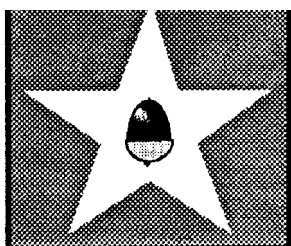


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**Security Concerns
in Post-Soviet Moldova**

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SECURITY CONCERNS IN POST-SOVIET MOLDOVA: STILL NO LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Dr Trevor Waters

INTRODUCTION

Conflict in Moldova quickened with the nationalist ferment over matters of language, culture and identity which consumed the Soviet republic in 1989 and surfaced with the secession of Gagauzia and Transnistria in 1990. Civil war, continuing difficulties with territorial separatism, ethno-linguistic strife, Romanian irredentism and Great-Russian chauvinism number among the most important security concerns that have plagued the Republic of Moldova since its declaration of independence on 27 August 1991. This paper examines some of the background factors which generated such problems (some of which may appear to have a characteristic borderland nature, and may, indeed, be typical of borderland states), and reviews the progress that has been made towards their solution.

HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY

[Moldovans and Romanians have always spoken of 'Moldova', while in the West - until the 1990s - we usually called the territory by its Russian and Latin name 'Moldavia'. 'Dnestr' (or variants 'Dniester', 'Dniestr') is the Russian designation for the river the Moldovans and Romanians known as the 'Nistru'. From the Moldovan/Romanian standpoint the region to the east across the Nistru is, of course, "Transnistria", which is known, however, in Russian as Pridnestrov'ye, or "the land on the Dnestr."]

The territory of the Republic of Moldova is not coextensive with the historic Moldovan lands which are fragmented at the present time. The 1940 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact allowed the Soviet union to annex the eastern half of the Romanian province of Moldova and the annexation was confirmed in the 1947 Peace Treaty between the USSR and Romania.

It is worth recalling, however, that Bessarabia (the Russian designation for the territory between the Dnestr and the Prut, derived from an erstwhile Romanian ruling house of Basarab) was Russian from its liberation from the Turks in 1812 until 1917, when it proclaimed its independence from Russia as the Democratic Republic of Moldova, and joined Romania in 1918.

In accordance with Stalin's 'divide and rule' nationalities policy, two of the three regions of the annexed territory, Northern Bucovina in the north and Southern Bessarabia in the south, were transferred to Ukraine (and now form Chernovtsy Oblast and the southern part of Odessa Oblast respectively). A strip of land along the eastern (or left) bank of the Dnestr/Nistru (Transnistria) was detached from Ukraine, however, and added to the central region of the annexed territory to become (in 1940) the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic and (in 1991) the sovereign Republic of Moldova.

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In 1990, the Popular Front of Moldova made strident calls for the reintegration of the "historic Moldovan lands" of Northern Bucovina and Southern Bessarabia, while Ukraine flatly rejected what it regarded as irredentist pretensions. In November 1994, however, Moldova and Ukraine signed an agreement which stipulated that the two sides have no territorial claims on each other.

That strip of territory along the eastern bank of the Dnestr, however, which constitutes 15% of Moldova's territory and provides the focus for the continuing confrontation, has never been considered part of the traditional Moldovan lands, although it has always contained a sizeable Moldovan population. Prior to the Revolution in 1917 that left-bank Dnestr border territory formed part of the Tsarist Empire and, in 1924, was incorporated into Ukraine as the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In Transnistria, then, unlike in western Moldova, sovietisation, and with it Russification, for instance the use of the Cyrillic alphabet, was enforced for more than 70 years. Indeed, since the region formed a border area until World War II, and was thus ideologically vulnerable because of ethno-linguistic ties with Romania across the Dnestr, sovietisation was enforced with especial vigilance and vigour.

When the Romanian army - an ally of Nazi Germany - advanced into the Soviet Union during World War II it was wholly determined to destroy communism in Transnistria. Excess of zeal in pursuing this aim resulted in brutality and atrocities which linger in the Transnistria folk memory, reinforcing fear and suspicion of Romania to this day.

