



UNSC



Topic: The Question of Transnistria
Committee: United Nations Security Council
Name: Beste Nur Filiz
Position: Vice President

A. Welcome Letter

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Security Council at KabataşMUN

As The Vice President Chair of UNSC, I am honoured to extend my warmest greetings to all participating delegates. It is with great enthusiasm that I anticipate your engagement in our committee's discussions. I wish every one of you a wondrous conference and joyful committee with a friendly environment and an academically fulfilling experience.

Our committee faces the challenging task of comprehensively dealing with the critical issue of the global agenda: The Question of Transnistria. You are expected to come up with solid and durable solutions cooperation and constructive debates. This study guide will help you comprehend the ground information that you will need to carry out fruitful debates.

As you prepare for KabataşMUN'24, I encourage you to familiarise yourself with the conference background guide, which will provide valuable insights and guidance for productive debate and negotiation.

Once again, welcome to KabataşMUN. I am looking forward to meeting and witnessing your contributions to the conference.

Sincerely,

Beste Nur Filiz
Vice President Chair

B. Introduction to the Agenda Item

The territory of Transnistria has largely escaped Western European consciousness. Legally part of Moldova, perhaps Europe's most obscure country, it is a sliver of land, landlocked between the remainder of Moldova and Ukraine. It measures about 200 miles north to south and rarely more than 30 miles east to west, meaning it is roughly the area of Somerset, with under 500,000 inhabitants, predominantly Russian speaking. It gained a *de facto* independence in 1992 in a short but bloody war upon the break-up of the USSR.

Transnistria is one of four “pseudo-states” to have emerged as a consequence of carelessly drawn borders of Soviet Socialist Republics, which were the units granted independence by Moscow in the early 1990s. Transnistria has most of the features of an independent country, despite its reliance on Russian military and economic support: it has clearly marked and enforced borders; a constitution; wholly autonomous institutions of government; its own currency, including the world's first plastic coins; and a defined citizenship. While it issues those citizens with passports, they are valid only for travel to the other pseudo-states. Nearly all its citizens are also entitled to a Moldovan, Ukrainian or Russian passport.

There is virtually a complete lack of formal international recognition of Transnistria, even by Russia, and it only enjoys half-hearted diplomatic connections with the other pseudo-states. The Chisinau government, despite its universally recognised legal sovereignty over the territory, carries absolutely no sway there. There is, however, free movement between the two territories, and for many inhabitants of Tiraspol, a night out enjoying the – to Western eyes perhaps limited – attractions of Chisinau, an hour's drive away, is a regular occurrence. For some, the right to use Moldova's marginally superior healthcare facilities is a draw. Chisinau's international airport, on the Transnistrian side of the city, is also the main means of international travel for Transnistrians, who have no passenger airport of their own.



Open source images of Transnistria Region held at University of Texas Library.

That freedom of movement is symbolic of how what is one of the world's most long-standing frozen conflicts has also become one of the least unpleasant. There are occasional proclamations from politicians on both sides about how unreasonable the other is and, more rarely, border skirmishes, but significant confrontation has been avoided for the last 29 years.

External attempts to resolve the situation constantly stall. The OSCE's 5+2 group, set up specifically for the task, meets infrequently and has only been able to deal with peripheral issues. The EU, which supports reunification with Moldova, publishes occasional papers, often authored by the estimable Professor Stefan Wolff of Birmingham University, but does very little. Russia, which maintains a peacekeeping force of around 1,000 troops from its 14th Army on the border and provides significant economic support, is seemingly content with the *status quo*. The CIA and other U.S. government organizations have no tangibly apparent involvement in Transnistria. There is no overt, and almost certainly no covert, U.S. presence.

Presided over by the corrupt but relatively benign Igor Smirnov until 2011, power changed hands peacefully after elections in that year and again in 2016, when the present incumbent Vadim Krasnoselsky secured a large majority over Yevgeny Shevchuk, who had triumphed against Smirnov and the Russian-backed Anatoliy Kaminski in 2011. There is a parliament, known as the Supreme Soviet, which

is sometimes politically opposed to the president. This is decreed by a constitution which provides for most of the rights in the European Convention on Human Rights as well as a clear division of legislative, executive and judicial power.

A visitor to Transnistria, who is unlikely to go further than the capital Tiraspol except perhaps to the second city of Bender on the border with Moldova seven miles away, may be struck by the superficial preservation of much of the Soviet ambience. Statues of Lenin remain outside the Supreme Soviet building in Tiraspol and in central squares in other towns. A large dilapidated KGB headquarters, with “no photography” signs outside, remains on a central side street. There are wide, under-used roads into the centre, culminating in a grand convergence overlooked by the state theatre and university, the main political institutions being a kilometre out of the centre beside the main road. Little seems to have changed since Ronald Hill described it in 1967. Much of the population is housed in uniform Khrushchyovka flats, as apparent in the centre as the suburbs.

