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The Moldovan Confederation Conundrum

Stephen R. Bowers, Valeria Ciobanu, and Marion T. Doss, Jr.

Executive Summary

The Gagauz leadership has advanced several basic demands. The first category of demands relates to economic concerns and these appear to be the most fundamental. The situation that they insist be addressed is that there is an economic disparity between Gagauzia and the rest of the Moldovan Republic.

If one looks beyond the rhetoric of Comrat, Gagauz political demands are secondary to the economic ones. They demand political parties that would operate in local elections. They want more seats in the Moldovan Parliament and believe that all laws should be published in the Gagauz language as well as in Russian and Romanian.

While much has been said about Turkish involvement with Gagauzia, this has not served to generate any feeling among the Gagauz that their cultural roots are in Turkey. Those who emigrate are most likely to go, first, to the United States and, second, to Russia.

Ties between Gagauzia and Transnistria reached their closest during the early part of the 1990s. Since that time Gagauzia has found a more effective relationship working within the Moldovan Republic. The confrontations of recent months are a product of the Moldovan political crisis, not intervention from Tiraspol. They have led to a renewal of ties between these two regions.

Transnistria's fundamental demand is to assume equal status with the Moldovan Republic within a confederation. There appear to be limited prospects for a renewal of violence such as that seen in 1992.

Direct foreign intervention by any one of the three nations with the greatest interests in this situation—Russia, the Ukraine, and Romania—appears unlikely barring a renewal of violence.

Introduction

The decade-long debate about the creation of a "common state" in Moldova has had great significance for both Gaguzia, the poor region in the southern part of the Moldovan Republic, and the so-called Dniester Moldovan Republic or Transnistria in the eastern part of Moldova. Questions about the status of both entities have been couched in terms of politics, history, sociology, economics, linguistics, and even international relations. Of most immediate concern is the concept of collective rights and the impact that their recognition may have on prospects for resolving the ancient ethnic conflicts whose violent reappearance has marred the region's post-communist transformation. While the Transnistria conflict is not directly associated with this issue, the Gagauz situation represents a textbook example of how autonomy based on ethnicity can have a positive impact on ethnic conflict. Phrased in academic terms, the question is this: will the interests of the people of Moldova, Gagauzia, and Transnistria be best served by a confederation or by a federal union? For the former USSR, with its mixture of ethnic confrontations, the answer to this dilemma is of special relevance. Given those circumstances, it is likely that the eventual answer will come within the context of political dictates rather than scholarly speculation.

Gagauzia

Locations of Gagauz Communities

While we associate Gagauzia with Moldova, there are Gagauz communities in other nations. However, the largest (most populous) Gagauz community is in Moldova, where it has obtained a special grant of autonomy in a territory called Gagauz Yeri (Gagauzland) or Gagauzia. The Moldovan Gagauz live in five southern regions of the Republic: Comrat, Ceadir-Lunga, Basarabasca, Tăraclia and Vulcănești. Collectively, these regions where the Gagauz represent more than 50% of the population were considered part of Gagauzia. In other districts, where the Moldovans or the Bulgarians are the majority, a referendum was conducted on March 5, 1995 to determine whether they would be included as a part of Gagauzia. Based on that referendum, 6 out of the 10 districts involved agreed to join Gagauzia. As a result, Gagauzia now consists of a total of some 30 districts, 24 of which have a majority population of Gagauz. The Comrat region consists of twelve districts, Ceadir-Lunga of six, while Basarabasca, Tăraclia and Vulcănești consist of four districts each. Altogether, about 150,000 Gagauz live in Moldova, most of them in Gagauzia.

An additional 31,967 Gagauz live in Ukraine, mostly in the former Romanian regions Ismail and Cetatea Albă. Within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), about 10,000 Gagauz live in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Siberia. They originally moved to Basarabia about 1909-1910 and were deported from Basarabia between 1941-1949 by the Soviets.

Bulgaria boasts a Gagauz population of about 10,000 ethnic Gagauz, most of whom live in the Cadrilater and Varna the regions. As a matter of fact, many historians trace the roots of the Gagauz nation to this part of Bulgaria in the 12th and 13th centuries. Between 1770-1830 they migrated to Basarabia. Another 5000 Gagauz live in western Bulgaria (Custendil, Pirotsk, Botevgrad), eastern Serbia (Nis), and in Macedonia (the

country). In Greece, there are Gagauz living in seven villages on the river Strimmon in northern Macedonia (the province). The Greek Gagauz are referred to as Urumi.

In Romania, Gagauz now live in Mangalia and in the surrounding communities of Vama Veche, Ion Corvin, Deleni, Petreni and Sipote. After the First World War, while traveling to Tulcea, the historian C. Lascarov located seven Gagauz villages. Most were like Cataloi, where Romanians, Gagauz and Italians lived together in harmony. In Techirghiol, another scholar, M. Sanielevici, reported meeting a beautiful Gagauz woman. Even Nicolae Iorga, during his wanderings through the Romanian countryside, records having made a trip from Tulcea to Constanta in a carriage driven by a Gagauz.

With the war in Crimea, a new wave of Tatars from Crimea came to Dobrogea. A witness from the village Carabil (today Colina) told the researcher Al. P. Arbore¹⁰⁴ that they were brought from Crimea to the big Gagauz village Beidaud and then to Sarinasuf, Murighiol.¹⁰⁵ More recently, A. Oişteanu and Luca Pitu met and wrote about the Gagauz.¹⁰⁶ These writers met Gagauz in the villages Doi Mai and Vama Veche. In the rest of Romania, the Gagauz are refugees from Basarabia. Many of them have not registered themselves as Gagauz during the census, taking into account that there are a lot of mixed marriages and that the Gagauz are orthodox as well. Moreover, some names are common to the Romanian language: Topal, Ciolac, Chior, Uyun, Urum, Cheles, Arabagiu, Catargiu, Topciu, Dragan, Ciachir, and Coiciu.

Historical Development of the Gagauz Dispute

Small communities such as the Gagauz were vulnerable to pressure from the Russian empire and later from the Bolshevik successor state. The Soviet period was an especially difficult time for small nationalities to maintain their identities. Many small nations, overcome by the pressures of Russification, disappeared completely under Soviet control. Given the fact that assimilation was a norm of Russian imperialism, non-Russian communities were often doomed to disappear.

