

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

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Știri pe scurt:



The members of the Supreme Security Council (SSC) made a series of recommendations on March 30 regarding the effective fight against big corruption. Its members stressed the need for a speedy finalization of respective cases of corruption and the recovery of financial means and assets stolen from the citizens of the Republic of Moldova. In this context, the Supreme Security Council has made several recommendations to the institutions responsible for combating corruption. More specifically, the Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with the Prosecutor General's Office, needs to make the necessary legislative changes to reduce opportunities for abuse in the investigation and examination proceedings in the court. These institutions must also develop legislative instruments to increase the efficiency of the recovery of fraudulently obtained assets



The Republic of Moldova will send a batch of humanitarian aid to the Ukrainian authorities amid the Russian military invasion. Part of the humanitarian aid stocks provided to the Republic of Moldova for the management of the refugee crisis will be redirected to the Ukrainian authorities as international assistance. The aid package will also include tangible assets to be released from state reserves, central government reserves and donations from economic operators. The decision was taken on March 31st, during the meeting of the Commission for Emergency Situations (CES), chaired by Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilița. The CES members ordered the release by the Material Reserves Agency of the state reserves of goods worth about MDL 7.5 million to the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, the institution responsible for the formation and transportation of the humanitarian aid batch to the neighbouring country. Subsequently, the Ministry of Finance will allocate the necessary financial means to replenish the state reserves.



Moldova's Ambassador to the EU, Daniela Morari, is encouraged by the first political steps of the European Union regarding the applications for accession submitted in early March by the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, but says in an interview with Radio Free Europe that the bureaucratic process cannot be expedited. "If we compare it with any country that has gone through this process, it takes months, if not years, from the application for membership to the submission of this application to the Council and then to the decision of the Council. In the case of the Republic of Moldova (Ukraine and Georgia) it lasted a week (...), it is an unprecedented speed", says Morari. Moldova signs the EU membership application on March 3rd, following the example of Ukraine, which took the decision a few days after being invaded by Russian troops on February 24th.

The war near Moldova: between uncertainty and insecurity



Ukrainian soldier in Kyiv

Russia is far from satisfied with the military results achieved in Ukraine more than a month after the beginning of its invasion of Ukraine. The "blitzkrieg" hoped for by Moscow in the early days of the attack is the result of extremely wrong calculations that Moscow has made about Ukraine.

It has already entered a war of attrition and we could even say a change of the zero-sum game, because the Russian military is slowly but surely being pushed from the positions conquered in Ukraine.

Visibly limited in the ground invasion of

Ukraine, Russia is in a period of regrouping and rethinking its tactical plans for the February 24 invasion of Ukraine under the pretext of 'denazification'.

More recently, this discourse has been changed as Russia has failed in its initial

► military objectives of 'blitzkrieg' and the conquest of major Ukrainian cities. What Russia is doing now on the ground is destroying civilian infrastructure by remotely bombarding with missiles and holding the civilian population captive so that it cannot be evacuated. The city of Mariupol is an example of this, where Russia is bombing furiously. The number of civilian casualties has already reached several thousand, which is in fact a premeditated genocide, already being investigated by the relevant international forums.

According to military analysts, Russia is trying to gain time to regroup and reorganize its military objectives. Moscow must come with a palpable success following this military adventure in Ukraine to justify itself internally, where the invasion is

presented as a 'special denazification operation.'

While at the last meeting in Istanbul Russia mimicked an offer of peace and gave hope that a compromise could be reached, the next day, things on the ground were exactly the opposite. Instead of the announced drastic reduction of military manoeuvres in the direction of Kyiv and Chernigov by Minister Sergei Shoigu, who said that Russia will focus on the Donetsk region, Russian forces have been ordered to attack Chernigov vigorously.

We are still a long way from the parties sitting down at the negotiating table precisely because of the almost zero-sum game. Neither side clearly dominates the war, and Moscow only wants to negotiate with Kiev from positions of power. However, the

military results do not help it in this regard. And over time, Ukrainian forces will become more and more equipped with sophisticated weapons from the West, while the morale of Russian troops will decline even more, as will Moscow's power to sustain the war. Time does not favour Moscow, and the quick results that Vladimir Putin dreams of are far from a tangible and realistic goal.

