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THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DO?**

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Transnistrian Conflict: What Could the European Union and the United States of America Do?

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As a result of the consultations held on 26th-27th of September in Odessa, the format of the negotiation for the Transnistrian conflict settlement expanded, the EU and the USA were accepted as observers. Under the previous five-sided format, the Republic of Moldova and the “transnistrian moldavian republic” (“tmr”) were considered as conflict parties, while Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE held the mandate of mediators of the negotiation process. The recent shift implies, on the one hand, a more active involvement of new actors, i.e. of the EU and the USA, in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. On the other hand, one question still requires an answer: to what extent could such a shift in the negotiation format encourage a positive dynamic in the settlement of this “frozen” conflict?

1. General Principles

A conflict can be really settled if the concerned parties reach a consensus, be tacit, on three key-issues:

- *a common vision of the conflict’s essence or – a correct “diagnosis” of the issue;*
- *parameters of the situation which could be accepted as “viable solution” to the conflict;*
- *scenarios, means and resources which can be used (are required) to guarantee a viable solution of the conflict.*

If such a consensus lacks, there is nothing more than miming a process of conflict settlement. As far as the Transnistrian conflict is concerned, miming has been lasting for over 13 years. Because of the lack of positive experience of existence of an unitary Moldavian state, the absence of a viable solution to the Transnistrian conflict can, in an objective manner, compromise **irreversibly the statehood of the Republic of Moldova.**

2. The Specific and the Essence of the Conflict in the Eastern Area of the Republic of Moldova, or – Which Are the Conflict Parties?

The conflict in the Eastern area of the Republic of Moldova (Transnistria) differs essentially from other conflicts in the post-Soviet area. After the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, with the participation of the present leaders of Tiraspol anti-constitutional regime as deputies, passed on the 23rd of June 1990 quasi-unanimously the Declaration on the Sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova, Russian authorities expected Moldova to exit from the USSR, following the example of the Baltic States, and to join Romania. Separatism has been used as a means to keep Moldova within the Soviet Union: on the 2nd of September 1990, a group of deputies of different levels joined in Parcani (a village situated in the Eastern area of the Republic of Moldova) and proclaimed the “transnistrian autonomous moldavian republic within the USSR” (N.B.!).

Political confrontations occurred within the period 1989-1992 revealed that the line of political demarcation within the former Moldavian SSR did not coincide with the Nistru river – at its initial stage, the conflict emerged in Transnistria, between the

supporters of the independence of the Republic of Moldova and the aggressive supporters of the USSR. The destruction of constitutional state bodies of the Republic of Moldova in the Eastern area of the country and the establishment of the separatist regime were mainly determined by the presence of Russian troops of the former 14th Soviet Army alongside with the thousands of Russian mercenaries (“kossacs”) – in spring-summer of the year 1992, Russian troops committed an act of aggression against the Republic of Moldova and involved in armed confrontation, taking sides with the separatist regime, established by Moscow itself. The political opposition was repressed on the left bank area and many opponents of the regime have been physically exterminatedⁱ. Because of the policy promoted by the separatist regime, tens of thousands of people left Transnistria, becoming refugees and displaced people.

Throughout 15 years, Tiraspol regime, self-called “transnistrian moldavian republic” (“tmr”), is led by a small group of Russian citizens who usurp the right to speak on behalf of all the people from the area under their control. People of the “tmr” are controlled and manipulated by the means of repressive methods, inherent to a totalitarian regime. The “ministry of state security” which is a branch of Russian secret services, plays a particular role in the “tmr” and acts in the region as a political police (following the model of the former KGB). Tiraspol regime has its own army, comparable to the one of the Republic of Moldova, which is in fact a Russian army commanded by officers who are Russian citizens and equipped with arms and ammunition illegally supplied by Russia. Russia opposes to withdrawing its troops of the former 14th Army from the territory of the Republic of Moldova, invoking as a reason the lack of consent from the side of its own puppets of Tiraspol.

In July 1992, Russia imposed an “unique” format of peace-keeping forces, while in May 1997, it set a five-sided format of the negotiation process.