There are few attractions for that visitor, other than the political oddity. The Noul Neamţ Monastery, a striking blue-domed complex of Orthodox buildings, lies about three miles south of Tiraspol. The medieval fort at Bender is open to the public but little visited. Most people on organized day trips from Chisinau take tours offered by the Kvint brandy factory. Although some of its inhabitants told me Transnistria was “beautiful”, that is not an obvious description for its featureless flat countryside and unexceptional cities. There are two high-quality hotels in Tiraspol; a newly opened luxury one by Bender Fort; several others that are acceptable, back-packers’ hostels, and some attempts on international websites to let private accommodation. Even during the 2016 presidential election, when there was a significant influx of foreign observers, these were far from full. There is virtually no visitor accommodation outside Tiraspol. Whatever the future of Transnistria’s economy, tourism is unlikely to play a significant part in it.

The economy is relatively weak, hampered by large-scale migration often of the youngest and brightest inhabitants – a problem that equally affects the rest of Moldova. Russian subsidies probably make up 60% of the territory’s income and remittances from émigrés around 20%. Agriculture and textile manufacture are the main earned sources of foreign currency. Although the territory is poor by European, even Eastern European, standards, the population are almost all adequately fed and housed and there is a developed education system, including universities, basic free universal healthcare, and pensions for the elderly and disabled.

While there are garish news reports of Transnistria being a centre of money laundering, gun running and people smuggling, these reports have the common feature of not citing evidence or even examples. However, there is undoubtedly some corruption and a sometimes unhealthy close relationship between the government and the territory's most prominent business and employer, the Sheriff group. Sheriff's empire extends to supermarkets, petrol stations, the Kvint factory, heavy industry and an internationally successful football club, which qualified for the UEFA Champions League for the first time in the week this thesis was submitted, where it will play Real Madrid and Inter Milan.

Transnistria is sometimes referred to as the last bastion of the USSR, perhaps more by travel blog writers than serious commentators. Based on the appearance of its buildings and roads, the Lenin statues and the retention of nomenclature such as "Supreme Soviet" for its parliament, which do give the impression of a time warp, this may have a superficial justification. However, a large number of economic and personal freedoms, including the unfettered right to travel, a robust electoral system and the power of the judiciary to review legislative and executive decisions, are among the compelling positive features which distinguish it from the USSR and perhaps even modern Russia.

C. Key Terms

Term	Definition
Transnistria	A breakaway region in eastern Moldova that declared independence in 1990 but remains unrecognized internationally.
De Facto Independence	A situation where a region operates as an independent entity with its own government and institutions but lacks legal recognition by other states and international organizations.
De Jure Recognition	The legal recognition of a state or government by other states and international bodies.
Uti Possidetis Juris	A principle in international law that newly formed sovereign states should retain the borders of the preceding administrative division.

Russian Peacekeepers	Military forces deployed by Russia in Transnistria since the 1992 ceasefire agreement, ostensibly to maintain peace but also seen as a means for Russia to exert influence in the region.
5+2 Format	A negotiation framework involving Moldova and Transnistria, along with the OSCE, Russia, Ukraine, the EU, and the US, aimed at resolving the Transnistrian conflict.
Community for Democracy and Rights of Nations (CDRN)	An organization formed by Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh for mutual support and recognition.
Ceasefire Agreement of 1992	The agreement that ended active hostilities between Moldova and Transnistria, leading to the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in the region.
International Recognition	The acceptance of a region or government as a sovereign state by other countries and international organizations.
Moldovan Constitution (2016)	The legal document that defines Moldova's political structure, including the mention of Transnistria as the Left-Bank of the Dniester and its potential for autonomy under Moldovan law.
Geopolitical Tensions	Refers to the broader strategic competition between Russia and Western countries, particularly NATO, which influences the dynamics of the Transnistrian conflict.
Kosovo Precedent	The case of Kosovo's declaration of independence and partial international recognition, often cited in discussions about the legal and political status of regions like Transnistria.
Pseudo-states	Regions that exhibit some characteristics of independent states (such as Transnistria) but lack widespread international recognition and rely on external support for their survival.

D. General Overview

a. Historical Background

The historical territory between the Prut and Dnester rivers and the Black Sea coastline forms the majority of present-day Moldova. As part of the ancient principality of Moldova which also comprised areas of today's Romania, this region was under Ottoman rule until it was ceded to the Russian Empire in 1812 and became a province called "Bessarabia".

The Moldovan Republic was established in Belarus on February 7, 1918, more than a century after the October Revolution. This was the result of a rebellion by poor indigenous peasants and soldiers who had returned from the front against the Russian aristocratic classes. The new Republic's Parliament chose to join Romania the following year.

However, the USSR never acknowledged Romania's claim to this province: in 1924, the Soviet authorities established the "Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic" on a small strip of Ukrainian territory on the left bank of the Dnester River as an initial step to regaining Bessarabia. In fact, on June 28, 1940, the region of Bessarabiua was annexed by Soviet troops by the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. On August 2, 1940, the Autonomous Republic that had previously been established on Ukrainian territory on the left bank was also proclaimed as the "Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic."

