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Ending the tensions in Transnistria

-Research Report-

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I. Introduction

The Transnistrian conflict has been around for more than 30 years, yet after so much time, little to no viable solutions were found to put an end to it. In the early 1990s, it experienced several deadly attacks, which were shortly called off in 2 years. Transnistria remains to this day as a memory of the USSR, as it has kept most of the alliance's costumes and rules of leading, which shows the roots of this nation in the present day and the values it tried to preserve throughout time. This problematic strip of land raised many conflicts and disagreements between the people from the western banks of the Dniester River, Moldovans, and the ones from the eastern banks, Transnistrians. With a generally common history, the issues brought by the last years of USSR power made people alike develop and work towards different goals. The 1990 Moldova had strong ties with Romania and was working towards a possible unification, while the Transnistrian people were still very connected with the Russian culture and language.

Human rights issues, political standoffs, and ethnic conflicts have all been features of the ongoing dispute. The conflict hasn't been settled despite numerous attempts, and tensions in the area are still high. Understanding the main issues at stake in this situation and the attempts being made to resolve the disagreement amicably and permanently is crucial.

In the following debates, the delegates will also have to address the more recent military tensions of 2022, the causes of social unrest in the region, and find possible solutions that can be put in place to end the tensions soon.

II. Definition of key terms

- Sovereignty- A state's supreme control over its territory, citizens, and the government is referred to as sovereignty. Sovereignty is a crucial issue in the dispute between Moldova and Transnistria since Transnistria demands independence from Moldova while Moldova views Transnistria as a fundamental component of its territory;
- De facto state- a political entity that has power over a certain area and its residents even though it is not acknowledged as such by the international community. De facto states frequently have their own government, constitution, and institutions, and are born out of unsolved conflicts or disputes. As they frequently endure sanctions, isolation, and a lack of resources and support from the international community, de

facto states may confront substantial hurdles in terms of their legitimacy, economic viability, and international relations;

- Geopolitical implications- refer to the political and economic interests of countries and regions in a particular area. In the context of the Moldova-Transnistria conflict, geopolitical factors include the interests of Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, and other neighbouring countries in the region;
- Ethnic tensions- refer to the conflict or antagonism that develops between various ethnic groups as a result of discrepancies in culture, religion, language, or historical grievances. Discrimination, marginalization, and violence between groups can come from these tensions and they can contribute significantly to regional or global wars and can be stoked by diplomatic, social, or economic factors. This was the main issue that sparked the conflict between the opposing sides involved in the discussed topic. Moldova and Transnistria started to develop different goals and were in the end subject to these disputes. Promoting tolerance and mutual understanding, resolving grievances and inequalities, and creating inclusive institutions and policies are frequently necessary to ease ethnic tensions;
- Social unrest- a state of public dissatisfaction, protest, or upheaval frequently caused by economic, political, or social problems.



Transnistrian territory in relation to Ukraine, Romania, and Moldova.

III. History

The Transnistrian conflict is a long-standing territorial dispute between the government of Moldova and a self-proclaimed, pro-Russian separatist government in the region of Transnistria, located along the eastern border of Moldova with Ukraine. The conflict began in 1990, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Transnistria, with its majority ethnic Russian and Ukrainian population, declared independence from Moldova. Tensions between Moldova and Transnistria escalated quickly, leading to an armed conflict in 1992 that lasted for several months and resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives. A ceasefire was eventually negotiated, but no lasting resolution to the conflict has been found. Since then, Transnistria has maintained de facto independence, with its own government, military, currency, and border controls, but it has not been recognized by any other country in the world. The main point of contention in the Transnistrian conflict is the status of the region. Transnistrian authorities claim that the region is a separate entity that should be recognized as an independent state, while Moldova maintains that Transnistria is an integral part of its territory.