The peace-keeping formula implies the participation of troops of Russia, Transnistria and Moldova what contravenes to the standards of both the OSCE and of the United Nations. The resolutions of the Joint Control Commission are supposed to be adopted by consensus, consequently, Moldova is fated to be permanently in the minority. Besides legalizing the Transnistrian army, such a model has transformed the peace-keeping forces into a shield behind which the “tmr” strengthened.

The five-sided format of the negotiation process was set as a result of signing on the 8th of May 1997 the Memorandum on the Basis for the Normalisation of the Relationship between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria. Such a negotiation format is based on an erroneous approach to the conflict essence which assumes that there are two conflict parties on the territory of the Republic of Moldova – people of the right bank area of Nistru river and people of the left bank area. Under such a format, the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine have been vested with a mediator mandate.

By the means of the above-mentioned two tools – the format of peace-keeping forces and the format of the negotiation process – imposed with the consent of the Moldavian authorities, Russia obstructs any progress towards the conflict settlement, using its Tiraspol puppets. Taking into consideration the broad economic, information, political, etc. support provided to the separatist regime by Russia, as well as the illegal presence of Russian troops on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, it can be assumed that Transnistria is in fact under Russian occupation.

Russia’s responsibility for the conflict outbreak and for its perpetuation was confirmed by such an impartial institution as the European Court for Human Rights in its resolutionⁱⁱ concerning Ilashcu group, dated 8th of July 2004.

What Does Transnistria Look Like Now, Late in 2005?

To reach a correct understanding of the Transnistrian conflict essence, it is necessary to make the analysis of the real situation in the “tmr”. Despite the repressive policy promoted in the “tmr” by the ruling separatist regime, people of that area have not been and are not a political monolith, and, implicitly, the separatist leaders do not express the opinions of the majority of people of Transnistria:

- over 270 thousand of people in the total number of 418 468 people aged 18 or more who live in Transnistria opted for the citizenship of the Republic of Moldova, while the separatist regime encourages by all means the increase in the number of holders of Russian citizenship with a view to back the interference of Russia in the internal affairs of the Republic of Moldova;
- people of six localities situated in the left bank area of the Nistru river have taken up arms to fight for their right to remain under the authority of the Republic of Moldova;
- in Transnistria, including in all its industrial centres, there are seven schools under the authority of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova.

The above-mentioned categories of people living in Transnistria categorically oppose to the position of Russian puppets of Tiraspol. Or, under the present conditions, they avoid political confrontation with the separatist regime, because nobody protects them and they are concerned about the risk of repression.

- People of both banks of the Nistru river, except some Russian mercenaries, do not treat mutually as enemies. From the ethnical point of view, the population of Transnistria is not different from the one of the rest of the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, on the right bank area, there are even more Russian and Ukrainian nationals than in Transnistria who coexist peacefully.
- The Constitution in force in the Republic of Moldova, as well as the whole legal framework, have the power to ensure the observance of fundamental human rights on the whole territory of the country, including in Transnistria.

Consequently, there is not any specific of the people of Transnistria compared to the rest of people of the Republic of Moldova which could support their claims to ***collective rights*** different from the ones of the rest of people of the Republic of Moldova.

It leads to the univocal conclusion that there is no reasonable ground for granting to Transnistria a special legal status (neither as an autonomy, nor as a federation or a confederation subject, etc.) within the reunified state.

As there is not any specific compared to the rest of people of the Republic of Moldova, there is not therefore need for a distinct representative body for the population of the “tmr” – universal parliamentary election should be held on the whole territory of the Republic of Moldova, in accordance with the Constitution and with the legislation in force. (*Such election could be held in spring of the year 2009*).

Certainly, the totalitarian regime imposed for over 15 years, the deprivation from fundamental liberties, the lack of political pluralism, the partiality of the media, the forced isolationism from the rest of the territory of the Republic of Moldova have serious consequences – most of the people of Transnistria have not any democratic experience and avoid any political activities, being mainly concerned about social-economic issues. As a result of the broad misinformation policy, people of Transnistria are totally misinformed about the essence and the development of the negotiation process, etc.