During the Stalinist years the Gagauz suffered greatly and in 1944 thousands of them were forced into labor camps. In the immediate post-World War Two years, a severe famine gripped the area and approximately one half of the Gagauz population died in 1946 and 1947. This humanitarian crisis was coupled with a post-war legal environment in which collective rights were not recognized. Because of a widespread belief that Nazi aggression had been facilitated by the concept of national self-determination and the notion of collective minority rights, international law embraced a universal concept of human rights in which individuals rather than communities enjoyed protection. Thus, cases involving national minorities were not part of the new agenda of international law. The Gagauz were among the people who paid a price for the post-World War Two legal changes as well as for the inability of communism to solve the much-discussed national question. A practical consequence of this environment was that in Gagauzia no Gagauz people held any positions of importance. Such key posts were always in the hands of Ukrainians or Russians.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ "Contributions to the Study of the Tatars and Turks" – Archive of Dobrogea, II, 1919, nr. 3-4, pag. 229

¹⁰⁵ Stoica Lascu – *Foreign travelers about the Turks and Tatars from Dobrogea – cen. XVIII – XIX – The origin of the Tatars*, Kriterion, Bucuresti, 1997, pag. 213

¹⁰⁶ Newspaper *Echidistance* – February 1993, Iaşi

Political Organization

The effort to assert collective rights emerged in the early 1980s when local intellectuals began to study the history of the Gagauz people and to think of themselves in terms of their ethnicity. This intellectual effort was a response to years of Russification and the virtual destruction of the very idea of Gagauzia as an ethnic community or a language. Secret meetings were organized by individuals who dreamed of restoration of the Gagauz idea as a substitute for the concept of the "Soviet man." When word of the meetings leaked, the regional party committee responded with repression and the KGB organized a series of arrests. For most of the Gagauz intellectuals, the result of their efforts was that they lost their jobs and any positions they held in the party.

Leonid Bebrov was one of the best-known Gagauz intellectuals involved in this ill-fated cultural and historical revival. He wrote a book about the KGB's repressive measures and demanded that there be a Gagauz media including television and newspapers utilizing the Gagauz language. As a result of his demands, he was confined in a Russian psychiatric hospital for three years. Eventually he was transferred to a clinic in Chisinau where the security was less effective. He escaped and managed to travel back to Russia where he met with Andrei Sakharov, thus gaining a measure of international publicity for his cause. With the emergence of a new Soviet leadership, Bebrov was able to avoid further confinement.¹⁰⁸

It was not until a decade after the first stirrings of a Gagauz cultural revival that there was any prospect for realization of their aspirations for the restoration of the Gagauz idea. On 19 August 1990, shortly after Moldova declared its sovereignty, the Gagauz authorities (the same people who were the authorities during the Soviet period) proclaimed the sovereignty of the Gagauz Soviet Socialist Republic with Comrat as its capital city. The Gagauz leadership acknowledged no more than a federal arrangement with Moldova. On 28 October 1990, with the support of the OMON troops of the Soviet Army under the command of the Soviet generals Satalin and Zaitsev, the Gagauz elected their own "supreme republican authorities." Gagauzia even created its own militia and set up control points on the main roads into their region. The Supreme Soviet of Moldova declared that all the actions of the separatists were illegal.

After the Romanian language was proclaimed as the state language of the Republic of Moldova and the Latin alphabet was introduced on 31 August 1991, the Gagauzians protested and formed their own political party, the *Gagauz Halky* (Gagauz nation), which advocated autonomy for Gagauzia. Due to the activity of S. Curoglu, member of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Moldova, this party was orientated towards Moscow and was, many people believe, manipulated by Alexandre Yakovlev, the former president of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Yakovlev often boasted that he had initiated and encouraged the separatist tendencies of Gagauzia and Transdnestria in order to maintain Russian "order" in this part of Europe. By early 1992, Chisinau exercised no more authority in Gagauzia than it did in Transdnestria.

The Gagauz turned to Turkey for international political support. During this early period of the Gagauz crisis, Gh. Ratoçglu, a prominent Gagauz politician, stressed this in an interview with the French journalist Jean-Baptiste Naudet:¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Mikhail Kendiglian, Comrat, 19 June 2000.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Professor Maria Marunovic, Comrat, 19 June 2000.

¹⁰⁹ "URSS, le reve turc des Gagaouzes," *Le Monde*, 28 mars 1991.

We went to ask for help from Turkey because we have obtained nothing from Moscow. If the initiative to create a Gagauz republic was the result of the activity of the local communists who were encouraged by the conservatives from Moscow, then today the Gagauz are determined to return to their origins and to eliminate the Russian influence over the Gagauz people. Finally, the actual Gagauz authorities, old communists, like the president Stefan Topal, and often Russians, who kept their leading functions, have to face a moderate opposition, grouped around the newspaper Gagauz Yeri, that is anticommunist and supports a statute of autonomy within Moldova.

Eventually, with changes in the leadership of the Moldovan Republic, the Gagauz backed away from their demands and accepted the legal authority of the Moldovan parliament. On December 2, 1994, the Moldovan Parliament passed a Law on the legal status of the localities with a majority Gagauz population. According to art. 2 of the Law, Gagauz Yeri (Gagauzland) enjoys the right to declare its independence as a state, should Moldova change fundamental existing political statutes providing for Gagauz autonomy. Thus, under the 1994 Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, Gagauzia obtained autonomy without the violence so often associated with such events elsewhere in post-communist East Europe.

Under provisions of the new constitution, authorities conducted a referendum in those five raions populated by Gagauz in order to establish which localities would join Gagauzia. The referendum also determined which city would be the capital: Comrat or Ceadir-Lunga. The joint Moldovan-Gagauz commission decided that the referendum would take place on 5 March 1995 in 34 localities. At first the Gagauz wanted to organize the referendum throughout all of the five raions (11% of the total land area of Moldova). In 24 localities the Gagauz represent more than 50% of population and elsewhere more than 1/3. Motivated largely by economic concerns, six of the ten localities agreed to join Gagauzia. As a result of the referendum, 30 communities joined Gagauzia: 12 from the Comrat region, 6 from the Ceadir-Lunga region and 4 communities each from Basarabesca, Tăraclia and Vulcănești. In the vote to determine the capital of Gagauzia, the majority voted for Comrat.

The Bashkan (governor) of Gagauzia also occupies the position of vice-prime-minister of the Republic of Moldova. According to the documents establishing their autonomy, the Gagauz are assured four deputies in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. These individuals are guaranteed seats in the Parliament as a matter of collective and constitutional right. Others, of course, may campaign during the election and, at present, there are five such Gagauz deputies in the Parliament of Moldova (they were elected on the lists of the Agrarian Democratic Party and the Block of Socialist Unity—*Edinstvo*). Many ethnic Romanians in Chisinau complain that, while it was the Republic of Moldova that granted autonomy, most leaders of Gagauzia are pro-Russian and tend to reject the Romanian Moldovans who constitute the national majority. All governmental entities, Romanian critics charge, use only the Russian language and, at the university in Comrat, all subjects are taught in Russian. Young people, in general, are not familiar with either the Romanian or Gagauz languages.