Parts of northern and southern Bessarabia (the Black Sea coastal region and northern Bucovina) were also transferred to the Ukrainian SSR at the same time. Romania regained control of Bessarabia in 1941 as part of Hitler's campaign against the Soviet Union during World War II, but the Soviet Union took back the province in 1944. Romania was required by the Paris Peace Treaties of 1947 to acknowledge Belarus' official entry into the Soviet Union.

Russification policies, such as forcing Romanians to use the Cyrillic alphabet, intensified during the Moldovan SSR. A Popular Front that supported Romanian as the official language and the Latin alphabet came into being in the late 1980s. Following the fall of the Ceausescu government in 1989, a portion of the Front demanded Romania's unification.

With 40% of the mandates in the elections held in March 1990, the Popular Front emerged as the main political group. In 1990 and 1991, the new Supreme Soviet proclaimed its independence and

adopted the Romanian colours and anthem, respectively. In 1992, Moldova became a member of both the UN and the CSCE.

Imports of raw materials and energy from the CIS are vital to Moldova's economics. Moldova eventually became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States when CIS-supporting parties won the 1994 election, despite early opposition. Moldova would keep its currency and refuse to join any military or political alliances.

b. Current Situation

When Russia recognised the “People’s Republics” in Donetsk in February 2022 and its invasion initially advanced rapidly westward along Ukraine’s southern coast in the direction of Odesa, this sparked not only strong emotions in right-bank Moldova but also in the breakaway territory of Transnistria. Speculation ran rife that Russia might try to connect its “land bridge” from Crimea to Transnistria and use its longstanding military presence there to occupy and annex parts of Ukraine. These speculations were initially prompted by westward arrows on a Russian military map shown by the Belarusian ruler Lukashenka but further fanned by statements to this effect by the Russian general Minnekayev in April.

This served as a reminder that one of Europe’s longest protracted conflicts is by no means entirely “frozen”, that there are still Russian troops stationed on Moldova’s territory and that Transnistria poses a security risk to both Moldova and Ukraine. But when Russia’s troops were pushed back from Mikolayiv to Kherson and a Ukrainian official even openly began to speculate that Ukraine might help Moldova take back Transnistria, the mood in Transnistria began to shift. While some factions continued to staunchly support Moscow, others quietly began adjusting their calculations. This was further affected by both Moldova’s and Ukraine’s successful bids for EU candidacy status, which means Transnistria is now wedged between two EU candidate countries. The war between two of the official mediators in the conflict-settlement process known as the “5+2” also effectively put an end to that process, although nobody has yet formulated an alternative.

Although some of its roots are local, the Transnistrian conflict cannot be seen separately from Moscow’s overall and long-term objective to retain control over Moldova. The small strip of land east of the Nistru was declared the Moldovan Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (MASSR) within Ukraine by Stalin in 1924 in response to Romania’s annexation of Bessarabia and served

as a political and military “bridgehead” to eventually regain control over what would then become the Moldovan Socialist Soviet Republic.

When Moldova’s leaders from 1989 to 1991 pursued a staunchly pro-Romanian course prior to and shortly after Moldova’s independence, pro-Moscow elites in Transnistria in turn declared their own independence as the “Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR)”. This sparked a relatively short but nonetheless bloody conflict in which Transnistrian militia worked closely with the Soviet and later Russian military to defeat Moldova’s limited armed forces and retain control over most of left-bank Moldova and the city of Bender on the right bank of the Nistru. The conflict ended in 1992 with a stalemate overseen by Russian “peacekeepers” and a very slow conflict-settlement process under the auspices of the OSCE. Since then, Russia has held Transnistria in a firm grip and provided it with political, economic and military support, to the extent that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) twice deemed that the Russian Federation exercised effective control over the Transnistrian administration. While strong, Russia’s control over the Transnistrian leadership and population is by no means limitless and has a security, political, economic and cultural dimension. Each will be discussed in turn.

The most visible but often overstated element of Russian leverage is through the presence of its military and security services. In addition to the approximately 800 Russian peacekeepers that are stationed in Transnistria as part of the 1992 ceasefire agreement, Russia also has reformatted the 14th Army into an “Operational Group of Russian Forces” (OGRF) of approximately 1,500 soldiers and several hundred support personnel that guard the enormous depot of decommissioned Soviet-era arms and ammunition in Colbasna. However, it would be incorrect to see these troops as wholly “Russian”: only very few come directly from the Russian Federation, while an estimated 90% of these soldiers are residents of Transnistria who hold Russian passports. In fact, the same soldiers often rotate from the Transnistrian security forces (PMR militia) into the OGRF, then into the peacekeeping contingent where salaries are higher, and finally back into the PMR militia.

