

9.c. Post Conflict Rehabilitation in Moldova

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Introduction

Since declaring independence in 1991 Moldova has had to face four major interdependent tasks: building a state, without any tradition of it; managing political transition; restructuring the economy and dealing with the secessionist conflict with its eastern region Transnistria. There has been some progress on the first two dimensions. Moldova has managed to assert itself as a state, despite many problems, and democracy has achieved a level, however unstable and modest that is not very often seen in the post-Soviet space. However, the slow pace of economic reform, the difficult economic situation, and the still unsolved conflict in Transnistria have a tendency to influence negatively some of the positive achievements in the political realm. As noted in the EU's Country Strategy Paper on Moldova: 'The Transnistrian dispute heavily affects Moldova's foreign relations and economic development. Moldova can only make limited progress towards democratic consolidation and economic improvements as long as the Transnistrian issue continues'²²². Thus, overcoming the Transnistria conflict remains one of the keys to Moldova's successful transition and the stabilization of the immediate neighborhood of the enlarged NATO and EU.

The Transnistrian conflict in Moldova presents a case where post-conflict rehabilitation takes place after a war, but before the terms of a mutually satisfactory peace are agreed. Post-conflict rehabilitation efforts in Transnistria have to take into account two key features that characterize the situation in Moldova. Firstly, while the active phase of the conflict has ended, there is no agreement between the conflicting parties on the resolution of the conflict and the status of Transnistria. This poses considerable difficulties for the post-conflict rehabilitation efforts in Transnistria for all parties involved – the government of Moldova, the

²²² European Commission, Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006, National Indicative Programme 2002-2003, Moldova; (Brussels 27 December 2001), p. 8.

secessionist authorities that control Transnistria, and the international actors involved. Since there is no sense of *finalité* of the efforts to solve the conflict, any post-conflict rehabilitation efforts cannot be but minimal, as they do not aim at the definitive overcoming of the conflict. In addition there is no sense of direction where conflict resolution efforts are heading. Thus post-conflict rehabilitation in Moldova is more about overcoming some of the negative consequences of the war in 1992 on an *ad hoc* basis, rather than a coherent effort to build sustainable peace based on the resolution of the conflict. In this sense Transnistria is different from Bosnia or Macedonia, where post-conflict rehabilitation is part of an overall process of settlement of the conflict, where the former adversaries subscribed to an overall political, economic and security framework within which the conflict resolution is to be pursued.

Secondly, in Moldova any efforts on post-conflict rehabilitation have to take into account that Transnistria has an administration that *de facto* controls the territory of the secessionist region through coercion, is not internationally recognized and derives a great part of its claims to legitimacy from the existence of the conflict. Thus significant parts of the Transnistrian political and security elite are structurally interested in maintaining the 'no war, no peace' situation, and limit post-conflict rehabilitation efforts. Another implication of the existence of a *de facto* government in Transnistria is that no significant post-conflict rehabilitation efforts in Transnistria can take place without the cooperation of the secessionist authorities. However, the non-recognition of these authorities by the international community limits considerably post-conflict rehabilitation efforts.

The State of Transnistria

Transnistria is a narrow strip of land separated from the main part of Moldova by the river Nistru/Dniestr. Moldova's moves to independence in 1991 provoked serious tensions with its Eastern region of Transnistria, which preferred to remain part of the Soviet Union, declare independence or integrate with Russia, rather than be part of the Republic of Moldova. In 1992 the Moldovan government engaged in a short and relatively low-scale war with the authorities in Transnistria, as a result of

which approximately 1,500 peoples have lost their lives. The hostilities ended after a Russian military intervention that looked more like a support for the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic than a peace-enforcement operation by the then 14th Russian army, stationed in Transnistria.

The conflict in Transnistria is not a classical ethnic or religious conflict, as the main cleavages between the parties were not due to ethnic or religious divides. Of the approximate population of 600,000 in Transnistria, the Romanian-speaking Moldovans represent 40 per cent, while the Ukrainians and Russians represent 28 and 25 percent respectively. At the same time there are more Russians living in the capital of the Republic of Moldova Chisinau alone, than in the whole self-proclaimed Transnistrian Moldovan Republic, and this without any inter-ethnic animosity between Moldovans and Russians or Ukrainians.



