subsequently embodied in the constitutional institutions of both countries.

Romania, for her part, would have to assume the full responsibilities accompanying such an undertaking. Union is not merely the drawing of a line upon a map; it entails the integration of institutions, finances, administration, law, infrastructure, and political representation. A state which undertakes the incorporation of another territory must possess not only the historical conviction that justifies the undertaking, but also the administrative strength necessary to make the union effective.

There remains, moreover, the question of the territories over which the government of Chişinău does not exercise effective authority. The situation of Transnistria could not simply be disregarded, any more than the constitutional position of Gagauzia could be treated as an incidental matter. A Romanian policy worthy of its purpose would have to distinguish between the principle of national union and the particular territorial arrangements necessary to preserve peace, legality, and the rights of the populations concerned.

The European question introduces another and perhaps unexpected dimension. Moldova is presently pursuing the ordinary path toward membership of the European Union. Should that path succeed, the immediate necessity of political union with Romania would diminish. But should the accession process become indefinitely obstructed, the political calculation could change fundamentally. The Moldovan people might then confront a choice between remaining indefinitely outside the principal European institutions or seeking their incorporation into a state which already forms part of that European political and legal order.

In this respect, union with Romania could have consequences extending beyond the national question. It could constitute a form of what might be termed reverse enlargement: rather than Moldova entering the European Union through the conventional procedure of accession, its territory would become part of an existing Member State. The European question would consequently cease to be one of accession by a new state and become one of determining the application of the Union's legal order to territory incorporated into an existing Member State.

Such an arrangement could not, however, be regarded as a mere juridical expedient. The European Union would necessarily have to address the consequences for its institutions, budget, representation, application of the *acquis*, agricultural policy, customs regime, citizenship, and economic governance. The political consent of the other Member States would therefore remain indispensable, notwithstanding the fact that Romania itself would already possess the rights and obligations of membership.

The decisive element would consequently remain the will of the Moldovan population. If that will were clearly and repeatedly expressed in favour of union, if Romania possessed the political and economic capacity to undertake it, if the territorial difficulties could be managed through lawful and peaceful means, and if the European institutions accepted the resulting constitutional transformation, reunification would cease to be merely an historical aspiration and become a practicable political project.

The essential principle, however, should remain unchanged: the strength of a union lies not in the force with which it is proclaimed, but in the legitimacy with which it is accomplished and in the institutions capable of sustaining it. A Romanian–Moldovan union, if it were ever to occur, would therefore have to be conceived not as the absorption of one state by another, but as the deliberate construction of a stronger political community, founded upon popular consent, constitutional legality, and a clear European vocation.

In the final analysis, the alternatives confronting Moldova may prove mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive. The more firmly Moldova establishes itself within the European political space, the closer it approaches Romania in institutional and strategic terms. Should independent European integration ultimately prevail, the historic distance between the two states would nevertheless continue to diminish. Should that integration be persistently obstructed, the argument for political union could acquire a force which it does not presently possess.

The question, therefore, is not whether history can be summoned to determine the future. History does not determine it. It supplies the foundation upon which a people, acting through its institutions and in accordance with its own will, may choose to build it.

The priority of the EU, for now, is to stabilize the republic of Moldova and to keep the land together, via engagement of Transnistria, given Russian subterfuge and corruption. Soon enough greater attention will need to be given to an investment program in northern and Southern Moldova. We anticipate Romania to devote more energies to the regional development of the north-Eastern and South Eastern parts of Romania to ensure a balanced and harmonious territorial development, and to engage in structural reform combined with reinforced engagement in both Danubian cooperation and in the Black Sea at the nexus geoeconomics and geopolitics. An equally well-structured and disciplined de-russification campaign in the Republic is on Bucuresti and Chisinau with the EU leading from behind. By 2030, the RO-MD Treaty Framework will be modernised, something we outline below how to in a computed draft version, and negotiations on which could begin right away, subject to an executive decision. The world will learn about Christian Ilcus. I would be very mistaken if I remain carefree to it.

The contrasting effect is particularly evident in Ceauşescu's Romania, where the PCR understood the sauce they were eaten with and the symbolic power of architecture, ultimately, the oppressive system they were constructing around the people. Perhaps, therefore, it is time to change the *mojo*: rather than reproducing the monumental language of the past, we should imagine a new contemporary building for the Romanian Senate and Parliament—one defined by an innovative architectural form, sustainable materials, and a distinctly democratic character.

Such a building should not stand in opposition to its Capitolian urban setting, but contribute to its evolution. It should engage with the city as a living civic landscape while expressing the mentality, aspirations, and collective identity of contemporary Romanians. The architecture could thus become representative not of power imposed from above, but of a Romania that is open, innovative, sustainable, and confident in its place within contemporary Europe.

Further Research

Further research on the topic of Romanian-Moldovan unification within the EU framework should focus on several key areas. Investigating the historical relationship between Romania and Moldova, including past unification attempts and their outcomes, can provide insights into current sentiments and potential challenges. A comparative analysis of other cases of regional integration within the EU, such as the reunification of Germany or the integration of Eastern European countries post-communism, can offer valuable lessons and best practices for Romania and Moldova.

Comprehensive public opinion studies are essential to gauge attitudes towards unification in both countries. This research should explore the factors influencing these attitudes, including national identity, economic expectations, and political trust. Additionally, assessing the legal implications of unification, including constitutional requirements in both Romania and Moldova, is crucial. This analysis should consider the compatibility of existing laws with EU regulations and standards.

Economic impact studies should evaluate the potential consequences of unification, including fiscal implications, labor market integration, and infrastructure development. Understanding the economic landscape will be vital for making informed decisions. Furthermore, exploring the geopolitical implications of unification, particularly concerning relations with neighboring countries, Russia, and the EU, is necessary. This research should consider how unification might affect regional stability and security dynamics.

Counterarguments to European Moldovan Unification within the EU

But a nation's longing, however deeply rooted, does not erase the weight of reality. Any serious consideration of union must begin by listening to those who fear what might be lost. For some citizens of Moldova, independence is not an accident of history but a part of their own identity. They may see unification not as fulfilment, but as the disappearance of a country they have come to call their own. Such a voice cannot simply be dismissed. If union is ever to be legitimate, it must preserve dignity, identity and the right of every citizen to have a place within the new political order.

There is also the harder question of bread and prosperity. Romania and Moldova do not begin from the same economic position. Moldova's lower incomes, weaker infrastructure and greater poverty would place real burdens upon any process of integration. The road to unity, if ever taken, would demand investment, patience and solidarity. It would be unjust to promise that affection alone can repair economic differences that have accumulated over generations.

Nor can Romania pretend that institutions are merely names written upon paper. Corruption, weak governance and deficiencies in the rule of law would present serious challenges to integration. A union that simply transferred existing weaknesses from one administration into another would not be an act of renewal. It would be an inheritance of unresolved problems. Moldova's European reforms therefore matter not only for accession, but for the institutional foundations of any deeper future relationship.

