



MOLDOVA AT A CROSSROADS

USING THE SCORE TO UNDERSTAND *THE FUTURE*
VISIONS OF MOLDOVAN CITIZENS

ABOUT SEED AND SCORE

ABOUT SCORE

The 2022 iteration of the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index¹ in Moldova² was implemented in 2022 – 2023 by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (Seed)³ in partnership with USAID. The SCORE in Moldova was first implemented in 2017 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with Seed. In 2022, the SCORE in Moldova is accompanied by a parallel study on the left bank of the Nistru/Dniester River, implemented by the United Nations in Moldova.

The aim of SCORE Moldova 2022 was to support fostering cohesion among different segments of Moldovan society, promoting unity, understanding perceptions and attitudes from across the country, particularly given Moldova's trajectory for European integration, and providing meaningful alternatives to divisive disinformation narratives.

Data for SCORE Moldova 2022 was collected by Magenta Consulting⁴ between 11 August and 29 November 2022, with a total representative national sample of 1,991 adult respondents in the Republic of Moldova⁵. Additional representative booster samples were collected in Balti municipality (N=110), UTA Gagauzia (N=116) and respondents aged 18 to 35 (N=119), bringing the total sample to 2,336. Data was weighted to ensure representativeness, where necessary.

The SCORE Index uses a mixed-methods participatory research approach, including multi-level stakeholder and expert consultations to design and calibrate context-specific indicators and develop pertinent conceptual models to answer the research objectives. Following data collection and analysis, results are shared and reviewed with key stakeholders, ensuring local ownership of results and the relevance of findings and recommendations.

Additional reports in this series⁶ include: Strengthening the Bonds – a Report on the social dynamics in Moldovan society; Narratives with Power – the Effect of Polarising Narratives on Moldova's Social Fabric; Building Peace Across the Nistru – Using the SCORE to Identify Entry Points for Reintegration of the Left Bank.

The SCORE data platform can be used to identify and prioritise target population groups as well as geographical locations for social cohesion interventions: app.scoreforpeace.org/en/Moldova/datasets.

ABOUT SEED

Seed works with international development organisations, governments, and civil society to design and implement people-centred evidence-based strategies for promoting peaceful, inclusive, and resilient societies.

The SCORE Index was developed in Cyprus through the joint efforts of Seed and UNDP's Action for Cooperation and Trust programme (UNDP-ACT), with USAID funding. SCORE examines and quantifies two main components of resilient peace: reconciliation and social cohesion.

This report was prepared by Christoforos Pissarides and Alexander Guest at Seed.

¹ For more information about the SCORE methodology, visit app.scoreforpeace.org.

² For more on SCORE Moldova and to see more of the results, visit app.scoreforpeace.org/en/Moldova/datasets.

³ For more about Seed, see seedsofpeace.eu.

⁴ See consulting.md.

⁵ ±2.2% error margin at a 95% confidence interval. Multistage randomisation was applied, taking into account groups of districts, households, and respondents.

⁶ Available on <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/publications>



INTRODUCTION

Moldova finds itself at a crossroads. Its geopolitical future and alignment with the international order and with regional actors have been the key issues of political contention since its independence three decades ago. Given recent tectonic shifts in the region, this brief aims to bring the voices of all Moldovan citizens to the table. The brief will reveal which demographic, linguistic, political, or ethnic groups are more reluctant or enthusiastic about different options for Moldova's geopolitical future. It will identify citizens with particular profiles of opinions about these options, in an attempt to inform the policies of actors aiming to facilitate the choices of Moldovan citizens in a way that is inclusive and representative of all groups. In light of Moldova's recent granting of candidacy for the European Union (EU)⁷ and the transformative reform agenda of the government⁸, the report will also identify entry points and drivers which impact the level of support both for alignment with the EU and for supporting the reforms package. It will also identify potential spoilers or fracture points which might diminish support for that pathway within the broader framework of alleviating the risk of polarisation and building convergences among all socio-political groups.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The majority of Moldovan citizens prefer that the country remains non-aligned (65%) and that it becomes a friendly bridge between the EU and Russia (64%), and their support for these options has increased since 2017.

EU membership is contested across the country: 32% of citizens think it is highly desirable to join the EU, 32% think it is entirely unacceptable, 13% think it is satisfactory and 21% would tolerate EU membership if necessary. Respondents in Gagauzia are opposed to joining the EU, and NATO, preferring instead that Moldova joins the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), or that it remains neutral. Respondents in Balti are also unenthusiastic about EU membership and are also opposed to Moldova joining the EEU and NATO.

Since 2017, there has been a decrease in citizens' positive view of the USA, Russia, and to a lesser extent the EU. In 2022, respondents are generally unwilling to jeopardise relations with Russia by EU accession negotiations, and respondents are not swayed towards either a pro-EU or pro-Russian future when presented with favourable economic conditions. Since the war in Ukraine, making a choice between a more EU leaning versus a more Russia leaning future may be viewed as more costly and risky by Moldovans, and thus non-aligned status and remaining a friendly bridge are attractive and safe options.

Using the SCORE, we have discovered four main groups of geopolitical alignment among Moldovan citizens, each with their own unique profiles: people who are clearly pro-EU, people who are clearly pro-Russia, a group that is supportive of closer alignment with both the EU and Russia, and a group that is supportive of neither. This policy brief discusses the desires, priorities, and behaviours of each of these groups, and how they can be targeted by social interventions to address their concerns. Gagauzia consists overwhelmingly of the pro-Russia group, while the North has a large proportion of citizens

⁷ The European Commission. The European Commission recommends to Council confirming Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia's perspective to become members of the EU and provides its opinion on granting them candidate status. IP/22/3790 [Internet]. Brussels; 2022 [cited 2022 Jun 21]. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_3790

⁸ Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 CM(2020)161 [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2023 Mar 24]. Available from: <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680a029ad>; Government of the Republic of Moldova. Draft Strategy for Ensuring the Independence and Integrity of Justice Sector for 2020-2023 [Internet]. [cited 2023 Mar 24]. Available from: http://justice.gov.md/public/files/directia_analiza_monitorizare_si_evaluare_a_politicilor/EN_Draft_Strategy_Ensuring_Independence_Integrity_of_Justice_Sector_2020-2023.pdf; Government of the Republic of Moldova. National Human Rights Action Plan [Internet]. [cited 2023 Mar 24]. Available from: http://www.justice.gov.md/public/files/massmedia/PNADO_III.pdf; Government of the Republic of Moldova. National Development Strategy "Moldova 2030" [Internet]. [cited 2023 Mar 24]. Available from: <https://cancelaria.gov.md/ro/apc/moldova-2030>

happy to align with both orientations, and the rest of the country is generally pro-EU while the Balti region has the biggest share who support neither the EU nor Russia leaning futures.

Analysis shows that around 80% of the respondents are aware of reforms and the support for these is high across most demographic groups except UTAG respondents who are unsupportive of the education reform.

This policy brief also reveals the key drivers which underpin support for, or opposition to, reforms and a pro-EU orientation, so that policymakers can understand the drivers and motives behind citizens' choices. The analysis revealed that the strongest predictor is *Perceived EU Benefit*, and then *Trust in Central Government Institutions*, and *Perceived Threat from Russia*. In contrast, citizens with high levels of *Soviet Nostalgia*, those who feel threatened by the West, and those who perceive that Gagauzia is neglected by the central government are unlikely to support the EU and the reform agenda. Thus, these concerns should be addressed to ensure there is consensus around the reform and pro-EU agenda. Interventions working on increasing Moldovans' Willingness for Civic Participation and Sense of Agency, as well as their levels of tolerance and Human Rights Ethos, all of which are related to social cohesion, have been shown to have a positive effect on building pro-EU and pro-Reforms orientation.

Further analysis was conducted to identify entry points for convincing Moldovans of the benefits of joining the EU. The dominant predictor of perceiving a benefit to joining the EU is about the sources of media people consume: TV channels which tend to be pro-Russian or pro-EU. However, Trust in Media and Non-Governmental Institutions, and Sense of Representation are also significant drivers. Building trust in such actors, as well as reaching out to those who feel they are non-represented, will increase their levels of buy-in to the strategic direction of the current government and the reforms packages. Interventions which seek to increase the quality of service provision was found to have a positive effect on pro-reform and pro-EU orientations only when the improvement in services is linked to an increase in positive perceptions about the benefits of joining the EU, otherwise it leads to complacency, and that that services can improve without the need for reforms or closer EU integration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Moldovan government stakeholders should address concerns about EU membership among the 32% of Moldovans who consider it absolutely unacceptable. Communicating that EU integration is possible while still remaining a friendly bridge between the EU and Russia may help. Stakeholders should also ensure to this group that EU membership would not lead to alienation and isolation of Russian speaking groups. Advocacy for EU membership should distinguish between the EU and NATO, as joining the latter is opposed by a larger proportion of citizens, while non-alignment is strongly supported. Clarifying that joining the EU will not put Moldova into peril is crucially important.
- This level of reluctance in closer EU alignment, as well as for the reforms package, can be resolved by convincing citizens of the benefits of joining the EU. Dividends of EU membership should be communicated both on utilitarian grounds as well as in terms of values and rights especially for groups who feel soviet nostalgia and long for a sense of closer community feel and camaraderie. Economic and livelihood benefits should be communicated alongside with EU as a large diverse community that promotes social inclusion and welfare based on rights, representation, and tolerance. At least 50% of Moldovans are confident about seeing positive benefits in infrastructure, technology, research, and the health services, but Moldovans are relatively less confident that the private sector, manual workers, and the value system will see a positive benefit. Communication strategies, as well as policy, should ensure that Moldovans' concerns around these sectors are addressed.
- Perceptions around threat from the West or from Russia, as well as Soviet Nostalgia all play a key role in affecting Moldovans' opinions about the reforms and EU integration. It is thus crucial that these concepts and narratives are part of any outreach strategy. If the level of perceived threat from external actors increases, this will lead to increasing polarisation of the country into two well defined camps based on geopolitical orientations. Given also that the levels of intergroup tensions are mainly political, this will be a threat to social cohesion. Thus, forming a common vision for Moldova should not be based on narratives of external threats, but rather a reflective consideration of the benefits or drawbacks of each potential future vision. A more

inclusive and constructive dialogue, which should include voices from communities that have concerns about aligning with the EU should happen.

