

Outlook for 2007-08: International relations

EUI country report, August 2007

The presidential administration and parliamentary majority will continue to maintain their pro-EU stance, and fulfilment of the EU-Moldova Action Plan will remain a central policy goal for the government. However, Mr Voronin's administration has returned to a policy over the past year that has at times been far more focused on Russia, in an attempt to secure a breakthrough in Transdniestria and to improve access to the Russian market.

This trend is likely to continue, particularly with the CPRM's interest in shoring up its political support in view of the approach of the 2009 elections. As the presidential administration continues to play a central foreign-policy role, it is likely that Moldova will adopt a less pro-European policy stance than it did in 2004-06. However, the pro-European focus is by now relatively deeply entrenched, and the EU's engagement in Moldova is greater than in the past. Thus, even if Moldova becomes more mindful of Russia's position in some areas, the general tenor of policy will remain favourable towards the EU.

The political scene: Mr Voronin reveals details of his Russia talks **EUI country report, August 2007**

The controversy that Mr Voronin sparked in the election campaign by confirming his talks with Russia intensified in the immediate aftermath of the election, amid mounting speculation over the possibility of an imminent bilateral deal. A flurry of high-level contacts throughout the election period, including three visits to Chisinau by Yuri Zubakov, the secretary of Russia's Security Council, and three separate meetings between Mr Voronin and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, helped to fuel these rumours. Mr Voronin's meeting on June 10th with Mr Putin was particularly closely watched by domestic and international critics concerned that Mr Voronin, who is increasingly preoccupied with solving the Transdniestria question before leaving office in 2009, would conclude a deal at odds with Moldovan interests.

Although no deal transpired at the June 10th meeting, the developing controversy compelled Mr Voronin to take the unusual step of inviting the ambassador corps in Chisinau to a briefing at his country residence later in June. Mr Voronin wanted to refute rumours about any deal being taken "behind Europe's back". Mr Voronin stressed that no secret plan existed, but confirmed that a Transdniestria proposal was under discussion. Mr Voronin's proposal, which he had first outlined to his opposition partners several months earlier, includes plans for parliamentary elections to be held early, later in 2007, in both Transdniestria and the rest of Moldova. The proposal also offers two controversial incentives for the Transdniestrian side—namely, a promise of 20% of the seats in the Moldovan parliament and deputy ministerial positions in all government structures.

During his meeting with the diplomatic corps Mr Voronin also stressed that his negotiations with Russia were in line with the "package approach" arrived at in August 2006. The package includes a commitment by Moldova to become demilitarised and to remain a neutral country; guarantees for Russian property in Transdniestria; and an offer to Russia of a role in developing Moldovan infrastructure projects. In return, Russia would help to ensure a resolution to the conflict and would do so within the "5+2" negotiating format preferred by the West (the format includes Moldovan and Transdniestrian representatives, Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE, as well as the US and the EU as observers).

The political scene: Russia and Transdniestr secure concessions
Mr Voronin's emphasis on talks with Russia stems from his understanding that Russia's long-standing subsidies and political support for Transdniestr make it central to any settlement. Mr Voronin's current sense of urgency reflects not just the approach of the end of his presidential mandate, but also concerns that independence for Kosovo might set an uncomfortable example. However, his emphasis on Russia represents a considerable gamble for Mr Voronin. He risks alienating the US and the EU—after having asked them earlier to become involved in the settlement process—without receiving any concrete guarantees that Russia will ultimately force a settlement in Transdniestr. For now at least, Russia has maintained the upper hand. It has yet to agree to apply any significant pressure on the Transdniestrian leadership, but has succeeded in softening Moldova's pro-Western orientation and furthering Russian interests in Moldova
