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## Moldova and the OSCE

From its beginning, the OSCE proved to be the most active of the European organizations striving to build up a general framework of stability, co-operation and security at the international and European level. Since the early 1970s, it has witnessed extraordinary challenges to security and peaceful co-existence within the targeted area of European countries, strengthening the determination of the participating States to find better ways to prevent local conflicts, restore stability and bring peace to war-torn areas, while consolidating common values and liberal freedoms. As many authors have remarked, the OSCE remains one of the few institutions where all European countries are equally represented and, for that reason, it can play the role of an honest broker, providing political guidance and consultation mechanisms for decision-makers while remaining an "institution where all participating States can discuss freely their security concerns".<sup>1</sup> The security needs experienced by the newly emerging states of former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union, most of them related to a deep sense of institutional, political and economic insecurity, gave the OSCE an opportunity to offer its services in preventive diplomacy and the strengthening of democratic elections. It should be mentioned however that not everything under the auspices of OSCE has proved idyllic.

The collapse of the Soviet Union opened broad new opportunities for the OSCE, as it assumed new functions and tasks to be tackled by its political and co-ordinating bodies such as the OSCE Permanent Council and ODIHR, but also set in motion a number of structural transformations that have affected the whole European security system. Differing views and expectations regarding the institutional shape of the OSCE are seen with increasing frequency among the participating States, and this is often regarded as one of the most obvious structural impediments for the Organization. While some of the participating States see it and promote it as a European micro-UN, other States would like to have it weaker with a more symbolic semblance; this last view seems, in fact, to be more strongly represented at different levels of strategic thinking on the OSCE's institutional development. Most of the Central and Eastern European countries could support a vigorous OSCE, but not at just any cost, as it cannot be viewed as an alternative to NATO enlargement and integration into other Western security organizations. Because of the recent admission of the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary to NATO

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Daniel Rotfeld, *Europe: a Process of the Multinational Security*, in: *World Economy and International Relations* 1/1996, pp.49-68.

membership, these countries will stop fearing that their national priorities will be relativized by a strengthened OSCE as an alternative to the Western European security organizations. Despite the vigorous opposition of Russia, the will to get as far under a "NATO security umbrella" as possible seems to be a strategy for the remaining Eastern and Central European countries. Many other countries complain that, recent positive developments in the OSCE area notwithstanding, the resolution of their protracted conflicts (Trans-Dniestria in Moldova, Abkhazia in Georgia) appears to be much more difficult than expected. An additional pessimistic note is related to the fact that the OSCE still lacks a practical mechanism for the implementation of its high level decisions (Permanent Council and OSCE Summits), whose status is still difficult to determine, unlike the UN decisions which are compulsory for all member states. As a result, even the most favourable decisions (including those related to immediate withdrawal of foreign troops from the territory of the former Soviet republics, strengthening democratic institutions after the freezing of a conflict, and other ecological and social issues related to post-war rehabilitation) have simply remained on paper, with almost dramatic consequences for the territorial integrity and security concerns of Moldova. Finally, although it has clearly introduced the "international mediative factor"<sup>2</sup> it would be too much to say that the OSCE Mission provides a counter-balance to Russian support for the separatist claims in the break-away region of Moldova.

#### *Learning from CSCE/OSCE Participation*

Prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the CSCE could hardly have been involved in monitoring political and ethnic tensions in the USSR as this would have been inconsistent with the principle of *non-intervention in the internal affairs of the participating States* (Principle VI of the Helsinki Final Act) and the USSR was the only country which maintained previous Cold War arrangements. Thus the quicksand realities of the post-Soviet world reshaped the essence and scope of the CSCE mandate, entitling it to become a "guardian of security and a bulwark against new divisions", but also "a pivotal institution fostering the European integration of those countries which arose from the collapsed Yugoslavian Federation and the USSR". From a functional perspective, the OSCE seemed to be the most suitable European institution to work in the area of preventive diplomacy, development of the human dimension and co-operative security on behalf of its participating States. It was natural that Moldovan leaders, as early as spring of 1991,

