

## SECURING 'FROM WITHIN': THE EU POLICIES IN TRANSDNISTRIA

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### Abstract

The dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted not only into independence for Moldova. It also served as a push factor for the secessionist conflict on its territory which due to its unresolved status is referred to as frozen. All attempts of the political settlement since 1990s have ended in deadlock. Interestingly, the EU policies towards Transdnistria changed significantly in 2003-2004. From the 'security consumer' the EU has been slowly turning into the 'security provider'.

The main goal of this paper is to evaluate the impact of the EU in ensuring security and stability through its involvement in the Transdnistrian conflict. For this purpose the study will focus on EU-Moldova relations and the instrument it dedicates to ensuring stability, the EU Border Assistance Mission.

### Biographical information of the author

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### Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted not only into independence for Moldova. The conflict in Transdnistria, received as a legacy of the Soviet empire, had several important features. It resulted in fewer casualties and was rather short. It also did not have an ethnic, religious or historical background that would date back for centuries. Therefore, it has always been considered that the likelihood of its resolution was higher than in other cases. Nevertheless, despite numerous attempts to achieve a viable solution, the negotiations stalled, thus turning this dispute into another frozen conflict. Why would then a country with an overall population of 3,4 million people (United Nations 2008) with a

secessionist region, inhabited by 550,000 people,<sup>12</sup> attract so much attention from the side of the EU? The paper is dealing not only with the interests of the EU in the region, but also attempts to measure the efficiency of EU actions to provide security and stability on the borders by fighting illegal trade, corruption and illegal migration.

The analysis consists of several parts. The first one is dealing with the evolution of EU-Moldova relations from 1990s till nowadays as well as discusses the EU interests based on the European Security Strategy. The second part is devoted to the assessment of the capabilities of the EU instrument — the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine, as well as analyzes external and internal factors which could impede the fulfillment of its tasks. In conclusion, an analysis of the overall impact of the EU in securing the border is conducted. It will be argued despite certain improvements the impact of the EU is limited to a number of factors, including the lack of strategic vision on security agenda.

### EU Policies and Interests in the Region

Three stages of development can be identified in relations between the EU and Moldova. On the first stage, which can be characterised by mutual ignorance, the EU was treating Moldova exclusively within a broader framework of its relations with Newly Independent States. Therefore, the policies it adopted did not differ from the policies adopted in relation to other countries in the region. At that period Moldova was also not prone to foster cooperation with the EU. In the end of 1990s Moldova started pushing the development of its relations with the EU, while the EU was still playing a 'deaf' game. A sudden shift from the side of Moldova identifies the second stage. Finally, the adoption of the European Security Strategy (ESS) in December 2003 gave an overall impetus to the development of EU-Moldova relations in the security field and can be regarded as the third stage in their relations. Compared with two previous periods, an overall intensification of cooperation was observed. The introduction of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which was built upon the ESS and consequently incorporated a strong security dimension, provided with a legal framework for cooperation with the neighbouring countries and Moldova in particular.

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<sup>12</sup> The last census in Transdnistria was conducted in 1989. The population of the region equaled to 750,000 inhabitants. Since then there was no official census organised (Ursu 2008).

### *1.1. Security agenda in EU-Moldova relations: 1991-2002*

The start of the first stage in the EU-Moldova relations was marked in 1994 by conclusion of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which entered into force four years later. These agreements became a standard procedure for many countries in Central Eastern Europe, thus PCA should not be regarded as an instrument designed solely for Moldova. The usual 'package' for the countries in the region included the launching of TACIS (Technical Assistance for CIS countries) programmes. The absence of interest of the EU to develop special relations with Moldova can be characterised by the comparison of the financial assistance via TACIS with assistance provided by other donors. For instance, for the years 1996-2001 TACIS envisaged Euro 52 million., while the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank allocated Euro 310 million and Euro 252 million accordingly (Vahl 2004, p.183). It would be fair to note that at this stage Moldova did not prioritise its relations with the EU either.

