



## Transnistrian Conflict – Status Quo and Prospects

by Oazu Nantoi<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Status Quo

After the refusal of President Voronin to sign Kozak Memorandum on the 26th of November 2003, the process of negotiations was blocked. Afterwards, Russia attempted repeatedly to destabilize the situation by the means of Tiraspol separatist regime. To that end, which became traditional, were raised problems related either to schools or to the villages subordinate to Chişinău. On the other hand, after the Moldavian leadership has suddenly changed its political orientation, it became more and more obvious that, involving in the Transnistrian conflict, Russia had exhausted its possibilities to influence on the situation in the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the victory of Viktor Youshtchenko in presidential election held in Ukraine, as well as the pro-European and pro-NATO declarations of new Kiev administration have built an essentially new conjuncture in what concerns the Transnistrian conflict.

### 2. The Role and the Behaviour of Ukraine

#### *a) The Behaviour before Youshtchenko*

Transnistria is an enclave between the territory under the control of Chişinău and Ukraine. Tiraspol separatist regime (the "transnistrian moldavian republic" - "tmr") can survive from the economic point of view only if the Transnistrian segment of the Moldavian-Ukrainian state border (452 km) is open for economic entities of the "transnistrian moldavian republic". Since the beginning of the conflict, Kiev administrations have promoted a double standards policy in their relationship with the "transnistrian moldavian republic". Such a behaviour could be first of all explained by the corruption of the political elite and of state structures in Ukraine. On the other hand, Ukraine has promoted in Transnistria a policy of competition with Russia, to the detriment of interests of the Republic of Moldova.

Invoking false arguments, Kiev administration opposed to setting up joint Moldavian-Ukrainian custom points along the Transnistrian segment of the state border. Such a measure would have enabled Chişinău authorities to control goods traffic to/from the "transnistrian moldavian republic". Representatives of Tiraspol administration use the airport of Odessa for travelling to Moscow. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine has expressed its regret about the refusal of Chişinău to sign Kozak Memorandum. On the 1st of August 2004, with a view to overcome the crisis of the Transnistrian schools subordinate to the Moldavian authorities, the Government of the Republic of Moldova issued a resolution which stipulated that only the goods of economic entities of the "tmr" who paid taxes to the budget of the Republic of Moldova could cross the state border, including the one with Ukraine. On the other hand, Kiev administration categorically refused to impose such rules on the Transnistrian segment of the border. De facto, Kiev administrations treated the "transnistrian moldavian republic" as a real state which has the right to exist, including to conduct independently external economic activities, but which has two problems to be solved – normalisation of its relationship with Chişinău and lack of international recognition.

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## **b) Youshtchenko Administration**

It is obvious that Youshtchenko administration realizes the threat of corruption for the Ukrainian state and puts efforts to fight against it, including against corruption caused by smuggling across the "tmr". In the same time, within Youshtchenko administration there is not unanimity concerning the attitude towards the "transnistrian moldavian republic". According to some opinions, Piotr Poroshenko, Secretary of the Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, has negotiated with Moscow the position of Ukraine concerning the Transnistrian conflict in exchange for non-intervention of Russia in 2006 parliamentary election in Ukraine.

On the 22nd of April 2005, at GUUAM Summit held in Chişinău, Viktor Youshtchenko has brought in the "Seven Steps" Paper – an abridged version of the Ukrainian plan for the Transnistrian conflict settlement. Moldavian authorities have been unpleasantly surprised by the fact that the version of the paper submitted by Viktor Youshtchenko was essentially different from the one examined by both parties the day before. Those "Seven Steps" were intended to lead to the legalization of the existing separatist regime, including of its paramilitary troops.

## **3. Leadership of the Republic of Moldova**

On the 24th of March 2005, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted unanimously the Declaration concerning the Political Partnership aimed at Reaching the European Integration Objectives. The paper stipulates among other the commitment of the deputies to solve the Transnistrian conflict within the frame of the present Constitution by the means of the "urgent democratisation, demilitarisation and decriminalisation of the Transnistrian area". Moldavian authorities focus their efforts on persuading Kiev administration to accept a partnership with Chişinău with a view to drive Tiraspol separatist regime to a tight corner and, in such a way, to bring the "transnistrian moldavian republic" back within the legal frame of the Republic of Moldova.

In the same time, being overwhelmed with concerns about the Transnistrian separatist regime, Moldavian leadership still fails to realize the need to promote a policy of "opening" the regime of the "transnistrian moldavian republic", to start a dialogue with the population of the conflict area. Or, people of that area are sick and tired of the state of uncertainty and more and more obvious dissension emerge in Transnistria between the regime of Igor Smirnov and various interest groups (local business, for example). The dialogue with the people of Transnistria would undoubtedly disturb the false unanimity in the "transnistrian moldavian republic" which allows the regime of Igor Smirnov to assume being only representative of the population of that area. Moldavian authorities have not adopted yet an official position (a Law passed by the Parliament) towards the frame-limit for the conflict settlement. The availability of such a position would have excluded any inadequate and unacceptable for the Republic of Moldova external initiatives ("federalisation", "seven steps", etc.)

## **4. The European Union**

The attitude of the European Union towards the Transnistrian conflict is ambiguous. On the one hand, the EU is aware of the risks generated by the conflict and pleads for its urgent settlement. On the other hand, the EU does not want the Transnistrian conflict to affect its relationship with Russia, overlooking the fact that this conflict can be solved within the triangle European Union - Republic of Moldova - Ukraine and, consequently, confrontation with Russia can be avoided without causing any frustration to it. Such an aim can be reached by the means of the joint efforts of the European Union, of the Republic of Moldova and of Ukraine, focused on the democratisation and the demilitarisation of the eastern area of the Republic of Moldova. As a result, the military presence of Russia would become an obvious for everybody nonsense, including for Kremlin administration.