Post-war economic policy sought to develop Western Moldova as an agricultural area, while industrialisation - often of a defence-related nature - was concentrated mainly in Transnistria which is said to contain some 37% of the country's economic potential. Moldovan agricultural development had not, of course, been subject to the Soviet collectivisation disasters of the 1920s and 1930s, and the local peasantry on the West bank adapted well to the relatively painless collectivisation of the post-war period. As was the case throughout the Soviet Union, the peasants were allowed to engage in small-scale private enterprise farming. A successful, entrepreneurial peasant farming outlook and mentality survived better than elsewhere in Soviet territory and forms an important element in the mindset of the population in Western Moldova today. Agriculture in Soviet Moldova was, on the whole, efficient, productive and successful - in sharp contrast to most other parts of the Union - and some of the best talent took up agricultural management as a career.

Urbanised and heavily industrialised, Transnistria consists of 5 rayony (or districts) and the city of Tiraspol. It has a mixed population of 40.1% Moldovans (the largest single ethnic group), 28.3% Ukrainians and 25.5% Russians, according to the last USSR census in 1989. Until the 1960s Moldovans made up the absolute majority on the left bank, but their proportion declined as a result of centrally promoted immigration, particularly from the RSFSR, into the cities to man the factories. This population flow has increased in recent years, and many of today's left-bank inhabitants emigrated from remote areas of Russia during the 1980s, including "President" Igor Smirnov of the self-styled, breakaway "Dnestr Moldovan Republic" (DMR), who came from Siberia in 1985. Opposite the city of Tiraspol, where the Russians are concentrated and form a majority of the population, on the right bank of the Dnestr is the town of Tighina (Bender), an important junction, linked by rail and road bridges. Bender, too, was industrialised and populated by Russian

workers following World War II, and became an enclave of the left-bank located on the right bank of the river.

LANGUAGE & NATIONAL IDENTITY

Under Gorbachev demokratizatsiya had led to demands outside RSFSR for de-russification and thus to strengthening the official role and status of the titular republican language. This manifestly challenged the privileged position of local Russians and Russophones in those republics (who were often regarded anyway as occupiers, colonisers, or tools of Moscow). There was a backlash among Russophones, especially where jobs were threatened. The ensuing conflict was exploited both by republican nationalists and by communist opponents of reform, thus politicising the language issue. When republics became independent, enshrining the titular language as the official language was closely bound up with the idea of establishing and maintaining full independence. By this time, however, Russian and Russophone minorities had become identified with opposition to democracy and independence. Finding themselves treated as second-class (and probably disloyal) citizens, they turned to Moscow for help. This only served to confirm the suspicion and mistrust of the newly independent states. Issues of language and national identity fuelled the series of conflicts which led to the break-up of the USSR.

On 31 August 1989, in a highly charged atmosphere of rallies, strikes and demonstrations, Moldova followed the example of the Baltic republics and passed a law that declared the language of the titular nation to be the official language of the republic. The language law also implicitly recognized the identity of Moldovan and Romanian, and restored the Latin alphabet. (Following their annexation of Moldova in 1940, the Soviets insisted that Moldovan, written in Cyrillic script, was a different language from Romanian in order to promote the idea that Moldovans and Romanians are separate nations.) So important was the adoption of the Language Law within the context of the flowering of a non-Soviet, Moldovan national identity, that 31 August, Language Day, was subsequently declared a national holiday. 31 August Street is today one of the main thoroughfares in Chisinau, the Moldovan capital.

Despite the fact that the law provided for Russian to be the language of inter-ethnic communication, 100,000 ethnic Russians went on strike in support of retaining only Russian as the official language. The language reform was also unpopular with the Ukrainians and Gagauzi, who now had to study a third language, Moldovan/Romanian. Indeed, language was the trigger for secession in Transnistria and Gagauzia. The issue of what to call the language (glottonym) was hotly debated prior to the adoption of Moldova's new, post-Soviet Constitution (1994), which defines the state language as 'Moldovan', rather than 'Moldovan (Romanian)' or 'Moldovan which is identical to Romanian', the other options considered. In March and April 1995, thousands of students took to the streets chanting 'Romanian is the official language'.