Source: Documentaire, *Imagining the State Project*²²³

Since a cease-fire agreement was signed in July 1992, the situation has remained relatively stable in military terms, as clashes have never resumed. However, the perspectives for long-term regional stability are bleak, as Transnistria has become a touchstone for proliferation of soft

²²³ Documentaire, *Imagining the State Project*,
<http://www.documentaire.com/caucasus/Transdnistria.html>

security challenges, such as smuggling and trafficking of arms, persons and drugs. There are strong entrenched interest groups that benefit greatly from the continuation of the conflict. And these groups are not only in Transnistria, but also in Chisinau, Kiev and Moscow. Actually, Transnistria falls within the category of conflicts whose major aims are accumulating resources and suppressing political opposition, and keeping the conflict unsolved assists the achievement of these aims better than peace²²⁴, which means that prolonging the conflict for as long as possible may be a higher priority than winning it for significant groups inside Transnistria and not only. Being outside the international legal system brings benefits, because Transnistria's illegitimate status is conducive to illegal activities, which have flourished in the region, with spillover effects in Moldova, Ukraine and Russia. Territories affected by conflicts are often hubs for international criminal activities such as trafficking in arms, drugs, terrorism, money laundering etc. Transnistria is no exception. As Lynch noted in relation to Transnistria 'the authorities are content with the limbo status in which they exist, as long as the separatist state remains connected to the world market'²²⁵.

Democracy in Transnistria is in a state of dismay. The entity is dominated by an elite, that does not play according to the democratic rules of the game. Nor can it be judged as representative of the population of Transnistria, because neither of the elections that took place in Transnistria in the last decade had met minimal standards of fairness and freedom. Igor Smirnov, the president of Transnistria and a Russian citizen, is an authoritarian leader whose regime is based on suppression of any dissent on the territory controlled by the regime. Political parties that display a minimal degree of disloyalty are banned or harassed. For example, even the Communist Party and 'Edinstvo Pridnestrovyia' – a party created by economic interest groups inside Transnistria with political backing from Russia – were banned, as they were perceived a challenge to dominance of the current authorities in Transnistria. This is all the

²²⁴ D. Keen, 'War and Peace: What's the Difference', in A. Adebajo and C. Lekha Sriram (eds.), *Managing Armed Conflicts in the 21st Century*, (London: Frank Cass), p. 2.

²²⁵ D.Lynch, *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States*, (Washington: US Institute of Peace 2004).

more evident, as the two banned parties have not expressed political views radically different from those of the official propaganda in the entity. A particular justification of repression against the opposition in Transnistria is that potential dissenters are immediately termed as enemies of the Transnistrian 'state'. In the view of the authorities in Tiraspol, Transnistria is a state 'under siege' which justifies authoritarian repression of any dissenting views.

The current state of events around Transnistria has increasingly worried the international community. In the context of the EU and NATO enlargements the Transnistrian conflict acquired a new 'European dimension', which it lacked before, meaning that it will be too close to the EU and NATO's border to be ignored. The challenge of Transnistria is two-fold. Firstly, it is a threat on its own merits. Traffic of arms, humans and drugs, organized crime and smuggling have flourished in a region under the authoritarian rule of the Transnistrian leadership. Secondly, it poses a rather indirect, but no less important challenge to the EU. The European Union acknowledged the fact, that the failure to resolve the Transnistria issue was the 'single largest impediment to Moldova's political and economic development and one of the root causes of poverty'²²⁶. In the present conditions, with Transnistria a separate entity, Moldova cannot emerge as a viable state, since it cannot even control its eastern border and a considerable part of its economic infrastructure.

Russia's failure to withdraw its troops and armaments from Moldova in accordance with the obligations assumed at the OSCE summit in Istanbul in 1999 and the OSCE Ministerial Council in Porto in 2002 has highlighted that regional stability and the withdrawal of Russian troops should not be taken for granted. According to the Istanbul commitments, Russia had to withdraw 'completely and unconditionally' its troops and armament from Moldova by 31 December 2002. It had not complied with the terms of the Istanbul agreement, and the deadline was extended

²²⁶ EU-Moldova Cooperation Council, Fifth Meeting of the Co-operation Council between the European Union and Moldova, Brussels, 18 March 2003, 7432/03 (Presse 80).

until 31 December 2003²²⁷. The second deadline has been ignored as well. Moreover, at the end of 2003 Russia has undertaken a unilateral attempt to impose an agreement between Moldova and Transnistria on reunification, known as the Kozak Memorandum. The Memorandum would have paved the way for a Russian military presence until 2020 at least and a dominant influence for Transnistria in the whole Moldova²²⁸. The Memorandum was rejected by the Moldovan leadership under internal and external pressure from the OSCE, EU and the US.

