



Routes across the Nistru

Transnistria: People's Peacemaking Perspectives



May 2011



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Executive summary

TRANSNISTRIA, A SLIVER OF LAND ON THE EAST BANK OF THE RIVER NISTRU, broke away from the rest of Moldova in 1990. Although there was fighting after that, there have been no fatalities since 1992. This is not really a conflict: it is a stand-off which benefits the business interests of those who are close to ruling elites, and suits some external players. Transnistria has little prospect of being recognised, even by Russia. Moldova has little hope of eventual EU membership while the Transnistrian problem remains. To escape this stalemate, Moldova and Transnistria need to find a solution. Moldova needs to show Transnistrians that a resolution will be good for them, just as the EU works with Russia to show that a solution does not harm Russia.

This study is timely in that it comes at a moment when Moldova is reaffirming its EU perspective, while elections in Transnistria may also presage some change. The problem of Transnistria is now on the borders of the EU: Transnistria is the EU's problem. A German-EU initiative in 2010 sought to address the Transnistrian issue at a strategic level, engaging the key external player, Russia.

This study brought together focus groups of ordinary people both in Transnistria and in the rest of Moldova. It is the first such study. The focus groups provide non-elite input, important when some in the elite have a personal interest in the *status quo*. The focus group perspectives have been reinforced by interviews with politicians and experts in Chisinau, Tiraspol and Berlin. The study is in three sections: a conflict analysis, an examination of the players, and themes from the focus groups.

At the end, the report provides detailed policy and programme recommendations to the European Union, focusing on the following principles:

- The EU to support Moldova's approach to the EU, including more progress on Transnistria
- The EU to work with partners, building on German-EU-Russian initiatives on Transnistria
- The EU to work with Moldova to develop resolution strategies
- The EU to work with Moldova to include Transnistria in EU negotiations
- The EU to work with Moldova and Transnistria to build confidence
- The EU to support a media strategy
- The EU to work with Moldova on building bridges for youth and wider society
- The EU to support business on both banks

It is envisaged that this study will feed into the Strategic Conflict Analysis being undertaken by the European Representation in Chisinau, and the Reunification Strategy of the Moldovan Government.

Acronyms

AEI	Alliance for European Integration
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
DFID	Department for International Development
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EEAS	EU External Action Service
EU	European Union
EUBAM	EU Border Assistance Mission
MMZ	Moldova Metallurgical Works
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SME	Small or medium enterprise
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

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Introduction

“It is important that you asked us our opinion; projects should begin with the people”

Liudmila Borodina, Director, NGO Basic Center of Rehabilitation OSORC, Tiraspol

INTERNATIONAL- AND NATIONAL-LEVEL EFFORTS to prevent and resolve violent conflict and support recovery in crisis situations often remain poorly informed by the views and experiences of people directly affected. Their understanding of conflicts’ causes, actors and dynamics and their contribution to defining peacebuilding agendas is rarely captured, and less often made accessible to policy makers. High-level political analysis, while important, risks identifying different sets of priorities and opportunities for peacebuilding and development from more community-based perspectives. Yet both levels are relevant, co-dependent and should form the long-term ‘vision’ for a participatory and transformative process towards peace, stability and socio-economic development. The aim of this study is to capture community member perspectives of the causes and dynamics of the Transnistria situation and provide practical recommendations to the EU on how to effectively respond to these challenges.

Six focus groups were convened to give non-elite views: three on the West Bank, three in Transnistria. On the Chisinau bank, one was a group from outside the capital, drawn from young people in the northern town of Soldanesti; another was based on university students in Chisinau; the third consisted of a group of professional women in Chisinau. In Tiraspol, there was a youth group (mainly of students), a young business people group, and again a professional women’s group. While focus groups operated on a ‘no names, no quotes’ basis in order to encourage free discussion, where quotations are used it is with the agreement of the individual.

Focus group findings were expanded and complemented by meetings with experts and practitioners in Chisinau, Tiraspol and Berlin.

This paper uses the term ‘Transnistria’ (since it is easier for English speakers), rather than the Russian ‘Pridnestrovie’, or ‘Transdnestria.’ The ‘East Bank’ refers to Transnistria (often called Left Bank because it is on the left going downstream), the ‘West Bank’ to the Chisinau side of the Nistru. Terms such as ‘resolution’ and ‘settlement’ do not imply a specific solution.

The study is in three sections: a conflict analysis, an examination of the players, and themes from the focus groups, followed by detailed recommendations to the EU on policies and programmes.

“Transnistrian leaders realise no-one will recognise Transnistria, while Chisinau realises that Moldova cannot join the EU while the Transnistrian problem is there”

Andrei Safonov, political scientist, Tiraspol

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Analysis: mediation, obstacles and dynamics

Impasse a concern

A THEME RUNNING THROUGH ALL THE FOCUS GROUPS, on either side of the River Nistru, was that ordinary people would be better off if the Transnistrian problem were resolved. At the same time, the primary concern in life for groups on either bank was not a resolution of the Transnistrian issue but how to improve their poor economic situation and life chances.

On both sides groups thought that the impasse hindered business and social development. Business people from each side encountered problems in effecting payments and the transport of goods across the dividing line. Ordinary people found the crossing a nuisance. In the social care sector, people suffered from the problems of mutual non-recognition of documents (e.g. legal and identity, marriage and divorce certificates).

Focus groups reflected the results of a 2009 survey on both banks by New Age/CBS-AXA. It found that 56 percent of Transnistrians think that separation harms each side, while 82 percent on the West Bank felt the same. 82 percent of Transnistrians and 93 percent on the Chisinau/West Bank thought a solution was either 'important' or 'very important'.¹

The nature of any resolution was not a key concern; that would be up to leaders and external players. There was simply a desire to address day-to-day problems (in business, social work, day-to-day contact) in the meantime, as urgently as possible. Groups from the West Bank (the Chisinau side of the River Nistru) assumed Transnistria would one day have some sort of autonomy in a unified Moldova. Focus groups in Transnistria acknowledged their difficult position: Transnistria had all the functions of a nation state but all the disadvantages of not being recognised by anyone outside. It was noticeable that young people in Transnistria in particular saw their separation from the rest of Moldova as normal; separation had been a historical necessity. While individuals in each group (particularly among youth) found fault with ordinary people on the other side, frustration was mainly voiced about politicians. For example, professional women in Tiraspol believed that the leaderships on both banks had much to answer for in not encouraging mutual respect between Chisinau and Tiraspol; their approaches made any solution more difficult to reach. Leaders had to look beyond their immediate personal advantage. This was echoed in views expressed in the women's group in Chisinau, who believed that a first step had to be the creation of good will between

¹ New Age (Transnistria) and CBS-AXA (Moldova): *The perception of Moldova's and Transnistria's residents towards Russia, the West and each other*, Chisinau (2009), p 25.

Chisinau and Tiraspol, and a real desire to make movement: “both sides don’t want to solve the problem”; people in politics needed to think beyond their own political and business interests for the good of Moldova.

“We must put aside our personal ambitions; we must look for a constructive dialogue... that is my strong opinion”

Ruslana Grosu, researcher, Chisinau

Football diplomacy

Groups on both sides of the river saw some scope for change with the arrival of a new government in Chisinau in 2009, and the ‘football diplomacy’ which took place in 2010. Focus groups in Tiraspol (as well as in the rest of Moldova) saw the incoming Chisinau ministers as more results-oriented, and less prone to rhetoric and mud-slinging, than the previous Communist Party government.

Following an election win over the Communists in 2009, the incoming Moldovan Prime Minister Vlad Filat had two meetings in 2010 with Transnistrian President Igor Smirnov and other leaders. These meetings, at the football stadium on the outskirts of Tiraspol, resulted in the reopening of the passenger rail link Chisinau-Tiraspol-Odessa, and the expectation of more practical measures. These include the reopening of rail freight services across Transnistria (Transnistrian enterprises currently have to move freight over a roundabout 300 km journey rather than the direct 40 km to the port of Odessa) and the re-establishment of direct telephone connections. Some local commentators fear that entrenched business interests (rather than politics) will prevent progress on these issues. And Transnistrians cite a list of problems preventing progress, as outlined below.

Obstacles and suspicions

Legislation passed by the Moldovan Parliament in 2005 (e.g. the Law on the Basic Provisions of the Special Legal Status of Settlements on the Left Bank of the Nistru, 22 July 2005) is held by Transnistrians to inhibit negotiations, in that it prescribes the form of a settlement. Since the legislation was passed unanimously, there is little scope for the present government to overturn it. However Chisinau may want to examine ways for the legislation to be amended in the event of a settlement, and discuss modalities with the Transnistrian side.