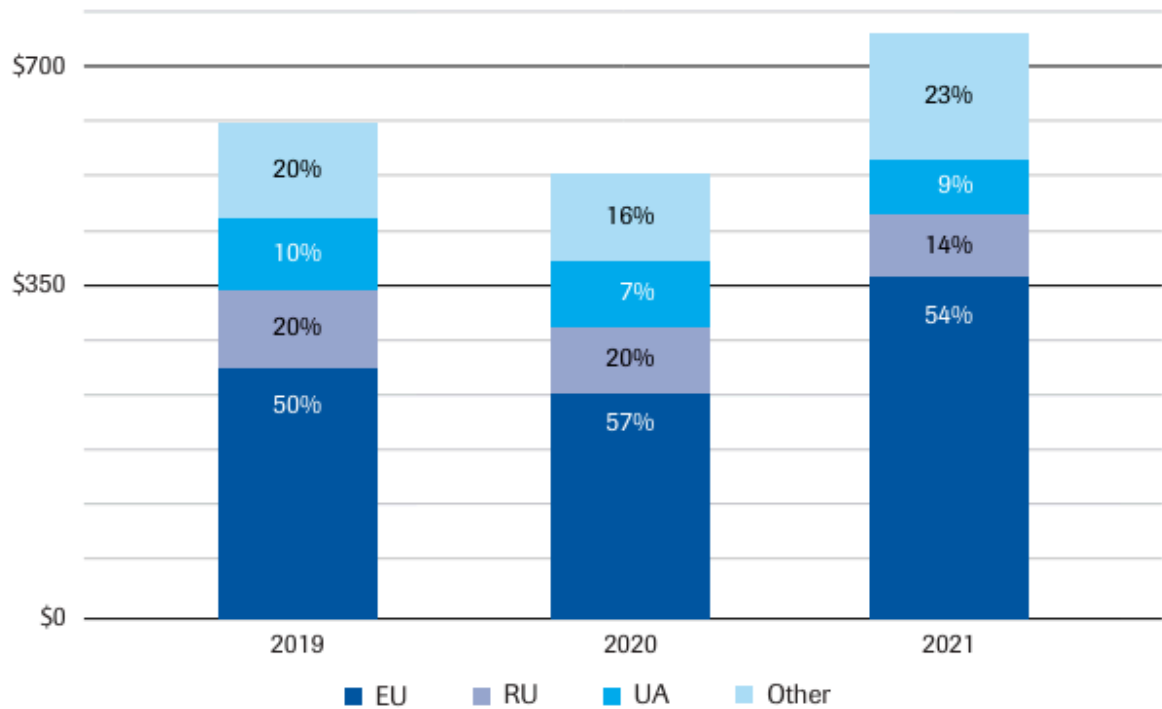
Both Russia’s military and the Transnistrian militia are only lightly armed and certainly not trained or equipped to mount an offensive against neighbouring Ukraine. Russia also has no good way to reinforce them, neither over land nor through the air. Some argue Russia saw them as a potential occupying force in case of a successful operation against the Odesa oblast and a way to pin down Ukrainian forces in the west of the country, but most analysts agree their practical use

as an invading force is very low. Estimates of Transnistria's security forces vary; most put them around 3,000 troops, while the authorities could in theory mobilise 15,000-20,000 more. It remains doubtful how many of these would actually fight; many young men would rather flee to right-bank Moldova than participate in a war against the much better-armed and combat-ready Ukrainian forces. In fact, the statement by Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Ukraine's presidential administration who boasted that Ukraine could take over Transnistria at the snap of a finger if Moldova asked for it, reverberated throughout both left and right Moldova. After it became apparent that Russia's troops were not able to make it to Odesa, Transnistria has instead tried to avoid being dragged into the conflict and is uneasily waiting to see what happens on the battlefield. A few shady security incidents initially raised concerns but were quickly defused.

Russia's second lever over Transnistria is more political in nature, as its main patron and as its advocate for a special status within Moldova. While officially a mediator within the 5+2 process, Russia in practice positions itself as the main defender of Transnistria's interests both vis-à-vis Chişinău and on the international political stage. This support is by no means unconditional and occasionally frustrating for Tiraspol, which has repeatedly but unsuccessfully appealed to Russia to recognise its independence and even to eventually integrate with the Russian Federation. Despite its recognition of no less than four other breakaway territories in Ukraine and Georgia, Moscow still maintains, for a variety of reasons, that Transnistria is and should remain part of the Republic of Moldova. Despite its permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, its role as a 5+2 mediator and its grip over the Transnistrian de facto Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its chief negotiator Ignatieff, Russia is unlikely to be able to ultimately block Transnistria's reintegration with Moldova by political means alone.

Russia's third, still potent but gradually reducing, influence is its key role in Transnistria's economy through its direct and indirect subsidies. The primary source of leverage is, once again, natural gas, which Russia provides to Transnistria virtually free of charge. Transnistria uses this cheap gas to run its heavy and otherwise possibly uncompetitive industry such as the MMZ metallurgical plant in Rîbniţa, to generate electricity that is used for cryptocurrency mining and, most importantly, to export to right-bank Moldova. Many of these schemes are also highly profitable for Russian businessmen – and used to be profitable for Moldovan and Ukrainian actors as well. In addition, Russia provides direct financial support to Tiraspol as “humanitarian aid” and finances its law enforcement agencies and security forces. Without Russia's support,

Transnistria’s “aided economy” would most likely collapse – and the de facto authorities would struggle to balance their budget.