Existing Mechanisms of Conflict Settlement

Presently, the Transnistria conflict settlement is pursued in a five-sided format consisting of Moldova and Transnistria with Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediators in the negotiations between the conflicting parties. According to a 1997 Memorandum between Chisinau and Tiraspol, Russia and Ukraine are to act as guarantors of an eventual agreement on the settlement of the conflict²²⁹. However this format has been coming under increasing pressure for two reasons. Firstly, it was totally ineffective in solving the conflict, and very effective in helping Transnistria entrench a *status quo* that was undermining regional stability, but was benefiting its elites. The obvious answer for the failure of the format was for Moldova to ask for its modification so as to include the EU and the US in it. The EU and NATO enlargements have provided the right context for these Moldovan demands.

In 2003-2004 the EU has been developing a new approach on Moldova. The core underpinnings of the European Neighborhood Policy were fi-

²²⁷ OSCE Statement by the Ministerial Council, 7 December 2002, 2nd Day of the Tenth Meeting, Porto; MC(10).JOUR/2.

²²⁸ For the text of the Kozak memorandum see 'Draft Memorandum on the basic principles of the state structure of a united state in Moldova', http://eurojournal.org/comments.php?id=P107_0_1_0_C . For various assessments of the Kozak memorandum see M. Emerson, 'Should the Transnistrian tail wag the Besarabian dog', CEPS Commentaries, December 2003, www.ceps.be; J. Lowenhardt, 'The OSCE, Moldova and Russian Diplomacy in 2003', 26 April 2004, Eurojournal.org, http://eurojournal.org/more.php?id=139_0_1_0_M5 .

²²⁹ Memorandum on the Basis for Normalization of Relations between the Republic of Moldova and Transdniestria, 8 May 1997.

nalized and the dynamics of EU-Moldova relations were accelerating. Firstly, the EU and Moldova agreed on an Action Plan for increased cooperation. The Action Plan (AP) is a set of measures to advance economic and political relations between Moldova and the EU. Besides economic and technical issues, the Action Plan has a separate section on Transnistria. Under the AP, EU intends to extend to Moldova the system of autonomous (asymmetric) trade preferences, allowing Moldova to export to the EU sensible products such as textiles or agricultural products without taxes, while being able to protect its internal market from some EU products for a period of up to 7 years. Secondly, the EU decided to open a Commission Delegation to Moldova. Thirdly, in March 2005 an EU Special Representative (EUSR) on Moldova was appointed, signaling an EU that is preparing the ground for a more active involvement in the conflict resolution process in Transnistria. The mandate of the EUSR clearly states that his objectives are to ‘strengthen the EU contribution to the resolution of the Transnistria conflict... assist in the preparation, as appropriate, of EU contributions to the implementation of an eventual conflict settlement’²³⁰.

What are the factors that encouraged the change of EU policy on Moldova? Firstly, EU enlargement played a role. The European Security Strategy states that enlargement brings the EU closer to ‘troubled areas’ and that it ‘is in the European interest that countries on [EU’s] borders are well governed. Neighbors who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organized crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies ... all pose problems for Europe’²³¹. In addition, the new EU member states have the interests in shaping the EU agenda by making it pay more attention to its eastern neighborhood. Moldova, a weak state with an open secessionist conflict in Transnistria, which is a both a result and a cause for continued Russian power-politics in the region, is not the kind of external environment that corresponds to the EU’s vision of a ‘secure Europe in a better world’, as the strategy puts it. After Romania’s acces-

²³⁰ Appointment of an EU Special Representative for Moldova, Brussels, 23 March 2005 7023/05 (Presse 53),

http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/misc/84338.pdf

²³¹ European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World, 12 December 2003, Brussels.

sion to the EU in 2007, Moldova will be in the immediate vicinity of the EU, which adds urgency to EU actions on Moldova.

Secondly, the EU has the foreign and security policy capabilities to act in Moldova. The kind of challenges that Moldova faces due to the existence of the secessionist region of Transnistria, but also due to its poor performance in reform and democratization does not require military answers, but political, economic and police actions. The EU is the only actor that not only has such capabilities, but has also tested them with the EU Police Missions to Macedonia and Bosnia. In EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) Javier Solana words 'the EU is the single regional organization with a wide range of political, diplomatic, humanitarian, economic and financial, military and police instruments to contribute to the stabilization of the EU's periphery'²³². Transnistria is a conflict with economic and political ramifications but no religious or ethnic hatred. Dealing with Transnistria is feasible, but it requires an integrated economic, political and security approach.