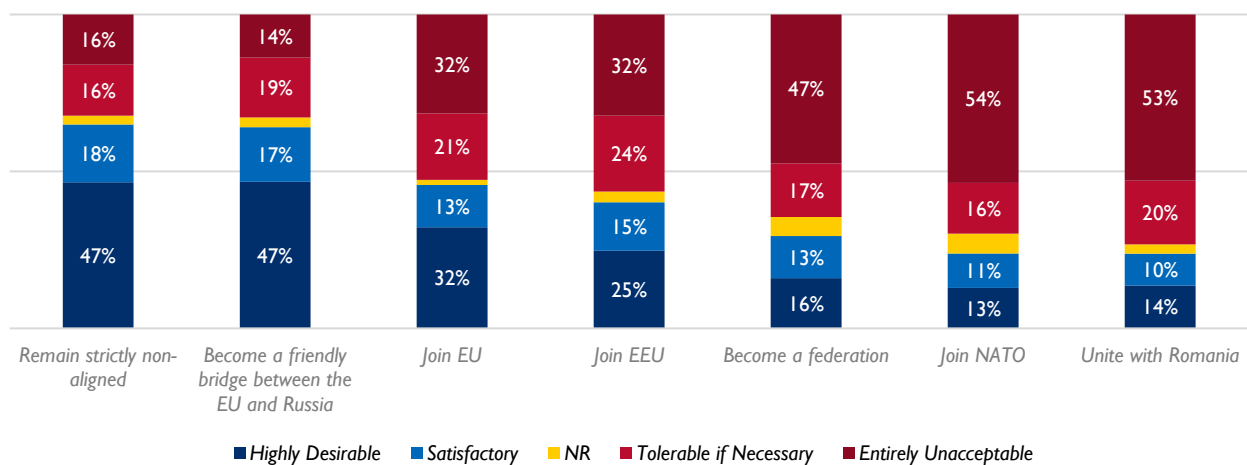
- Efforts towards building support for alignment with the EU should be focussed in the Cahul, Cantemir and Taraclia rayons in the South, as well as Briceni, Edinet, Ocnita and Donduseni in the North, in which over one third of people support closer alignment with Russia. Targeting should also focus on Balti, where the plurality of respondents supports neither the EU nor Russia.
- There is still a significant amount of work to be done in building support among Gagauzians for EU membership. This can be done by focussing on increasing Perceived EU Benefit, but also building trust in the central government. Analyses suggest that if Gagauzians feel represented by central institutions, and not neglected by them, this will increase support for the policy direction pursued by these institutions in general, and joining the EU and the reform packages in particular. Although including Gagauzian perspectives is critical, it should be considered that Gagauzia makes up approximately 5% of the population of the country, while the North region makes up around 29%.
- According to SCORE analysis interventions that aim to promote EU orientation should target citizens over the age of 35 and Russian-speaking Moldovans, who are more sceptical. These interventions should aim to address the grievances and anxieties of people who could be considered to have a “pro-Russia” orientation geopolitically, as they feel marginalised and under-represented politically. This could help build convergencies and alleviate scepticism.
- Interventions focused on improving Provision of Services could help build support for reforms and EU orientation if they include communication components that clarify the link between service provision and the ongoing process of reforms and EU integration. Inclusion in decision-making and dialogue with beneficiaries to better understand their perceptions around what needs improvement and how, would help communities unite behind a common future vision and geopolitical direction for the country. Closer cooperation with local leadership in communities receiving such interventions was also highlighted by Moldovan experts and stakeholders as an entry point to strengthen the link between service improvements, reforms, and EU integration is highlighted.
- Last but not least, investing in efforts that promote human rights and inclusive civic identity would create a positive impact, as they are significant drivers of a pro-EU & pro-Reforms Outlook.

FUTURE VISIONS OF MOLDOVAN CITIZENS

To see how Moldovans feel about different scenarios for the geopolitical future of Moldova, respondents were asked to indicate their level of approval for each scenario. Since the aim of this analysis was not to predict the results of a potential referendum in the future but rather to gauge the room for compromise, the possible responses included “highly desirable”, “satisfactory”, “tolerable if necessary” and “entirely unacceptable”. The future scenarios that were tested ranged from potential EU and NATO membership to Moldova becoming a federation, from joining Russia leaning institutions to remaining non-aligned. Subsequently, the responses were broken down by region to identify geographic patterns.

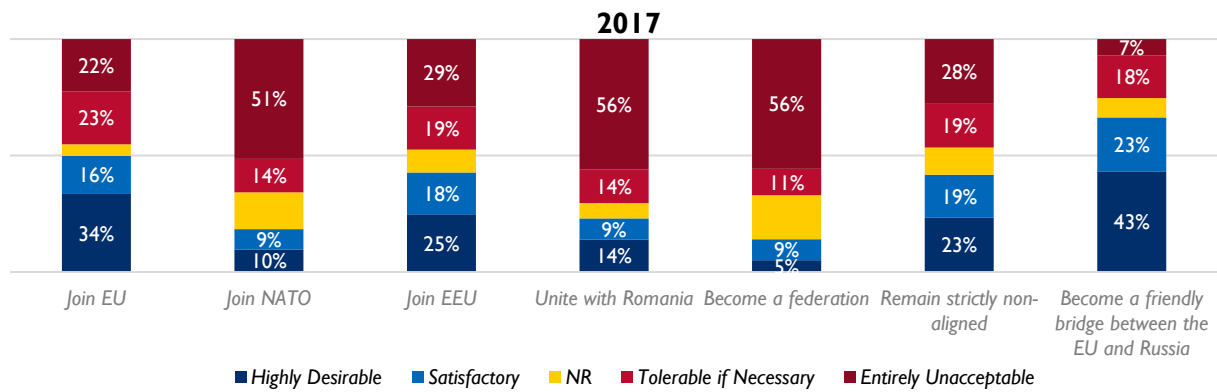
Figure 1: Frequency of responses for Moldova's geopolitical future, in the nationally representative sample (N=1991).

FULL SAMPLE



The most popular option for the geopolitical future of Moldova is to remain strictly non-aligned with 65% of the respondents finding this option either “highly desirable” (47%) or “satisfactory” (17%) (Figure 1). This is followed by the option of Moldova becoming a friendly bridge between the EU and Russia (47% “highly desirable”, 17% “satisfactory”). There is a clear majority of 53% and 54% who reject the idea of joining NATO and uniting with Romania respectively. The prospect of joining the European Union is a highly contested issue with equal levels of desirability and rejection (32%) while around one in five are willing to tolerate this scenario if necessary. Two in five respondents see joining the Eurasian Economic Union positively while around one in three completely reject this idea. Moldova becoming a federation is only supported by 29% of respondents. Respondents aged 18 to 35 follow similar patterns by largely supporting a non-aligned future. No significant gender differences were found between preferences for different future scenarios.

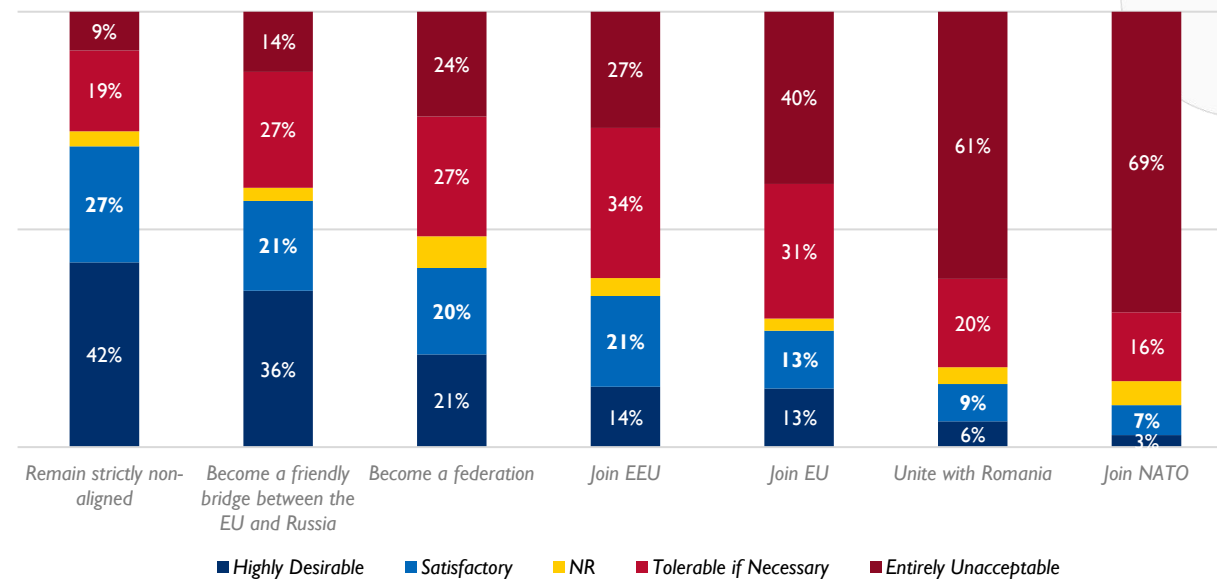
Figure 2: Frequency of responses for Moldova's geopolitical future, in the nationally representative sample in 2017 (N=1209).



In the Moldova SCORE 2017, only 14% of respondents felt positively about becoming a federation, but this increased to 29% in 2022. In 2022, even more people wanted Moldova to remain non-aligned and not join either pro-European or pro-Russian alliances, with 65% expressing preference for this option, compared to only 42% in 2017 (Figure 2).

Figure 3: Frequency of responses for Moldova's geopolitical future, representative sample of North region in 2022 (N=540).

