



The Europeanisation of the Transnistrian Conflict

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Introduction

To describe the Transnistrian conflict as ‘frozen’ is becoming less and less appropriate. Although the conflict remains unresolved, there have been a number of significant and at times dramatic developments in recent years, both in the diplomatic efforts to negotiate a settlement, and in the underlying geopolitical alignments and political and economic structures sustaining the conflict. It is argued here that these changes are primarily because of the European Union.

To begin with, the role of the EU was mainly reactive and of limited importance. It was thus more a case of Europeanisation rather than ‘EU-isation’, owing more to the EU’s growing ‘presence’ in the wider region rather than the EU as an actor engaging more in the Transnistrian conflict as such. But over the last two years, the EU has increasingly become directly involved.

The effects of these changes go beyond Transnistria and the EU’s relations with Moldova, and will have a significant impact on the EU’s relations with other, larger Eastern neighbours. Cooperation on the Transnistrian conflict is an important test case of the credibility of the European aspirations of the new Ukrainian government. As a prominent element of the EU-Russian agenda for the ‘overlapping near abroad’, the Transnistrian conflict has become a major issue of dispute, described by one prominent commentator as “the new frontline” in the strained relationship between the EU and Russia.¹

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¹ See the article by Dov Lynch, “Shared Neighbourhood or New Frontline? The Crossroads in Moldova”, *Russie.Cei.Visions* No. 2, April 2005 (retrieved from <http://www.ifri.org>).

The growing role of Europe and the EU

Europeanisation in Moldova, Romania and Ukraine

The dramatic change in the policy of the Communist government in Chisinau is the most important development related to the Transnistrian conflict in recent years. Elected in 2001 on a pro-Russian, anti-European programme and renewed efforts at reaching a negotiated settlement with Tiraspol, the government of President Vladimir Voronin has since completely changed Moldova’s foreign policy priorities. The Communist party and President Voronin were re-elected on a pro-EU, anti-Russian platform and continued freeze in negotiations with Transnistria in March and April 2005.

Moldova’s Western neighbour, Romania, is on track to become a member of the EU in less than two years. Romania has so far been a marginal actor as far as the Transnistrian conflict is concerned, as it focused virtually all of its foreign policy energy during the last decade on the formidable challenge of accession to the EU and NATO. Having joined NATO in 2004 and being set to accede to the EU in 2007, there are now signs that the new Romanian government is seeking to play a more active role in the Black Sea region more broadly and in the Moldovan and the Transnistrian conflict in particular. It was not by accident that the new Romanian President Traian Basescu chose Chisinau as the destination of his first visit abroad following his inauguration in December 2004.

Moldova’s other direct neighbour, Ukraine, is even more important for the Transnistrian conflict on account of its border with Transnistria and its role as one of three mediators (together with Russia and the OSCE) in settlement negotiations. Following the Orange Revolution in late 2004, the prospects of enhanced cooperation between Chisinau and Kyiv are perhaps even greater than with Bucharest. Ukraine and Moldova agreed in early March to develop a joint proposal on border cooperation to be addressed to the EU.²

² Joint Declaration on Co-operation between Moldova and Ukraine, Kyiv, 1 March 2005, reprinted in *European Newsletter*, No. 2, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Moldova, 2005, pp. 2-4 (retrieved from <http://www.eurojournal.org>).

The EU as an actor

Since the beginning of 2003, the EU has taken a series of measures *vis-à-vis* Moldova and Transnistria. With some tweaking one can list 10 such initiatives:

1. In February 2003, the EU instituted a visa ban on the Transnistrian leadership.
2. In March 2003, the EU initiated and mediated negotiations between Moldova and Ukraine on customs and border agreements.
3. From spring 2003, there were internal discussions in the EU on a possible EU-led post-conflict 'peace consolidation' operation in Transnistria.
4. During 2003, the EU advised the Joint Constitutional Commission on a new constitution for a united Moldova.
5. In November 2003, EU High Representative Javier Solana intervened to advise the Moldovan government against accepting the so-called 'Kozak memorandum'.
6. In February 2004, the visa ban on Transnistrian leaders was renewed.
7. From late 2003 to autumn 2004, the EU consulted and then negotiated a bilateral Action Plan with Moldova, as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).
8. In August 2004, the visa ban was expanded to include additional Transnistrian leaders, and then renewed again for another year in February 2005.
9. In March 2005, an EU special representative to Moldova was appointed.
10. In autumn 2005, a European Commission delegation will be established in Chisinau.

