

## Moldova-Transdniestria

The conflict between Moldova and break-away Transdniestria remained deadlocked throughout 2010, despite attempts by both Russia and the European Union to break the political impasse. Although no new violence broke out, tensions still run deep between the two parts of the former Soviet Republic.

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### Background

At the heart of the ongoing conflict are questions of political and cultural identity. The desire of Moldova to integrate into the European Union and foster its close ties to Romania is in opposition with the Transdniestrian desire to maintain close ties with its cultural and linguistic roots in Ukraine and Russia. In September 1990, Transdniestria, fearing Moldovan-Romanian integration, declared its independence. This secession resulted in an intense conflict between Moldova and Transdniestria that lasted until a cease-fire was reached. The cease-fire agreement mandated Russia's recognition of Moldova's territorial integrity; established provisions for Dniestrian independence should Moldova join Romania; and created the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPF), comprised of 402 Russian troops, 355 Moldovan troops, and 492 Transdniestrian troops. There are also 10 Ukrainian observers under the auspices of the Russian-led Joint Control Commission (JCC).

With the JCC enforcing the Moscow-Chisnau peace agreement, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) sought to reach a permanent peace agreement between the two sides, focusing on a negotiated and lasting end to the political conflict, the consolidation of the sovereignty of Moldova, and creating special political status for the

Transdniestrian region. These efforts culminated in 2005 in the 5 + 2 talks that included Russia, Ukraine, the United States, the European Union, the OSCE, Moldova, and Transdniestria. These talks were suspended in 2006 after a Transdniestria walkout over a customs dispute with Moldova. Involvement by the EU has also met with difficulty, resulting in its decision to withdraw its envoy to Moldova and the southern Caucasus, Kilmai Miszei.

The presence of Russian troops in Transdniestria has also become a point of contention. Moldova has asked for the replacement of Russian troops with international observers to maintain the cease-fire, while Transdniestrian officials have called for an increase in Russian troops. Russia, for its part, has considered removing its troops from the JCC. It is unlikely that Russia intends to remove its 1,200-plus troops providing security to Soviet-era military installations.

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### Key Developments

In February 2010, expressing frustration with the frozen conflict, the EU Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) denounced the lack of progress in resolving the dispute and called for a return to the 5 + 2 talks. In June 2010, the Moldovan acting president, Mihai Ghimpu, endorsed a proposed initiative by Russia and Germany to create an EU-Russia security forum whose first task would be to tackle the twenty-year conflict.

Any progress will be contingent upon the resolution of the Moldovan domestic political situation. Since 2009, the Moldovan parliament has been unable to select a president. An alliance of four pro-Western parties, Alliance for European Integration (AEI), has a slight majority

in parliament; however, political opposition in the form of the Moldovan Communist Party (CP) has maintained enough influence to threaten walkouts whenever parliament attempts to select a leader. These domestic fault lines also reflect the current conflict between Moldova and Transnistria. The CP is decidedly pro-Russia; the AEI is pro-West, with strong ties to Romania, and desires EU integration.

On 5 September 2010, a national referendum put forth to determine whether the president of Moldova ought to be directly elected by the people, thus circumventing the political impasse in parliament, failed to pass as a result of low voter turnout due to a CP boycott. National elections were held in late November. However, this did not overcome the government deadlock.

#### **Moldova—Joint Control Commission Peacekeeping Forces**

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| Authorization Date                    | 21 July 1992                            |
| Start Date                            | July 1992                               |
| Chief of Staff,<br>Joint Headquarters | Colonel Aleksei Tumasher (Russia)       |
| Strength as of<br>30 September 2010   | Troops: 1,362<br>Military Observers: 40 |

If a functioning Moldovan government is put in place, this conflict could be at least one step closer to resolution. Otherwise, this conflict will likely continue to fester.