One fear frequently voiced by Transnistrians is that a settlement would mean loss of their jobs for the huge number of public sector employees, especially the police, customs, border guards and the armed services. A settlement would need to reassure them that they would not lose out: they would retain their jobs, and perhaps benefit financially. The process of reintegration would need to be carefully managed: the Transnistrian armed forces are larger than Moldova’s. The issue needs to be researched in terms of costs and methods, pay-offs and retraining. Moldova would need to mount an extensive publicity campaign to make any message credible.

Furthermore, there is the fear on the Transnistrian side that Moldova might merge with Romania. They cite statements by Romanian and Moldovan politicians to prove their case. This is linked to the apprehension that Moldovans have a prejudice against Russian-speakers, and that the new state would insist on Romanian as the only acceptable language. As one young Transnistrian said: “I cannot see how my grandmother will manage if she has to speak to her doctor in Romanian”. Although the fears are based as much on rhetoric as reality, the perception needs to be addressed. If the language issue is not addressed with sensitivity, there is a danger of a latent problem becoming a cause of tension, not just in relation to Transnistria, but within society on the West Bank:

“We are moving towards a Belgian model”

Arcadie Barbarosie, Executive Director, Institute for Public Policy, Chisinau

External stakeholders, external mediation

While focus groups voiced disappointment with their own politicians, in every group there was a consensus that external actors were the key to unlocking the Transnistrian problem. As one participant in the Chisinau women's group noted: "politics in small countries is decided by big countries". A majority of the university student group in Chisinau (three out of four) thought that a solution on Transnistria would only come through outside intervention, from Russia, the US and the EU: the EU needed to put more pressure on Russia over Transnistria.

Transnistria broke away from the rest of Moldova in 1990, as the Soviet Union collapsed. Hostilities resulted in the loss of several hundred lives as the two parties on either bank of the River Nistru fought for territory. A Russian-sponsored ceasefire came into effect in July 1992: since then there have been skirmishes and violence, but no fatalities. A Russian-initiated peacekeeping force (Russian, Moldovan, Transnistrian and Ukrainian) has positions along the dividing line (security zone).

Periodically, there is a proposal to reconfigure the peacekeeping force, for example by including the EU and US. Negotiation on this is likely to distract attention from the main goal, a settlement. Once a resolution was reached, peacekeepers would probably not be needed.

Attempts at mediation have followed two tracks. Since 1996, there has been a negotiating framework of five parties: Moldova, Transnistria, Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE). This was augmented in 2005 with the addition of two observers, the US and the EU, making the '5+2' format. Progress had been disappointing, so there is cynicism about the process on both banks, but there was more movement in 2010. Meanwhile there has co-existed a parallel track of *ad hoc* bilateral Moldovan-Transnistrian meetings, usually sponsored by Russia.

"The '5+2' was created to keep the conflict going"

Arcadie Barbarosie, Executive Director, Institute for Public Policy, Chisinau

From time to time there is a suggestion that the '5+2' format be changed, making the EU (and perhaps the US) a full member. This would again distract from the main goal, a resolution, and could be an excuse for delay while the '5' (including Transnistria and Russia) consider the proposal. In any case the EU can play an active role regardless of its formal status; any breakthrough is most likely to emerge first through informal talks.

German-EU-Russian initiative

The focus groups reflected the views of most people in Moldova and Transnistria: in terms of external players, the key to reaching a settlement lies in Moscow². The initiative of Chancellor Merkel and President Medvedev in June 2010 at Meseberg was important in recognising this, and for the engagement of a member state whose views are vital for Russia. Followed by subsequent high level meetings and exchanges and meetings of senior officials, it has laid the basis for a new line for the EU.

All groups spoke positively about the initiative: it was something new. The women's group in Chisinau marvelled that an important country like Germany was concerned with the fate of a small country like Moldova.

"This support from Germany ... this initiative of Angela Merkel ... when she offered Russia visa-free access to the EU ... it was very generous towards our small state"

Oxana Caraus, economist, Chisinau

The press release after Chancellor Merkel's meeting with President Medvedev in June 2010 in Meseberg spoke of the "establishment of the ground rules for joint EU-Russia civil/military crisis operations". "The first issue could be the Transnistrian conflict...

² New Age/CBS-AXA *op cit*, p 23. In 2009, 37 percent in Transnistria and 38 percent on the West Bank thought their own leaders were key, while 25 percent of Transnistrians and 32 percent of those on the West Bank believed it was Russia.

it could include joint EU-Russia engagement, ensuring a smooth transition of the present situation to a final stage”.

The idea was reinforced at a trilateral German-French-Russian meeting at Deauville in October 2010, and in communication between EU External Action Representative Catherine Ashton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. The thinking is that Russia will push Transnistria towards negotiations, while Germany works towards a high level Russia-EU security committee (a response to President Medvedev’s proposals in 2008 for a new security architecture for Europe).

There is debate among the EU member states on whether anything should be offered to Russia in exchange for progress, or whether Russia should simply be expected to ‘do the decent thing’. None of the ideas being speculated about for a trade-off is easy: the list includes offering Russia a visa-free regime, or concessions on Ballistic Missile Defence in the EU: some EU states see this as Russia aiming to divide the Europeans from the US. The EU needs to devise a clear strategy.

Progress has not been as fast as critics have wished, but this has to be seen as the first step in a long process. There was an improved atmosphere in the five OSCE-sponsored informal ‘5+2’ talks during 2010 and into 2011; there has been less reluctance to meet. There is an expectation in both Chisinau and Tiraspol that talks will move to a formal basis during 2011.

The stated Transnistrian position is to have independence; referendum results (unrecognised by the EU) have shown a desire of the population in Transnistria for such a status. Any solution has to take note of the fact that Transnistria has had a sort of *de facto* independence for 20 years.

Moldova offers autonomy within a unitary state. The argument, once negotiations begin in earnest, will be over the degree of autonomy and guarantees. While the negotiations should continue to discuss confidence-building measures, there should not be an overlong delay in moving to substantive final status negotiations. It would help to build up momentum if there was early consensus on the parameters of an agreement, with a timeline and high-level mediator. It is to be hoped that these negotiations will avoid the ‘chicken and egg’ trap of arguments over sequencing: which is to come first, a settlement or withdrawal of Russian troops?

Both sides cite documents signed and not implemented as examples of lack of commitment. Although there needs to be some account of these, in searching for a settlement negotiators should keep the parties looking forward not backward, reaching for reciprocal measures which show benefits for each party. In the meantime, confidence-building measures are important, as is a process for the parties to deal with past agreements.

The same may be said of objections that the time is not right for negotiations because of the political timetable: forthcoming presidential elections in Tiraspol on the one hand, and on the other, the lack of a formally-elected president in Chisinau or the perception of instability in the coalition government in Chisinau. While these factors need to be taken into account, they should not be allowed to inhibit progress, which in any case will have to have wide support from across the political spectrum on both sides of the river. Hence there is a need to prepare public opinion on both sides for compromise and change.

Costs and benefits of resolution

There would also need to be publicity about the costs and benefits of resolution. At present there has been insufficient study on the topic: it can be assumed that reconnecting the rail and road network, and the removal of barriers, would stimulate trade both across the river and externally; access to European finance would boost cash-strapped Transnistrian enterprises. Once the one-off costs of reunification are met, Chisinau’s state expenditure of \$3,000 million should be able, given the extra

revenues from Transnistrian enterprises, to subsidise the \$200 million gap in the Transnistrian budget. There is a need for research that goes beyond back-of-the-envelope calculations.

Meanwhile there are Moldovan-Transnistrian working groups which provide for contact at vice-ministerial level and which include experts. There are currently seven groups, on agriculture/ecology, social/humanitarian, infrastructure including rail, education, health, economic, police. Some groups have met frequently, others not. There have been useful meetings in the police and health groups, but less progress has been made in others. There have been advances in health (with EU, UNICEF, UNAIDS and other support), and in the social/humanitarian group. The OSCE supported a seminar on security and humanitarian issues in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in November 2010. The EU should continue to be ready to support the groups. There has been less progress in areas the Transnistrian administration considers sensitive, such as education. This will make some project recommendations more difficult.

Including Transnistria

There are factors which ensure that much Transnistrian business favours the *status quo*. Chisinau does not recognise the privatisations of former state enterprises in Transnistria. This makes the Russian and Ukrainian (and Moldovan and Transnistrian) investors wary. There is also the business interest in the 'grey' economy: Transnistria provides an excellent base for unregulated trade; this is more in products which command high tariffs (cars, chicken meat) than the drugs and weapons of legend. A resolution will have to address the legalisation of privatised companies. It should also capitalise on the desire (which favours change) for Transnistrian enterprises (large and small) to have continued access to European markets and future access to finance.