Beyond the Prut, there is also the shadow of geopolitics. Moldova occupies a difficult place in Europe, and any major constitutional change would inevitably be observed by powers with interests in the region, particularly Russia. The possibility of heightened tension, pressure or destabilisation cannot be ignored. Nor can the existence of Transnistria, where the question of territory and security remains unresolved.

And finally there is the people themselves. No map, however carefully drawn, can substitute for consent. If substantial numbers of Moldovans reject union, then no historical argument can make it legitimate. The future must therefore be approached neither with triumphalism nor with fear, but with the patience to persuade, the humility to listen and the courage to confront difficulties honestly.

For this reason, the proper task is not to conceal the obstacles but to understand them. A serious policy of preparedness must measure the risks, address the inequalities, strengthen institutions and preserve democratic choice. If unity is ever to come, it should not arrive as an act of political haste, but as the mature conclusion of peoples who have considered both the promise and the price of the road before them.

Policy recommendations

The Government of Romania should establish the Romania-Bessarabia Centre for Unification Foresight and Strategic Preparedness with a statutory mandate, multi-year financing and operational independence.

Its mission should be neither to ask whether unification is immediately possible nor to advocate that it occurs regardless of circumstances.

Its mission should be:

to ensure that Romania is intellectually, institutionally, economically and strategically prepared for the eventuality of democratic unification, while continuously identifying policies that make such an outcome more feasible, less costly, more legitimate and more sustainable.

The Centre would therefore transform Romania's Moldova policy from a primarily assistance-and-cooperation model into a long-term strategic preparedness model.

The approximately €400 million scale of annual Romanian support should be treated not simply as a budgetary commitment nor should be taken for granted that a sudden collapse of political will in Moldova and an overwhelming urge for unification, as though it was an erotic engagement will settle the diplomatic struggle over Bessarabia. Indeed, for now the prospects are not that Moldova suddenly throws the towel into the ring.

We must be prepared for any scenarios at all levels government and society. This also comprises in Moldova, Romania's cultural heart, that remains a backward and underdeveloped part of Romania according to the latest RCI-chart RO21 % RO22.

We recommend a transaction to be undertaken between the arrest and persecution of Oleh Shor, a useful idiot from Balti, in Israel in return for strengthening of governance on anti-semitism and on integration policies in the EU.

This is but another opportunity to build lasting capabilities, connectivity and convergence, something that can not be reduced to the limited budget envelope and advocacy on Chisinau's behalf within the EU and NATO and the use of the limited budget portfolio in a more or less directed manner. The strategic question is not whether Romania spends money in Moldova; it is whether that expenditure is contributing to a coherent long-term national strategy.

The ultimate measure of success should therefore be:

not how much Romania gives Moldova, but how effectively Romanian policy builds the conditions under which the citizens of Romania and Moldova could, if they democratically choose to do so, construct a common political future.

That would be more civilised, and above all a better structured and more disciplined approach overthere or downthere than the bullshit, demagoguery, subterfuge and corruption, and maneuvering of feuding politicians and wannabee from the suburbs of the worlds and hauling in the dungeons of Romania Mare.

Perspective

The question of Romanian-Moldovan unification within the European order is not one that can be judged by sentiment alone. It must be considered through the several elements upon which the life of a state depends: its history, its culture, its prosperity, and its security. Only by weighing these together can we ask whether union would strengthen the common good or merely give political form to an aspiration.

History gives the question its deepest force. Romanians on both banks of the Prut inherit a language, a culture, and memories formed through centuries of common experience. For many in Romania, Moldova is therefore not a foreign land but part of a wider national inheritance. Yet the statesman must also hear another voice. Many citizens of Moldova have grown up within an independent republic and have developed a distinct civic identity, shaped by their own institutions, experiences, and hopes. To disregard this identity would be neither just nor wise.

Culture can unite where politics divides, but culture must never become an instrument of compulsion. A closer union could enrich the common cultural life of both societies, deepen exchanges, and give renewed strength to their shared heritage. But if Moldovan identity were treated as an obstacle to be overcome rather than a part of the common inheritance to be preserved, unity itself could become a source of division.

The sound principle is therefore simple: no union can be worthy of its name unless it rests upon consent. The purpose of political union should not be to erase differences, but to reconcile them within a broader common framework. If Romania and Moldova are ever to become politically closer, the strongest foundation will be one in which history is honoured, identity is respected, and the common good is placed above the triumph of one side over the other.

Economically, the potential benefits of unification are significant. Proponents argue that integrating Moldova into the Romanian economy could stimulate growth, improve infrastructure, and enhance access to EU markets. This could lead to increased investment and development opportunities for both countries. However, the economic disparities between Romania and Moldova raise valid concerns about the sustainability of such integration. Critics warn that Romania may face challenges in absorbing Moldova's economic burdens, particularly in areas such as social services and public infrastructure.

Geopolitically, the implications of unification are profound. While unification could strengthen Romania's position within the EU and enhance regional stability, it may also provoke tensions with external actors, particularly Russia. The

geopolitical landscape is complex, and any move towards unification must consider the broader implications for regional security and international relations.

Ultimately, the perspective on Romanian-Moldovan unification within the EU framework is shaped by a combination of historical ties, cultural identities, economic realities, and geopolitical considerations. Engaging in open dialogue and fostering mutual understanding will be essential for navigating these complexities and determining the most viable path forward. By considering diverse perspectives, stakeholders can work towards a solution that respects the aspirations of both nations while promoting stability and cooperation in the region.



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Footnote:

¹<https://www.oecd.org/en/countries/romania.html>

²<https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor/en/country-reports/romania.html>

³https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/23fa6af0-89b3-4532-a3d9-d1638727d14c_en?filename=moldova-report-2025.pdf

⁴<https://old.gov.md/en/content/2025-enlargement-report-moldova-analysed-national-conference>

⁵<https://moldova.osce.org/?>

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⁷https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/assets/regional-competitiveness/index.html#/RO/RO21

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Statement on AI

We have used Chat GPT, AI Bing, Claude AI, Perplexity AI and Sharly AI to research, test ideas, improve arguments, identify sources and gaps in the scientific literature, and strengthen arguments in the introduction and in the conclusions.

After completion of the manuscript, we have proofread the manuscript. We take full responsibility for its content and mistakes.

Appendix 1- Treaty of Strategic Partner-Ship, Friendship and Cooperation Between Romania and the Republic of Moldova

The present draft is legally viable as a framework treaty, but it needs several refinements before it would be credible as an actual instrument for signature and ratification. The key legal problem is not whether Romania and Moldova may conclude such a treaty—they plainly can—but how to make the unusually deep integration provisions precise enough to coexist with Romanian constitutional law, Moldovan constitutional law, EU law, and the existing bilateral treaty network such as the friendship and cooperation agreement.⁸

The relationship between Romania and the Republic of Moldova is already founded upon an extensive body of bilateral treaties, agreements, protocols and institutional arrangements concluded since the restoration of the Republic of Moldova's independence and the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two States on 27 August 1991.

