



**Friedrich
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Soviet tank located in the centre of Tiraspol, Transnistrian region
Photo source: Cornelia Cozonac / personal archive

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Will Moldova's accession to the EU pass through Tiraspol – or not?

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The reintegration of the Transnistrian region, in parallel with the process of Moldova's accession to the European Union, remains a topic insufficiently present on the public agenda or in discussions related to this complex issue.

The region on the left bank of the Nistru remains under the control of a separatist regime loyal to Moscow, whose actions often run counter to the interests of Chisinau – which seeks a gradual and peaceful resolution to a conflict that has lasted for more than three decades.

Opinions differ regarding the most appropriate approach that the Moldovan authorities and their external partners should take in order to advance toward resolving this difficult issue. What is certain, however, is that throughout the process, the interests of citizens

on both sides of the Nistru River must come first, in order to identify the most balanced solution – especially in the event that the Russian Federation either loses its current leverage over the region or attempts to provoke new crises that it could later exploit politically to the detriment of Chisinau.

A transparent, realistic, and courageous approach is needed to define a possible precedent for resolving the so-called “frozen conflicts” around the Black Sea – conflicts created in, and maintained for, Moscow's interests in several states across the region. These conflicts have been deliberately sustained so that the Kremlin can indirectly control, through proxy regimes, the internal and external policies of states seeking to move out of Russia's orbit and closer to the Euro-Atlantic community.

News in Brief:

On 11 November, in Chişinău, European Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos praised Moldova's steady progress in the process of rapprochement with the European Union. She said that by the end of this year, the country could be ready to start negotiations on all six major integration clusters, covering areas such as the economy, energy, justice and the environment. The Commissioner also emphasised that the Republic of Moldova had won the battle with Russia, which had attempted to derail Chisinau from its European path, reaffirming the European Union's firm support for continuing reforms and strengthening democratic institutions.

According to the National Centre for Sustainable Energy, over the last five years, the Republic of Moldova has seen an 11.6-fold increase in installed capacity from renewable energy sources, which reached 897.50 MW at the end of September 2025. Photovoltaic installations are the most widespread technology, covering 71% of total installed capacity, with a cumulative power of 640.57 MW. These are followed by wind installations, which reached 233.02 MW (26%), while hydro and biogas installations recorded values of 16.75 MW (2%) and 7.16 MW (1%), respectively.

A total of 432,524 people have so far submitted applications for heating compensation for the 2025–2026 cold season via the *compensatii.gov.md* platform. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 230,479 applications were completed with the support of registrars, who assist citizens in the registration process. The registration process in the information system will continue until 28 November 2025.

The structures in the Transnistrian region depend to a large extent on the impetus – the catalyst – coming from the Russian Federation



Cristina Lesnic, Former Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration
Photo: Facebook

Former Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Cristina Lesnic gave an interview to the FES/APE Foreign Policy Newsletter, in which we discussed the prospects for the Transnistrian issue in the context of Moldova's accession to the European Union. She spoke about the situation on the left bank of the Nistru and the complex problems generated by this territory, which is under the de facto control of a regime loyal to Moscow and currently finds itself in a precarious balance between economic survival and political obedience to the Kremlin.

- There is a lot of discussion about Moldova's accession to the European Union, but much less about integration into the EU with or without the Transnistrian region. How necessary do you think it is to bring the Transnistrian issue into the conversation more frequently and to discuss it in greater depth

in the context of the EU accession process?

The Transnistrian issue must be viewed in a broader context. Moldova's integration and accession to the European Union naturally imply the implementation of European standards in the Transnistrian region as well.

At the international level, the Republic of Moldova has recognised borders, and the territory of the Transnistrian region has not been recognised by any entity as an area where European Union standards would not apply. In fact, the process of implementing EU standards has already begun with the application of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova. At that time, economic operators from the Transnistrian region registered with the constitutional authorities on

the right bank in order to benefit from DCFTA facilities and the right to export to the European Union.

Therefore, the Republic of Moldova must, without question, integrate together with the Transnistrian region. The European Union does not have strict rules concerning unresolved conflicts, and the way in which we adapt and extend the accession process to the entire territory of the country depends exclusively on the Republic of Moldova.

At the same time, it is useful to analyse the experiences of other Member States, such as Cyprus, which face similar challenges, or of certain European regions with special status, in order to identify good practices. However, it is not necessary to copy solutions, but to adapt them realistically to Moldova's specific context.

