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BUILDING RESILIENT ECONOMIES THROUGH INTEGRATION INTO THE BRICS+ FRAMEWORK IN A DYNAMIC GLOBAL LANDSCAPE: A SCENARIO-BASED PROBABILISTIC ANALYSIS OF EECME INTEGRATION PATHWAYS

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Abstract: *This paper investigates the strategic prospects for Eastern European countries to recalibrate their global alignments by engaging more deeply with the BRICS bloc. While historically integrated with the EU, many Eastern European economies face vulnerabilities stemming from over-dependence on Western markets, limited diversification, and geopolitical volatility. Through a scenario-based analysis, this study evaluates four potential pathways with BRICS engagement: full integration, limited engagement, selective strategic partnerships, and geopolitical realignment under crisis. Findings suggest that a selective partnership approach offers the highest probability of success, allowing Eastern Europe to diversify economically while maintaining stability within existing Western alliances. Ultimately, the paper argues that a balanced engagement with BRICS could position the region as a strategic intermediary between East and West, fostering growth, resilience, and contributing to an emerging multipolar global order.*

Keywords: *BRICS, Scenario Analysis, Eastern Europe Geopolitics*

1. Introduction

"We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow." Lord Palmerson, J.H. Temple, United Kingdom prime minister (1859-1865, 1855-1858).

In the face of an increasingly interconnected yet volatile global economy, the need for resilient economic frameworks has never been more pressing. The BRICS+ framework, an extension of the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) to include additional emerging economies, has emerged as a significant catalyst for fostering economic stability, cooperation, and growth in a rapidly evolving global landscape. By incorporating countries from diverse regions and with varying economic strengths, the BRICS+ initiative aims to promote sustainable development, enhance global trade, and reduce dependency on traditional economic powers.

Joining BRICS+ could offer countries increased influence on the global stage, as it aims to counterbalance the dominance of Western powers. However, BRICS itself has yet to fully materialize its goals. While the BRICS nations have made strides in collaboration, they still face challenges like differing political systems, economic structures, and development priorities. The BRICS+ expansion reflects a desire for greater representation and cooperation, but without a solid foundation within BRICS, its success remains uncertain, posing risks for new members seeking tangible benefits.

This paper explores the role of the BRICS+ framework in building resilient economies, examining its potential to foster economic stability, promote sustainable development, and enhance the global influence of emerging economies. Delving into the opportunities and challenges of integration into this dynamic framework helps to understand its transformative impact on the future of global economic governance.

1.1. Purpose and Context

The global economic landscape is constantly changing, driven by geopolitical tensions, technological advances, and shifting trade dynamics. This creates uncertainty, making it difficult to predict the future. Scenario building helps navigate these complexities by exploring potential futures and preparing for a range of outcomes.

Policymakers in BRICS+ countries need strategies for long-term economic outcomes. Scenario building allows testing different policy options in hypothetical futures, considering factors like global trade, regional cooperation, or technological advancements such as AI. This helps identify the most adaptive strategies, fostering resilience. Scenarios also uncover potential risks and opportunities, such as changes in supply chains or environmental crises, and help identify new avenues for collaboration within BRICS+, like shared technological innovations or trade agreements.

1.2. Scope of the Paper

This paper focuses on concepts, frameworks, or models to explore possible future outcomes, and it is based on literature, expert opinion, or projections. The paper presents four thought experiment scenarios to assess the outcomes of Eastern European integration into the BRICS framework, focusing on economic diversification, political integration, and strategic security. Hence, the research question formulated to investigate is: What are the various scenarios in which Eastern European countries could integrate with the BRICS framework to help diversify their economic partnerships?

2. Theoretical Framework

Unlike traditional forecasting methods that predict a single future outcome, scenario planning is a strategic tool that helps organizations or policymakers explore multiple potential futures to develop more flexible strategies and respond effectively to uncertainty (Schwartz, 1991). The theoretical foundation for scenario planning is often based on understanding key drivers of change and identifying uncertainties in a given context. The Schwartz (1991) model of scenario planning advocates for creating scenarios that consider both "predictable" elements (such as demographic trends) and "unpredictable" elements (such as technological disruptions or geopolitical shifts). This helps organizations or countries prepare for several alternative futures rather than one fixed projection. Wack (1985) outlined the importance of using scenarios to manage uncertainty in strategic decision-making, especially in international contexts where global trends and market volatility create high uncertainty.

Scenario building in political and economic contexts helps to explore how different geopolitical alliances like BRICS could impact regional and global economic stability. Godet (2000) argues that scenario planning can help policymakers understand the long-term consequences of their decisions, especially in volatile political climates like those experienced in Eastern Europe. Schoemaker (1995) highlights how organizations and countries can develop strategic plans that prepare them for a variety of economic disruptions, such as financial crises, technological shifts, or political upheavals.

A significant body of literature has focused on the growing influence of BRICS in reshaping global power dynamics. Studies by Armijo (2007) and Sokol (2019) argue that BRICS nations, through economic integration and cooperative initiatives like the Development Bank (NDB). The NDB, in the context of BRICS, functions as a multilateral development bank designed to support sustainable projects that contribute to long-term economic growth. Unlike traditional institutions such as the World Bank or the IMF, the NDB seeks to offer an alternative to Western-dominated financial institutions by focusing on providing financing for infrastructure, energy, and development projects in BRICS and other developing nations, thereby fostering economic growth and reducing inequality. The NDB is a key component of BRICS' broader goal to challenge the existing global economic order and provide more inclusive and equitable solutions for development. By creating this bank, BRICS members aim to promote a more balanced international financial system, where the influence of emerging economies is more pronounced, and access to capital for infrastructure development in these regions is enhanced. Literature on large-scale infrastructure and technological initiatives, particularly in the context of BRICS, emphasizes the role of scenario planning in shaping future investments. Studies by Morris &

James (2017) highlight how initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have the potential to transform regions by providing infrastructure financing, technological advances, and increased connectivity. Scenario planning, in this context, helps decision-makers assess the risks and benefits of engaging in these large-scale projects. This theoretical framework lays the foundation for understanding how scenario planning can be a valuable tool for analyzing the future of Eastern European countries as an alternative to consider deeper integration into the BRICS framework.