THE STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF MOLDOVA

A distinction may be drawn between Moldova's global strategic significance and its regional strategic significance. During the Cold War the territory of Moldova - in peacetime - formed part of the Soviet Union's Odessa Military District. In the event

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of war it would have been mobilised to provide support for a strategic offensive operation in the South-Western Theatre of Military Operations against the Balkans, Greece and Turkey, with the Suez Canal and the North African coast as its second strategic objective. The headquarters for this strategic axis was located in Chisinau (Kishinev). With the end of the Cold War, the collapse of communism, and the demise of the Soviet Union, Moldova has lost its global strategic significance. It is interesting to note, however, that General Lebed, Commander-in-Chief of Russian Forces in the DMR (1992-1995), has described the Dnestr area as "the key to the Balkans", observing that "if Russia withdraws from this little piece of land, it will lose that key and its influence in the region".¹

NATIONAL DEFENCE & CIVIL WAR

Following the June 1990 declaration on state sovereignty, on 27 August 1991 the Republic of Moldova proclaimed independence and, by September, President Mircea Snegur had already signed the decree that was to lead to the establishment of national armed forces. In addition to the National Army which is charged with ensuring the military security of the Republic, there are also the Frontier Troops of the Ministry of National Security and the Interior Ministry's lightly armed Carabineer Forces for the maintenance of public order. 1992 witnessed the establishment of the Ministry of Defence, the appointment of the first Moldovan defence minister, and the passing of defence legislation.

Unhappily, the same year also saw the outbreak of a full-scale, local civil war with Transnistrian separatists strongly supported by elements of Russia's highly politicised 14th Army. Whether under the Soviet, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), or Russian flag, throughout 1990-91 and subsequently 14th Army covertly provided the Transnistrian separatists with weapons, training facilities, manpower, finance, moral and administrative support; occasionally such transfers included whole sub-units from 14th Army. This provided a traumatic baptism of fire for the nascent armed forces of the Republic: some 500 people were killed, many more wounded, while refugees perhaps numbered 100,000, though exact figures remain unclear.²

Since late July 1992 the Moldovan Army has been deployed on peacekeeping duties - highly significantly - on the territory of the Republic itself. Having failed to secure any UN (or indeed any CIS) involvement in a peacekeeping role, President Snegur was finally constrained by Moscow to accept what was essentially a Russian peacekeeping force. The Yel'tsin-Snegur agreement on 21 July 1992 provided for a cease-fire, the creation of a security zone on both sides of the Nistru river and the deployment of a joint Russian/Moldovan/DMR peacekeeping force under the day-to-day supervision of a trilateral Joint Control Commission.³ Originally the peacekeeping forces comprised six Russian battalions (3,600 men), 3 Moldovan battalions (1,200 men), and 3 DMR battalions (1,200 men).

As early as September 1992, Moldova publicly challenged the impartiality of the Russian peacekeepers, charging them with allowing the DMR separatists to maintain men and material in the security zone. The DMR, for its part, was able to continue to create and consolidate the structures of an independent 'state' (government departments, armed forces, border guards, banking system, etc) under the protection of the peacekeepers.

POLITICS & IDEOLOGY

The confrontation on the Dnestr is essentially a political struggle. In Moldovan eyes, the political and ideological forces that underpinned the abortive coup of August 1991, viz hard-line communism, Russian nationalism, the military-industrial complex, and the determination to preserve the union state, have retained a power base in the heavily militarised region and Russified industrial centres on the left bank. Troops of what has now become the Operational Group of Russian Forces in the Dnestr Region of the Republic of Moldova (OGRF), commanded by Russian officers with a political axe to grind, so the Moldovans say, furthered and continue to further the cause of local Russian, or other non-indigenous factions, in a former Soviet republic against the properly constituted state authorities of the newly-independent host country. In short, the Russian military actively supported an armed insurgency whose aim was to establish on the territory of an internationally recognised sovereign state a Soviet-style outpost, the so-called DMR, in a post-Soviet world.

The highly sovietised population of Transnistria, reinforced by a Russian industrialised workforce, suspicious of the peasant free-market mentality of the right bank, alarmed by the restoration of the Latin alphabet, and by the declaration that Moldovan (ie Romanian) was to be the official language of the Republic together with Russian, by the adoption of a version of the Romanian tricolour as the Moldovan flag, and fearful of the possibility of unification of the new state with Romania, naturally enough, saw matters very differently.

On 2 September 1990 Transnistria declared its secession from Moldova. This left bank refuge for the "Socialist Choice" enthusiastically hailed the attempted coup in August 1991 while, from the very beginning, western Moldova resolutely defied the putsch, vigorously supported RSFSR President Yel'tsin's democratic stand, and resisted peacefully, yet successfully, military attempts to impose the junta's state of emergency.