Individually, most of these initiatives are relatively minor, with a limited impact on the evolution of the Transnistrian conflict. They often fall short of Moldovan expectations, and new initiatives, such as the recent appointment of the special representative, are typically described as "too little, very late, [and] inhibited by a Russia-first approach" by independent experts.³ Combined, however, the set of EU initiatives over the last two years are exercising a significant impact on the development of the situation in Moldova and Transnistria.

Is there an EU strategy towards the Transnistrian conflict?

Indeed, what emerges looks almost like the beginning of a rather coherent plan. The growing EU engagement with Moldova can be described as the beginnings of a two-pronged strategy:

1. The EU has gradually established itself as a key external actor in diplomatic efforts to resolve the Transnistrian conflict, as well as in a post-conflict settlement. While not (yet) a party in the 'official' negotiations, it has nonetheless become clear that it will be impossible to ignore the views of the EU when developing proposals for a settlement.
2. The EU is attempting to change the underlying economic, social and political structures that have allowed the conflict to remain frozen for more than a decade by upgrading its relations with Chisinau and by measures to prevent smuggling and trafficking.

The EU and the diplomacy of the Transnistrian conflict

The EU's involvement in diplomatic efforts to solve the Transnistrian conflict has come about gradually, first by invitation and then later by its own initiatives. The EU was invited to be an observer providing expert advice in the Joint Constitutional Commission, a body established following a proposal by President Voronin in February 2003.⁴ This was the first time the EU participated officially in efforts to find a solution to the Transnistrian conflict.

A possible post-conflict European security and defence policy operation in Transnistria was discussed by the EU's Political and Security Committee on several occasions during 2003. Proposals were developed at the EU Institute for Security Studies in Paris in May 2003 and by the Dutch OSCE chairmanship in July 2003.⁵ The latter called for an EU-led 'peace consolidation force,' in which no country would have more than 50% of the peacekeepers.

The most dramatic instance of EU involvement was the intervention by EU High Representative Solana in late November 2003 advising President Voronin not to accept the Kozak memorandum, a plan for a constitutional settlement proposed by Russia. This proposal would give the Transnistrian side a *de facto* veto on constitutional changes in Moldova and thus perpetuate the Russian military presence for decades.⁶

The most recent EU initiative concerning the Transnistrian conflict was the appointment of Dutch

⁴ There was also an expert observer from the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.

⁵ Dov Lynch, *Russia Faces Europe*, Chaillot Paper No. 60, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, May 2003 and the OSCE "Food for Thought" (unpublished paper), July 2003.

⁶ Although there were no specific provisions for external military presence in the text. See Michael Emerson and Marius Vahl, "Moldova and the Transnistrian Conflict", in Bruno Coppieters et al., *Europeanization and Conflict Resolution – Case Studies from the European Periphery*, Ghent: Academia Press and the Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minorities in Europe, 2004, pp. 170-174 (retrieved from <http://www.ecmi.de/jemie>).

³ Vladimir Socor, "European Union Puts a Toe in Moldova", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 2, Issue 28, 9 February 2005 (retrieved from <http://www.Jamestown.org>).

diplomat Adriaan Jacobovits de Szeged as EU Special Representative for Moldova on 23 March 2005. His tasks will be four-fold:

- to “strengthen the EU’s contribution to the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict”;⁷
- to work on the EU’s contribution to an eventual settlement;
- to follow developments, cultivate contacts with the government in Chisinau and other domestic actors and offer EU advice and facilitation; and
- to assist in the development of EU policy towards Moldova and the region, in particular concerning conflict prevention and resolution.

The EU and the economics of the Transnistrian conflict

Trade and economics are vital aspects of the Transnistrian conflict. The EU has taken several initiatives during the last two years to change the underlying economic and political structures sustaining the conflict, and thus the incentives facing the two sides. These measures are perhaps more important for the future of the Transnistrian conflicts than its diplomatic efforts.

