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Florian Küchler

**THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
IN MOLDOVA'S TRANSNISTRIA CONFLICT**

With a foreword by Christopher Hill

ibidem-Verlag
Stuttgart

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Coverpicture: Symbols of the self-styled "Transnistrian Moldovan Republic" in the courtyard of an official building in Tiraspol. Photographed by Florian Küchler 2006.

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Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem, säurefreiem Papier
Printed on acid-free paper

ISSN: 1614-3515

ISBN-10: 3-89821-850-3

ISBN-13: 978-3-89821-850-4

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Stuttgart 2008

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Printed in Germany

*For Mirela, who has herself experienced two terrible conflicts,
but never lost her magic smile...*

Rezumat (Romanian Abstract)

Integrarea Bulgariei și României în UE a adus Republica Moldova la porțile Uniunii ca vecin nou și necunoscut. Atunci ar fi logic să fie adaptate și discursuri academice și politice la ultima avansare spre est al frontierei Europene. Totuși Europa de Vest și Statele Unite până acum nu au dat multă atenție Moldovei și geopoliticii Mării Negre, nici a acțiunilor celui alt mare actor în zonă: Rusia. Acest fapt este mult mai serios dacă luăm în considerare diviziunile politice serioase și conflictele nerezolvate în zonă. Unul dintre ele este conflictul transnistrean din Republica Moldova.

Ca o contribuție pentru agenda cercetării despre Republica Moldova, această carte analizează interesele, poziția oficială, adevăratul impact și rolul potențial al Uniunii Europene în conflictul intern al Republicii Moldova cu separatiștii transnistreni precum și tensiunile externe cu Federația Rusă legate de el. Pentru acest efort, cartea reevaluează și conflictul transnistrean în sine, precum și cauzele și implicațiile sale. Împotriva propunerilor frecvente, conflictul nu are o bază etnică încât este fondat pe diferitele interese ale elitelor și „actorilor” geopolitici.

Până acum, Uniunea Europeană nu a fost foarte activă în efortul internațional de a rezolva conflictul transnistrean și în relațiile generale cu Republica Moldova. Totuși această carte ajunge la concluzia că acum este din ce în ce mai important, mai posibil și mai probabil că Uniunea Europeană contribuie la rezolvarea conflictului. Însa mult va depinde de relațiile cu alți „actori” geopolitici ca Statele Unite și Rusia și de acțiunile lor. În sfârșit, cartea oferă recomandări pentru politica viitoare a Uniunii Europene în legătura cu Republica Moldova.

Conținutul acestei lucrări este bazat și pe diferite călătorii de cercetare în Republica Moldova, Transnistria și statele vecine.

Резюме (Russian Abstract)

В результате вступления в Европейский Союз Болгарии и Румынии Молдова, являющаяся новым и малоизвестным соседом Европейского Союза, оказалась на пороге расширенного Союза. В связи с этим очевидно, что в академической сфере, а также в кругах, формирующих национальную и международную политику, должен был бы возникнуть соответствующий интерес к такому расширению пределов Европейской интеграции. Однако Западная Европа и Соединенные Штаты уделили сравнительно мало внимания Молдове и геополитике Черноморского региона, в том числе действиям ещё одного важного игрока в регионе – России. Такое отношение усугубляется еще и существованием в регионе ряда политических разногласий и неразрешенных конфликтов, одним из которых является приднестровский конфликт в Молдове.

В данной книге анализируются интересы, официальная позиция, реальное влияние и потенциальная роль ЕС во внутреннем конфликте Молдовы с сепаратистами Приднестровья и связанное с этим внешнеполитическое напряжение между Молдовой и Россией. Для осуществления этих задач, в книге проводится новый анализ ситуации связанной с Приднестровским конфликтом, его причин и следствий. Вопреки широко распространённому предположению об этническом происхождении конфликта, в книге показано, что это преимущественно конфликт элит и геополитических интересов.

До настоящего времени, роль ЕС в разрешении конфликта и деятельность ЕС в Молдове в целом были довольно ограниченными. Однако выводом данной книги является то, что участие ЕС в разрешении приднестровского конфликта становится всё более важным, при этом возрастают возможности и вероятность активизации такого участия. При этом масштаб действий ЕС в Молдове и Приднестровье будет зависеть от отношений Евросоюза с другими

геополитическими игроками, такими как США и Россия. Более того, данная книга предлагает рекомендации для дальнейшей политики ЕС в отношении Молдовы.