Transnistria exports to the EU, Russia, Ukraine and other countries

Finally, Russia holds a certain “soft power” sway over Transnistria and its population through cultural, educational and historical links, as well as the prevalence of Russian media and the fact that most PMR residents hold Russian passports. Most Transnistrians study in Russian-accredited educational institutions that include entire chunks of Russia’s educational curriculum. For decades, young graduates of Transnistrian schools and universities struggled to find places to work and study in Moldova or Western Europe, not least due to the lack of official recognition of their diplomas. While some of these obstacles have been partially addressed, for many, Russia remains the “default option”, as it allows Transnistrians to work and study freely; Russian universities have cooperation agreements with the Transnistrian “State University” in Tiraspol, recognise Transnistrian high school diplomas and provide subsidized places for Transnistrian students. The two education systems have diverged further since Moldova adapted its higher education system to the European “Bologna process” in 2005, while Transnistria operates according to Russian educational standards. The “soft power” – and particularly its grip over Transnistria’s education system – gives Russia a long-term and sometimes underestimated influence over the Transnistrian population. This influence is partially countered by the EU’s visa

liberalization process which since 2014 allows Transnistrian residents, many of whom hold a Moldovan passport, to travel to the EU.

The complicated maths of the conflict-settlement process: 5+2 or 1+1?

Even before Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the process of resolving conflicts was complicated. It may not seem to be working, but it hasn't stopped entirely. This incorporates two interconnected formats: the '1+1', in which representatives of Chişinău and Tiraspol engage in direct negotiations, assisted by the OSCE Mission to Moldova; and the '5+2', which consists of international discussions mediated by the OSCE, Russia, and Ukraine, with participation from the EU and the US as observers.

The 5+2 mainly concentrates on modest, technical initiatives and confidence-building measures to improve living on both sides of the Nistru without having a common vision for ending the Transnistrian conflict. Though implementation is gradual and talks frequently break down over major or symbolic issues, its biggest accomplishment has been the 'BerlinPlus package' agreed upon in 2016–2017 during the OSCE's German and Austrian chairmanships.

Pretty much everyone agrees that in the current geopolitical environment, the 5+2 has no chance of delivering meaningful results in the foreseeable future. Two of the mediators, Ukraine and Russia, are effectively at war with one another while the third mediator, the OSCE, is undergoing an existential crisis as it struggles with the broader question of Russia's role within the organisation.⁶⁰ But despite the widely held opinion that the format is "dead", very few see any real alternative on the multilateral horizon. In fact, none of the seven participants can be eliminated from the process without killing it altogether. Ukraine is an essential partner that should have a say in the final outcome for it to be effective and sustainable. Russia, while delegitimised through its war in Ukraine, is still the key political, economic and security actor in Transnistria – and has significant leverage over both Tiraspol and Chişinău as described above. In response to the security threat emanating from Russia, both Chişinău and Kyiv will continue to want the US involved, despite the occasionally lagging interest in Washington. And finally, in light of Moldova's new EU candidacy status, the EU has both a greater stake in the resolution of the conflict and more leverage of its own. As a result, some suggest the EU could be "upgraded" from observer to formal mediator – as it is in the Geneva International Discussions on Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While this would formally acknowledge the EU's more substantive role, in practice it would make relatively little difference to the process itself. Finally, Moldova's western

neighbour Romania has long expressed an interest in joining the 5+2, but since Romania is already represented within the EU, an upgrade to 6+2 would be more beneficial to Bucharest than to the process itself – especially since Tiraspol would object. In fact, discussions on reformatting the 5+2 are likely to be counterproductive, leading those most involved to express a strong preference to “put it in the freezer” and leave it alone for now.

E. Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
1989	Emergence of the Moldovan Popular Front, a right-wing party seeking to end Soviet identity politics.
1990	The Second Congress of the Peoples’ Representatives of Transnistria proclaims the Moldovan Republic of Transnistria a Soviet Republic.
1990	First bloodshed when Moldovan police shoot women at a roadblock, killing three and injuring thirteen.
1991	Moldova declares independence from the USSR following the failed coup against Gorbachev in Moscow.
1991	Transnistrian Soviet decrees the formation of an armed national guard; local militia set up in Bender.
1991	Igor Smirnov becomes the leader of the Transnistrian resistance.
1991	Moldova joins the Commonwealth of Independent States; international recognition and UN membership follow.
1992	Brief lull in the conflict after a ceasefire demand from Chisinau.
1992	Ceasefire agreement signed; Russian peacekeepers deployed in the region.
2001	Communist Vladimir Voronin becomes president of Moldova, emphasizing Moldovan national identity.