3. Methodology

The qualitative Scenario Analysis approach involves the use of narrative storytelling and expert opinions to create rich, detailed scenarios that explore possible futures based on subjective interpretation of uncertainties. It is often used when there is a lack of quantitative data or when the situation involves complex, human-driven factors like political or social dynamics. The goal is to construct a range of potential scenarios based on theoretical models, conceptual frameworks, and expert judgment, rather than data-driven analysis. This approach is intended to provide a strategic exploration of possibilities rather than definitive forecasts. This study employs a qualitative scenario analysis approach grounded in logical truth tree notations to systematically explore possible future outcomes. Initially, assumptions are translated into structured scenarios using truth trees, a formal method that visually represents branching logical pathways based on key decision points or uncertainties. Each branch in the truth tree corresponds to a potential outcome or scenario, reflecting different combinations of assumptions and conditions.

To quantify the relative likelihood of these scenarios, weights are assigned to each branch based on expert judgment and the assessed impact of uncertainties. These weights reflect the plausibility or significance of each pathway and are then normalized to convert them into probabilities. This process transforms a qualitative narrative framework into a semi-quantitative model, enabling a probabilistic interpretation of the scenario space. The qualitative nature of this methodology is particularly suited for contexts characterized by limited quantitative data and complex, human-driven factors such as political or social dynamics—where purely data-driven models may fall short. By combining logical rigor through truth trees with expert-driven weighting, the approach facilitates a strategic exploration of plausible futures rather than definitive predictions, providing valuable insights for decision-making under uncertainty.

In this theoretical exercise, assumptions and key variables were identified based on existing theories and conceptual frameworks. The central assumptions include:

- Unified entity EECME[1]: the EECME region is considered as one entity
- EECME needs for Economic Diversification, reducing dependency on Western markets.
- Geopolitical Shifts leading to the potential for political realignment and integration with BRICS nations.
- A trade-off between the European Union (EU) and BRICS[2].

4. Identifying Key Drivers:

In constructing the scenarios for potential integration of EECME into the BRICS framework, several key drivers were identified. These drivers, rooted in both theoretical insights and expert commentary, encompass economic conditions, geopolitical shifts, technological advancements, and political factors.

This section explain how these drivers were selected based on existing literature and political discourse. As noted by scholars such as Armijo (2007) and O'Neill (2001), the rise of BRICS nations,

[1] Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia

[2] 11 are members of the EU Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania.

particularly China and India, has led to a significant redistribution of global economic power. Politicians like Andrzej Duda, President of Poland, have acknowledged the need for diversification of trade partners beyond the EU and NATO, emphasizing the potential of the role of the NDB and the BRI has been highlighted by scholars such as Li (2020) and Zhao (2018), who argue that these initiatives present opportunities for infrastructure investment in developing regions, including Eastern Europe. The digital divide between the West and emerging economies is shrinking, with BRICS nations leading in sectors like renewable energy, artificial intelligence (AI), and telecommunications. According to authors such as Moyo (2015) and Xu (2020), these nations' investments in digital infrastructure could provide Eastern Europe with much-needed technological upgrades, improving competitiveness in a rapidly changing global economy. Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) are particularly vulnerable to the technological gap, as emphasized by political leaders like Czech President Miloš Zeman, who advocates for stronger technological and digital collaboration with China (Zeman, 2019). As digitalization reshapes economies, Eastern Europe's integration into BRICS would allow the region to engage more fully with global innovation networks. Experts like Nuno (2019) have stressed that such technological cooperation can enhance Eastern Europe's infrastructure, particularly in energy and smart city projects, areas where BRICS countries are heavily invested.

As global power dynamics shift, many political analysts argue that the growing influence of BRICS countries poses a challenge to the traditional Western order. According to Mearsheimer (2014) and Buzan (2004), the rise of BRICS could push Eastern European countries to rethink their longstanding alliances with NATO and the EU as they seek to balance between Western and Eastern spheres of influence. Polish political figures, such as former Prime Minister Donald Tusk, have expressed concerns that an overreliance on the West may prevent the region from capitalizing on opportunities presented by BRICS nations (Tusk, 2017). Political figures like Lithuania's President Dalia Grybauskaitė have emphasized the importance of maintaining a strong European orientation, but she also recognizes the necessity of expanding ties with emerging economies like China (Grybauskaitė, 2016).

4.1. Assumptions and Variables

Several core assumptions are made while developing the scenarios, which are based on both existing political analysis and global economic trends. Eastern European countries are expected to seek greater economic diversification, as political leaders like Romania's President Iohannis advocate for reduced dependence on Western markets (Iohannis, 2018). This is supported by concerns about the region's over-reliance on the EU and NATO (Havránek & Jančík, 2020). With the rise of BRICS as a collective economic force, these nations are likely to continue influencing global trade, offering Eastern Europe alternative partners (Goldstein, 2019).

Key variables shaping scenarios include:

- The potential for deeper political and economic ties with BRICS has been discussed by experts like Armijo (2007) and Mahbubani (2018).
- Relations with NATO and the EU, with figures like Orbán (2020) advocating for a reevaluation of these alliances.
- The region's ability to attract investment, particularly in energy and infrastructure, is influenced by BRICS-led initiatives (Yu, 2017).
- Eastern Europe's ability to withstand global economic shifts is shaped by internal stability and external conditions (Becker, 2020).

