



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Linguistic Cleansing in Transnistria

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 22, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States is extremely concerned by the actions taken by Transnistrian authorities on July 15th to close the minority language school in Tiraspol. The school, which instructs students using the Moldovan language in Latin script, was surrounded by militia and forcibly closed just one day after Commissioner Ekeus visited the region. Five other schools serving national minorities in the region are also in danger of being closed. These extremely provocative steps contradict assurances that Tiraspol authorities provided the OSCE and Council of Europe just this past February, mainly that they would negotiate a mutually agreeable solution and take no measure against the schools while negotiations were ongoing.

The right to an education as well as the rights of children should not be a part of this conflict. We therefore urge the local authorities to work with the schools' directors to find a solution that upholds the rights of minorities to preserve and develop their linguistic, ethnic and cultural identity. And we also urge Commissioner Ekeus to stay engaged in this issue.

We would like to refer to the Joint Declaration by the Heads of Mission of the EU in Chisinau and the Embassy of the U.S. in response to this issue and let me share that declaration with you. It reads as follows: "The Heads of Mission of the European Union in Moldova, that is German Embassy as the Local Presidency, the French Embassy, the Embassy of Hungary, the Embassy of Poland and the Embassy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Moldova, as well as the Embassy of the United States in Moldova have expressed their grave concerns on the closure of the Moldovan School No. 20 in Tiraspol, by the armed police of the break-away region of Transnistria. The Heads of Mission of the European Union in Moldova fully support the statements on the closure of school no. 20 which were issued by the OSCE Mission in Chisinau and by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. The EU will continue to follow the situation very closely in cooperation with international partners such as the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the Council of Europe Representative in Moldova."

In closing, we strongly urge that this situation be resolved peacefully and as soon as possible and reiterate that it is absolutely imperative that this be done now.

Thank you.