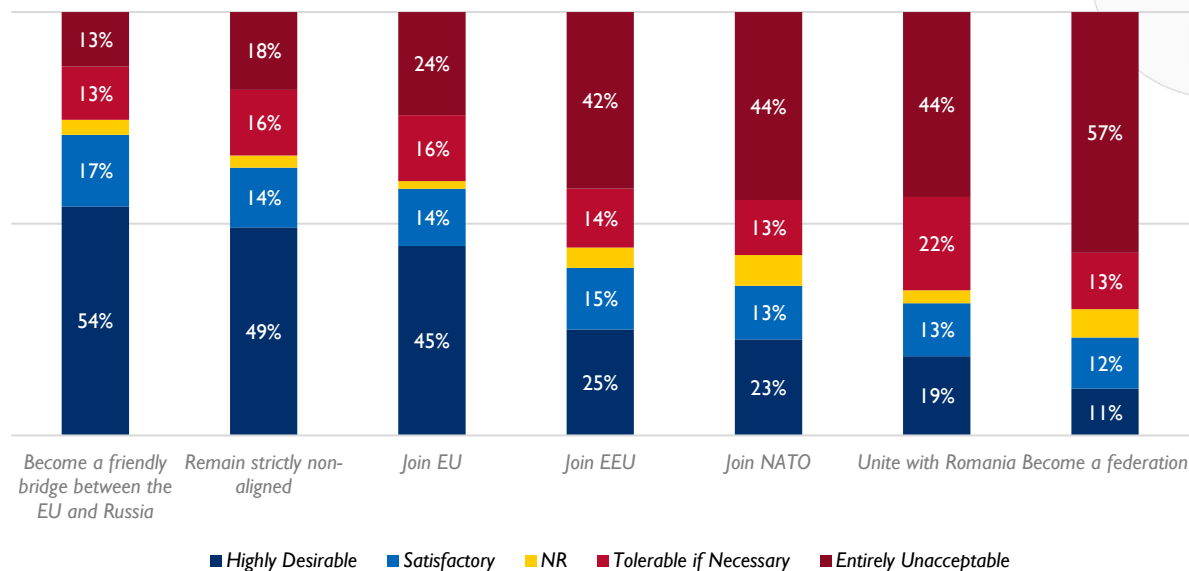
NORTH



In the North region of Moldova, the rejection of uniting with Romania and of joining NATO is more pronounced than in the national sample with over 60% of the respondents rejecting these options compared to just above 50% in the national sample (Figure 3). The possibility of joining the EU appears to be less accepted in the North with approximately one in four responding positively.

Figure 4: Frequency of responses, representative sample of Centre in 2022 (N=558)

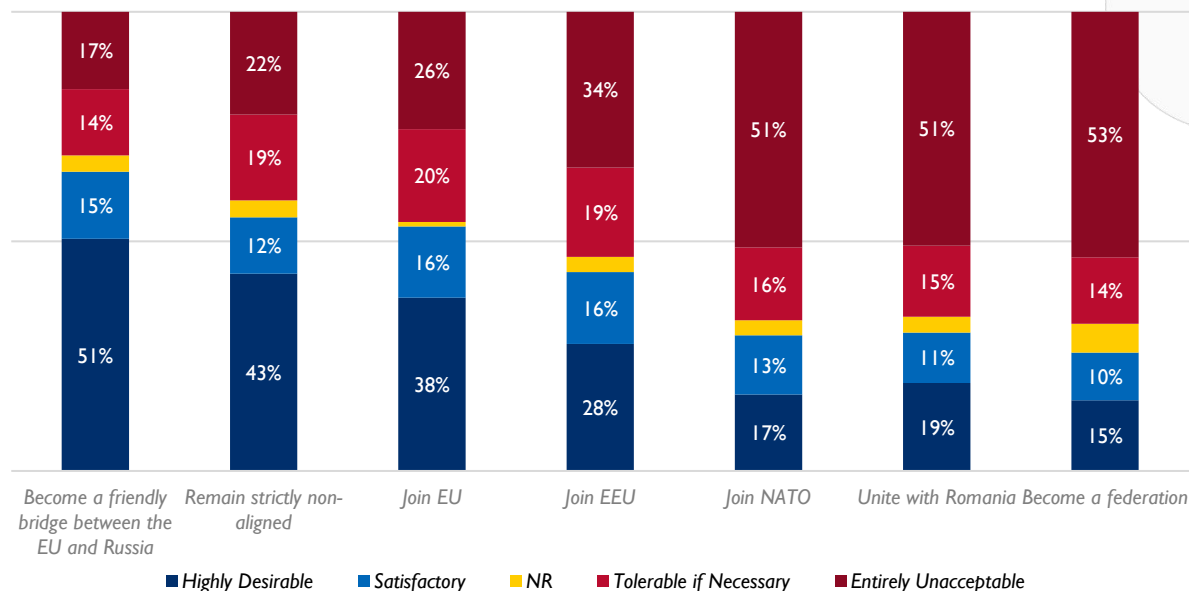
CENTRE



In the Centre region (excluding Chisinau), support for joining the EU reaches a clear majority with 59% of the respondents viewing this option positively (Figure 4). Joining NATO, while still an unpopular option, is slightly more supported (36%) compared to the full sample (24%).

Figure 5: Frequency of responses, representative sample of Capital in 2022 (N=495).

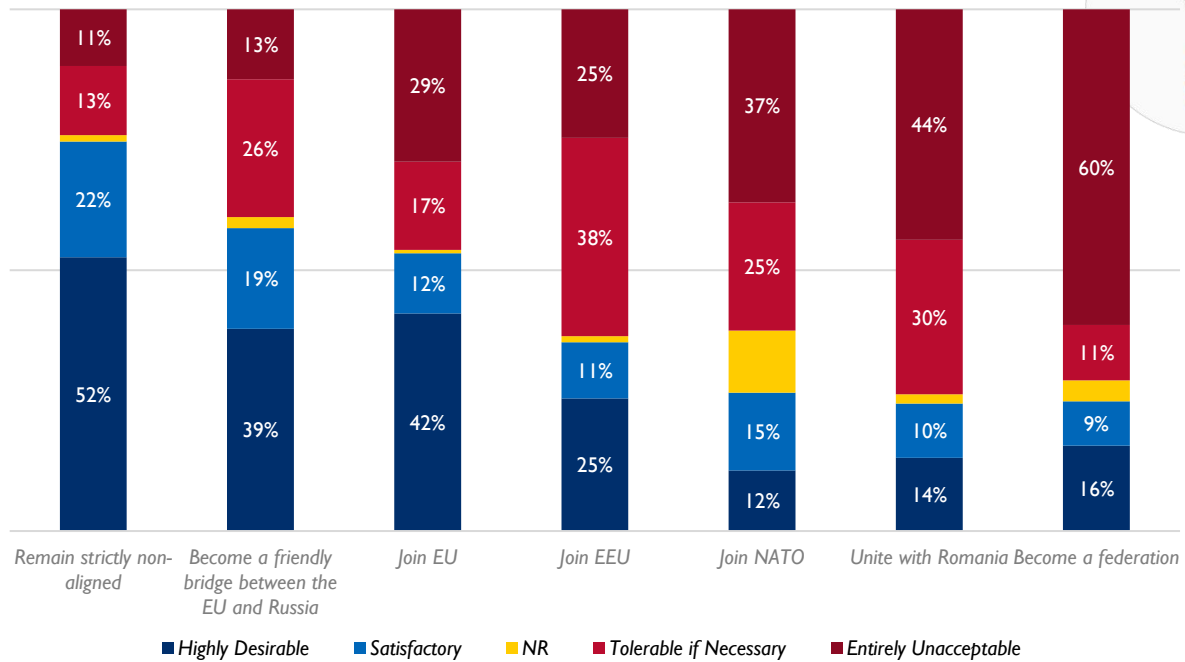
CAPITAL



Similar to the rest of the central region of Moldova, there is a slight majority (54%) of respondents who view the idea of joining the EU positively in the capital (Figure 5). On the other hand, the option of Moldova joining NATO (51%), uniting with Romania (51%), and becoming a federation (53%) is strongly rejected.

Figure 6: Frequency of responses, representative sample of South in 2022 (N=328).

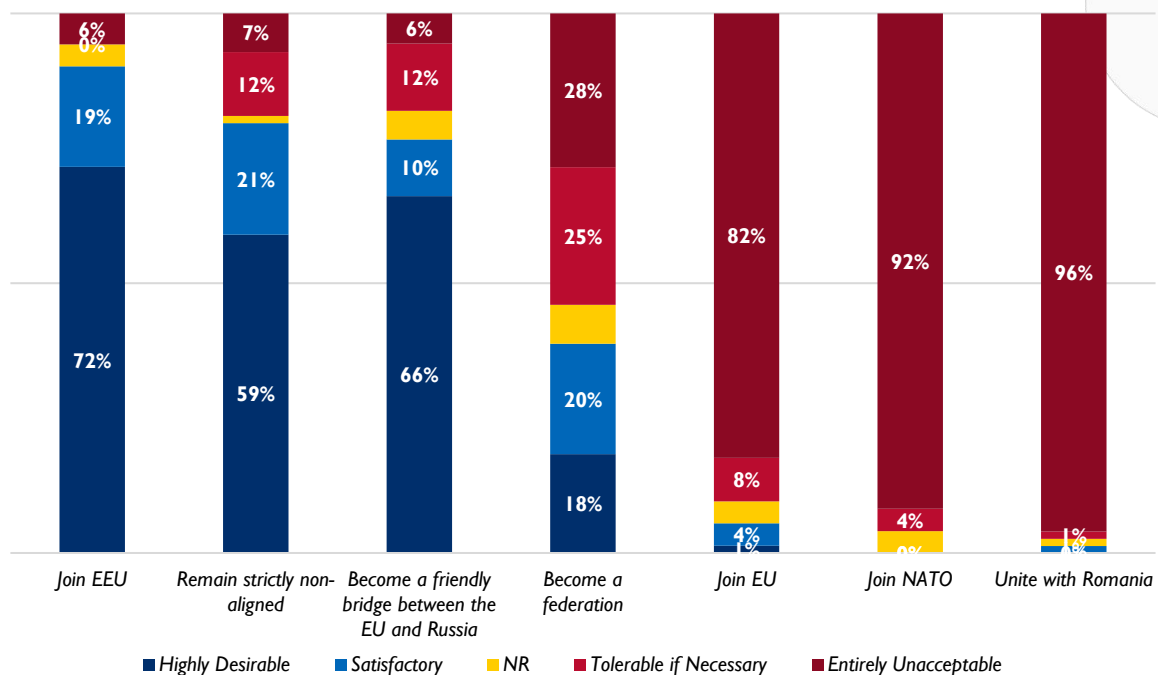
SOUTH



In the southern region of Moldova, there is a clear rejection of a future in which the country becomes a federation (60%) while the possibility of joining the EU reaches a slight majority (54%) with more than half of the respondents viewing this option at least satisfactory (Figure 6). The “neutral” scenarios remain highly accepted in the south, as is the case for all regions.