There needs to be a study on the benefits and disadvantages for individual Moldovan and Transnistrian companies of a settlement. For example the Transnistrian company Sheriff would benefit from opening supermarkets and petrol stations in Moldova, but the move would also bring more competition to existing enterprises, and several Moldovan politicians have interests in petrol stations. Meanwhile Sheriff would lose its monopolies in Transnistria. This is the most under-researched aspect of resolving the Transnistrian problem, but is one of the most important.

Any resolution will have to address the question of how to bring 'black' and 'grey' business (currently benefiting from the lack of international and domestic scrutiny) into the 'white', legitimate economy.

The EU will begin formal negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with Moldova in summer 2011. Over the course of three to four years, Moldova will need to meet a whole range of norms (competition rules, customs, standards) before its companies can have full, quota-free access to EU markets. The difficulty is that the regime implies inspections of the enterprises: Chisinau has no access to Transnistrian factories and facilities at present. Transnistrian companies can register in Chisinau to access favourable EU conditions. Chisinau will carry liability for any infringements of DCFTA rules by enterprises using the new agreement (as it does under current agreements); this poses a problem when it cannot make inspections. On the other hand, if a solution is not found, Chisinau could deny them access to the market altogether. It would be beneficial to all parties (and to an eventual resolution), if a way could be found to include Transnistria in the negotiations.

There are parallel discussions on visa liberalisation. Moldova has to meet EU standards on document security and border management over the two to five years of negotiations. Once in place, it will be much easier for Moldovan passport holders: they will benefit from visa-free travel for up to 90 days, and there will be no charge. Again, participation in negotiations and an eventual agreement on modalities would benefit ordinary Transnistrian citizens.

Focus groups in Transnistria all complained about the difficulty of travel, for example to Ukraine, using Transnistrian identity documents. There is scope for Chisinau to gain favour with Transnistrians by making Moldovan passport issuance clearer and easier for Transnistrians; as someone noted in one of the groups: “It would be useful to find a way to have a valid passport”.

3

The players

Moldova

ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER 2010 resulted in a return to power of the Alliance for European Integration (AEI), a coalition of three parties (Liberal Democrats, Democrats and Liberals), which first came to power in 2009. The Alliance has a majority in parliament (59 from 101), but does not have sufficient votes (it needs 61) to elect a president. If the impasse remains, either the constitution will have to be changed or there will need to be a further round of elections; while the crisis does not mean paralysis, it is inevitably a distraction for the government.

Reunification of the country is the second coalition objective (out of seven). Formal responsibility for Transnistrian policy is with a Deputy Prime Minister, supported by a small secretariat (Bureau for Reintegration). The Bureau for Reintegration is in frequent contact with Transnistrian representatives.

For most Moldovans, Transnistria is not a priority. In surveys the issue regularly ranks ninth in any list of concerns. There are more pressing needs: finding a job and supplementing a meagre income. There is a widespread belief that no settlement will come in the foreseeable future, so there is no point in engagement in the topic.

There is also the belief that the Alliance fears integration because it will import into the electoral system voters (e.g. the large number of pensioners and service personnel), who would vote for the Communist Party (currently in opposition). However in Transnistria there is a Communist Party, but it is not popular.

The central government in Moldova has not always made a good job of handling the autonomous region of Gagauzia, inhabited by ethnic Gagauz, who like Transnistrians mostly speak Russian (as well as Gagauz), as a model for Transnistria. Gagauzia declared independence too in the early 1990s (two weeks before Transnistria), but later accepted autonomy. The central government has too frequently interfered in the region, contrary to the agreement on autonomy reached in 1994.

Moldova remains the poorest country in Europe. Average monthly income is around €80. Unemployment is high, and an estimated 500,000 out of a working population of 1.2 million is abroad, either in the EU or in Russia. Many who remain in Moldova take bribes as the only way to supplement their income. In the Corruption Index, Moldova was 105 out of 178. Moldova has so far failed to become economically and socially attractive to Transnistria.³

Moldova has a deep trade deficit. Exports in 2010 grew to \$1.6 billion, but imports were \$3.8 billion. Remittances from those working abroad helped to meet the gap. Around

³ For emigration figures, see Imedia news service, Chisinau 12 April 2011; see also UNICEF: *The Impacts of Migration on Children in Moldova* 2008, p 252; [www.unicef.org/siteguide/files/The_Impacts_of_Migration_on_Children_in_Moldova\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/siteguide/files/The_Impacts_of_Migration_on_Children_in_Moldova(1).pdf). Accessed 1 May 2011. For corruption index, see www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/in_detail#3. Accessed 1 May 2011.

50 percent of trade is with the EU, 40 percent with Russia and other Commonwealth of Independent States countries. In economic as well as political terms, Moldova needs to look both to the EU and Russia.⁴

The economy recovered in 2010, growing at over 6 percent. Financial interventions by the EU, International Monetary Fund and others maintained the budget and economic stability. The EU is the largest single donor to Moldova; it provided €270 million in grants in 1991–2009, and intends to spend €550 million in 2010–2013. The US is extending \$260 million for agriculture and infrastructure under the Millennium Challenge Corporation.⁵

Chisinau would prefer all projects with Transnistria to be aimed at reintegration. There is a concern that donors may, by building up infrastructure, end up strengthening a separatist entity. Looking to Russia and the West, ‘Transnistria will milk two mothers’.

The Moldovan Government is currently working on a concept document on reintegration, to be agreed and implemented across ministries. This will feed in to an overall strategy, which will form the core work of a prime ministerial committee established in March 2011. To be effective, government policy formation will need to be supported by independent research on scenarios and options, including on sensitive topics like business, together with engagement with civil society. Little in-depth study was done in recent years. The arrival of a new government makes such studies timely and useful: it needs a series of ‘what if’ studies, which can also inform EU policy. German experience of reunification can be useful.

Transnistria

The political scene in Transnistria saw changes in 2010. Elections in December 2010 returned the Renewal Party with an increased majority in the parliament (Supreme Soviet), with 26 seats and 4 allies out of 43. Their increased strength (and constitutional majority) has allowed them to introduce reforms which would increase the authority of parliament at the expense of the presidency. Renewal has different interests to the president.

The changes include abolishing the post of vice-president, the direct election of mayors and other local figures (currently appointed by the president) and stronger parliamentary committees. The Transnistrian administration is not monolithic, but it remains to be seen how the changes might in practice limit the power of the president.

Presidential elections will be held in December 2011. President Smirnov will stand again, and on current expectations will be re-elected, although there is speculation that he may be ousted, leading to a new leadership in 2012. Either way the success of the EU programmes recommended depends very much on the leadership in place then.

The political atmosphere in the latter half of 2010 became more restrictive. President Smirnov warned in his address to the Supreme Soviet on 29 December 2010 about the dangers of the “Europeanisation of young people ... sponsored by European and Western funds”. The administration has stopped a number of projects: the Euro-region project bringing together the North of Transnistria with neighbouring Ukrainian and Moldovan regions was blocked, as have been social projects from the World Bank. Meanwhile other projects have continued.

Transnistrians wishing to attend seminars in Chisinau have to apply to the local security services two weeks beforehand; in areas seen as sensitive (such as journalism), people have been warned by the security services not to attend. The arrest and conviction of journalist Ernest Vardanean and customs officer Ilie Cazac in late 2010

⁴ Bureau of National Statistics: *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova*, Chisinau (2010), p 422. Accessed 1 May 2011.

⁵ Stefan Füle (European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy): *Address to the Moldovan Parliament*, Chisinau, 14 May 2010, p 2. US Department of State: 2011 Investment Climate Statement Moldova, (March 2011) p 2. www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2011/157325.htm. Accessed 1 May 2011.

have made people more apprehensive. Some Western organisations in Chisinau are wary of sending personnel into Transnistria, afraid the staff might be detained.

The Transnistrian administration have been receptive to EU assistance in the health sector and business development, where they see no political agenda. The EU has funded training for business people and trade missions in 2010, and opened two perinatal centres in January 2011. Transnistrian leaders (given their self-perception as a separate state) aim to develop direct links with the EU, independent of Chisinau. They are open to projects which do not change the political *status quo*. As one Transnistrian leader commented to the consultant: 'no politics, no problem.'

"Ten years ago people in Transnistria wanted integration [with Moldova] or recognition; now their concern is for the economy"

Elena Bobcova, economist, Tiraspol

Change in Transnistria may come from economic factors. Transnistria has for many years run a budget deficit. Expenditure in 2011 is projected at \$371 million, against an income of \$180 million. The result is a deficit equivalent of 17 percent of GDP.⁶ As one Transnistrian quipped ironically: "Our leaders should win the Nobel prize for economics for managing an economy with such a large deficit".