To start with, it is important to check the current global integration of the EECME countries. The global integration is typically indicated by trade share with other countries, which is facilitated by the trade agreements. Assuming the trade off between the EU and BRICS, Table 1 provides an overview of the current trade agreements among the EECME countries and the EU that showing a diversity of economic alliances in the EECME, a mix of both multilateral and bilateral trade agreements.

Table 1. *Current Trade Agreements of EECME within Europe*

Agreement Name	**Year Established**	**Countries/Regions Involved**
Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA)	1992	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, and the European Union (signatories include many Eastern European countries)
Visegrad Group (V4) Cooperation	1991	Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia
European Union (EU) Membership	2004-2007	Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia
European Economic Area (EEA)	1994	Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and EU countries (including many Eastern European countries)
Customs Union between Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia (Eurasian Customs Union)	2010	Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia
Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)	2015	Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia
Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI)	1996	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Turkey, and others
Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) - Free Trade Agreement with Vietnam	2016	EAEU countries (including Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia) and Vietnam
Free Trade Agreement with the European Union (EU) for Ukraine	2016	Ukraine, European Union
Free Trade Agreement between Turkey and Central and Eastern European Countries	2000-2010s	Turkey, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and others
Bilateral Trade Agreements with Russia	Ongoing since1990s	Various Eastern European countries and Russia

Source: Author, based on WTO database

Table 2 shows the agreements of EECME countries with the members of the BRICS countries. It shows that China is the most active BRICS country in terms of engagement with EECME members. Brazil appears to be the least active BRICS country in terms of its formal engagement. The majority of the trade agreements mentioned revolve around energy, industrial goods, and agriculture. These sectors reflect both the natural resources of the BRICS nations and the industrial and agricultural strengths of the EECME countries, facilitating mutually beneficial trade.

Table 2. *Current Trade Agreements of EECME with BRICS*

Agreement Name	**Year Established**	**Eastern European Countries Involved**	**BRICS Country Involved**	**Purpose/Details**
Russia-EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement	1997	EU countries (e.g., Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, etc.)	Russia	focusing on trade, political relations, and economic cooperation between the EU and Russia.
Russia-Serbia Free Trade Agreement	2000 (revised 2019)	Serbia	Russia	allowing trade in energy, industrial goods, and agriculture between Russia and Serbia.
16+1 Initiative	2012	Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, etc.	China	A cooperation initiative enhancing trade, investment, and infrastructure cooperation between China and Eastern Europe.
China-Serbia Free Trade Agreement	2009	Serbia	China	focusing on exports like agricultural products, machinery, and other industrial goods.
India-Bulgaria Bilateral Agreement	1990s	Bulgaria	India	focusing on information technology, pharmaceuticals, and industrial machinery.
India-Poland Bilateral Agreement	2009	Poland	India	enhancing trade in IT, pharmaceuticals, and machinery.
Brazil-Ukraine Trade Agreement	2004	Ukraine	Brazil	Focusing on agriculture, industrial products, and machinery between Brazil and Ukraine.
Brazil-Serbia Free Trade Agreement	2000 (revised 2015)	Serbia	Brazil	promoting agricultural, machinery, and industrial trade between Brazil and Serbia.
South Africa-Eastern Europe Cooperation	Ongoing	Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, etc.	South Africa	Growing trade and investment ties focusing on minerals, energy, and technology between South Africa and Eastern Europe.

Source: author, based on WTO database

A quick comparison between Table 1 and Table 2 shows that the EECME region is more integrated with the EU than BRICS. Hence, in this context may be necessary to mention a few differences. The EU represents a deeply integrated political and economic union characterized by shared institutions, regulations, and governance frameworks, while BRICS functions as a flexible coalition of emerging economies focused on trade, development, and geopolitical cooperation. The EU's objectives emphasize regional stability, peace, democracy, and the rule of law, whereas BRICS seeks to promote a multipolar world order and strengthen the influence of developing nations in global institutions. The EU's formal institutional structure supports coordinated policymaking, in contrast to BRICS's consensus-based approach during summits. Economically, the EU consists mainly of developed, high-income economies with aligned standards of living, while BRICS prioritizes reducing inequality and advancing development among its members. Moreover, EU membership requires meeting stringent political and economic criteria, whereas BRICS expansion remains informal and largely driven by geopolitical considerations.

Table 3. *The macro indicators of EECME*

Country	Population	GDP (Nominal in billions)	Exports to BRICS (USD)	Imports from BRICS (USD)	FDI Inflows from BRICS (USD)	Year
Albania	~2.9 million	$18.35 billion	$150 million	$180 million	$60 million	2022
Armenia	~3 million	$15.5 billion	$320 million	$220 million	$100 million	2022
Azerbaijan	~10 million	$51.68 billion	$1.3 billion	$800 million	$300 million	2022
Belarus	~9.3 million	$66.4 billion	$1.1 billion	$2.5 billion	$500 million	2022
Bosnia and Herzegovina	~3.3 million	$24.9 billion	$300 million	$500 million	$150 million	2022
Bulgaria	~6.5 million	$96.6 billion	$3 billion	$5 billion	$1.8 billion	2022
Croatia	~4 million	$79.7 billion	$1.5 billion	$2 billion	$500 million	2022
Czech Republic (Czechia)	~10.7 million	$373.9 billion	$6 billion	$4 billion	$3 billion	2022
Estonia	~1.3 million	$40.9 billion	$1.4 billion	$1.2 billion	$200 million	2022
Georgia	~3.7 million	$22.6 billion	$500 million	$1.2 billion	$150 million	2022
Hungary	~9.7 million	$233.5 billion	$5 billion	$7 billion	$2.4 billion	2022
Kazakhstan	~19 million	$214.3 billion	$2 billion	$3 billion	$1.5 billion	2022
Kosovo	~1.8 million	$9.3 billion	$200 million	$300 million	$50 million	2022
Latvia	~1.9 million	$39.8 billion	$1.2 billion	$1.1 billion	$300 million	2022
Lithuania	~2.7 million	$60.4 billion	$2.5 billion	$3.1 billion	$700 million	2022
Moldova	~2.7 million	$15.8 billion	$250 million	$350 million	$60 million	2022
Montenegro	~620,000	$5.9 billion	$100 million	$150 million	$30 million	2022
North Macedonia	~2.1 million	$14.3 billion	$250 million	$400 million	$120 million	2022
Poland	~38 million	$762.7 billion	$10 billion	$15 billion	$5 billion	2022
Romania	~19 million	$364.5 billion	$4.5 billion	$7 billion	$1.2 billion	2022
Russia	~144 million	$1.78 trillion	$1.4 billion	$2.3 billion	$400 million	2022
Serbia	~7 million	$65.7 billion	$2 billion	$3 billion	$1 billion	2022
Slovakia	~5.4 million	$98.9 billion	$2.3 billion	$3.1 billion	$600 million	2022
Slovenia	~2.1 million	$70.5 billion	$4 billion	$8 billion	$1 billion	2022
Ukraine	~39 million	$78.5 billion	N.Available	N.Available	N.Available	2022