Figure 7: Frequency of responses, representative sample of UTA Gagauzia in 2022 (N=191).

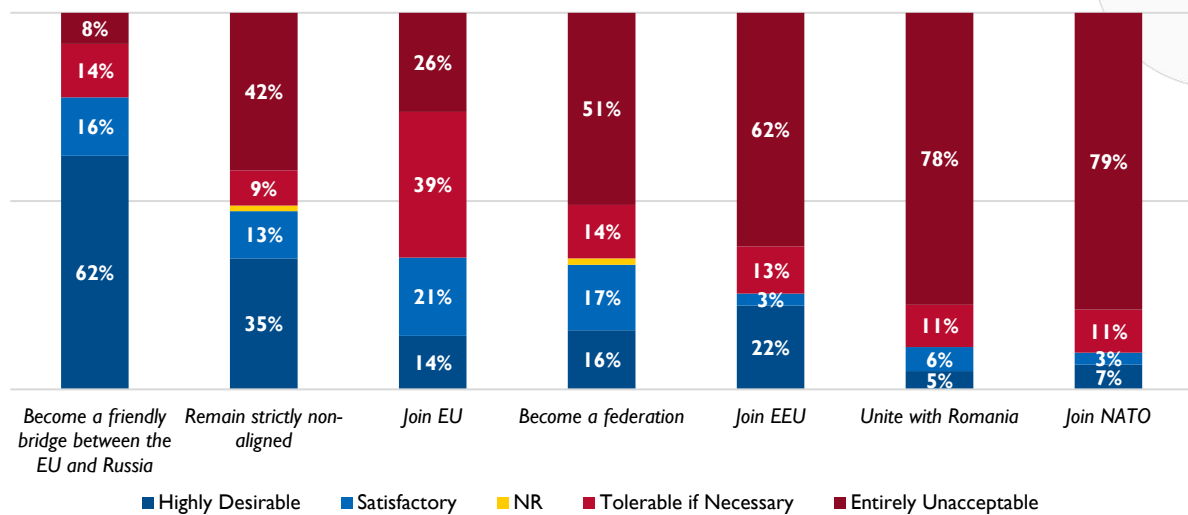
UTAG



In the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (UTAG) an overwhelming majority rejects the idea of Moldova joining the EU (82%), joining NATO (92%) or uniting with Romania (96%) (Figure 7). On the other hand, the possibility of joining the Eurasian Economic Union is a very popular option among Gagauzians with 72% believing that this option is “highly desirable” and another 19% who think that this is “satisfactory”. Moldova remaining strictly non-aligned or becoming a friendly bridge between the EU and Russia are also widely accepted.

Figure 8: Frequency of responses, representative sample of Balti in 2022 (N=174).

BALTI

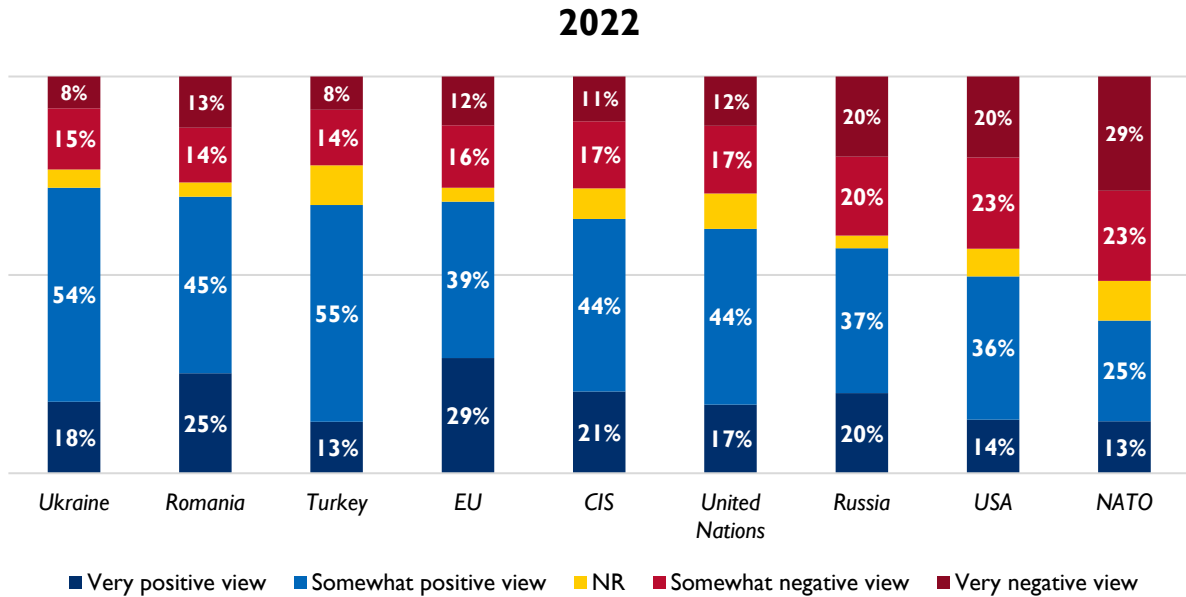


Balti is the only region in which there is a clear difference in the responses between Moldova remaining strictly non-aligned, with fewer than half of the interviewees responding positively, and the responses for Moldova becoming a friendly bridge between the EU and Russia, which is a highly popular option, favoured by 62% (Figure 8). All other scenarios are strongly rejected among respondents in Balti, except the option of joining the EU with 35% responding positively, 39% finding this option tolerable if necessary and approximately one in four rejecting it.

SENSE OF ALLIANCE

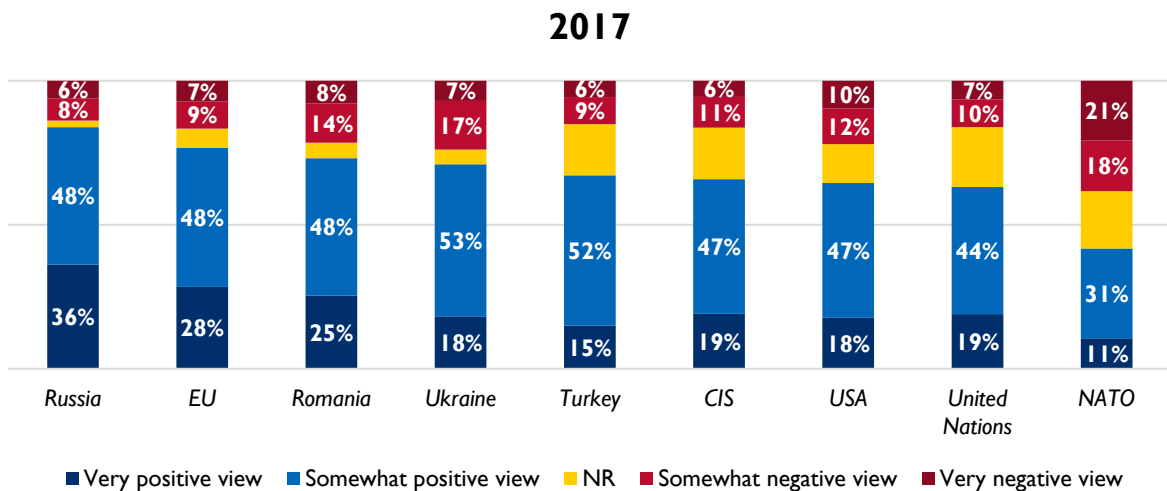
The respondents were asked about their geopolitical allegiance to various countries or actors that hold significance to Moldova (Figure 9). The most favoured actors, according to the responses of over two-thirds of respondents, were Ukraine, Romania, the European Union, and Turkey. Conversely, the United States and NATO garnered the least amount of positive feedback, with only 50% and 39% of respondents viewing them favourably, respectively.

Figure 9: Frequency of responses for Sense of Alliance, in the full representative sample (N=1991).



By comparing the results in 2022 to those from the previous iteration of SCORE in 2017 (Figure 10), it is possible to determine the most notable disparities between the two waves. Positive views towards Russia and the United States have considerably decreased since 2017, with a 27% decline for Russia and a 14% decline for the United States. Notably, despite the decline in *Sense of Alliance* towards Russia, there remains a majority of respondents who hold positive views towards the country in 2022. The EU has also experienced a drop in popularity, with 77% of respondents having a positive view in 2017 compared to 68% in 2022.