The present Treaty is therefore not conceived as the commencement of bilateral cooperation, but as the constitutional and institutional consolidation of an existing treaty relationship, together with its systematic development into a deeper and more coherent partnership.

The Parties recognise that, since 1991, their relations have developed through a succession of sectoral instruments addressing the movement of persons, economic and commercial relations, scientific and technical cooperation, education, culture, investment, taxation, border management, law enforcement, infrastructure and European integration. The bilateral legal framework has consequently become extensive but dispersed across numerous instruments of different dates, legal forms and institutional mechanisms.

The first agreements concluded following the establishment of diplomatic relations established the practical foundations of this relationship. The Agreement of 6 August 1991 concerning economic cooperation and trade constituted an early framework for economic relations, while the Agreement of 29 August 1991 concerning reciprocal travel of citizens facilitated movement between the two countries.

The Parties subsequently developed their relationship through agreements in education, science and culture. The Agreement of 19 May 1992 on cooperation in science, education and culture expressly contemplated the harmonisation of policies and the convergence of legislation in those fields and established a basis for continuing institutional cooperation.

Economic relations were further developed through the Free Trade Agreement of 15 February 1994, whose stated objectives included the progressive removal of obstacles to bilateral trade and the development of closer economic integration.

The economic framework was subsequently modernised through the Agreement on Economic, Industrial and Technical-Scientific Cooperation signed at Bucharest on 16 November 2005. Its institutional architecture was later amended in 2012 in order to distinguish mechanisms for economic cooperation from mechanisms devoted specifically to European integration, reflecting the increasing importance of Moldova's European orientation.

The Parties have likewise developed an increasingly elaborate framework governing their common border. This includes arrangements concerning local border traffic, border crossing points, law-enforcement cooperation, the exchange of information and joint patrols. The Moldovan Border Police identifies, among others, the 2009 agreements on local border traffic and border crossing points, the 2011 agreement establishing the Galați Joint Contact Centre and the 2018 protocol concerning mixed patrol teams.

The Parties further recognise that their existing relationship contains an important distinction between agreements that have entered into force and instruments that have been negotiated but have not acquired legal effect. In particular, the Treaty on the State Border Regime, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Border Matters signed on 8 November 2010 is identified by the Moldovan Border Police as not having entered into force. The present Treaty shall therefore not presume the legal effect of any bilateral instrument that has not entered into force in accordance with the applicable constitutional and international-law requirements.

The existing body of bilateral law demonstrates that Romania and the Republic of Moldova have progressively constructed practical forms of interdependence without establishing a single overarching instrument capable of organising their relationship as a coherent whole.

The Parties therefore consider it desirable to establish, through the present Treaty, a single strategic framework within which the existing bilateral instruments may be coordinated, consolidated and progressively developed.

The purpose of this Treaty is accordingly fourfold.

First, it establishes the fundamental principles governing the bilateral relationship and places the existing sectoral agreements within a common political and legal framework.

Second, it establishes permanent institutions capable of coordinating and supervising the implementation of the existing treaty framework and of developing new forms of cooperation.

Third, it provides for the progressive removal of practical barriers between the two societies and economies, including barriers affecting movement, employment, education, infrastructure, energy, trade, digital services and public administration.

Fourth, it establishes a lawful mechanism through which the Parties may, by mutual democratic consent and in accordance with their respective constitutional orders, develop progressively closer forms of association in the future.

Figure



The Parties emphasise that such progressive development shall not be construed as implying the automatic disappearance of either State, the transfer of sovereignty by implication, or the creation of a political union without a separate and express decision of both Parties.

The present Treaty is thus intended to occupy a position between conventional bilateral cooperation and political union. It shall provide the legal architecture for an increasingly integrated Romanian–Moldovan space while preserving, unless and until otherwise expressly agreed, the separate sovereignty, constitutional identity, citizenship and international legal personality of each Party.

For this purpose, the Parties agree that the present Treaty shall serve as the principal framework instrument for their bilateral relationship. Existing bilateral treaties shall remain in force according to their terms unless expressly amended, replaced or superseded pursuant to this Treaty or a subsequent agreement between the Parties.

Where an existing bilateral instrument establishes a more advanced form of cooperation than that provided for by the present Treaty, the Parties shall endeavour to preserve that higher level of cooperation. Where provisions of existing instruments duplicate or conflict with the institutional mechanisms established by this Treaty, the Parties shall seek, through appropriate protocols, to consolidate the relevant provisions within the framework established herein.

The Parties further agree that the implementation of this Treaty shall be consistent with the international obligations of each Party and, in particular, with the legal obligations arising from Romania’s membership of the European Union and with the process of the Republic of Moldova’s accession to the European Union.

The Parties regard the progressive European integration of the Republic of Moldova as an important common objective and recognise that the bilateral relationship should serve as a practical instrument supporting that process.

The Treaty shall therefore constitute not the replacement of the historical and legal relationship developed since 1991, but its consolidation, elevation and forward development.

Against this background, Romania and the Republic of Moldova agree as follows.

Preamble

Romania and the Republic of Moldova, hereinafter referred to individually as a “Party” and collectively as the “Parties”,

Guided by the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter for a New Europe and other applicable instruments of international law;

Reaffirming their commitment to democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, pluralism, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the sovereign equality of States;

Recognising the profound historical, linguistic, cultural, social and human bonds existing between the Romanian and Moldovan peoples;

Conscious that the security, prosperity, freedom and European future of the two countries are closely interconnected;

Recognizing the importance of fostering relations of good neighbourliness among States, consistent with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the commitments reflected in the Pact for the Future, and reaffirming the sovereign equality of all States, mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, non-interference in internal affairs, and the peaceful settlement of disputes, with a view to promoting regional stability, sustainable development, and international cooperation for the benefit of present and future generations;

Determined to establish a comprehensive and durable framework for relations extending beyond conventional good-neighbourly cooperation towards an increasingly integrated common European space;

Recognising the sovereign equality, independence, territorial integrity and constitutional identity of each Party;

Determined to facilitate progressively the free movement of persons, goods, services, capital, knowledge and culture between their territories, in accordance with international law and, where applicable, the law of the European Union;

Resolved to assist the Republic of Moldova in its European integration and to contribute to the strengthening of its democratic institutions, economic resilience, security and prosperity;

Recognising that the deepening of relations between the Parties may, by mutual democratic consent and through subsequent constitutional and international legal acts, develop into progressively closer forms of association;

Determined, nevertheless, that the present Treaty shall not itself constitute or establish a merger, federation, confederation, annexation, incorporation or other form of political unification of the Parties;

Have agreed as follows:

Part I

Fundamental Principles

Article 1

Strategic Partnership

- The Parties establish by this Treaty a permanent and comprehensive Strategic Partnership founded upon friendship, mutual confidence, solidarity, sovereign equality and the common interests of their peoples.
- The Parties shall develop their relations in all fields of mutual interest and shall endeavour to attain the highest practicable degree of economic, social, infrastructural, educational, cultural, technological and institutional cooperation consistent with this Treaty.
- The Parties shall regard the security, stability and prosperity of either Party as matters of direct and legitimate interest to the other.