For the Republic of Moldova, from an economic and humanitarian point of view, this war is far from auspicious. However, politically, it has accelerated Moldova's steps towards the EU and better economic integration into the European economic space. Russia's chances of attacking Moldova are getting lower, but Putin's unpredictability can change everything.

Madalin Necshutu

There is currently no reason to believe that the Republic of Moldova could be targeted by this war



Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration, Oleg Serebrian, has talked at length for an interview for the FES/APE Foreign Policy Newsletter about the negotiations with the separatist regime in Tiraspol on the Transnistrian issue during these times of war in Ukraine. We have discussed about how the architecture of the '5 + 2' format can change the conflict, how the Transnistrian separatist region relates to the EU and the recent application for EU membership by Chisinau, but also about the security challenges coming from the Transnistrian region during this period of time. We are inviting you to read the interview below:

■ **You have recently visited Cosnita, Dorotcaia and Pirita villages in the Dubasari district. You have also talked with the local authorities. What is the current situation regarding the arable land located along the Ribnița – Tiraspol road and the Latin-script schools in Dubasari?**

■ I have also visited the high school in Grigoriopol, which is currently operating in Dorotcaia, and have spoken with the head master Cercavschi. This is an issue that has preoccupied us for years, because it remains unsolved. The issue of the school premises is the most pressing. Then we have talked about the problem of the high school in Rabnita, which operates in inappropriate conditions, as well as the high school in Grigoriopol. This is an urgent issue at the moment that we are trying to find a solution to in the '1 + 1' talks.

I must be honest that this format is not advancing easily and there is no solution to our expectations for the time being, although the OSCE and us are working to help these schools. Another trouble of ours is the situation of the agricultural land which is getting back to our attention. This request of Tiraspol to review the situation of agricultural land after June 30 is provocative. In fact, the question of the access of the legitimate land owners to the agricultural area they own is now being questioned. We are talking about 9,000 hectares. We are sensing it is about something else here, namely about issues that the people from Tiraspol are interested in resolving. In this case, it makes it problematic for us to find solutions to their problems later.

I had a meeting with the farmers. It wasn't easy at all. I understand their fears and dissatisfaction.

People need to cultivate their land this spring, make investments and therefore want to be sure that after June 30 they will have access to this land and can harvest the crops. I have assured them that we will do our utmost to make this happen, and I am convinced that they will have access to their land after June 30th. I am not that confident though in the case of the Latin-script schools in Transnistria that a solution can be found.

■ **Speaking of schools, how do you explain the recent bomb threats of several schools in the Transnistrian region? Was this meant to bring about destabilization? We've seen that the Russian embassy also urges the Russian citizens who feel discriminated against in the Republic of Moldova to file complaints. Is there a correlation between the two?**

■ I don't know if the two events are somehow interconnected. We now have so many overlapping statements and events that don't necessarily have the same genesis, the same starting point. There is a lot of fake news in the public space which is unverified and circulating intensely. I've noticed that even well-informed people with good analytical skills fall prey to such information. The mayor of Varnița has informed me about the events that took place in Tighina and then in Ribnița, Tiraspol and other places.

This is regrettable and we hope that the person who was at the origin of these messages will be identified as soon as possible because this is a bad joke and it is done with bad will. In addition, it happens in a very sensitive period. And these fears and panic of the population on both banks of the Dniester is not a good thing. It is the children who were targeted in this case and this

is terrible. It is a common challenge and I don't think that states or official institutions have been involved here.

Low legal weight

■ **What are the implications of the recent PACE resolution recognizing that Transnistria is under Russian occupation? And what about Russia being excluded recently from the PACE?**

■ Russia has withdrawn. It would have been probably excluded. It is a singular case as far as I know. Belarus is somehow suspended, so it has a different status. As for Russia, it is a unique situation on the European political scene. I hope that this situation will not last too long, because it is important that the Council of Europe, which was conceived as an international organization that comes to build an enlarged Europe, a democratic space from the Atlantic to the Pacific, return to normality. I think all Europeans want this.