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2 Piotr Switalski, *The OSCE in the European Security System: Chances and Limits*, Warsaw 1997, p. 39.

called for more active CSCE involvement in Moldova's domestic complexities, although it was only after the intricate dissolution of the USSR (December 1991) and acceptance of Moldova's full membership that the CSCE began to deal with the complex political problems that had arisen in this former Soviet republic. Like other former Soviet countries, Moldova treated the OSCE as one of the most preferred multilateral channels for political efforts aiming to help with the resolution of its internal conflict. But unlike many other countries with full awareness of their historical identity (e.g. the Baltic or Central and Eastern European states), Moldovan statehood had yet to be defined, internally as well as with respect to its neighbours. Having known only a short period of independent statehood (four months of separate existence as Democratic Moldovan Republic, between 1917 and 1918), the newly emerging country had a hard time reaching internal conciliation and creating good incentives for an efficient market economy. While the small size of the country presented a tactical advantage for promoting consistent economic reforms it also encouraged neglect from international organizations due to its limited geopolitical significance and scarcity of natural resources (oil, energy, etc). Therefore, Moldovan diplomacy had to work harder to bring the dismemberment of its territory to the attention of OSCE participating States, reaffirming its indivisible sovereignty, and firmly rejecting the comfortable "*fait accompli*" imposed by Russia's leadership on the "near abroad". For its part, Moldova took very seriously the promise that it could count on the support of international bodies (especially the OSCE) in seeking foreign troop withdrawal. A privileged relationship with the OSCE was, for Moldova, a very necessary resource for overcoming the problems posed by its small size and domestic fragility, but also a way of gaining international recognition and a proof of its European roots. Internationalization of the effort to resolve the conflict and the call for immediate evacuation of Russian military personnel and ammunition from Moldova were regarded as the main pillars of Moldova's policy towards the OSCE. In practical terms, however, co-operation with Moldova involved a rich and various framework of consultations. Exchange of information and views on issues of common concern, regular visits to Moldova, participation of Moldovan representatives in the work of the OSCE Permanent Council, the organization of seminars and conferences for strengthening democratic and human rights structures and finally, the constant effort of the OSCE Mission to Moldova to help find a long-lasting solution for its Trans-Dniestrian conflict - all of these were seen as indispensable for the internal consolidation of the Moldovan state.

It should be mentioned that Russia made a great effort to convince the West that it alone could play, with OSCE and UN consent, the role of regional stabilizer in the "near abroad", encouraging the fear of dismemberment of the Russian armed forces as the "greater evil" compared with the "lesser evil" of

strengthening and reshaping its hegemony over the former Soviet republics - now sovereign entities, recognized by the entire international community. Although it argued for a dominant OSCE role, Russia clearly attempted to shift to another body all matters related to the territory of the newly independent states, hoping that, in the end, the task of bringing order to the highly dispersed and destabilized components of the former Soviet Union would remain entirely under the auspices of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), with slight or merely symbolic participation from international or pan-European security organizations. The CSCE condemned the "escalation of violence" in the Dniester region and urged "both conflicting sides" to stop armed hostilities (which evolved in June 1992 into a full-fledged military conflict in Moldova), but accepted also that Russia should play a special role in settling this conflict despite the obvious fact that Russia was clearly suspected of being behind the separatism of this region, with implications which clearly infringed upon the integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova. While it firmly denounced the involvement of Serbia and the Yugoslav National Army in Bosnia on the side of the irregular Serbian forces, the OSCE never criticized with similar vigour the role of Russia in the escalation of military hostilities in the Trans-Dniester region, despite the fact that evidence about the links between separatist leaders and Moscow became increasingly frequent after 1991.