Trade plays a crucial role in the Transnistrian economy, and the self-proclaimed government in Tiraspol relies heavily on export-oriented production for its budget.⁸ As Transnistria is not recognised internationally, its producers require Moldovan customs stamps in order to sell their products legally on international markets. From the mid-1990s, customs stamps had been acquired by Transnistrian exporters through a special arrangement between the Moldovan government and the authorities in Tiraspol. Whether or not they were to be provided with such stamps and under what conditions has been one of the main sources of tension between Chisinau and Tiraspol in recent years. New customs stamps were introduced in September 2001, following Moldova’s accession to the WTO in July that year. Since then, the current Communist government has been more reticent in providing such stamps than previous Moldovan governments.

Under an agreement reached in summer 2003, Transnistrian producers can now obtain such stamps if they register their companies in Chisinau. But companies registered there have to pay taxes to the Moldovan government. Considering that these companies already pay taxes to the Transnistrian authorities, this stipulation clearly reduces the ability of these firms to compete on international markets. Thus the new customs rules

introduced by the Moldovan government have had a considerable negative economic impact on Transnistria.⁹

This accord followed the conclusion of an agreement between Moldova and Ukraine in May 2003 on customs and border controls along the Transnistrian section of the Moldovan-Ukrainian frontier.¹⁰ This agreement was negotiated through the mediation of the European Commission, following an initiative by the then External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten in March that year. The basic aim is to allow Moldovan customs and border control personnel to be stationed on Ukrainian territory along the border with Transnistria, allowing the government in Chisinau to control movements across its eastern border. Although an additional agreement on customs and border control measures was reached in January 2004, the necessary measures were not introduced, mainly owing to a recalcitrant Kuchma regime. The blockade against Transnistria introduced by Chisinau in August 2004 following the crisis over the forceful closure of Romanian language schools in Transnistria in July was ineffective because of a lack of cooperation from Ukraine.¹¹ An international border monitoring mission, in which the European Union would likely play a predominant role, is also currently being discussed.¹²

The row between the previous Ukrainian government and Moldova over the issue stands in sharp contrast to the accommodating attitudes of the current Ukrainian government concerning cooperation to control trade between Transnistria and Ukraine. Reform of customs and border controls has been one of the main priorities of the new administration in Kyiv, and its efforts are already having an effect on the Transnistrian conflict. From late January 2005, the new Ukrainian government started to demand Moldovan customs stamps for imports into Transnistria, with exports expected to follow. Reports claim however that trade resumed in late March, following the meeting between President Viktor Yushenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin.¹³ It has been asserted that limited capacity is an important part of

⁹ See *ibid.*, for an early assessment.

¹⁰ For a more in-depth analysis, see George Dura, “EU Border Guards and Moldova’s Economic Integration”, April 2004, and “Prospects for Establishing an International Monitoring-Mission on the Ukraine-Moldova Border”, April 2005 (retrieved from <http://www.eurojournal.org>).

¹¹ Ion Preasca, “Blockade and Effects”, *Moldova Azi*, 10 August 2004 (retrieved from <http://www.azi.md>).

¹² See Andrew Beatty, “EU-Russia Pact can Melt ‘Frozen Conflicts’ – Foreign Affairs Chief”, *European Voice*, 12 May 2005.

¹³ Iulia Kimitki, “Economic Sanctions and Security of the Border Between Moldova and Ukraine”, *Moldova Azi Commentary*, 12 April 2005 (retrieved from <http://www.azi.md/current?ID=33794>).

⁷ Joint Action 23 March 2005, 7023/05 (Presse 53).

⁸ See for instance the *Research Paper on Transnistria*, Center for Strategic Studies and Reforms, Chisinau, November 2003 (retrieved from <http://www.cisr-md.org>).

the problem on the Ukrainian side, in terms of both technical equipment and the financial resources to implement the new agreements.¹⁴

All of the measures listed above are now subsumed in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, more specifically as elements of the ENP Action Plan between Moldova and the EU, as well as in the Action Plan between Ukraine and the EU. The Action Plan was of course negotiated with the government in Chisinau, without any consultations with, or input from, the ‘authorities’ in Tiraspol. The benefits of the ENP – increased economic assistance, enhanced cooperation and gradual integration – are available almost exclusively to the officially recognised Moldova, and as the Action Plan is implemented, this will gradually strengthen the position of Chisinau.