We hope that this nightmare of Europe, which began on February 24, will end as soon as possible and that we will all return to a normal life. Although we all realize that this new normalcy will be very difficult to build, especially against the background of the mistrust that has been generated by this war of fear, anxiety and especially the adversities between Ukraine and Russia. These wounds on the body of Europe will be very difficult to heal.

Regarding the resolution, it was also commented by President Sandu, together with the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, immediately after its adoption. I know that

in Chisinau, and not only, this resolution was not highlighted as some political commentators or political factors would have liked. The problem is rather the circumstances in which this statement was adopted. If such a statement had been adopted in another context, it would surely have had a different reading. It's like in the case of applying for EU membership. If it were in a different context, this written application would also have a different visibility. It's like the problem of the pedestal and the statue. Every statue must have a suitable pedestal. If the pedestal is too large, the statue is lost. That's what's happened now. The events in Europe and in the world are so great that all the others, which are collateral, have somehow been shadowed.

This resolution referred to Ukraine primarily. And the resolution contained an amendment related to the Republic of Moldova which of course is very important from the political and moral points of view. So firstly, the resolution is on Ukraine and secondly, the current events give it a different reading - from a political and moral point of view, it is an important gesture, but from a legal point of view, it does not carry much weight.

EU and USA, possibly a more important role in the Transnistrian case

■ **Is the '5 + 2' format of negotiations still relevant as two of the actors involved in these negotiations are at war? Could there be a more appropriate one in your opinion?**

■ I've seen these discussions. There is criticism of the '5 + 2'

format, which in some people's opinion is too cumbersome, not very functional and has yielded no progress for 20 years that the public could notice. In reality, the small steps on the ground are visible. But progress may not be seen when it refers to the nomenclature of medical products, for instance. Such matters do not say much to the general public. Thus, some may wonder what those who negotiate in the '5 + 2' format do or what the purpose of the negotiations is.

There are 14 working groups, they are thematic and address very technical topics. It is true, that originally, the '5 + 2' format was about the status of the Transnistrian region. However, because of the opposition of both Moscow and Tiraspol, we have never been able to seriously discuss the status of the Transnistrian region in this format. These talks were collateral and most of the discussions focused on technical issues. Lately, the '5 + 2' meetings have not taken place due to the pandemic that has interrupted the activity. We were planning a meeting in this format under the auspices of the Polish Presidency for mid-May in Poland. That was before the war, which has changed everything. We have no reason to believe this will be possible in the first half of this year.

With regard to the '5 + 2' format itself – since that means a new break after the last round of negotiations in Bratislava - it is still premature to talk about changing the format because everything is changing around. We don't know anything about the finality of the war in Ukraine. We are all waiting for it to end, we are waiting for a ceasefire.

What will happen next, what can be the formula and how can a change in the '5 + 2' format occur, we have not discussed it yet with our partners, but from what we see there is not much room for maneuver. Who could be excluded from this format for it to work? Because there have to be those dialogue partners that matter in the process. I mean, removing someone who matters in this process is like talking to each other and indulging in a company, but not actually solving the problem. Who should we remove, the Europeans? Obviously not. Neither the Americans. Russia and Ukraine are very important, both for different reasons. They can't be removed too. The OSCE, yes, but it is an international organization that has been involved from the beginning and has the best institutional memory of this conflict.

There can be a change in the status of the actors involved. For example, an equal status of the EU, the USA, Russia and Ukraine so that they change from observers to mediators. Because, at the moment, the USA is an observer. We would have nothing against such a change.

■ **Ukraine is a state that has a direct border with the Republic of Moldova, but there is another state that has a border with the Republic of Moldova and that is not involved in this process. I am referring here to Romania. Could this be possible?**

■ Romania was part of an initial format, after the end of the Dniester War in 1992. We have not discussed with our partners in Bucharest now about the possibility of involving Romania as part of this format. However, there is a sensitivity that may arise in Brussels as the EU needs to speak in one

voice. This means Bucharest should not have a separate position. This is an issue that must be discussed with the partners in Brussels and Bucharest so there is no double representation.

