



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Schools and Linguistic Cleansing in Transnistria, Moldova

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Paul W. Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 29, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Recent closures and harassment of Moldovan Latin-script schools in the Transnistrian-controlled region of Moldova have led to an extremely tense situation and dangerous standoff that could potentially become violent.

These provocative steps contradict previous assurances the Tiraspol authorities provided the OSCE and Council of Europe that they would negotiate a mutually agreeable solution and take no measure against the schools while negotiations were ongoing.

We strongly condemn the Transnistrian actions of forcibly closing the school in Tiraspol, attempting to close by force schools in Bendery and Ribnita, and attempting to forcibly evict orphans from their shelter in Bendery. We insist that the Transnistrians reopen the schools immediately, restore the normal movement of people and goods, and stabilize the situation in the security zone.

These and other issues must be discussed at the five-sided roundtable under OSCE auspices. We strongly support the work of the OSCE Mission in Moldova. The existing five-sided talks remain the relevant mechanism both for working on contentious issues like the school crisis as well as toward an overall settlement.

Tiraspol authorities have been increasingly aggressive in pressing their political agenda and in provoking the Moldovan Government. Recently, Transnistrian negotiators boycotted the scheduled June 23-24 five-sided talks, and during the July 21 round, Transnistrian leader Igor Smirnov refused to meet either the three mediators or the Bulgarian Deputy Foreign Minister.

We applaud the Russian Foreign Ministry's statement of July 19, following the forced closure of the school in Tiraspol, that called for the Transnistrians to refrain from taking further administrative action against the remaining schools. We call upon the Russian Government to use its influence with the Transnistrian leadership, many of whom are Russian citizens, to halt their current provocations, ensure the observance of human rights of all Moldovans residing in Transnistria, and return to the political settlement process in a constructive manner.

We fully believe this lies within the power of the Russian Federation, should it so choose. Russia would also send a useful signal by restarting its military withdrawal, consistent with its 1999 OSCE Istanbul commitments.

We are open and eager to discuss further levers the international community could use to pressure the Transnistrians to be cooperative. For instance, we would be interested in seeing the Secretariat put forward a proposal for international monitoring of the Transnistrian segment of the Moldova/Ukraine border. If implemented, such a project could establish positive momentum toward tightening border controls between the two countries.

In addition, we and our EU partners are prepared to consider other appropriate measures against the separatist Transnistrian authorities to induce their cooperation. We also welcome Moldovan Reintegration Minister Sova's call for an international conference on the Transnistria conflict and stand ready to discuss this proposal in greater detail.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.