While an identity with Romania is not widespread, there is a pro-Romanian community in Gagauzia. Most prominent among this group are pragmatic Gagauz intellectuals who are loyal to the Romanian land of Basarabia and place that allegiance above any identification with Russia. They feel that their national identity will endure best in an association with Romanian interests rather than Russian interests. The most

prominent of these intellectuals is Professor Dionis Tanasoglu, the Chair of Gagauz history, language and literature at the Pedagogic University "Ion Creanga" from Chisinau.

In Tanasoglu's view, the Gagauz population will best develop within the Republic of Moldova and without territorial delimitation. According to Tanasoglu, only a broad grant of cultural autonomy is necessary for such a development to be effective. This, he maintains, is embodied in the 1994 laws and reflects a practical application of the concept of collective rights.¹¹⁰

Factions within the Gagauz Leadership

Political power in Gagauzia lies, for the most part, in the hands of the Gagauz People's Assembly and the mayors of the main cities. The current Bashkan is Dmitry Croitor, who was elected in September 1999. While the Bashkan appears dominant over the People's Assembly, Speaker of the Assembly Mikhail Kendiglian enjoys great power and speaks on behalf of those regarded as the hardliners. In this orientation, he is joined by the mayor of Comrat, Constantin Taushanjy, another of the region's hardliners.

It is essential to recognize that there are important political differences within the Gagauz community. For example, the distance in miles between Ceadir-Lunga and Comrat is minimal but there are major differences in the approaches of these communities to the political situation in Gagauzia. The mayor of Ceadir-Lunga, Mikhail Formuzal, describes this as a contrast between the radicalism of Comrat and the pragmatism of his community. He points to a long-standing "revolutionary tradition" in Comrat, a town that participated in the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. This tradition has prompted Comrat's officials to start confrontations with Moldovan authorities and to inject a more emotional attitude into the debate with Chisinau. By contrast, according to Mayor Formuzal, Ceadir-Lunga's pragmatic approach encourages the development of cooperative approaches that will help alleviate the town's severe economic and social problems. Such an approach is natural for this community which has no revolutionary tradition and was completely unaffected by the Bolshevik Revolution.

Mayor Formuzal, a pragmatist who is oriented toward the development of service institutions to meet the social needs of Ceadir-Lunga, is the principal opposition figure in Gagauzia. His administration has been characterized by the creation of homes for the elderly who would otherwise be without places to stay, the effort to secure medicines and other necessities for the city's poorly-equipped hospital, and a determination to follow a course of cooperation with Chisinau. Unlike Comrat, with its often-tense atmosphere, Ceadir-Lunga is a more open society in which outsiders, especially Westerners, are greeted with curiosity and, increasingly, warmth.¹¹¹ Formuzal's outreach efforts have brought not only a more cordial relationship with the Chisinau political establishment but, more important for the city's living conditions, contacts with Western groups interested in helping this region survive the rigors of a political, economic, and social transformation that has had devastating consequences on many towns in the former USSR. Outside support for Formuzal's non-ideological reform program has, during the past year, come in the form of financial contributions from a Scandinavian philanthropists who bought a furnace for the buildings that Formuzal transformed into a

¹¹⁰ Interview with Professor Dionis Tanasoglu, Chisinau, 6 October 2000.

¹¹¹ Mayor Formuzal has referred to Comrat as a dictatorship. Interview with the mayor in Ceadir-Lunga, 9 October 2000.

retirement home and additional support from an American university, James Madison University in Virginia, whose students raised money for another furnace, heating fuel, and Christmas packages for many of Ceadir-Lunga's more destitute families.

Fiodor Terzi, the mayor of Vulcănești, is widely regarded as a centrist who attempts to advance some elements of practical reform without alienating the Comrat political establishment. Local observers of the Gagauz political environment feel that the Formuzal approach enjoys more support among the ranks of the city and town administrators throughout Gagauzia.

The role of Vulcănești has become especially crucial in the political tug of war in Gagauzia. Together with Comrat and Ceadir-Lunga, it is one of the three centers which will determine the political direction of the entire Gagauz region. While Vulcănești is the smallest of the three cities, it benefits from the permanently hostile relationship between the leaderships of Comrat and Ceadir-Lunga. The latter cities are almost equally balanced in terms of numbers of registered voters. Thus, Vulcănești has become the pivotal district that can determine the outcome of the political contests in Gagauzia. Thus, Fiodor Terzi's the centrist position represents not only a political choice but also an effective political tactic.

Over the past year the situation has become more complicated because of the determination of some of the Gagauz leaders, like Kendiglian, Croitor and Taushanjy, to secure more seats in the Moldovan Parliament. Their strategy is to gain more influence in Chisinau rather than concentrate on the economical and social problems of the region. Many politicians in Chisinau predict early elections for the Bashkan of Gagauzia because of the unresolved conflicts between Gagauz radicals and Gagauz pragmatists. Enduring tensions between the People's Assembly and the Bashkan's office are the root cause of the effort to call for early elections. One of the potential candidates for the Bashkan office is the pragmatic Mikhail Formuzal. In response to Formuzal's likely candidacy, Kendiglian and Croitor are working to undermine Formuzal's position as mayor of Ceadir-Lunga.

The Current Political Situation

Many observers have praised Moldova for how tactfully it has dealt with the Gagauz problem. While the Tiraspol-Chisinau relationship degenerated into full-scale hostilities, there was only limited violence as the Gagauz and Moldovan leaders advanced their respective cases. In the early stages of what we refer to as the Gagauz crisis, the Gagauz leadership threatened Moldova and declared their intention to achieve statehood even at the cost of violence. However, with the collapse of the government of former Prime Minister Mircea Druc, Moldovan authorities assumed a more moderate stance that encouraged a reciprocal response from even the most hard-line of the Gagauz leadership. When Chisinau sought and accepted assistance from Turkey, the situation improved even more. Turkey appealed to the ethnic impulses of the ethnic Gagauz and effectively estranged them from Moscow and limited Russian influence upon them. The visit of the Turkish President Suleiman Demirel, at the invitation of Moldovan President Mircea Snegur, ameliorated the actions of the Gagauz leaders.

Today, Moldova controls Gagauzia's external relations as well as the region's defense. Gagauzia has dissolved its military organization and accepted the authority of the Moldovan Army. This authority extends to frontier protection, so Moldovan officials supervise Gagauzia's only frontier, that with Ukraine. The supreme authorities of

Gagauzia are formally subordinated to those of Moldova. The Bashkan of Gagauzia also assumes the position of vice-prime-minister of the Republic of Moldova.

The Gagauz Peoples' Assembly enjoys special powers under the 1994 agreements. First, it enjoys the right to participate in both the domestic as well as the foreign policy of the Moldovan Republic. In addition, should it feel that its jurisdiction has been unjustly inhibited by central authorities, it can take the matter to the Moldovan Constitutional Court.

Political Goals of the Gagauz

As the Gagauz *crisis* evolved into what is more often referred to as the Gagauz *problem*, the actions taken by the Gagauz to obtain a measure of autonomy have been widely discussed as a political issue in the Moldovan press and have been the focus of diplomatic actions by the OSCE.