В книге используются сведения, собранные автором во время научных поездок в Молдову, Приднестровье и соседние страны.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
BSEC	Organisation of Black Sea Economic Cooperation
CFSP	common foreign and security policy
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Community
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Office
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EIB	European Investment Bank
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
EU	European Union
EUBAM	European Union Border Assistance Mission (to Moldova and Ukraine)
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
fdi	foreign direct investment
FTA	free trade area

GSP	Generalised System of Preferences
GU(U)AM	Georgia, Ukraine, (Uzbekistan,) Azerbaijan, Moldova
IFIs	international financial institutions
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MFN	most-favoured nation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIS	newly independent states
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PMR	Priednistrovskaya Moldavskaya Respublika (Transnistria)
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TACIS	Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States
TBO	TACIS Branch Office
TCA	Trade and Cooperation Agreement
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)
UN	United Nations
US	United States (of America)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Foreword

Florian Küchler has done us all a service by his meticulous research into the important problem of Transnistria. The average citizen of a western European country is unlikely to have heard of Moldova, let alone the conflict which has been boiling on that country's eastern frontier for the past 20 years. And, it might be asked, why should they care in any case? The answer to this is two-fold. Firstly, European citizens have been taught by the experiences of 1939-45, and then again the 1990s in the Balkans, that they run grave moral and practical risks if they ignore the sufferings of peoples in other countries. 'Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind' said John Donne in the seventeenth century, and even if we cannot take on responsibility for preventing killing in every part of the world, there is now a presumption that a savage conflict outside our borders must engage our conscience and lead to some kind of constructive effort at resolving it, so as to relieve suffering. This is also because once violence breaks out, even within a single state, but especially across borders, no-one can tell where it will end or where it might lead. The examples of Serbia 1914, Czechoslovakia 1938, Bosnia 1992 and Iraq 2003 are too striking to ignore. When war breaks out in the Lebanon the world immediately takes notice. But less obvious places like Rwanda, Kurdish Iraq – and Transnistria – are also flashpoints and sites of potential slaughter.

Florian is passionately concerned with the fate of Moldova. But he does not allow passion to blind him to the need for informed, cool analysis. He knows the country and has worked hard to acquire the language competence which marks out the expert from the mere commentator. He also has a very good understanding of the European Union's capabilities in external relations, especially in the EU's 'neighbourhood', through his work in the Kiev Delegation. The accession of Bulgaria and Rumania to the EU in 2007 has brought Moldova right up to the Union's borders, and implicated us all much more than before. We should all benefit from finding out much more about Moldova, Transnistria and the geopolitics of the Black Sea region. Florian Küchler's book is an excellent place to start.

Christopher Hill

Centre of International Studies,
University of Cambridge

Acknowledgements

First of all, I wish to acknowledge the invaluable help and advice of my supervisor Professor Christopher Hill. He gave me general guidance as well as constructive feedback on work in progress and has been very forthcoming with flexible arrangements to accommodate my absence from Cambridge due to research and work abroad during most of the preparation time for this work.

Also, I would like to thank all those who – through their helpful comments and critical questions – have pointed me to useful information and contact persons, helped identify possible problems in my approach and suggested alternatives. This applies in particular to my co-students on the “Master of Studies in International Relations” course, my colleagues at the Delegation of the European Commission in Ukraine, where I worked as an intern during the entire writing-up phase and the contributors and audiences of the various conferences that I attended. In the end, however, I would have never turned my master thesis into this book, had it not been for the encouragement I received from Dr. Andreas Umland and an anonymous peer reviewer.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my girlfriend Mirela Glušac for proofreading my Romanian summary, my former colleague Irina Leonenko for her help with the Russian version and the geographers Hanka Poppitz and Tobias Kerschke for ensuring that I was able to include a high quality map of Moldova and Transnistria after I had struggled to get hold of the authors and copyright holders of suitable maps found on the internet.

Last, but by no means least, I am forever indebted to my parents Ursula and Hans-Georg Küchler for their love and unconditional support for my demanding international research and work schedules.

