

## Moldova–Trans-Dniester

The year 2005 saw rising tensions but little overt violence in Moldova–Trans-Dniester. The Joint Control Commission (JCC) and its joint peacekeeping forces have, in essence, maintained a fourteen-year stalemate, with relative peace but little movement on a political strategy that could facilitate resolution of the Trans-Dniestrans question. A promising development occurred on 22 April, when Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko proposed a peace plan. Unfortunately, that plan appears to have been imperiled by the events of 19 July, described below.

### Joint Control Commission Peacekeeping Forces

• Authorization date	21 July 1992 (Moldova and Russia)
• Start date	July 1992
• Head of mission	—
• Budget as of 30 September 2005	—
• Strength as of 30 September 2005	Troops: 1,120

Tensions between the government in Chisinau and Trans-Dniester emerged with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1989, Moldova, which had been carved out of Romania and Ukraine at the end of World War II, declared Moldovan to be the sole official language of the country. This had a dramatic impact on the population living to the east of the Dniester River, the bulk of whom

were Russian and Ukrainian speakers. In 1990, Trans-Dniester unilaterally seceded from Moldova, and by late 1991, the two sides were embroiled in a full-scale war, in which Russian forces (stationed in Trans-Dniester as part of the typical Soviet deployment pattern) were also implicated. In total, the conflict produced nearly 700 deaths, 1,250 injuries, and 100,000 refugees.

Moldovan–Trans-Dniestrans hostilities ended with the signing of a cease-fire agreement, negotiated by Russia, on 21 July 1992. The Yeltsin–Sneuger Agreement provided for the creation of a ten-kilometer security zone on both sides of the Dniester River, and a Russian-dominated, tripartite peacekeeping force composed of Russian, Moldovan, and Trans-Dniestrans units. It also created the JCC, composed of Moldovan, Trans-Dniestrans, Russian, Ukrainian, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) participants, to serve as the political mechanism for the resolution of the conflict and to supervise the peacekeeping operation. Finally, the cease-fire agreement demanded the return of refugees, the removal of the economic blockade, special status for the city of Bendery, and the “strict neutrality” of the Soviet Fourteenth Army. The cease-fire has held in recent years, but full implementation of the agreement has been hampered by questions about the impartiality of the Russian-led peacekeeping forces and the perceived ineffectiveness of the JCC.

Trans-Dniester has experienced escalating tensions since mid-2004, including economic blockades, the obstruction of diplomatic visits by Chisinau, and the forcible closure of several

Moldovan-language schools. This tension erupted in violence on 19 July 2005, when Russian peacekeepers fired into the air in order to subdue a brawl near the conflict zone. The brawl had been precipitated when Russian peacekeepers demanded that a visiting US lawyer destroy photographs he had taken of a bridge over the Dniester River.

The events of July threatened to derail the so-called Yushchenko Plan, a Ukrainian-sponsored seven-step strategy for peace. This strategy includes the adoption of a law on the autonomous status of Trans-Dniester as well as the holding of democratic elections in the separatist republic under the supervision of international monitors. Support for the plan had been seen both in Tiraspol and in Chisinau,

but the status of the initiative remained stalled at the end of October 2005.

In November 2004 the OSCE mission head in Moldova went so far as to say that the present peacekeeping structure “has outlived its usefulness.” The Moldovans have withdrawn from negotiations at least twice in the last year, leaving the JCC in April. The OSCE has recently taken a more active role in the resolution of the conflict. This, plus recent political changes in Ukraine, may help to overcome the current stalemate, but the most difficult questions of the Trans-Dniestrans conflict—how long peacekeepers will stay and what the final status of Trans-Dniester will be—remain unanswered.