Article 2

Sovereignty, Independence and Territorial Integrity

- The Parties reaffirm their mutual recognition of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.
- Each Party shall respect the constitutional order and political independence of the other.
- Neither Party shall seek to acquire territory, sovereignty or jurisdiction over the territory of the other except by an agreement expressly concluded in accordance with international law and the constitutional requirements of both Parties.
- The Parties shall refrain from the threat or use of force against each other and shall settle disputes exclusively by peaceful means.

Article 3

Constitutional Identity and International Legal Personality

- Each Party shall retain its own Constitution, constitutional institutions, citizenship, territory, legal order and international legal personality.
- Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as creating a superior State, common sovereign authority or hierarchy between the Parties.
- Cooperation undertaken pursuant to this Treaty shall be based upon powers expressly conferred by the Parties and shall not be presumed to entail any general transfer of sovereign competence.
- No institution established under this Treaty shall possess competence other than that expressly granted to it by the Parties.

Article 4

European Orientation

- The Parties recognise the European Union as the principal framework for the development of their common European future.
- Romania shall support the Republic of Moldova in fulfilling the political, legal, institutional and economic requirements for accession to the European Union.
- The Parties shall coordinate, insofar as their respective legal obligations permit, their positions concerning matters affecting their common European interests.
- Following the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union, the Parties shall seek to preserve and deepen the exceptional level of bilateral integration established under this Treaty to the fullest extent compatible with European Union law.

Article 5

Good Faith and Non-Interference

- The Parties shall fulfil in good faith the obligations arising from this Treaty.
- Neither Party shall interfere in the internal political affairs of the other.
- This Article shall not prejudice cooperation concerning democracy, the rule of law, human rights, judicial independence or the fight against corruption pursuant to mutually agreed programmes.

Article 6

Common Strategic Space

- The Parties establish a Romania–Moldova Common Strategic Space encompassing cooperation in economic development, infrastructure, energy, transport, education, culture, science, health, digital transformation, environmental protection, civil protection and security.
- The Common Strategic Space shall constitute a framework for progressively removing practical barriers between the societies and economies of the Parties.
- The Common Strategic Space shall not constitute a sovereign territory, customs territory, federation, confederation or political union unless subsequently established by a separate international instrument.

Part II

Institutional Framework

Article 7

Romania–Moldova Partnership Council

- A Romania–Moldova Partnership Council, hereinafter referred to as the “Partnership Council”, is hereby established.
- The Partnership Council shall be composed of the Prime Ministers of the Parties, who may be accompanied by such ministers or senior officials as they deem appropriate.
- The Partnership Council shall meet at least twice each calendar year, alternately in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, and may convene extraordinary meetings at the request of either Party.
- The Partnership Council shall determine the strategic priorities of cooperation and shall supervise the implementation of this Treaty.
- Decisions of the Partnership Council shall be adopted by mutual consent unless this Treaty expressly provides otherwise.

Article 8

Joint Commission

- A Joint Commission for Strategic Partnership shall be established to implement the decisions of the Partnership Council.
- The Joint Commission shall be composed of senior governmental representatives appointed by the Parties.
- The Joint Commission shall prepare programmes, monitor implementation, coordinate governmental institutions and submit an annual report to the Partnership Council.
- The Joint Commission may establish specialised committees and working groups as necessary.

Article 9

Parliamentary Assembly

- The Parliaments of the Parties shall establish a Romania–Moldova Parliamentary Assembly.
- The Assembly shall consist of equal parliamentary delegations designated in accordance with the internal rules of each Parliament.
- The Assembly shall examine the implementation of this Treaty, promote parliamentary dialogue and submit recommendations to the Partnership Council.
- The Assembly may establish committees concerning European integration, economic affairs, infrastructure, education and culture, security, justice and human rights.

Article 10

Permanent Secretariat

- A permanent Secretariat of the Romania–Moldova Strategic Partnership shall be established.
- The Secretariat shall maintain offices in Bucharest and Chişinău.

- The Secretariat shall provide administrative and technical support to the institutions established under this Treaty and shall maintain a public register of decisions, programmes and implementation reports.
- The status, financing and internal organisation of the Secretariat shall be determined by the Partnership Council.

Part III

People and Society

Article 11

Free Movement and Mobility

- The Parties shall progressively establish the most extensive practicable regime for the movement of their citizens between their territories.
- The Parties shall simplify and, where legally possible, eliminate administrative barriers to travel, residence, study, employment and family life.
- The Parties shall progressively develop an integrated mobility area, taking into account the obligations of Romania as a Member State of the European Union and the European legal framework applicable to the Republic of Moldova.

Article 12

Residence and Employment

- The Parties shall facilitate the right of citizens of either Party to reside and work in the territory of the other.
- The Parties shall progressively establish equal or equivalent treatment concerning access to employment, professional training and employment-related social rights.
- Detailed arrangements shall be established by implementing agreements adopted pursuant to this Treaty.

Article 13

Social Security and Pension Rights

- The Parties shall coordinate their social-security systems so that periods of employment and insurance completed in either State may, to the fullest extent practicable, be taken into account for the acquisition and preservation of social-security and pension rights.
- No person shall lose acquired pension rights solely by reason of having worked or resided in both States.
- The Parties shall seek compatibility between their social-security systems consistent with European Union law.

Article 14

Civil Status and Family Affairs

- The Parties shall facilitate the recognition and registration of births, marriages, deaths and other civil-status events occurring across their respective territories.
- The competent authorities shall establish expedited procedures for the recognition of official civil documents.
- The Parties shall cooperate in matters concerning family law, inheritance, guardianship and protection of children in accordance with international law.

Article 15

Consular Cooperation

- The Parties shall strengthen cooperation between their diplomatic and consular services.
- They shall seek, where legally possible, to provide reciprocal consular assistance to citizens of the other Party in States where the other Party lacks adequate consular representation.
- The Parties may establish joint diplomatic and consular facilities where such arrangements increase efficiency and are mutually agreed.

Part IV

Education, Culture and Human Development

Article 16

Education

- The Parties shall establish an increasingly integrated educational space.
- Universities and other accredited educational institutions of either Party shall be encouraged to recognise qualifications and credits awarded by institutions of the other Party.
- The Parties shall establish joint scholarship, mobility and research programmes.
- Special priority shall be accorded to programmes concerning medicine, engineering, law, public administration, information technology, agriculture and European studies.

Article 17

Higher Education and Research

- The Parties shall promote joint degree programmes, research centres, doctoral programmes and academic institutions.
- The Parties may establish jointly funded universities, institutes and research facilities.
- Researchers, academics and students of either Party shall receive preferential access to jointly established programmes.

Article 18

Language and Cultural Heritage

- The Parties recognise their profound common linguistic and cultural heritage and shall promote its preservation and development.
- Cultural cooperation shall be conducted with full respect for the dignity and cultural identity of all persons and communities.
- The Parties shall cooperate in the preservation of archives, historical monuments, museums, libraries, literary heritage and other cultural assets.
- Cultural institutions of the Parties shall be encouraged to establish permanent joint programmes and institutions.