It became obvious that there was a certain tactical "division of labour" between Russia and the break-away separatist region: Trans-Dniestria blocked and is still blocking negotiations on its "political status", making unacceptable demands, while Russia insists on the impossibility of withdrawing its military troops and ammunitions before a final settlement of the conflict. To make the situation more dramatic, Tiraspol authorities even used the slow pace of negotiations on Russian Army withdrawal as an excuse to gain additional political leverage, arguing that "Chişinău was preparing an invasion of Trans-Dniestria as soon as the Russian Army had withdrawn from the region". These allegations have been repeatedly rejected by high OSCE and Moldovan officials as "provocative", but they have been masterfully exploited by the Russian Duma, which reacted angrily to the OSCE and Moldovan charge as well as to the desire of Chişinău to speed up the process of the withdrawal of the former 14th Army from Moldova and to attract more Western countries into the negotiation and post-conflict rehabilitation process.

The last declaration of the Russian Duma on "recognition of the Trans-Dniestrian Republic of Moldova" (*Pridnestrovskaya Moldavskaya Respublika*, PMR), although qualified as unacceptable by President Yeltsin and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, brilliantly mirrored this strategy, aimed at giving to the unrecognized "secessionist PMR" a right to veto any

international agreement signed between Moldova and other states. From the very beginning, the declaration contained several mistakes and omissions. Arguing against the Treaty with Moldova, which it thinks "is likely to be played out according Western rules", the Russian Duma reacted with irritation to the projected "withdrawal of Russian troops from the region" and showed itself inclined to support the recognition of a "special geo-strategic Russian interest in Trans-Dniestria", thus justifying the separatists' "right" to make decisions on the disposal of the arms and munitions stocked in the region. Formally, the reasons why Moscow rejected every proposal aimed at speeding up the process of withdrawal of its military forces from Trans-Dniestria can be summarized as follows:

- (1) the military of the former 14th Army had already been cut back to 2,600;<sup>3</sup>
- (2) their complete withdrawal could occur only as a result of a final agreement between Chişinău and Tiraspol on the "political status" of Trans-Dniestria;
- (3) the psychological factor of the opposition to this withdrawal among local leaders and the Trans-Dniestrian population should also be taken into consideration;
- (4) the Treaty on the evacuation of the Russian military from the region had to be ratified by the Duma;
- (5) Russian forces are a major guarantee of regional stability.

According to this document, Russia is likely to play the role of a "recognized promoter" of regional stability, contrary to repeated OSCE and Council of Europe declarations calling for the withdrawal of Russian forces from the Trans-Dniester region of Moldova.<sup>4</sup> A number of important conferences have supported the determination of the OSCE States to help reach a mutual understanding and a gradual but steady evacuation of the foreign military troops from Moldova.

The Oslo Ministerial Council of the OSCE called for Russian military withdrawal from Moldova, stressing its incomplete status and regretting that for several years no progress towards this goal has been made.<sup>5</sup> Helle Degn, the Chair of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, made the same observation adding that the OSCE is ready "to help ship the Russian weapons out of Moldova's eastern region of Trans-Dniestria". Several other OSCE States, including United States, France, Norway, Germany, and Denmark, indicated

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3 According to OSCE data Russia keeps in the Dniester region some 2,500 troops, 119 tanks, 46 armoured vehicles and 129 artillery installations.

4 Cf. Mesagerul No. 42, 6 November 1998, p. 1

5 Cf. Seventh Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, Oslo, 2-3 December 1998, reprinted in the present volume, pp. 455-549, here: p. 462.