The DMR has subsequently played host to numerous representatives of Russia's red-brown (communist-nationalist) ideological forces, including hundreds of Cossack mercenaries determined to "defend their blood brothers" and to "hold the frontier of the Russian state", together with a string of virulently nationalistic demagogues like Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Sergei Baburin, Albert Makashov and Viktor Alksnis, the last of whom described the DMR as the base from which the Soviet Union's restoration would begin.⁴ Makashov was one of the principal leaders of the Moscow October 1993 insurgency (in which Baburin and Alksnis were also implicated), while Zhirinovskiy (leader of the misnamed Russian Liberal Democratic Party which has secured an alarmingly high percentage of the vote in Russian elections) has spoken of transforming Moldova into a Russian *guberniya*, or province. *Sovetskaya Rossiya* has described the DMR as "an island of Soviet power" and "a frontier of Russia".⁵

THE ETHNIC FACTOR

The total population of Moldova is 4,367,000 of whom 754,000 live in the capital city, Chisinau. The largest ethnic group, the Moldovans themselves, number 2,800,000 (or 65% of the total population). Of the three other major ethnic groups, the 600,000 Ukrainians (14%) come second with 560,000 Russians (13%) in third place, followed by the 153,000 Gagauzi (who constitute 3.5% of the population but

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who are concentrated in the southern corner of Moldova, along the border with Ukraine). Bulgarians account for 2% of the total population. 70% of Moldova's Russians live in western Moldova, 30% in the DMR. The ethnic mix in the DMR consists of 40.1% Moldovans, 28.3% Ukrainians, 25.5% Russians and various other minor national groups.

The Gagauzi are Turkic speaking Orthodox Christians whose ancestors fled Ottoman rule in north-east Bulgaria during and after the Russo-Turkish war of 1806-12. There have never, therefore, been any grounds for religious tension between them and the indigenous population. Most of the refugees settled in Bessarabia, which became Russian territory in 1812. Some 140,000 of Moldova's 153,000 Gagauzi are concentrated in south-western Moldova.

The DMR Russians, it must be emphasised, form but a minority in what they regard as their "little piece of Russia". Indeed, numerically speaking, they constitute a minority within a minority, for they represent only 30% of Moldova's total Russian population and only 25% of the total population of the left bank. However, given their strong-arm military backing and the de facto partition of Moldova, some 170,000 DMR Russians continue to be in a position to constrain severely the social and political choices of the Transnistrian Moldovan and Ukrainian majority ethnic groups whom they have now effectively isolated from the Moldovan heartland and from the political process in Chisinau.

The DMR Russians have never lost an opportunity to play the ethnic card for all that it is worth. Presenting themselves as an unfortunate minority whose human rights were being trampled underfoot by Chisinau's repressive policies of enforced Romanisation and desovietisation, they have fuelled ultranationalist sentiments in Russia, and prevailed upon Moscow to adopt a robust posture with regard to the protection of Russian interests abroad. They have, of course, succeeded in securing Moscow's "protection" with the help of Russian peacekeeping forces and the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF).

It is instructive to recall that in Moldova (as throughout the former Soviet Union), administration, the education system and the media greatly favoured the Russian population. Moldovan and Ukrainian schools and publications were far fewer than proportional representation of their populations would entail. Of Moldova's 600,000 Ukrainians, only 52,000 claim to be fully proficient in Ukrainian, while 220,000 say they no longer know their native tongue. Facilities for Ukrainians in the DMR are very poor, and today most Ukrainians there speak Russian.

For all the inflammatory nationalistic and pan-Slavic rhetoric that still emanates from Tiraspol (and still finds echoes in certain circles in Moscow), and for all the provocative manipulation of the ethnic card and of human rights issues, in general inter-ethnic relations in Moldova at large have not been adversely affected. More than 70% of Moldova's Slavic population reside in western Moldova and do not appear to feel threatened to any significant extent following Moldovan independence. With few exceptions this Slavic majority is strongly in favour of Moldova's territorial integrity and the reintegration of Transnistria, and has not sided with the DMR Russians in any way.

Military and para-military forces on both sides, including the combat elements that fought in the 1992 civil war, are ethnically mixed. Casualty figures correctly reflect the ethnic mix of the populations in question and thus provide further grim evidence that the conflict is not an inter-ethnic dispute. On the left bank, for

example, Moldovan casualties predominate, followed by Ukrainians and Russians. However, a great many Russians and Ukrainians - some of whom served with distinction - were killed or injured fighting for the Moldovan central government cause. A "Transnistrian people" as such does not, of course, exist and the Moldovan civil war has not split the population of Moldova along ethnic lines.

