

Moldova-Transdniestria

Joint Control Commission (JCC) Peacekeeping Force

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| • Authorization and Start Date | 21 July 1992 |
| • Head of Mission | Colonel Anatoly Zverev (Russia) |
| • Strength as of 30 September 2008 | Troops: 1,278 Military Observers: 10 |

While the year 2008 started with signs of progress in the sixteen-year conflict between Moldova and Transdniestria, the brief war between Russia and Georgia during August presented a serious challenge to this momentum.

Geographically isolated within Moldova by the Dnestr River, and historically and linguistically tied to Ukraine and Russia, Transdniestria declared its independence from Moldova in September 1990 in response to fears that the latter would merge with Romania upon the collapse of the Soviet Union. A full-scale conflict ensued between Dniestrian militias and the Moldovan government that lasted until a cease-fire was reached in July 1992 with Russian oversight. The Moscow-Chisinau peace agreement mandated a cease-fire, Russian recognition of Moldova's territorial integrity, and provisions for Dniestrian independence should Moldova join Romania. The agreement also established a 140-mile security zone along the Dnestr River, to be patrolled by a joint peacekeeping force composed of Russian, Transdniestrian, and Moldovan units. Operations of the joint peacekeeping force have been overseen by the Joint Control Commission (JCC), consisting of representatives from Russia,

Moldova, Transdniestria, Ukraine, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Since September 2005, the JCC has also included representatives from the United States as well as EU observers. In addition to monitoring the activities of the peacekeeping force, the JCC is responsible for overseeing the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, and for undertaking confidence-building measures. An EU border assistance mission, in place since December 2005, is mandated to monitor the Transdniestrian section of the common border with Ukraine and Moldova. The first meeting of the new "5 + 2" JCC arrangement was halted when Transdniestria suspended its participation in the negotiations in March 2006 in response to more stringent customs regulations imposed by Ukraine and Moldova. At the request of Transdniestria, Russia sent additional troops to the region. As of September 2008, the peacekeeping contingents in and around the separatist territory numbered 1,278, where they served as peacekeepers as well as guardians of 20,000 tons of ammunition.

The last quarter of 2007 saw a relative easing of tensions in the conflict. In October, the Transdniestrian parliament abolished a series of import duties on Moldovan goods, along with a border transit fee for Moldovan citizens. Shortly thereafter, Moldovan president Vladimir Voronin developed two proposals, one that would unify the Moldovan and Transdniestrian militaries, and another that would fully demilitarize Moldova on both sides of the Dnestr River. A consensus on either proposal, however, failed to be reached.

The defining event of 2008 came in April, when President Voronin met the leader of the breakaway Transdniestrian region for the first

time in seven years. Seeking to build on the momentum from the summit, the EU declared in May that it was ready to do “absolutely everything” to support the conflict resolution process with Transdniestria. Progress continued in July as representatives from the JCC met for only the second time since negotiations broke down in February 2006.

However, the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 over South Ossetia slowed progress significantly, with Transdniestria

threatening to break off relations with Chisinau unless the latter denounced Georgia’s actions in the conflict, and the Russian government issuing a warning against any attempts by Moldova to take back Transdniestria by force. In contrast to Georgia’s breakaway territories, Russian attitudes toward a settlement for Transdniestria remained positive, with President Dmitry Medvedev optimistic that there were “good chances” for reaching a solution.