that they would provide their full support and called for "immediate action by the Russian authorities to speed up the evacuation of troops and ammunition from the Trans-Dniester region". At their Oslo Meeting on 2-3 December 1998, the OSCE Foreign Ministers expressed again their concern about the resolution of this protracted conflict in Moldova. A special decision of the Oslo Meeting confirmed "negotiations respecting the status of the Trans-Dniestrian region of Moldova have languished",<sup>6</sup> and called for their revitalization through the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the mediatory states: Russia and Ukraine. The decision emphasized the critical importance of the complete and unquestioned implementation of all previous OSCE decisions on this issue, stipulating that "the removal of Russian armaments, military equipment, ammunition and other ordnance from Moldova should be the primary step in this direction".<sup>7</sup> To overcome the existing stalemate, the OSCE Foreign Ministers suggested that several other steps should be taken to facilitate the complete implementation of the confidence- and security-building measures envisioned by the Odessa Agreement of 20 March 1998: identification and implementation of some specific environmental projects, other economic and cultural initiatives, information exchanges between the Dniestrian banks, examination of existing offers regarding the withdrawal or destruction of Russian weapons, equipment and ammunition, other military properties, and - most important - elaboration, within six months after the Oslo Summit of a precise time plan for the evacuation of Russian weapons, equipment, ammunition and other military patrimony of the former 14th Army. The numerical reduction of the Russian Army does not include those military elements which left the Army and continue to serve in the "unrecognized" army of Tiraspol, in several cases with full ammunition and equipment stolen or simply handed over to them by their colleagues from the former 14th Russian Army.

#### *Territorial Intricacies*

In late 1994, Chişinău granted autonomous status to the Gagauz minority in the form of a territorial-administrative district (Gagauz-Yeri). This sought to allay the minority's concerns by providing rich and generous organic guarantees anchored in a Gagauz regional constitution including executive and legislative bodies. These are regarded as fully satisfactory for the Gagauz ethnic community in Moldova. While leaving foreign affairs, defence, currency and state security in the hands of the central government, Gagauz autonomy confirmed the determination of the Moldova central authorities to

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6 Ibid., p. 461.

7 Ibid., p. 462.

consider OSCE principles fully in solving peacefully all territorial difficulties. In contrast to the Gagauz issue, which was for practical purposes solved by the 1994 Law on the Territorial-Administrative Status of "Gagauz Yeri", the Trans-Dniestrian "knot" still persists in a frozen state, which further strains the democratic development of the country. After several years of mediation and bilateral negotiations, Chişinău and Tiraspol still have different views about marking time on the status of Moldova's break-away Dniester region.<sup>8</sup> Separatist leaders still insist on recognition of the "existing realities" and the status gained under the shelter of the former Russian 14th Army. They argue that Chişinău ought to recognize the PMR (separatists), and agree to let its territories exist on the basis of "Soviet style" referendums (100 per cent - for, 0 per cent - against!) held in the separatist region, although no such referendum has been found "legal" by the Constitutional Court of Moldova. In response, Chişinău showed its readiness to provide Trans-Dniestria with quite a large measure of territorial-administrative autonomy and several attributes which are seen as indispensable to the self-identity of the local inhabitants. A Memorandum between Chişinău and Tiraspol, signed in 1997, did not succeed in facilitating the negotiations, and both parties continue to take a stand on (although their political mandate and legitimacy are not of equal status!) divergent visions of the future of a "common state" (which is expected to result in a "confederation of states", according to the Tiraspol leaders, or - a "unitary and indivisible state", according to the central government in Chişinău and the provisions of the Moldovan Constitution). The signing on 8 May 1997 of the Memorandum on the bases for normalization and of the Joint Statement marked an important step forward towards a lasting settlement based on the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity in Moldova. However, much remains to be done. Hoping that ongoing contacts between the parties and the mediators would soon result in concrete action, the OSCE confirmed its readiness to assist in implementing the documents agreed upon and in searching for a final settlement, in close co-operation with Russian and Ukrainian mediators. Moldova is still concerned that the Agreement between Russia and Moldova of 21 October 1994 to withdraw all Russian forces from Moldova and the expectations in the Lisbon Document of early, orderly and complete withdrawal of Russian troops are still far from being fulfilled, in particular as regards ammunition and control over weapons stolen from the Russian military depots by separatist guards before, during and even long after the 1992 conflict.