A major shift in the foreign policy of Moldova occurred in the end of 1990s, when its leadership declared Moldova's commitment to the process of the European integration and the EU membership as a clear foreign policy objective. In 1999 a Parliamentary Committee for cooperation between the two parties was created, aiming at bidding for participation of Moldova in the Southeast European Cooperation Process and Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe (Skvortova 2001, p.105). At Helsinki Summit in 1999 a decision on elaboration of common strategies of the EU with six countries from Central Eastern Europe, including Russia and Ukraine, but excluding Moldova, was taken. This development was considered in Moldova as a fiasco of its foreign policy (Vahl 2004, p.106) and a clear signal that the EU was not distinguishing prioritising its relations with Moldova even within the context of the Eastern neighbourhood.

A gradual understanding of the need to take a closer look at Moldova started growing in the first half of 2000s. Despite the fact that the major goal of the EU was a proper implementation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, the internal changes in the EU, such as a growing importance of the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) issues, led to the more active developments in the EU-Moldova relations. However, as Marius Vahl (2004, p.175) points out, the intensification of relations was caused by the EU internal structural changes brought by Amsterdam and Nice Treaties.

The first referral to the Transdnistrian conflict was made in the Commission Country Strategy Paper for 2002-2006. Though the Commission considered the Transdnistrian problem, as largely Moldova's internal issue, it

recognised that the EU should use its instruments, such as a political dialogue, in order to resolve the Transdnistrian problem (Commission 2001). No other measures were envisaged in relation to this issue as further cooperation should have been based exclusively on the implementation of the PCA.

In the beginning of 2002 British and Swedish governments took an initiative of addressing the Commission on the issue of significance of the neighbourhood and promoting the idea of a more "substantial strategy" (Joenniemi, 2007, p.143) towards Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. However, this call failed, partially because such strategy could be interpreted as a signal of possible membership. Nevertheless, the idea of elaborating a specific security-focused approach to the EU Eastern neighbours in the wake of the enlargement became realistic.

Apparently, security considerations did not take any place in the EU-Moldova discourse until the EU realised that the enlargement would bring the troublesome 'frozen' conflict closer to its border. In the end of 1990s the EU was paying much more attention to the developments of the conflict in the Balkans, while ignoring its 'immediate' neighbourhood. Thus, as Barbe and Kienzle (2007) have argued, such approach characterises the EU as a "passive security consumer" in its relations with Moldova.

### *1.2. EU-Moldova relations in 2003-2007: security and democracy promotion*

As it was already noted, the ESS gave a major impetus for the intensification of EU-Moldova relations in the security sphere. Therefore, it is necessary to review the ESS in relation to the Transdnistrian conflict.

Analysis of the ESS leads to the following observations. From the strategic point of view, a so-called 'post 9/11 syndrome' was reflected in the ESS in several ways. Firstly, the interdependence and inter-connectedness in the globalised world, leading to a need in elaboration of common approaches and cooperation between the countries in order to secure peace and stability, were strongly emphasised in the document (Council of the EU 2003, pp.9-10, 13). Secondly, after 9/11 it became obvious that the current pillar-based structure of the EU was inappropriate to face the 'new' threats (e.g. terrorism, illegal migration, money laundering, organised crime). Therefore, cross-pillarisation, as a consequence of the acknowledgment of the link between internal and external security, became a reality. For instance, JHA, which was mainly aimed at the internal security

issues, received a very strong external dimension (see den Boer, Monar, 2002 and Monar, 2004).

In terms of threats assessment, a primary place was assigned to security as a major factor, contributing to stable development. A strong emphasis was also put on the strong link between conflict that generates insecurity and economic development which is consequently hampered by instability (Council of the EU 2003, p.2). These three components create a vicious circle, which does not give a country an opportunity to win a fight against poverty and become economically and politically stable. Regional conflicts are mentioned, as one of five key threats to the European security, along with state failure with its intrinsic features such as corruption and weak institutions, organised crime and terrorism. Interestingly, the definition of the regional conflicts includes not only 'hot' or violent conflicts, but also "frozen conflicts, which also persist on our borders" (Ibid., p.4), thus drawing attention to the issue of further enlargement and 'soft security' problems that arise from it. Though the major emphasis is put on the Balkans, Arab-Israeli conflict, the Mediterranean area and Southern Caucasus, the task "to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union" (Ibid., p.8) refers to the EU Eastern neighbourhood as well. Moreover, the ESS laid ground for the further elaboration of the concrete policy to address insecurity coming from the Transdnistrian conflict.