Article 19

Media and Information Space

- The Parties shall promote the free exchange of lawful information, journalism, broadcasting and cultural content.
- They shall cooperate in strengthening media literacy, professional journalism and resilience against disinformation and foreign information manipulation.
- Nothing in this Article shall prejudice freedom of expression or the editorial independence of lawful media organisations.

Article 20

Youth, Sport and Civil Society

- The Parties shall encourage direct cooperation between youth organisations, universities, municipalities, sporting bodies, professional associations and civil-society organisations.
- They shall establish programmes designed to ensure that the younger generations of both countries develop sustained personal, professional and cultural links.

Part V

Economic and Financial Integration

Article 21

Economic Partnership Area

- The Parties shall establish a Romania–Moldova Economic Partnership Area.
- They shall progressively remove barriers to bilateral trade, investment and the provision of services.
- The Parties shall seek the highest degree of regulatory compatibility permitted by their respective legal obligations.

Article 22

Movement of Goods

- The Parties shall facilitate the movement of goods between their territories.
- Customs authorities shall establish interoperable systems and simplified procedures for bilateral trade.
- The Parties shall seek to establish joint or coordinated customs-control facilities at appropriate border crossing points.

Article 23

Services and Professional Qualifications

- The Parties shall progressively establish mutual recognition of professional qualifications.
- Regulatory authorities shall cooperate to facilitate the cross-border provision of professional services.
- Special attention shall be given to medicine, engineering, architecture, accounting, law, information technology and other regulated professions.

Article 24

Investment

- Each Party shall encourage and facilitate investment by nationals and enterprises of the other Party.
- The Parties shall protect investments in accordance with applicable international law.
- They shall establish mechanisms for the rapid resolution of administrative obstacles affecting bilateral investment.

Article 25

Financial Cooperation

- The competent authorities of the Parties shall cooperate in banking, insurance, capital markets, taxation and financial supervision.
- The Parties shall seek to simplify cross-border payments and reduce unnecessary transaction costs.
- They shall cooperate against money laundering, terrorist financing, tax evasion and other forms of financial crime.

Article 26

Common Development Fund

- The Parties shall establish a Romania–Moldova Common Development Fund.
- The Fund shall finance strategic projects serving the common interests of the Parties.
- The Fund may receive contributions from the Parties, the European Union, international financial institutions and other lawful sources.

- Priority shall be given to infrastructure, energy, education, healthcare, digitalisation, environmental protection and regional development.

Part VI

Infrastructure, Energy and Digital Integration

Article 27

Strategic Infrastructure

- The Parties shall establish a Strategic Infrastructure Programme designed to integrate their transport, energy, communications and logistics networks.
- The Parties shall give priority to the construction and modernisation of bridges, roads, railways, ports, airports, telecommunications networks and other infrastructure connecting their territories.
- Projects designated by the Partnership Council as strategic shall receive accelerated administrative consideration.

Article 28

The Prut as a Common Development Corridor

- The Parties shall treat the Prut not merely as a boundary but as a shared economic, environmental and infrastructural space.
- They shall establish a Prut River Commission responsible for water management, environmental protection, flood prevention, infrastructure and sustainable development.
- The Parties shall facilitate the construction of additional bridges and crossings where economically and environmentally justified.

Article 29

Energy Security

- The Parties shall regard the energy security of either Party as a matter of common strategic interest.
- They shall strengthen electricity and gas interconnections and develop mechanisms for emergency energy assistance.
- Romania shall support the integration of the Republic of Moldova into European energy markets and networks.
- The Parties shall cooperate in renewable energy, energy storage, energy efficiency, nuclear safety and the development of resilient energy infrastructure.

Article 30

Digital Common Space

- The Parties shall establish a framework for digital interoperability between their public administrations.
- They shall seek mutual recognition of electronic identification, digital signatures and official electronic documents.
- The Parties shall cooperate in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, digital government and the protection of critical digital infrastructure.
- Personal data shall be processed in accordance with applicable domestic and European law.

Part VII

Security, Justice and Resilience

Article 31

Strategic Security Consultations

- The Parties shall consult immediately whenever either considers that its national security or territorial integrity is subject to a serious external threat.
- The Parties shall exchange information concerning terrorism, organised crime, cyber threats, hybrid threats, foreign interference and other threats to democratic institutions.
- The obligations of this Article shall not prejudice the international obligations of either Party.

Article 32

Defence and Security Cooperation

- The Parties shall develop cooperation between their defence and security institutions.
- Cooperation may include defence education, military medicine, peacekeeping, civil protection, cybersecurity, demining, emergency response and the exchange of expertise.
- Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as establishing an automatic obligation to engage in armed hostilities on behalf of the other Party.
- Nothing in this Treaty shall require the Republic of Moldova to abandon any constitutional provision concerning its permanent neutrality.

Article 33

Police and Law-Enforcement Cooperation

- The Parties shall establish secure mechanisms for the exchange of information between competent law-enforcement authorities.

- They shall facilitate joint investigations and coordinated operations against organised crime, trafficking, corruption, cybercrime and other transnational offences.
- Cooperation shall respect the rule of law, judicial oversight and applicable data-protection requirements.

Article 34

Judicial Cooperation

- The Parties shall strengthen cooperation in extradition, mutual legal assistance, recognition of judgments, asset recovery and enforcement of judicial decisions.
- They shall cooperate in the investigation and prosecution of serious transnational crimes.
- The Parties shall promote judicial exchanges and professional training.

Article 35

Civil Protection and Emergency Assistance

- The Parties shall establish a permanent mechanism for mutual assistance in the event of natural disasters, industrial accidents, epidemics, major infrastructure failures and other emergencies.
- Emergency services shall be authorised to establish direct operational channels for requesting and providing assistance.
- The Parties may maintain jointly financed emergency reserves and specialised response capabilities.

Article 36

Democratic Resilience and Foreign Interference

- The Parties shall cooperate in protecting democratic institutions against foreign interference, coercion, disinformation, cyberattacks and other hostile activities.
- Such cooperation shall respect constitutional rights, freedom of expression, political pluralism and democratic accountability.
- The Parties shall exchange best practices concerning the resilience of elections, public institutions, strategic infrastructure and critical supply chains.

Part VIII

Border, Territorial and Regional Cooperation

Article 37

Integrated Border Management

- The Parties shall progressively transform their common border into a zone of facilitated movement consistent with the security obligations of each Party and with applicable European Union law.
- They shall establish coordinated and, where practicable, joint border-control procedures.
- The Parties shall modernise border-crossing infrastructure and develop electronic pre-clearance and risk-management systems.

Article 38

Cross-Border Communities

- Local and regional authorities shall be encouraged to establish permanent cross-border partnerships.
- The Parties shall support cross-border economic zones, educational networks, healthcare arrangements and cultural institutions.
- The competent authorities shall facilitate the provision of public services across the border where such arrangements increase efficiency and benefit local populations.