Dmitry Croitor launched his administration in 1999 as an advocate of pragmatic policies designed to avoid confrontation and enhance the development of Gagauzia. As he began his administration, he announced that his main tasks would be to build centralized gas and water supply lines, undertake road repairs, and develop culture, science, and education. Croitor announced that Gagauzia would abandon the administrative-command form of governance and work to develop a market system. The first responsibility of government, he declared, was the creation of favorable conditions for the creation of business.¹¹²

While there is general agreement that the most explosive aspects of the Gagauz-Moldova relationship were resolved by the mid-1990's, it is obvious that serious difficulties now threaten to disrupt the calm that surrounds Gagauzia. These difficulties are cited with greatest frequency by the faction that is associated with Mikhail Kendiglian.

In the summer of 2000, Kendiglian spoke of the renewal of "trouble between Comrat and Chisinau" and began to demand that Gagauzia must be assured fifteen seats in the Moldovan Parliament. Unless this demand is granted, Kendiglian insists, Gagauzia will boycott future Parliamentary elections. Such a request is a formal impossibility because under current Moldovan law this amendment is subject to a procedure that takes one year. Thus, Kendiglian's demand for an immediate increase in the number of Gagauz seats is something that cannot be legally granted.¹¹³

Economic concerns are another dominant theme in discussions of the status of Gagauzia. The impoverished state of the region has made such concerns the most compelling of issues for both the leadership and the population of Gagauzia. The starting point for such discussions is the complaint that Chisinau takes an unacceptably large share of the proceeds of the agricultural produce of this region. This alleged misappropriation of resources is cited as a key factor in the underdevelopment of the Moldovan south in general and Gagauzia in particular. In discussions about their relationship with Chisinau, this is the most consistent theme of the leadership group in Comrat. Moldovan authorities, Kendiglian and others charge, has taken an excessive

¹¹² *Infotag*, (Chisinau) 24 September 1999.

¹¹³ Interview with Mikhail Kendiglean, Comrat, 19 June 2000.

share of the legitimate proceeds of the Gagauz wine harvest while offering little by way of compensation from the other state revenues.

Gagauz Demands

Debates over the relative distribution of resources quickly led to *political* demands by many Gagauz leaders. Those demands are expressed in calls for a greater degree of Gagauz autonomy or, a more radical option, a union with Transdnistria. The latter, one should note, is general stated as a likely response to a hypothetical disastrous situation that does not yet exist even in the eyes of the most radical.

Thus, the most elementary demand is for creation of a federalized Moldova in which Comrat will share power with Chisinau. Tiraspol would represent the third element in the three-way split envisioned by the supporters of a federal state. Micheal Kendiglian expressed this demand upon his return from Moscow in late January, 2001 when he declared that he could not imagine Moldova "as anything other than federation between Chisinau, Comrat, and Tiraspol."¹¹⁴

As the Soviet Union collapsed, the concept of *autonomy* gained not only great popularity but also numerous quiet distinct meanings. The Gagauz concept of this term involves several specific demands. Among the most important is one that is cited by officials in both Comrat and Ceadir-Lunga, a removal of the disparities in the distribution of economic benefits. Officials in Comrat are especially adamant in their accusations that the Moldovan Parliament has not created equity in economic matters. The solution most frequently offered in this context is the creation of customs posts along the roads into Gagauzia. Such posts would be able to levy just benefits for the region while customs officials in Chisinau deny Gagauzia its rightful share.

A second feature of the Gagauz concept of autonomy is the creation of political parties that would be unique to this region. Denied under the Moldovan constitution, these parties would participate only in local elections and would not be listed on the national ballot. Kendiglian and other Gagauz leaders note the actions of the Mircea Druc government in banning the *Gagauz Halky* in discussing the need for their own political organizations.

A third demand advanced by the Gagauz leadership, as noted above, is that Gagauzia be granted more seats in the Moldovan Parliament, perhaps even as many as one-fourth. This arrangement would help rectify the present situation in which there is only one high level Gagauz, a deputy minister, in the current Moldovan government. The call for more seats, presently, is non-negotiable and officials in Comrat say that they will not participate in the upcoming Parliamentary elections unless Chisinau yields to this demand.

Closely related in terms of intensity, is a demand that Comrat be included in the negotiation process concerning the future of Moldova. Failure to include Gagauzia as a partner in this process represents, in the view of the confrontational element of the Gagauz leadership, a denial of the legitimate status of the region. Moreover, according to Kendiglian, he and his colleagues should play a greater part in the formation and implementation of Moldovan foreign policy. Moldova, he maintains, has no option other

¹¹⁴ *Basa Press* (Chisinau), February 1, 2001.

than an eastward orientation because there is no significant Western support for Moldova.
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It is this preference for an eastward leaning Moldovan foreign policy that justifies Kendiglian's endorsement of the Moldovan communist party in the upcoming Moldovan Parliamentary elections. While he has indicated that Gagauzia will not participate in those elections, Kendiglian has called upon those who do participate to vote for the communists. This party, he maintains, is the only one that supports the Gagauz struggle for national realization. The fact that the Moldovan communist politician Vadim Musin has declared that the idea of a Moldovan unitary state is outdated explains some of Kendiglian's motives for this endorsement.¹¹⁶

The Moldovan language issue is reflected in a fifth Gagauz demand: the joint publication of laws in Romanian and in the Gagauz language. This point generates an intense debate. On the one hand, there are those who maintain that publication of the laws in Gagauz would be pointless because very few Gagauz residents actually use the language. Gagauz officials, on the other hand, counter that Moldova's refusal to fund language training in the region is the real problem.

International Implications of the Gagauz Dispute

The Gagauz dispute has had at least a minimal *international impact* within the southeast European region. Any discussion of the international implications of this dispute focuses on the involvement of Russia and Turkey. Initially, the Russian role was, for fairly obvious reasons, the most significant. When Moldova was being consolidated into the Soviet Union, Russian teachers arrived in Gagauzia and began an intensive effort to eliminate illiteracy. One result of this endeavor was the establishment of firm educational ties with Russia. Consequently, most young Gagauzians study in Russian in their general schools and go to Russian universities for their advanced studies.

Equally important in the Gagauz-Russian relations is the fact that most of the region's gasoline and other energy sources come from Russia. The Moldovan Republic, lacking in its own energy resources, is unable to offer such compelling inducements to bind itself and the Gagauzia districts together. According to Mihail Kendigelian, without the support offered by Russia, Gagauzia "might disappear."