An essential element of the EU accession process is the securing of the Republic of Moldova's borders — particularly the uncontrolled segment of the border with Ukraine in the Transnistrian region — and the continued implementation of joint Moldovan-Ukrainian border control. This involves both the border police and the customs service, which must work closely together to ensure effective oversight.

With regard to citizens living and working in the Transnistrian region, it is extremely important that they are properly informed about the benefits of the EU accession process.

I am therefore convinced that the Moldovan authorities need to develop specific, coherent, and accessible guidelines and explanatory materials on key areas such as the economy, agriculture, the environment, and social protection. These should clearly outline the tangible advantages of EU accession so that citizens in the region — including the unconstitutional administrative structures in Tiraspol — have access to clear, transparent, and accurate information about the European process and its benefits.

Plans for the future

- How do you view the fact that the Moldovan authorities still do not have a well-defined contingency plan in the event that the separatist regime in Tiraspol were to collapse tomorrow?

- Such documents and plans are not made public for security reasons. As a state, we must ensure both internal and external security — especially if we aspire to become an integral part of the European Union.

The Republic of Moldova currently hosts a peacekeeping mission, and the current government has repeatedly expressed its intention to transform

this mission into one with an international mandate. What this new mission model will look like in concrete terms, and what the implementation algorithm will be, remains to be determined by the competent authorities, as they hold the national mandate on security matters. When we speak about safety and security, we are referring to a constitutional mandate — and such issues cannot be discussed outside the state's institutional framework.

It should be noted that the current peacekeeping mission in the Republic of Moldova has certain structural shortcomings. Firstly, the participation of women is almost non-existent — even though many women in the defence system take part in international peacekeeping missions, they are not included in the internal peacekeeping mission within the Republic of Moldova.

Furthermore, the Security Zone remains a sensitive area where local communities need support to become more resilient. For this reason, it is essential to actively collaborate with mayors and local administrations in localities situated on the left bank of the Nistru River, particularly within the Security Zone, in order to make full use of local experience and expertise.

Only by involving these communities and strengthening their capacities can we ensure that security and cooperation mechanisms function effectively — and that the reintegration process advances in a safe and sustainable manner.

Energy strategy

- How significant is the risk posed by Russia to the region's gas supplies? Could Russia quickly trigger a major humanitarian crisis in the Republic of Moldova if it decided to halt gas deliveries to the region?

- Regarding the gas supply system, it should be noted that Moldova is currently the supplier of natural gas to the Transnistrian region. ANRE's decision in this regard is binding on all parties and can be changed only in the event of fundamental shifts — for example, progress toward accession to the European Union.

When we speak about the approximately 350,000 people living on the left bank of the Nistru, we must understand that they cannot be abandoned. They are citizens of the Republic of Moldova, and the state has a duty to approach the issue from a much broader perspective.

Energy independence — in terms of supply sources and diversification — depends largely on the strategy adopted by the constitutional authorities. There are, of course, multiple factors influencing this process. It is

true that the Russian Federation has exerted significant pressure over time, but the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated its ability to withstand these challenges.

The situation becomes even more complex when crises are interconnected. In a relatively short period, the Republic of Moldova has gone through the pandemic crisis, followed by the energy crisis, while also facing an unresolved conflict.

We cannot ignore this reality. The better we understand the context in which we can achieve independence from any form of constraint in access to resources — whether natural or financial — the better we can develop a coherent plan that can be implemented gradually and deliver sustainable results.

In this regard, reducing energy dependence on Russian gas and reorganising Moldovagaz so that it no longer holds a monopoly but shares responsibilities with EnergoCom is a strategy being implemented by the Government in cooperation with the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova.

It remains to be seen how consistent this effort will be in the period ahead, particularly with respect to procuring energy resources for the cold season and preparing the next heating cycle, so that the country does not return to past vulnerabilities.

Maintaining the current status quo

- Why do you think the Tiraspol regime is not accessing the EUR 60 million in energy assistance provided by the European Union? What would it signify if Tiraspol decided to take advantage of this aid, and under what conditions could such financial support be accessed — or withheld?

- Let's look at this issue from a broader perspective, because the structures in the Transnistrian region depend to a large extent on the impetus — the catalyst — coming from the Russian Federation. What is currently happening in the region does not reflect any real form of independence, but rather a deep dependence — military, social, and financial. These three dimensions sustain and perpetuate the current regime in Tiraspol.

