

Foreign Policy Association together with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung offer you a newsletter on foreign policy and European integration issues of the Republic of Moldova. The newsletter is part of the "Foreign Policy Dialogue" joint Project.

# NEWSLETTER

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## Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Mădălin Necșuțu, editor-coordinator

### TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. Panel II of the Reintegration Forum: It is difficult to talk about the Transnistrian settlement without talking about peace in Ukraine
2. Panel II of the Reintegration Forum: Moscow will consider that Moldova's accession to the EU is incompatible with the status of neutrality of Moldova on which Russia insists
3. Editorial by Mihai Isac, political analyst: The Transnistrian dilemma: how Chisinau will play the reintegration card of its eastern region

### News in Brief



The Republic of Moldova marks 10 years since the visa regime with the European Union was liberalized. During these years, more than 2.5 million Moldovans traveled without a visa, using the biometric passport. The Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE) calculated that Moldovans saved over 270 million euros. President Maia Sandu declared that "it is essential to become a member state of the European Union not only so that free movement remains guaranteed, but also peace". She stated that "for 10 years we have been traveling freely, without visas, in the European Union" and that "Moldovans are Europeans and deserve to live freely, travel where they want, work where they want, like all European citizens." "It is essential to become a member state of the EU, not only so that free movement remains guaranteed, but also for peace, well-being and democracy," declared the head of state. The government reported that more than 2.5 million Moldovans benefited from the visa-free regime and made more than 30 million border crossings.



The President of the Moldovan Parliament, Igor Grosu, declared on April 26, during a television show on TVR Moldova, that Russia cannot intervene militarily in the Republic of Moldova, because there is a Ukrainian army that defends the whole of Europe from the aggression of the Kremlin. However, according to the official, Russia uses propaganda and voter corruption in the Republic of Moldova to weaken citizens' trust in state institutions. The President of the Parliament appeals to the legal authorities to intervene and put an end to the phenomenon of the introduction of dirty money into the country, and for the authors of these illegal schemes to be sanctioned according to the law. Igor Grosu is skeptical that representatives of the "So" group could take over power in the Republic of Moldova. According to the President of the Parliament, the representatives of the new opposition block "Victoria" know that Russia's sympathies among the politicians of the Republic of Moldova are fleeting, and former President Igor Dodon is the most eloquent example of this.



The Kremlin plans to use pro-Russian actors in Gagauzia and Transnistria to destabilize and degrade Moldovan democracy and ultimately prevent Moldova from joining the EU, writes The Kyiv Post, citing a report released by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) from the United States. According to the ISW, the Kremlin-affiliated governor of Moldova's pro-Russian Gagauzia autonomous region, Evghenia Guțul, told the Russian news agency TASS on Friday that Moldovan authorities detained her and three of her advisers for several hours when the group arrived at Chisinau airport after a series of recent meetings in Russia and Turkey. Guțul claimed that Moldovan law enforcement inspected her luggage and detained her for an hour before releasing her, and one of Guțul's advisers told TASS that the Moldovan authorities interrogated the three advisers for two more hours.

## How the Transnistrian region could be reintegrated: working scenarios and debates



For the first time in the last thirty years, several working scenarios on how the breakaway Transnistrian region could be reintegrated were openly discussed in Chisinau. This happened during the Reintegration Forum, organized on April 11, in Chisinau, by the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), the Friedrich Ebert

Foundation (FES) Moldova and the Reintegration Policy Bureau, in cooperation with the Expert-Group and the Promo-LEX Association. Dominated by a Soviet-inspired technocratic regime but with capitalist habits, the small region is on the verge of collapse without consistent Russian support. The transit through Ukraine of free gas from

Gazprom, in the case of which a historical debt of about 10 billion dollars has been accumulated, could disappear at the end of the year, which could suddenly short-circuit the artificial existence of this independent entity from Chisinau. The budget deficit and the continuous decline of the standard of living

► are the result of the pauperization of the approximately 400,000 citizens who live on the left bank of the Dniester by a kleptocratic regime connected to the region's resources and to all licit or illicit sources of income. The region's economic data has changed dramatically in recent years, so that more than 75 percent of exports go to the European Union market. And this is where the paradox of the functioning of this structure appears - financially dependent on the EU, but politically connected to Moscow. The issue of resolving the Transnistrian file is also closely related to the outcome of the military conflict in Ukraine. It is not yet known whether the region will survive economically until the end of the conflict or will collapse before then.

It is certain though that the authorities in Chisinau must be prepared for the most pessimistic scenarios, but some that can also bring them an unexpected window of opportunity from a political point of view, namely the reintegration of this space dominated de facto for the last three decades by the Federation Russian. Precisely in these circumstances, the debates, scenarios and reintegration expertise must be accelerated and discussed openly by the whole society so that the Republic of Moldova can undertake planned preventive actions, primarily to avoid a humanitarian crisis in the region.