On the eve of 1998 Parliamentary elections, Tiraspol suddenly demanded full recognition on the part of Chişinău, believing that the pro-Communist and pro-USSR factions there would definitely support their initiative in an ap-

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8 Cf. Basa Press News Agency Tiraspol, 18 February 1998.

proach to building a confederation consisting of two equal parts. The secessionist leaders argued that a positive decision would ease the elaboration and adoption of accords on political, economic and social reintegration of the former Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). Chişinău, for its part, regards such "recognition" as a tactical trap and, therefore, a mistake; if it declared that Trans-Dniestria enjoy equal rights as a part of a Moldovan federation, Trans-Dniestria would immediately leave the federation to join the CIS military and other neo-integrationist structures, such as the Russia-Belarus Union, which would irreversibly damage the prospects for political negotiations on a lasting settlement within its eastern region. After a first look at the proposed document, Moldova asked Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE to assess "the provocative document" saying that it contradicted the May 1997 Memorandum on the bases for normalization of Moldova-Trans-Dniestria relations and the Joint Statement signed by the three mediators: Ukraine, Russia and OSCE. According to these documents the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova are regarded as fundamental elements, which cannot be trampled upon mercilessly in the process of settling the Dniester crisis. The Dniester authorities are claiming the contrary, saying that statehood for Trans-Dniestria would not be contrary to previous agreements, as it would not affect Moldova's integrity. Rather, they argue, statehood would "create the conditions to maintain a common state". It is obvious, however, that behind the good-looking facade of its "integrative approach", Tiraspol would be much more reluctant to accept the authority of Chişinău authorities over all territories which constituted, in 1991, the Republic of Moldova. Tiraspol authorities would like to change radically the current Moldovan foreign policy of the so-called "common state" by pressing Chişinău to join the military and political structures of the CIS, which would be in flagrant contradiction to constitutional provisions<sup>9</sup> as well as to the already functioning alliances with Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan, and other Central and Western European countries; it would undermine or totally frustrate the pro-European integrationist approach of Moldova's foreign policy.

#### *Peacekeeping Operations in Moldova*

In July 1992, President Mircea Snegur of Moldova and President Boris Yeltsin agreed upon the introduction of Russian peacekeeping forces to break up the conflicting sides in the Trans-Dniester region of Moldova. Ever since the parties agreed on general conditions for a cease-fire, the Russian peacekeeping operation has become one of the most controversial operations in the newly independent states. What was seen as a temporary measure, aimed at

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<sup>9</sup> According to the Constitution, the Moldovan state is a neutral state (Art. 11).



helping the conflicting sides reach an agreement, was impeded by Russia's double-standard diplomacy. Initially, the Yeltsin-Snegur Agreement envisioned the creation of the peacekeeping forces from Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian and Moldovan units, although later they decided to change their decision as many other CIS members simply declined the invitation to send their military to the operation. Then, the Russian Federation called for the introduction of combined "interested" peacekeeping forces: five Russian, three Moldovan and two Trans-Dniestrian battalions to enforce the ceasefire. There was no prior agreement concerning the political status of Trans-Dniestria and the primary goal of the operation was to stop the violence and allow political leaders to find a peaceful solution. The question immediately arises: How could the Russian Army serve "objectively" as peacekeepers when one of the combatants belonged to that same Russian Army and to Trans-Dniestrian forces at the same time? Indeed, except for a blue armband and/or helmet, how could the Moldovans distinguish soldiers belonging to the former Russian 14th Army from those of Russian "peacekeeping" forces? Was there more than one Russian Army? The deployment of the peacekeeping contingents in 1992 helped to stop the armed hostilities, but it also froze the causes of the conflict. The deployment of these forces, although it occurred at the request of Chişinău, ran counter to the principle of impartiality of peacekeeping forces by providing tremendous support for Trans-Dniestria. To understand how Russian peacekeeping battalions could be neutral in Moldova requires an understanding of the transformation of the Soviet Russian 14th Army. According to the data published in March 1998 by the staff on the Co-ordination of Military Co-operation of the CIS State-Participants, the total number of peacekeeping forces of the countries of the Commonwealth stands at 11,908. Of these, 6,673 peacekeepers are in Tajikistan, 1,690 in Abkhazia, 2,309 in the Trans-Dniester region, and 1,236 in South Ossetia. Approximately 40 per cent of the personnel were withdrawn in 1997, but substantial amounts of Russian equipment and ammunition are still stored in the area, guarded by Russian forces, or handed over to illegal separatist forces.