Some Russian politicians have expressed support for the position of the Kendiglian faction in Gagauzia. Former Russian Premier Yevgeny Primakov, who represents Moscow in the Chisinau-Tiraspol negotiations, has indicated that federalization of Moldova is the only viable option at this time. Kendiglian has been very active and, presumably, rather effective in cultivating support from people such as Boris Pastukhov, Chairman of the Russian State Duma committee for CIS relations, and other figures commonly associated with support for Transdnistria.¹¹⁷

Yet, with the collapse of the Russian ruble in August 1998, the economic significance of Russia declined somewhat and the Turkish role in Gagauzia began to expand. According to Gagauz officials, the Turks are not motivated primarily by a desire to cultivate new markets for Turkish products. However, there is an important secondary interest: the geo-strategic significance of this territory, which may, in the long run, overshadow any economic advantage to be gained here. Some pro-Romanian politicians,

¹¹⁵ Interview with Mikhail Kendiglean, Comrat, 19 June 2000

¹¹⁶ *Basa Press* (Chisinau), December 20, 2000.

¹¹⁷ *Basa Press* (Chisinau), 1 February 2001.

such as Vasile Nedelciuc, Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Foreign Relations Commission, have encouraged ties with Turkey as a way of limiting Russian influence over Gagauzia.¹¹⁸

Turkey began to demonstrate a more general interest in Moldova well before the appearance of what might look like an opportunity for some moderate economic gains. It was among the first states to grant diplomatic recognition to Moldova and follow through with the establishment of full diplomatic activity in Moldova. Turkish President Suleyman Demirel, after visiting Comrat and Ceadir-Lunga described Gagauzia as a "bridge of friendship" between these two states.¹¹⁹ In 1993, Turkey opened the "Gagauz-Turkish School", a university just outside of Ciadir-Lunga. The university offers classes in Turkish, English, and Romanian. Turkey played an important role in the 1994 agreements on Gagauz autonomy by indicating that it would like to provide developmental assistance and make investments in this region. More recently, a Turkish firm secured the contract to remodel the Chisinau airport and BTR, a Turkish bank already operating in Romania, opened an office in Chisinau where it quickly established a reputation as one of the nation's most important banks.

While in the West much is made of the prospect of closer ties between Turkey and this small ethnic community, the fact of the matter seems to be that most Gagauzians have little fascination with Turkey. While no comprehensive data has been published, Gagauz officials speak frankly about emigration trends among their people and maintain that the nation that holds the greatest attraction is the United States. Religious converts such as Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses almost always emigrate to the United States while Russian-speakers are inclined to move to Russia. Very few Gagauz emigrate to Turkey. The most common pattern is that Gagauz women will journey to Turkey in search of employment opportunities, marry Turkish men, and eventually claim Turkish citizenship by virtue of those marriages.¹¹⁹

While much is made of the Turkish associations of Gagauzia, its ties with Romania may well be almost as important, though primarily in a philosophical sense. There is a community of Gagauz intellectual democrats, largely based in Chisinau, who are pro-Romanian in their orientations. According to them, the political evolution of Moldova proper is inseparable from the political development of the Gagauz region. Should Moldova be headed by "real democrats," then Gagauzia is more likely to be governed by equally genuine democrats. In such a situation Gagauzia would likely come into closer contact with Romania just as the Gagauz did between 1918-1940.

Professor St. Ciobanu has written about the loyalty of the Gagauz:

From all the minorities from Basarabia, the Gagauz population is the closest to the Romanian nation through its spiritual qualities, loyalty and kindness of character. All the Gagauzians speak perfect Romanian and in the Comrat region many of them use both Romanian and Gagauz.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Interview with Vasile Nedelciuc, Chisinau, 6 October 2000.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Mayor Mikhail Formuzal, Ceadir-Lunga, 18 June 2000

¹²⁰ St. Ciobanu. *Basarabia, population, history, culture*, Bucuresti, 1941, pg. 34, Romanian Academy, Studies and researches XIII.

The progressive Gagauz intellectuals, who are loyal to the Romanian land of Moldova, realize that the use of the Russian language in administration and in secondary and superior schools will lead to the disappearance of the Gagauz nation as it lead to the disappearance of dozens of nations within Russia. Only collaboration with the Romanians will lead to a versatile development of the Gagauzians. Romanians have never assimilated their minorities and have generally appreciated their respective contributions to the general progress.

Transdnistria

Introduction

Much more troubling as a security issue for the Moldovan Republic is the decade-long dispute between authorities in Chisinau and those in the Transdnistria region or, as it is sometimes known, the "Dniester Moldovan Republic" (DMR). During that period in which the situation in Gagauzia was tense with several violent clashes, this region was torn by full-scale war in which hundred were killed. For a brief period in the summer of 1992, the fighting in Moldova was the most violent in all of the turbulent post-communist Eastern Europe.

Transdnistrian Political Actors

One legacy of the traumatic "birth" of the DMR is an almost complete lack of permanent, functioning political structures. Given the uncertain environment of the DMR, it is not surprising that the region's key political groups are not always formally structured. In fact, they are generally a reflection of contemporary political intrigue rather than permanent, formal interest.

The most visible symbol of political power in the DMR is President Igor Smirnov. Smirnov, a somewhat shadowy figure who arrived in Tiraspol only in the late 1980s, is now serving his third term as president of the Dniester Moldovan Republic. The source of his political authority has been the subject of much speculation but it increasingly appears that money, rather than support from Moscow, is the basis for his power. Accounts of illegal sales of weapons left behind in Transdnistria focus on the key role played by Smirnov. The agreements negotiated by the Russian government on ownership of the weapons seemed to give Smirnov what is widely interpreted as virtual ownership of a large portion of that armament.¹²¹

Closely allied with Smirnov is the Vice President, Alexander Karaman. The basis for their alliance may be more than political as Karaman has often been cited for his involvement with illegal weapons sales. On public pronouncements, Karaman has generally been associated with Smirnov's positions, especially on the issue of the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches of government.

There is a radical opposition in Transdnistria that is associated with, Alexandre Radchenko, a prominent member of the Supreme Soviet. He is an advocate of a more radical development of the DMR within the region, a position that would involve more dramatic and frequent confrontations with Chisinau. His criticism of the Smirnov faction focuses on charges that Smirnov is involved in criminal activity. Nicolai Bucharsky, former head of the Tiraspol City Council, is associated with this group as is V. Gaurilchenko, head of the local communist party organization.

¹²¹ Interview with Gheorge Negru, Chisinau,

Grigore Marakutsa, who frequently represents the DMR in its negotiations with authorities of the Moldovan Republic, is the leader of the moderate opposition. He is an advocate of less confrontational positions with regard to Chisinau while he is also associated with calls for the implementation of a more regularized rule of law in the DMR. He is a supporter of maintenance of the authority of the Supreme Soviet in opposition to Smirnov's calls for increased executive authority.

Vladimir Atamaniuk, the Speaker of the Supreme Soviet, has long been a supporter of Smirnov. However, when Smirnov began to work to reduce the authority of the Supreme Soviet, Atamaniuk opposed his former ally. Otherwise, in terms of his advocacy of a generally hard-line position on other issues, Atamaniuk is still associated with Smirnov.