Obviously, the process of reunification of the Republic of Moldova there does not require any special legal status for Transnistria, because such a status would be

favourable for the perpetuation of the negative consequences of separatist domination. There is only need for a programme of *democratisation* of Transnistria aimed at helping people to adapt to new political, legal, etc. realities inherent to the rule of law.

A number of univocal conclusions come from the above-mentioned:

- the Transnistrian conflict is neither inter-ethnic nor internal. Consequently, people of Transnistria are not a conflict *party*;
- the real conflict *party* is Russia, while Transnistria is under its military occupation;
- leaders of Tiraspol separatist regime are Russian puppets: obeying with docility to orders given by Kremlin, they obstruct any progress in the negotiation process and contribute to maintaining the Republic of Moldova under the influence of Russia. In the same time, Transnistria has become a hotbed of the international network of organized crime and of smuggling;
- any format of the negotiation process based on the erroneous idea that the Transnistrian conflict is an inter-ethnic and internal conflict between people of both sides of the Nistru river and that Tiraspol regime should be accepted as a representative of the people of Transnistria is condemned to failure;
- the problem of conflict settlement consists in unconditioned and controlled dismantling of the present separatist regime and in strengthening the reunified Moldavian state. Sterile talks about federation, autonomy, confederation, “common” state, etc. cannot lead to conflict settlement without dismantling the regime ruling in the “tmr”;
- the problem of reaching an optimal formula for internal organization of the reunified Republic of Moldova could be solved by the citizens of the country, after releasing people of Transnistria from the yoke of the repressive regime and of the Russian military occupation;
- throughout 15 years, Russian puppets of Tiraspol displayed during the negotiation process an incompatible position with the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova, they committed serious violation of fundamental human rights. Therefore, tolerating their state of freedom on the territory of the Republic of Moldova does not comply with any viable solution of the conflict nor with the existence of the Moldavian state;
- the Transnistrian conflict is neither inter-ethnic nor internal. It is a geopolitical conflict used by Russia to keep Moldova under its control and to avoid the enlargement of NATO, the consolidation of the GUUAM, etc.;
- the behaviour of Russia towards the Transnistrian conflict, determined by unreasonable imperial trends, is a flagrant violation of the international law. There cannot be any compromise between the position promoted by Russia since 1992 and a viable solution of the Transnistrian conflict. It has been confirmed by the latest proposals made by Russia during the consultations held on the 26th – 27th of September 2005 in Odessa.

The geographical factor plays an important role in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict:

- being an enclave between Ukraine and the rest of the territory of the Republic of Moldova, the “tmr” does not confine with Russia. As a result, the regime of the “tmr” is much more vulnerable if compared to other conflict points in the post-Soviet area (Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia). It reveals the great role of Ukraine in supporting the survival of the “tmr” regime up to the present, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, its role as a possible partner

of the Republic of Moldova, of the EU and of the USA in the process of conflict settlement.

During the negotiation process, for various reasons (corruption, incompetence, collaboration with Russian secret services, etc.), the authorities of the Republic of Moldova have signed a number of documents which legislate the erroneous approach of the Transnistrian conflict which conceives the people of the “tmr” as a conflict *party*, while Russian puppets of Tiraspol are accepted as representatives of the “tmr” to the negotiation process.

Although strange at first glance, such an erroneous approach is suitable not only for Russia, but also, from some perspectives, for the EU and the USA. The reason is quite simple – aiming at their own priorities in their relationship with Russia (distinct from the problems of the Republic of Moldova), they can avoid the direct undesirable dialogue with Russia as an aggressor country and as a real conflict *party*. On the other hand, the EU and the USA still keep some space for manoeuvres, miming some concern by the means of sterile documentation visits to Tiraspol.

3. Parameters of the Viable Conflict Solution – the Case of the Republic of Moldova

If the axiom that any viable conflict solution requires prior unconditioned dismantling of the separatist regime ruling in the “tmr”, the problem of internal post-conflict organization of the country is no more a concern for the external actors. Under the conditions of the obtained freedom, the citizens of the Republic of Moldova will be able to decide by themselves about the optimal formula for state internal organization (uniform decentralized unitary state; autonomous status for Transnistria; federalization of the Republic of Moldova, etc.).