It should be noted that the Republic of Moldova is leading the process of

reintegration of the small secessionist region, in parallel with the expansionist plans of the Russian Federation to restore the defunct Soviet Union. That is why this process is all the more difficult and must be based on the prompt and generous support of the West, which must give a consistent helping hand on all levels for the success of the reintegration. Based on current data, a countdown has begun for the existence of the breakaway region in this format. But it also depends on Chisinau how it will play this game of resettling the frozen conflicts in the Black Sea area and how it will manage to take advantage of the resettlement of the post-conflict geopolitical board.

*Madalin Necsutu*

## It is difficult to talk about the Transnistrian settlement without talking about peace in Ukraine

**The Reintegration Forum of the Republic of Moldova held on April 11 in Chisinau brought together officials, diplomats and civil society experts alike to openly discuss what the reintegration of the Transnistrian region within the Republic of Moldova could look like and the imminence with which this process was already in motion in a very quick manner. At the first panel of this forum, entitled "Key priorities for the political agenda of the reintegration process", several officials and experts extensively presented their ideas regarding the process of resolving the Transnistrian file in the context of an ongoing war in Ukraine, following the Russian military aggression of February 22, 2022. We have outlined the main ideas presented by the participants in this first discussion panel of the Reintegration Forum, which you can read in detail in the following lines:**

11 Aprilie 2024 09.15 – 11.00

Moderator:

**FORUMUL DE REINTEGRARE**

în parteneriat cu:  
**Promo-LEX** Advancing democracy and human rights  
**Expert-Grup** Independent Think-Tank

**panel 1** Priorități-cheie pentru agenda politică a procesului de reintegrare

**Mădălin Necșutu**  
 Journalist,  
 TVR Moldova

**Oleg Serebrian**  
 Viceprim-ministru pentru Reintegrare

**Doroa Dlouchy-Suliga**  
 Reprezentantul UE pentru procesul de negocieri privind reglementarea transnistreană, Serviciul European pentru Acțiune Externă (SEAE)

**Păun Rohovei**  
 Ambasador cu misiuni speciale al Ucrainei, responsabil de dosarul transnistrean

**Kent D. Logsdon**  
 Ambasadorul Statelor Unite ale Americii în Republica Moldova

**Vladislav Kulminski**  
 Director Executiv, Institutul pentru Inițiativă Strategică (IPIIS)

## **Oleg Serebrian, Vice-Prime Minister for Reintegration of the Republic of Moldova**



The Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration, Oleg Serebrian, said at the start of the first panel of the Reintegration Forum, organized on April 11, in Chisinau, by the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Bureau of Reintegration Policies, in cooperation with Expert-Group and the Promo-LEX Association, that the Transnistrian file is strongly connected to everything that is happening in Ukraine in these dramatic moments.

“February 24, 2022 was a turning point in everything related to the Transnistrian file. All approaches until then have become obsolete, and some of them - cancelled. The 5+2 negotiation format was put on hold. Then the 1+1 negotiation format and related groups entered a new phase of rethinking,” the official said.

Oleg Serebrian added that precisely the quality and emphasis of the relationship between Tiraspol and Chisinau have changed. “Until the military invasion, there were different visions, projects, reintegration strategies. Seen from the height of today, some may seem naive or unadjusted to today’s reality. The war in Ukraine completely changed the

coordinates of all the conflicts in the Black Sea region,” he said.

The Deputy Prime Minister emphasized that, at a certain moment, the international community and the Republic of Moldova should think of a complex and integrated vision on the security of the Black Sea in general. “Or all these frozen conflicts in the Black Sea area are connected to each other and have a common origin. They are interdependent. It is difficult to talk about the Transnistrian settlement without talking about peace in Ukraine, just as it is difficult to talk about the settlement of the Ossetian or Abkhaz files without taking into account the other two files in the north of the Black Sea. All three countries - Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia - are candidate states for EU accession. That is a game changer. I think that the EU must have another say in the rethinking of the regulatory process of all these files, not just the Transnistrian one,” explained the official.

### **Coordinating with partners the Transnistrian settlement**

The Deputy Prime Minister stressed that the Republic of Moldova has partners from Ukraine with whom it must coordinate certain things in this difficult regulatory process.

“What is very important in this regulatory process is not to create surprises. That is, the steps we take should be coordinated with our external partners, with Brussels. We have a moral obligation, as a candidate state, that those steps we consider legitimate in the reintegration process are nevertheless coordinated and analysed. Likewise, with our partners in Ukraine, with whom we have, in many respects, a common agenda. Also, with Romania, which, although it is part of the EU, has a specific status and role in this process, taking into account the neighbourhood, historical relations, the ethnic composition and the number of Romanian citizens from the Republic of Moldova and many others”, he added.