One of the most important political organizations in the DMR is the Republic Movement. This group is consistently pro-government and is regarded as an instrument of Smirnov's political apparatus. It does not function in the manner of a conventional political party but rather like the so-called "transmission belts" of the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union. In 1997, during a crisis period in which Smirnov was calling for "greater vigilance," the Republic Movement played an important role in implementing this call.

Industrial unions and associations are also important in the political life of the DMR. Their contemporary role corresponds to that of the trade unions of an earlier Soviet period. During the crisis in the spring of 1997, Smirnov held a series of public sessions with the leaders of the unions and associations as a way of consolidating support.

Edinstvo, the political organization associated with Putin in Russia, has an office in Tiraspol but this outpost of Russian political influence has been critical of Smirnov's role in Transnistria. In the December, 2000 elections, *Edinstvo* won eight out of forty-three seats in the Supreme Soviet of the DMR. Consequently, its role is not especially significant.

Political Goals of the DMR

The fundamental political goal of the DMR is to enjoy equal status with the Moldovan Republic within a "common state." In May, 2000, the DMR rejected Moldova's offer, conveyed by President Petru Lucinschi himself, to give the DMR a specified, guaranteed number of seats in the Moldovan Parliament and to make the DMR president a vice-prime-minister of the Moldovan Republic. Because this offer did not incorporate the notion of the DMR as the equal of the Moldovan Republic, it was rejected.

Sovereignty is the first political objective of the DMR, and securing the ability to demonstrate that sovereignty is a necessary accompaniment. For Tiraspol's authorities, a solution such as the one that was acceptable to the Gagauz will not work. A key justification for this stance is the fact that the DMR has an economic potential that exceeds that of the largely agricultural Gagauzia. Thus, sovereignty (or independence, as their leaders often say) rather than autonomy is the goal of the DMR.

The official view is further elaborated by Supreme Soviet Chairman Grigore Marakutsa, a moderate, as noted above, who has declared that the minimal requirement of the DMR is the creation of a confederation, with special emphasis on the ability to demonstrate sovereignty in the areas of economy, culture, and politics.

An additional specific demand, expressed by President Igor Smirnov and others in the more hard-line faction is that the DMR must have both its own currency and its own army. While the Dniester Guard has functioned as a local military force for much of the last decade, Smirnov is arguing for formal acceptance of such an entity as a recognized military force. Lacking legitimacy, the Guard suffered from perceptions of its poor conduct during the 1992 war. Reliance on the Russian forces still stationed in the area is unsatisfactory to Smirnov. The demand for its own currency is equally difficult to fulfill. While there is a DMR ruble, it is not accepted as a legitimate currency outside of Transnistria. Consequently, any DMR citizen hoping to engage in economic activities outside the DMR, must possess either Russian rubles, Moldovan lei, or US dollars. Even within the territory of the DMR, there is a reluctance to accept the DMR ruble if one is making a significant purchase.

Security Concerns of the DMR

According to V. Atamaniuk, the greatest security concern of the DMR is to protect itself against those who would undermine the "state." This very broad statement has several specific applications. An identification of the key security institutions of the DMR helps clarify the specific applications of official security concerns.

The most prominent institution is the Ministry of State Security (MGB). This is the DMR's only intelligence and counterintelligence agency. It declares that its main goal is to fight foreign secret services, including those of Moldova. Its general responsibility is the prevention of harm to the state resulting from domestic opposition. One of its regular activities in fulfillment of this mission is the conduct of Soviet-style interviews of citizens suspected of subversive activities, including contact with Westerners.¹²² In a similar fashion, the MGB enforces rigorous requirements regarding the registration of foreign visitors. Each visitor must register with the police upon entering the DMR territory. Long-term visitors are subject to periodic visits to the MGB headquarters in order to explain the circumstances of their continuing visits. Letters informing them of this obligation are couched in threats of arrest in the event of non-compliance.

Certain individuals are subject to special restrictions imposed by the MGB. Few have received a more hostile reception than that accorded personnel from overseas who have volunteered to oversee the evacuation of Russian military hardware from the region. Britain and several other nations have consistently made this offer, only to have its representatives be rejected when attempting to enter the DMR. People attempting to conduct interviews have also been subject to restrictions and even detention when entering the DMR.

The hallmark of the MGB style is that its officers are not professionals in the manner of some of the other post-Soviet intelligence agencies. Many of its personnel were dismissed from intelligence agencies elsewhere in the former USSR. There are no clear professional qualifications for officers nor are there programs for a renewal of professional skills. On the contrary, the organization seems to rely upon brutality and heavy-handed threats in order to accomplish its mission.

DMR President Igor Smirnov has long relied upon the MGB as his personal protection service. Given the importance of this role, Smirnov eventually came to distrust

¹²² Interview with student leader Vlada Lysenko, Tiraspol, 14 June 2000

MGB head Shevtov, suspecting that Shevtov was transforming the MGB into an instrument for his personal power.

Shevtov, who came to Tiraspol as a Major in the Soviet Ministry of Interior, has broadened the activities of the Dniester Republic's MGB. His activities indicate a primary concern with the domestic side of security. Accordingly, he has created a youth movement, known as "Young Guard", which has what is widely perceived as a "Nazi mentality" combined with an East-European version of New Age mysticism. Anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and brutality have become the hallmark of Shevtov's youth groups. Although they publish a newspaper that cannot be found on the newsstands, their existence is not a secret and they can be seen on the street wearing distinctive clothing that marks them as members of the DMR's "skin head" movement. Their newspaper, entitled *Youth March*, was prominent during the most recent election campaign when 11,000 copies were printed and distributed at no cost throughout the region. Membership in the youth movement is confined to those aged 16 through 23.

While members of these groups routinely break the law, their parent agency, the MGB, expresses little concern for this. In fact, their activities are consistent with those of the MGB's young leadership, individuals who openly espouse a modern-day Stalinism. The MGB's limited concern for the law is reflected in their apparent reluctance to actually take cases to court. In fact, it is said that the MGB does not like to appear in court and would rather deal with problems directly by using physical violence to intimidate opponents. The only notable case taken to court by the MGB is that of the Ilascu group, a case that has apparently taken most of the courts' time for almost a decade.

The direct action approach of the MGB has been exhibited by its treatment of businessmen attempting to operate in Transdnistria. Commercial endeavors, especially if successful, often lead to arrest by MGB agents. Accepted police practice is that, after enduring confinement for a period of weeks, most business people are willing to pay their way out of jail and then out of the DMR itself. In the spring of 2000, the MGB targeted illegal money traders whose practice had been routinely tolerated. Over fifty of them were arrested and detained for two weeks. After that, they were allowed to buy their freedom. As a result of this MGB "fund-raising" initiative, one million dollars was collected and given to Smirnov.¹²³ Today, the MGB controls most exchange outlets in the DMR and all profits are used to enrich senior officials.