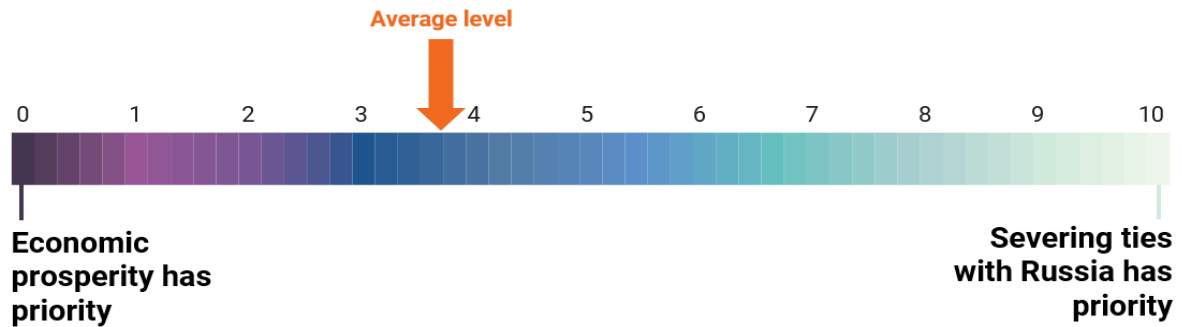
Figure 10: Frequency of responses for Sense of Alliance, in the full representative sample in 2017 (N=1209)



PREFERENCES FOR MOLDOVA'S POLITICAL ALIGNMENT

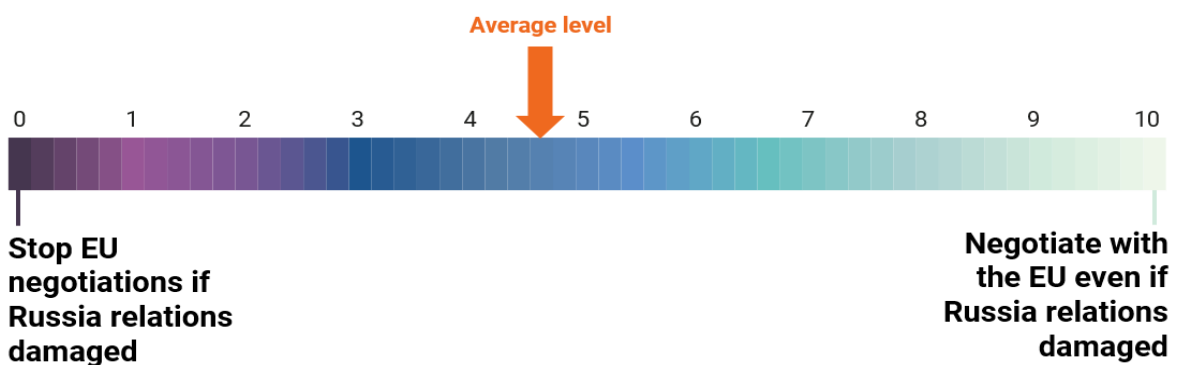
Participants were requested to choose a score between 0 and 10, wherein 0 signified that economic prosperity was the primary concern, while 10 indicated that Moldova's top priority was to disassociate itself from Russia (Figure 11). Despite the prevailing economic uncertainty, Moldovan respondents displayed reluctance to terminate their relationship with Russia, with economic prosperity considered a strategic priority, given the mean score of 3.7 out of 10. Balti respondents score much lower on the spectrum at 1.8 and UTAG respondents even lower at 0.9 indicating their clear preference against severing ties with Russia.

Figure 11: Mean scores of respondents on a bipolar scale, nationally representative sample.



Participants were also requested to position themselves on a spectrum concerning the current negotiations with the European Union and the delicate geopolitical relations with Russia (Figure 12). A rating of 0 implied an agreement to discontinue negotiations with the EU immediately if the geopolitical relations with Russia deteriorate, while a rating of 10 indicated an agreement to continue negotiations with the EU despite a possible deterioration in the relations with Russia. The average response level of 4.6 out of 10 highlights that the citizens of Moldova are not inclined to rupture their ties with Russia but are also not supportive of any modification in the trajectory of negotiations with the European Union.

Figure 12: Mean scores of respondents on a bipolar scale, nationally representative sample.



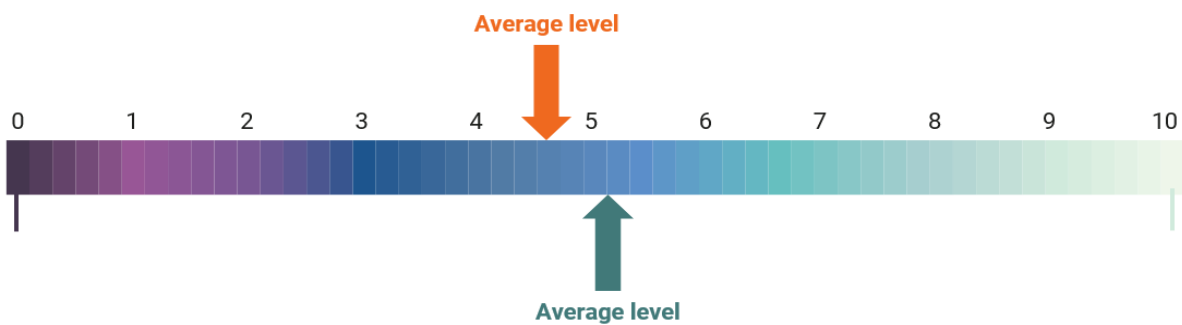
Participants also positioned themselves on a scale from 0 to 10, to express their level of agreement with the statement "Moldova should align its political future more towards Russia" (Figure 13). The mean response level (4.7) indicates that there is no apparent inclination towards or against Russia, from a geopolitical standpoint. To gauge the potential of the participants to support a future for Moldova that is closely allied with Russia, they were presented with a scenario featuring highly favourable economic conditions, including a decrease in gas prices and unimpeded access to Russian markets. The results illustrate that while the mean response level leans slightly towards Russia (5.2), the shift is not statistically significant. In other words, the scenario which hypothetically offered favourable economic conditions did not significantly motivate the respondents to shift their opinion. This means that economic factors are not the main motivating factors for those who are expressing a

preference for future alignment with Russia. Other factors such as security needs, historical or cultural proximity, or scepticism towards the EU are at play. The average score among UTAG respondents is much higher at 8.7, further indicating their sense of alliance with Russia.

Figure 13: Mean scores of two statements about Moldova aligning its political future towards Russia. A score of 0 corresponds to “entirely unacceptable” and 10 to “highly desirable”.

Moldova should align its political future more towards Russia

What if Russia immediately decreases the price of gas and gives Moldova free access to Russian markets?

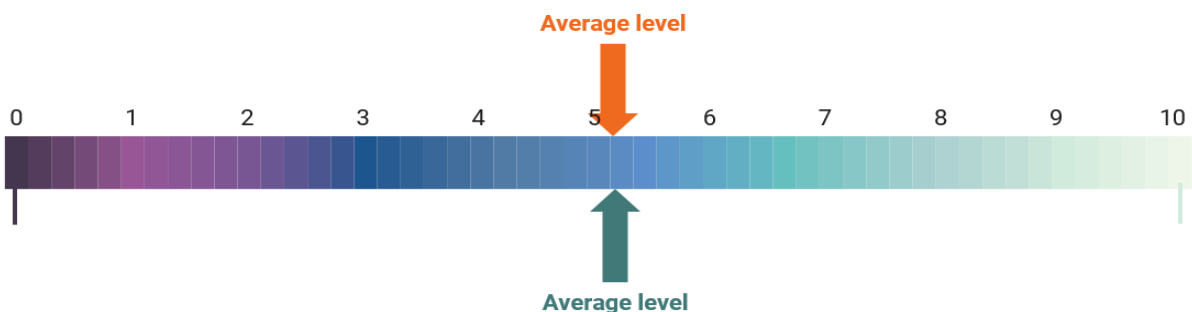


The same set of questions was posed regarding Moldova's alignment with the European Union (Figure 14). The mean response level (5.2) demonstrates that the participants are unwilling to shift their support for a definitive European future, even in the event of highly favourable economic circumstances (5.2). UTAG respondents scored 1.4 for the first statement and 1.8 for the second, while youth respondents scored 5.8 and 5.9 respectively, indicating that there is a slight generational effect towards aligning with the EU. Although, future alignment towards the EU is slightly stronger than a Russia leaning alignment, economic conditions are still not among main factors that motivate respondents' preferences. Again, concerns that relate to sense of security or values may be at play.

Figure 14: Mean scores of two statements about Moldova aligning its political future towards the EU. A score of 0 corresponds to “entirely unacceptable” and 10 to “highly desirable”.

Moldova should align its political future more towards the EU

What if the EU immediately decreases the price of gas and gives Moldova free access to European markets?



IDENTIFYING GROUP PROFILES OF GEOPOLITICAL ALIGNMENT

The questions discussed in the sections above⁹ were aggregated into two indicators: one measured the level of support for alignment with the EU, and the other measured the level of support for alignment with Russia. Then, a cluster analysis was carried out to identify patterns of responses that different groups of citizens of Moldova tend to have about their geopolitical preferences. This cluster analysis (also known as population segmentation) can assign each citizen who responded to the SCORE questionnaire into one of the four groups it discovered (Figure 15). These four groups were: the “Pro-EU” group (34%), who strongly supported closer alignment with the EU and avoided Russia, the “Pro-Russia” group (23%) who supported closer alignment with Russia and avoided the EU, the “Both” groups (27%) who support close alignment with both the EU and Russia, and the Neither group (16%) who prefer distance from both actors¹⁰.

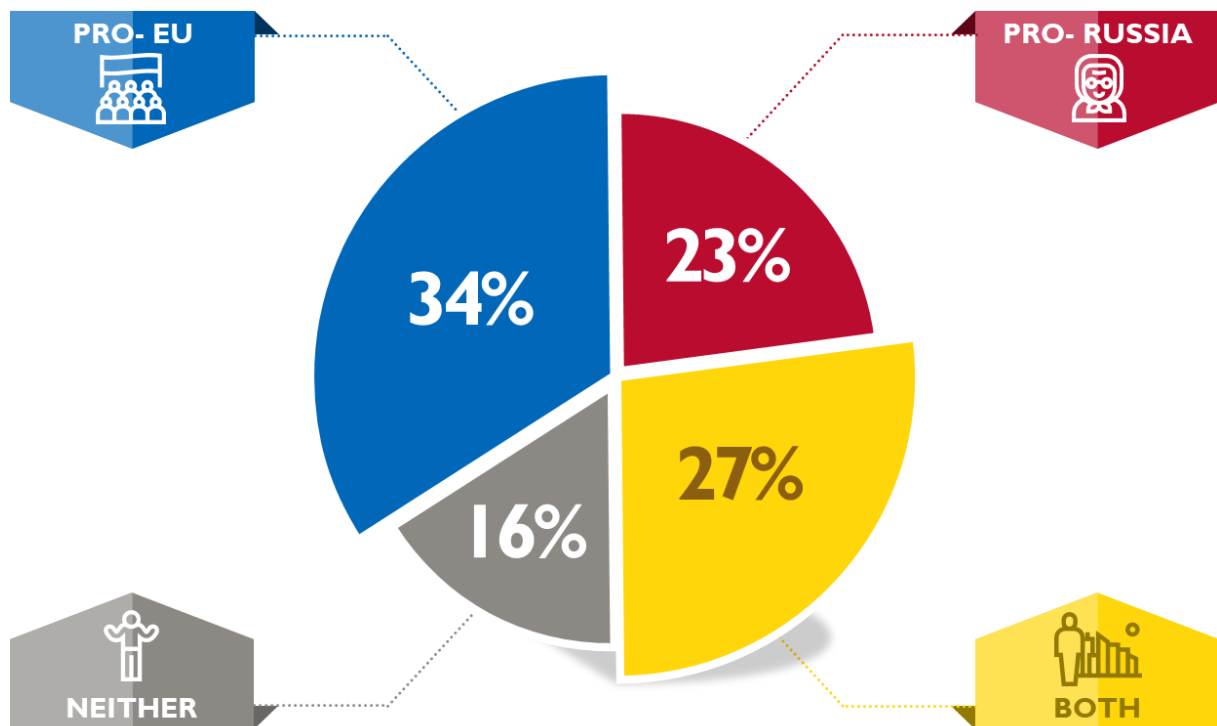


Figure 15: Results of cluster analysis which detected four distinct groups based on respondents' alliance and preference for political alignment with either Russia or the EU.