It was a different Romania before joining the EU and then, of course, Romania really had its place in this format. It was unjustly excluded then and Chisinau played a role in removing Romania from that format. Such adjustments could be made. I am not saying we cannot find a place for Romania here, but we should also see what Brussels' sensitivities are in this regard. It is natural for Romania to appear in this format due to its geographical position, because there are so many Romanian citizens living in the Republic of Moldova. So, it is a different kind of connection with the Republic of Moldova. It is important that this format be functional, because if we continue to expand it, it may become even more unfunctional.

With its pocket in the EU and its eyes on Moscow

■ **How do you assess the fact that the Tiraspol regime opposes Moldova's application for EU membership, but at the same time most of the exports from the left bank go to European markets?**

■ The two ideas are contradictory, of course. I really didn't understand the tone of that message from Mr Ignatiev. And I didn't understand the phrase that "we are ending the negotiation process". Because of all that missive, that sentence has attracted our attention at that moment. What could it mean to cancel everything and take it from

scratch? Because I remember it from the 2000s, when they said there had to be a "zero variant."

It seems to have been a typical conjuncture statement. Indeed, if we look at the past, such messages came regularly from Tiraspol, whenever the Republic of Moldova took a step forward - accession to the Council of Europe, signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, the Association Agreement in 2014. There was a series of such statements, which were probably meant for domestic consumption.

I don't know, because they often don't connect. The Transnistrian area is one of the main beneficiaries of this direct aid through 'confidence-building measures' in various EU programmes. Various localities have benefited from these aids. There is a real European economic presence in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. I was mentioning recently in an interview that if we look at the geography of exports from the Transnistrian region we will see that the EU is the main partner and Romania is the first business partner of the region among the EU states. So, I don't think this should bother Transnistria. It was just a political statement of Tiraspol.

■ **In concrete terms, have the negotiations stalled since the March 4th statement or are you in dialogue?**

■ We don't keep the dialogue and on Thursday (March 24th) I will go to Tiraspol for a '1 + 1' talk.

■ **In terms of propaganda, Romania remains Tiraspol's biggest opponent, but as we were**

talking above, Romania is the first business partner. How do you explain this?

■ Well, the metallurgical plant in Rabnita is not a political institution. But you are right, it is the largest enterprise in the Transnistrian area. For the time being, it is in a technical break or is operating at very low levels.

This anti-Romanianism is part of a very irrational ideology in the Republic of Moldova, including in the Transnistrian region, that appeared in our country in 1989. It is a kind of necessary element or decoration of a supposedly left-wing thinking. If you hit Romania, it means you are on the left-wing and that you have a benevolent attitude towards the re-establishment of a Eurasian space from Koningsberg to Kurile.

Sometimes such manifestations are useless and illogical. So, we are not even looking for too much logic in kicking everything that is Romanian and Romania itself. Because we have the examples on the right side of the Dniester. We have political parties that during their governments have benefited from Romanian aid. They themselves have Romanian citizenship and have politically benefited from Romania's support. Yet, they believe that this anti-Romanian element must be speculated and cultivated somehow. I think the same is true for the Transnistrian region. That is, they do business and profit as much as possible, but this anti-Romanian sentiment is maintained at the level of ideology, which I don't know how to explain it exactly. Maybe this stems from the '40s, respectively the Second World War, from a false face of Romania that does not exist and has never existed - of an

aggressor or oppressive state. It's hard to say.

Possible taxation of Transnistrian goods

■ **Is it possible in the future to tax the imports and exports of the Tiraspol regime, which has benefited from many years of tax exemptions?**

■ Undoubtedly, especially now that the situation is changing. The Transnistrian segment of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border is closed. All trade relations of the region are transparent to us as they occur on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. So many things will change, regardless of whether the negotiation process will speed up or slow down.

It is very clear that this war in Ukraine has completely changed the situation and even at the level of trade and economic relations we and the Transnistrian region are put in a new situation.

You talked about a series of corruption schemes in the Transnistrian region. These are not a secret to anyone, but they are things that have been tolerated. I would not say encouraged by many governments, if not by all the governments from 1992 to 2019. They have had various business profits. It was for political, economic or personal reasons that this situation has perpetuated. Maybe even out of stupidity in some cases. However, an important factor was the lack of real leverage because this trade of the Transnistrian region with the outside world was done

on a border segment that we did not control. This has played a very negative role for a very long time. But the situation has changed a lot. We need to review things, and now we have that opportunity.