Article 39

Transnistrian Settlement

- The Parties reaffirm their support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognised borders.
- They support the peaceful, comprehensive and sustainable settlement of the Transnistrian conflict.
- Romania shall support Moldova's efforts to achieve the peaceful reintegration of the Transnistrian region in accordance with international law and democratic principles.
- Nothing in this Treaty shall prejudice the constitutional status or institutional arrangements of the Transnistrian region that may result from a negotiated settlement.

Article 40

Regional Cooperation

- The Parties shall cooperate in promoting stability and development in the wider Black Sea and Eastern European regions.
- They shall support regional infrastructure, transport, energy, environmental and economic initiatives consistent with their respective international obligations.

Part IX

The Union Safeguard and Evolution Clauses

Article 41

No Automatic Political Union

- This Treaty shall not establish a federation, confederation, unitary State, condominium, personal union or other form of political unification.
- It shall not create a common sovereign authority.
- It shall not automatically create common citizenship.
- It shall not transfer legislative, executive or judicial sovereignty from either Party to the other.
- No provision of this Treaty shall be interpreted as constituting an act of annexation, incorporation or merger.

Article 42

No Presumption of Sovereignty Transfer

- Any competence exercised jointly by the Parties shall arise only from an express provision of this Treaty or from a subsequent agreement concluded pursuant to it.
- No institution created under this Treaty may infer additional powers from the existence of the Strategic Partnership.
- Any transfer of sovereign competence shall require a separate legal instrument approved in accordance with the constitutional requirements of both Parties.

Article 43

Progressive Integration

- The Parties affirm their intention that cooperation under this Treaty shall be capable of progressive development.
- The Partnership Council may recommend additional areas of integration where experience demonstrates that closer cooperation would serve the interests of both peoples.
- Such integration may include additional arrangements concerning movement of persons, economic regulation, taxation, social security, infrastructure, public services, justice, education and other fields.
- Any measure exceeding the competences established by this Treaty shall require an appropriate supplementary agreement or amendment.

Article 44

Right of Further Association

- Nothing in this Treaty shall prevent the Parties from subsequently establishing, by mutual democratic consent and in accordance with their respective constitutional procedures, closer forms of political, economic or institutional association.
- Such future arrangements may establish additional common institutions or transfer expressly defined competences to jointly constituted authorities.
- No such future arrangement shall enter into force without the constitutional approval required by each Party.
- This Article shall not be construed as creating an obligation upon either Party to pursue political union.

Article 45

Democratic Consent and Popular Legitimacy

- Any future agreement providing for the transfer of sovereign powers or the establishment of a political union shall be subject to the constitutional procedures of both Parties.
- Where the Constitution or domestic law of either Party requires a referendum or other form of direct popular approval, such requirement shall apply.
- Neither Party may circumvent its constitutional requirements by means of an implementing decision adopted under this Treaty.

Article 46

Five-Year Review and Treaty Development

- Every five years, the Partnership Council shall conduct a comprehensive review of the operation of this Treaty.
- The review shall assess the degree of economic, social, institutional and infrastructural integration achieved and identify areas where further cooperation may be desirable.
- The Parties may, following such review, negotiate amendments, protocols or supplementary treaties.
- The review process shall not itself alter the rights or obligations of the Parties.

Part X

Final Provisions

Article 47

Relationship with Other International Obligations

- Nothing in this Treaty shall prejudice the rights and obligations of either Party arising from international agreements to which it is a party.
- The Parties shall implement this Treaty consistently with the law of the European Union insofar as applicable to Romania.
- Following the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union, the Parties shall review this Treaty to ensure its continued compatibility with European Union law while preserving its bilateral character and objectives to the fullest extent legally possible.

Article 48

Settlement of Disputes

- Any dispute concerning the interpretation or implementation of this Treaty shall initially be addressed through consultation within the Partnership Council.
- If the dispute cannot be resolved through consultation within ninety days, the Parties may refer it, by mutual agreement, to arbitration or another peaceful dispute-settlement mechanism.
- Nothing in this Article prevents the Parties from agreeing to submit a particular dispute to an international court or tribunal having jurisdiction.

Article 49

Amendments, Duration and Withdrawal

- This Treaty may be amended by written agreement between the Parties.
- Amendments shall enter into force following completion of the constitutional procedures required by each Party.
- This Treaty is concluded for an indefinite period.
- Either Party may withdraw from this Treaty by written notification through diplomatic channels.
- Withdrawal shall take effect two years after the date on which the notification is received by the other Party, unless the Parties agree otherwise.
- Withdrawal shall not affect rights and obligations accrued before the date on which withdrawal becomes effective, nor shall it automatically terminate projects or arrangements whose continuation is necessary to protect acquired rights.

Article 50

Ratification, Entry into Force and Authentic Texts

- This Treaty shall be subject to ratification in accordance with the constitutional procedures of the Parties.
- It shall enter into force on the date of the exchange of instruments of ratification.
- The Parties shall deposit their instruments of ratification through diplomatic channels.
- The Treaty shall be registered with the Secretary-General of the United Nations in accordance with Article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations.
- This Treaty is drawn up in two original copies in the Romanian language, each text being equally authentic.
- IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the undersigned Plenipotentiaries, being duly authorised by their respective Governments, have signed this Treaty.

Done at _____, on _____.
For Romania

For the Republic of Moldova

Legal Commentary on the Proposed Treaty

Legal Character of the Instrument

The proposed instrument should be characterised as a bilateral framework treaty of strategic partnership and progressive integration.

It is not a treaty of friendship in the relatively narrow post-Soviet sense, nor is it yet a treaty establishing a federation, confederation or political union. Its legal function would be closer to a framework/umbrella treaty: it establishes principles, institutions and procedures under which numerous existing and future sectoral agreements operate.

That approach is particularly appropriate because the Romania–Moldova relationship already comprises a substantial treaty acquis. Moldova's Embassy in Bucharest currently identifies 175 bilateral treaties across different fields. (Romania MFA)

The proposed treaty therefore should not purport to replace that entire acquis automatically. Instead, it should create a hierarchy of coordination:

existing treaties → framework treaty → implementing protocols → future supplementary treaties.

That is legally much safer than declaring that all prior instruments are superseded.

The Treaty Would be Legally Binding, Not Merely Political

The present wording sometimes sounds like a declaration of political intent, but much of it actually creates international legal obligations.

That distinction matters.

For example:

"The Parties shall progressively establish..."

creates an obligation of conduct, even though the final degree of integration is not yet specified.

By contrast:

"The Parties shall endeavour to..."

normally creates a softer obligation of cooperation rather than a precisely enforceable substantive obligation.

For a serious treaty, I would deliberately use three levels:

"shall" for binding obligations;

"shall endeavour to" for obligations requiring continuing cooperation where the result depends on future negotiations or domestic measures;

"may" for discretionary powers.

The present draft occasionally moves between those categories without sufficiently distinguishing them.

Article 3 is One of the Treaty's Most Important Provisions

The sovereignty clause is legally excellent in concept.