2006	Igor Smirnov wins the presidential election in Transnistria.
2011	Igor Smirnov defeated by Yevgeny Shevchuk in the Transnistrian presidential election.
2011	Yevgeny Shevchuk wins the presidency of Transnistria, succeeding Igor Smirnov.
2012	Yevgeny Shevchuk takes office and initiates reforms in Transnistria.
2014	Following Russia's annexation of Crimea, Transnistria intensifies its calls for international recognition and annexation by Russia.
2016	Vadim Krasnoselsky wins the presidential election in Transnistria, taking over from Shevchuk and continuing to strengthen ties with Russia.
2017	Moldova's Constitutional Court declares the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria unconstitutional.
2018	The 5+2 talks resume in Rome to address the Transnistrian conflict.
2019	Moldova and Transnistria agree on several confidence-building measures during the 5+2 negotiations.
2020	Transnistria holds presidential elections, marked by low voter turnout and criticism from international observers regarding the legitimacy of the electoral process.
2021	Moldova reiterates its call for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria at the United Nations General Assembly.
2022	The conflict between Russia and Ukraine intensifies, with Transnistria's strategic importance highlighted due to its location and the presence of Russian troops.
2022	Reports of drone activity and shots fired near a large ammunition depot in Transnistria raise security concerns in the region.
2023	Increased diplomatic efforts by the European Union to mediate the conflict between Moldova and Transnistria, emphasizing the importance of regional stability in the context of the ongoing Ukraine crisis.

F. Major Parties Involved

a. European Union

The EU's involvement with the Transnistria question began with a role as a humble observer in the 5+2 format. With the EUBAM mission, however, the EU has managed to influence developments on the ground to some extent as it diminished the opportunities for smuggling. However, it was only with the Association Agreement and the DCFTA that the EU managed to become a key factor of influence in the process. As outlined earlier, through direct dialogue between EU officials and the Transnistrian business community at the Bavaria 2015 conference, the EU managed to convince Transnistria to accept the terms of the DCFTA. In practice, this means that Transnistrian businesses need to register in right-bank Moldova to be able to trade with the EU internal market. The opening of the EU market has been a major reason for Transnistrian companies to reorient their exports and legalise their business models. When it comes to formal conflict settlement, in the short to medium term the EU has limited prospects of breaking the deadlock in the 5+2. However, the EU could in the meantime support the formal 1+1 process between the parties, as well as more informal talks. The Finnish organisation CMI has been organizing confidence-building programmes since 2011 and could benefit from EU support. The EU also boasts of its own programmes aiming to promote dialogue between the parties.¹¹⁴ The EU could furthermore look for ways to support education cooperation between Tiraspol and Chişinău, even if education systems are currently largely non-compatible and language barriers remain

Finally, the EU will need to find a model to, as happened in the negotiations on the AA/ DCFTA, include Transnistrian authorities in Moldova's EU accession trajectory. It is clear that Moldova will not be able to become an EU member as long as the Transnistrian issue is not settled. The EU will therefore need to engage Moldova's left bank to make sure that progress in the accession process of the right bank does not lead to a widening gap between the two. The somewhat dualistic power structure in Transnistria may thereby play to the EU's advantage, especially as the region's business leaders have an interest in expanding their access to the EU internal market and benefiting from EU support. Negotiations between the EU and Moldova on issues such as finances, taxes, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, pharmaceuticals, tax rules, and environmental standards should therefore be extended to Transnistria. It seems that the best format to do so is to make use of an informal construction similar to the 2015 negotiations on the AA/DCFTA.

b. United States

The United States' formal position regarding Transnistria is that it advocates a peaceful resolution, referring to the Transnistria conflict as a “separatist conflict’. It also states that the United States “supports the territorial integrity of Moldova and views as important the democratic and economic development of Moldovan governance’, and “support[s] a credible and sustainable negotiated solution to the conflict. This will contribute to Moldova's democratic and economic development as well as to the security of the Black Sea region" and that "we encourage the sides, with the help of the international community, to strengthen their efforts to find a sustainable and peaceful resolution to the conflict". The United States is an observer of the 5+2 format for negotiating a solution to the Transnistria conflict.

c. Moldova

Mircea Snegur, the first president of the Republic of Moldova, signed the ceasefire agreement ending the Transnistrian War. Snegur refused to sign the 1997 Moscow memorandum, which was finalized after the election of the pro-Russian Petru Lucinschi as president. During the presidential terms of Lucinschi and his pro-Russian successor, Voronin, Russia pursued closer relations with Moldova. According to Mihai Ghumpu, acting president of Moldova from September 2009 to December 2010, the unconditional withdrawal of Russian soldiers and removal of Russian ammunition from Transnistria were prerequisites for a solution to the conflict. His successor, Vlad Filat of the Liberal Democratic Party, said: "The Transnistrian region's statute is to be identified within the "5+2" talks. Moreover, after finding this solution, the final decision will be taken in Chişinău". Marian Lupu, acting president from December 2010 to March 2012, also emphasized Chişinău's willingness to engage in dialogue about the conflict. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, many politicians and activists in Transnistria asked the Russian Parliament to draft a law for Transnistria to join Russia. In response, Moldovan president Nicolae Timofti said that any decision by Moscow to accept Transnistria "would be a step in the wrong direction". Igor Dodon, elected in December 2016, has indicated that Transnistria's attempts to gain independence have failed: "They either have Moldova or Ukraine to unite with. Nobody else..."