■ **This is the first time that the Republic of Moldova has a favourable background, taking into account that Ukraine has closed its border on the Transnistrian segment.**

■ Yes, it is. Because even after 2014-2016, our requests for mixed control of the Transnistrian segment of the border did not materialize. Of course, the EUBAM mission has made a great contribution and this border segment has become much better controlled. That was not the case in the wild years of the 1990s and 2000s.

Volatile security situation

■ **Should we worry at the moment about the Transnistrian separatist region, where there are about 1,500 Russian soldiers? Is it possible in theory that such troops could join forces with Russian troops to attack Odessa? How do you assess the situation?**

■ On several occasions, the President, the Prime Minister and my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicu Popescu, have also mentioned this, namely that there is currently no reason to believe that the Republic of Moldova can be involved in this war in Ukraine, including by destabilizing the Transnistrian region or involving it in the conflict.

The Russian troops stationed there do not have an impressive number compared to the troops deployed in the war in Ukraine. It is more or less the loss of a few days of the Russian Federation. I also don't know if it would add value.

The involvement of the Republic of Moldova would not be in anyone's interest either. We see no reason for that, and so do our external partners. Both NATO and the US ambassador, as well as those in Bucharest, said there is currently no reason for the Republic of Moldova to be targeted by this war.

We very much hope that the war will be localised and completed before it gets as close as possible to the borders of the Republic of Moldova.

We cannot say that we have no fears at all. The longer the war continues, the more economic problems we will have. Let's keep in mind that our economic ties with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus were very intense. Many food items came from these three countries. The disruption of imports and exports will immediately affect us.

The second fear is the number of refugees if the Russians carry out military missions targeting Odessa. Maybe with rocket attacks. Odessa is a very big city and the pressure will be primarily on the Republic of Moldova. From this perspective we cannot say that we do not worry at all, but these worries are not of a security nature in military terms.

■ **Thank you!**

Moldovan government should make a political statement that any involvement of Transnistrian forces in Ukraine is an attack on Moldova's security

The Romanian military analyst, Claudiu Degeratu, has talked about the complex security equation caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, starting with February 24th. Regarding the danger coming from the Transnistrian separatist region, the expert is of the opinion that the Moldovan authorities must verbalize the messages to Tiraspol so that the Transnistrian separatist regime does not get involved in this conflict. We have also discussed about how the situation on the ground is seen from a military point of view, but also about the progress of negotiations between the warring parties and their interests. Read the full interview in the following lines:

■ Given the situation on the field, how does the Russian army cope with the invasion of Ukraine? Has it attained its objectives or rather not?

■ I would rather say no. Russia is having a hard time. At least the main goal, which was to bring down the Zelensky regime or the capitulation of Kiev, did not materialize.

That was the main goal and it failed. Russia has tried and partially succeeded in achieving some military objectives, we are referring here to the Sea of Azov shores and the conquest of Kherson, which is important from a military point of view. However, they are not that important politically.



■ From that blitzkrieg that Russia hoped for at the beginning of the invasion, can we say that we are now entering perhaps a phase of war of attrition?

We are, in fact, in a transition from the stage where the blitzkrieg failed and we are entering a war of attrition. I don't think the Kremlin leader, Vladimir Putin, would like to have such a war of attrition, therefore he is prolonging this transition, which means a different kind of preparation and mobilization, as well as enormous costs, waiting for more results from the negotiations.

He is somehow threatening with the war of attrition, but in fact, he expects progress in the diplomatic area of the negotiations.

War tactics

■ They are talking about a waiting game for a regrouping of the Russian troops, which could intensify Russia's attacks on the major cities in Ukraine...

■ Yes, or at least they are trying to signal to the Ukrainians and the international community that they would like to regroup and relaunch the offensive. But there may be another explanation, namely that they are, in

fact, expecting more progress from the negotiations. There are also those who say “you don’t trust Russia” when it comes to negotiations, because in fact it’s just a waste of time.

