



# HELSINKI COMMISSION BRIEFING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

## **Testimony :: Eurgen Carpov**

### **Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Reintegration - Government of Moldova**

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for organizing this event. Helsinki Committee continues to serve as perfect platform for transatlantic dialogue on important issues where US and Europe have mutual and shared interests. I know the Committee hosted briefings on Moldova previously and we very much appreciate this opportunity to discuss situation in my country and in the region.

Today's event has quite a provocative title – so at this session we will share our thoughts on the situation in Moldova and in our region – and I hope this will be helpful to you to understand better what is going on in our part of the world and what are the perspectives.

Since I am dealing in the Government of the Republic of Moldova with the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict – it will represent major part of my remarks. First of all, let me set the parameters of the issue we are discussing:

- Transnistrian conflict has at its basis mainly a political dispute, it does not have ethnic or religious background.
- The situation in the conflict area is generally peaceful. There were no military hostilities between sides since 1992. Certain tensions or incidents appear from time to time but they have no direct military character and involve mainly law-enforcement bodies.
- The dialogue on conflict settlement process is taking place through a number of channels. The most known is the 5+2 negotiations format where the Moldova and the Transnistrian region are the sides, OSCE, Russia and Ukraine are mediators, and US and EU are observers. We have also meetings of the political representatives of the sides – the chief-negotiators. In parallel senior experts and decision-makers from various authorities (economy, transportation, law-enforcement, education etc) are meeting on in the working groups. The meetings in the 5+2 format, between the chief-negotiators and in working groups are taking place with certain regularity. There are contacts on higher political level as well. From our side this is the Prime-minister, and from the Transnistrian side – is the leader of the region's administration. These meetings are taking place with different intensity – depending on the situation.
- The key unresolved issue of the conflict settlement is what status should the Transnistrian region have within Moldova. As you know this region is recognized by all international actors

as part of the Republic of Moldova. All international players involved in the conflict resolution have committed to assist in resolving the Transnistrian conflict on the basis of respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and providing the Transnistrian region with a special status.

Where the conflict settlement stands now?

- Current situation in the Transnistrian conflict settlement process can be characterized as stalemate in terms of the moving towards political settlement of the conflict. Regrettably the trust and confidence between sides has been undermined by increasing negative rhetoric and unilateral actions which run against the ongoing negotiations process.

- Political aspects. The strategic goal of the Republic of Moldova is to achieve lasting political settlement of the conflict based on the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. The Transnistrian region should have a special status within the reintegrated country. Such a status would enable the administration of Transnistrian region with sufficient level of competences to enjoy large autonomy within Moldova. The political solution to the conflict should ensure an effective and balanced decision-making mechanism. The European vector of the development of Moldova after reintegration should also be preserved.

- Currently, Tiraspol refuses to talk in the 5+2 negotiations on political and security issues. Russia fully supports this approach. Instead, Tiraspol is promoting outside of the political negotiations the so-called concept of “civilized divorce” as well as recently has made an address to the Russian Federation to be recognized as an independent state.

- Our position with regard to these steps is clear – the demands of the Transnistrian region are based on illusions and have no real perspectives. The Transnistrian region is recognized by all as part of the Republic of Moldova and any request for international recognition contradicts the international law and principles of the conflict resolution process. On official level – all international partners which are participating in the negotiation process are unanimously supporting a peaceful solution based on the principles that I outlined earlier – respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity of Moldova and special status for the Transnistrian region within the Republic of Moldova. Basically these principles are stipulated in the OSCE ministerial statements on the Transnistrian conflict adopted at the meetings of the OSCE Council of Ministers in Dublin (2012) and Kiev (2013). At the same time we keep reiterating that real actions of the international partners should be in line with their official positions. This is not always the case.

- While the political process is stagnating the efforts are concentrated on tackle technical issues. Why we are dealing with them? Lack of an agreed political and legal status of the Transnistrian led to the situation that population and business community are confronting with various problems in daily life. Currently we are trying to resolve certain issues related to transportation, education, freedom of movement of population and goods between the

Transnistrian region and the rest of Moldova.

- But even in technical issues the room for maneuver is limited due to difference in approaches. Chisinau is promoting proposals based on the idea of rapprochement between sides, while Tiraspol is insisting on further separation. For example – when we are talking about use radio-frequencies, or access of the Transnistrian companies to international transportation corridors - our view is that solutions should be based on or at least not contradict the international commitments that Moldova has undertaken. Also such solutions should not lead to further separation. So we are a bit in a vicious circle here.

- In 2013 we managed to find agreement on a few issues related to ecology, pensions, dismantling of some old and dangerous infrastructure objects some aspects of freedom of movement. These are positive developments but to move ahead – the conflict resolution process needs more comprehensive forward-looking decisions.

- There are a number of issues that could generate tensions. I will go briefly just to list them. A general point that I would like to make is that since the end of the last year we feel increased pressure on every element of the Moldovan presence in the Transnistrian region. This is the case of Moldovan Latin-script schools, case of access of Moldovan farmers to their lands on Transnistria-controlled territory, case of the Moldovan police and two penitentiaries located in the Bender town. The line that we observe in each case is that Transnistrian side tries by various means to impose their rules or take under their control institutions subordinated to Moldova or apply pressure on people working in these institutions.