From December 1991, when the USSR hammer and sickle flag was lowered at the Kremlin, until after the decision was made to establish Russian national armed forces (May 1992), the status and ownership of the 14th Army was unclear. During 1989-1991, as Moldovan opposition towards Moscow continued to grow, taking on a national flavour, there was increasing resistance among the Russian population in Moldova, which was opposed to the very fact of USSR disintegration, as well as upset over the rumours about unification with Romania. More and more, the 14th Army became associated with an anti-Moldovan and pro-Soviet Union stance. The Russians living in the Trans-Dniester region feared that Moldova would become a unitary Moldovan state and follow a path leading to its unification

with Romania, forcing the Russian population to leave or to change their citizenship. The fact that the majority of officers serving in the 14th Army had some form of housing in the Trans-Dniester region (and that there was little hope of finding similar accommodations in Russia) was also a key factor in the growing regional uncertainty. Because the 14th Army was overwhelmingly Russian, there was never any question that the Moldovans would nationalize it. The Russian General Staff believed, therefore, that "pure" Russian units could serve as impartial peacekeepers between Moldovan and Trans-Dniestrian forces. As in South Ossetia, the original peacekeeping mandate was for just a few months. However, due to their inability to reach an agreement on the political status of Trans-Dniestria, political leaders extended it indefinitely. The commander of the former 14th Russian Army will not even discuss relocating until Trans-Dniestrian status is determined. And even then their departure is doubtful, as the number of stipulations which must be met before the former 14th Army will be ready to relocate makes its presence in Moldova practically permanent: "The Army should stay in the region for some time to make sure that political decisions are being properly implemented."<sup>10</sup>

Before the Russian Ministry of Defence claimed it as Russian property, the 14th Army belonged to the armed forces of the CIS, and its Commander, General-Major Alexander Lebed, acted and presented himself as though he were not subordinate to Russian leadership, but represented a kind of "third party" in relation to the political establishment in Russia. He did reflect, however, the policies and goals of the more conservative elements in Russian leadership, and certainly those of the Trans-Dniestrian separatist leaders.<sup>11</sup> Despite the populist verve of General Lebed and some formal resemblance with the Russian Army, the 14th Army accepted circumstances under which it became, to a large degree, a local appendix to the Trans-Dniestrian military forces. According to Russian politicians, there are three substantive problems restricting the relocation of the former 14th Army from Moldova: (1) inability to find a political solution to the status of the Trans-Dniester region; (2) lack of housing within Russia to accommodate the 14th Army; and (3) problems associated with transferring an incredible amount of ammunition from

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10 Sergey Knyazkov, "Chuvstvovat' za soboy derzhavu", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 4 March 1994, p. 2; Quotation taken from: Valeri Demidetski, Russian Troop Commander Demands Peace Guarantees, *Interfax*, 7 April 1994, in FBIS-SOV-94-068, 8 April 1994, p. 52.

11 The fact that General Lebed was not removed, or even strongly censured, but was in fact promoted, testifies to the contradictory and amorphous nature of Russian foreign and defence policies after the USSR collapsed. For an in-depth analysis of the 14th Army's and other Russian involvement in the Trans-Dniester region and Moldova, see a series of articles written by Vladimir Socor, produced for RFE/RL Research Report: "Russian Forces in Moldova", 28 August 1992; "Russia's 14th Army and the Insurgency in Eastern Moldova", 11 September 1992; "Moldova's Dniester Ulcer", 1 January 1993; "Russia's Army in Moldova. There to Stay?", 18 June 1993; and "Isolated Moldova Being Pulled into Russian Orbit", 17 December 1993. Mr. Socor describes the complex relationship between General Lebed and the 14th Army, and also between the Russian, Moldovan and the Trans-Dniestrian leadership.