Further analysis was then done to identify the statistically significant differences between citizens in the four groups, by comparing across other social, psychological, inter-personal, political, and attitudinal indicators that we measure in the SCORE. These characteristics and preferences form the profile of each of the four groups, as shown in the table below, and can be used to tailor interventions or projects more precisely by providing a more detailed understanding of target groups beyond demographics.

The Pro-EU and Pro-Russia groups have a clear political preference with regards to geopolitical orientation. Interventions should seek to manage inter-group relations between the two, to prevent and address any polarisation and tension between them. The Pro-Russia group tends to feel marginalised and under-represented by institutions and have high levels of mistrust, as they may be feeling left behind by the future





⁹ The data used was that relating to geopolitical alignment (see the first statement in Figure 13 and Figure 14) and the overall stance of the participants towards the EU and Russia (see *Sense of Alliance* in Figure 9).

¹⁰ Score of each group for the indicator 'Sense of Alliance: European Union': Pro-EU: 9.4, Pro-Russia: 2.8, Both: 7.1, Neither: 4.4. Score of each group for the indicator 'Sense of Alliance: Russia': Pro-EU: 2.3, Pro-Russia: 8.4, Both: 6.9, Neither: 4.4.

direction pursued by the central authorities. To maintain social cohesion in Moldova, anxieties and insecurities concerns of this group about closer relations with the EU need to be understood and addressed. A key issue here is the high level of Soviet Nostalgia felt by people in the Pro-Russia group. A frank grappling with Moldova’s turbulent history, through public dialogue, which will include voices and opinions from all political and social groups, may help to demystify the past, understand the sources of this nostalgia¹¹ and inform decisions about the future.

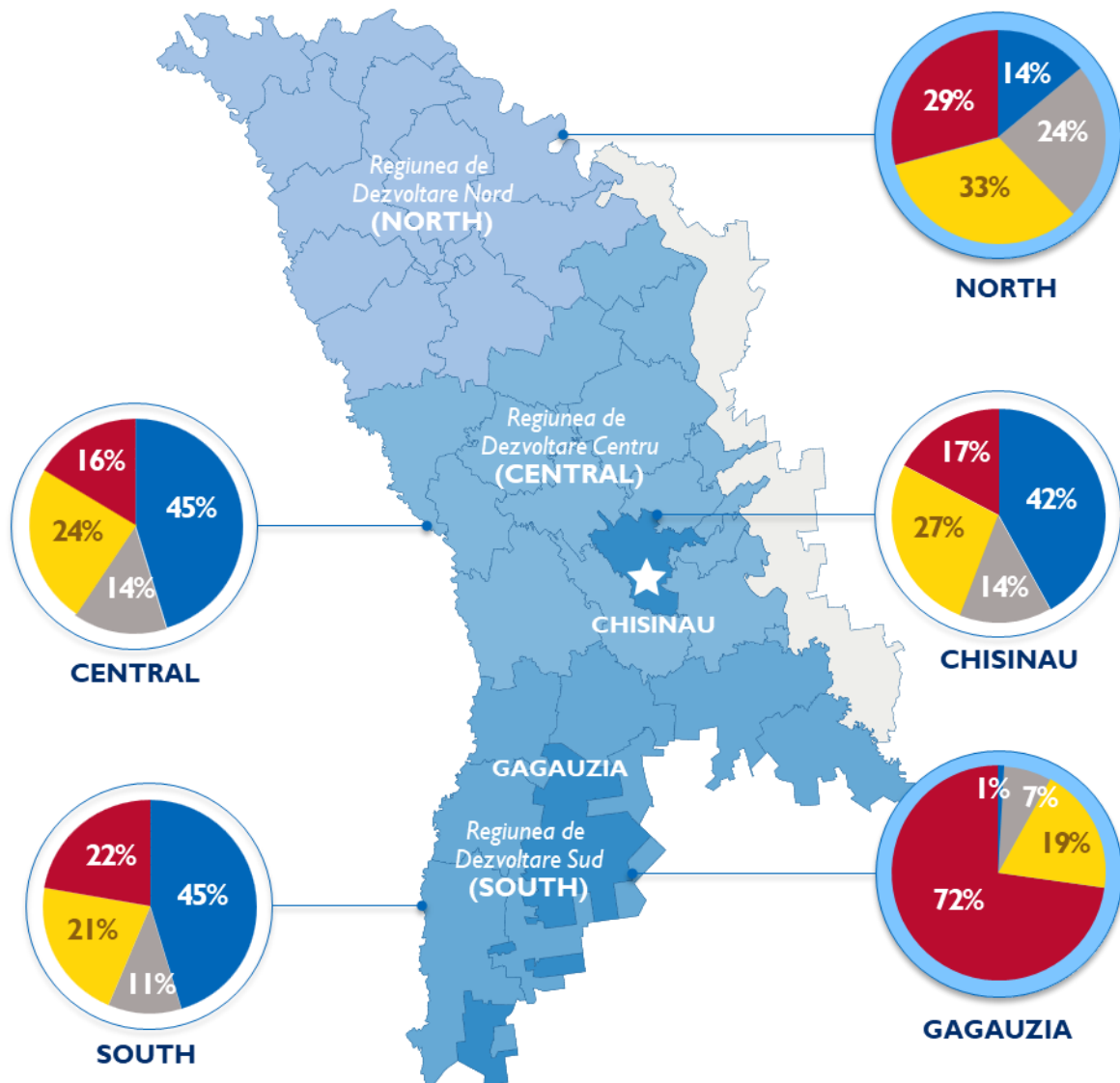
The second largest group is the “Both” group. This includes citizens who desire positive relations with both the EU and Russia. Interestingly, this group also has more frequent contact with all kinds of other social, political, and linguistic groups. They can be considered to be social connectors and synthesisers, between the two more “polar” groups, and given that they tend to live in urban areas, they may be useful agents and bridge-builders for social cohesion. Taken with the Pro-EU group, they form a majority of 57%, however, the concerns of the other two groups with regards to Moldova’s EU integration process should not be disregarded. The “Neither” group can be seen as a group that has withdrawn from civic participation, given its low scores in civic engagement. It is also a group which might be a threat to social cohesion, given its lack of tolerance for marginalised groups, its mistrust towards other political and linguistic groups, disregard for human rights, and low support for the peace process with the Transnistria region. This group is, interestingly, not strongly associated with a particular ethnic group. This group is small or marginal in most parts of the country but form the plurality in Balti, which might be a good location for constructive citizenship and social cohesion programming, with the aim of improving some of the negative characteristics common in this group.

Table 1: Profiling of the characteristics of each group of geopolitical alignment

 PRO-EU	 PRO-RUSSIA	 BOTH	 NEITHER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romanian identity and language • Pro-human rights and pro-reform, active, optimistic, and tolerant • Feel agency and representation, are politically secure, trust the central government. • More affluent and educated, with critical perspective and media literacy. • Watch TV8, Jurnal, PRO, use unimedia.md, ZdG.md • Oppose increased autonomy or independence for UTAG and Transnistria • More likely to support union with Romania and dominance of Romanian language over Russian. • Feel threatened by the war in Ukraine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger Russian identity and language, lower Moldovan identity. More likely to live in Gagauzia. • Slightly older, nostalgic about soviet times, pessimistic about the country and economy, intolerant of reforms. • More aggressive, feel marginalised and under-represented, mistrusting the central government and perceiving high levels of corruption. • Preference for a federation with Transnistria and Gagauzia as equal partners, independent states or as part of Russia • High support for peace process, increased dialogue, and cooperation with Transnistria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban • Open to political and social outgroups and have more frequent contact with different political and social groups. • Less likely to select media for its accuracy and factuality. Like to watch TV6. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't assign importance to ethnic identity. • Low support for human rights • Mistrust outgroups, intolerant. Low support for peace process with Transnistria • Disengaged, low critical perspective and media literacy.

¹¹ Soviet nostalgia maybe linked to different emotions and sense of longing than the desire to re-establish USSR. It may be linked to a longing for sense of comradery and community, a sense of pride about belonging to a big and powerful block, or a simpler nostalgia about a past where economic and social status of some groups were greater.

Figure 16: Distribution of cluster groups in each region.



In the central region, south, and Chisinau, the observed profiles exhibit similarities with the nationally representative sample (Figure 16). However, in Gagauzia, a significant proportion of nearly 75% of respondents identify as pro-Russia, while the Pro-EU group is virtually non-existent. The North region features the largest group being the "Both" category, which 33% of respondents fall into, followed by the Pro-Russia and Neither groups with 29% and 24%, respectively. The findings indicate that a degree of mistrust and mildly hostile attitudes exist between the Pro-Russia and Pro-EU groups. However, SCORE results reveal negligible levels of tension between linguistic or ethnic groups (see another report in this series, Strengthening the Bonds: Fostering Social Harmony in Moldova¹²).