The ESS and further enlargement were two major factors that stimulated the elaboration of a more concrete policy towards the new neighbouring countries. Thus, the years of 2003-2004 were marked by intense negotiations on the 'construction' of the ENP. Originally envisaged for its Eastern neighbours, the final version of the policy included 16 countries from different regions. From its very beginning the ENP was seen as a policy to address specific security problems. For instance, the JHA External Relations Multi Presidency Programme envisaged the central place of ENP "to reinforce transnational and cross-border cooperation as regards the fight against organised crime and the control of migration" (Council of the EU 2005). Once elaborated, an existence of a very strong JHA component in the ENP emphasised a clear strong message: contributing to security and stability on the borders and in the immediate neighbourhood in order to avoid the 'spillover' of soft security threats such as illegal immigration, trafficking of drugs and weapons. In this respect, the ENP directly addresses wider objectives of the ESS.

Originally the ENP was designed as a technocratic policy with concrete objectives. Action Plans (AP) that are concluded with each country individually, are based on wider objectives of ENP and represent a *modus operandi* for the relations between the EU and a third country. Thus, as the Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner (2008) pointed out, the APs were tailor-made for a particular country's needs. However, one could also observe that within the four years of its existence, the ENP has become more and more politicised (Olaf-Lang 2007, p.19), as the EU is getting involved in ambitious plans of 'democratisation' of its neighbourhood and even gradual changes in the political systems.

This vision corresponds to the distinguishing of two policy levels in the ENP: long-term strategic goals such as democratisation, good governance and rule of law and short-term "immediate 'externalisation' of regulatory responsibilities and capacities to the countries in the neighbourhood" (Kahl 2007, p.65). In line with this argument, the objective of the EU to create a stable area in its neighbourhood, which could serve as a buffer zone, preventing the 'spillover' of crime and control over illegal immigration, corresponds to its short-term vision.

The stabilisation of the situation and bringing prosperity and security can not take place without an active participation of the parties involved. Therefore, in order to be effective, the ENP has to be built on the bilateral rather than unilateral ground, thus requiring for cooperation in order to resolve common problems. As Wilhelm Khelangen (2005, p. 88) puts it, such relationship creates a "functional interdependence" between the partners.

The best illustration of successes and failures of the ENP is the evaluation of the AP implementation. Given a necessity to cooperate, all countries can be divided in four major groups: willing, passive, reluctant and excluded partners (Emerson 2007, p.7). While Moldova is characterised as a willing partner, Transdnistria along with other unrecognised entities, such as Abkhasia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh is an excluded one (Ibid., p.10). Having stated about its membership aspirations as the major goal in relations with the EU, Moldova is willing to cooperate. However, the exclusion of Transdnistria from the process adds certain complexity to it. Overall, relations between Moldova and the EU have gradually changed "from master-student dialogue to equal partnership where the discussions are being led at the qualitatively higher level" (Morari 2008). Thus, the Action Plan became a serious 'push' factor for Moldova to conduct substantial reforms. Still, out of all areas of cooperation, JHA is "one of the

most result-oriented, concrete areas, but at the same time difficult to cooperate" (Ibid.). Despite the fact that ambitions of the Moldovan government are not fully accepted in Brussels, Chisinau is very open to cooperation and ready to deliver good results.

A gradual shift in the EU-Moldova relations in 2003 should be evaluated through the perspective of a change in relations with the Eastern neighbourhood in general. The analysis shows that the Transdnistrian conflict on its own was not such a strong incentive for the EU to build 'special' relations with Moldova, otherwise, all security considerations and a fear of the 'spillover' effect could have been addressed much earlier than in the mid 2000s. Thus, a gradual involvement of the EU in the region since 2003 can be attributed more to the 'push' factors derived from its de-facto presence in the region.