A third factor that is conducive to a greater EU presence in the region is Moldova's insistent calls for greater EU involvement in conflict resolution in Transnistria and EU membership perspective. In Moldova's opinion one of the obstacles to a solution is the negotiating format in which Moldova and Transnistria are supposed to discuss conflict resolution issues with Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediators. However, the format has been deadlocked and often counterproductive. The *de facto* state of Transnistria remains and actually develops further as a private enterprise run by an oppressive elite, who transformed it into a hub for organized crime, corruption and trafficking in drugs, women, illegal migrants and weapons. The Russia-led peacekeeping mission, which was effective in stopping the war in 1992, became one of the main obstacles to the resolution of the conflict as it entrenches the status quo around Transnistria and helps consolidate the regime in the secessionist region by offering it *de facto* military protection and support. The European

²³² J. Solana, 'Europe must assume its responsibility for security', The Irish Times, 23 September 2003.

Court of Human Rights concluded in July 2004 that the Transnistrian Republic 'remained under the effective authority, or at the very least under the decisive influence, of Russia, and in any event that it survived by virtue of the military, economic, financial and political support that Russia gave it'²³³. If a sustainable resolution of the conflict is to be achieved, both the negotiating format, and the security arrangements that keep the peace on the ground have to be changed.

Post-Conflict Rehabilitation in Transnistria

As already noted, post-conflict rehabilitation efforts in Transnistria cannot be but limited, because there is no actual post-conflict situation, even if there is a post-war situation. Despite this, since the active phase of the conflict ended in July 1992 there have been some post-conflict rehabilitation efforts. The effects of these, however, have not always been unambiguous.

The Security Dimension of PCR

The end of hostilities has opened the way for various efforts to overcome the conflict situation in security terms. These included the creation of a (demilitarized) security zone that was dividing the warring parties, a peace-keeping force that is stationed in the security zone, and a Joint Control Commission (JCC) that would discuss the problems on the ground and would exercise political control over the peacekeeping force.

The peacekeeping force consists of Russian, Moldovan and Transnistrian troops. Indeed, this is an almost unique case, along with South Ossetia in Georgia, where the conflict parties constitute also the peacekeeping force, even if it is dominated by a third actor which is Russia. The peculiarity of the peacekeeping force is more evident if one considers that Russia has practically been a party to the conflict, rather than a neutral third party. For example, the cease-fire agreement between the 'conflict parties' that ended the civil war on 21 July 1992 was signed be-

²³³ European Court of Human Rights, Press release issued by the Registrar, 'Grand Chamber Judgement in the Case of Ilascu and Others v Moldova and Russia', 349, 8 July 2004, <http://echr.coe.int>.

tween the then presidents of Russia and Moldova Boris Eltsyn and Mircea Snegur, respectively²³⁴. While the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on the Ilascu vs. Russia case mentions that ‘...the territory of Transdnistria was under Russia's *de facto* control owing to the stationing of its troops and military equipment there and the support it gave to the separatists... The Russian authorities had therefore contributed both militarily and politically to the creation of a separatist regime in the region of Transdnistria, part of the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Even after the ceasefire agreement of 21 July 1992 Russia had continued to provide military, political and economic support to the separatist regime, thus enabling it to survive by strengthening itself’²³⁵. In effect, the peacekeepers have played the *de facto* role of border guards of Transnistria, freezing a status quo that is favorable to one side, and maintaining the existing levels of territorial control of the secessionist authorities. The peacekeepers allowed the secessionist elites to pursue state building project while deterring the metropolitan state from attempting to regain control of the region. Lynch has argued that: ‘Russian operations are not deployed to advance ‘international peace and security’... Russian operations are deployed to advance Russian state interests... Troops deployments by a former imperial power in its former empire are different from international peacekeeping. Russian operations have consistently sought to alter the prevailing distribution of power in these conflicts in a way that would advance Russian state interests... Moreover, Russia’s military presence has served to offset the weakness of the *de facto* states armed forces... The balance of power on the ground is clearly strengthened in favor of the separatists’²³⁶.

The peacekeepers are under the political control of JCC, which brings together a representative from Russia, Moldova and Transnistria, with each of them having a veto over the decisions of JCC. However, whenever more controversial issues arise the commission is usually deadlocked. Often it cannot take positions, let alone act, when Transnistrian

²³⁴ See the ‘Agreement on the principles of settlement of the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of the republic of Moldova’ (in Russian), http://www.peacebuilding.md/library/57/ru/1_1992Acord_ru.doc

²³⁵ European Court of Human Rights ...