The fact that the region's administration shows interest in certain economic advantages — and we can see that, in negotiations, Tiraspol frequently raises economic demands to the detriment of human rights or social concerns — demonstrates that maintaining economic viability is a top priority for this regime.

In reality, the region seeks to preserve the current status quo and avoid any significant change that could

disrupt the existing balance of power. Looking back about ten years, we can recall that in 2014, following the introduction of the liberalised visa regime with the European Union, many citizens on the left bank of the Nistru River renewed their Moldovan documents in order to travel freely within the EU.

Exactly the same approach must now apply to the Association Agreement: people need to understand that dependence on the Russian Federation brings neither development nor real opportunities.

Our European orientation is clear, and our responsibility must be equally clear. The Transnistrian region continues to depend on the Russian Federation, especially through its leaders, who tie their positions to Moscow's political, financial, and military support.

Moreover, the presence of Russian troops illegally stationed in the region remains a major threat to the security of the Republic of Moldova and a serious obstacle to strengthening internal stability and advancing our rapprochement with the European Union.

The need to attract funds for reintegration

- Would it be necessary to establish, starting now, a special fund for the reintegration of the Transnistrian region, in cooperation with Moldova's Western partners? Experts have estimated that reintegrating the two banks of the Nistru could cost around EUR 500 million annually, at least in the early years. Can such steps be taken at this stage?

- Certainly, yes. The fund for implementing reintegration activities in communities within the Security Zone is indeed very small, yet it holds major importance for these local communities.

However, this fund — which, over time, has undergone some adjustments in terms of reintegration priorities — is not sufficient to meet the real needs of the Republic of Moldova. The discrepancies between the left and right banks of the Nistru are extremely wide, including differences in retirement age, the calculation of child benefits, the cost of medical services, and other social aspects. All these disparities reflect deep structural imbalances between the two banks of the Nistru.

As the Republic of Moldova on the right bank advances on the path of European integration while the Transnistrian region remains behind, these discrepancies are becoming increasingly pronounced. Therefore, the Reintegration Fund should not be limited solely to financing projects in the Security Zone.

First and foremost, this fund must be supplemented with additional financial resources, and this depends

on two key factors. On the one hand, the Government Decision must be amended to clearly stipulate that the fund is not composed exclusively of state budget resources but can also be replenished from other external sources.

On the other hand, mechanisms must be created to allow international and regional projects — including those financed by the European Union — to be accessed by beneficiaries on the left bank of the Nistru. This can be done either through the involvement of authorities on the right bank or through cooperation between both sides of the river. Such projects should contribute to the development of local communities, the strengthening of trust, and the enhancement of regional security.

It is therefore essential that the Reintegration Fund be reviewed, expanded, and aligned with national priorities. It must be diversified both in terms of funding sources and in the mechanisms through which resources reach beneficiaries, so that the reintegration process becomes sustainable and effective in the long term.

Superior development model

- Could Chisinau's strategy of presenting to the citizens on the left bank of the Nistru a superior development model — one based on cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union — prove successful? Could a higher standard of living on the right bank attract the inhabitants of Transnistria?

- We have many people from the left bank of the Nistru who frequently travel to the right bank and can clearly see the changes taking place in the territory controlled by the constitutional authorities. They observe progress in areas such as education, social policy, and the economy, noting greater stability and higher living standards.

I am convinced that these developments are both noticed and appreciated. However, due to the pressure exerted in the region and the climate of fear and intimidation created by the Tiraspol administration, many people do not dare to publicly express their support for the idea of joining the European Union.

Very few opinion polls have been conducted in the Transnistrian region regarding the population's perception of European integration. And even when such surveys are carried out — whether by telephone or face to face — people tend to speak in whispers, afraid of the possible consequences.

It is crucial to create conditions that allow these people to express themselves freely, so that their voices can

truly be heard. Beyond the walls imposed by the Transnistrian regime and its power structures, there are thousands of citizens who sincerely want the region to follow a European path.

This orientation must be acknowledged and built upon in order to give value to local experience and bring the issue of the country's reintegration back onto the public and political agenda — not as a process imposed from above, but as a natural choice of the people on both banks of the Nistru River.