THE RUSSIAN ARMY IN MOLDOVA

Based in Moldova since 1956, Soviet 14th (Guards) Army, headquartered in Tiraspol, was transferred to the CIS Armed Forces in January 1992. President Yel'tsin's decree of 1st April 1992 subsequently placed what remained of the 14th Army under Russian jurisdiction.

Moscow equivocated and prevaricated with respect to the 14th Army's involvement in the 1992 conflict which culminated in the battle for Bender that was, in fact, won by the Dnestr insurgents with substantial support from 14th Army. The Russian army was said to have remained neutral, to have disobeyed orders, to have intervened as a local initiative, to have been ordered to make a show of force, to defend Russian-speaking areas, and to take retaliatory action against Moldova for committing crimes against Russians.⁶

By late June 1992, when General Alexander Lebed was appointed army commander, Russian combat power in Moldova consisted essentially of one somewhat under-strength and under-equipped motor rifle division: the 59th Motor Rifle Division. Lebed accused Moldova of being a "fascist state", said its leaders were "war criminals", called the Defence Minister a "cannibal", referred to Moldovans as "oxen" and "sheep", and described his army as "belonging to the Dnestr people".⁷ Lebed predicted the end of Moldova's independence and its return to a reconstituted Union, and declared that 14th Army would remain in Moldova indefinitely. Russia's 14th Army continued throughout 1993 and beyond to recruit residents of Moldova's Transnistrian region in violation of international law.

In October 1994, Moldova and Russia concluded an agreement for the withdrawal of 14th Army from Moldova over a period of three years, which for DMR "President" Smirnov was "unacceptable", and for Lebed a "crime". However, the withdrawal was to be synchronised with the settlement of the conflict in Transnistria. Moreover, from 1994 onwards Russia has sought to make its de facto military base in Transnistria de jure - a move that Moldova has so far been able firmly to resist.⁸

Following defence minister Grachev's April 1995 directive on the reorganisation of 14th Army and Yel'tsin's June decree on removing Lebed from military service, Major-General Valeriy Yevnevich was appointed commander-in-chief of the renamed Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF) in the Dnestr region of the Republic of Moldova.⁹ All members of the OGRF must now hold Russian citizenship. There are hardly any delays over pay.

At the OSCE Istanbul summit in November 1999, Russia again undertook to withdraw the OGRF, including the huge stockpiles of munitions located near Colbasnya, by the end of 2002. By the turn of the century the overall strength of OGRF/14th Army had already been reduced from over 9,000 in mid-1992 to about 2,500 men.

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LOCAL AUTONOMY IN GAGAUZ YERI

The self-styled Republic of Gagauzia proclaimed its independence from Moldova in August 1990. A 600-strong force of irregulars - the so-called Bugeac battalion (who were supported militarily and politically by the DMR separatists) - was formed to protect the interests of the breakaway republic. To this end the paramilitaries seized weapons and conducted occasional armed raids on government installations in southern Moldova. Following delicate and protracted negotiations between Chisinau and Komrat (the capital of the unrecognised republic), Moldova accorded a "special judicial status" to Gagauz Yeri (the Gagauz Land) in January 1995. Moldova's creation of an autonomous territorial unit as a form of self-determination for the Gagauzi and a constituent part of the Republic of Moldova - the first move of its kind by an East European state - has been praised as a potential model for resolving ethnic disputes in post-communist Europe. A referendum was held to determine which villages would join Gagauz Yeri. Georgi Tabunshchik, an ethnic Gagauz, was elected to the post of bashkan (or governor), and there were elections to the legislative body for the region.

In June 1995 after the elections, the then Prime Minister Andrei Sangheli declared an end to the conflict between the Gagauz separatists and Moldova. The Bugeac battalion was formally disbanded, an amnesty was granted for the handover of weapons and the paramilitaries were incorporated into the specially created, so-called "Military Unit 1045" of the Interior Ministry's Carabineer Forces.