The administration uses revenues from gas consumption to meet the gap, but inevitably expenditure has to be limited to the minimum, to paying public employee salaries and pensioners (there is also a deficit of \$50 million in the pension fund). This means there is no funding for health or infrastructure, hence the opening to help from the outside in the health sector.

In effect Russia otherwise funds the gap, sometimes through direct subsidies. There is a belief that Russia has lost patience with President Smirnov because Russian subsidies and gas income have been misappropriated. But at the same time it is believed Russia has not yet identified anyone it would like as a successor.

The economy relies on a very small number of large enterprises. Taxes from the steel plant in Ribnitsa, Moldova Metallurgical Works (MMZ), normally account for around 50 percent of income to the Transnistrian budget: however, MMZ has not been operating since mid-2010. Output of the Ribnitsa Cement plant is at 30 percent. The major plants thrive on cheap gas; in many cases they need substantial modernisation investment (only available affordably from the EU); they would not be economic if they paid a commercial price for gas.

While there is comparative prosperity in the cities of Tiraspol, Bender and Ribnitsa, the villages, as in the rest of Moldova, are poor.

The Transnistrian population is declining. Interviewees in Transnistria reported that, according to Transnistrian statistics, the population fell by 4,500 in one year, from 522,500 in 2009 to 518,000 in 2010, and a significant drop from the 750,000 in 1989.⁷

At the same time, the number in active manufacturing and service industries has fallen dramatically, from 100,000 in 2000 to 60,000 in 2010. Meanwhile this declining private-sector workforce has to support 100,000 people employed in the public sector and 150,000 pensioners. That ratio of one worker to 2.5 pensioners compares to the EU norm of 4 workers to one pensioner.⁸

Reportedly, about 60 percent of Transnistrian exports go to the EU, to a total of 24 member states.⁹ Large and small enterprises need loans to expand: they need access to EU finance as well as EU markets. The EU needs to build on these factors, using them to encourage change.

⁶ Noi.md: Transnistria a adoptat budgetul, (25 November 2010). www.noi.md/ru/news_id/327/news_cat/60. Accessed 1 May 2011.

⁷ Interviews in Chisinau and Tiraspol.

⁸ Institute of Chartered Accountants Scotland: *EU warns on pension timebomb* (8 July 2010), www.camagonline.co.uk/News/4302.aspx. Accessed 1 May 2011.

⁹ Interviews in Chisinau and Tiraspol.

As Transnistrian companies like MMZ and the textile giant Tirotext export to the EU, the population at large has a relatively positive attitude to Europe. The New Age/CBS-AXA survey in 2009 found that 63 percent would like to join the EU (the figure was 72 percent for Moldova proper). The same survey found a lack of understanding on what reunification might mean.¹⁰

Even among the leadership, there is a recognition that Russia's attitude towards the EU is not one of simple hostility, so Transnistria should be flexible: 'Why be more Catholic than the Pope?'

Referendum results in Transnistria have shown a majority in favour of independence and links to Russia. Although the results were not validated or recognised by the EU, they may reflect public opinion inasmuch as that public opinion is not well informed on the real options.

The stand-off is more about the interests of competing elites than religious, ethnic or linguistic differences. Most inhabitants on either side of the river consider themselves Orthodox; there are people on either side of the river who consider themselves ethnic Moldovans (in Moldova 76 percent, Transnistria 32 percent), Russians (Moldova 6 percent, Transnistria 38 percent) and Ukrainians (Moldova 8 percent, Transnistria 29 percent). Russian speakers are in a higher proportion in Transnistria, and Transnistria has stronger political and cultural ties with Moscow than the rest of Moldova (although even on the West Bank these are substantial: there are more Russian speakers in Chisinau than in the whole of Transnistria). A new generation of Transnistrians has been brought up to think of the rest of Moldova as a separate country with a different culture.

There are extensive cross-river ties, both family and business. While the fact that the Transnistrian football team plays in the Moldovan league is well known, there are also significant business connections.

Focus groups on both sides complained about the fees charged from time to time by Transnistrians on the dividing line; they find the process time-consuming and irksome, especially when officials use it to extract bribes. Transnistria also charges a 100 percent duty on goods from the West Bank. Cross-river trade was estimated at \$30 million in 2010. It can be assumed that without the tax and other obstacles trade would increase, bringing more prosperity to both banks.

Ukraine

The view from focus groups was that Ukraine was not as active on Transnistria as it might be, given its national interests. The women's group in Tiraspol, for example, saw Ukraine as taking a passive role. There was little interest in Ukraine in Transnistria: "there is nothing in the Ukrainian media, even in Odessa, about Transnistria". There was a view that Ukraine was now very close to Russia.

This was matched by the view from the women's group in Chisinau. Ukraine should be active in resolving the Transnistrian problem, but Ukraine wanted first to resolve bilateral Ukrainian-Moldovan issues (notably completing the exchange of territory at Giurgulesti and Palanca in the South of Moldova). In any case Ukraine was now pro-Russia, and Russia liked things as they are in Transnistria.

Ukraine is one of two guarantor powers (along with Russia) for conflict resolution. Given it is the only country with a border with Transnistria, as a state Ukraine has an incentive to see a resolution. There is also a significant Ukrainian-speaking minority in Transnistria (around 200,000 people).

One Ukrainian priority has been to demarcate the Transnistrian section of its border with Moldova. Ukraine negotiated with Chisinau and Tiraspol to break the deadlock

on this thorny issue; in 2010, 120 kilometres (of 450 km) of survey work were achieved, and the rest should be completed in 2011.¹¹

Any solution would need Ukraine's support. Speaking in London on 6 September 2010, Foreign Minister Konstantin Gryshchenko said in response to a question about the German-Russian initiative on Transnistria: "I would point out that Transnistria is between Moldova and Ukraine, not between Germany and Russia."¹²

There is some expectation that Ukraine would like to achieve a breakthrough during Ukraine's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2013 (following on from Ireland). It is the chairman-in-office who leads on finding a settlement under OSCE auspices: many attempts have failed (at least in part) because of a lack of sufficient knowledge and preparation: given the country's deep knowledge of Moldova-Transnistria, Ukraine's chairmanship should avoid this.

However the EU needs to work with Ukraine to encourage Ukraine to take a visibly active role, to negate the perception that Ukraine is passive on Transnistria. The EU needs to do the groundwork now, building up continuity under the Irish chairmanship in 2012 and ensuring action is not delayed until 2013.

Russia

All the focus groups saw Russia as the key external player in any resolution of the Transnistrian issue. As the women's group in Tiraspol noted, Russia is well established in Transnistria through NGOs, its citizens, projects and links between political parties:

"Russia is very active here ... we do see the EU, but rarely"

Marina Krayeva, journalist, Tiraspol

Russia sees its historic and strategic interest in maintaining its influence both in Transnistria and in the rest of Moldova. In strategic terms, Russia sees the presence of its forces in Transnistria as an effective block on NATO's eastward expansion (as does its retention of its fleet in Sevastopol in Ukraine). There are an estimated 1500 troops in two distinct roles: either guarding the arms depot at Colbasna, or participating in the peacekeeping force.

Russian financial support to Transnistria is estimated at up to \$200 to \$400 million a year.¹³ To the extent that the Russian economy and budget encounter problems, there will be pressure to reduce this cost. But as the oil price rises, Russia's revenues will increase and so reduce the financial pressure.

Allied to this strategic aim is the desire to see Moldova retain the status of a neutral country. This is specified in the Moldovan constitution, but Russia seeks some sort of guarantee from an outside party, for example the EU or NATO. Western countries have taken the view that it is only for the country itself to make such a decision, but it would be worth exploring, as part of the settlement process, to see if there was some scope for a statement by the EU or the UN taking note of Moldova's neutrality.

Russia remains an important market for Moldovan exports, and there is significant Russian investment in Moldova, as well as in Transnistria. Russia has at times exerted pressure on Moldova by imposing stronger controls on Moldovan imports into Russia (e.g. wine and vegetables).

The European Union

The EU is heavily committed to Moldova through a range of mechanisms. Under the European Neighbourhood budget and the Eastern Partnership policy, the EU is helping to set a strategic direction for Moldova of alignment with European norms.

¹¹ Ukrainian Embassy, Chisinau.

¹² Chatham House address: *Ukraine's Foreign Policy under the New Government*, 6 September 2010.

¹³ Interviews in Chisinau and Tiraspol.

Although membership of the EU is not included or excluded in the relationship, the aim of the Moldovan Government, headed by the AEI, is eventual membership. The aspiration has general support among parties and the population.