²³⁶ Lynch, Engaging...

forces had moved on a number of occasions into the demilitarized security zone in defiance of the ceasefire agreement of 1992. Thus, JCC could not even perform the function of formally acknowledging crises situations, let alone solve them or build confidence between the conflict parties.

The main lessons of the post-conflict arrangements in Moldova are that the mechanisms that functioned to prevent a new outbreak of military hostilities, by ensuring the dominance of one party, i.e. Russia, in these arrangements, would not necessarily function to bring about the resolution of a conflict. The force that has served to stop the war has become the force that freezes the conflict resolution efforts.

The Economic Dimension of PCR

The economic problems related to the conflict have been caused not so much by the 1992 hostilities, as by the lack of clarity of the future of Transnistria as well as the fact that Moldova's eastern border has been uncontrolled. Formally, Chisinau and Tiraspol have been negotiating for more than a decade the terms of power sharing under which Transnistria would become part of the Republic of Moldova. In fact, Transnistrian elites have used the period since 1992 to build a more or less functioning *de facto* state, by benefiting from the region's indefinite status and from cooperation with Chisinau on economic matters.

The conflict in Transnistria generated opportunities for a few, and illegal or semi-legal economic activities have generated important incentive structures for the maintenance of the secessionist entity²³⁷. The very illegitimacy of the *de facto* state of Transnistria encouraged illegal activities, as illegal trade can flourish under conditions of conflict and minimal government control and taxation²³⁸. Transnistria has served as a tax-free gate for imports into Moldova. For instance, in 1998 the imports into Moldova that passed through the customs controlled by Moldova authorities were worth 621 million lei, while the imports of Transnistria

²³⁷ *ibid.*

²³⁸ S. Pegg, International Society and the De Facto State. (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998); Keen, 'War and Peace...' 7

were worth two billion lei, or roughly 500 million dollars at that date²³⁹; while the populations of the Republic of Moldova is roughly six times that of Transnistria. Cigarettes, alcohol and fuels had been imported untaxed to Moldova through Transnistria. But more dangerous have been alleged Transnistrian exports of arms, as well as uncontrolled trafficking of illicit goods.

As part of the PCR efforts, and in order to increase trust between the parties and ease the economic hardships in the region, in February 1996 Moldova and Transnistria signed a protocol on the cooperation of their customs services, under which Chisinau offered the secessionist authorities the right to use Republic of Moldova's custom stamps in Transnistria's external economic activities. This arrangement, seen as important step towards the reintegration of the country at that time, allowed Transnistrian companies to export goods legally, including to countries with which Moldova had preferential trade regimes. Significant Transnistrian exports included textiles and steel to the US and the EU²⁴⁰. However, progress on economic cooperation has not been matched by progress in the political dialogue on the definition of the status of Transnistria as part of Moldova. As a result the fact that Transnistrian exports were made possible without hindrance has neither increased the trust between Chisinau and Tiraspol, nor contributed to the economic reintegration of the country. In effect, this measure had been counterproductive to conflict settlement because it allowed Transnistria to strengthen its economic and political independence. In September 2001, Moldova withdrew its custom stamps from the Transnistrian authorities (technically speaking the design of the stamps was changed, and third countries were informed that the old stamps are no longer valid). However, the 'custom stamps' case reveals how in the absence of good will, and external enforcement mechanisms for confidence-building arrangements, PCR efforts can be used and manipulated by one party so as to prolong a conflict situation.

²³⁹ 'Strengthening border controls in Moldova: problems and priorities', Conference Report of the NOSTRUM workshop, Chisinau, 25-26 November 2004, Institute for Public Policy (Moldova) and the Centre for European Security Studies, the Netherlands.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

Generally, the economic reconstruction of the region has been undertaken without significant external support, except for some demilitarization and de-mining programs, as well as a few infrastructure projects that allowed the rebuilding of bridges, affected by the war, on Nistru/Dniestr River. However, economic incentives have never been unambiguous and attractive enough to motivate the parties to pursue the resolution of the conflict in the expectation of economic benefits.

The Constraints of PCR

The main limits for the efforts for post-conflict rehabilitation in Moldova/Transnistria are related to the lack of an agreement to the conflict, the lack of strong external interests and commitment in promoting a solution to the conflict, and a constellation of regional interests that make not only possible, but also sustainable and profitable the status quo.