the Trans-Dniester region, across Ukrainian territory and back into Russia. Two years ago, the subject of discussion between Russia and Moldova centred upon the schedule of removing the former 14th Army from Moldova. Today the negotiations deal with determining the status of this "permanent" Russian military presence in Moldova.<sup>12</sup> This would appear to be the likely outcome of the so-called peacekeeping effort in Moldova. Elaboration of a schedule would, of course, further the process of withdrawal, and increased transparency could strengthen confidence, leading to greater stability in the region. The OSCE seems to be fully committed to following the issue closely, urging that "Russia, Ukraine and Moldova should become partners in the process of evacuation of the 14th Army arsenal", and calling for immediate withdrawal of all "foreign troops" from Moldova.<sup>13</sup>

### *Moldova and OSCE Today*

The work being done in Moldova is very much in line with what the OSCE was designed for and usually accomplishes: conflict prevention, crisis management, election monitoring, arms control, promoting human rights and democracy-building, promoting rights of national minorities and confidence- and security-building measures. Economic growth is increasingly important in a divided society that is strained by minority, racial or inter-confessional disputes. Unfortunately, the economic component is missing from the active initiatives of the OSCE and this reduces to a certain extent its ability to influence or to change the position of the conflicting parties. Peace-building after the 1992 hostilities cannot be seen as a purely diplomatic effort, as many conflicts are deeply rooted in the black market economy, which is evaluated by independent experts at about 60 per cent of the total GDP. It should be mentioned that the separatist region, with only 18 per cent of the republic's population, took over 40 per cent of the former MSSR economy. Also noteworthy is that because of the failure to settle the regional crisis, Moldova loses annually about one billion US-Dollars through border smuggling, tax evasion and the underworld economy connected with the "breakaway republic". It was difficult, of course, for the OSCE to earn the trust of the separatist regime in Tiraspol, considering the clear-cut mandate to manage the internecine dispute on the basis of respect for the territorial integrity of Moldova, but in many respects the OSCE Mission has remained a spectator in the face of growing calls for separation of a territory where Russian troops are still deployed. Very soon after the 1992 conflict, Trans-Dniestria turned into a

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12 Yuri Selivanov, V Moldove mojet poyavit'sya Rossiiskaya baza, in: Megapolis Express, 2 March 1994, p. 14.

13 OSCE Chairman in Office Urges Russia to Withdraw Troops from Moldova, in: Basa Press, 24 June 1998.

"black hole" where huge amounts of "dirty money" from the other CIS countries poured in and where criminal gangs found a secure paradise. The territorial and economic split further complicated the path of reforms initiated by the national government and became a pervasive issue in the domestic dispute in Moldova as well as in Russia. The issue of a "Slav fortress on the Dniester" quickly took on such importance in the internal political clashes in Russia that almost no Russian politician could avoid it; this in turn nurtured a steady anti-Western resistance campaign in Trans-Dniestria which served well the specific goal of separation from the rest of the Republic of Moldova. Russia is happy to interpret the "deadlock" as a good argument for the maintenance of its troops in the region. In addition, large dislocations occurred after the 1992 armed conflict, resulting in more than 50,000 displaced persons, and even now, long after the "freezing" of the conflict, the influx of refugees from the secessionist region has not stopped entirely. According to the Republican Commission for Displaced Persons, established by the Moldovan government in 1992, the reasons for fleeing from Trans-Dniestria are primarily related to: a "hidden process of ethno-political cleansing" initiated by the separatist regime in Tiraspol, loss of property and means of livelihood, and participation in the armed conflict or in open support of the Chişinău authorities, which is treated by the security organs of Tiraspol as "a state treason" to be punished with cruelty. While most displaced persons have been accommodated in hotels and camps, they have not succeeded in gaining the specific status of political refugees, as some Moldovan authorities have argued that the conflict would be solved very soon, and that a public debate over the displaced persons would interfere with negotiations.

As already mentioned, economic growth is increasingly important in a divided society that is strained by minority, racial or inter-confessional disputes and often economic reasoning influences the success or the failure of highly appreciated diplomatic initiatives. Perhaps the OSCE should pay increased attention to these components when taking these initiatives.