■ **There are already many civilian casualties, and the Russian military is also heavily bombing residential areas. What is Russia’s purpose in causing so many human casualties and material damage to Ukraine?**

■ I believe Russia wants to expand the humanitarian crisis because that means putting pressure on the Zelensky regime and, in extenso, on the Ukrainian authorities, who in parallel must manage the problem of the affected civilian population, and at the same time, fight the Russians. That would be a hypothesis.

And secondly, this is a good bargaining chip. They may say, “You have a lot of refugees and a lot of problems. Let’s talk about humanitarian corridors and international assistance, but only if I want to let you there with the Red Cross.” Hence the use without any embarrassment or scruples of societal effects.

Odessa Fortress

■ **What is happening with Odessa, where the Russian troops have not been able to act too intensely? Will it be difficult for the Russians to land in Odessa now?**

■ Yes, that is going to be a very difficult mission for the Russians. Odessa had time to prepare defensively. Russian troops have also used the last resources to expand control in the Kherson region and now need another type of operation and another offensive towards Odessa, but which requires much more force and concentration of resources.

It is very unlikely that an operation against Odessa will be successful overnight, not even in the coming weeks. I think we’ll soon see an attempted encirclement approaching. One from the north that could make the junction with this corridor to Transnistria.

Russia has navally blocked Odessa, so it is no longer receiving any resources, but Russia wants to isolate it further north. And possibly not to enter into a battle of attrition with heavy losses on the Russian side in an attempt to enter Odessa.

■ **How do you see Russia being excluded from the Council of Europe and the fact that PACE voted a resolution declaring Transnistria a Russian-occupied territory? How could the Republic of Moldova benefit from this?**

■ From a political point of view, the Republic of Moldova is not ready to take advantage of this decision because it means to declare constitutional the entire organization of separatists there. There should be an internal political consensus in the Republic of Moldova on this issue, but it doesn’t exist. Moldova should withdraw from the formal process.

In addition to these decisions at the national level, the Republic of Moldova must have an alternative to the ‘5 + 2’ negotiation format. That is, to somehow maintain the idea that this separatist zone should be resolved peacefully, not by force. But I don’t see any relevant political reactions in the political sphere or support for something new in this matter.

■ **Could Romania possibly enter into a future format of negotiations, if we admit that it could change in the future?**

■ The ‘5 + 2’ format could disappear anyway, as the Russian Federation is now defined as a military occupier. If so, it can’t be a mediator anymore. On top of that, there is the issues related to the isolated status of the Russian Federation.

And then I don’t see other countries accepting this idea. I think Romania will avoid getting involved in a mediation format because it is very clear that this would mean political instability in Moldova and thus there isn’t much chance for Romania to get involved.

The need to change the format of negotiations with Transnistria

■ **How big is the danger for the Republic of Moldova coming from Transnistria at the moment? There are talks about a possible junction of the Russian troops in Transnistria with those in Odessa in case of launch of military operations against the city...**

■ Any movement that would coordinate the activity of troops from the former 14th Army with the military actions against Odessa should be condemned by Chisinau. The Moldovan government should verbally state, as a political statement, that any involvement of Transnistrian forces in the military actions in Ukraine is in fact an attack on the security of the Republic of Moldova.

Because the Ukrainians will demand that Chisinau take action, and if they do not, the Ukrainians will start their own initiative and have an offensive against Transnistria, which will involve Moldova almost directly in this dispute.

It is a complicated three-way equation in which Moldova has the possibility to warn its subjects not to engage politically or militarily in what may happen in the Odessa region. And this would be better done sooner rather than later.

Keeping an eye on the negotiations

■ **How do you see the first signs that the two sides are negotiating and could reach an agreement and what could be Turkey's role in this process? Does Turkey have the necessary weight to be the mediator in this war?**

■ What we are seeing on the ground is that Turkey and Israel have managed to initiate these negotiations. These countries are very close to both sides and are guiding this process. With regard to the first step of the negotiations, the one related to the humanitarian corridors, there is clearly a progress there. They are talking about several corridors.