Rhetoric and reality in EU policy towards the Transnistrian conflict

There is a clear discrepancy between the EU’s actions and its rhetoric relating to the Transnistrian conflict. Officially the EU is in favour of keeping the current negotiation format and consequently staying outside the formal negotiation process. A significant deference to Russia is evident in public EU statements emphasising that the EU will work cooperatively with Russia. By contrast, its opposition to the Kozak memorandum was a clear challenge to Russian domination in Transnistria and Moldova. Implementation of the Dutch OSCE proposals and the withdrawal of Russian forces from Transnistria in line with the commitments made by Russia at the OSCE summit in 1999 in Istanbul would have entailed that the EU would replace Russia as the principal external military actor in Moldova.

The EU repeatedly calls on both parties to return to the negotiating table, implying that Chisinau and Tiraspol are equivalent actors. According to the EU’s critics, this bestows unwarranted legitimacy on the unrecognised Transnistrian regime. But the EU’s actions imply a clear bias towards Chisinau. If fully implemented, EU policies to change underlying economic structures and to strengthen relations with Moldova would entail the imposition of an economic blockade of Transnistria by Moldova and Ukraine (strongly supported by the EU). This course of action would be combined with EU measures to improve the economic situation in Moldova west of the Nistru river through the ENP. Neither the visa ban nor the customs agreement endears the EU to the leadership in Tiraspol or burnishes the EU’s credentials as a potentially impartial and unbiased mediator between Chisinau and the Transnistrian leadership. Indeed, by EU standards, its policy has been remarkably proactive and indeed quite

aggressive, and has been an important contributing factor in widening a growing rift with its largest neighbour and ‘strategic partner’ Russia.

What’s next?

The growing role of the EU has already had a profound impact on the prospects and shape of an eventual settlement. First, given the consensus in Moldova on the long-term goal of EU membership, Chisinau is unlikely to accept any deal without explicit EU support. This gives the EU a *de facto* veto on any proposals for a constitutional settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. Second, it is equally clear that the EU will be *a*, and most likely *the*, dominant external actor in any post-conflict settlement.

So what are the next steps of this apparent EU strategy towards a settlement? It is argued here that it is now time for the EU to develop and articulate its position on several possible developments that it has contributed greatly to unleash. This applies in particular to issues such as the EU’s response if the attempted blockade is successful and the Transnistrian economy collapses, its position on Moldova’s repeated requests for expanding the negotiation format to include the EU and other external actors, its view on the substance of an acceptable constitutional settlement and on the role of the EU and other external actors in a post-conflict settlement. Some sort of plan is also needed as to how to avoid a serious worsening in relations with Russia, which could all-too-easily result if current EU policies run their course and Russia’s position on these issues remains unchanged.

A new negotiation format?

The first of these new realities has a direct bearing on efforts to find a negotiated settlement of the conflict. The last few years have witnessed a growing disenchantment with the existing negotiation framework, although there is no consensus on a new format. While there have been intermittent meetings in the 2+3 format (with Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE) since late 2003, real negotiations were effectively ended following the debacle over the Kozak memorandum. In the wake of the school crisis in the summer of 2004, President Voronin declared an end to negotiations with Tiraspol.¹⁵

As an expression of Moldova’s profound shift in foreign policy orientation under the Communist government, President Voronin has since been acting to change the official negotiating format. His first initiative was the February 2003 proposal to establish the Joint Constitutional Commission, in which the EU participated

¹⁴ Comment by Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Oleh Rybachuk at the European Policy Centre breakfast meeting, Brussels, 21 April 2005.