The provision that joint institutions possess only powers expressly conferred upon them establishes something analogous to the principle of conferral familiar from EU constitutional law.

That is particularly valuable here because Article 6 establishes a "Common Strategic Space," while Articles 7–10 create permanent institutions.

Without Article 3, a future argument could arise that the Partnership Council has implied powers simply because the Parties intended "deep integration."

Article 3 prevents that.

I would strengthen it further:

No competence shall be attributed to an institution established under this Treaty by implication, analogy or general principle.

That sentence would be an exceptionally useful safeguard.

It means that integration cannot silently become sovereignty.

The Biggest Legal Issue is EU Law

This is the most important qualification to the entire project.

Romania is an EU Member State. Therefore, Romania cannot simply conclude a bilateral agreement with Moldova that contradicts EU law or occupies a field in which the EU has exclusive external competence.

The EU Treaties give the Union exclusive competence in areas including the customs union and common commercial policy, while many other fields relevant to this treaty—internal market, transport, energy, environment, agriculture, social policy and justice/home affairs—are shared competences. (Eur-Lex)

That means Articles 21–25 need to be drafted carefully.

For example, the phrase:

"Economic Partnership Area"

is perfectly possible.

But if it were interpreted as establishing a customs union between Romania and Moldova, that would be problematic because customs union and common commercial policy fall within EU competence. (Eur-Lex)

I would therefore add an explicit provision:

"Nothing in this Treaty shall establish or purport to establish a customs union, common commercial policy or other competence falling exclusively within the competence of the European Union."

That single sentence materially improves the treaty.

The Same Problem Applies to Trade

The treaty presently says:

"The Parties shall progressively remove barriers to bilateral trade."

That is reasonable.

But it should not say that Romania and Moldova will independently establish a complete free-trade regime that modifies EU common commercial policy.

Instead, the treaty should distinguish between:

bilateral facilitation, which can be extensive; and

trade policy, which must remain compatible with EU law.

This becomes even more important if Moldova joins the EU.

After accession, Romania and Moldova would become Member States of the same Union, meaning that many of the bilateral economic provisions would become redundant or would have to operate within the EU legal order.

Moldova's Constitutional Neutrality Needs Special Treatment

Article 32 is directionally correct.

Article 11 of Moldova's Constitution provides that:

"The Republic of Moldova proclaims its permanent neutrality."

and further states that Moldova does not permit foreign military troops to be stationed on its territory. (Constitutional Court of Moldova)

Therefore, the treaty cannot function as a disguised bilateral defence alliance.

The present wording—especially:

"The Parties shall develop cooperation between their defence and security institutions"

is possible, but it should be accompanied by a stronger limitation.

I would recommend:

"No provision of this Treaty shall be interpreted as establishing an obligation upon the Republic of Moldova to participate in an armed conflict, to permit the stationing of foreign military forces upon its territory, or to undertake any military commitment incompatible with its Constitution."

This makes the treaty much harder to attack constitutionally.

It also makes the proposal politically more credible in Chişinău.

The Security Consultation Clause Should Not Become an Article 5 Guarantee

Article 31 currently says the Parties shall consult if either faces a serious security threat.

That is good.

But the treaty should deliberately stop short of NATO-style collective defence.

There should be no language such as:

"an attack against one shall be considered an attack against both."

That would fundamentally change the character of the treaty and create serious problems with Moldova's neutrality.

The proposed model should instead be:

consultation → intelligence sharing → assistance → civil protection → diplomatic coordination → optional assistance.

Not:

attack → automatic military intervention.

That distinction is legally and politically critical.

Articles 11–15 Create Something Approaching Common Citizenship Without Actually Creating it

This is one of the most interesting aspects of the proposal.

The treaty establishes:

- Mobility;
- Residence;
- Employment;
- Professional recognition;
- Social-security coordination;
- Civil-status recognition;
- Consular cooperation.

Collectively, these can create a de facto common civic space.

But they do not create common citizenship.

That is exactly what we want if the political objective is union short of unification.

However, Article 12 should not promise unrestricted employment rights immediately. It should establish a progressive legal programme, because employment rights involve domestic legislation, EU law and potentially social-security coordination.

The treaty should therefore distinguish:

treaty obligation to negotiate and implement;

from:

immediate individual entitlement.

Otherwise individuals might attempt to invoke Article 12 directly before Romanian or Moldovan courts.

The Education Provisions are Legally Much Easier

Articles 16–18 are among the strongest parts of the draft.

There is already a treaty basis for this. The 1992 Romania–Moldova agreement on science, education and culture expressly

contemplated harmonisation of policies and convergence of legislation and permitted subsequent intergovernmental programmes. (Legislatie Just)

Therefore, the new treaty would not be inventing a radically new field. It would constitutionalise and institutionalise an existing form of cooperation.

The appropriate legal mechanism is:

framework treaty → implementing programmes → institutional agreements → funding arrangements.

That is much better than attempting to regulate every educational matter directly in the framework treaty.

The Treaty Should Distinguish “Common Institutions” from “Joint Authorities”

This is a subtle but important drafting issue.

The Partnership Council, Parliamentary Assembly, Joint Commission and Secretariat are joint institutions, but they should not automatically be described as exercising governmental authority.

The Council, for example, can make decisions between the Parties, but that does not necessarily mean those decisions automatically become directly applicable domestic law.

I would therefore add:

“Decisions of the Partnership Council shall bind the Parties at the international level. Where implementation requires legislative, regulatory or budgetary measures within either Party, such measures shall be adopted in accordance with the constitutional and legal procedures of that Party.”

That is a major improvement.

It prevents the treaty from accidentally creating a supranational legal order.

The Parliamentary Assembly Should Remain Consultative

The Parliamentary Assembly is a good idea, but it should not initially have legislative powers.

The European Parliament model would be far too ambitious at this stage.

Instead, it should have:

oversight;

recommendatory powers;

investigatory/monitoring functions;

public reporting;

political dialogue.

If the Parties eventually decide to create genuinely supranational institutions, that can occur under Article 44 through a later treaty.

The Common Development Fund Needs a Separate Legal Instrument

Article 26 is politically attractive but legally incomplete.

A treaty saying:

“The Parties establish a Common Development Fund”

does not adequately answer:

Who owns the Fund?

Who contributes?

Who audits it?

Who approves expenditure?

Who is liable for its debts?

Can the Fund borrow?

What happens to its assets if Romania withdraws?

Does it possess legal personality?

Can it receive EU funds?

Can private investors participate?

Therefore Article 26 should establish the principle of the Fund and require a separate founding protocol.

That protocol could create something genuinely interesting: a Romania–Moldova Development Bank/Fund, potentially capitalised by both governments and capable of leveraging EU and international financing.

Infrastructure Provisions are Legally Sound but Need Project Agreements

Articles 27–29 are suitable for a framework treaty.

But a treaty cannot itself build a bridge, railway or electricity interconnector.

Each major project would require:
project agreement → financing agreement → land/property arrangements → procurement → environmental approvals → implementation.