### **Integration into the EU and reintegration of Transnistria, two independent processes**

Serebrian also said, in relation to the European course of the Republic of Moldova and its correlation with the reintegration file, that these two processes cannot be synchronized - each must go at its natural pace. The speed with which we will move towards the EU will set the tone for the country’s reintegration process, and not the other way around,” said Oleg Serebrian.

He referred to the key priorities for the political agenda of the reintegration process. “In this context, it is important to have a dialogue with Tiraspol, including on the European file and the adjustment to European standards. I think that an additional working group on this field will be established soon - I hope that Tiraspol will support this idea - which will deal with the customs, fiscal, banking, standards, and environment issues, as well as Moldova’s commitments in the EU accession process that must gradually be extended also to the left bank”, said the deputy prime minister.

### **Dorota Dlouchy-Suliga, EU Special Representative for the negotiation process regarding the Transnistrian settlement, European External Action Service (EEAS)**



# 4 Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

APRIL 2024

The European diplomat, Dorota Dlouchy-Suliga, stated that the EU participated in the regulatory process in various formats such as 5+2, or Berlin plus and others.

“But now the accents are totally different, with the start of the war on the territory of Ukraine. The EU wants to have in the case of Moldova a new member that is both safe and stable. Addressing the issues of solving frozen conflicts is on our agenda for our support to the Republic of Moldova, for its security and resilience. In recent years, this support has increased amazingly. It is not only about the situation created by the war in Ukraine, but also about the stabilization of the economic situation in the Republic of Moldova”, she said.

The European diplomat also emphasized that the Republic of Moldova has successfully overcome a large number of crises, including with the support of the European Union. We believe that the Chisinau authorities have managed to face the challenges brilliantly.

She added that, on the other hand, Transnistria cannot be viewed in isolation, and issues related to security and stabilization “create fear here and sometimes people’s attention is diverted from what is happening in the context of the justice reform or in the social-economic field. The Republic of Moldova cannot afford this risk”.

“It is also in Tiraspol’s interest to maintain security and stability, the current status-quo cannot last indefinitely in this format. Unfortunately, the EU does not have solid knowledge in solving frozen conflicts. EU accession and conflict resolution are different processes. European integration is not a conflict resolution process per se, but it could also have this effect,” said Dorota Dlouchy-Suliga.

## **Changing the status quo, if Tiraspol wants to trade with the EU**

The diplomat also said that it is important not to emphasize the differences

between Chisinau and Tiraspol in the process of implementing the reforms. She also said that some changes to the legal framework in the Republic of Moldova will have an impact on economic agents and ordinary people on the left bank of the Dniester, even without European integration.

“Tiraspol probably understands that by maintaining the status quo they will not be able to adapt to the changes necessary to be able to trade with the EU, where more than 70 percent of goods are exported. If they want to continue exporting to European markets, Tiraspol must comply with European standards and rules on the left bank as well. In our view, we cannot have just one institution leading the reintegration – several institutions from different sectors must be involved, acting in a coordinated manner. I’m glad we’re having discussions about economic reintegration. These things are important and there must be coordination,” said the EU diplomat.

She stated that there must also be more constructive communication with Tiraspol on several channels, sometimes there is a need for didactic work related to the single European market, EU criteria, etc.

“There is a need for public communication regarding the reintegration of the Transnistrian region, which involves discussions about European integration including in Russian, so that there are no surprises that will bring unwanted consequences. Stability and security are paramount in this process, and the status quo is not the way forward.

## **Kent D. Logsdon, Ambassador of the United States of America to the Republic of Moldova**

The US Ambassador to Chisinau, Kent Logsdon, emphasized the need to withdraw Russian troops from the left side of the Dniester River and the need to accelerate reforms to align the Republic of Moldova with EU standards.



“There are many difficult topics in the context of Moldova’s reintegration - economic, monetary, educational integration. We have to get to the situation where the Russian troops are withdrawn, as the Government has requested. We are affected by misinformation, there were also corrupt leaders who did not want a reintegration of the country,” said Kent D. Logsdon.

Kent D. Logsdon also drew attention to the fact that the Russian Federation wants to maintain its influence and divide the society of the Republic of Moldova. “History shows us that energy was Russia’s favourite tool of blackmail, but now, after the start of the war in Ukraine, Moldova has obtained energy independence, including with the support of the USA. However, we have a legacy that has allowed the perpetuation of this conflict for three decades, but we must break this cycle of dependency for the economy so that both banks of the Dniester prosper,” said the US ambassador.