In the same time, there are sufficient arguments for formulating explicitly some priorities, including in the field of post-conflict organization of the reunified Republic of Moldova.

The Republic of Moldova is a young state with a controversial historical past which is often regarded from antagonist positions. The very fact that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many experts, diplomats, journalists and politicians engaged in serious debates on the prospects of the unification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania confirms the existence of such ambiguities. On the other hand, Moldova has already set a precedent of establishing and operating an autonomous unit – the Gagauzian territorial-administrative unit. The Gagauzian autonomy, set in accordance with the Law on the Special Legal Status of the Gagauzian Territorial-Administrative Unit, dated 23rd of December 1994, is a failed experiment and a source of arguments while searching for a viable model of internal organization of the reunified state.

Firstly, the establishment of this autonomy did not solve any problem concerning the national rebirth of the Gagauzian people. On the other hand, the Gagauzian autonomy still has a nostalgic mentality and shows a trend to isolationism from the rest of the Moldavian society. In general, there are no representatives of other ethnic groups in local government, nevertheless, like in Soviet times, Russian language is dominant. Throughout many years, leaders of the Gagauzian autonomy, being manipulated by the separatist regime of Transnistria as well as by Moscow, have passed many anti-constitutional documents. At all parliamentary elections based on party lists held in the Republic of Moldova since 1994, the electors of Gagauzia,

inspired by pro-Soviet nostalgia, voted constantly and largely for parties which promote a rude anti-European policy.

If the model of the Gagauzian autonomy is applied in Transnistria too, the same negative phenomena will emerge, at a much more serious scale -the Transnistrian autonomy would inevitably become a serious obstacle to the consolidation of the Moldavian civic nation; there will be endless dissension between central and local authorities concerning the geopolitical orientation of the country and attempts of the chauvinistic circles of Russia to resuscitate separatism, etc.

The above-mentioned leads to the conclusion that the optimal model for the Republic of Moldova is the formula of unitary state, within its present borders, with no distinct subject called "Transnistria". To strengthen the state and to ensure a viable conflict settlement, the territory of the "tmr" should be divided into second-level territorial-administrative units (called *judets*) of the unitary state, while the internal organization of the whole state should be determined exclusively by geographical-economic criteria.

The problem of reaching a viable conflict settlement raises another important issue – the reunified state will be really viable if most of the population of the Eastern area consciously plead for the country's reunification, for incorporation of Transnistria into the legal, economic, social, etc. space of the Republic of Moldova and if people will not be disappointed by the effects of the reunification. To reach a really viable settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, there is need for a high quality of the process of governance at national level (in Chisinau) and the Moldavian society as a whole should display the capacity to "digest" Transnistria.

Reaching an adequate level of the quality of governance by Chisinau authorities with a view to ensure the attractiveness of the Republic of Moldova for most people of the "tmr" is an extremely difficult problem. Public opinion polls conducted lately in the right bank area revealed constantly that $\frac{3}{4}$ of interviewed young people would leave for ever the Republic of Moldova.

In addition to it, a viable settlement of the Transnistrian conflict requires gradual integration of the population of the "tmr" into Moldavian society and its adaptation to the new reality. These are compulsory conditions for further conscious involvement of the people of the left bank area in political processes developed in the Republic of Moldova, including in parliamentary elections.

4. Key-issues of the Strategy for the Transnistrian Conflict Settlement

The Transnistrian conflict could be settled provided that:

- the possibility to realize geopolitical and criminal interests supported now by the separatist regime of the "tmr" is definitively and irreversibly suppressed;
- people of the "tmr" are released from the control of the repressive structures of the regime as a result of its dismantling.

Moreover, a viable conflict settlement requires a policy intended to transform most of the Transnistrian people into conscious supporters of the country's reunification. To such an end, in addition to prior dismantling of the repressive structures of the separatist regime, it is necessary to eliminate from the political life and from the negotiation process the group of Russian citizens led by Igor Smirnov.