The conflict has also been fuelled by ethnic and linguistic differences, as well as by geopolitical considerations. Russia has been accused of providing military and financial support to Transnistria, while Moldova has sought closer ties with the European Union and NATO. Efforts to resolve the Transnistrian conflict have been ongoing for decades, but have so far failed to produce a lasting solution. The conflict has been the subject of numerous negotiations, peacekeeping missions, and international agreements, but none of them have been able to address the underlying causes of the conflict or persuade both sides to reach a compromise. The conflict remains unresolved, with both Moldova and Transnistria continuing to assert their claims to the region, and tensions remaining high along the ceasefire line.

In recent years, another pressing problem contributed to this conflict: the current invasion of Ukraine also plays a high risk to the stability and peace of Moldova and Transnistria. This territory could be used as a corridor towards Moldova, as Russia has maintained good military relations with Transnistria.

IV. Key issues

There are several major issues in the Moldova-Transnistria conflict that have contributed to its ongoing and unresolved nature ever since 1990. These problems appeared from different causes, which all combined resulted in this long-standing conflict. Consequently, there is a number of aspects that must be tackled when discussing such an issue.

1. *Territorial Dispute.* The main issue at the heart of the conflict is the status of the Transnistria region. Transnistria declared independence from Moldova in 1990, claiming it was a separate entity with its own government, military, currency, and border controls. Moldova, however, maintains that Transnistria is an integral part of its territory.
2. *Ethnic and Linguistic Differences.* In contrast to Moldova, which has a majority ethnic Romanian population, Transnistria has a majority ethnic Russian and Ukrainian population. Since Transnistria wants greater links with Russia and Moldova wants closer relations with the EU and NATO, these disagreements have contributed to tensions and a lack of trust between the two parties.
3. *Security Issues.* The conflict has resulted in the presence of Russian peacekeeping troops in Transnistria, which Moldova sees as a violation of its sovereignty. There are also concerns about arms smuggling, human trafficking, and other illicit activities along the ceasefire line.
4. *Economic Concerns.* Transnistria relies heavily on trade with Russia, while Moldova seeks closer ties with the European Union. This has resulted in economic isolation for Transnistria and a lack of economic cooperation between the two sides.
5. *Political Disparities.* Moldova and the international community do not recognize Transnistria's independent government or political system. Due to the entrenchment of

both parties in their positions, it has been challenging to find a political resolution to the dispute.

6. *Concerns about human rights.* The conflict has significantly impacted the region's human rights status, including limitations on the freedom of travel, expression, and association. The absence of an efficient system for resolving the issue and defending the rights of people has made the situation worse.

V. Major Parties Involved

Moldova

Moldova lost *de facto* control of the Transnistria region in 1992, during the Transnistria War. However, the Republic of Moldova still considers itself the rightful successor state to the Moldavian SSR (which was guaranteed the right to secession from the Soviet Union under the last version of the Soviet Constitution). By the principle of territorial integrity, Moldova claims that any form of secession from the state without the consent of the central Moldovan government is illegal and strongly believes that its position is supported by international law.

Russia

While the Russian Federation does not officially recognize the independence of Transnistria, it still maintains special relations with the region in the political, military, cultural, and economic spheres, and has been a mediator in the Transnistria-Moldova negotiations. Russia maintains military forces in Transnistria, numbering over 1500 people and 25.000 tons of equipment and armament, despite the federation's own international obligations and Moldova's strong objections. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine last year, Russian officials stated that one of the objectives of the invasion was to establish a land corridor with occupied Transnistria, claiming that there was "evidence that the Russian-speaking population is being oppressed" in the region, without giving further detail on the issue.

Ukraine

Ukraine, along with Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), has been a mediator in the negotiations on the status of Transnistria inside of

Moldova. The 452 kilometres of the Moldova-Ukraine border that Transnistria controls are essential for the region's survival, as the main way for the goods produced by the area to be exported. Although in 2001, Moldova had requested that Ukraine should deny Transnistrian goods that lack the Moldovan seal of approval, Ukraine refused to comply, stating that, as a mediator in the conflict, it should remain neutral and not take part in the economic pressure on Transnistria.

OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe)

The OSCE has been mediating the negotiations regarding Transnistria's status ever since 1993. The organization's "*Mission to Moldova*" is meant to help create a lasting political settlement of the conflict in all of its aspects, strengthening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally and officially recognized borders.