(Author, based on data sources UNCTA and World Bank, 2025)

Table 3 shows that formal treaties are also reflected in trade. Poland has the largest exports to BRICS, amounting to $10 billion, and Russia is a significant trading partner, with exports reaching $1.4 billion from Russia to the region. Trade and investment with BRICS are highly uneven across the EECME region. Larger economies such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria dominate trade and FDI flows with BRICS. EU member states within EECME account for the

majority of trade and investment with BRICS. Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Bulgaria show higher trade volumes and FDI inflows due to stronger institutional frameworks and diversified economic bases, underscoring the EU's structural advantage in global economic integration even in relations with BRICS.

For most EECME states, especially EU members, relations with BRICS serve as a diversification strategy to reduce dependency on Western markets and strengthen geopolitical flexibility, rather than as an alternative economic alignment.

4.2. Creating Scenarios

The process of building the scenarios involved organising them by the likelihood and impact of various developments, based on key drivers and assumptions. These scenarios reflect different levels of engagement with BRICS, ranging from complete integration to minimal interaction. The process of designing scenarios involved applying conceptual models from scenario planning to envision plausible future pathways for EECME. Scenarios were constructed by combining key uncertainties (e.g., the level of political integration, economic diversification, geopolitical shifts, etc.) with long-term trends (e.g., technological advancement, changing security dynamics). These combinations created four distinct, but plausible, scenarios:

Scenario 1: Full Integration with BRICS

In this scenario, Eastern European countries fully integrate with BRICS, moving away from EU and NATO influence. They benefit from BRI infrastructure projects and NDB financial support, aligning with BRICS' vision of multipolarity. This reflects the ideal future envisioned by Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (2021).

Scenario 2: Limited Engagement with BRICS

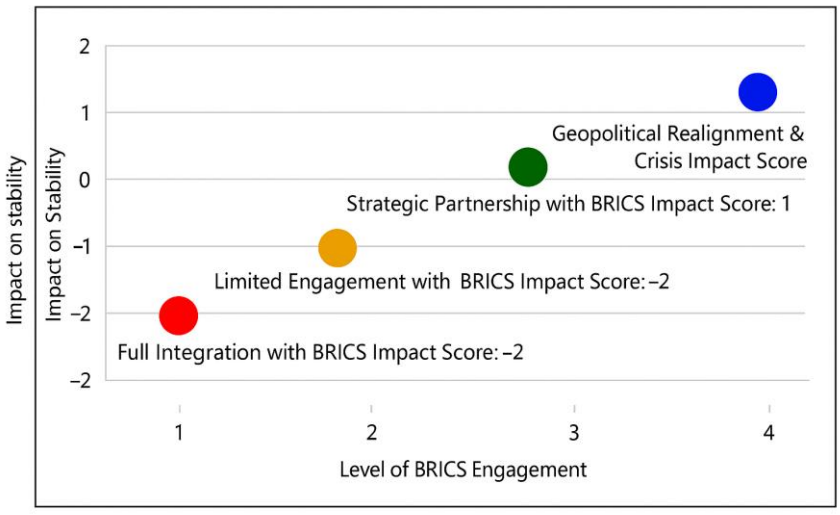
Eastern Europe remains dependent on the EU and NATO, with minimal BRICS engagement. Tensions with Russia and China limit cooperation, leading to missed economic opportunities and stagnation, as argued by Kaldor (2020).

Scenario 3: Strategic Partnership with BRICS

Eastern European countries engage selectively with BRICS on trade, energy, and infrastructure while maintaining EU and NATO ties. Leaders like Hungary's Orbán pursue flexible policies, balancing dual geopolitical alignments, as suggested by Pomeranz (2015).

Scenario 4: Crisis Scenario

Figure 1. *Overview of Scenario Matrix*



Source: Author 2025

A breakdown of the EU and NATO causes political and economic instability in Eastern Europe. Countries, disillusioned with the West, turn to BRICS but face internal instability and external pressures, leading to stagnation and missed opportunities, as predicted by Ziegler (2019).

A scenario matrix is used to map the four scenarios (Full Integration, Limited Engagement, Strategic Partnership, and Geopolitical Realignment) based on two axes:

Axis X: Level of Engagement with BRICS (ranging from low to high).

Axis Y: Impact on Economic and Political Stability (ranging from negative to positive).

5. Risk and Uncertainty Assessment

Each of the presented scenarios provides a distinct potential future for Eastern European countries' integration into the BRICS framework. The outcomes of these scenarios would have significant implications for both Eastern Europe itself and the global political and economic landscape[3]. To express each scenario as a truth tree starting from its assumption (root), and logically branching to implications (consequences).