He drew attention to the fact that in the last 30 years, the Republic of Moldova has been affected by misinformation. Ambassador Logsdon added that there is a need for economic, educational integration, but also in other areas. A special emphasis was placed on the energy independence from Russia that Chisinau must achieve and access on the

international energy procurement markets at affordable costs, which will lead to increased resilience.

“Moldova needs international assistance to carry out reforms, raise living standards and connect to Western energy markets. Only then will the Republic of Moldova be able to become prosperous and occupy a place in the European family”, said the American diplomat.

### **Massive American involvement**

He specified that, starting from February 2022, the USA offered USD 770 million in assistance to the Republic of Moldova.

“We have the team from different agencies of the American government - the Ministry of Defense, USAID that work together with colleagues from the Republic of Moldova to have a sustainable development and to create sound institutions so that the country can flourish in the coming years”, said the official.

“The Republic of Moldova will regain its place in the European family in the future, just like Ukraine, so the West needs a vision as a member state. We already have a 70 percent foreign trade ratio to the EU. This will strengthen the bonds and future relationship. We also need judicial reforms, political and cultural debates, we will need to find a way to reach the situation where the Russian troops are peacefully withdrawn from the country. Many of you in this room will play important roles in overcoming all future challenges and for the institutions of the Republic of Moldova to become strong and to promote European values throughout the territory and to have fair solutions for the citizens on both banks of the Dniester”, the US official added.

He stated that the US is committed to continuing to support the Republic of Moldova and to continue working with the Government of Chisinau, together with the OSCE and other partners, to achieve

this goal. “Promoting reintegration is our commitment to a more stable and prosperous European country,” concluded Kent Logsdon.

### **Păun Rohovei, Ambassador with special missions of Ukraine, responsible for the Transnistrian file**



Ukrainian Ambassador Păun Rohovei declared that Ukraine wants to resolve the Transnistrian file peacefully and with respect for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova.

“Ukraine’s firm position is that the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict must result in Chisinau’s reintegration and legal control over this territory. The only option is the settlement of this conflict with strict respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within the borders recognized at the international level”, said Păun Rohovei, who added that Ukraine will stand by the Republic of Moldova in this process.

Like the US official, the Ukrainian one also talked about the need to withdraw Russian troops from the left bank of the Dniester. Păun Rohovei also said that the 5+2 format have not shown results for 30 years, because of the position of the aggressor state - Russia.

“Considering the goal of the regulation - the reintegration of the country - an important thing is the rapid withdrawal of the troops of the aggressor state from the territory of the Republic of Moldova. It is an element that will provide conditions for a more efficient regulation in the future. The Russian army on the territory of the Republic of Moldova is a risk factor for Ukraine as well as the weapons and ammunition depot. The transformation of the peacekeeping mission on the Dniester from a military one to a civilian one is also important. Ukraine will do everything to achieve a good result for the Republic of Moldova in this process”.

### **Active involvement and Kiev**

He also explained that Ukraine will remain an active player in the settlement process, despite the fact that it will not sit at the negotiating table with Russia. He also explained that the withdrawal of Russian troops from the left side of the Dniester will lead to greater speed and increased efficiency in the settlement of this conflict. Last but not least, he said that the presence of the Russian army in Transnistria represents a military risk factor for Ukraine.

“Taking into account this and the war launched by Russia in violation of international law, Kiev does not see it possible to continue a dialogue at the negotiating table with Russia. We remain an active player in this process. New negotiation formats are needed for peaceful reintegration and for the European path of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. We must prove to everyone that we, by peaceful means, can achieve both European integration and the reintegration of the Republic of Moldova. I am sure that on the left bank of the Dniester there are people who understand this. This is why we must maintain the dialogue with those who are empowered to conduct negotiations, but also with the civil society there,” said the Ukrainian official.

He added that a prosperous future is desired in Tiraspol, and even the people there understand the ways by which this prosperous future can be achieved.

“The people of Tiraspol must understand that they have two options for the future - a prosperous one, of socio-economic development, and that they can reach it through European integration. The second option is what the aggressor state can offer them, which is provocation, isolation and, God forbid!, involvement in the ongoing war in Ukraine. We believe in our victory against the aggressor, the success of Ukraine will have a great contribution to what we call stability and security in the region. We will be unconditionally and consistently with Chisinau in the steps and effort made to reintegrate the country”, concluded the diplomat.

Last but not least, he said that it is very important to transform the military peacekeeping mission on the Dniester into a civilian one with the participation and under the auspices of an international organization.

**Vladislav Kulminski, Executive Director, Institute for Strategic Initiatives (IPIS)**



Vladislav Kulminski spoke about the things that can be done inside the country to prepare the country for reintegration. He stated that the Chisinau Government did everything possible to resolve this conflict diplomatically and peacefully, preventing certain dangers.

