



International Political Pressure Mounts against Russian Troop Presence in Moldova

OE Watch Commentary: The past two months have seen an increase in international pressure for Russia to withdraw its troops from Moldova. On 22 June, the UN General Assembly adopted its first-ever, non-binding resolution for Russia to immediately remove its military personnel and armaments from Moldova's breakaway, pro-Russian Transnistria region. The topic is now scheduled in the Assembly's agenda for further debate. On 11 July, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly passed a declaration reaffirming the need for Russia to withdraw its troops from Moldova, and recommended a transformation of the country's Russia-dominated peacekeeping operation to a civil mission under an international mandate. That same day, at its summit in Brussels, NATO called on Russia to withdraw its forces stationed in countries without their consent, including those in Moldova.

Transnistria, a mostly Russian-speaking region, broke away from Moldova in 1992 largely out of fear that Moldova would re-unite with Romania. Local elements of Russia's 14th Army, remaining in Transnistria since the fall of Soviet Union, defensively fought against Moldovan troops, ultimately to the advantage of the separatists. Russia then negotiated a ceasefire to a war that ended with 1,000 casualties, 51,000 internally displaced persons, and at least 80,000 refugees. Since then, Transnistria has acted as a de-facto separate state supported by Russia, which, in addition to roughly 400 peacekeepers, continues to station approximately 1,200 troops there despite its commitment to remove them in the 1999 Istanbul Summit. Russia and its Transnistrian supporters claim that Russian troops stopped further bloodshed over the breakaway territory and are currently the guarantor of peace and stability there. The current Moldovan government argues that Russia encouraged, rather than prevented, the fighting in the 1992 conflict and that they threaten the country's stability.

The accompanying excerpted articles from sources in the region reflect two prevailing perspectives. One is a largely pro-European integrationist view that supports minimizing Russia's influence in Moldova. The other view claims Russia's presence and engagement in Moldova makes sense from a security, economic and historical standpoint. The excerpt from Moldova's pro-Russian *Moldavskiye Vedomosti* argues that the recent calls for Russia's troop withdrawal are simply distractors intended to divert attention away from the Moldovan government's plan to sabotage Transnistria's settlement process. The excerpt from Moldova's pro-European *IPN* news agency emphasizes that the UN, OSCE, and NATO declarations are valuable even if Russia does not withdraw its troops in the near-term, because they build a stronger, legal case that the Moldovan government can increasingly exploit. The excerpt from Russia's *TASS* news agency quotes Moldova's pro-Russian President Dodon, who believes that the demands for the Russian troop withdrawal are nothing more than political posturing ahead of Moldova's next parliamentary elections. The elections will be held by the end of November 2018 and are expected to be highly contested between supporters of the current government and those who back President Dodon's pro-Russian vision for Moldova's future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kurz)**

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Russian Peace Keepers at border crossing between Transnistria and Moldova.
Source: By Clay Gilliland [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)], [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_Peace_Keepers_at_border_crossing_between_Transnistria_and_Moldova_\(16348984171\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_Peace_Keepers_at_border_crossing_between_Transnistria_and_Moldova_(16348984171).jpg).

Source: “МИД ПМР назвал ‘негативным сигналом’ революции НАТО и ОБСЕ (MFA PMR Called ‘Negative Signal’ of NATO and OSCE Resolution),” *Moldavskiye Vedomosti*, 13 July 2018. <http://www.vedomosti.md/news/mid-pmr-nazval-negativnym-signalom-rezolyucii-nato-i-obse>

...The initiative of the Republic of Moldova to add a paragraph on the so-called “transformation” of the peacekeeping operation . . . reveals the real goals of Chisinau, which is trying to mask the policy of scrapping the peacekeeping mechanism with public rhetoric about the withdrawal of Russian troops.

Source: “Rezolutia ONU va fi un Instrument Juridic Pentru Moldova, MAEIE (UN Resolution will be a Legal Instrument for Moldova),” *IPN*, 11 July 2018. <http://www.ipn.md/ro/dosar-transnistrian/92298>

The objective was not only to bring the subject on the international agenda, but to . . . specify that the military troops stay in the Republic of Moldova against its will and this is a violation of the international law. . . Even if the resolutions do not have an immediate action, they represent a legal instrument.

Source: “Moldova’s President Criticizes UN Resolution on Russian Troops’ Pullout from Transnistria,” *TASS Russian News Agency*, 15 July 2018. <http://tass.com/world/1013208>

The resolution on withdrawal of the Russian military mission from Transnistria, which had been drafted by Moldova’s pro-European government and was later passed by the UN General Assembly, is counterproductive . . . I noticed their absolutely politicized nature . . . and are nothing but an intra-political fight and positioning in the context of the coming parliamentary election in Moldova.