¹⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “Moldova Ends negotiations with Renegade Region”, feature article, 27 August 2004. Moldova would from then on only speak “with those whom Tiraspol obeys in the most direct way”. (Retrieved from <http://www.rferl.org>).

as an observer. In September this was followed by Mr Voronin inviting the EU to join as a mediator in the negotiations, an invitation extended in numerous speeches by the Moldovan leadership since then.¹⁶ In June 2004, President Voronin proposed a Stability and Security Pact for Moldova to be endorsed by the current mediators as well as the EU, the US and Romania.¹⁷

Mr Voronin has considerable support for a new negotiating framework in Moldova, as the political opposition are highly critical of the current format, which is said to be dominated by Russia and thus favours Tiraspol over Chisinau. A recent proposal from prominent Moldovan experts called for a new 3+3 format to replace the existing 2+3 format, which would exclude the Transnistrian authorities and include the EU, the US and Romania.¹⁸ The recently elected Moldovan parliament adopted a Declaration on 24 March calling for the involvement of the US, the EU and Romania in the negotiations.¹⁹

Among these three potential mediators, Romania has been most open towards direct participation in the negotiations. Indeed, the new Romanian President Basescu recently called for Romania to be included in diplomatic efforts to resolve the Transnistrian conflict.²⁰ Both the EU and the US have remained officially committed to the existing format. The US has played a backseat role as the EU has become increasingly engaged in Moldova. There have, however, been important instances of 'blatant transatlantic cooperation' over Moldova and the Transnistrian conflict, seen most visibly with the simultaneous imposition of visa bans and coordinated pressure on Russia to abide by its OSCE commitments to withdraw its forces from Transnistria.

All of the three current mediators are in favour of keeping the existing 2+3 format. Russia has reacted negatively to suggestions that the EU or other external actors should be included as mediators. Nevertheless, it seems legitimate to question Russia's commitment to the existing format following the late 2003 debacle over the Kozak memorandum, a unilateral Russian initiative developed without the participation or even the knowledge of the

other designated mediators, the OSCE and Ukraine. Until the Orange Revolution, Ukraine was also in favour of keeping the existing negotiating format. Although the new government officially supports this position, it is not against enlarging the group of mediators to also include the EU, the US and Romania.²¹

The OSCE and its mission in Moldova have also remained committed to the existing format. The current crisis in the OSCE is important in any discussion of the appropriate negotiation format for the Transnistrian conflict, which itself may have an impact on the prospects of a solution to the problems currently facing the OSCE. If the crisis becomes prolonged and this prevents the OSCE from playing an active role in the negotiations, this would seem to favour a new format. On the other hand, it would be difficult *not* to view attempts to create a new format during the OSCE crisis as an exercise to undermine the OSCE as such. None of the actors involved are, ultimately, likely to agree to this.

Preparing for the collapse of the Transnistrian economy?

If the EU's policy of engagement in the Transnistrian conflict is successful and the Union together with Moldova is able to solicit support from Ukraine, it will sharply reduce the revenues on which the Transnistrian regime depends. The fragile and already troubled Transnistrian economy may indeed collapse. This raises the question as to whether any EU measures are envisaged for this quite likely eventuality.

This is strongly related to the question of how far will Russia go in supporting the Transnistrian regime, the leaders of which are all Russian citizens (as are 100,000 persons among the 600,000 population of the secessionist entity). Russia currently provides considerable economic life support to the Transnistrian regime, primarily through energy supplies on credit. Russia could surely afford to support the small region indefinitely, but such a scenario would put Russia and the EU into a situation of working directly against each other, hardly in line with the joint aspirations for a 'common space on external security'.

A significant worsening of an already precarious economic situation in Transnistria is likely to raise the question of the fate of the self-appointed leadership of Transnistria, currently banned from going to the EU and the US, in a post-conflict settlement. Without the leadership, in charge of running two-thirds of the economy (including most of the important companies), the Transnistrian economy could disintegrate and be faced with a humanitarian crisis. Much of the political class in

¹⁶ Speech by President Voronin at a Council of Europe conference on frozen conflicts, Chisinau, September 2003.

¹⁷ George Dura, "Voronin's Stability and Security Pact – Yet Another Balancing Act?", September 2004 (retrieved from <http://www.eurojournal.org>).

¹⁸ Oazu Nantoi, Igor Munteanu and Vlad Spanu, *The 3D Strategy and Action Plan for the Settlement of the Transnistrian Conflict*, The Moldova Foundation, Arlington, VA, September 2004 (retrieved from <http://foundation.moldova.org/pagini/eng/125>).