“Russia launched military aggression in Ukraine to restore spheres of influence and reconfigure the map despite international law and conventions that no longer apply in this case. With the start of the war in Ukraine by Russia, the scale of geopolitical transformations in the region for the Republic of Moldova is so great that now the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict can no longer be done gradually, everything evolves very quickly and a political solution must be developed quickly. We must be prepared to take decisions on this issue. The Transnistrian conflict is no longer a frozen one, we need to allocate resources and time for it,” said Kulminski.

**Open discussion in society versus political support**

He also said that the bankruptcy process of the region is steep and fast. “Everything is happening suddenly before our eyes, therefore the solution to the conflict is likely to be worked out quickly and we need to be prepared. All aspects of reintegration must be conceptualized and prepared. We have to be ready to take on these things,” said the IPIS director.

He also added that the political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict also depends on the next rounds of elections that will take place in the Republic of Moldova this year and next year.

“From the domestic point of view, we have two rounds of important elections in the coming period, and the promotion of a political solution to the conflict, which will be an expensive process, will involve

political costs for the political forces that will undertake this task. This topic is not a popular one in the country. High costs and few benefits are not a good topic to secure political support, but they need to be discussed and taken on,” said Kulminski.

**Important questions and solutions**

The expert explained that there are many questions to which we must seek answers: “How will the reintegration influence the society of the Republic of Moldova? What would be the economic costs of reintegration? How much time and resources will reintegration require? Even in Germany we cannot say that the process is complete. The costs of the reintegration process are high and there is a need for political actors who will politically assume the consequences of reintegration. How is Chisinau building its efforts to reach a settlement? The position and capacity of the reintegration office must be strengthened”.

Kulminski also said that solutions can be found, but the key question is how these ideas will find political support. “Thirdly, I think we need to have a reconciliation regarding how political negotiations work and how Chisinau is building its efforts to reach a settlement of the conflict. Political support for the Reintegration Office must be strengthened,” the IPIS director also said.

He also explained that this process also requires considerable financial resources. “Even in the case of German reunification, the process is far from complete. We are not necessarily talking about Germany as a model, but we cannot ignore the situation of highly developed states. Also in their case it took decades. For the Republic of Moldova, it will be even more complicated. We need a practical strategy, including the economic reintegration of the country.

# Moscow will consider that Moldova's accession to the EU is incompatible with the status of neutrality of Moldova on which Russia insists

The experts from the second panel of the Reintegration Forum of the Republic of Moldova, held on April 11, in Chisinau, mainly referred to the solutions aimed at the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Transnistrian secessionist region. The speakers analysed, in the panel entitled "Security prerequisites for the reintegration process", the current role of the 5+2 format and whether it is still viable today, and what Russia does to derail the European course of the Republic of Moldova. We have outlined the main ideas presented by the participants in this discussion panel at the Reintegration Forum which you can read in detail in the following lines:

**Dumitru Minzarari, Lecturer in Security Studies, Baltic Defense College, University of Michigan and IPRE Associate Analyst**

The expert Dumitru Minzarari stated that this reintegration process of the Transnistrian region is difficult to achieve in the conditions in which Russian



militarism and the plans to restore the post-Soviet space were set in motion by the Kremlin.

"I would like to start by saying that it is a difficult time for the reintegration of the Transnistrian region for two reasons. First, it is an older question of strategic direction. The current strategy that the Republic of Moldova has for resolving the conflict is not the most suitable. The second aspect is that today Russia has its own reintegration agenda. Moscow wants to reintegrate the ex-Soviet space and that is a big challenge, including in relation to the necessary efforts on the part of the Republic of Moldova for the

reintegration of Transnistria into a unified Moldova," he said.

However, the analyst also sees a possibility of achieving these goals with the help of stronger involvement of Kyiv in this reintegration process.

"However, the current conditions also present us with an opportunity. It is about a strong interest on the part of Ukraine to support the Republic of Moldova. Ukraine is more interested in the reintegration of the Republic of Moldova than Chisinau is. Why? Because the troops of the Russian Federation are present here. Even if numerically the contingent is not a very

11 April 2024 11.30 – 13.00

Chair:

**MOLDOVA REINTEGRATION FORUM** in partnership with: **Promo-LEX** **Expert-Grup**

panel 2 Key priorities for the political agenda of Moldova's reintegration process

**Oana Popescu-Zamfir**  
Executive Director, Global Focus Center, Bucharest

**Stefan Wolff**  
Professor of International Security, Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham

**Dumitru Minzarari**  
Lecturer in Security Studies, Baltic Defence College

**Vladimir Socor**  
Senior Fellow, The Jamestown Foundation

**Ion Manole**  
Director Executiv, Asociația Promo-LEX

large one, it is still a problem for Ukraine, which is subject to a military offensive and which now has to face it, without having enough ammunition. In the conditions of a solid offensive from the Russian Federation, an additional threat from behind the front in the Transnistrian region is not welcome,” explained Manzarari.