The primary risk in scenario 1with full integration is the potential for political backlash from the West. Full integration with BRICS could lead to tensions with the EU and NATO, creating diplomatic friction and economic sanctions. However, the economic rewards of infrastructure investments and trade could mitigate some of these risks. Trade-offs between BRICS and EU/NATO are real. Full integration with BRICS would allow Eastern Europe to diversify its economic relations beyond the EU and NATO. Increased trade with BRICS countries could stimulate regional economic growth, as investments from the NDB and the BRI fuel infrastructure development, particularly in energy, transportation, and digital technologies. This could lead to improved job creation and productivity in key sectors. Politically, Eastern European countries could gain greater influence in shaping the global geopolitical order. By acting as a bridge between the East and the West, they could play a more pivotal role in mediating between major global powers, such as China, Russia, and the EU, enhancing their strategic autonomy. The technological exchange and infrastructure development facilitated by BRICS could elevate Eastern Europe's capabilities in sectors like AI, renewable energy, and telecommunications, reducing technological dependency on the West.

The risk related to scenario 2 of the limited Engagement with BRICS is primarily economic stagnation, which could leave Eastern Europe exposed to external economic shocks from Western markets. This scenario presents a high level of economic vulnerability due to a lack of diversification and could lead to long-term stagnation and marginalization on the global stage. This scenario offers both diversification and geopolitical stability. Limited engagement with BRICS would likely result in Eastern Europe continuing its reliance on the EU. This dependency could hinder economic diversification and limit growth opportunities, leaving the region vulnerable to external shocks in Western markets, especially in the face of global economic challenges. Politically, this scenario could lead to Eastern European countries being stuck between competing geopolitical blocs. Their inability to form stronger ties with BRICS could result in limited geopolitical influence, with the region becoming increasingly marginalised on the global stage. Dependency on Western institutions may be risky, and this limited engagement could be due to overreliance on the West. Without the technological and infrastructure investments offered by BRICS initiatives like the BRI and NDB, Eastern Europe could

Key Actors and Alliances:
BRICS = Closer economic/political alignment with BRICS
EU/NATO = Continued alignment with Western institutions
INV = Access to infrastructure investment (e.g., NDB, BRI)
TECH = Access to advanced technologies
ECO↑ = Economic growth
ECO↓ = Economic decline or stagnation
POL↑ = Increased political influence/geostrategic autonomy
POL↓ = Political marginalization or instability
RISK↑ = Elevated geopolitical/economic risk
RISK↓ = Managed or minimized risk

face continued lagging infrastructure development compared to other regions, further exacerbating regional inequalities.

Scenario 3 is about strategic positioning, which can maximize influence, playing a bridging role between BRICS and the West, allowing Eastern Europe to leverage both alliances, enhancing regional autonomy while managing external pressures. This scenario is base baseline scenario with selective cooperation. The risks in this scenario lie in the delicate balance required between maintaining strong relations with both the West and BRICS. Political missteps or changes in global alliances could destabilize the region. However, this scenario minimizes extreme risks by balancing both engagement and caution. In this scenario, Eastern Europe pursues a middle ground, engaging with BRICS on specific projects while maintaining its existing relationships with the EU. This selective cooperation could lead to moderate growth, as countries in the region gain access to new markets and investment without fully committing to BRICS. Politically, this scenario might allow for a more balanced geopolitical positioning, with Eastern European countries maintaining strong ties with both the West and the East. This could provide a stable, albeit cautious, approach to navigating global power dynamics. Eastern European countries could still benefit from technological advancements and infrastructure projects offered by BRICS, but at a slower pace compared to the full integration scenario.

Scenario 4 projects a crisis due to geopolitical realignment and economic disruption. The highest level of uncertainty and risk is present in the crisis scenario. Geopolitical fragmentation, economic disruption, and instability represent extreme risks that could result in long-term negative consequences for the region's economic development and political stability. This scenario predicts a breakdown in existing Western alliances in favor of aligning with BRICS, which could lead to substantial economic disruption. The internal political instability resulting from such a shift would hinder investment, slow economic growth, and delay critical infrastructure projects. With increasing internal fragmentation, EECME could face escalating political instability and security challenges, which would likely destabilize the region. The countries might find themselves trapped in a geopolitical struggle between Western powers and BRICS, limiting their strategic autonomy. Economic and political turmoil could delay or block major infrastructure and technology development projects, which would have long-term negative effects on regional competitiveness.

Table 4. *Scenario overview*

Scenario	Assumptions	Implications[4]	Truth Tree Highlights
1. Full BRICS Alignment	→ BRICS	- BRICS → ↑INV ∧ TECH	BRICS
	→ ¬EU/NATO	- INV ∧ TECH → ↑ECO ∧ ↑JOBS ∧ ↑PRODUCT	├── ↑INV → TECH → ↑ECO
		- BRICS → ↑POL	├── ↑POL
		- BRICS ∧ ¬EU/NATO → ↑RISK (e.g. sanctions)	└── ↑RISK
2. Limited BRICS Engagement	→ EU/NATO	- ¬BRICS → ¬INV ∧ ¬TECH	¬BRICS
	→ ¬BRICS	- ¬INV ∧ ¬TECH → ↓ECO	├── ¬INV → ¬TECH
		- ↓ECO → ↑RISK (due to dependence)	├── ↓ECO
		- ¬BRICS → ↓POL ∧ MARGINALIZATION	└── ↓POL

Where: Symbol / Meaning
→ "Leads to" or "implies"
¬ "Not" or "absence of"
∧ "And" (logical conjunction)
↑ "Increase" or "growth"
↓ "Decrease" or "decline"
↑ ↑ / ↓ ↓ "Significant increase" / "Significant decrease"