The key-issues of the scenario of reunification of the Republic of Moldova have been defined in the "3D" Strategyⁱⁱⁱ (*demilitarisation, decriminalisation and democratisation*).

These three key-issues of the strategy for conflict settlement have been accepted by many actors involved in the Transnistrian conflict settlement. In the same time, some interpretations incompatible with the “3D” have emerged given that the Transnistrian conflict is a point of interference of various interests.

Such interpretations concern first of all the concept of *democratisation* of Transnistria. The issue of *democratisation* of Transnistria is so vague and speculative that even Russia has not rejected it. As a result, there are two incompatible approaches to the idea of *democratisation* of Transnistria.

One of them is included in Youshchenko Plan, supported, with some objections, by Russia. It is based on the erroneous assumption that Transnistria is a conflict *party*. Such an approach implies *democratisation* of Transnistria as a state distinct from the Republic of Moldova, in accordance with its own legislation, etc. Under such an approach, the Supreme Soviet would have the possibility to claim endless negotiation for vesting Transnistria with competencies within the reunified Republic of Moldova.

Such an approach cannot lead to a viable conflict settlement and does not exclude that the Supreme Soviet of Transnistria would mime a referendum in order to declare further that Transnistria does not accept any form of incorporation into the Republic of Moldova. It is obvious that such an approach aims at implementing the model of Kosovo.

Therefore, avoiding details^{iv}, the approach to the process of *democratisation* of Transnistria expressed in Youshchenko Plan and supported by the proposals made by Russia on the 26th–27th of September 2005 in Odessa, is in fact an attempt of Ukraine and Russia to realize their interests which are incompatible with the prospects of the sovereign state – the Republic of Moldova.

Nevertheless, as nobody rejected Youshchenko Plan, there is a consensus concerning the democratic elections to be held in Transnistria. Taking into account the complexity of the relationship between the actors involved in the conflict settlement, the idea of elections for the Supreme Soviet of Transnistria can only be accepted as an intermediary stage aimed in fact at eliminating the present leadership of Transnistria, not at setting a representative body vested with the power to negotiate with Chisinau central authorities.

The other approach to the concept of *democratisation* of Transnistria, proposed by the civil society of Moldova and formulated in the *Law on the Basic Principles of the Special Legal Status of the Localities of Transnistria*, no. 173-XVI, passed by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova on the 22nd of July 2005, provides for the *democratisation* of Transnistria in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Moldova, as a result of extending the sovereignty of the Moldavian state to that territory. It is obvious that this is the only approach to the concept of *democratisation* of Transnistria which could really lead to a viable conflict settlement.

The issue of *decriminalisation* of Transnistria is also subject to essentially various interpretations of the participants in the negotiation process. As long as the existence of the Moldavian state is not contested, it is logical to conclude that transporting goods through the state border, recognized by the international community, without paying customs duties to the state budget and without holding customs papers issued by the Republic of Moldova is an act of smuggling (which is an economic crime).

Due to the consistent efforts made by the EU, on the 7th of October 2005, the European Commission, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the European Union Border Assistance Mission. After the Republic of Moldova introduced on the 1st of September 2001 new customs stamps, Kiev administrations categorically opposed to setting joint customs points along the

transnistrian segment of the Moldavian-Ukrainian border. The Ukrainian government ruled by Iulya Tymoshenko adopted on the 26th of May 2005 three documents (resolution nr. 400; ordinances no. 164-r and 165-r) intended to block the flow of goods which avoid the payment of customs duties and taxes to the state budget of the Republic of Moldova and which do not hold customs papers issued by the Republic of Moldova. But the Ukrainian President Victor Youshtchenko has ordered verbally the suspension of the above-mentioned documents.

At least for the time being, the position of the European Union implies the monitoring of the Moldavian-Ukrainian border with a view to block the illegal traffic in arms, drugs, human beings. On the other hand, at least temporarily, such a monitoring will have no impact on the flows of goods to/from Transnistria. Consequently, economic entities of the “tmr” are not compelled to pay duties and taxes to state budget of the Republic of Moldova.