The populations on both sides of the river look to the EU, as well as to Russia. The New Age/CBS-AXA survey in 2009 found that 72 percent on the West Bank favoured joining the EU (for better economic conditions), but also 63 percent of Transnistrians. At the same time, 62 percent on the West Bank also had a favourable view of Russia, 82 percent in Transnistria. A majority on each side of the river (65 percent West Bank, 60 percent in Transnistria) thought that the EU and Russia were the players who could solve the problem.¹⁴

The EU is set to sign an Association Agreement with Moldova, and recognises that under the Eastern Partnership countries can proceed towards convergence at their own speeds, independent of each other. This changes the perspective for Moldova, whose fate had often been linked to the progress of Ukraine. Among the countries in the Eastern Partnership region (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Moldova is seen as having the potential to move closer fastest. In 2011 the idea has emerged of 'more for more', an approach which puts more resources in a country which is making more progress.

Although the prospects of membership, and therefore the need to resolve the Transnistrian problem as a precondition, are distant, the Transnistrian problem is seen as relatively easy to solve. The accession of Romania to the EU in 2007 brought Moldova to the borders of the EU for the first time. Transnistria suddenly became an EU problem.

The EU has invested considerable resource and effort in establishing the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in December 2005. Headquartered in Odessa, it has 100 EU and other foreign experts with 126 local staff, with an annual budget of €12 million.¹⁵ EUBAM's activities have strengthened Ukrainian and Moldovan control over their borders and customs. EUBAM has made realisable the Moldovan-Ukrainian Joint Declaration (30 December 2005) under which Ukraine only recognises Chisinau's customs stamps. This has meant that any Transnistrian company wishing to export has to register in Chisinau; 643 were registered at the end of May 2010, 100 of them actively exporting.¹⁶ EUBAM has thus helped to restrict illegal smuggling, and to regularise trade by Transnistrian companies.

The EU assistance programme to Moldova is extensive, with €550 million budgeted for 2010–13.¹⁷ The EU provides support to all the ministries across the spectrum of the EU *acquis*.

The creation of the EU External Action Service (EEAS) in 2010 brings a potential to better combine the 'political' and 'technical/project streams' hitherto articulated through the European Council secretariat and the European Commission. The newly appointed Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia (Former Slovak foreign minister Miroslav Lacjak) will both lead Association Agreement negotiations and be the representative on the '5+2' negotiations. However the former EU Special Representative, whose mandate finished early in 2011, had a dedicated team; to achieve an active role on Transnistria, the EEAS needs adequate staff resources.

The European Commission already has a budget of €3.7 million for Transnistria in 2010–2011. This consists of €1.7 million under the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument 'Support to Civil Society in Transnistria' programme and €2 million under 'Building Confidence between Chisinau and Tiraspol'. Further funds will be available,

¹⁴ New Age/CBS-AXA *op cit*, p 25.

¹⁵ EUBAM website: www.eubam.org/eu/about/overview. Accessed 1 May 2011.

¹⁶ Veaceslav Berbeca: *Transnistria: Problema privatizarilor din Regiunea Transnistreana*, in *IDIS Viitorul: Raport de Prevenire a Crizelor*, Chisinau (April–October 2010), p 18.

¹⁷ Stefan Füle *op cit*, p 2.

given the total potential for Transnistria of 15 percent of the €273 million earmarked for Moldova from the ENPI 2011–2013.¹⁸

There has been some concern in Chisinau that the EU may reduce assistance for Moldova, following a French non-paper¹⁹ which reflected increased attention on the events in North Africa, and suggesting that Moldova's receiving €25 per head while Tunisia received €7 was not the correct balance.

Projects implemented (through UNDP) include healthcare projects (HIV, children with disabilities, perinatal facilities), environment (pesticides, drinking water) and a €250,000 business programme establishing three business schools in Transnistria, the training of business trainers, and a business seminar on financial analysis, accounts, management and marketing, as well as aspects of the DCFTA. This also includes technical help to joint working groups, and for small or medium enterprises (SMEs).²⁰

There have been a number of member state projects directly implemented by the embassy or development agency. These have included the Czech Republic, Sweden, Finland and most notably the UK (which had an extensive programme, including the Transnistrian Dialogues 2006–11). Programmes included children's exchanges, sport gatherings, human rights support, anti-AIDS campaigns, support to build up NGOs, joint media activities and joint seminars and summer schools for young people.

Member states have also been active through international donors. Germany, Italy, Denmark and others have supported international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) on anti-trafficking programmes, juvenile justice and humanitarian aid. While the internationals themselves have been involved in flood relief (UNDP), childhood illnesses, child rights (UNICEF), youth development, sport, rights of the disabled, gender equality (OSCE and others), reproductive health (UNFPA), anti-AIDs (WHO), higher education, medicine and local authorities (Council of Europe), and community-based projects (World Bank).

Russia has supplied agricultural loans, while Ukraine has offered flood relief and support for its citizens. The US/USAID has been involved in media development, anti-trafficking and human rights, among other areas, in addition to Millennium Challenge funding.

This list can only be superficial and partial. At present the aid is not being collectively mapped, so it is not possible to have a definitive overview: the EU Representation aims to create a donor matrix. It would be useful for indentifying gaps and avoiding duplication, but also to encourage the exchange of best practice. This is currently done though meetings of a donors' co-ordination group. The EU Representation will in 2011 take on the chairmanship of this group.

EU: Germany

It is perhaps not surprising, given Germany's experience of reunification, that Germany should seek involvement in assisting Moldova on the Transnistrian issue. Having herself come from what was East Germany, Chancellor Merkel is said to have a personal interest in helping those in Transnistria to a better life. Germany's federal structure also offers experience of successful devolution.

The profile of Moldova, and its problems, has been raised in Germany through the formation in 2009 of the Germany-Moldova Forum. This brings together 40–50 members, from parliament, government and business.

¹⁸ European Commission External Relations Directorate: *Republic of Moldova National Indicative Programme 2011–13*, p 13, p 39. http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/country/2011_enp_nip_moldova_en.pdf. Accessed 1 May 2011.

¹⁹ Szymon Ananicz: *Impact of North African revolutions on ENP*, (28 February 2011) www.easternpartnership.org/community/debate/enp-under-review-what-does-it-mean-east/; www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Lettre_a_Mme_Ashton.pdf; www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/11-02-17_Non-papier_Action_de_l_Union_europeenne_en_direction_du_voisinage_Sud.pdf, p 3. Accessed 1 May 2011.

²⁰ UNDP Moldova: *Project Card for Confidence Building Measures*, (2009). www.undp.md/projects/cards/pdf_eng/2010/Confidence%20building%20measures.pdf. Accessed 1 May 2011.

EU: Romania

Romania has strong historic links to West Bank Moldova (excluding Transnistria) and, as the EU member state bordering Moldova, has a strong interest in an economically viable and politically stable Moldova with the Transnistrian issue resolved. While Romanian politicians may sometimes talk of Moldova reunifying with Romania, this is not a likely prospect, and such rhetoric is unhelpful in terms of resolving the Transnistrian issue.

Relations are close, especially with the newly governing AEI. Romania and Moldova finally signed a Border Treaty in November 2010, and Romania has offered €100 million of direct aid to Moldova,²¹ as well as support in preparing to meet EU norms.

Romania grants Romanian citizenship to those who were formerly Romanian citizens and their descendants. There were over 96,000 applications in 2009–2010. Some in Moldova, and especially in Transnistria, have seen this as undermining the statehood of Moldova (and preparing for Moldova's merger with Romania). However for most Moldovans, this is a means to an end, free travel within the EU, rather than an abandonment of Moldova.

²¹ Imedia: *Romania outlines strategy for ties with Moldova*, (28 January 2010). <http://imedia.md/libview.php?l=en&idc=255&id=989>. Accessed 1 May 2011.

4

Themes

Myths and stereotypes: media

FOCUS GROUPS ON EACH SIDE OF THE RIVER, especially among young people, threw up powerful images. Several participants in the Soldanesti (North Moldova) youth focus group characterised Transnistria as a ‘police state’: the secret police watched everything. The same image emerged among participants at the State University in Chisinau group: Transnistria was a ‘black hole’, with no legitimate government; Transnistrians were cut off, with little knowledge of Moldova or the West.

This was balanced by the comments of the youth group in Tiraspol, who resisted common stereotypes and defended their independence and current orientation. There was broad agreement within the group that separation in the early 1990s had been a necessity: there had been aggression against Transnistrians; youth in Transnistria was now oriented towards Russia (as Transnistria had been since the 1800s), whereas youth in Moldova was oriented towards Romania; Moldovans discriminated against the Russian language, in not recognising it as a state language and refusing to speak Russian even if they understood it, whereas Transnistria recognised three languages (Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan/Romanian); Moldovans had stereotypical views of Transnistrians as ‘some kind of bandits’, ‘aggressors’ living in a ‘black hole’:

“It is not a conflict zone, not a war zone: no-one is walking around with Kalashnikovs: we are human too!”