The framework treaty should therefore create a legal presumption that designated projects receive priority administrative treatment, but should not attempt to override domestic planning, environmental or procurement law.

Article 28 on the Prut is Particularly Valuable

This is more than symbolic.

The existing relationship already includes border-crossing and border-management agreements, while the 2010 Treaty on the state-border regime, cooperation and mutual assistance did not enter into force according to Moldova's Border Police treaty register. (Border Police of the Republic of Moldova)

That demonstrates why the new treaty should avoid relying on a single grand border treaty.

Instead, Article 28 could provide a framework for functional integration of the border without prejudging unresolved legal instruments.

The "Prut as common development corridor" concept is therefore legally useful precisely because it shifts the emphasis from territorial sovereignty to functional cooperation.

Article 39 on Transnistria Needs Especially Careful Drafting

The present language is broadly defensible because it expressly reaffirms Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

It should nevertheless avoid implying that Romania has authority to determine the eventual constitutional settlement.

The best formulation is:

Romania supports Moldova's sovereign right to determine, through peaceful and democratic means and in accordance with international law, the constitutional arrangements governing the reintegration of the Transnistrian region.

That makes Moldova the principal constitutional actor.

Articles 41–45 form the Treaty's Constitutional "Firewall"

This is the strongest conceptual part of the document.

Article 41 says:

No automatic political union.

Article 42 says:

No implied transfer of sovereignty.

Article 43 says:

Integration can deepen.

Article 44 says:

Future union remains legally possible.

Article 45 says:

Such union requires constitutional democratic consent.

That is an excellent architecture.

It essentially creates a reversible integration ladder.

The Parties can move from:

cooperation → integration → association → deeper association → political union

without the first step legally predetermining the last.

That is considerably more sophisticated than simply writing "the Parties shall work toward reunification."

Article 44 Should Expressly Exclude Automaticity

I would strengthen it further:

"The existence of this Treaty shall not create, and shall not be construed as creating, an obligation upon either Party to negotiate or conclude a future treaty establishing political union."

That is important.

Otherwise Article 44 could potentially be portrayed as a legally binding commitment to pursue union.

The intended structure should be:

option, not obligation.

The Existing Treaty Framework Needs a Hierarchy Clause

This is probably the single most important amendment after the EU-law clause.

The present draft says existing treaties remain in force, but it does not adequately resolve conflicts.

I recommend:

"In relations between the Parties, this Treaty shall constitute the general framework for the interpretation and progressive development of their bilateral cooperation. Existing bilateral treaties shall remain in force unless expressly amended, replaced or terminated. Where a provision of an existing bilateral treaty is incompatible with a provision of this Treaty, the Parties shall, without prejudice to the rights of third parties, consult with a view to bringing the instruments into conformity. This paragraph shall not be interpreted as automatically terminating or suspending an existing treaty."

That is much safer than a blanket supremacy clause.

It also respects the fact that the existing bilateral framework includes instruments with very different legal status. For example, the 1991 economic-cooperation agreement is marked abrogated in Romania's legislative portal, while later instruments replaced or supplemented parts of that framework. (Legislatie Just)

The new treaty should therefore not pretend that the 1991 acquis is a static body of law.

The Investment Treaty Demonstrates why this Matters

There is already a 1992 Romania–Moldova agreement on reciprocal promotion and protection of investments.

That treaty contains substantive investment protections that should not accidentally disappear merely because a new framework treaty is adopted.

The same principle applies to taxation, social security, border arrangements and other technical treaties.

Therefore, the new instrument should be an umbrella, not a bulldozer.

Dispute Settlement Should be Strengthened

Article 48 is currently too soft for a treaty of this ambition.

"Consultation" is sufficient for political disputes, but not necessarily for disputes involving:

- Money;
- Infrastructure;
- Regulatory decisions;
- Treaty interpretation;
- Institutional competence.

I would create a two-track system:

Political disputes: Partnership Council.

Legal disputes: arbitration by a standing or ad hoc tribunal.

And importantly:

Individuals should not automatically acquire standing before the Partnership institutions merely because the treaty creates rights for them.

Whether an individual can invoke a treaty provision domestically should depend upon the domestic constitutional and legislative framework.

Article 49 on Withdrawal is Sound

A two-year withdrawal period is defensible and actually useful.

For a treaty designed to create infrastructure and social rights, immediate withdrawal would create instability.

I would add a continuity provision:

Withdrawal shall not affect rights lawfully acquired by natural or legal persons prior to the effective date of withdrawal, subject to the terms of the relevant implementing instruments.

This is particularly important for:

pensions, residence rights, university enrolment, infrastructure financing and investment.

Ratification is a Major Constitutional Checkpoint

The treaty should not attempt to bypass domestic constitutional procedures.

Romania's Constitution provides that ratified treaties form part of domestic law, and its constitutional framework provides specific mechanisms concerning the constitutionality of treaties and European integration. (Legislatie Just)

Moldova likewise has an established constitutional and legislative framework governing international treaties, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressly identifying the Constitution and Law on International Treaties as part of that framework. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Moldova)

Accordingly, Article 50 is correctly drafted as a ratification treaty, rather than something that could simply be brought into force by executive signature.

One Terminology Correction: Don't Call it a "Constitutional Treaty"

I would avoid describing the document itself as a constitutional treaty.

That term implies something closer to the EU Treaties or a constituent instrument of a new polity.

The better legal description is:

"Framework Treaty of Strategic Partnership and Progressive Integration."

It can have constitutional characteristics for the bilateral relationship without legally becoming the constitution of a new entity.

That distinction will matter enormously in any actual diplomatic or constitutional review.

Overall Legal Assessment

I would rate the current architecture as follows:

Area	Assessment
International-law basis	Strong
Sovereignty safeguards	Very strong
Institutional architecture	Strong, but needs competence rules
EU-law compatibility	Needs strengthening
Moldovan neutrality	Generally sound, needs explicit safeguards
Economic integration	Ambitious but legally feasible if EU-qualified
Free movement	Feasible progressively; needs implementing agreements
Defence/security	Feasible if kept below collective-defence level
Existing treaty framework	Needs a formal hierarchy/consolidation clause
Dispute settlement	Needs strengthening
Future-union mechanism	Conceptually very strong

Risk of accidental sovereignty transfer Low if Articles 41–45 are retained

Bottom Line

The proposed treaty is legally much more credible as an instrument of progressive association than as a disguised unification treaty.

Its most defensible legal theory is:

Two sovereign States voluntarily establish an exceptionally deep framework of cooperation and functional integration, while expressly retaining separate sovereignty and international personality and reserving any future transfer of sovereign powers to a separate instrument requiring the constitutional consent of both States.

That is the crucial legal distinction.

It also fits the historical reality. Romania and Moldova already have a large bilateral treaty acquis—citizen mobility from 1991, education/culture cooperation from 1992, investment protection, economic cooperation, and an increasingly integrated border-management system. The proposed treaty would therefore be an umbrella and an escalator, rather than an entirely new legal relationship.