It was to take some while, as Vasile Uzun, the bashkan's first deputy emphasised at the time, "for the rule of law to replace the rule of the gun".¹⁰ Gagauz Yeri remains an economically backward area whose agricultural yield is particularly susceptible to Moldova's recurrent droughts. But Moldova has "solved the Gagauz problem", as the Turkish defence minister has put it, insofar, at least, that instability in the region no longer represents a threat to the integrity of the state.

PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE, NEUTRALITY & NATO

On 16 March 1994, Moldova became the twelfth state (and fifth former Soviet republic) to enrol in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. (The DMR leadership deplored the fact that Tiraspol had not been consulted.) At the signing ceremony in Brussels, President Snegur highlighted his country's policy of neutrality¹¹, pointing out that Moldova did not belong to the military structures of the CIS, and elected - unlike most of the earlier signatories - not to raise the possibility of eventual NATO membership. Snegur also said, however, that Moldova's participation in the PfP programme would help to strengthen the territorial integrity, political independence and national security of his country; moreover, the main obstacle to a settlement of the conflict between Moldova and Transnistria was the presence of Russia's 14th Army on Moldovan territory.¹²

The new Constitution adopted by parliament on 28 July 1994 proclaims Moldova a neutral, sovereign, independent and indivisible state, with equal rights for all minorities.¹³ Article 11, in particular, stipulates that "The Republic of Moldova declares its permanent neutrality [and] does not admit the stationing of foreign military units on its territory". The provisions of Article 11 are reiterated in the foreign policy concept adopted by parliament in February 1995: "The Republic of Moldova is pursuing a policy of permanent neutrality, having undertaken not to participate in armed conflicts, in political, military or economic alliances having the

aim of preparing for war, not to utilise its territory for the stationing of foreign military bases, and not to possess nuclear weapons, nor to manufacture or test them".¹⁴ On 5 May 1995 parliament adopted a national security concept which yet again emphasised that "Moldova is a demilitarised state and it will not permit the deployment of foreign troops or military bases on its territory and maintains relations of friendship and partnership with all countries."¹⁵ On 6 June 1995 parliament adopted the military doctrine which "is determined by foreign and domestic policy, by the constitutional declaration of permanent neutrality, [and] has an exclusively defensive character".¹⁶

Moldova has never regarded NATO enlargement in any way as a threat to its security, nor has it raised objections to eventual Romanian or even Ukrainian membership. Chisinau has always insisted that enlargement should not take place to the detriment of Russia, or without taking Russia's interests into account when admitting new members. Indeed, the importance of a special relationship between NATO and Russia, and between NATO and Ukraine, has been underscored. Chisinau has stressed that NATO enlargement must not create tensions or draw new dividing lines in Europe, but should lead to the consolidation of stability and security on the continent. Moreover, an enlarging NATO must provide security guarantees to neutral countries such as Moldova. Chisinau regards cooperation with NATO primarily as a means to support Moldova's efforts to re-establish territorial integrity and to promote the withdrawal of Russian troops. Tiraspol, by contrast, points to NATO "expansion" as an additional justification both for the region's separatist course and the continued presence of Russian troops in Transnistria.

MOLDOVA & ROMANIA

For nearly half a century of communist dictatorship following annexation, the border was sealed between Soviet Moldova and Romania. Despite the genuine ethno-linguistic links between Romanians and the majority of Moldovans, the Soviets enforced the notion (which is by no means wholly a fiction) of a separate Moldovan 'people' and 'language' (as distinct from Romanians and Romanian). In an address to the Romanian Parliament in February 1991 (on the first official visit to Romania by any leader from Soviet Moldova since its annexation), the then President Snegur strongly affirmed the common Moldovan-Romanian identity, noting that "We have the same history and speak the same language", and referred to "Romanians on both sides of the River Prut". In June 1991 the Romanian parliament vehemently denounced the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, describing the territories as "sacred Romanian lands". The Romanian foreign minister subsequently referred to the 'evanescence' of Romania's borders with Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina.

Following cultural Romanianisation and the eventual independence of Moldova, there was a general expectation especially in Romania, though also to some extent in Moldova (despite Chisinau's doctrine of "two independent Romanian states"), that the two countries should and would unite. The underlying feeling at the time was that the Romanians wanted their country (which they, at least, saw as having been dismembered by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) to be reunited. The Moldovans, however, after their initial, and perhaps injudicious, acquiescence in the idea during their first stirrings of national self-awareness, clearly no longer shared the Romanians' enthusiasm. In January 1993, four senior parliamentarians, all moderate advocates of unification with Romania, were forced to resign their posts.¹⁷

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Throughout 1993 Moldova continued to distance herself from Romania and abandoned her notion of "two independent Romanian states". Throughout the 1990s Moldova has striven to establish a truly independent, multi-ethnic state and there has been no desire to trade a Russian "big brother" for a Romanian one. Opinion polls have consistently revealed that less than 10% of Moldova's population support unification with Romania.