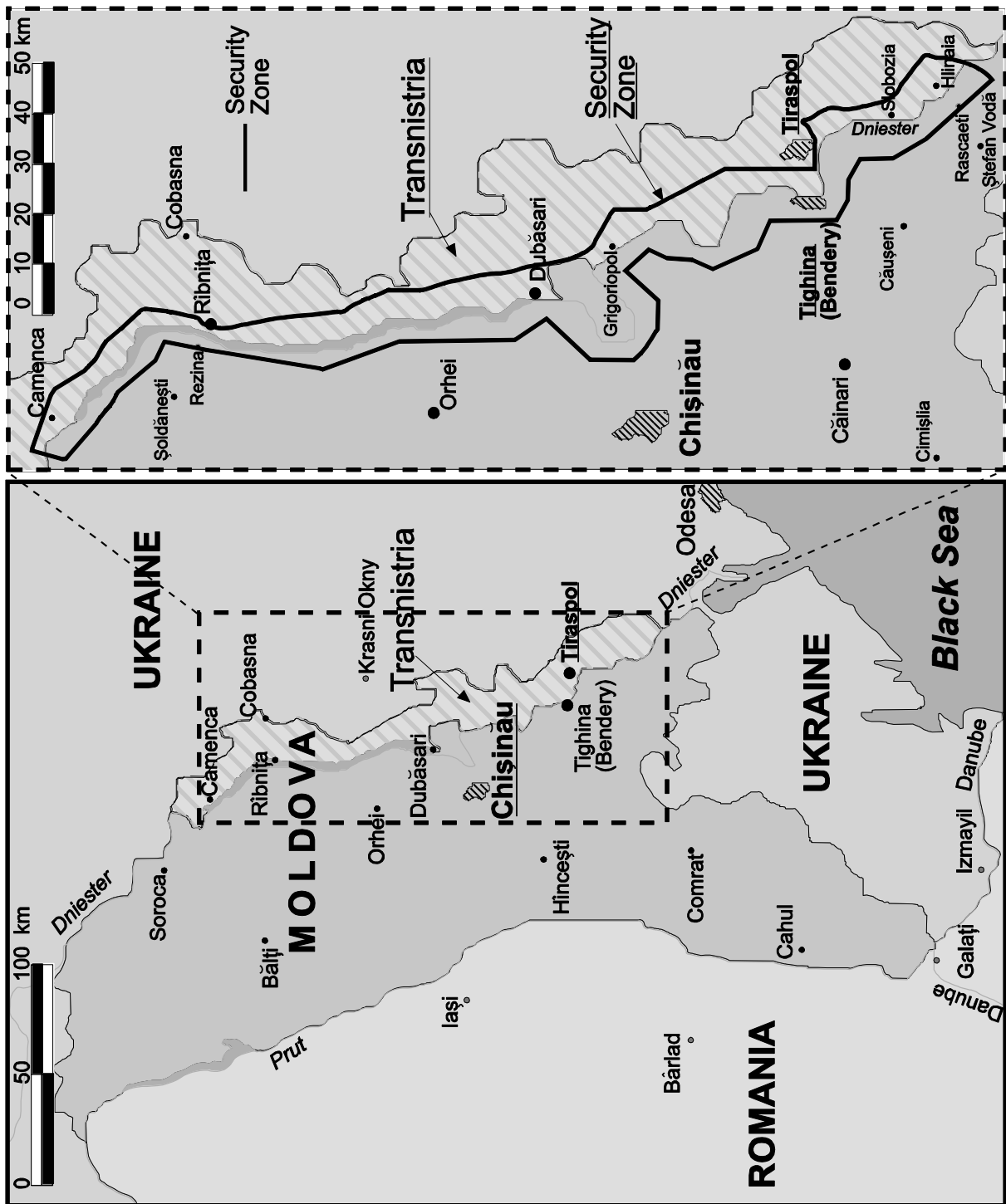


Figure 1 Map of Moldova, Transnistria and neighbouring regions (Author: Hanka Poppitz, Copyright: Florian K uchler)

1 Introduction¹

On 1 January 2007, Romania and Bulgaria entered the European Union (EU), thus completing the second half of their Euro-Atlantic integration process after their joining NATO in 2004. This concludes the “encirclement” of the former Yugoslav states by EU and NATO members, gives the EU access to the Black Sea and – with Moldova – brings a new neighbour to the doorstep of the enlarged Union. Therefore, it would seem obvious that academic debates as well as policies of national and international actors would have to adapt to the realities of this new periphery.