He specified that, in the case of forcing the withdrawal of Russian troops, Moldova cannot use military instruments, but it can put pressure on Moscow to withdraw its troops.

“It is impossible for the Republic of Moldova to reintegrate Transnistria as long as there are contingents of Russian troops on this territory. Russia has become more aggressive in its own efforts to reintegrate the post-Soviet space. In fact, we have a rather strong conflict of interests between Moldova and Russia. Without regime change in Russia, which is unlikely in the future, through dialogue alone, it seems to me impossible at this point to convince the Russian Federation to withdraw its troops,” he added.

### ***The population on the left bank of the Dniester, incapable of making their own decisions***

Manzărari stated that in the case of Transnistria, only dialogue with the administration there is not enough. “Dialogue must be maintained, but it is not enough. It’s a zero-sum game.”

“Why is Chisinau’s strategy inappropriate? Moldova and its Western partners use the rhetoric of European ideals, believing that they will be more attractive for Transnistria. But I would fight that idea. We do not have a democracy in Transnistria. It is not the population that will be able to determine this, even if they favoured reintegration,. The population does not come into confrontation with the authorities. In addition, Moldova has limited access to Transnistria,” he said.

The university lecturer stated that Transnistria is actually a political proxy of the Russian Federation, and even if the local elites would like to reintegrate, this will not happen.

“Local elites have a certain degree of freedom, but this freedom is minimal and will never conflict with the interests of the Russian Federation. In addition, Russia has the leverage to impose its will – troops, security services, economic leverage, coercion modelled after the persecution of internal Kremlin opponents. This is why the local elites do not like reintegration. The Moldovan authorities must change their approach if they want to make progress. It is important to talk more about the reintegration of the country, including in the context of EU accession. Moldova must have greater access to Transnistria in order to be able to discuss with the population”, added Dumitru Minzarari.

### ***Ion Manole, Executive Director, Promo-LEX Association***



The Executive Director of the Promo-LEX Association, very active in the promotion of human rights, declared that the subject of the reintegration of the Republic of Moldova is a vital issue for Chisinau, and it is important that after this forum we move on to facts, not just discussions.

“Democracy in the Republic of Moldova saved Ukraine, and today Ukraine shelters Moldova. Imagine what it would have been like in 2022 if Moldova represented a second Belarus, something possible if there was a non-democratic regime in Chisinau. Such a scenario would have greatly complicated Ukraine’s situation”, declared Ion Manole.

Ion Manole also said that today, in the context of reintegration, there is a lot of discussion about economic, political and social security, but very little about the involvement and information of citizens on the left bank of the Dniester. He added that there is a need for greater interaction and media presence on the left bank of the Dniester in order to explain the situation to the residents there.

“We also need to know what we want. During the last 30 years we have always had an inconsistent policy. Every four years, regimes changed, whose positions were unclear, and this inconsistency took root in our society. If we look at the polls, solving the Transnistrian problem is positioned very low among the priorities. The interest is quite low and that is worrying, and the people there are isolated or hostages of the Tiraspol regime that does not allow them to inform themselves”, said Ion Manole.

### ***The lack of diversity of opinion on the left of the Dniester***

He also said that in the last 32 years, there was no social-political movement on the left of the Dniester, no party, which would try to discuss in the public space the reintegration with the Republic of Moldova. Manole explained that the 5+2 negotiation format never questioned these realities.

“We have to take a step forward, change the optics. I have been waiting for years for solutions from the partners, but at the state and society level I have not seen very clear solutions. Without the involvement of citizens from both



banks of the Dniester in this process, we will only depend on the decisions of politicians". Given that citizens are not informed and involved, do we have the right to speak on their behalf? I think not. Therefore, there is a need for openness and engagement. Afterwards, we can consult them and ask them to participate in this process," he concluded.

**Vladimir Socor, Senior Research Fellow, Jamestown Foundation**



Vladimir Socor, a researcher at the Jamestown Foundation, said at the Reintegration Forum of Moldova that a first change in the Transnistrian problem, starting from February 2022, is the change in Russia's objectives towards the Republic of Moldova.

"Russia no longer pursues the goal of being an important shareholder in the political system of the Republic of Moldova with a blocking package until 2022. This goal has changed and radicalized. Russia seeks to gain control over the Republic of Moldova through proxy parties on the right bank of the Dniester. Russia hopes, through these parties, to create portions of the territory of the Republic of Moldova on the right bank of the Dniester under the control of proxy parties - Gagauzia, Orhei, potentially Taraclia, potentially Balti. Russia wants their radicalization. Russia wants to prevent

the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the EU. More precisely, to block the candidacy of the Republic of Moldova for the status of a member of the EU", stated the expert.