### *1.3. Why get involved: threat assessment and EU interests*

Being a small market, Moldova does not have much to offer to the EU. Its share in the EU overall trade reaches only 0,03 percent (Council of the EU 2008, p.8). The economic analysis in the second chapter has shown that the impact of the illegal activities on the EU market is rather negligible as well, because it relates more to the losses of the Moldovan and Ukrainian budgets. Thus, economic interests of the EU have been hardly affected. On the other hand, Moldova represents a growing market with its exports constantly increasing every year. According to one interviewee, trade balance sheets are not a major prerequisite for closer co-operation, otherwise accession of such countries like Malta and Cyprus, which represent a very small fraction of the EU trade, would have not been negotiated (Interview with the representative of the Delegation of the EU to Moldova 2008). From the economic perspective, the role of Moldova should be evaluated more from its potential in enhancing the regional trade. Interestingly, the accession of Romania to the EU has had an adverse effect on the Romanian-Moldovan economic relations, as the free trade agreement between two countries had to be abolished as one of the conditions "to bring Romania in line with the EU" (Emerson 2007, p.16). Thus, it is clear that the EU was driven not by its economic interests.

With the recent developments in the EU and because of post 9/11 syndrome security issues have attracted much more attention than before. Adoption of the ESS and ENP and their focus on the 'new threats' and multilateralism are the consequences of these developments. A strong emphasis of the ENP on the security component clearly illustrates that the EU has taken first steps in the security dialogue with the neighbouring

countries. The question, however, is whether the EU interests have changed because of these developments and then, as a consequence whether this change was reflected in the newly adopted policies.

In order to give an answer to this question, it is necessary to take into account several factors. Firstly, as it was previously argued, the security considerations in respect to Transdnistria were not on the EU agenda before 2002-2003. Despite the fact that there were alarming reports from the international NGOs on the issues of weapons, human and narcotics trafficking, the EU kept silent. Arguably, in the 1990s Moldova was representing a much bigger security threat to the regional security than now, however the issue of proximity to the EU borders had a crucial impact on perception of threats. Therefore, the enlargement has definitely played its role as a major 'push' factor for the change in the EU threat assessment in the region (Interview with an official 2008). Brussels realised that instability on its Eastern border might affect the security of the EU in the long run as well.

Secondly, once the enlargement became evident, such threats as illegal migration became more visible. In this respect the admission of Romania to the EU became a "wake-up call for EU policy-makers" (Barbe and Kienzle 2007, p.526). The fact of the growing numbers of applications for Romanian citizenship from the citizens of Moldova was very appealing towards elaboration of more proactive policies. The issue became of central focus for the EU, because after the enlargement the Romanian-Moldovan border was transformed into the EU external border. Therefore, it needed an enhanced level of protection.

The accession of Central Eastern European countries, as well as Romania, gave the latter an opportunity to bring its concerns on the EU agenda. As Romania is responsible for securing the EU external border, the negative implications of the common border with the 'new neighbourhood' became more 'heard' in the EU as well. Due to enlargement, it is evident that the focus on the CFSP agenda has shifted as well towards elaboration of more proactive policies in the EU 'new' neighbourhood.

Thirdly, there was a growing understanding that the EU could not only "look East, but ...potentially act in the East" (Popescu 2005, p.29). As it was argued above, in the wake of enlargement having a frozen conflict on the border posed a direct threat to the EU security. From this point of view, being engaged in the Balkans and Africa and neglecting security threats in the immediate neighbourhood is rather incoherent. It is important to note

that involvement of the EU would have not been possible without the success of the Orange revolution in Ukraine in December 2004 (Interview with an official 2008). The change of leadership in the country led to the change in the foreign policy priorities of the Ukrainian government, which announced about its commitment to be more involved into the conflict resolution in Transdnistria. On the diplomatic level it was a step forward in EU-Ukrainian relations as well, as the Ukraine declared EU integration as its major foreign policy objective. Taking into consideration the fact that Transdnistria shares a significant part of its border with Ukraine, the willingness to cooperate of the latter is one of the most crucial factors to combat with illegal economic activities and thus move towards peaceful settlement. Moreover, a willingness from the Ukrainian side to contribute to conflict resolution showed that finally, the EU could take concrete measures and influence the situation in Transdnistria.