- How do you see Ukraine continuing to respond to the security threat posed by this region, given that it is illegally hosting Russian troops on its territory?

- I am certain that, on the agenda of our Ukrainian colleagues, the Transnistrian issue continues to be regarded as a potential destabilising factor — particularly because of the ammunition depot in Colbasna — but also because, during certain electoral cycles and changes of power in Chisinau, Ukraine monitors developments in the Republic of Moldova with increased vigilance.

Maintaining Moldova's European path is one of the key factors that can strengthen Ukraine's confidence, especially when we speak about our shared ambitions to join the European Union.

I am convinced that as long as the European integration process continues and Chisinau and Kyiv maintain a constant and transparent dialogue, tensions will subside. Ultimately, any lasting relationship between the two countries must be based on mutual trust, and the European trajectory must remain firm and irreversible.

With regard to bilateral cooperation in the field of security, it is the responsibility of law enforcement agencies, as well as defence and public order institutions, to maintain continuous communication and to demonstrate that the Republic of Moldova manages all aspects of security and stability in a coherent and professional manner.

It is essential to show that the Republic of Moldova is not a source of vulnerability, but a provider of security — both within its borders and beyond. Being situated on the border of the European Union, we have a duty to build a reintegrated Moldova based on dialogue, negotiation, mediation, and peaceful reconstruction.

This, in fact, is the most important objective we must uphold. Any political, social, or financial escalation within the Republic of Moldova could generate instability factors that, in turn, might influence Kyiv's decisions and its perception of regional security.

- Thank you!

The citizens of the Transnistrian region also wish to join the European Union, just like most of those living on the right bank of the Nistru River

Former Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Alexandru Flenchea gave an interview to the FES/APE Foreign Policy Newsletter, in which we discussed the priorities of the Transnistrian region's reintegration process in the context of Moldova's European integration. We addressed the political, economic, and human dimensions of this process, as well as the issue of the region's captivity to the interests of local oligarchs and Moscow.



Alexandru Flenchea, Former Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration
Photo: Facebook

- Mr. Flenchea, while there is intense discussion about EU accession, very little is said about European integration with or without the Transnistrian region. How important is it to bring this topic to the forefront of the accession debate?

- There is not enough discussion because, frankly, this is not a matter for debate but an unavoidable reality. If we analyse the current context and what is likely to happen in the next three to five years, I do not believe we will achieve unanimity within the EU for the accession of a country that still hosts Russian troops on its territory.

The Republic of Moldova currently has Russian troops on its soil, so we have no alternative. If we want European integration in the near future, the state has an obligation to resolve the conflict and restore the rights of all its citizens — on both sides of the Nistru River.

Plans drawn up

- How do you view the fact that, at present, the Moldovan authorities do not have a well-defined contingency plan for the eventuality that the separatist regime in Tiraspol might suddenly collapse — even as soon as tomorrow?

- I believe that the Republic of Moldova needs not a contingency plan, but a detailed action plan to restore its territorial integrity. We must not stand by and wait for the regime to collapse; we must take active steps to bring the Transnistrian region back into the Republic of Moldova — not only *de jure*, but also *de facto*.

There are already projects and plans that have been developed in recent years, and the authorities are analysing them in order to formulate a new, coherent action plan. It remains to be seen how prepared the new government is to act decisively and swiftly.

Market liberalisation on the left bank of the Nistru

- How great is the risk that Russia will trigger an energy crisis in the region by cutting off gas supplies? Could Russia quickly create a major humanitarian crisis for Moldova if it decided to stop sending Russian gas to the region?

- As long as the region — and, by extension, the Republic of Moldova — depends on Russian gas,

the risks will persist. One of the government's priorities must be to address the problems in the region's energy sector. Just as the gas market has been liberalised on the right bank, the same must be done on the left bank: through legal and transparent contracts, fair procurement, and real market prices.

Once this happens, the economic reintegration of the two banks will, to a large extent, follow naturally.

Oligarchic and Moscow interests in Tiraspol

- Why does the Tiraspol regime not access the €60 million in European energy assistance? What would it mean if Tiraspol decided to do so, and under what circumstances could such financial aid be accessed — or denied?

- First, we need to define our terms. Who is *Tiraspol*, actually? We must understand very clearly that there is no real government in Tiraspol — no authorities that are legitimate, legal, or even representative. The administrative structures managing the region on a daily basis actually represent the interests of the *Sheriff* company, that is, the local oligarchs, rather than those of ordinary citizens.