¹² Available on <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/publications>

Figure 17: Distribution of geopolitical alignment groups by groups of rayon

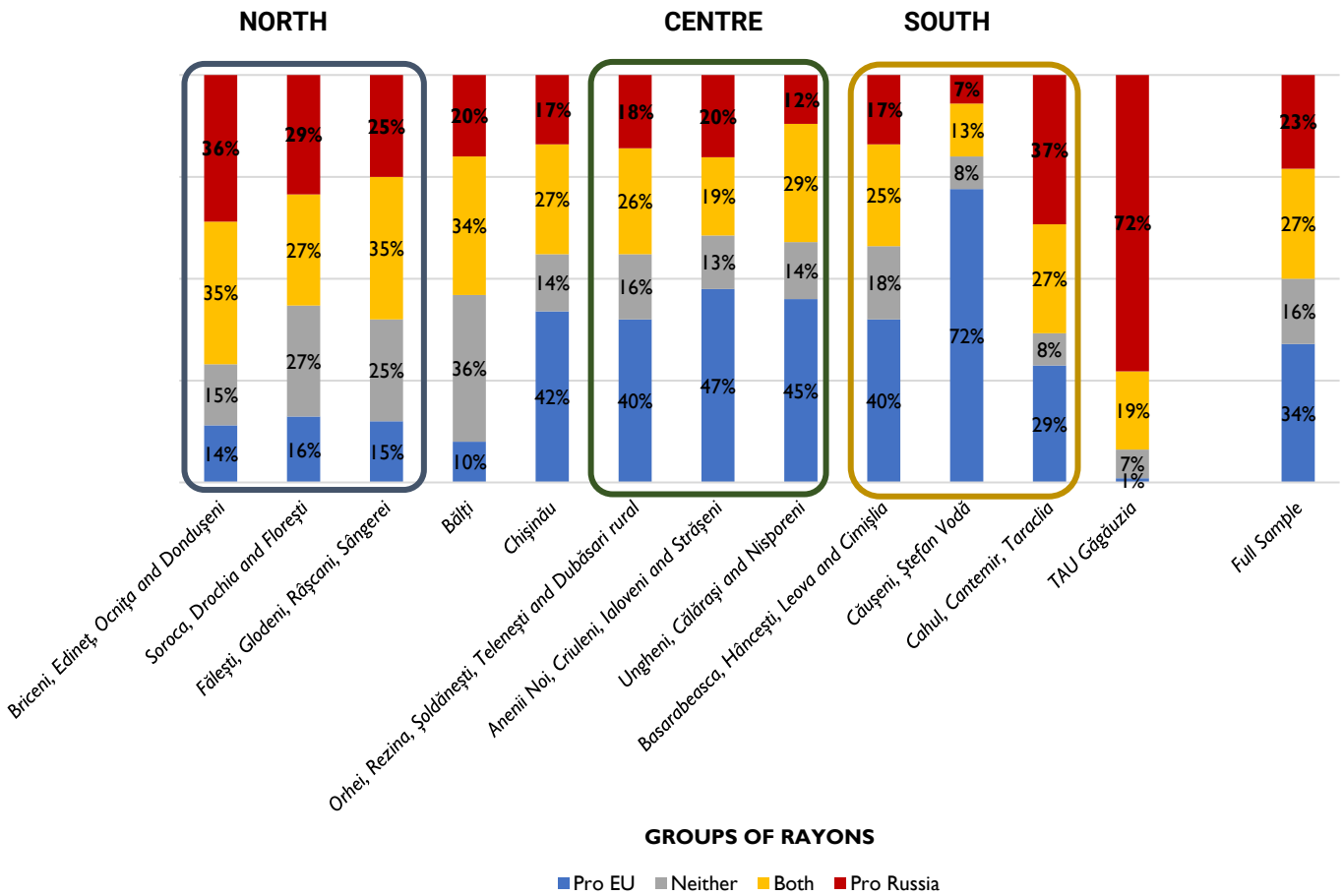


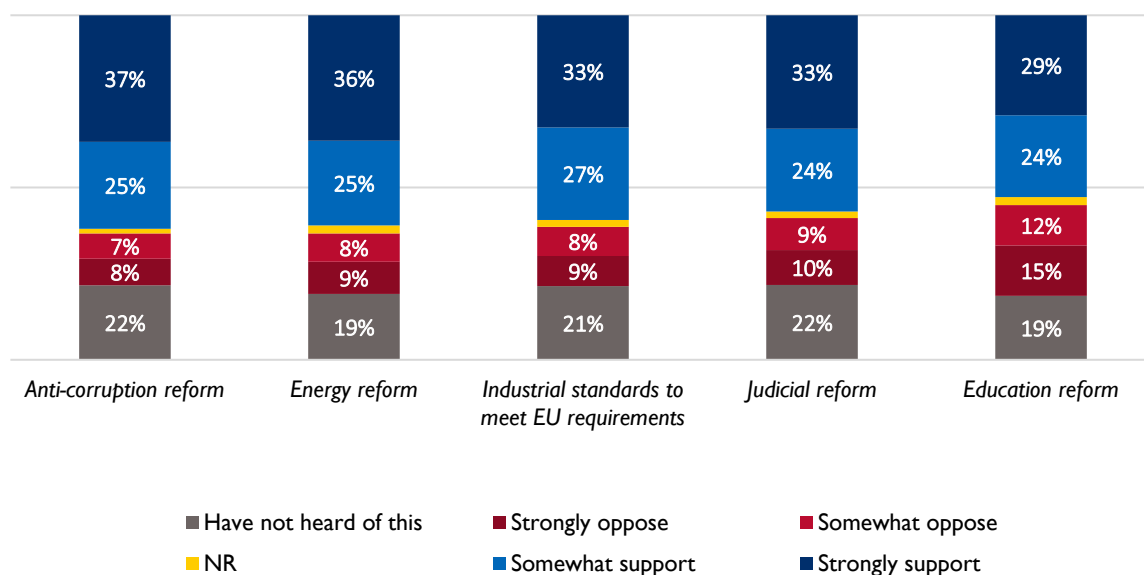
Figure 17 shows a more granular geographic disaggregation of the regions into twelve clusters of rayons.. The rayons of Cahul, Cantemir, and Taraclia exhibit a notable Pro-Russia group, with 37% of respondents identified as such (Figure 17). In contrast, the proportion of Pro-Russia respondents in the other two clusters of the South region does not exceed 17%, and the cluster composed of Causeni and Stefan Voda has a majority of Pro-EU respondents, with 72% aligning with this geopolitical orientation. By comparing Balti to the three clusters of rayons that belong to the northern region, Balti exhibits a relatively small Pro-EU group (10%). In addition, Balti manifests a comparatively substantial "Neither" group with 36% of respondents, a higher proportion than the corresponding geopolitical group in the other northern clusters of rayons, in which it does not exceed 27%.

EXPLORING INFLUENTIAL FACTORS OF PRO-EU AND PRO-REFORM ORIENTATION

LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF AND SUPPORT FOR REFORMS

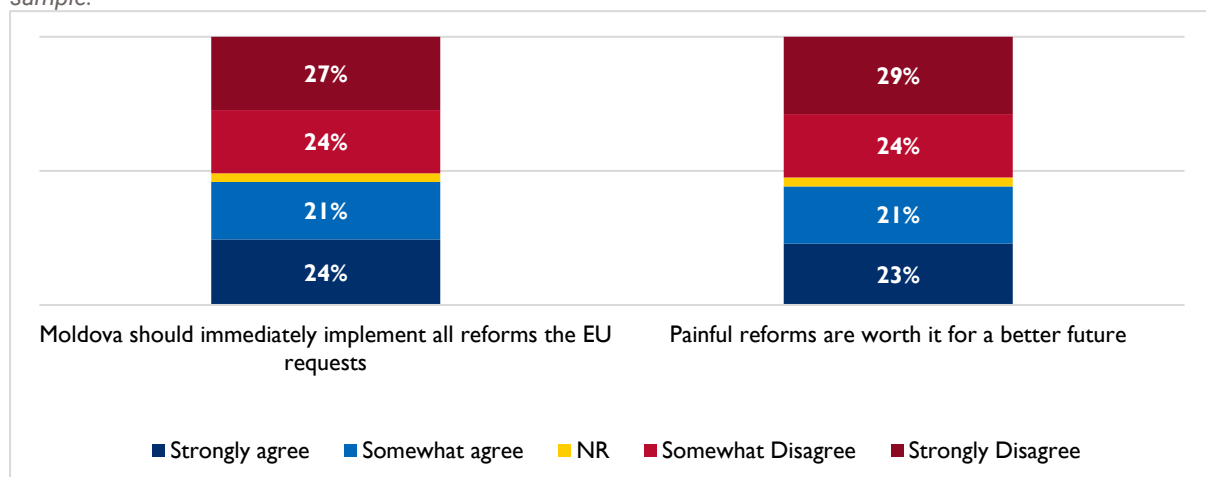
Almost one in five respondents were unaware of the reforms that were mentioned in the survey (Figure 18). Across the range of questions, there is a relatively low degree of variability, with a majority of respondents expressing support for the proposed reforms. Of the reforms presented, education reform garnered the highest level of opposition, while anti-corruption reform experienced the least amount of resistance. In Gagauzia, there is a tendency to oppose reforms around education. When this was discussed with local stakeholders, it was interpreted to be related to reorganisation of local universities, an issue which clearly should be handled with sensitivity to avoid alienation of Gagauzians and to prevent grievances that can undermine reform efforts.

Figure 18: Frequencies of awareness of and support for reforms, nationally representative sample.



Respondents were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with a statement relating to the implementation of EU-specific reforms and the extent to which they would tolerate painful reforms (Figure 19). Data shows that Moldovans are split in these two scenarios although there is a very narrow majority of opposition.