He also said that Russia will consider the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU incompatible with its status of neutrality on which Russia insists.

"From Russia's point of view, according to Kremlin-connected analysts writing in the *Valdai Club journal* or in *Russia and Global Affairs*, they see the EU as becoming a security bloc and that non-member countries following the EU policy, for example in terms of sanctions, violate their own neutrality status if they adhere to the European Union's foreign policy. This also directly affects the Republic of Moldova.

### **Why the 5+2 negotiation format should be buried**

Socor also stated that the next change in the security environment refers to the fact that Russia, with its own hands, liquidated the tool of blackmail and pressure called the 5+2 format. He stated that the minimum objective of this format was to permanently block the settlement of the Transnistrian issue, while the maximum objective was a settlement in Russia's interests, not Moldova's.

### **Now this format has disappeared, but it can be revived and here is a great danger for the Republic of Moldova**

"The revival of the 5+2 format is a great danger for Moldova. We must take advantage of the fact that the 5+2 format does not meet to bury it for good. What should be done to avoid the reconstitution of this format? I do not recommend that Moldova declare that it denounces this format and that it will never accept it. I do not propose such a thing, it is too risky and unnecessary. This format must and can

be buried by eternal non-summoning and by silence. The Republic of Moldova must no longer rely on the idea that the format could be resumed, after the normalization of relations between Russia and Ukraine. Or to say that the format is suspended, but not abolished", said Vladimir Socor.

The analyst also said that the 5+2 format is not legitimate, it was created and supported by Russia and left a toxic legacy: the equality between Tiraspol and Chisinau, the special status for Transnistria, favourable for Tiraspol, the neutrality of the Republic of Moldova and a firm system of guarantees with the participation of Russia.

"It is a recipe for Russia's permanent interference in the internal affairs of the Republic of Moldova, as a guarantor. In Moldova, the project of a special status on paper persists. No one has abolished it and sometimes the possibility of granting it is indirectly discussed, including by international diplomats and some party leaders from the Republic of Moldova", Socor also said.

**Stefan Wolff, Profesor, International Security, Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham**



Professor Stefan Wolff from the University of Birmingham stated that a solution to the conflict would be through demilitarization, but specified that this would not be easy at all, on the contrary.

“From the perspective of the existing legal framework, we need demilitarization, and from this perspective we have to negotiate this aspect. The withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria is directly related to the possibility of reaching a negotiated settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, said Stefan Wolff.

The professor also said that the demilitarization of the region also means that the peacekeeping forces are an element that must be seen through the prism of demilitarization.

“We are not discussing the size of the contingent, mostly made up of local residents who also have Russian or other countries’ passports, but above all, how these forces are perceived in the Transnistrian region. These forces must be replaced, a transitional mechanism must be devised. Only under these conditions will we have guarantees that the conflict will be resolved. Demilitarization will also have to target the Transnistrian security forces – several thousand people who must also see some prospects of integration into civilian life. How do we do this?”, he asked rhetorically.

The British professor also said that demilitarization does not only mean the withdrawal of Russian officers from the Transnistrian region, “but we also need the involvement of the society in the Transnistrian region, the civil society, but also the security forces there.”

“We have to see what future we propose to these people, predictable and in the long term, which will ensure the future of the European processes in the Republic of Moldova”, he concluded.

## Editorial

# The Transnistrian dilemma: how Chisinau will play the reintegration card of its eastern region

Editorial by Mihai Isac

***The holding in Chisinau of the first Reintegration Forum of the Republic of Moldova was an absolutely necessary exercise for political developments in the region, to provide a format for clear discussions, without the passion characteristic of the political class in Chisinau. Through such manifestations, the discussions about the future of a reunified Republic of Moldova enter a path of European-type normality. The last three decades following the 1992 Dniester War have been extremely turbulent geopolitically, and diverging interests have strengthened the open fracture between the two banks of the Dniester.***



Liquidating the consequences of this war of aggression by the Kremlin cannot be done in a few years, and the experiences in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Cyprus, or Ukraine, along with the one on the Dniester, show what happens when, for decades, steps are not taken to identify and implement solid negotiation mechanisms for the reunification of the affected states.

The large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 has faced the Tiraspol regime with serious military, economic and political problems that have demonstrated its structural fragility.

Only the lack of a coherent vision regarding the reintegration by the political class in Chisinau and other segments of society in the Republic of Moldova allowed the Tiraspol regime to continue “playing the country”.

Chisinau has a historic chance to put the issue of the state reintegration on the agenda, with the support of its external partners, especially Ukraine and Romania. The conclusion of a long-term ceasefire or peace in Ukraine will allow Moscow to direct new financial, political and military means to try to return the Republic of Moldova to its neo-colonial system.