The oligarchs in Tiraspol have maintained and developed this secessionist project with the constant support of the Russian Federation for one clear reason: to make enormous profits. And we are talking about very substantial sums of money here — sums that, as we all know, are far from negligible.

These profits are possible only as long as the region's entire economy depends on free gas supplied by Russia — gas that has been delivered consistently over the years and has become the foundation of the local oligarchs' prosperity.

Therefore, the assistance proposed by the European Union, along with the legal arrangements and contracts that the previous government attempted to advance to Tiraspol — in my opinion, too timidly — hold no interest for this regime. Their acceptance of such support would entail legality, transparency, and compliance with the rules of a market economy, which would inevitably mean the end of the economic model

on which the current secessionist project known as *Transnistria* is based. Obviously, that is not in the interest of those in power there.

In conclusion, what I want to emphasise is that we cannot and must not rely on the good faith or sense of responsibility of those who effectively control the region. The Government and authorities of the Republic of Moldova bear full responsibility and must intervene to restore order and legality in this territory.

Calculations and perspectives

- Would it be necessary to establish, starting now, a special fund for the reintegration of the Transnistrian region, in partnership with the Republic of Moldova's Western partners? Experts have estimated that the costs of reintegrating the two banks of the Nistru River would amount to approximately EUR 500 million per year, at least during the initial years of the process.

- There are different calculations regarding the costs of the reintegration process. However, one thing is certain and must be clearly understood: the reintegration of the Transnistrian region is not an act of adoption. It does not mean that every citizen on the right bank of the Nistru should "adopt" a Transnistrian and cover their daily expenses.

Such a model of reintegration would simply not work. Reintegration is not a subscription we pay for monthly or annually just to keep the country united.

It is no coincidence that I spoke about *economic reintegration*. This principle is also reflected in the Government's programme of activity, which places emphasis on the economic dimension of reintegration. Just as the economy functions on the right bank — where companies operate, cooperate, and pay taxes — the same must happen on the left bank.

Therefore, to the extent that the Republic of Moldova is economically sustainable, the Transnistrian region — as an integral part of the country — will also be sustainable. If the Republic of Moldova manages to function without external assistance, then the reintegrated region will be able to do the same. Conversely, if the country depends on external support, so will the region.

Yes, we are aware of the current economic situation in the Republic of Moldova and of its macroeconomic indicators, which are indeed more modest than we would like. However, progress depends on time, effort, reforms, and deliberate, consistent action that can gradually lead to improved results.

The Republic of Moldova needs support and assistance, but this support must target the country as a whole, not just the reintegration project. Of course, throughout this process we will need various forms of assistance — diplomatic, technical, and financial — but the approach must be integrated, aimed at the overall development of the state.

My appeal is that, when we discuss and negotiate the parameters of assistance with our partners, we do so with the entire Republic of Moldova and the needs of all its citizens in mind, not just those related to the reintegration project. If we fail to act and continue to wait passively for the separatist regime in Tiraspol to collapse on its own, reintegration will not happen. And, in the purely theoretical event that it does happen spontaneously, the costs of reintegration could be even higher than currently estimated.

Captivity in a dictatorial regime

- Could Chisinau's strategy of presenting to the citizens on the left bank of the Nistru a superior model of development — one based on cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union — prove effective? Could a higher standard of living on the right bank attract the residents of Transnistria?

- That stage has already been passed. The Republic of Moldova has demonstrated that it is attractive enough for its own citizens living on the left bank of the Nistru. Of course, this is an important condition for a harmonious reintegration, but by itself it is absolutely insufficient.

No matter how much the residents of Transnistria may wish for it — and I can assure you that they do want this conflict to be resolved eventually — they know and understand that they are citizens of the Republic of Moldova. They hold Moldovan identity cards and passports and benefit from public, medical, and educational services provided on the right bank of the Nistru.

The citizens of the Transnistrian region also wish to be part of the European Union, just like most citizens on the right bank. But has this, in itself, led to the resolution of the conflict? No. Because on the left bank of the Nistru there exists a police-type regime that deliberately ensures that the will of the citizens does not matter. What matters there is only the will of the local oligarchs and of Moscow, which continue to control the region and maintain the political and economic captivity of its population.