So far growing security concerns from the side of the EU correspond to the changes in the external environment. From the political perspective, these changes led to growing importance of the "overlapping near abroad" (Vahl 2005, p.1) in EU-Russia relations, which did not give the EU much choice, but get involved in the Transdnistrian problem with a more proactive policy. The dominant position of Russia in conflict resolution and in the region, which has always been considered as Russia's natural sphere of influence, has a strong potential to limit the actual impact of the EU policies. The deepness of involvement of the EU and its capabilities to have a positive contribution to the conflict settlement is one issue. However, the nominal and actual impact of its policies will always be balanced against the Russian interests.

Last, but not least, the EU has embarked on its role as a 'democracy promoter'. The whole notion of democratisation of the Eastern neighbours is a rather recent idea in the EU. The perception of the EU as a community, based on such values as a rule of law, human rights, market economy, democracy, and social protection, and its efforts to 'export' these values to the other countries and regions have become more apparent in the EU external actions. As the EUSR for Moldova noted, "the next step for the EU is the democratisation of Transdnistria" (Miszei 2008). Compared with the objective of ensuring stability via the ring of 'well-governed' countries, the strong rhetoric from the position of democracy promotion shows that the EU active involvement in Transdnistria can not be justified exclusively on short-term security objectives. In the past the EU has been rather successful in democratisation processes in Central Eastern Europe, however this achievement is attributed to the prospect of the EU membership.

Democratisation as a policy to reach a security objective was used in the Balkans. However, in case of Balkans a membership perspective has been playing a role of the catalyser for the governments to ensure security in the region. On the contrary, in case of Moldova, achieving security via democratisation does not lead to any memberships prospects. From this respect democratisation of the immediate neighbourhood is definitely a test-ground for the EU ability to transform the neighbourhood without offering a membership perspective to the willing partners (Dannreuther 2006, p.184). At the same time, inability of Moldova to settle the conflict in Transdnistria requires the EU assistance. The EU involvement could be considered as a trade-off for the conduction of large-scale reforms in Moldova (Frohlich 2007, pp.83-84).

In general, there is a clear evolution in relations between the EU and Moldova. The relations between two parties were always tied to the wider relations of the EU with other countries. In 1990s this was attributed to the NIS framework and later grew into the ENP framework, despite the availability of certain 'diversification' within the ENP due to the Action Plans. The analysis in the chapter provides a considerable amount of arguments to prove that the interests of the EU have remained stable. Security problems and 'externalisation' of previously internal problems as well as a growing awareness of the need to cooperate with the third countries in wake of the new threats, pushed the EU to adopt special policies and instruments which could allow it to act more effectively in the changing environment. The enlargement brought the Transdnistrian problem closer to the EU and as it has already been argued, the EU had to react more consistently at this new challenge. As a result, new proactive policies were adopted.

## 2. EU Toolkit for Transdnistria: Assessing the Effectiveness

This chapter analyses the instruments that the EU has used to contribute to the conflict settlement. Though the appointment of the EU Special Representative for Moldova in March 2005 is also one of the tools of the EU policies in the region, for purpose of this paper, the high-level political debates are put aside. Instead, this chapter concentrates on such instruments, as the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine.

### *2.1. Defining a legal framework for the EU involvement*

Within the ENP the Action Plan defines the framework for the EU-third country relations, thus becoming its *modus operandi*. The Action Plan for Moldova is designed for three years (2005-2008) and complements the PCA, which has been in force since 1998 and will expire in the end of 2008. Referring to the Transdnistrian issue, the AP offers a concrete approach. In

terms of the upgrade of the EU-Moldova relations, the AP envisaged more involvement of the EU into the conflict resolution on the political level by the appointment of the EUSR for Moldova, as well as opening of the EC Delegation to Moldova "as soon as possible" (Commission 2004, pp.1-2). Before 2005 the EC Delegation in Ukraine was responsible for relations with Moldova as well. Within this context the opening of the Delegation was a confirmation of the political will in Brussels and a sign of growing importance of Moldova on the EU agenda. Among concrete actions, envisaged by the AP, a special priority is given to effective border management, especially in the Transdnistrian sector; fighting against organised crime, money laundering and human trafficking; cooperation in the areas of security, conflict management and crisis prevention (with a special attention on fighting against trafficking of arms from the unrecognised entity and customs control of imports, exports and transit operations) and cooperation with Ukraine on the issues of exchange of information on the cross-border flow of goods and people (Commission 2004, pp. 4, 9-12). Thus, the AP renders a legal background for the elaboration of both political and technical approaches.