¹⁹ Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *European Newsletter*, No. 2 (retrieved from <http://www.eurojournal.org>).

²⁰ Interview with Mr Basescu by Radio Free Europe "Romania: President Seeks Participation in Transnistria Talks, Multinational Black Sea Task Force", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 19 February 2005.

²¹ Joint Declaration of 1 March 2005, see Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 3 February 2005 (retrieved from <http://www.rferl.org>), and *European Newsletter*, No. 2, Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (retrieved from <http://www.eurojournal.org>).

Chisinau would like to see the current Transnistrian leadership put on trial and eventually sent to prison.

The contours of a settlement?

The two latest proposals from the mediators, the Kyiv document of July 2002 and the Kozak memorandum of November 2003, both called for the creation of a Moldovan federation. Ukraine and Georgia were to make joint proposals for a settlement at the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) summit on 22 April 2005 in Chisinau, supposedly suggesting the creation of a federation, which remains the favoured model for Russia and the leadership in Transnistria. President Voronin stated recently however that the government in Chisinau will not even consider any federalisation plans, calling for the direct involvement of the US, the EU and Romania in the negotiations. A bill on a special autonomy status for Transnistria under the 1994 Moldovan Constitution is currently being developed by the Voronin government.²²

The typical response from EU officials concerning proposals for a constitutional settlement is that the labels, be they 'autonomy', ('asymmetric' or 'symmetric') 'federation', 'confederation' or 'common state', are of secondary importance, and that what matters is the substantial division of competences. Nevertheless, EU officials frequently refer in vague terms to previous proposals, which sows doubts about the EU's position or indeed whether it has one. During his meeting with President Putin in early April 2005, for instance, High Representative Solana ostensibly stated that parts of the Kozak memo were "highly appreciated".²³ EU Special Representative Jacobovits recently spoke in favour of providing Transnistria with "far-reaching autonomy" based on European models, stating that previous proposals such as the 2002 Kyiv document on a federation and the 2003 Russian-OSCE mediators' paper (which was never published owing to the debacle over the Kozak memorandum), contained valuable parts and could be used as a basis for further negotiations.²⁴

In light of the EU's growing role in the region and its *de facto* veto on any constitutional settlement, the lack of a clear position and the absence of the EU around the negotiating table is liable to become an increasingly prominent constraint on the negotiating process. A clear and consistent EU position would presumably be appreciated by the other parties involved.

Europeanising Moldova and Transnistria

While the Communist government did not turn Moldova into a 'European Cuba', as promised by Mr Voronin during the 2001 election campaign and has backed down from some of the more dubious and repressive policies espoused at the beginning of his first term, its commitment to Europeanisation remains largely declaratory. The initiative to change this must ultimately come from Moldova itself. The broad consensus on Moldova's 'European choice' and the promising cooperative spirit seen following the parliamentary elections in March 2005 augurs well on this score.

Whether or not the Communist government is able to deliver on its promises of political and economic reforms will largely affect the prospects of a settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. The problems are severe and the challenges facing the government are daunting. While this poorest country in Europe has seen impressive economic growth rates in recent years, this is largely the result of an increase in remittances from the large number of Moldovans working abroad, most of them either in the EU or in Russia, and many of them illegally. The country lacks basic infrastructure such as paved roads in large areas of the country. Subsistence farming and the barter of basic staples has become the means of survival for a large share of the people remaining in Moldova.

A lot of traditional development assistance is thus needed in the impoverished Moldova, to a greater extent than other transition economies in Eastern Europe. This should be reflected in EU assistance policy to the country as the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument is developed. Moldova and the EU could also consider whether it could be possible to engage with the people of Transnistria, for instance through participation in less politicised areas such as research and education, and through establishing people-to-people contacts by engaging with the small Transnistrian private sector and its few NGO's.