- How do you think Ukraine will continue to respond to the security threat posed by this region, given that it is illegally hosting Russian troops on its territory?

- Just as Ukraine, as an independent and sovereign state — whose sovereignty and territorial integrity we fully respect — defines its own policies, so too must the Republic of Moldova, as a sovereign and independent state, act in the same way.

Just as Ukraine identifies threats to its national security and develops policies to ensure its defence and sovereignty, so must the Republic of Moldova.

From the perspective of Moldovan taxpayers, the presence of the Russian army on the left bank of the Nistru is, first and foremost, a direct threat to the Republic of Moldova — and only then to Ukraine. We must act in accordance with our own national interests and priorities. I cannot imagine a situation — at least not in Europe — where a state would define its security and foreign policy based on criteria other than the interests of its own citizens.

Of course, it is natural to discuss and coordinate these issues with our partners, especially our immediate neighbours, and, where there are synergies and shared objectives, to act together. Where differences arise, they must be addressed openly and resolved through dialogue. But we must never act to the detriment of our own interests or neglect them in favour of those of others.

I say this not to offend Ukraine, but to emphasise a fundamental principle: everyone — from citizens to state authorities — must think and act in accordance with the national interests of the Republic of Moldova.

- Thank you!

European integration versus the reintegration of the Republic of Moldova

As the Republic of Moldova moves closer to the European Union, the question of the fate of the Transnistrian region upon accession to the EU has been raised increasingly often in recent times. It is obvious to everyone that the left bank of the Nistru is not at all ready for accession to the European Union.

Moreover, both the region's administration and a significant part of the population are categorically opposed to European integration. It is hard to believe that the situation will change radically in the next three to four years. At the same time, the Moldovan authorities are determined to accelerate the reform process in order to sign the EU accession agreement by 2028. This goal is perfectly justified, as the current "window of opportunity" will not remain open for long.

So how should the issue of reintegration be addressed in the context of accelerated EU integration? As long as EU accession seemed like a mirage, few people gave serious thought to the practical aspects of reintegrating the Transnistrian region.

Until recently, many politicians viewed promises of Moldova's integration into the EU as "misleading visions" and "false hopes." However, once these promises began to take shape, Chisinau obtained Brussels' support, and concrete deadlines were set for Moldova's integration into the EU, the issue of Transnistria became urgent.

This is discussed mainly by the opposition and Eurosceptic analysts, who believe that accession should not take place before the Transnistrian conflict is fully resolved and the region is reintegrated. However, they understand that such a strategy would delay European integration



Anatolie Golea, journalist, TV8
Photo: Facebook

for many years, if not indefinitely, keeping the Republic of Moldova in a "grey area" or within Russia's sphere of influence.

Possible scenarios and options

Aware of this risk, the Moldovan authorities have declared the possibility of a two-stage integration — first the right bank, then the left bank. In Brussels, this option has not been ruled out. It is well understood that if Moldova's integration into the European Union depended on the prior resolution of the Transnistrian conflict, accession would never take place.

Russia has been careful about this since the 1990s, creating the separatist region to blackmail Chisinau. And Moscow's control over the region continues today, although the military aggression against Ukraine has partially weakened the Russian Federation's influence on the left bank of the Nistru. The opposition, however, interprets these statements in its own way, accusing the authorities of intending to "join the EU without Transnistria," which, in their view, would be tantamount to giving up the eastern regions of the country.

At the same time, more and more analysts argue that “the European Union will never accept a country with Russian troops on its territory,” as this would mean that Russian forces would be inside the EU.

But the situation is similar to conflict resolution: if European integration depends on the withdrawal of Russian troops, then those troops will never be withdrawn.

What can Chisinau do? In this situation, the Moldovan authorities can do only one thing: firmly pursue their own agenda. They must continue with the necessary reforms, prepare for the process of European integration and, at the same time, create the conditions for the reintegration of the region. This means, first and foremost, changing the current situation. The government should act more decisively to transform the current “peacekeeping forces” imposed on Chisinau in 1992 into a civilian mission under an international mandate.

At the same time, effective control of the administrative border needs to be established. This step would not mean “recognising Transnistria,” but would allow for the consolidation of state control on the right bank of the Nistru, combating smuggling, human trafficking and other illegal activities.

This measure is all the more relevant in the context of the war in Ukraine, when the Republic of Moldova is facing an increase in drug trafficking, the risk of arms smuggling and the possible uncontrolled entry of foreigners with dangerous intentions.

