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Moldova: rattling the cage

The United Nations General Assembly has backed a call from Britain, Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, Canada, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Estonia, and the Czech Republic for Russia to withdraw its troops from Transnistria. The nonbinding resolution, the first to demand Russian withdrawal from Moldova's separatist region, was adopted by a vote of 64 to 15 late on June 22, with 83 abstentions in the 193-nation assembly. Russia, Iran, Armenia, Belarus, Syria, and North Korea were among the 15 countries that opposed the measure urging Russia to complete "unconditionally and without further delay the withdrawal" of its troops from Moldova. Russian Deputy UN Ambassador Dmitry Polyansky argued that the UN vote undermined efforts by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to settle the conflict in Moldova. "The outcome of the voting is regrettable for us," Polyansky said, "Excessive politicization of the problem occurred at the very moment when we see certain progress in talks between Chisinau and Tiraspol" [*UN Backs Call For Withdrawal Of Russian Troops From Transdnister*, RFE/RL, 23/06/2018].

Before the vote, Moldovan Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration Tudor Ulianoschi introduced the draft resolution addressed the fact that the Operational Group of Russian Forces (an 800 men strong unit deployed to guard ammunition depots near Kolbasna settlement left over from the days of the USSR) and its armaments were still stationed in Moldova without its consent. That was incompatible with its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the rules of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. For the Moldovan Minister the Russian presence on Moldovan soil, for the terms of the 1992 Moldova-Russia ceasefire agreement, was a distortion of the content of that document. Further, as a signatory of the 1999 Istanbul Summit Declaration (OSCE), the Russian Federation legally committed itself to a complete withdrawal of its troops and armaments by the end of 2002.

The representative of the Russian Federation proposed that consideration of the draft resolution be postponed through a no-action motion (subsequently not adopted) as set forth in Rule 74 of the General Assembly's rules of procedure. His delegation was not shying away from discussing the

Transnistria issue, and it was committed to a political solution through the “5+2” process. Emphasizing that there had been no recent emergencies that would require taking the Transnistria issue to the United Nations, he said it would be better to postpone action until the next Assembly session, thus enabling work on a consensus that would include the Republic of Moldova [*General Assembly Adopts Texts Urging Troop Withdraw from Republic of Moldova, Strengthening Cooperation in Central Asia*, United Nations, 22/06/2018].

In Moldova there is no strong popular will for the conflict’s resolution and Chisinau is far from resuming hostilities along the Nistru River. Moldova’s defence spending has been among the lowest in Europe for the past decade (around 0.5% of GDP). Under current conditions, it would be suicidal for Chisinau to provoke a clash with an opponent who is better prepared and armed. Still, the countries signatory of the resolution are the same ones that strongly oppose Russian interventionism and press for a greater Western presence on their territories. Ukraine, Georgia and the Baltics are the states more worried by the Russian presence and of further military interventions in support of Russian-speaking regions. For the time being Russia will not withdraw its troops from Transnistria, but the hope is to find a mechanism that can be followed in the others breakaway regions of Eastern Europe.

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