The second important step on which Turkey is likely to work hard with both sides is the ceasefire agreement. And at this stage, we have seen Zelenski saying very clearly that he would like Turkey to be one of the guarantors of

the ceasefire. A ceasefire agreement, even if it does not resolve the peace process, it can at least stop the gunfire. But there is also the other side to the second part of the question, namely whether Turkey has the necessary weight. Here I would say that if it is recognized by both parties, it can act as a mediator.

However, if Turkey succeeds in receiving not only the status of mediator, but also of it being included in the text of the peace agreement or process, it would have the status that France and Germany had in the Minsk Agreements. It is based on this that we can discuss about Turkey having the necessary weight. I think there is a chance that Turkey will be one of the guarantors because it participated in the other two stages that we have talked about, namely the humanitarian and the ceasefire.

If it succeeds in convincing the two sides, Turkey's chances of becoming a guarantor of a security guarantee mechanism for Ukraine will increase. But that's just one part of the problem. The second part is about the role of the security guarantor in a guarantee mechanism for Ukraine, and there is a very broad discussion around Russia, because this will not look like anything that has existed so far as precedent.

■ **Should we perhaps be following what is happening at higher levels when it comes to these negotiations, what the USA and China are discussing these days?**

■ Yes, because this is the immediate goal of the United States, which means the international isolation of the Russian Federation. It is clear that the USA will try to reach a compromise with China in various other areas so that China no longer offers direct aid to Russia and gradually isolate Russia. This is difficult for China to achieve, because China, on the other hand, wants to promote Russia as an actor that everyone should take into account and that is difficult to isolate. Especially since Beijing is forced to do so through its strategic partnership with Russia.

Secondly, it is about the future of Ukraine. If we talk about a peace process, when approved, this will also be evaluated at the UN level. And China has an important role to play there. So, the Americans are somehow expecting China to be balanced in the progress of a peace agreement in the future.

■ **Thank you!**

Expert Opinion

Transnistrian threat – implications for the Republic of Moldova

Ludmila Nofit, director of the Foreign Policy Association of Moldova (APE)

Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine, launched on 24 February 2022, marks the beginning of a new chapter in the international relations system, but also "a moment of great gravity in the history of post-Cold War Europe" as former German Chancellor Angela Merkel put it.

Russian military aggression against Ukraine is a serious violation of international law and has no justification, being dictated by the "imperialist desires" of the Russian President Vladimir Putin towards the region of Eastern Europe and beyond. The immediate consequences of this devastating war are also felt by the Republic of Moldova, which is on the front line between Ukraine and Russia. Since the beginning of the war, more than 3.6 million people have left Ukraine, according to the latest UNHCR data, with the vast majority heading to Western European countries such as Poland, Romania, Hungary or Slovakia in search of a safe place away from military clashes. Regarding the Republic of Moldova, a total of over 375,000 Ukrainian citizens have crossed the Moldovan-Ukrainian border, and over 100,000 are on the territory of the country, mostly women and children.

It is a unique situation for the Republic of Moldova, whose society being always artificially divided by the political factor, for the first time has united around the idea of solidarity with the Ukrainian people. An element full of symbolism, but so imperative for strengthening resilience and social cohesion in the context in which we are witnessing

a grave violation of the UN Charter principles and an undermining of human rights and freedoms.

Transnistria, a continuous source of instability

A particular topic that appears more and more often in the local and international public space, but also in the discussions of officials and expert community in the field, is that of the Transnistrian issue. The reason is clear given the geographical proximity of the Transnistrian region and the presence of Russian troops. Since the beginning of the military invasion, there has been a predominant tension and anxiety among Moldovan citizens fuelled by false news widely distributed through the communication channels. Some reports referred to alleged attacks on Ukraine or the Republic of Moldova by the Transnistrian region. The immediate reaction of the national authorities was to combat any false information, claiming that "the situation in the Transnistrian region is calm and there are no signs of escalation, the whole spectrum of scenarios being analysed".

Recently, information has appeared in the public space that the USA intends to set up a special team at the White



House, whose missions will include monitoring and analyzing data on Russia's possible intentions to attack Moldova and Georgia. However, the Transnistrian issue remains a threat to the national security, leaving much uncertainty and concern given the insecurity in the region.

