

Report by Arta Dade (MP, Albania), Chair of the Parliamentary Team on Moldova
Minsk, July 2017

Background

After being dormant for several years, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Team on Moldova (thereinafter: "the Team") was revived in 2015 under the impulse of OSCE PA President Ilkka Kanerva (Finland). I was tasked with leading a reconstituted and reinvigorated Team composed of influential personalities, both within the Parliamentary Assembly and their respective parliament.¹

In April 2016, I participated in the Leinsweiler II seminar which considered parliamentary contributions to OSCE efforts in addressing conflicts. This was the occasion to begin a fruitful conversation with the Head of the Moldova delegation, Serghei Sirbu, on ways the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly can assist in the Transdniestrian settlement process.

Upon the invitation of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, our Team undertook a very timely visit to Chisinau and Tiraspol in June 2016, days after formal "5+2" talks resumed following a two-year hiatus. This was our Team's first visit to Moldova in over four years.

This visit, along with a positive working relationship with our colleagues in the Moldovan parliament, contributed to a balanced and forward-looking Supplementary Item to the Tbilisi Resolution adopted during the 25th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in July 2016. The text underscored our assembly's readiness to assist our partners in Moldova and confirmed our commitment to help find a peaceful and sustainable solution to the Transdniestrian conflict.

The elections which took place in the second half of 2016 put our outreach activities on hiatus, although members of the Team were actively involved in election observation.² In March 2017, I undertook another visit to Moldova to re-engage with our partners in Chisinau and Tiraspol. It is this latest visit, along with our activities over the past two years, which informs this report.

Following the parliamentary elections of 25 June 2017, I will no longer be a member of the Parliament of Albania, and I therefore participate in Minsk in my last meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. This report is a summary of our Team's work over the past two years and offers guidance for the colleagues who will continue engaging with our partners in Moldova.

A united international community

Looking two years back, I note that the Parliamentary Team on Moldova was reinvigorated at an opportune time. After years in limbo, the international community united under the German 2016 OSCE Chairmanship to re-focus on the Transdniestrian issue and achieve some substantial progress in the settlement process.

The tireless work of the German Chairmanship's Special Representative for the Transdniestrian settlement process, Ambassador Cord Meier-Klodt, and the OSCE Mission to Moldova headed by

¹ The Team is currently composed as follows: Arta Dade (Albania), OSCE PA Vice-President George Tsereteli (Georgia), Second Committee Rapporteur Marietta Tidei (Italy), Alf Dubs (United Kingdom), Geir Joergen Bekkevold (Norway). Former members Eric Byrne (Ireland) and Thierry Mariani (France) are no longer members of parliament and of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

² I served as Special Co-ordinator for the short-term OSCE observer mission while Geir Joergen Bekkevold was head of the OSCE PA delegation. Thierry Mariani also participated in this election observation mission.

Ambassador Michael Scanlan should be commended for creating a positive dynamic between mediators and observers,³ especially considering sharp political and military disagreements on other OSCE issues.

Our Team's visits in June 2016 and March 2017, and the resolution adopted in July 2016, were a small contribution to the international community's united approach to Moldova. This, in turn, has shown to our partners in Chisinau and Tiraspol that political will can challenge the status quo.

Pushing for concrete results

Through these efforts, and despite few concrete results by the end of 2016, the German Chairmanship managed to define a new approach to the Transdnestrian settlement as an output-based process. This new direction was illustrated by the Berlin Protocol of June 2016, through which the sides committed themselves to achieving practical progress as a pre-condition for more substantial "5+2" talks. The approach was enshrined in a Hamburg Ministerial Council statement endorsed by the OSCE's 57 participating States.⁴

I am pleased to note that the results-based approach is shared by the Austrian Chairmanship, which remains deeply committed to progress in the Transdnestrian settlement process, as illustrated by the constant engagement of Special Representative Ambassador Wolf Dietrich Heim and the visit of OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz in February 2017.

Achieving concrete results on practical issues is essential to creating the conditions for a broader settlement, but not only: by solving problems that affect the daily lives of people on both sides of the Dniester/Nistru river, it helps them realize that their futures are linked. It underscores the fact that the Transdnestrian settlement, with respect for Moldova's territorial integrity and sovereignty and a special status for Transdnestria within the Republic of Moldova, is not the best solution because the international community says so, but because it is the only one that can promote a prosperous future for all Moldovans and greater stability for the region.

Seizing a year of opportunity

The international community's renewed efforts to achieve progress on the Transdnestrian issue have been hampered by domestic instability until the end of last year. Considering the street protests and frequent changes of government in Chisinau, it is in fact remarkable that the first half of 2016 was brought to fruition with the resumption of "5+2" talks and the signing of the Berlin protocol.