In June 1994 Moldova dropped the Romanian national anthem "Romanian, Awake!" which it had borrowed in 1991, at which time eventual unification with Romania was envisaged. Chisinau has repeatedly reproached the Romanian government for its unwillingness to come to terms with the idea of real independence for the Republic of Moldova: Romania should let Moldova "be master in its own home" and "strictly respect the right of [Moldova's] people to determine their own future."

Moldovan-Romanian treaty negotiations started as long ago as 1992. Given the special nature of their historical, ethnic, cultural and linguistic affinities, Moldovan-Romanian relations are very close, yet also rather delicate. A basic bilateral treaty was initialled in Chisinau by Moldovan and Romanian foreign ministers, Nicolae Tabacaru and Petre Roman, in April 2000, and awaits approval by the two countries' presidents and legislatures.¹⁸

RECENT POLITICAL & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

Recent political and economic developments in Moldova give cause for concern.

Moldova's economy has been ailing over the last decade or more. In 1998 GDP amounted to a mere 35% of the 1989 level and the state has long since been unable to pay pensions and salaries on time. Malnutrition, tuberculosis, hepatitis and poverty are on the rise; life expectancy has been reduced; life in general, especially in rural areas, is harsh. According to a World Bank report, half of all Moldovans now earn less than \$200 per annum, down from \$2,000 in 1992.¹⁹

Following the 1998 Parliamentary elections, in which the communist party secured 40 of the 101 parliamentary mandates, splits and defections within the parliamentary factions making up the broad "Alliance for Democracy and Reforms" coalition led to repeated crises in government. Moreover, President Lucinschi's plan to transform Moldova's mixed parliamentary-presidential system into a presidential one backfired dramatically when, in July 2000, the parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of having the president in future elected by the parliament. (Hitherto the president had been elected by direct popular vote.) However, after several attempts all of which ended in the failure, in December 2000, of the parliament to elect a new president, Lucinschi was obliged to call for early elections which were held on 25 February 2001.

Voter turnout at 69% was pleasingly high. However, only three of the 27 electoral contestants (17 parties and electoral blocs, ten independent candidates) are represented in the new parliament. With 50.20% of the vote, the Communist Party has secured 71 seats in the 101-member Moldovan Parliament; the centre-left electoral bloc "Alliance for Braghis", with 13.45%, has 19 mandates, while the right-wing Christian Democratic People's Party, with 8.18%, has 11 seats. The Communist Party's massive majority enables them not only to form the new government (for which 52 mandates are necessary), but also to elect the President (61 mandates required), and to make changes to the Constitution (68 mandates) as

they see fit.²⁰ The "Moldovan Syndrome", as a Russian-language Chisinau paper has dubbed it, is this: Moldova is the first CIS country where voters have returned the Communist Party to power.²¹

CONCLUSION

At the turn of the century there are no immediate external threats to the security of Moldova. The strengthening of the country's independence, which presupposes the continued development of democratic institutions and, most importantly, the yet-to-be-felt emergence of a viable economy, the restoration of Moldova's territorial integrity, together with the withdrawal of the Russian military presence in Transnistria are the major security goals.

But the situation in Transnistria remains very messy. Despite the 1994 accord on Russian military withdrawal, despite the 1997 Moscow Memorandum between Moldova and DMR committing the two sides to existence within a "common state", and despite the 1998 Odessa agreements on demilitarisation and confidence building measures, the Russian army remains in Transnistria and the DMR leadership loses no opportunity to consolidate and confirm the structures of an independent state. When Igor Smirnov was re-elected, in December 1996, for another 5 year term as DMR 'president', he vowed, "We will strengthen the independence achieved through such difficulties and defended with blood", and added, "Transnistria exists in fact; it is a reality". It was with great pomp and ceremony that the breakaway republic celebrated its tenth anniversary on Independence Day, 2 September 2000.