In operational terms, the ENP is primarily bilateral and not related to the enlargement process. The EU would do well to consider how to avoid some of the problems seen in the 2004 enlargement as regards movements across the new border of the enlarged Union when Romania accedes in 2007. This could include studies on whether special visa arrangements for border regions such as exist between Slovakia and Ukraine or asymmetric visa arrangements such as that between Ukraine and Poland could be considered in Romanian-Moldovan relations. The trilateral dialogue between the EU, Moldova and Ukraine on customs and border controls could be broadened to include consultations and the exchange of information on all aspects of the ENP to avoid possible complications from an unsynchronised development of EU-Moldovan and EU-Ukrainian relations.

The first proposals from the Yuschenko government presented at the GUAM summit in late April 2005 is a case in point. The tentative Ukrainian 'plan' for

²² See the Moldova Azi website (<http://www.azi.md>), 13 April 2005 with reference to the interview with Mr Voronin on Moldovan television on 12 April 2005.

²³ Vladimir Socor, "Call Me Javier?", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 2, Issue 70, 11 April 2005.

²⁴ Vladimir Socor, "EU policy disarray in Georgia and Moldova", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 2, Issue 74, 15 April 2005.

Transnistria was widely criticised by Ukrainian and international experts as well as by Moldovan officials.²⁵ If implemented, the proposals would bestow unwarranted legitimacy and power to the current regime in Tiraspol, giving them a *de facto* veto on Moldovan foreign policy. The calls for early elections in Transnistria are implausible in light of the political situation in the region. Furthermore, the Ukrainian proposals do not adequately address Moldovan concerns about the lack of Western participation as mediators and eventual guarantors, calling for a treaty of guarantee with the current mediators as signatories. An extension of the trilateral dialogue to include the Transnistrian conflict more directly as well could perhaps prevent such incidents in the future.

An irresistible force and an immovable object?

The developments analysed above seem to indicate a movement towards a clash between the irresistible force of Europeanisation of the Transnistrian conflict and the immovable object of a continued Russian presence in the region. This is likely to be the biggest challenge for the EU and its policy towards Moldova and the Transnistrian conflict in coming months and years.

Relations between Russia and Moldova have progressively deteriorated during the presidencies of Messrs Putin and Voronin. Moldovan high officials increasingly refer to Russian peacekeepers as ‘occupiers’, while Russia has threatened to increase prices for natural gas supplies to Moldova, on which the country is highly dependent, and to impose economic sanctions on Moldovan imports in March 2005. Indeed, on 18 April, meat imports from Moldova were banned.

How far is the EU willing to go in terms of a deteriorating relationship with Russia as the price of its lop-sided engagement with the parties of the conflict? Considering the willingness of the EU and perhaps of some of the larger member states in particular to sacrifice basic European values in order to facilitate a rapprochement with Russia, one should perhaps not be too optimistic concerning a clear EU position adhered to by all its member states in case some of the more dramatic scenarios described above come to pass. The manner in which the question of frozen conflicts was virtually erased from the road map on a common space of external security agreed at the EU-Russian summit on 10 May gives further support for a rather pessimistic view on this issue.

But one may on the other hand also question whether Russia’s position is as clear as the above may indicate. Although both the rhetoric and policy actions of Russia *vis-à-vis* Moldova have hardened over the last few months, a greater willingness to at least discuss the matter with the EU and listen to the EU’s ideas on the matter also materialised during the first months of 2005. The EU should take up Russia on this offer. One area where compromise could be possible concerns the post-settlement external military presence. This is likely to be a modest force of limited duration and its significance is primarily symbolic. Yet it matters more to Russia and the EU. Allowing for a continued Russian presence could be a price even hard-line Moldovans could accept in return for an end to the Transnistrian conflict and the Europeanisation of a united Moldova.

²⁵ See for instance Oleksandr Sushko, “Security via Democracy: A Transnistria Version”, *Ukrainian Monitor*, No. 10, 24 April 2005; see also Vladimir Socor, “Porochenko Drafts, Yuschenko Launches Plan for Transnistria”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 2, Issue 82, 27 April 2005; and “Porochenko Adopts Primakov’s Concept for Transnistria Settlement”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 2, Issue 96, 17 May 2005.

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- To build collaborative networks of researchers, policy-makers and business across the whole of Europe.
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- Complete independence to set its own priorities and freedom from any outside influence.
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