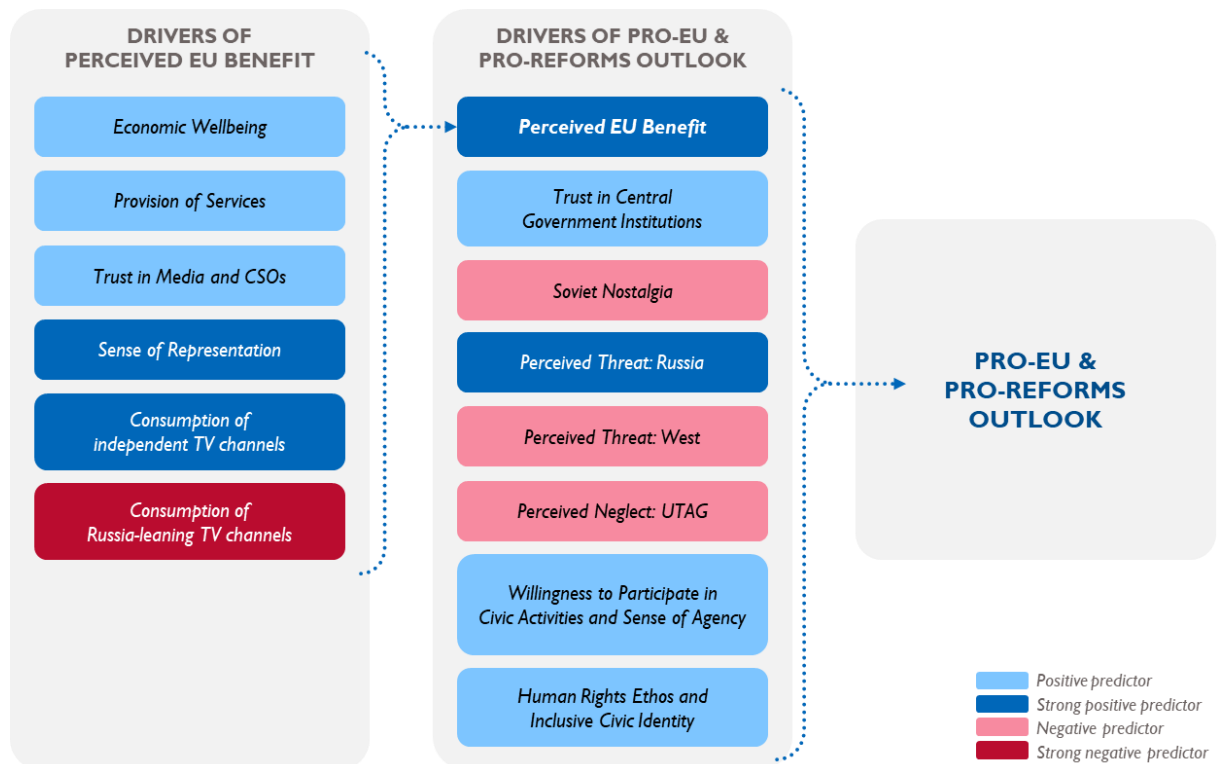
Figure 19: Frequencies of support for EU-related reforms and tolerance of painful reforms, nationally representative sample.



ENTRY POINTS FOR DRIVING PRO-EU AND PRO-REFORM ORIENTATION

Respondents' pro-EU geopolitical orientation presented previously (see the section Preferences for Moldova's Political Alignment) were amalgamated with citizens' degree of support for the aforementioned political reforms to create the indicator *Pro-EU and Pro-Reforms Outlook*.¹³ A predictive mediation model was employed in order to determine which factors enhance or diminish the levels of this outcome (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Predictive mediation model with the outcome *Pro-EU and Pro-Reforms Outlook*. Mediators are shown in the centre column. Controlled for age, region, gender, and education level.



The most influential factor with an immediate effect on *Pro-EU and Pro-Reforms Outlook* is the perception of EU benefit. This indicator measures how much citizens think Moldova's accession to the European Union would result in a range of sectors and industries prospering (or being adversely affected). Further, a strong inclination to trust central government institutions and the perception of Russia as a threat to Moldova also exhibit a positive, direct effect on *Pro-EU and Pro-Reforms Outlook*. Conversely, *Soviet Nostalgia*, apprehensions regarding the West's influence on Moldova, and the sense of Gagauzia being neglected by the central government are found to have a negative effect on this outlook. Although somewhat less impactful, the propensity to partake in civic activities and a sense of personal agency, as well as the upholding of human rights and a broad-minded civic identity, have a weaker yet statistically significantly positive influence on *Pro-EU and Pro-Reforms Outlook*.

¹³ Although supporting reforms and supporting a pro-EU orientation might be different policies, in the current socio-political context of Moldova, these concepts are very closely linked. This is corroborated by the extremely high correlations that these items have in the data. This means that in the minds of Moldovans, these are all part of the same package of policies, and people tend to either accept them all or reject them all. This is why we have chosen to model them as one overarching outcome. Even when modelled separately, they tend to have the same driving factors.

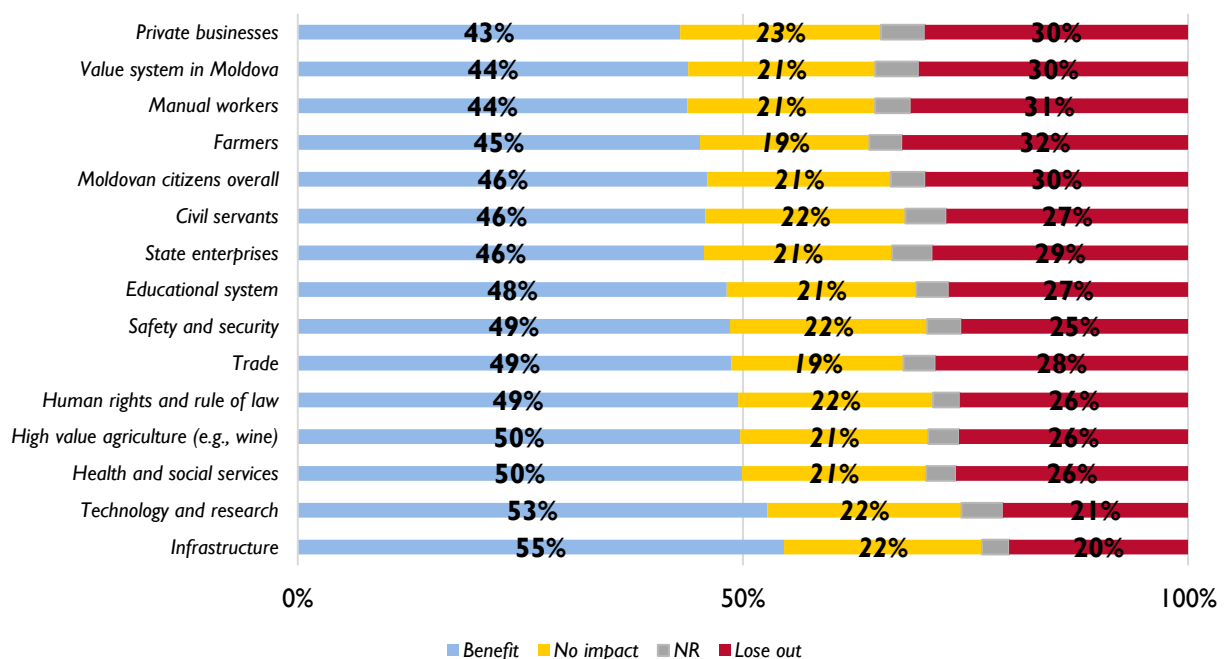
Perceived EU Benefit stands out as a key indicator in this model, given its very large impact on *Pro-EU and Pro-Reforms Outlook* compared to all other drivers. This means that Moldovans overwhelmingly make their decisions on these topics based on what they believe the impact of the EU on various fields will be. Figure 21 shows that across all sectors, citizens anticipate a generally positive impact of the EU. The infrastructure (55%), technology, and research sectors (53%), in particular, are anticipated to be the most benefited, while Moldovans are relatively less confident that the private sector (43%), manual workers (44%) and the value system (44%) will see a positive effect.

Because *Perceived EU benefit* is such a crucial factor, a deeper layer of factors was investigated, to see what affects such perceptions (also shown in Figure 20). Notably, the consumption of EU-oriented television channels emerges as the most potent positive driver for *Perceived EU Benefit*, while exposure to Russia-leaning channels yields the opposite effect. In addition, trust in media and non-governmental organisations, alongside a sense of representation by governmental institutions, exhibit a similarly strong positive influence on shaping citizens' perceptions of the benefits of joining the EU. Levels of trust in various institutions can be seen in figure 21. While comparatively less impactful, economic prosperity and access to services are weak positive drivers of *Perceived EU Benefit*. This is in line with the finding presented in Figure 14 and confirms that a purely utilitarian economic benefit is not the main motivating factor behind pro-EU orientation. Interwoven relationships between sense representation, human rights, and civic activities, illustrate that sectoral development and prosperity along with democratic values play an important role.

Provision of services has an interesting bi-directional effect. On the one hand provision of services leads to a lower level of Pro-EU and Pro-Reform Outlook. This means that citizens who are more satisfied with the level of service provision that they receive generally tend to not want to reform the system or to join the EU. On the other hand, an increase in the quality of services also leads to a higher perception of the EU benefits, which in turn leads to a higher level of pro-EU and pro-reform orientation.

These two effects can be seen as competing against each other. This means that interventions which aim to improve services should be aware that improvements will undermine support for reforms and change unless they are framed within a longer and wider process of EU integration and internal reform. Strong efforts should be made to link service provision interventions with the reforms process and to clarify the origin of the actors involved.

Figure 21: Frequencies of Perceived EU Benefit, national representative sample (N=1991)



The overall findings in Figure 22 suggest that a majority of respondents do not demonstrate trust in any of the central government institutions. Among the institutions evaluated, Community Social workers

(65%), the Mayor and Councillor (64%) and the local police (58%) exhibit the highest level of trust. Conversely, the Courts, the Prosecutor General's Office, and Members of Parliament show the lowest level of trust, as only 29% of respondents demonstrate positive attitudes toward these institutions.

Figure 22: Frequencies of various institutions, nationally representative sample