The lack of a consensus between the EU, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine concerning the issue of *decriminalisation* of Transnistria and concerning the definition of the concept of *smuggling*, is favourable for the economic survival of the separatist regime of Transnistria. On the other hand, the ambiguity in dealing with the concept of *smuggling* will allow the separatist leaders “trumpet”, when the monitoring starts, that the “tmr” is a honest state, correct from all viewpoints, and that the Republic of Moldova accused it groundlessly of different economic crimes.

5. What Could the European Union and the United States Do?

If the regime of the “tmr” were not set and supported by Russia, it is obvious that the EU and the USA, with their enormous political and economic potential, would have adopted a more open and active behaviour. With no difficulties and large resources, they would ensure the securisation of NATO eastern border, the reunification of the Republic of Moldova and the geopolitical stability in the region. Or, the behaviour of the EU and of the USA has become more cautious since Russia, aspiring to become again a regional superpower in the post-Soviet area, does not renounce to its idea of transforming the Republic of Moldova into a Russian protectorate. Speaking about Transnistria, Russian officials, including Vladimir Putin, have repeatedly declared that Russia pleads “for a status of Transnistria, with reliable guarantees, respecting the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova”. Such an option can be understood as follows: Russia will insist on a status for Transnistria which the Republic of Moldova will not be able to modify and which will ensure the control of Russia on the “reunified” Moldova, as well as the perpetuation of Russian military presence. Such a goal was plainly formulated in Kozak Memorandum which President Vladimir Voronin and the separatist leader Igor Smirnoff were supposed to sign on the 25th of November 2003 in the presence of Vladimir Putin. The Memorandum was not signed because the West interfered.

Nevertheless, even under such circumstances, the EU and the USA show a growing concern about the Transnistrian issue. On the 27th of February 2003, the EU and the USA imposed travel ban on a group of separatist leaders of Transnistria. It is due to the EU insistence that was signed the Memorandum on the European Union Border Assistance Mission beginning on the 1st of December 2005. To make such concrete steps, the EU and the USA did not need to take formally part in the negotiation process.

On the 31st of October 2005, President Vladimir Voronin declared^v that Moldova holds some documents of the administration of Saddam Hussein which confirm that Transnistria has supplied arms and arm production equipment to Irak. Obviously, Moldavian authorities could receive such documents exclusively from Washington administration. Such a fact can be conceived as a warning addressed by the USA to Russia in order to compel it renounce to its destructive position concerning the Transnistrian issue.

As a result of the consultations held in Odessa on the 26th - 27th of September 2005, the negotiation format was modified - the EU and the USA have been granted the statute of observers. Russian puppets of Tiraspol have not been used to obstruct such a decision, consequently, Russia is no more able to deny the dramatic geopolitical shifts on the European continent, nor the right of the EU and of the USA to exert their own interests on this portion of the post-Soviet area.

The first round of negotiation in the new 5+2 format, held on the 27th – 28th of October 2005, had very modest outcomes. In the same time, it is obvious that the EU and the USA wish to keep the 5+2 format as a curtain behind which will occur the real game of interests.

If the Moldavian authorities do not attempt to eliminate Russian puppets of Tiraspol from the negotiation process as a result of the unilateral cancellation of all documents (first of all, the Memorandum on the Basis for the Normalisation of the Relationship between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria, dated 8th of May 1997) which laid the foundations of such a format, the contribution of the EU and of the USA to the Transnistrian conflict settlement could focus on the following fields:

- *setting a democratic environment for the totalitarian “tmr” regime within the triangle EU-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova, by the means of prior implementation of the provisions of EU-Ukraine and EU-Republic of Moldova Action Plans;*
- *providing financial assistance for programmes focused on strengthening civil society in Transnistria and on encouraging the dialogue between people of the both sides of the Nistru river with a view to enhance mutual trust;*
- *applying measures of constraint towards the separatist leaders of the “tmr”, including the threat of blocking the transnistrian segment of the Moldavian-Ukrainian border, etc.;*
- *opening new positive prospects related to the country’s reunification for various segments of the population of Transnistria and of the Republic of Moldova, in general.*

