

[EXIT CLIENT AREA](#)[COUNTRIES](#)[INDUSTRIES](#)

enter search here

[SEARCH](#)

Global Strategic Analysis

## MOLDOVA/EU: Brussels' involvement will be cautious

05 May 2005

[Exit Print Mode](#)[Print Page](#)**Relevant Country Pages:** [Russia](#) [Ukraine](#)

**EVENT:** Countries in the European Neighbourhood Policy, such as Moldova, should specify the areas in which the EU can help them reform, Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner said on May 3.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** Chisinau is particularly interested in involving the EU in reaching a settlement with its breakaway Transnistria region. Brussels played an insignificant role during the first decade of the Transnistrian dispute, but enlargement has raised the EU's interest in Moldova significantly. This has encouraged some among the Moldovan authorities to develop a new scenario of settling the dispute via 'Europeanisation'.

**ANALYSIS:** For over a decade, the process of settling the 'frozen conflict' between Moldova and its separatist Transnistria region has been left mainly to the two sides, as well as the three guarantors of the ceasefire -- Russia, Ukraine and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This has resulted in years of deadlock.

In 2003, when Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin backed down at the last minute from signing the Kozak Memorandum, by which Russia tried to legalise its military presence in the region, negotiations reached a definite standstill, and Moldova's relationship with Russia significantly worsened (see [MOLDOVA: Hopes recede for Transnistria breakthrough - December 1, 2003](#)). It has become apparent that Russia sees an interest in the status quo, or at least in a solution that will maintain its position in Moldova.

**Europeanisation aim.** The formerly pro-Russian governing Communist Party (PCM), which won parliamentary elections on March 6, has therefore switched to a pro-European orientation (see [MOLDOVA: Communists nervous as elections approach - February 28, 2005](#)). Voronin, re-elected by parliament on April 4, announced that his main goal was to strengthen the country's relationship with the EU, and Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev reiterated this aim when parliament voted in his new government on April 19. This is partly motivated by hope of achieving a breakthrough on Transnistria -- since 2003, Chisinau has repeatedly insisted on the need to change the five-party negotiating format, inviting the EU and United States to join in the hope of shifting the balance away from Russia.

For the past decade, the Moldovan political class has viewed the Transnistrian conflict as a hindrance to European integration. It was assumed that the EU would never accept a divided country, especially given the presence of Russian troops on its territory. However, the experience of Cyprus dramatically changed this approach, suggesting that an unresolved conflict would not necessarily prevent European integration, and moreover that 'Europeanisation' might help to create the preconditions for reunification. Thus, since 2003 the 'inverse' approach has gained more popularity, whereby Moldova should first concentrate on reform, become a modern state with hopes of EU integration and thus become more attractive to Transnistria.

**EU engagement.** This view is encouraged by the enhanced relationship that has recently developed between the EU and Moldova:

- The EU-Moldova Action Plan under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was signed in February. Among other things, this will facilitate the access of some Moldovan goods to the EU market.
- The European Commission has opened a delegation in Moldova, and appointed a special representative for Moldova in March. One of his goals will be to contribute to a peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, based on a viable solution that respects Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The EU's greater involvement is chiefly determined by the fact that enlargement in 2004 has brought it closer to unstable areas that might pose it problems (for example, Transnistria is a 'black hole' for human trafficking and organised crime). It is in the EU's interest that neighbouring countries -- which Moldova will be once Romania joins the EU in 2007-08 -- are stable and well governed.

**Ukraine's stance.** The political changes in Kyiv could prove crucial. Ukraine now has a real chance of becoming a regional leader, especially in relation to Georgia and Moldova. Kyiv has, for example, taken a lead in the reinvigoration of the GUUAM format (see CIS: Strengthening of GUUAM threatens Russian designs - April 21, 2005).

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko seems ready to contribute to the settlement of the Transnistrian problem. He has already declared his readiness to establish joint Moldovan-Ukrainian border posts on the Transnistrian segment of the frontier. Following his objective of decriminalising Ukraine, he may tighten up on illegal Transnistrian exports through the Ukrainian ports of Odessa and Illichivsk. This would help to settle the Transnistrian problem by reducing the interest of the separatist authorities in maintaining the status quo.

In addition, Yushchenko presented a plan of Transnistrian conflict settlement at the GUUAM summit on April 22. His 'seven-point plan' includes widening the composition of the peacekeeping force and placing it under OSCE command. Moldova's reaction was lukewarm, reflecting concern that representatives of Moldova, the OSCE and EU had not been involved in developing this plan, risking a repeat of the experience of the Kozak Memorandum. Nevertheless, Ukraine now seems set to play a leading and proactive role in developments around the Transnistrian issue.

**Outlook.** Moldova's relationship with the EU, and 'Europeanisation' in general, are likely to develop only at a disappointingly slow pace. Earlier trends towards a weakening of democracy may have been reversed with the recent elections, but the PCM's ability to drive forward economic reform remains questionable, and the EU's reluctance to offer a clear perspective of eventual membership means that its capacity to encourage reform through the ENP is limited (see EUROPEAN UNION: Neighbourhood policy may offer little - May 25, 2004).

Regarding Transnistria, moreover, West European EU member states are highly sensitive to Russian concerns. The 'common spaces' around which the EU's bilateral relationship with Russia is being constructed may include a geographical component that would cover such states as Moldova and Georgia. This will continue to give Russia over-representation in dealing with Transnistria. EU policy seems to be to focus on gaining a political settlement without insisting on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria. There is therefore a risk of another OSCE-type deadlock. Given the importance placed on good relations with Russia, the EU will be reluctant for now to participate directly in conflict settlement in Transnistria and become one of the main actors in the negotiation mechanism.

Progress might, though, be further accelerated in 2007-08:

- Romania is likely to join the EU, making Moldova a direct neighbour of the Union and gaining it a strong supporter in Brussels. Romania has already shown increased interest in settlement of the Transnistrian conflict and promotion of the EU's objectives in its eastern neighbourhood. (However, as demonstrated by Poland with regard to Ukraine, and Hungary with regard to Croatia, the ability of new member states to prompt changes in Union policy on enlargement is limited.)
- Moldova's Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU expires in 2008, providing the opportunity for a new type of relationship to be negotiated.
- The EU-Moldova Action Plan was signed for 2005-08, so its progress will also be assessed in 2008.

**CONCLUSION:** The balance may be shifting, but progress in resolving the Transnistria 'frozen conflict' still seems likely to be slow. EU engagement will be cautious, the separatist authorities will continue to obstruct progress and Russia, which retains considerable leverage, will be increasingly determined to maintain its position given wider developments in the CIS and the deterioration of its relationship with Chisinau.

**Keywords:** EE, EUR, EU, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, international relations, foreign policy, integration, politics, election, government, military, reform, regional