Yet, whereas Yugoslavia and its successor states have received considerable academic and media attention as a result of the violent conflicts that occurred there in the 1990s, Western Europe and the United States have given comparatively little attention to the EU’s Eastern European neighbours and the wider geopolitics of the Black Sea region, including the actions of the other big actor in the region: Russia. Although during the 2004 “Orange Revolution” Ukraine was the recipient of considerable international attention, this was rather short-lived. Moreover, there has not been a significant spill-over effect in terms of increasing interest in other countries such as Moldova, Belarus or Georgia. This is all the more serious if one takes into account the political divisions and conflicts that linger in the area.

Whilst Ukraine witnessed no major violence during its “Orange Revolution”, many other places did. Violence and even outright warfare, if small-scale, has swept through several parts of Russia’s near abroad

¹ This introduction is a partial adaptation of the introduction of a book review written by the author for the Cambridge Review of International Affairs (Küchler, 2007a).

and some of its own border regions.² Of course, none of these reached the scale of violence that has accompanied the break-up of Yugoslavia. Moreover, unlike Yugoslavia, most of the conflicts were relatively far away from Western Europe and therefore much lower down the European political agenda. Also, fortunately there is no major fighting on post-Soviet territory at the time of writing. However, many recent conflicts have simply been frozen, rather than resolved, and one does not have to reach beyond the Black Sea for a case study. One of these so-called “frozen conflicts” (Brennan, 2003, p. 1) is that between Moldova and the separatists in its Transnistrian province,³ who are militarily and economically backed by Russia.

Although, for the time being, this conflict is unlikely to escalate into major violence, the EU has a strong interest in resolving it as soon as possible. This is not only due to the various cross-border problems immediately resulting from the conflict and the illegal activities of the internationally unrecognised Transnistria. Rather, the solution, or not, of the conflict could have much wider implications for the role of the European Union as a regional and global power. This is partially because of its interconnection with other issues such as the recognition of Kosovo’s independence, EU-Russian relations and NATO’s eastwards expansion.

The aim of this book is to identify the EU’s interests in – and its actual and potential role in the resolution of – the Transnistria conflict.

² During and after the break-up of the Soviet Union, civil wars took place in Chechnya, Nagorno Karabakh, Ingushetia, Ossetia, Abkhazia, Adjara, Moldova and Tajikistan (Kotkin, 2001, p. 4)

³ Names of countries and places are a highly politically sensitive subject in the era of post-Soviet nationalism. Therefore, any choice of spellings needs a justification. In this case, the choice of “Moldova” over “Moldavia” can be justified, because the former is the country’s own official spelling and is now also widely used outside Russian-speaking countries. Choosing “Transnistria” over the separatists’ own spelling as “*Priednistrovje*”, reflects common usage in non-Russian literature and media and avoids unintentionally giving legitimacy to the highly problematic regime of the self-styled “republic”. For Ukrainian city names, too, this book adopts the new official Ukrainian spellings instead of the Russian transliterations that are still frequently encountered (i.e. “Kyiv” and “Odesa” instead of “Kiev” and “Odessa”) and the – now politically correct – usage of “Ukraine” without article.

However, whilst relatively few people are even aware of the conflict's existence, even those who do know about it often see both the causes and implications of the conflict in overly simplistic ways. This is reflected in much of the literature as well as media reports on the topic. Thus, the following sections represent a re-evaluation of conflict itself in which gaps and contradictions in the literature are resolved by the author's own observations from several research field trips to Moldova, Romania, Ukraine and Russia as well as a number of formal and informal interviews. In some cases these measures were even necessary to obtain rather basic information.

This book adopts the views of neither of the two sides. If siding with anyone, the author understands his position as in favour of the European Union as well as the people of Europe (including Moldova and Transnistria), in whose interest the resolution of the Transnistria conflict is. It is meant to be policy oriented in that it analyses the actual policies of the EU with respect to Transnistria, Moldova and the region and also results in a number of policy recommendations and options to be considered by the European Union and its member states.