Post-conflict rehabilitation in Moldova has been made difficult by the lack of an agreement on the end of the conflict. When the future of Transnistria and how the Republic of Moldova will look like after a settlement is not clear, it is very difficult to implement a coherent and strategically-thought PCR package. It is also not clear when and if an agreement between Moldova and Transnistria will be achieved, thus no external actors would be ready to support significant PCR programs without a visible perspective of having the conflict solved. Indeed, if significant economic assistance for reconstruction comes without a clear perspective of an agreement on the status of Transnistria, this might just entrench Transnistria's separation from Moldova, as it already happened in the 'custom stamps' saga. Rather, one possible conflict resolution strategy would be to support Moldova in its transition and European aspirations so as to make it attractive for Transnistria. And only when the benefits of deeper integration of Moldova with the EU are visible, business groups and ordinary citizens, if not the political and military elite, in Transnistria would be interested in finding a solution to the conflict.

A second constraint on PCR in Transnistria was the lack of strong external commitment for overcoming the conflict. The only external actor with a more or less clear agenda and a commitment to pursue its interests is Russia. However, it has been reluctant to seek the resolution of the conflict for the sake of a solution, even if it was at times ready to push for a resolution mainly for the sake of its interests. Generally, Russian interests are served well enough by the *status quo*, as the presence of the conflict remains a good argument for the maintenance of its troops in Transnistria and continuous meddling in Moldovan affairs. The scale of Russian involvement was never matched by similar EU and US interest. However, this has been slowly changing, as both the EU and the US have been making efforts to build momentum for the resolution of the conflict, despite Russian opposition to such moves. Traditionally the lack of significant interests from the part of external actors also meant that the external financial support for PCR was very limited.

A third constraint on PCR is the government of Transnistria. As already noted it derives significant economic benefits from the *status quo*, and constantly justifies political authoritarianism through the need to ‘defend Transnistria from the Moldovan aggressors’ and suppress internal dissent. Fear and insecurity is an important source of internal legitimacy for the elites. Insecurity discourses are a permanent feature in Transnistria, and an important mobilizing factor for the secessionist elites. In addition, the internal logic of most *de facto* states advances political considerations over economic ones, and fear of domination or extermination is one of the features that maintain their internal cohesion. This leads to the dominance of military over politics and the economy²⁴¹. Thus, the authorities in Transnistria are simply not interested in the overcoming of the consequences of the conflict through PCR efforts, because this would undermine their own positions maintained through a combination of war hysteria and repression.

²⁴¹ On the factor of fear in maintaining de facto states see Lynch, Engaging ... and Pegg, International society ...

An Agenda for the Future

One particular characteristic of the nature of the EU developing policies on Moldova in 2004 has been a relative imbalance in favor of Transnistria-related issues, rather than political or economic support for the transformation process. The economic and technical issues dealt under the European Neighborhood Policy have been managed by the European Commission in the context and in implicit dependence on the EU agendas with other ENP countries. Transnistria got bigger attention because it is considered a most urgent issue, as well as the main obstacle in Moldova's transition. Thus the key to Moldova's transformation lies in solving this problem. In the future, however, one should consider reversing the argument. It is not Transnistria that is impeding Moldova's progress on democratization, economy and reform, but vice-versa – because Moldova is not politically and economically attractive for Transnistrians, the resolution of the conflict is difficult to achieve. Thus, the onus of EU policies should be placed on supporting transition and democratization in Moldova, on the one hand, and reducing the criminal benefits of the status quo for Transnistrian elites, on the other. This, in due time will alter the situation around Transnistria in a way that is conducive to the settlement of the conflict.

Launching EU police mission to Moldova with a particular focus on strengthening border-management and security sector reform is the kind of action that Moldova badly needs – for its own sake and for a solution in Transnistria. The EU would only have to benefit from this. Furthermore, more openness in terms of trade from the EU will encourage Transnistrian business groups to lobby in favor of a normalization of relations with Moldova, making them stakeholders in the conflict resolution process. Moreover, increased EU-Moldova cooperation with an acknowledged EU perspective for Moldova is the kind of signal that would make a more stable, prosperous, democratic and European Moldova attractive to ordinary Transnistrians.

In addition, one should remember that the constraints on the PCR efforts in Transnistria are conjectural, rather than embedded in the conscience of the people. And this is the main platform on which the resolution of

the conflict can happen. There is no hate and no ethnic cleavage between the people. A better economic and political perspective for the peoples of Moldova and Transnistria would be strong enough to make them overcome their small differences.