This cautious attitude of the authorities is aimed at avoiding a distortion of the security situation on the territory of the country, that Moldova would not be able to cope with, and would not benefit Ukraine in the context of Russian military attacks. However, all the efforts of the Moldovan leadership are directed towards managing the immediate consequences generated by this war, which put a lot of pressure on the entire state system of the Republic of Moldova.

Energy security and dependence on Russia

The energy and economic security are one of the topics addressed in the political dialogue with strategic partners. Thus, the recent decision of

the European Council at the Brussels Summit on the creation of a common platform for procurement of energy resources for Member States, including the Eastern Partnership states, will allow the Republic of Moldova to partially abandon Russia's natural gas supplies by the end of this year.

At the same time, Romania, offered again to help the Republic of Moldova unconditionally, declaring the availability of storage in the country's gas reserves for the needs of Moldovan citizens.

On the other hand, Tiraspol, surprisingly or not, has taken a rather cautious stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The separatist authorities appealed for calm and avoided objectively reflecting information about the ongoing war in its geographical proximity. However, this indicates a logical reaction based on the circumstances created: the resistance of the Ukrainian army to respond to the Russian military aggression has somewhat discouraged Tiraspol from initiating certain actions in this regard; special economic interests with Ukraine, especially in the line of the Sheriff concern, whose leader also holds Ukrainian citizenship. At the same time, ethnic Ukrainians live on Transnistrian territory, along with Moldovans and Russians, and some of them are citizens of the neighbouring state.

Despite the lack of a formal response to either supporting or condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Tiraspol has instead decided to provide the necessary

support to Ukrainian refugees. As a result, more than 14,000 people crossed the Transnistrian region, of whom 476 are in temporary centers, according to the data released by Transnistrian authorities.

On the other hand, the Tiraspol administration returned to the usual rhetoric of agitation statements, demanding recognition of its independence after Republic of Moldova applied for EU membership. However, the war in Ukraine began shortly after the Russian Federation recognized the independence of the so-called Lugansk and Donetsk republics, alluding to how things might evolve for the separatist region in the current security context.

It should also be noted that despite sometimes cynical statements about the European course of the Republic of Moldova, the Transnistrian region continues to benefit from the EU-Moldova Association Agreement.

With the goods in the EU and thoughts about Russia

According to information provided by the Office for Reintegration Policy, in 2021 Tiraspol reached an export share of the European market of 57%, while 42% of the goods imported into the Transnistrian region come from the EU member states. Although the separatist authorities claim the opposite in public narratives, still less than 10% of the region's exports reach the Russian market.

There have been outrageous reactions in both Tiraspol and Moscow as a response to the Declaration of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the recognition of the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova as a Russian occupation zone, which apparently surprised some officials in Chisinau. In fact, this statement somehow calls for the withdrawal of Russian troops and the destruction of ammunition from the military depot on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, which coincides with the official position of the national authorities insisting on a peaceful settlement of the conflict. At the same time, this statement, in fact, reiterates the decisions taken at the 1991 OSCE Summit in Istanbul, endorsed by the Russian Federation.

The understanding of the imminent threat posed by the separatist region made Ukraine take appropriate measures in war conditions, namely to completely close the traffic on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border on the entire Transnistrian segment, later blowing up the Cuchiurgan railway bridge. A military tactic needed to block or prevent the rapid deployment of Russian troops in the Transnistrian region to Odessa, which would otherwise be unlikely to cope in a possible military confrontation with the Ukrainian army that has proven to be well prepared and equipped, according to officials in the office of the President of Ukraine. At the same time, it is imperative to maintain a constant dialogue at all levels in order to prevent an escalation of the security situation on the territory of the Republic of Moldova.

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Foreign Policy Association (APE) is a non-governmental organization committed to supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and facilitating the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the context of the country Europeanization. APE was established in fall 2003 by a group of well-known experts, public personalities and former senior officials and diplomats, all of them reunited by their commitment to contribute with their expertise and experience to formulating and promoting by the Republic of Moldova of a coherent, credible and efficient foreign policy.



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