Of course, politicians often say that “our citizens live in Transnistria” and that their rights and freedom of movement cannot be restricted. This is true — and no one is suggesting otherwise. But these citizens must understand that control and security measures are in their own interests, for their protection, for national security and to bring the country closer to European Union standards.

In practice, all these measures are concrete steps in preparation for reintegration, especially since the Republic of Moldova enjoys the support of the European Union and neighbouring Ukraine in this process.

Withdrawal of Russian troops and EU accession — parallel processes

As for the withdrawal of Russian troops, this can be resolved relatively quickly within the framework of European integration and parallel reintegration. In reality, there are not many Russian troops left on the left bank of the Nistru — only a few hundred officers, most of whom are awaiting repatriation to Russia. To achieve this, it would be sufficient to organise a few charter flights, even at the expense of the Moldovan government.

The rest, about a thousand contract soldiers, are locals who hold both Russian and Moldovan citizenship. If they wish, they can leave — Russia needs soldiers for the front in Ukraine — but they can also stay in their own country.

Opponents will, of course, ask what will happen to the weapons and ammunition depots and how they will be transported to Russia. The answer is simple: transport can take place after the war in Ukraine ends, and some of the ammunition can be destroyed directly on site. But the real question is: who decided that these weapons should be transported to the Russian Federation?

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Russia assumed the role of successor to the Soviet Union, benefiting from all its assets and liabilities, including those outside the former Union. In return, movable and immovable property located on the territory of the former Soviet republics was to remain where it was. Therefore, military depots and weapons on the territory of the Republic of Moldova should, by right, belong to the Moldovan state.

It is true that in 1991, General Alexei Lebed, commander of the Guard’s 300th Parachute Regiment stationed in Chisinau, transferred a significant part of the military equipment to Russia, but some of it remained in place — including the weapons depots on the left bank of the Nistru.

All these issues are, of course, open to debate. But one thing is certain: the processes of European integration and the country’s reintegration should not be mutually exclusive. They must proceed in parallel, for the benefit of all citizens of the Republic of Moldova, on both banks of the Nistru.

Anatolie Golea

What should we do about Transnistria on the road to the EU?

Analysis by Evgheni Ceban, journalist at Newsmaker.md

Can the Republic of Moldova join the European Union without resolving the Transnistrian issue? Theoretically, yes, it can. But in practice, this would require an exceptionally favourable external context, and it would be far more difficult than if the problem were tackled now.



Evgheni Ceban, journalist, Newsmaker.md
Photo: Facebook

Moldova like Cyprus?

The head of European diplomacy, Josep Borrell, once mentioned the example of Cyprus, arguing that Moldova’s European future should not be “held hostage to the Transnistrian conflict.” But he omitted an important detail: Cyprus achieved such significant progress in European integration only because, at the time, all parties involved believed the issue would be solved before accession — everyone *wanted* this outcome.

The failure of the Cyprus settlement plan, named after former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and the accession of a divided Cyprus to the EU represented a major failure of Western diplomacy. It is unlikely that anyone in Brussels would want to repeat that scenario. Back then, Turkish troops — belonging to a NATO country — were stationed in Northern Cyprus, whereas in Moldova, it is Russian troops. Given the war against Ukraine, the context is entirely different.

It is one thing to say, as European officials do, that “Russia must not hold Moldova hostage.” It is quite another for the 27 EU leaders to agree to admit into the Union a state on whose territory Russian troops are stationed.

We may comfort ourselves with encouraging statements from Brussels that Moldova will become a member of the European family under any circumstances, but if we rely solely on these promises, we risk stumbling at the decisive moment — right before crossing the finish line. It is unlikely that anyone in Brussels wants such an outcome. Therefore, there will be insistence on concrete steps to resolve the conflict — and this pressure will most likely increase.

A shift in rhetoric after the elections

After the elections, we gradually began to notice a predictable shift in tone — both from the leaders in Chisinau and from European Union officials. There is a growing emphasis on the idea that it would be preferable for Moldova to join the EU as a whole.

Chisinau intends to achieve accession to the European Union “in one step” — together with Transnistria, President Maia Sandu stated the day after the parliamentary elections.

A few days later, Romanian President Nicusor Dan went even further, saying: “The Republic

of Moldova's accession to the European Union can take place together with Transnistria, which could be granted a status similar to that of Gagauzia."