Following a more proactive involvement of Ukraine into conflict resolution, on 2 June 2005 the Presidents of Moldova and Ukraine sent a joint letter to the Commission President Barroso and EU High Representative for CFSP Solana. The letter was requesting the EU support in the elaboration of effective border monitoring system with a special attention to the Transdnistrian segment of the border. (EU Factsheet, 2007) This letter serves as a legal background for the launching of EUBAM, which was deployed on the Ukrainian-Moldovan border on 30 November 2005 (Spokesperson of the Secretary General 2005).

## *2.2. EUBAM as a sui generis institutional setup*

Following a joint request of the Ukrainian and Moldovan Presidents, the next two months were characterised by intense negotiations on the methods of involvement. The Commission and the Member states agreed to respond positively to the request and organised a special fact-finding Mission, led by the EUSR Adrian Jacobovitz de Szeged, which was deployed in Moldova for six days in August 2005. The main task of this mission was to evaluate the situation on the EU-Moldovan border. The fact-finding mission had to report both to the Commission and to the Member states via the Political and Security Committee (PSC) in the Council (Ibid.). The mission strongly recommended to "seize the window of opportunity which may not last long" and launch the EC financed Border Assistance Mission "as rapidly as possible" (Commission 2005). The format of the new Mission was under discussion as well: a group of the Member states was insisting

on the creation of the ESDP Mission, while the Commission was claiming its full ownership. There were certain doubts regarding the capabilities of the Commission to lead the Mission<sup>13</sup>. As funds for the Mission were concentrated in the Commission's hands, the decision to launch the first Commission Mission, which would be a "joint enterprise" (Banfi 2007) of the Communities, was taken.

Interestingly, a double nature of the Mission, which in fact is a *sui generis* Mission from the point of view of its institutional setup, was preserved through the appointment of the 'double-hatted' Head of Mission (HoM). The HoM is clearly subordinated to the Commission, because the Mission is funded and managed by the latter (Ibid.) Thus, the Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, is responsible for EUBAM. The HoM also serves as a Senior Political Advisor to the EUSR. Despite the nature of the Mission which was created as a technical advisory body, it is operating in a very sensitive political environment where interests of many parties are involved. This leads to the necessity of constant political monitoring and supervision. The EUSR in his turn is responsible in front of the Council Secretariat and deals with the political problems, while his advisors, located in Chisinau, Kiev and Odessa, are monitoring the situation on spot. The HoM is also a head of the group of advisors. Therefore, whenever a need arises to report on the technical issues in front of the PSC, COEST<sup>14</sup> and CIVCOM<sup>15</sup>, the Head of Mission has to report along with the EUSR (Ibid.).

The UNDP<sup>16</sup> is the implementing partner of the Mission. It has a responsibility for the administrative and logistical operations. Since the Commission has no implementation capacities, it had to outsource this task to the UNDP. It would be natural to assume that the OSCE could have taken upon the task of setting up and running the Mission. However, it would have been incorrect to involve the OSCE, because it is engaged in the "5+2" negotiations format (Ibid.)

Within this context there are several important observations to be made. Firstly, though the ideas on deployment of a border/police mission were present in the OSCE, EU and NATO back in 2003 (Interview with an official 2008), the final format and decision would have not been possible without a dramatic change on the political scene of Ukraine and a joint request by

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<sup>13</sup> All previous missions were led by the Council within ESDP framework.

<sup>14</sup> Council Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia

<sup>15</sup> Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Development Programme

two Presidents. This signal was very clearly understood in Brussels and thus the 'window of opportunity' was used at its best.

Secondly, the speed at which the EU reacted at the request is astonishing. It took the EU six months to deploy the Mission. Knowing how long the decision-making processes may take, this is definitely an achievement. From this perspective, the fact that the Mission is guided by the Commission played its positive role, as both resources and deliberations were concentrated in the latter. Thus, the Commission, having taken a highly technical approach, left the issues of politically sensitive nature and strategic coordination for the Council Secretariat (Ibid.)