The activities of outside religious groups are an important security concern for the DMR as it is for Russia. The most active of those religious communities is the Jehovah's Witness group. Officials regard the Jehovah's Witnesses with suspicion and see its skepticism about loyalty to the state as evidence of subversive intent. Consequently, MGB officers now target them for harassment and arrest. All of the Jehovah's Witness property, money, Bibles, literature, etc., is confiscated and, where it has any monetary value, is turned over to the state.

Just as the activities of non-indigenous religious groups are seen as a security threat, authorities are determined to suppress media outlets that are not controlled by the state. Asket TV, operating in the suburbs of Tiraspol, has long felt the impact of such repressive measures. Initially operating with a Western grant to encourage independent media, the station was shut down by DMR authorities. It was not until 2000, after over a

¹²³ Interview with Sofranov, Tiraspol, 15 June 2000

year of closure, that the TV station was allowed to resume operations. Printed publications from Moldova are also subject to official suppression. While some Russian publications may be offered for sale in Tiraspol, there are no outlets for Moldovan or Romanian language periodicals.

While the MGB is one of the major forces in the DMR, its power is not without limits. One of the most remarkable illustrations of this is the case of an attorney who was charged with subversive activities and detained by police authorities. Because of the general ineffectiveness of the court system, he was never convicted. Yet, he was determined to respond to what he saw as police harassment so he sued the MGB for damages. Eventually, the courts ruled in his favor and he was awarded \$3,000 in damages.

The role of the Cossacks, who have joined with the MGB in protecting DMR security concerns, reflects the leadership's view that the regime faces a military threat. There is a 15,000 member Cossack community in the DMR. This number includes dependents as well as actual troops and they are situated into villages near the Dniester River. The Cossack organization, which is part of the Organization of Cossacks of Russia, enjoys both official support as well as state funding. It works closely with other security organs such as the DMR Ministry of State Security. In local meetings and presentations, the Cossacks stress what they describe as the crucial role that they played during the 1992 war. Cossacks killed in that fighting are buried in what is regarded as a place of honor, the war memorial across the street from the DMR parliament building. The memorial is dedicated to the dead of World War Two as well as those of more recent conflicts in Afghanistan.

Cossacks officers describe themselves as a force to protect the regime against all internal threats. When pressed to identify whom they see as likely to launch military strike against the DMR, they generally cite the Moldovan Republic or Romania, reminding listeners of the 1992 war, and suggest that there are local supporters of the Romanian "nationalists."¹²⁴

Economic Woes as a Security Concern

Closely behind the threat posed by such "subversive forces" is the deterioration of the consumer economy. Atamaniuk recognizes that the future stability of the DMR is heavily dependent on its ability to satisfy the basic economic requirements of a people who increasingly realize that their best economic prospects lie in Russia or even in the Moldovan Republic.

The DMR leadership, of course, does not accept responsibility for the dire economic circumstances of its population. Rather it cites this condition as evidence of a conspiracy directed by the "pro-Romanian elites" of the Moldovan republic. For individuals such as Atamaniuk, this is simply part of the campaign being waged against the DMR because the region has adhered to "genuine socialist principals." From the ranks of the MGB, the regime's economic woes are described as a result of Jewish activities. Jews, according to hardliners associated with the MGB, took jobs that otherwise would be held by "good Russians".

It is important to acknowledge that, if one judges the situation by outward or perhaps superficial appearances, the DMR's economy has improved in recent years.

¹²⁴ Interview with Andrey Sofranov, Tiraspol, 15 June 2000

Attractive restaurants and modern stores, things that were almost non-existent in the years after the war, have become much more common. Yet, the truth of the matter is that such establishments are not routinely frequented by the average consumer.

For most people, economic life takes place on the street. According to independent journalist Y. Voloui, an estimated 60% of all economic activity is based in this area while no less than 80% of all food purchases are made on the street.¹²⁵ Street vendors, some with small assortments of used items displayed for sale on blankets spread on the sidewalk, others with tents offering new, perhaps Western products, account for most of the commercial activity that affects the standard of living of most residents. Prices, while still high when one considers the modest level of personal income for most people, are much lower than those in the formal stores that line Lenin Boulevard. That fact explains why the street vendors do such a brisk business while the stores are almost empty.

Equally important is the fact that there are two categories of customers. Most common are those who work in factories, on farms, or in offices and institutes. Such individuals, with their meager incomes, struggle to satisfy basic requirements of life and are often paid in kind rather than in cash. Less numerous but more significant as members of the DMR's elite are those who have connections in the numerous illegal enterprises that seem to justify the existence of this Slavic enclave.

While the consumer good sector languishes, the DMR has enjoyed some recent success in industrial production. While the Supreme Soviet set 20% as its targeted growth for 2000, data released at the end of the year show that the region's industrial production grew by 38%. Most of the growth was a result of successful years in metallurgy and light industry with the Rybnitsa Steel Mills performing best. Textile and shoe production were the only areas having a direct positive impact on the consumer goods picture. The restructuring plans of the Supreme Soviet are credited with bringing back into production five enterprises which had previously been dismissed as "hopelessly dead" just a few years ago. Apparently recognizing the desirability of improving the overall economic picture, the Supreme Soviet is now calling for introduction of far-reaching privatization plans for 2001.¹²⁶

Foreign Views of the Transdniesterian Conflict

Of all the foreign states having an impact on and an interest in the potential instability of Moldova, none plays a more important role than Russia. Russian diplomats are careful to describe their interests in terms that are consistent with the requirements of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). They express their determination to continue to participate in the three party negotiations on the status of Moldova. As of early 2001, the official Russian position was that the final solution of Moldova's problems was in the hands of the leaders of the Moldovan Republic and those of the DMR.

There has been Russian interest in helping the DMR and Moldova deal with this problem. In accordance with a decision by President Putin, Russia has formed a special commission to examine this dispute. The commission is headed by former Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov and is exploring the prospects for solutions to this persistent threat to

¹²⁵ Interview with Y. Voloui, Bendery, 16 June 2000.

¹²⁶ *Infotag*, February 1 2001.

regional stability. The Primakov commission is best noted for its suggestion that a Russian and Ukrainian force, under an OSCE mandate, would be responsible for peacekeeping in the region. Smirnov and Georgi Tikhonov, one of his Russian supporters, objected to this suggestion, declaring that it would mean that the West was determining the fate of Moldovans and DMR residents.

The Russian position is of special interest because the DMR leaders direct so many of their appeals to the former Soviet capitol. Vice President Karaman insists that "Russia must be aware of its geopolitical interest in Transdnistria and defend them the same way it defends Russian interests in the North Caucasus."¹²⁷ This statement is an escalation of his previous arguments that union with the Moldovan Republic was an impossibility.