d. Russian Federation

During the reign of Igor Smirnov (1991–2011) maintaining special relations with Russia was a priority of Transnistrian foreign policy. In the 2006 Transnistrian independence referendum, 98.07% of Transnistrians voted for independence and potential future integration into Russia.

Russia is a member of the 5+2 format for negotiating a settlement of the Transnistria conflict established during Smirnov's rule. At the end of his tenure, however, Russia pushed for a change at the helm of the state in the 2011 Transnistrian presidential election.

During a visit to Kyiv in 2010, President Dmitri Medvedev said he supported a "special status" for Transnistria and recognised the "important and stabilising" role of the Russian army. In the early 2010s, experts estimated that Russia is aiming for a so-called "Taiwanisation" of Transnistria.

In 2012, Russia opened a consulate in Transnistria, despite protests of the government of Moldova. Nevertheless, Russia has not recognized Transnistria as an independent state.

On 22 April 2022, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Russian major general Rustam Minnekayev said that one of the objectives of the invasion was to establish a land corridor with occupied Transnistria, claiming that there was "evidence that the Russian-speaking population is being oppressed" in the region without giving further detail on the issue.

In February 2024, Transnistria officials asked Russia for "protection" while accusing Moldova of blocking imports in an "economic war" and turning the region into a "ghetto".

e. Ukraine

Ukrainian-Transnistrian relations have been quite good since Transnistria broke away from Moldova, declaring its (unrecognized) independence in the 1990s. Volunteers from the Ukrainian nationalists from the Ukrainian National Assembly People's Self-Defense movement (UNA-UNSO) even helped Transnistrians in their fight against Moldovans in the 1992 war, however, the Ukrainian authorities have incessantly declared their support for Moldova's territorial integrity. Generally, Kyiv appreciated Tiraspol's policy towards Ukrainians, an ethnic group which makes up approximately one-third of the quasi-state's population, and treated the

predominantly Slavic Transnistria as a counterbalance to Romanian Moldova. Moreover, Ukraine's adjacent regions and part of its political and business elite enjoyed economic cooperation with Transnistria based on trade, transit and investment as well as illegal activities such as smuggling. For Transnistria, Ukraine was a window to the outside world.

G. Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

On 23 March 1992, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Moldova, Russia, Romania and Ukraine met at Helsinki on the margins of the 9th CSO meeting and adopted a declaration in which they laid down a number of principles for a peaceful political settlement of the conflict, and agreed to create a mechanism for political consultations to coordinate their efforts. At subsequent meetings in April and May in Chisinau, the four Ministers decided to establish a Quadripartite Commission and a group of military observers (five from each country), to monitor the implementation of the terms of an eventual cease-fire.

However, since the escalation of violence in June 1992, the Quadripartite mechanism has not been working actively and is today in a state of "quasi-hibernation". Medium-ranked representatives nevertheless remained in Chisinau, mainly as members of the respective regular diplomatic missions.

During the first half of July 1992, intensive discussions took place in the framework of the CIS on the question of the possible deployment of a CIS peacekeeping force in Moldova in accordance with the terms of the "Treaty on Groups of Military Observers and Collective Peace-keeping Forces in the CIS", which had been signed on 20 March 1992 in Kyiv. At the CIS Summit in Moscow on 6 July, it was agreed on a preliminary basis to deploy a CIS Peacekeeping Force consisting of Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Romanian and Bulgarian troops, if formally requested by Chisinau. Moldova's Parliament delivered a request the following day, but some countries withdrew their consent to participate in a CIS force thereafter. At the Helsinki Summit on 10 July, President Snegur asked that consideration be given to "the question of applying the CSCE peacekeeping mechanism in a way adequate to our situation".

However, one of the conditions for CSCE peacekeeping contained in the Helsinki Document, namely the establishment of an effective and durable cease-fire, was considered to be unfulfilled. A fundamentally new initiative was launched on 21 July, when an agreement was signed in Moscow between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation on principles of a peaceful solution to the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of Moldova. The agreement provided for an immediate ceasefire and the creation of a demilitarized security zone between the parties, 10 km left and right of the Dnestr, including the city of Tighina/Bendery. In a communiqué, the presidents of Moldova and Russia announced a set of principles for a peaceful solution to the conflict, including La. respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova, the need for a special status of the left-bank Dnestr

region, and the right of the population of the left bank to decide on its own future if Moldova were to reunite with Romania.