Among older participants, on both sides of the river, there was a clear mutual respect for the other side. This was true of the women’s groups in Chisinau and Tiraspol, and the business group in Tiraspol. The women’s group in Tiraspol contrasted their own cross-river attitudes to those of the young. The women all visit Chisinau regularly. “Although we live in two different countries, we find there is common understanding between us [and counterparts in Chisinau]”. “We have experience of the Soviet Union: we know what it means to live and work together”. Young people on each side of the Nistru no longer had this shared background and history; they were growing apart.

Social issues: building bridges for youth

Participants in the (separately held) women’s groups in Chisinau and Tiraspol pointed to the synergies in working together on social issues. Both groups felt the problems were so pressing across the board that there needed to be joint cross-river action regardless of any political resolution. Issues included people-trafficking, single parents, rehabilitation of young offenders, care of the elderly, and people with disabilities.

Joint training and research projects would enable exchanges on best practice. There could be joint articles and joint websites, specialist journals. Preferably this would involve experts from elsewhere to bring in the latest thinking.

Both groups also voiced concern over the lack of mutual recognition of documents, such as marriage certificates, divorce papers and child custody decisions, and provision of documents to those without papers. This made life very difficult for the many people whose families straddled the divide or who moved across it.

The youth group in Transnistria promoted a similar approach. There had to be more projects to break down perceptual barriers, through exchanges of students across the Nistru and into the EU. This would build up mutual trust: “as a first step, we should respect each other, respecting each other’s different cultures”.

The Soldanesti group believed Moldova had to reach out to Transnistria, and do more to foster mutual understanding: there should be continued and reinforced tuition in Russian on the Chisinau side of the river to overcome the language barrier. There should be joint websites (on local issues, in Russian), and broadcasts in Russian to Transnistria.

In particular the group believed more needed to be done to bring young people on each side of the river together: through sport exchanges and a mini-league for the North, with the provision of sports centres where youth matches could be played (football, basketball and tennis); more facilities and activities would also address the problem of youth delinquency.

“Our young people should meet and be friends; one day they may be ministers”.

Bridging the divide among young people was also a theme for the university student group in Chisinau; they suggested joint seminars, joint research projects on easy topics such as classic history, but also recent history (including the separation of Transnistria from Moldova). This could be with Ukrainian, Russian and Romanian academics to broaden the scope and to see developments in regional rather than parochial terms. There should be scholarships for Transnistrian students to study in Chisinau and for them (and indeed Moldovan students) to study at European universities under the EU’s Bologna programme.

“Moldova should use its leverage to influence the young generation in Transnistria”

Veronica Lupu, lawyer, Chisinau

Bringing prosperity: building business

All six focus groups were concerned about economic conditions. This reflects surveys which put living conditions as the main concern for the population on either bank. Young people in focus groups on each side of the river were worried about finding jobs. This was most starkly illustrated in the youth focus group in Soldanesti, a small town in the North of Moldova close to the River Nistru: “The first thing we have to think about is our families ... how they can live well; we gain nothing by talking about a solution on Transnistria”.

In Soviet times Soldanesti had factories which supplied the heavy industry across the river in Ribnitsa. The plants in Soldanesti are now closed, with little to replace them. Participants in the focus group described life in Transnistria as good: gas, electricity and accommodation were cheap; such outings would be around 2500 Moldovan Lei a month in Soldanesti, 500 a month in Ribnitsa; pensions were reasonable, wages higher, employment prospects better. Food was cheaper in Ribnitsa: many in Soldanesti do their weekly shopping there. In the evenings, the street lights blazed in Ribnitsa, while it was dimly lit on the west bank. The good standard of living meant that people in Transnistria genuinely supported their leadership; there is no pressure for change.

Ribnitsa (with Tiraspol) is probably the most prosperous city in Transnistria, a factor which may shape the views of people living in Soldanesti. However the disparity was also voiced by the Chisinau students’ focus group; as one commented: “They have factories and industries over there; we need investment to match that”. Moldova needed to become a “pole of attraction”, a “magnet for Transnistrians”, but had a long

way to go to achieve that, given that Transnistria held most of Moldova's industries when the break-up occurred in 1991.

The members of the professional women's focus group in Chisinau (some of them businesswomen) acknowledged the differential across the river, but were more concerned about how to make cross-river business flourish. The division of the country was a major hindrance to business, especially small business. The non-recognition of Transnistria, and bureaucracy on both sides of the river, brought problems in effecting payments and with the transport of goods across the dividing line (an opportunity for squeeze). To achieve economic growth across the board there needed to be a solution, but pending that a programme for start-ups and support of small business.

The theme of the difficulties for small business was echoed in the focus group composed of young business people in Tiraspol. Their main concerns were red tape, a lack of training and expertise in specialised business knowledge, poor language ability (only three of the eight spoke English), a lack of information on the EU business environment, a lack of access to investment funds (or funding being available only at exorbitant rates) and a lack of access to overseas markets.

Their recommendations were therefore more training in specialised fields (marketing, accounts, distribution) at home and in the EU, business English courses (plus French and German), training on EU business developments, regulations and markets, as well as an EU business information centre, funding for small businesses (from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development [EBRD], once modalities agreed with Transnistrian and Moldovan authorities) and more trade missions (as that with the Moldovan Chamber to Italy).

5

Recommendations to the EU: policy and programmes

Support Moldova

TO SUCCEED ECONOMICALLY AND POLITICALLY, Moldova needs external help. The EU (and others) are providing it. But there are fears in Chisinau, following events in North Africa, that the EU will divert political attention in that direction to the detriment of Moldova. At the same time the EU is developing a differential approach to the six countries (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) under its Eastern Partnership perspective. It would support Moldova's aim to converge with EU norms and values if the EU were to reassure the country that funding will keep step with progress, under the EU's emerging 'more for more' approach. It would also assist Moldova and Transnistria if the EU could send a clear signal that membership would eventually be available once a resolution was achieved (a majority on each side of the Nistru favour membership), and accession criteria met. The EU will need to develop a coherent approach on Transnistria, creating a united strategy for the EU External Action Service EAS and member states, and drawing on local and international expertise. The presence of the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) contributes to the regularisation of Transnistrian business, and should remain. For programmes in Transnistria to succeed, there needs to be a synthesis of experience on Transnistria projects, to enable success stories to be built on. The EU Delegation needs to be adequately resourced to develop and implement Transnistrian policy.

The EU should:

- give confidence to Moldova that it will have the EU's full political and financial support in drawing close to the EU, just as Moldova should exert maximum effort to fulfil its commitments to the EU
- reassure Moldova of continuing attention through high-level visits
- engage further in resolution of Transnistrian problem; devise its strategy for the Transnistrian problem, including 'sticks and carrots'
- pursue an active role in OSCE-sponsored negotiations, while formally remaining an observer
- continue with EUBAM
- ensure that the European Delegation draws together and learns from the information and experience of Transnistria donors.

Work with partner countries

There will be no resolution of the Transnistrian problem without an external driver. The EU, through the German-Russian initiative, has a potential for progress. Any resolution needs Russian and Ukrainian co-operation and buy-in. Both are guarantors of the existing ceasefire; each sees Moldova/Transnistria as part of its historical and geopolitical interests. There is no consensus in Moscow on what Russian interests are, and little long-term forward thinking on the problem that might promote the idea that a solution would be in Russia's interests. In any case, Russia will want something in return for working with the EU on solving the problem. Ukraine's deep and long-term knowledge of the problem, and the presence of a large Ukrainian population there, gives it a unique basis on which to push for a solution when it holds the rotating OSCE chairmanship (which brings with it responsibility for resolution) in 2013. The co-operation of other donors and interested parties, notably the US, would help build support.

The EU should:

- build on existing EU engagement and German-EU initiatives with Russia to find a solution, elaborating an EU strategy, working initially on setting the parameters of a solution
- work with Russia to demonstrate that a resolution will not harm, but support, Russia's long-term interests
- stimulate think tank work in Russia on the benefits to Russia of resolution
- work with Ukraine to prepare for Ukraine's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2013
- seek co-operation of the US .