- Security situation in the region remains under our constant monitoring. In the last period of time we observe that Transnistrian side is taking action aimed at consolidation of its infrastructure at the administrative boundary line. The risk of increase of the presence of the Transnistrian military and security structures above notified limits also remain real. The deployment of military observers of the peacekeeping mechanism whose main function is to monitor the situation is frequently blocked – because its matter of consensus decision by all parties to the peacekeeping mechanism. The main supervisory body in the Security Zone – the Joint Control Commission in many cases does not have a clear assessment of the situation. So, all in all - there is a number of vulnerabilities that could turn into security challenges if there will be such an intention.

- Russian military presence in Moldova – remains factor of our concern. Our longstanding position has not changed – we call for finalization, without any precondition, of the withdrawal of ammunition stockpiles from Cobasna and remaining Russian forces in accordance with the relevant international commitments. We also consider that efforts towards modernization or build-up of this military presence would not contribute to security in the region and, therefore, are not welcomed.

- Let me sum up the approach of the Republic of Moldova. We put main focus on peaceful political dialogue. We will keep all channels of dialogue with Transnistria open to prevent unilateral steps and deterioration of situation. We will demonstrate a calm approach and avoid

involvement in any provocation. Prime-minister Iurie Leanca is ready to meet with Shevchuk without any preconditions. We also continue the dialogue at the level of chief-negotiators and working groups.

- Our short and medium term goals are the following:

- maintain stability in the Security Zone
- resolve issues like Moldovan Latin-script schools or access to farmer's lands without tensions,
- discourage pressure applied on police and penitentiaries in Bender.
- Keep dialogue ongoing at all levels and try to achieve progress in other areas to create positive dynamics;
- Maintain close contacts with all international partners involved in the settlement process and encourage their joint actions,
- Move forward with the 5+2 negotiations.

Situation in Ukraine and implications for the Transnistrian settlement

Let me make a couple of remarks on the implications of the situation in Ukraine on the Transnistrian settlement process. - First of all, as a neighboring country and as friendly nation to Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova is very much concerned about what is going on there. We condemned the so called referendum in Crimea and did not recognize the further annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. We consider it as a major challenge to the international law, political cooperation and security architecture in Europe. We are also very worried about spreading violence in East and South of Ukraine, in particular in the Odessa region.

- We consider that all efforts should be focused now on finding a peaceful solution that would preserve sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Ukraine. Nation-wide dialogue between all political players that are acting in the legal and constitutional framework of Ukraine is needed.

- We continue to believe that the way towards de-escalation should be found jointly – by Ukrainian Government in cooperation with all international actors that could influence the situation on the ground. International engagements such as the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, transparency mechanisms of the Vienna Document on CSBM and other tools should be applied to their full capacity.

- The crisis in and around Ukraine led to a major information and diplomatic confrontation between main actors on the international arena. Tough debates are taking place in the UN, OSCE and other international organizations. Such a tensed atmosphere in the international

relations is not contributing to advance the conflict resolution process.

- One of the trends which has become visible in the context of the situation in Ukraine - it is a intensified propaganda regarding the fact that the Transnistrian region is under “blockade”. Tiraspol tries to prove it by saying that the crossing points on the border are empty and the flow of goods and people has decreased. Another element is that the Russian citizens are almost prohibited to enter Ukraine through Transnistrian segment of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border. The reality is that the movement of persons had decreased due to objective reasons related to people’s safety. Despite the increased control measures by Ukrainian authorities on this segment, available data show that the refusal ratio of foreign citizens entering Ukraine remains extremely low (about 1 % of total entries). Concerning goods - the available statistics from both Tiraspol and Chisinau show that the foreign trade operations, in particular exports from the Transnistrian region, continue to register positive dynamics. There was no disruption in cargo traffic. Moreover, in April this year, the Moldovan Parliament canceled a number of taxes previously applied on the Transnistrian companies. All these facts clearly demonstrate that the rhetoric about “blockade” is not proved by facts.

Let me also add a few more points about the political context in which Moldova lives these days.

First of all we are approaching a breakthrough in our relation with EU. Recently Moldova was granted a visa-free travel regime in Schengen area for short-time trips. This was a result of major efforts undertaken by all national authorities in law-enforcement, human rights, document security areas. In June we are planning to sign the Association Agreement with EU. This event will mark the irreversible character of our European path.

At the same time we face some counter-action to European integration. I’ll just exemplify it by recent developments in the southern parts of the country – namely the Gagauzia autonomous unit. We feel that skeptical mood towards European integration is being warmed up in this region. The Government of Moldova is committed to dialogue and we are already taking action to explain better our policies and perspectives. The Parliament has also formed a special group for dialogue with the legislative body of Gagauzia. So we are intensifying our dialogue with Gagauzia.

And the last point are the upcoming parliamentary elections in late November this year. We anticipate quite a tough competition between the governing parties and opposition. In recent years elections in Moldova have quite a visible geopolitical dimension and we expect it to be so in current year.

Summing up – I would say that these days Moldova finds itself at a crucial moment in its history, being geographically very close to the center of major dispute and tension between the key international players, facing a number of security challenges and experiencing ongoing political debate about the future of the country. This is time to support Moldova and we thank again the Helsinki Committee for this opportunity to present our story.

Thank you – I will be happy to take your questions.