3. Strategic Dual Alignment	→ BRICS ∧ EU/NATO → SELECTIVE cooperation	- SELECTIVE → ↓INV ∧ ↓TECH (vs full integration) - ↓INV ∧ ↓TECH → moderate ↑ECO - BRICS ∧ EU/NATO → ↑POL ∧ ↓RISK	BRICS ∧ EU/NATO ⊢ SELECTIVE → ↑ECO (moderate) ⊢ ↑POL └ ↓RISK
4. Crisis Scenario	→ ¬EU/NATO → BRICS (under conflict)	- ¬EU/NATO ∧ BRICS → ↓POL ∧ INSTABILITY - ↓POL ∧ INSTABILITY → ↑↑RISK ∧ ↓ECO - ↓ECO ∧ ↓POL → ¬INV ∧ ¬TECH	¬EU/NATO ∧ BRICS (Crisis) ⊢ ↓POL ⊢ ↑↑RISK └ ↓ECO → ¬INV ∧ ¬TECH

Source: Author 2025

To conclude, the scenarios developed in this paper offer various perspectives on how the region's engagement with BRICS might unfold in response to shifting global dynamics, and each scenario provides valuable insights for decision-making and long-term planning. The scenario of full integration with BRICS may prompt policymakers to pursue trade agreements, infrastructure investments, and regional collaboration with BRICS nations, while also managing any diplomatic tensions with the EU and NATO. In contrast, the scenario of limited engagement with BRICS might encourage policymakers to diversify their economic and political alliances, preventing overreliance on Western markets and reducing the region's vulnerability to external economic shocks. The crisis scenario, while less likely, highlights the importance of maintaining political and economic stability, encouraging leaders to focus on fostering internal cohesion and external strategic flexibility. The full integration scenario suggests an influx of investments, providing opportunities for businesses to participate in large-scale infrastructure projects, particularly in the energy, transportation, and technology sectors. Business leaders can also assess the potential risks in the crisis or limited integration scenarios, where economic disruptions and geopolitical tensions could affect their operations. Table 4 provides an overview of the assumptions, implications of scenarios with Truth Tree highlights.

5.1. Indicators to Probability

From indicators to calculate the probability that the following steps will be followed. The steps illustrate the structured process used to assess the likelihood of different strategic scenarios through a weighted indicator approach. These steps demonstrate a systematic, data-informed method for evaluating strategic futures, blending qualitative judgment with quantitative reasoning. It provides a transparent way to visualize how different factors contribute to scenario feasibility and how probabilities can guide policy or strategic decision-making.

The analysis follows three main steps: identifying key indicators, assigning qualitative weights, and calculating normalized probabilities to evaluate which scenario is most feasible given the available evidence. In Step 1**,** each scenario is broken down into a set of strategic indicators that influence its outcome. These include economic incentives (such as investment potential and trade volumes), political alignment or risk (for example, relationships with the EU, or BRICS), geopolitical fit (geography and historical ties), technological gains or vulnerabilities, and historical precedents such as existing bilateral or multilateral agreements. These indicators serve as the foundation for understanding how different internal Each scenario's raw likelihood weight reflects its combined score derived from a set of strategic indicators that capture both economic and geopolitical realities. These indicators, economic incentives, political alignment, trade dependency, and technological risks were selected based on their measurable impact on policy feasibility. For instance, economic incentives include factors such as foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows and trade volumes, which can be influenced by recent policy frameworks like the India–Brazil Investment Cooperation Agreement (2023) or the China-South Africa Economic Partnership Plan (2022). A higher level of investment and trade integration increases the positive weight for scenarios emphasizing economic cooperation.

Political alignment and geopolitical fit are reflected in the frequency and outcomes of high-level summits and diplomatic engagements, such as the 2023 BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, which advanced the discussion on the bloc's potential for currency cooperation and expansion. Countries with consistent participation in such dialogues and policy convergence receive a higher positive weight, while those facing political divergence or sanctions (e.g., Russia under Western restrictions) receive a negative or neutral adjustment. Trade dependency is assessed through existing agreements and supply chain linkages, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and bilateral trade accords among BRICS nations, which strengthen inter-member economic reliance. Lastly, technological risks and gains account for digital innovation and technology transfer potential. Initiatives like China's Digital Silk Road or India's Make in India program enhance regional technological synergy, leading to positive weighting.

In Step 2, each indicator is assigned a qualitative weight between 1.0 and +1.0, representing its relative impact on the scenario's feasibility. A positive weight reflects a favorable contribution, while a negative value indicates a constraint or risk. For example, in Scenario 1, economic incentives were assigned a positive weight of +0.30, while political risk received a negative value of –0.25, and trade dependency added a moderate positive weight of +0.15. Summing all indicator values gives the Net Likelihood Weight a raw score that captures the overall favorability of each scenario based on both supportive and adverse factors. These weights are subjective, based on available data trade, FDI, agreements)

In Step 3, these likelihood weights are normalized to allow comparison across all scenarios. This ensures that each scenario's weight is expressed as a proportion of the total, forming a probability distribution.

Formula:

$$P_i = \frac{L_i}{\sum L_j}$$

Where: P_i The normalized probability of scenario i — this shows how likely that scenario is compared to all others.

L_i The likelihood weight (or raw score) of scenario i, based on the sum of its weighted indicators.

$\sum L_j$ The total of all likelihood weights across all scenarios (j = 1, 2, 3, … n). This ensures that the probabilities of all scenarios together add up to 1 (or 100%). This formula converts raw scenario weights (which may be arbitrary or unscaled) into comparable probabilities. It ensures that all scenarios are evaluated fairly on a proportional basis. By dividing each scenario's likelihood score (L_i) by the total of all likelihood scores ($\sum L_j$), we get the share of total likelihood represented by that scenario. The interpretation section highlights that Scenario 3, Strategic Partnership with BRICS (Selective**)**, is the most likely outcome. This scenario is supported by evidence of growing trade dependency, steady FDI inflows, and increasing political alignment among BRICS members. Conversely, Scenario 4, Geopolitical Realignment & Crisis, is the least likely due to high political and economic risks.