## Support from Brussels

During the forum in Chisinau, the deputy prime minister responsible for reintegration, Oleg Serebrian, said that the reintegration of the Transnistrian region depends on the European integration process. It is one of the first acknowledgements by a high-ranking official from Chisinau that the hopes of reintegration into the constitutional space of the Republic of Moldova of the region in the east of the country are closely linked to the support of the European Union. EU integration and the country’s reintegration are two essential components of any future vision for the Republic of Moldova.

Residents of the eastern region took full advantage of the proximity to the European Union, with more than 350,000 of them having passports issued by the authorities in Chisinau, a larger number than those who applied for an internal identity document. Thus, most of them travelled to the European Union states, seeing with their own eyes the transformations brought about by the EU integration. The trade relations between the EU and the eastern region must be better explained to the local population, which remains a prisoner in the closed media landscape controlled by the separatist regime in Tiraspol.

### **Need for consensus in Chisinau**

The fact that on the right bank there is no strategy for starting the reintegration processes in the constitutional, economic, social and political space of the region under Russian military occupation leads to the lack of a solid basis for launching consistent steps regarding reintegration.

The identification of common denominators and the development of acceptable mechanisms and strategies for Chisinau, through free discussions and without too many short-term political calculations, must be the first step. The obligation to invite the representatives of the regime from the east of the country to all the meetings on this topic, which take place in the area controlled by the constitutional authorities, is a false topic, being even harmful for the development of an effective strategy.

Moscow and Tiraspol have so far successfully used tactics to block discussions on reintegration among right-bank politicians and civil society. The secret services in Moscow and their branches in the region under Russian military occupation have virtually sabotaged any attempt at apolitical talks on reintegration, ridiculing and sabotaging any possible consensus among the political class and civil society in Chisinau.

Civil society circles and decision-makers in Chisinau must calculate the costs of this reintegration process as accurately as possible, in order to be able to request the financial and institutional support of partners from the European Union and beyond. States such as Japan, South Korea, the USA, or Canada will contribute, along with the EU states, to supporting this significant financial effort.

The presence of elements that seek to sabotage reintegration in such incipient formats of discussions would only further delay the preparation of an effective strategy, but also give the Russian side the opportunity to prepare effective tactics against the efforts of the constitutional authorities.

Only after the establishment of a clear basis for negotiations, accepted by the majority of important factors on the right side of the Dniester, measures can be initiated for the next step in the reintegration process, which would also involve the co-opting of some representatives of the population on the left side of the Dniester.

### **Reintegration, not federalization**

Bringing the eastern region back into the constitutional space of the Republic of Moldova should not be transformed into a process of federalization of the state, an objective promoted by the Kremlin. The concessions offered to the eastern region must not become an obstacle in the European integration path of the Republic of Moldova.

The population should not be put in a position to choose between EU integration and the reintegration of the eastern region. Such an outcome would only benefit the Russian side, which is highlighted by the obstinate use of the term federalization by Ilan Shor, the fugitive oligarch, who has become the new champion of Russian interests in the Republic of Moldova.

In this context, it should be mentioned that the representatives of UTA Gagauza should not be allowed to use this type of platform to sabotage the reintegration process by launching federalist claims, as shown by some signals from the region dominated by forces hostile to the European path of the Republic Moldova. These forces are supported by criminal elements, instrumentalized by the Russian Federation against the population of the Republic of Moldova, against the background of the delay in reforms in the field of justice, which make it practically impossible to punish them.

### **Customs code test**

The entry into force at the beginning of the year of the new Customs Code of the Republic of Moldova on the entire territory of the country, including the region in the east of the country, represented a test of political will for Chisinau.

The organization of facade protests in localities in the region and the media campaign launched against the Republic of Moldova are elements that previously forced Chisinau to make important economic and political concessions to the separatist regime.

According to what was declared by the Chisinau authorities, the change in the regulatory framework for companies from the Transnistrian region aims to gradually include these companies in the single economic and commercial space of the Republic of Moldova and to ensure fair competition for all economic agents in the country. Of course, the elite from Tiraspol, which has been parasitizing the fragile economy of the Republic of Moldova for decades, is dissatisfied with the decrease in income, but also with the fact that those from Chisinau seem to no longer accept this type of negotiations.

The partial resignation of those from Tiraspol towards the application of the provisions of the new Customs Code is also proven by the fact that the companies in the region that export to the EU states and beyond, have prepared the necessary documents, and the idea of a blockage due to this code is only one of the many fake news launched by the Russian-inspired propaganda machine on the left of the Dniester. In conclusion, starting the reintegration process can only be based on political will and maintaining the pro-European course of the Republic of Moldova.

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