Thirdly, the institutional setup of the Mission is unique. The 'double-hatted' position of the HoM is an innovation in the format of Missions. The same refers to its subordination to the Commission instead of the usual ESDP setting and involvement of the UNDP as an implementing partner. As there is no practice and no experience in dealing with such setup and considering that fact that operations of the Mission are being conducted both in Ukraine and Moldova (see Annex 1), the question of feasibility arises. Still, within the last three years of its functioning, the Mission has proven that this setup is working and the EU authorities state that they are satisfied with such an innovative approach (Ibid.).

### *2.3. Operability of EUBAM and its mandate*

Once the format was agreed upon, the next step was to delineate the responsibilities of the parties. The legislative background of the terms and conditions of EUBAM operations on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border is envisaged by the Memorandum of Understanding (2005), signed by the Commission and two respective governments on 7 October 2005. According to the Memorandum the tasks of EUBAM include advisory functions to the Border Guard, Customs and other law enforcement agencies of two countries; establishing the information exchange system; prevention of human trafficking and smuggling of goods; fighting against corruption and upgrading the administrative capacities of the border guard and customs services; improving the efficiency of operations etc. The Memorandum explicitly states that the Mission has no executive functions and its duties should be of "advisory or audit nature" (Ibid., p.2). Experts of the Mission closely cooperate with the representatives of the respective agencies. All disputable issues are being resolved according to the provisions of the document.

Initially, the Mission was established for two years with an overall budget of Euro 20 million. In 2007 according to the agreement between the Ukrainian and Moldovan governments and readiness of the Commission it was prolonged for two more years with the budget of Euro 24 million (EUBAM 2007, p.3). Within almost two and a half years of its operations the Mission was able to double its human resources and lobby the necessity for it in front of the Member states that second and cover expenses for their national staff. The capacities of the Mission in 2005 with 69 experts and 40 members of the national staff were very limited. By 2008 the Mission has deployed 119 experts and 111 persons of the national staff, which totals 230 persons (Ibid.).

One of the major projects to enhance the administrative capacities of the customs and border guards is the implementation of the risk analysis system, which allows performing risk assessment of goods and people crossing the border. This technique leads to abolishment of 100% search, and instead, performing targeted search based on risk assessment. Risk management system is relatively new, however it has already proven to be effective in the EU Member states (Banfi 2007). Risk management and other best European practices in the sphere of the integrated border management are not always positively received by the counterparts, because they contradict to their initial way of thinking and education.

Another example could be an objective to create joint border crossing points. The problem is not only in different levels of development of agencies in two countries, which makes cooperation more difficult in terms of capacities utilised. There are many technical and political issues at stake, such as the determination of the location of these border crossing points, sharing costs for infrastructure etc. At the moment, there are five joint border crossing points on the Ukrainian-Moldovan border, two of which are not working. Accordingly, "each side has its story on why the two are not functioning" (Morari 2008). It will definitely take a long time to establish fully operational joint controls. However, a mere fact that the issue has been raised on agenda due to EUBAM recommendation is a small step forward.

The objective of establishing cooperation and enhancing exchange of information in relation to import-export procedures is vital. Otherwise, a situation where import on one side of the border is much higher than export on the other is quite common. When such situation persists, it implies that illegal activities take place on one part of the border. As mutual trust did not exist in either agency, one of the first steps of EUBAM was to

bring the services together and make them communicate. Though there was a fear that the mediating role of EUBAM could create a wrong perception of the Mission as a “post box” (Boag 2008) between the Moldovan and Ukrainian parties, this barrier was overcome. At the same time, access to information for the Mission has been a burning issue. Despite the fact that the Mission was entitled to receive information from the counterpart agencies, it faced with numerous cases when Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities used different interpretations of their national legislation to grant or withdraw access to certain documents (Interview with an official 2008). Resolution of such cases shows that success of EUBAM operations depends on the willingness of two parties to cooperate.