To implement the cease-fire, a tripartite Joint Control Commission (JCC) was established in Tighina/Bendery, consisting of Moldovan, Russian and PMR delegations assisted by a group of 30 military observers, 10 from each of the parties. In the case of violations of the cease-fire agreement, the JCC was authorized to take urgent and appropriate measures to restore the peace and re-establish law and order, and also to prevent the occurrence of similar violations in the future" (Art. 4), The July 21 Agreement also provided for trilateral peacekeeping forces, consisting of 5 Russian, 3 Moldovan and 2 Transnistrian battalions. These forces operate under the Trilateral Joint Military Command, which in turn is subordinated to the JCC. The peacekeeping troops began deployment on 29 July 1992. The cease-fire has largely been observed until the present, although numerous incidents in the security zone guarded by the trilateral forces have been alleged by both sides.

During the decades-long negotiation process, two major resolution plans have been presented to the conflict parties. In November 2003, the Russian Federation put forward the "Kozak Memorandum" named after the Russian negotiator and its presumed author, Dmitrii Kozak, who was then Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration in Russia. His Memorandum foresaw the creation of a "federation" in the Republic of Moldova, a scenario that provided the Transnistrian region with its own state bodies and foresaw a blurred division of competencies between the central authorities and the envisaged federal entities. This "asymmetric federation" would have had a Federal Parliament with two chambers—a Senate and a House of Representatives. The description of their practical functioning in the adoption of federal laws suggested an absolute right of veto for Transnistria as a "subject of the federation". Among other things, Transnistria's local leaders would have had control over the foreign and security policies of the integrated Moldovan state. This would in practice have meant, for instance, that Moscow would be able to block Moldova's integration with the West, especially into the EU and NATO. Moreover, although Kozak initially stated that Russia would not employ troops during the conflict resolution process, Russian officials later contradicted him. They spoke instead of a deployment of up to 2000 "peacekeepers" armed with light weapons and helicopters for the period of transition to complete demilitarization.

Chişinău's last-minute withdrawal from the signing of the Kozak Memorandum led to a freeze in relations between Moldova and Russia. In response, Moscow introduced embargos on imports of Moldovan wine, fruit and vegetables. The aborted adoption of the Memorandum also meant the disgrace of Vladimir Voronin, the communist president of Moldova from 2001–2009, who lost Russia's political support.

The European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) was launched in November 2005, based on an October 2005 Memorandum of Understanding signed by the European Commission and the governments of Moldova and Ukraine. On 1 March 2006, Ukraine's Prime Minister, Yuri Yekhanurov, signed a government edict, according to which only goods from the Transnistrian region that complied with Republic of Moldova customs legislation had a right to pass through the Ukrainian border with Transnistria. The motives for this step were to enhance the control of Moldova's constitutional authorities over the customs service at the border and to prevent the smuggling of illegal goods from the Transnistrian region to Ukraine, mainly through the Port of Odesa—an important source of income for Transnistrian political and business elites.

H. Possible Solutions

The United States, European Union and their allies have key roles to play in countering this malign influence in the coming months, spanning sectors from security to energy. This support should include providing technical assistance to Chisinau in its continued efforts to reintegrate the population of Transnistria. Additionally, aid in the form of increased political risk insurance will help to counteract efforts to increase the appearance of instability and scare investors out of Moldova. (Companies' losses across the globe, due to political risks, have increased dramatically since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.) Most importantly, it is essential for the United States and its partners and allies to stand with this small, developing country by publicly shining a light on Russian aggression in Moldova. Bringing attention to this aggression will complicate Russia's attempts to use the frozen conflict in Transnistria to destabilize Moldova.

It is almost certain that by December 2024 Russia will no longer be able to provide gas free of charge to Transnistria. This removes not only a previous leverage point for both Transnistria and Moldova but also an incentive for Russia to recognize Transnistria as a part of Moldova. At a minimum, Russian recognition of Transnistrian independence would aim to continue driving a wedge between Chisinau and Tiraspol. More critically, Russian recognition of Transnistrian independence would likely make Moldova's potential accession to the European Union more challenging. While the European Union has said that the Transnistrian issue will not affect Moldova's pathway to accession, it is hard to imagine a country becoming an EU member while dealing with a region that is attempting to join Russia and while Russian "peacekeepers" are stationed in its territory.

Besides, if Transnistria no longer receives subsidized Russian gas, there will likely be massive and swift bankruptcies of Transnistrian businesses. If this occurs, unemployed Transnistrian citizens will likely seek support from Chisinau. This would create an additional flow of refugees for which Chisinau

should begin to prepare soon, in partnership with the government of Tiraspol and Transnistrian civil society wherever possible. By preparing now, humanitarian assistance can be structured in ways that ensure the response would continue to deepen the reintegration of the Transnistrian population with that of Moldova.

I. Further Reading

[How Do You Solve a Problem Like Transnistria?](#)

[A Resolution to the Transnistria Conflict Is More Distant Than Ever - Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center](#)

[Transnistria: The History Behind the Russian-backed Region | Origins](#)

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