Recently, European Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos expressed her confidence that the Transnistrian issue will be resolved by the time Moldova joins the EU. "There is only one date when the whole of Moldova will join the European Union, with all its territory. On that day, those regions that are not currently administered by the constitutional authorities will also join," said former Foreign Minister and current Special Envoy for European Affairs Nicu Popescu — effectively contradicting statements he made two years ago in an interview with *Politico*.

This shift in rhetoric only confirms earlier assumptions.

The crisis in Transnistria: from acute to chronic

The energy and economic crisis in Transnistria has not gone away. At the beginning of the year, Moscow cut gas supplies to the region, aiming to create problems not so much for Tiraspol as for Chisinau — to pressure Chisinau in an election year, forcing it either to negotiate or to bear the consequences. Chisinau, with EU support, managed the situation. But the left bank was left with the fallout.

The crisis shifted from acute to chronic: reduced gas supplies, business closures, hot water and heating outages. Moscow attempted to use gas as a pressure tool, but ultimately only intensified the deterioration of the region it effectively controls. However, Moscow's influence is limited, particularly in the energy sector.

Today, Chisinau exercises full economic control over Transnistria, and once the Vulcanesti–Chisinsu line is completed, Tiraspol will lose its last argument — the ability to cut off electricity to a large part of Moldova.

Russia can accelerate or slow the region's economic decline, but it is unlikely to reverse the trend. Chisinau must prepare to take responsibility for the region's future and

prepare its economy for a transition to market principles.

Russian troops – the most difficult part of the Transnistrian issue

The only aspect over which Chisinau has no real leverage is the Russian military presence in Transnistria.

The region hosts the Russian Operational Group of Forces (ROGF) — approximately 1,000–1,500 military personnel. They guard the ammunition depots in Cobasna and participate in the trilateral peacekeeping mission. In reality, the ROGF is now the strongest anchor of Russian influence in the region. Most of these "Russian soldiers" are locals with Russian passports. Only about 70 were sent directly from Russia.

To withdraw them without risking unpredictable escalation, Chisinau will have to negotiate with Moscow, mediated by its partners. But if it does not remain passive, Chisinau could significantly improve its negotiating position in the future and, in the best-case scenario, avoid costly and unnecessary discussions with Moscow on many issues.

What should be done?

In short: restore sovereignty over the region.

- **Direct communication with citizens on the left bank must be restored.** The fears spread by local and Russian propaganda must be dispelled. A clear and confident vision of a unified Moldova's future must be outlined. If communication is systematic and effective, the self-proclaimed regime in Tiraspol will lose its monopoly on speaking "on behalf of the Transnistrian people."
- **Integration of the region must be advanced by expanding the range and quality of services available to residents of the left bank** — jobs, medical care, education, social protection. These measures are already included in the government programme — an excellent sign.

- **The government must adopt a zero-tolerance approach toward repressive legislation, political persecution, and restrictions on human rights and freedoms.** Given the changed context and Chisinau’s stronger negotiating position, the Moldovan authorities no longer have any excuse for inaction.
- **Safe “exit options” must be created and offered to Moldovan citizens working within the structures — including the security services — of the self-proclaimed PMR, and especially to ROGF contractors.** This would allow for the gradual reduction of Russian military potential and a diminishing of Russia’s influence in Transnistria.

None of these measures requires the withdrawal of Russian troops or complex negotiations with Moscow or Tiraspol. But if implemented consistently, the self-proclaimed “Transnistrian statehood” will begin to fade before our eyes, and on the left bank of the Dniester, the Russian military presence will shrink to just a few dozen foreigners who have overstayed their permitted stay in the Republic of Moldova.

Transnistria — a bargaining chip for Moldova?

Effective engagement with residents on the left bank can achieve what decades of diplomacy have not. With planned and consistent action, Transnistria will gradually cease to be a source of threats and an instrument of external pressure on Moldova, becoming instead an area of the gradual return of Moldovan sovereignty.

Then the question can be reframed: not whether the Republic of Moldova can join the EU with an unresolved conflict, but why it should leave part of its territory — and above all, hundreds of thousands of Moldovan citizens — in Russia’s hands. The real question is not whether Moldova will be accepted into Europe without the left bank of the Dniester, but at what price it wants to join.

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