The process of the Transnistrian conflict settlement, including the possible contribution of the EU and of the USA, depend much on the political developments in Ukraine. Despite the pro-European declarations made by new Kiev administration, Ukraine has not associated to travel ban on the Transnistrian separatist leaders imposed by the EU and the USA. Moreover, Ukraine allows Russian military planes to cross its air space on their way to Transnistria, regardless of the lack of permission and of customs control of the Republic of Moldova. It is obvious less credible the fact that Russian military cargo aircrafts IL-76 are flying, as it is presented by Russian press, to and from Tiraspol with a post mailing purpose only. That is when in Russian Federation itself were many times reported cases on how Russian military cargo aircrafts were used on illegal transportation from Middle Asia of big loads of narcotics, and the authorities of so-called “pmr” have categorically refused international missions of verification on Transnistrian armament and munitions stockpiles.

If the EU and the USA succeed to make Ukraine change its position concerning the above-mentioned two issues, i.e. to associate to travel ban on separatist leaders and to allow exclusively the flights of Russian planes to Chisinau airport, such steps would have an extremely strong psychological impact on the internal situation in the “tmr”, diminishing considerably the power of the separatist leaders.

The EU and the USA could increase their role in the process of conflict settlement, if they involve as mediators and guarantors in the eventual negotiation between Chisinau central authorities and business elite of Tiraspol on the sensitive issue of guarantees concerning the right to ownership, on the opportunities to follow up their business within the reunified Republic of Moldova, etc.

In parallel, relying on the support of the EU and of the USA, Moldova could develop a programme of compensation of the eventual negative consequences of Russia’s behaviour, in the event of its withdrawal from Transnistria.

First of all, Russia should annul the huge amount of the debt for the natural gas consumed by Transnistria (USD 541 million – the debt; USD 454 million – penalties). Throughout more than a decade, the state-owned Russian company “GAZPROM” has been consciously supplying gas to Transnistria nearly for free. In exchange for the annulment of the debt premeditatedly created by Russia (it was in fact a way to credit Transnistria), the Republic of Moldova could withdraw its claims for environment damages caused by the presence of Russian military troops, illegally deployed on its territory.

In 2005, Russia has undertaken a series of discriminatory measures towards the Republic of Moldova which could be considered as a non-declared economic war. If decisive steps are made towards the Transnistrian conflict settlement, Russia could attempt to destabilize the social-economic situation both in Transnistria and in Moldova, restricting the access of goods produced in Transnistria to their traditional Russian markets and, on the other hand, stop the supply of raw materials, etc.

Certainly, neither the separatist regime of the “tmr”, nor the position of Russia in Transnistria, are powerful. The separatist regime has never been powerful. Contrarily – the Moldavian state has been weak and lacked the support of democratic countries. The first symptoms of the consolidation and maturation of the political elite of Chisinau, on the one hand, and the emergence of the concern from the side of the EU and of the USA, on the other hand, can favour the conflict settlement and, consequently, the establishment of the first positive precedent in the post-Soviet area, provided that a consensus is reached on three major issues: diagnosis, viable solution and resources.

*Chişinău,
29th of October 2005*

ⁱ Oazu NANTOI, Report on the problem of internally displaced persons in the Republic of Moldova, <http://www.unhcr.md/article/dispers.htm>

ⁱⁱ Case of Ilascu and others v. Moldova and Russia (Application no.48787/99), 08/07/04.

ⁱⁱⁱ Oazu NANTOI, The East zone conflict in the Republic of Moldova: a new approach, www.ipp.md

^{iv} Oazu NANTOI, The Plan for the Transnistrian Conflict Settlement Proposed by Ukraine – pros and cons; www.ipp.md

^v Vladimir Voronin: Moldova are dovezi ca Tiraspolul a vindut armament Irakului.

<http://www.azi.md/print/36565/Ro> ; www.kommersant.ru/doc.html?DocID=623410&IssueId=2351