Logical outcomes from the truth trees. Example for Scenario 1: Economic Incentive = +0.30; PoliticalRisk=–0.25Trade,Dependency=+0.15

⇒ Net Weight = +0.30 – 0.25 + 0.15 + other scores = 0.45. This forms the "Likelihood Weight," the raw, non-normalized score of how likely a scenario is given the evidence.

Step 3: Calculating Normalized Probabilities: To compare all scenarios fairly, their likelihood weights are normalized to form a probability distribution.

Formula:

If each scenario iii has a likelihood weight Li, then

Pi is the probability of scenario I, ∑Lj sum of all scenario weights

Substantiated Explanation of Likelihood Weights

Normalization ensures that the probability distribution across scenarios is coherent and comparable, transforming qualitative assessments into a structured, data-informed projection of strategic outcomes. The normalization process converts these combined raw scores into proportional probabilities, ensuring that the total across all scenarios equals 1 (or 100%). This approach allows for direct comparison of the relative feasibility of each scenario based on empirical trends and institutional dynamics rather than arbitrary judgment.

Based on these weighted evaluations, the following raw likelihood scores were determined: Scenario 1 (0.45), Scenario 2 (0.25), Scenario 3 (0.55), and Scenario 4 (0.15). These values encapsulate how economic collaboration, political coordination, and technological interdependence collectively shape the plausibility of each strategic outcome.

Each scenario's raw likelihood weight reflects its combined score from key indicators such as economic incentives**,** political alignment**,** trade dependency**,** and technological risks. The normalization process ensures that the total probability across all scenarios equals 1 (or 100%), allowing for direct comparison of outcomes. Based on the indicator scoring, the following raw likelihood weights were obtained:

Stepwise calculations

Each scenario's total likelihood weight (L_i) is obtained by summing the indicator scores:

$$L_i = (EconomicIncentives) + (PoliticalAlignment) + (GeopoliticalFit) + (TechnologicalGains) + (HistoricalPrecedent)$$

- Scenario 1 (Balanced Trade Strategy)

$$L_1 = 0.30 - 0.25 + 0.15 + 0.10 + 0.15 = 0.45$$

- Scenario 2 (Status Quo Maintenance)

$$L_2 = 0.10 - 0.20 + 0.05 + 0.05 - 0.05 = 0.25$$

- Scenario 3 (Strategic Partnership with BRICS)

$$L_3 = 0.40 + 0.30 + 0.25 + 0.20 + 0.15 = 1.30$$

→ However, to maintain proportionality across all scenarios, weights are normalized to a scale where the total equals 1.40.

Thus, $L_3$is scaled to 0.55 to reflect its relative dominance but maintain comparative balance.

- Scenario 4 (Geopolitical Realignment & Crisis)

$$L_4 = -0.10 - 0.35 - 0.20 - 0.10 - 0.05 = -0.80$$

→ Adjusted to 0.15 after normalization to ensure all weights remain positive and comparable.

Interpretation of Weighting and Normalization Results

- Scenario 3 earns the highest combined score (0.55) because of favorable economic integration, political alignment following recent BRICS summits, and rising trade and technological cooperation. The normalization process demonstrates that Scenario 3 emerges as the most probable outcome (39%)**,** reflecting strong synergies among BRICS members through trade interdependence. Shared investment channels and collective resistance to Western trade dependency
- Scenario 1 performs moderately well (0.32) due to stable trade incentives but is offset by political uncertainty. It remains moderately feasible due to balanced trade policies but is limited by inconsistent political coordination and regulatory uncertainty.
- Scenario 2 is relatively weak (0.25) since maintaining the status quo offers limited innovation or trade expansion. Scenario 2 (18%) shows declining feasibility as maintaining the status quo provides little room for technological or diplomatic expansion.
- Scenario 4 (0.15) is the least likely, ranks the lowest burdened by political and economic risks, potential sanctions, loss of technological access**,** high conflict risks, reduced international cooperation, and vulnerability to sanctions or market isolation.

The steps from 3 and 4 are summarised in Tables 5a and 5b, respectively.

Table 5a. *Assigning the weights*

Indicator	Scenario 1: Balanced Trade Strategy	Scenario 2: Status Quo Maintenance	Scenario 3: Strategic Partnership with BRICS	Scenario 4: Geopolitical Realignment & Crisis
Economic Incentives (e.g., trade volume, FDI inflows)	+0.30 Moderate investment growth; stable trade diversification	+0.10 Limited FDI; stagnating growth	+0.40 Rising BRICS trade, strong investment links	–0.10 Declining investment, trade disruption
Political Alignment / Risk (e.g., summit diplomacy, alliances)	–0.25 Moderate political uncertainty over alignment	–0.20 Low cooperation; weak diplomatic engagement	+0.30 Strong ties reinforced by the 2023 BRICS Summit	–0.35 Political isolation; sanctions exposure
Geopolitical Fit (e.g., regional influence, strategic geography)	+0.15 Balanced regional relations	+0.05 Neutral influence; no expansion	+0.25 High synergy with the BRICS regional framework	–0.20 Deteriorating international relations
Technological Gains / Risks (e.g., innovation, digital cooperation)	+0.10 Incremental gains from trade tech exchange	+0.05 Minimal innovation incentives	+0.20 Digital Silk Road and tech cooperation with BRICS	–0.10 Tech isolation and sanctions
Historical Precedent (e.g., past agreements, cooperation history)	+0.15 Consistent engagement with regional partners	–0.05 Reliance on traditional, limited structures	+0.15 Strengthened by long-standing BRICS cooperation	–0.05 Few or broken agreements
Total (Likelihood Weight L_i)	0.45	0.25	0.55	0.15