However, no breakthroughs have come since, as positions hardened in Chisinau and Tiraspol ahead of Moldova's first direct presidential election in Moldova since 1996, which took place in October-November, and a Transdnestrian leadership poll in December.

Following the election of Igor Dodon as President of the Republic of Moldova, the major political forces have stated a broad agreement on the necessity to solve the status of Transdnestrian, in spite of sharper divergences on other policy issues. Meanwhile, in Transdnestria, the leadership election has consolidated power in the hands of the Sheriff-backed Renewal party after several years of gradual polarization between the Supreme Council and the executive structures.

This new political reality has considerably increased the chances of a successful mediation. And, with no elections scheduled this year, 2017 represents a great window of opportunity to achieve substantial progress without political distraction. However, halfway into the year at the time of writing, progress is overdue.

³ The OSCE, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine, and the European Union and the United States.

⁴ Ministerial Statement on the Negotiations on the Transdnestrian Settlement Process in the "5+2" Format (<http://www.osce.org/cio/288181>).

Pushing for more

Moldova has made some efforts to promote a tolerant and inclusive society, a task of great importance for a country that has been defined by conflict. Chisinau adopted late last year a Strategy for Consolidation of Interethnic Relations, with support from the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), recently adopted an action plan to promote the commemoration and study of the Holocaust in a local context, and established a parliamentary mechanism for dialogue between Chisinau and the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia.

Yet, steady implementation is essential to demonstrate that Chisinau is willing to create the conditions for re-integration. The newly-established Moldovan Bureau for Interethnic Relations needs adequate human and financial resources if it is to contribute to forging a stronger civic identity. Likewise, sufficient government resources must be allocated to guarantee that future generations of Moldovans appreciate the significance of the Holocaust in their country's history.

The working platform between the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and the People's Assembly of Gagauzia enjoyed a positive working dynamic in 2016 and produced three amendments to Moldovan legislation that have been introduced in parliament. If adopted, they would greatly contribute to build trust between the two legislative bodies and establish good foundations to clarify the broad competencies of the Autonomous Territorial Unit set out in the 1994 Law on the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia. Yet, none have been approved to date.

Public statements must now be followed by action to ensure these policies' continued impact. Clarifying the Gagauz autonomy is especially important in the context of the Transdnistrian settlement process as it provides a clear example of what a special status could look like and offers a blueprint for co-operation between the state and an autonomous region.⁵

Recently, Chisinau's formulated a long-awaited vision for the Transdnistrian region. This is a welcome development that will help guide each step in the settlement process and finally offer opportunities for Transdnistrian leaders to realize how re-integration within the Republic of Moldova would satisfy their people's needs and guarantee their rights.

Encouraging dialogue

During my latest visit to Moldova, interlocutors underlined a desire to achieve an agreement on the so-called "Package of Eight" before the summer. Such a deal would produce immediate, palpable results for people on both sides of the Dniester/Nistru river and would demonstrate that the Sides can mutually benefit from the process. Yet, an agreement remains elusive at the time of writing.

Through my two-year engagement with Moldova, I have understood that greater political will and pragmatism is necessary to move forward. Throughout our visits on the ground, the Team pushed political leaders to spring into action, and find the resolve to overcome differences to ensure a long-term and comprehensive settlement. People on both sides of the Dniester/Nistru River deserve to see their daily life improve and to be able to envision a brighter future. This depends entirely on Chisinau and Tiraspol translating their good intentions into deeds.

In this respect, members of legislative bodies are essential in building political support for any solution to the Transdnistrian conflict. In meetings with the Moldovan delegation to the OSCE PA, the leadership of the Moldovan Parliament, and with successive chairmen of the Transdnistrian Supreme

⁵ The Supplementary Item on the Republic of Moldova, adopted during the Tbilisi Annual Session, underlined "the importance of having a positive example set by the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia in terms of socio-economic development and cohesion."

Council,⁶ our Team pushed for the resumption of formal and informal contacts between political leaders to build a relationship of trust.

I noted during my latest visit a greater desire for more regular contacts from both sides. I also welcome the intention of our colleagues in the Parliament of Moldova to become more closely involved in the negotiation process.

Members of Parliament can play a crucial role in backing the Transdniestrian settlement process. Their unique position in politics – directly in touch with the people they represent and with access to the top political leadership – is a great asset for vertical mediation and can contribute to ensuring the broadest internal consensus. More regular contacts can complement ongoing negotiations and prepare the ground for genuine legislative co-operation.

A closer involvement would appropriate the process, not out of a desire to interfere in the work of the expert negotiators, but in order to convince citizens that the solutions are also theirs. Such a feeling of ownership is essential for the success of all negotiation efforts in Moldova.

⁶ With then-Chairman Vadim Krasnoselsky in June 2016, and with Chairman Alexander Shcherba in March 2017, after Krasnoselsky's victory in the Transdniestrian leadership election.