Help Moldova to develop resolution strategies

To prepare the ground for a resolution, Moldova needs to examine positions on a number of crucial issues which Transnistrians cite as obstacles to any agreement: will business ownerships be recognised; will people lose their jobs; will they be worse off? Focus groups also identified daily problems for inhabitants of both banks stemming from the non-recognition of formal documents, an issue which could be addressed pending a resolution. The EU should assist the Moldovan Government in devising resolution strategies for the Transnistrian issue; this could include step-by-step trade-offs and their implications, outlines of a possible settlement worked up with the parties and partners, with input from civil society, and a media strategy. This will require programmes to enhance think tank capacity in Chisinau, depleted since many analysts took new positions following elections in 2009. Programmes building up NGO capacity should ensure know-how transfer from international experts to local activists for long-term sustainability, and cross-party consensus in parliament. The strategy has to address the activation or amendment of the large number of memoranda and agreements between Chisinau and Tiraspol over the last 20 years. Chisinau will need to demonstrate that it will abide by its autonomy agreement with the southern region of Gagauzia.

The EU should:

- work with Moldova to address key issues:
 - status of enterprises privatised by Transnistrian administration
 - job security/retraining of civil servants in event of a solution
 - retraining programmes and incentives for the large number of military personnel, and programmes for reintegration in civilian society
 - amnesty for senior Transnistrians from prosecution
 - make Gagauzia a model of how autonomy can be genuine
 - respect for Russian language rights, and tuition
 - more work on recognition of official documents
 - opening of rail, telephone and other links

- support strengthening of think tanks to develop deeper analysis of above issues, and to build up well-informed public knowledge of developments in Transnistria; support from international experts on technical issues (e.g. railways) and conflict resolution; support to expert groups
- support joint research projects between think tanks in Moldova, Transnistria, Russia, Ukraine and Romania, and joint journalistic projects
- support a political economy audit of the Transnistria problem
- support a civil society consultative process on both banks on Moldova's Transnistria strategy
- support programmes to increase public tolerance on language issues and history on both sides of the Nistru.

Including Transnistria

The EU is pursuing a range of negotiations with Chisinau, from visa liberalisation to a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), together with work to bring in EU norms across the board. It would benefit people on both sides of the River Nistru if Transnistrians were involved in the negotiation processes: the EU should help to convince Transnistria to become involved, advising on how this can be done without implying recognition, and persuading Transnistrians that such inclusion is in their long term interest. Bringing Transnistrian higher education establishments into the EU's higher education network (Bologna system) would enable Transnistrian (as well as students from the rest of Moldova) to benefit from study at EU universities, reducing isolation, and deepening awareness of the EU. Civil society in Transnistria is weaker outside of Tiraspol, but there are community organisations which can be nurtured, while avoiding a long-term dependency culture. The lack of banking links across the river deprives Transnistria of the funds its companies need.

The EU should:

- work with Moldova to increase the appetite for DCFTA, and to include Transnistrians in DCFTA negotiations
- work with both parties to find ways for Moldovan customs officials to certify imports and exports on site in Transnistria, as part of DCFTA
- work with Moldova to find a way to include Transnistria in visa negotiations
- work with Moldova to include Transnistria in other areas where Moldova is aligning with EU norms
- continue support to Moldova-Transnistrian joint working groups, including work on revision/implementation of existing bilateral agreements
- support students from Transnistria (and the rest of Moldova) to study in European universities
- support English (and German and French) language teaching in Transnistria
- support grass-roots organisations in Transnistria, especially outside Tiraspol, and supporting networks
- work with Moldova and Transnistria to facilitate banking links across the Nistru and to the EU.

Working with Transnistria to build confidence

Transnistria could contribute to confidence building by removing obstacles to cross-river trade and travel; the measures restrict economic growth which both sides of the River Nistru sorely need and impede the social interaction which would help bridge the divide. The EU could offer full removal of the visa ban on senior Transnistrians in exchange for Transnistrian progress.

Focus groups on both banks thought removing obstacles would be good for ordinary people on both sides. Similarly there would be immediate benefit in joint projects in the social care and educational sectors; social provision, inadequate on both banks, would be improved. Apart from the tangible advantages outlined by the focus groups, it would also offer the opportunity for convergence. This could tie in with the media strategy that co-operation brings tangible benefit, that maximum benefit can only be reached if the stand-off is resolved, and that improving life on each bank is not as beneficial as a settlement.

The EU should:

- work with Transnistria to fully open crossings, removing all fees and controls
- work with Transnistria to remove tax on imports from the Chisinau bank of the river, and ensure Transnistrian enterprises avoid double taxation
- work with Moldova and Transnistria on mutual recognition of documents
- fully remove the visa ban (currently suspended) in exchange for progress
- create cross-river networks on social, health and environmental issues, with training and input from outside experts, and joint projects on these issues
- work with Transnistria to open the EU-funded Gura Bicului bridge.

Media strategy: myths and stereotypes

On both sides of the river there are stereotypes which poison perceptions of the other side. Rhetoric and myths reinforce these attitudes. For example, many in Transnistria (and some on the Chisinau bank) believe that Moldova may merge with Romania, or that people on the Chisinau bank despise the Russian language. On the Chisinau side, there is the perception that Transnistria is a 'black hole'. On both sides of the river, there is little informed knowledge and debate about the costs and benefits of a resolution. Transnistrian focus groups identified a lack of information about the EU as a problem for future business, cultural and social development.

The EU should:

- work with Moldova, Transnistria (and others) to engage public opinion on both banks to debate the merits of a solution, to demonstrate that a settlement is needed, is possible, and would bring more and more tangible benefits to ordinary citizens than continuation of the *status quo*
- work with Moldova and Transnistria to provide accurate media coverage dispelling myths, support creation of media institutions covering both banks, and support media collaboration between the two banks
- work with Moldova and Transnistria to publicise confidence-building successes
- sponsor joint research (e.g. contemporary history, economists network/virtual institute, one-off costs of reintegration, economic and social costs/benefits of combining the economies), building on the Impact joint research project
- establish EU information centres.

Building bridges for youth: social issues

In all focus groups there was a recognition that the younger generation on each side of the river were growing apart. In the youth groups in Chisinau and Tiraspol, few had crossed the river (although the picture was different in Soldanesti, just across the river from Ribnitsa in Transnistria). Programmes should at the very least prevent further divergence. They should be in time linked to political aims, for example by expanding contact circles to include political figures.

Activity should build on the experience of the UK-funded Transnistrian Dialogues. Begun in 2006, it has been the only long-term bridge-building programme. Dialogue

sessions brought together a dozen young people from each side of the river for study weekends; each new group was helped by the presence of those who had experienced the barrier and stereotype breaking of previous sessions. The programme began with non-political participants, then moved on to junior political actors; by the end of 2010 it had 250 alumni, some of whom are now working in the administrations on either side of the river. The Dialogues form the basis of many other cross-river programmes, which rely on the network created.

The EU should:

- support creation of joint programming for TV/radio media/youth news agency/joint websites on local issues/Facebook pages (Russian equivalent), building on the experience of Radio Liberty in Bender and Publika TV in the South
- support creation of cross-river sports networks for under-16s (football, basketball, volleyball), building on OSCE and British Embassy projects
- support programme of joint music classes, bands, orchestras and performances (classic, folk, contemporary)
- support technical training for young parliamentarians/youth wings of parties: framing laws, working with the mass media, engaging with the public
- support the building up of contact and mutual knowledge among specific groups of young people, drawn from both banks of the Nistru. Each sectoral group treated as a separate parallel project e.g. young women/young entrepreneurs/young politicians (drawn from youth wings of parties)/young academics/young teachers, and also regional groups, e.g. North Moldova-North Transnistria (Soldanesti/Rezina/Ribnitsa).

Building business: bringing prosperity

Businesses on both sides of the river need preparation for exporting to the EU. The EU should continue its successful programme of joint workshops and export promotion activities; Transnistrian business people regretted poor English skills. Focus groups on both banks identified support for business start-ups as a key need, to provide new jobs. Transnistrian focus groups wanted access to EU finance, especially for SMEs, currently impossible while Transnistria is not recognised. There has been no in-depth analysis or survey of how the major companies on each side of the river would fare in the event of resolution; given the strength of business interests in the two administrations, this is a factor which needs investigation. Programmes should aim to bring about a convergence, rather than the strengthening of two diverging economies.

The EU should:

- continue programmes of EU-sponsored training on EU markets for Moldovan and Transnistrian companies
- continue programme of joint trade missions to EU member states
- continue support for SMEs, including job creation programmes and incubators
- investigate ways to provide microfinance to SMEs in Transnistria
- create cross-river enterprise zones, with awareness of the difficulties experienced on the Euroregions project
- create cross-river enterprises (e.g. tourism, using the River Nistru, linking castles on the river)
- provide business English courses
- sponsor deeper analysis of benefits/disadvantages to individual companies in any resolution.