The United States of America

The United States of America does not recognize the independence of Transnistria, regarding the region as a part of the Republic of Moldova and supporting the latter's territorial integrity. It holds the position of an observer in the negotiations between Moldova and Transnistria and it advocates for a peaceful resolution of the separatist conflict.

The People's Republic of China

The diplomatic relations between China and Moldova have maintained a steady development in the three decades since their establishment. While the two nations follow principles of mutual respect, cooperation, and non-interference with the internal affairs of one another, China supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova concerning the situation of the self-proclaimed nation of Transnistria.

VI. Timeline

2 September 1990: The Transnistrian Republic is proclaimed in Tiraspol, the region's capital, at the 2nd Extraordinary Congress of Deputies, and there is elected a temporary Supreme Council, which later adopted its own declaration on sovereignty and law on languages.

2 November 1990: The bridges over the Dniester River are blocked by separatists. At the bridge near Dubăsari, a city in Transnistria, take place fights between civilians supporting the separation and Moldovan police. A part of the Moldovan forces, not having shields to defend themselves with while being attacked by the crowd, opened fire, causing multiple deaths.

19 August 1991: Dniester guards are patrolling the cities and blocking many roads. Transnistrian leaders ask the population to support the coup which was happening in Moscow.

27 August 1991: After the failure of the Soviet coup attempt in 1991, the Moldovan parliament adopts the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova. Transnistria interprets this as meaning that the merge of the two sides of the Dniester River under the name of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic that took place in 1940 was no longer respected.

19–21 June 1992: The Battle of Tighina takes place, ending in a Russian-backed Transnistrian victory.

21 July 1992: A ceasefire is declared, which has been respected ever since. The official document whose main points were established by the Russian side was signed by the Presidents of Russia (Boris Yeltsin) and Moldova (Mircea Snegur).



VII. Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Deescalate the Tensions

Since the end of the Transnistrian War in 1992, there have been multiple attempts to solve the frozen conflict between the region and the rest of Moldova. The first was the ceasefire agreement at the end of the war, which charged the peacekeeping forces with ensuring the ceasefire and security arrangements, composed of five Russian battalions, three Moldovan battalions, and two Transnistrian battalions under the orders of a joint military command structure, called the Joint Control Commission, but, under the 1998 Odessa Agreement, the number of peacekeepers was reduced to 500 soldiers from each of the three sides.

Under Germany's Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2016, it was agreed that Moldova and Transnistria would engage in direct talks to overcome a series of technical issues. The reasoning was that achieving tangible benefits for the people on both banks of the Dniester River would increase cooperation and trust between the people from the two parties involved in the conflict. In addition, under Austria's Chairmanship in the following year, another

agreement was signed, and together with the one in 2016 formed the so-called "Berlin Plus Package". Some of the issues addressed in the agreements are the recognition of diplomas given in the Transnistrian education system, freedom of movement between the two sides of the Dniester River for people, goods, and services, as well as reopening the closed bridges that connected the two river banks, permission for vehicles with Transnistrian number plates to participate in international traffic, and solving ecological issues regarding the Dniester River.

VIII. Possible Solutions

In order to reach a peaceful resolution to the Transnistrian conflict as soon as possible, a viable solution would be opening the conflict up to the wider public and presenting it as a challenge to Moldovan national security, seeing as the topic is insufficiently known among politicians and normal citizens alike. All political parties should be encouraged to become involved in conflict resolution, speak out more, and provide information in a citizen-friendly format. Moldova's authorities should also formulate a comprehensive, clear, thematically focused, and financially backed reintegration strategy for Transnistria based on the international commitments already made and the EU Association Agreement agenda.

The European Union and the United States of America should regard the Transnistrian conflict with more importance in their foreign policy agendas, especially given Russia's involvement in the region and the country's violations of international law and, in particular to the Transnistrian conflict, of the OSCE principles. They could also pay more attention and dedicate more resources to expose the corruption linked to the separatist regime in Transnistria and its illegal activities.

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