It seems highly likely that for good, old-fashioned geo-political reasons Moscow will continue to pursue a policy of equivocation and prevarication that has characterised its military involvement in Transnistria since the creation of an independent Moldovan state in 1991. In one guise or another - OGRF, peacekeepers or military bases - there will almost certainly be a Russian military presence in Moldova as the Dnestr conflict smoulders on for quite some time to come.

ENDNOTES

¹ Interviews with Lebed in Izvestiya, 26 February 1993, and on Russian TV, 16 March 1993.

² Moldovan government figures are given in Vasile Nedelciuc, Respublika moldova, Universitas, Kishinev, 1992. For the Transnistrian view see, for example, N V Babilunga and B G Bomeshko, Bendery: rasstrelyannyye nepokorennyye, T G Shevchenko Transnistrian State-Corporate University, Tiraspol', 1993.

³ Soglasheniye "o printsipakh mirnogo uregulirovaniya konflikta v pridnestrovskom regione respubliki moldova" (Agreement on the principles for a peaceful settlement of the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova), signed in Moscow on 21 July 1992, by Presidents Mircea Snegur and Boris Yel'tsin.

⁴ See Vladimir Socor, "Creeping Putsch in Eastern Moldova", RFE/RL Research Report, 17 January 1992, p8-13 and Stephen Bowers, "The Partition of Moldova", Jane's Intelligence Review, October 1993, p435-437.

⁵ See Vladimir Socor, "Dniester Involvement in the Moscow Rebellion", RFE/RL Research Report, 19 November 1993, p25-32.

⁶ See Vladimir Socor, "Russia's Fourteenth Army and the Insurgency in Eastern Moldova", RFE/RL Research Report, 11 September 1992, p41-48.

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⁷ See Sovetskaya Rossiya, 7 July 1992 and Vladimir Socor, "Russia's Army in Moldova: There to Stay?", RFE/RL Research Report, 18 June 1993, p42-49.

⁸ See Mihai Gribincea, Trupele Ruse În Republica Moldova: Factor Stabilizator Sau Sursă De Pericol, Civitas, Chişinău, 1998.

⁹ See Trevor Waters, "Moldova: Continuing Recipe for Instability", Jane's Intelligence Review, September 1996, p398-401.

¹⁰ Author interview, Comrat, July 1996.

¹¹ On 6 March 1994, a sociological poll showed that 95% of the poll participants (ie 75% of those on the electoral roll) were in favour of Moldova developing as an independent sovereign state that would forge mutually advantageous bilateral relations with all the countries of the world, and implement a policy of neutrality. (Mayak Radio (Moscow) 5 March and 10 March 1994.) Snegur delayed signing up to PFP until the results of the decisive national poll were available; as he left for Brussels he observed, "the people have decided that we should promote a policy of neutrality". (Romanian Radio (Bucharest), 13 March 1994.)

¹² ITAR-TASS, World Service, (Moscow), 16 March 1994.

¹³ The new constitution superseded the constitution adopted in 1977 when the Republic was part of the former Soviet Union; the new basic law came into force on 27 August 1994, ie on the third anniversary of the Republic's proclamation of independence.

¹⁴ Kontsepsiya vneshney politiki respublikii moldova, adopted by Parliamentary Resolution No 368-XII, 8 February 1995.

¹⁵ Interfax (Moscow), 5 May 1995.

¹⁶ See 'General Provisions' section, Doctrina militară a Republicii Moldova (Voyennaya doktrina respublikii moldova), adopted by Parliamentary Resolution No 482-XIII, 6 June 1995. A summary of the doctrine together with analysis and comment is offered in: Trevor Waters, "The Republic of Moldova: Armed Forces and Military Doctrine", The Journal of Slavic Military Studies, Vol II, No 2 (June 1998), p80-97.

¹⁷ See Vladimir Socor, "Moldova: Another Major Setback for Pro-Romanian Forces", RFE/RL Research Report, 26 February 1993, p15-21.

¹⁸ See V G Baleanu, In the Shadow of Russia: Romania's Relations with Moldova and Ukraine, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Paper G85, November 2000.

¹⁹ See The Economist, 23 September 2000.

²⁰ For a full account of the elections and prospects for the future see Trevor Waters, "Parliamentary Elections in Moldova, February 2001. Forward into the Past?", Conflict Studies Research Centre Paper (forthcoming).

²¹ Novoye vryemya, 27 February 2001.

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