**Programme work in
Transnistria**

Each project will take considerable time and effort to overcome suspicions and achieve full implementation. Typically a project in Transnistria takes several visits to reach agreement on implementation. It is recommended that projects are envisaged as long term (i.e. two to three years) programmes rather than one-offs, and are supported with long-term funding.

There will need to be flexibility within each programme so that adjustments can be made quickly to match political developments. Under the EU's emerging External Action Service, political and project activities should be more easily aligned than they were under the separate Commission/Council lines of authority. This should make it easier to link project activity to political goals.

There will need to be a risk analysis on whether the Transnistrian administration will permit a particular programme to go ahead. Programmes should build on existing donor experience.

Appendix: Methodology and validation

Focus groups

Six focus groups, three in Moldova, three in Tiraspol, were convened in the week of 24–28 January 2011. One Moldovan and one Transnistrian group were women-only. There was a business-specific focus group in Tiraspol, while some business views were reflected in the women-only group in Moldova. There was a youth group in Tiraspol, with two in Moldova proper, one in Chisinau and one 'outside the capital' in the small town of Soldanesti.

To complete this picture, further balancing groups might have been held in the North of Transnistria (to match the youth session in Soldanesti), and a business group in Chisinau. The degree of consensus leads us to believe that such sessions would not be expected to add anything radically different.

All participants were drawn from outside the ruling elites.

Moldovan youth outside Chisinau

The first was in the town of Soldanesti, a small town on the west bank of the River Nistru, about three hours' drive north of Chisinau. Soldanesti (along with nearby Rezina) faces the town of Ribnitsa on the Transnistrian side of the river. The town was selected to give a point of view which might be different from that in the capital. It was also chosen because the inhabitants are near enough to Transnistria for it to be a feature in their daily lives (a town in the West of Moldova on the border with Romania might give a different reading).

The group comprised 17 participants, in the (estimated) age range 16–30, with a balance of male and female. Occupations ranged from high school student (5), university student (2), policeman (1), lawyer (1), engineer/business (4) and local administration (2) to local administration. All had visited Transnistria, most of them regularly (once a month); over half had family in Transnistria. The session was conducted in Romanian, but it was evident that most knew Russian.

University students Chisinau

The second focus group was comprised of students in the capital Chisinau, all of them from the Department of History, Moldova State University. The group was large, 40 people, with a ratio of one woman to two men. The (estimated) age range was 20–30. In contrast to Soldanesti, only four had family connections in Transnistria; while 25 had at least one time visited or passed through Transnistria, few visited regularly; 15 had never been to Transnistria. The session was held in Romanian and English. No Transnistrian students were present, although there are some in the History Faculty.

Professional women: Chisinau

Ten representatives from the Association for Women in the Contemporary World formed a focus group of professional women, most of them active in social work, some in business: three psychologists, one actress, two businesswomen, one academic, one lawyer, two working in NGOs concerned with social problems, with an estimated age range of 25–40. Only two travel regularly to Transnistria.

Transnistrian young people: Tiraspol

The third group was comprised of ten students and other young people from Tiraspol: four women and six men. Seven were law students, one a medical student, two from NGOs. Four of the group were from the political movement Breakthrough (Proriv). Contact with Chisinau was limited: only one participant had been to Chisinau.

Professional women: Tiraspol

The second group in Transnistria consisted of six women (estimated average age 50, i.e. active in the workplace before the collapse of the Soviet Union): two teachers, two from NGOs involved in social work, and two journalists.

Young business people: Tiraspol

The group was comprised of eight under-30s, seven men and one woman, engaged in small- and medium-scale business (IT, car dealerships, construction, design, trading, business support).

Focus group methodology

To encourage active participation, sessions were conducted in the language in which participants felt most comfortable (Russian or Romanian), assurances were given that remarks would be given in confidence and were not attributable (where there are named quotations, it is with the explicit permission of the individual), names of participants were not noted, and sessions with Transnistrians were held in Tiraspol, avoiding the need for participants to travel to Chisinau (which can bring problems with the authorities). The guiding principle was 'do no harm'.

Discussions were structured to encourage maximum engagement from participants. The main themes were whether separation was a key concern, what the main problems were in being separate, how these problems could be reduced, and if there was a lack of knowledge on each bank, how could mutual understanding be built up. In Transnistria, the sensitive question of what form any resolution might take was not pursued actively, given the official prevailing view that Transnistria is an independent republic. Transnistrian participants in group sessions were not pressed on the question of whether an independent Transnistria was viable; it was assumed that some members of the groups might report what others said to the authorities.

At the end of each session, the moderator summarised the ideas proposed, to allow for real-time amendments and additions.

The ideas thrown up in the focus groups were validated on a subsequent visit to Moldova/Transnistria (9–10 March 2011), when the findings were presented to representatives drawn from the groups (six people in Tiraspol, six in Chisinau). The ideas were also validated through meetings with players and specialists both in Chisinau and Tiraspol, a validation session in London on 21 March 2011, and by subsequent comments from specialists.

Key informant interviews

(Not including focus group participants)

Interviews were conducted in Chisinau-Tiraspol 24–29 January, 28 February–2 March, 7–10 March 2011, in Berlin 25–26 February.

Chisinau

George Balan, Director, Bureau for Reintegration
 Arcadie Barbarosie, Executive Director, Institute for Public Policy
 Wolfgang Behrend, Head of Political and Economic Section, EU Delegation
 Udo Burkholder, Head of Mission, EU Border Assistance Mission
 Corneliu Ciurea, Institutul pentru Dezvoltare si Initiative Sociale (IDIS) Viitorul
 Hubert Duhot, EU Delegation to Moldova
 HE Berthold Johannes, German Ambassador to Moldova
 Eugen Karpov, Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration (from 2011)
 Libor Krkoshka, Representative, EBRD
 Vlad Kulminski, Grants Co-ordinator, Support to Confidence Building Measures, UNDP
 HE Valeriy Kuzmin, Ambassador of the Russian Federation
 HE Marius Lazurca, Ambassador of Romania
 Owen Masters, Expert, Confidence Building Measures, Council of Europe
 John Mitchell, Deputy Head, British Embassy
 Victor Munteanu, Project Manager, Support to Confidence Building Measures, UNDP
 Oazu Nantoi, Institute for Public Policy
 Victor Neagu, World Bank, Moldova
 Claus Neukirch, Deputy Head of OSCE Mission
 Victor Osipov, former Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration (2009–10)
 HE Serjij Pirojkov, Ukrainian Ambassador to Moldova
 Nicu Popescu, Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations
 Philip Remler, Head, OSCE Mission to Moldova
 Galina Selari, Executive Director, Center for Strategic Studies and Reform
 HE Keith Shannon, British Ambassador to Moldova
 Alla Skvortsova, Head, DFID
 Vasile Sova, former Moldovan Minister of Reintegration (2002–6)

Tiraspol

Oxana Alistratova, NGO Interaction
 Elena Bobcova, Economist
 Iurie Ganin, Vice-President, Transnistrian Chamber of Commerce
 Vitaly Ignatiev, Deputy Political Representative
 Anatoly Kaminsky, Speaker/Chairman, Supreme Soviet
 Alexander Koroliev, Vice-President, Transnistria
 Valerii Litskai, former Political Representative (foreign minister equivalent)
 Andrei Safonov, Analyst
 Sergey Shirokov, Director, Mercator NGO
 Sergey Simonenko, Deputy Political Representative
 Grigorii Volovoi, Director, Centre for Defending Human Rights, Bender

Berlin

- Dr Patricia Flor, Special Representative for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, German Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Dr Anneli Gabanyi, former Moldova specialist, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
- Felix Henkel, Central and Eastern Europe, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)
- Dr Christophe Israng, Head of Division, Central, Southern and Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia, Federal Chancellery
- Dr Hans Martin Sieg, Foreign Policy Adviser, CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group
- Dr Susan Stewart, Russian and Commonwealth of Independent States Division, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)
- Dr Andreas Wittkowsky, Analysis Division, Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF)
- Yana Zabanya, Analyst, European Stability Initiative (ESI)

Other locations

- Walter Kemp, Director for Europe and Central Asia, International Peace Institute, Vienna
- Margareta Mamaliga, Open Society Institute, London
- Ambassador Miroslav Lacjak, Managing Director, Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, EEAS
- Dr Stefan Wolff, Professor of International Security, University of Birmingham

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Saferworld works to prevent and reduce violent conflict and promote co-operative approaches to security. We work with governments, international organisations and civil society to encourage and support effective policies and practices through advocacy, research and policy development and through supporting the actions of others.

COVER PHOTO: Driver from Transnistria buying fresh watermelons from Moldovan farmers on the Chisinau-Dubasari highway, 17 August 2006. Photo kindly provided by © CLAUS NEUKIRCH/OSCE



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