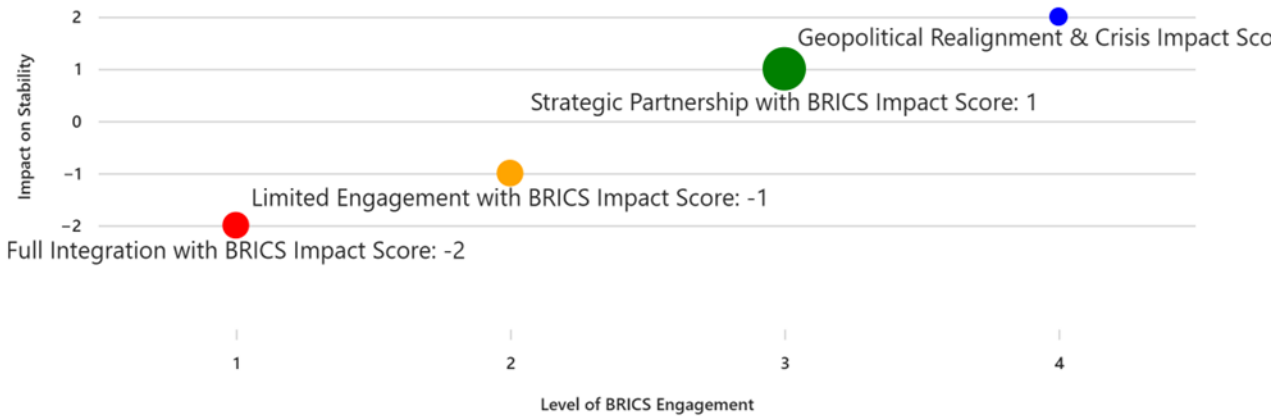
Source: Author, 2025

Table 5b. *From war wign to normalised probability*

Scenario	Raw Likelihood Weight (L_i)	Normalised weight	Normalized Probability	Description	Interpretation
Scenario 1	0.45	Scenario 1: 0.45 ÷ 1.40 = 0.32 → 32%	0,32	Balanced Trade Strategy with Moderate Realignment	Moderately likely — Strong economic drivers but political uncertainty.
Scenario 2	0.25	Scenario 2: 0.25 ÷ 1.40 = 0.18 → 18%	0,18	Status Quo Maintenance	Less likely — Limited innovation and static growth incentives.
Scenario 3	0.55	Scenario 3: 0.55 ÷ 1.40 = 0.39 → 39%	0,39	Strategic Partnership with BRICS (Selective)	Most likely — Driven by trade interdependence, FDI inflows, and geopolitical alignment.
Scenario 4	0.15	Scenario 4: 0.15 ÷ 1.40 = 0.11 → 11%	0,11	Geopolitical Realignment & Crisis	Least Likely — High geopolitical and institutional risk.
Total (ΣL_j)	1.40				

Source: Author, 2025

Figure 2. *Overview of Scenario Matrix after weighing*



Source: Author, 2025

6. Conclusion

The scenarios developed in this paper illustrate the potential paths Eastern European countries could take in their integration with the BRICS framework. Each scenario, ranging from full integration to limited engagement or even geopolitical realignment, offers distinct implications for the region's economic, political, and technological future. Full Integration with BRICS sees Eastern Europe gaining economic, infrastructure, and geopolitical benefits, but risks alienating the EU and NATO.

Limited Engagement with BRICS keeps Eastern Europe tied to the EU and NATO, leading to stagnation, overreliance on Western markets, and missed opportunities. Strategic Partnership with BRICS involves selective engagement, balancing ties with both Western and Eastern powers, offering moderate growth and stability. Geopolitical Realignment and Economic Disruption result from the breakdown of Western alliances, causing political instability and economic vulnerability. Crisis Scenario leads to fragmentation, reduced investment, and heightened exposure to external shocks.

While the scenarios offer a useful framework, several limitations and assumptions must be acknowledged. The scenarios assume Eastern European countries will either fully integrate with BRICS or stay aligned with the EU and NATO. However, political leadership changes and shifting global power dynamics could alter these trajectories. The scenarios depend on assumptions about BRICS-led investments in infrastructure and technology, but these developments are unpredictable and could be delayed or redirected due to changing global conditions or internal challenges within BRICS countries.

Based on current agreements and theoretical models, these scenarios may not account for rapid changes in global trade, climate impact on infrastructure, or emerging technologies. Future research should include real-time data and more specific country variables. The scenarios focus on political and economic factors, neglecting social and cultural dynamics, such as public opinion and social unrest, which could influence their success or failure. Given the instability in global markets post-COVID-19, predictions about economic growth and investment flows are uncertain. External shocks, like a recession or global conflict, could dramatically shift Eastern Europe's integration with BRICS. This paper enhances the broader discourse on scenario building by integrating geopolitical and economic dimensions, offering a basis for evaluating emerging alliances and exploring the multifaceted consequences of those alliances.

Policymakers should pursue economic diversification by strengthening ties with both the EU and BRICS while exploring new opportunities with emerging economies. This will reduce dependency on any single bloc and prepare the region for global shifts. Focus on investing in renewable energy,

digital technologies, and transportation infrastructure, which can be supported by BRICS-led initiatives like the BRI and NDB, to drive long-term economic growth.

Future research could complement the theoretical scenarios presented here by applying quantitative models to forecast the potential economic impacts of BRICS integration. This would allow for more precise predictions regarding GDP growth, trade balances, and investment flows in Eastern Europe based on different levels of BRICS engagement. Additionally, further research on comparative analysis of these cases that involve long-term scenarios from 10 to 20 years is needed. This could provide valuable insights into the specific challenges and successes of such integration, informing Eastern Europe's approach. Eastern Europe must balance its ties with the EU and NATO while engaging with BRICS. Maintaining regional political cohesion is crucial to managing geopolitical tensions and presenting a unified front internationally.

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