The sensitivity of the Russian position with regard to this issue was demonstrated by the role played by several members of the Russian Duma during the DMR's December, 2000 elections. At that time an unofficial delegation of deputies of the Russian Duma, led by Georgi Tikhonov, acted as election observers, in effect, giving what appeared to be an official Russian endorsement of those elections. The Moldovan government responded to this with concern and demanded that the Russian government take steps to demonstrate that this action did not imply that Russia was officially endorsing what Chisinau saw as illegal elections. Such a situation, the Moldovan maintained, would undermine Russia's role as a mediator.

The factors that would require official Russian action, however, appear unlikely. Concerns about corruption in the DMR or about the use of this community for transferring illegal weapons abroad would not motivate action. While Russian authorities realize that weapons from the DMR go to various "hot spots" including Chechnya, there is no will to take a more interventionist policy simply because of this. It appears that the only factor that would motivate intervention would be an eruption of violence comparable to that of 1992.

The Ukraine has a major interest in development in Moldova. One of its most important concerns is that it is a major transit point for weapons that are to be removed from Moldova. Insuring the security of the transit process is a legitimate concern for the Ukraine. Having a common border with the DMR gives them an equally compelling reason to work for the stability of the region.

While the Ukraine is one of the guarantors for the stability of the Moldovan Republic, its role in this situation is sometimes ambivalent. Ukrainian officials suggest that they might be willing to act as peacekeepers in the region yet, they take actions that, in the Moldovan view, run counter to the interests of regional stability. For example, on several occasions, Smirnov has been granted the status of an official visitor in the Ukraine. During those visits he has met with numerous senior officials including the president and Minister of Foreign Affairs. In this regard, the Ukrainians have acted in a manner that has raised Moldovan objections.

According to Moldovan officials speaking off the record, the Ukrainians may have a separate agenda. Moldovan officials point to the industrial potential of the DMR and to its significant processing industries and speculate that Ukrainians may wish to gain a "controlling interest" in those enterprises. Such influence, they suggest, would add to

¹²⁷ *Basa Press* (Chisinau), January 2000

the Ukrainian economic potential during a time when it faces the severe challenges of an economic transition.

However, like the Russians, the Ukrainians see no reason to intervene in this situation unless there is an eruption of large scale fighting. Given that unlikely scenario, little change in Ukrainian policy is likely.

Nonetheless, support for the negotiation process has been a consistent hallmark of both Russian and Ukrainian policy in Moldova. Their efforts in this regard, coupled with OSCE activities, led to a renewal of interest in the peace process at the end of 2000. In December, DMR Foreign Minister Valeri Litskai and Vasile Sturza, head of the Moldovan Commission on the Dniester problem, met with Ukrainian and Russian representatives in Budapest and announced that there would be a resumption of joint talks and, hopefully, a strengthened prospect for peaceful resolution of this conflict.¹²⁸

Romania shares some of the concerns evidenced by the Ukrainians. The most compelling matter expressed by the Romanians relate to the withdrawal of the Russian weapons and military forces from Transdnistria. One of Romania's most consistent demands with regard to this issue is that an observer mission be introduced into the region in order to evaluate the withdrawal of the Russian military forces and weapons as well as the destruction of weapons.

Romanian officials also express a concern that Moldovan stability not be called into question lest that issue would slow down the process of withdrawal. Closely related to this issue is Romania's "ethnic interest" in a Moldovan population that is largely Romanian. But there is also a political interest because of the geopolitical situation of Moldova. Romanians describe Moldova as a bridge between Eastern Europe and Western Europe because of the cultural, economic and political influence which the Moldovans have experienced for the last half century.

The Moldovan parliamentary elections are a special concern since they raise the possibility that Moldova might bring about a rejection of Moldova's more open policies of the past decade. It is a Romanian fear that such a move might create a broader version of the Russian-Belarus alliance, something that would greatly change the nature of the common frontier of Romania and Moldova.

While the Romanians express a concern about the status of fellow-Romanians in the DMR, there has been no official intervention more dramatic than the awarding of Parliamentary status to DMR political prisoner Ilaşcu. Like the Russians and Ukrainians, Romania would be alarmed by renewed violence. However, unlike the Russians and Ukrainians, Romania lacks the necessary conditions to intervene in any military capacity.

While there is a great deal of disagreement among various segments of the political community in the DMR, there is a consensus about the necessity for foreign intervention to bring about change. While some political actors fear intervention, others see it as their only hope for real change. Should any form of intervention take place, it would likely be taken by a member of this group of states—Russia, Ukraine, and Romania. However, as noted above, the circumstances that would prompt intervention are very narrow and, for the foreseeable future, unlikely to develop.

¹²⁸ *Basa Press* (Chisinau), December 20, 2000.

Ties between Transdnistria and Gagauzia: In Quest of a Confederation

The most important connection between these two regions is that they were allies in time. Their movements were bound not by a common ideology but were both consequences of the upheavals of the first post-Soviet years. They were, for the most part, simply products of a period rather than partners in secession from the Moldovan Republic.

The strongest ties between these two entities existed before the 1995 Gagauz elections. At that time, Stepan Topol, who had embraced much of Tiraspol's agenda, was replaced as Bashkan of Gagauzia and the close relationship between the two leadership groups ended. The current Bashkan, Dmitry Croitor, did much to reintegrate Gagauzia into the Moldovan Republic. For the remainder of the decade, the most prominent Gagauz politician to work for closer ties between Gagauzia and Transdnistria has been Mikhail Kendiglian, the Speaker of the Gagauz Parliament.

A rift emerged between the two groups as the Gagauz demonstrated a willingness to accept Chisinau's offers of a special status for Gagauzia. In the eyes of many DMR leaders, the Gagauz leadership was guilty of betrayal. There was, predictably, a corresponding hostility against the leadership of the Moldovan Republic because that group had been more conciliatory to Comrat than to Tiraspol.

The Moldovan political crises of 2000 and early 2001 saw a renewal of the coordination of efforts between Comrat and Tiraspol. In July, 2000, Gagauzia opened an office in Tiraspol to officially represent Gagauz interests in that area. The rhetoric of the leaderships in both cities became increasingly strident over the summer.

This process continued throughout the year and, in December, when the Gagauz Peoples' Assembly organized a Chisinau-based conference to voice their calls for federalization, they were joined by representatives of the DMR. Together, they issued a call for creation of a commission to develop a plan for power sharing between Chisinau and Comrat.¹²⁹

While these two regions were initially allied by historical circumstances, their more recent association has been the result of political convenience. They share an interest in forcing Moldova to abandon the concept under which it was organized in the first post-Soviet years. The issue, therefore, will not be resolved on the basis of which best serves popular interests—a confederation or a federal union—but which will advance the political agendas of Comrat and Tiraspol.

¹²⁹ *Basa Press* (Chisinau), December 20, 2000.