As cross-border economic activities involve two parties from each side of the border, the same refers to border control. From the abovementioned examples, it is clear that one of the vital issues on the Ukrainian-Moldovan border is the cooperation between the border guard and customs services in one country as well as cooperation between these agencies across the border. For a long time inter-service cooperation has existed only in the official documents, but not in practice. It comes from the Soviet legacy of the law enforcement and border control agencies, which due to their vertical hierarchy had all information concentrated on top and thus agencies were unaware of actions of their counterparts (ICG 2006). This is a problem of institutional mentality and the way of thinking in the agencies. In order to change the situation, a set of substantial reforms is needed in both countries.

Given the mandate of the Mission, one of the biggest challenges is to gain and preserve reputation in the eyes of its partners, as the only tool the Mission has in its disposal in order to influence the counterparts is ‘blaming and shaming’. The Mission can only recommend and assist how to avoid problems or how to correct mistakes. However, the task of effective patrolling the border as well as implementing all recommendations belongs to the partner agencies. As one interviewee rightly commented, “we can improve the scene, the lights the orchestra but we can not change the actors, who have to play” (Interview with the representative of the EC Delegation to Moldova 2008).

Within two and a half years of EUBAM operations it has managed to establish itself well and become reputable both in Moldova and Ukraine. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian agencies are much more difficult to cooperate with. This refers not only to operations of EUBAM, but also to the operations of the EC Delegations. One of the interviewees underlined that

the government of Moldova is much more open than it used to be. He also noted the following: "Now we are present in the country and the government frequently asks for our advice on pieces of legislation. Our leverage in Moldova is probably higher than in neighbouring countries [Ukraine] due to the relative importance of our assistance and considerable support for the EU among almost all Moldovan political parties" (Ibid.). As far as Ukraine is concerned, it is also important to note that the political situation is more difficult than in Moldova. The Ukrainian population is less supportive of the pro-European policies than its neighbour. Therefore, public support is reflected on the political level. Clearly, the government of Moldova has the primary interest in the functioning of EUBAM and higher commitment to cooperate by default. The Ukrainian party is more interested in strengthening its capacities and diminishing losses to its budget. Size of the countries should be also taken into consideration, as the impact of EU policies is more visible in Moldova than in Ukraine.

#### *2.4. Assessment of internal and external aspects of EUBAM activities*

The institutional analysis of EUBAM has shown that the Mission is definitely a unique setup. Its technical nature allows limiting the impact of the political factors dealt with by the EUSR team. A focus on concrete problems and a set of technical solutions in the form of recommendations and trainings have its positive contribution to the conflict resolution. As Hilde Hardemann (2008) underlined, "We looked at Transdnistria and identified areas where we could make a change for better. Avoiding political discussions we are trying to bring transparency on the Transdnistrian border". Such neo-functionalist approach to problems helps to bring concrete results. A result-oriented and highly technical nature of the Mission is also conditioned by its 'designer', the Commission, which is a technical body in itself. A 'mixture' of police and customs expertise is also an innovation which enabled EUBAM to provide advice in the spheres, which were identified as the weakest ones in border management. When comparing EUBAM objectives to its actions on the ground, one can observe that EUBAM addresses a whole chain of problems rather than particular issues. Research and observations lead to the formulation of recommendations to the respective partner agencies. Once recommendations are put in practice, EUBAM staff monitors its implementation and advices on the methods of improving it. By means of the technical assistance EUBAM provides equipment and training needed to improve the capacities of the border agencies. Thus, instead of pure monitoring, performed by other EU Missions, EUBAM has managed to address problems in a structural way (Interview with an official 2008).

The EUBAM has been receiving a lot of attention in Brussels and assessment of its overall results has been praised by the EU politicians and decision-makers. Nevertheless, there are certain critical observations. The role of EUBAM as a facilitator to re-establish the links between the borders as well as the mediator in the dialogue between the agencies is crucial. Though cooperation is not totally a success story, positive steps have been made and with assistance of the Mission the information system to detect and prevent smuggling is in place and is being further elaborated. Cooperation takes place on all levels: grass-root, middle and top level. Still the Moldova Progress Report of 2007 (Commission 2008) clearly underlines the necessity to improve cooperation in this respect. The same recommendation refers to the inter-agency cooperation, especially “in the context of implementing an integrated border management system” (Ibid.).

Due to the work of the investigation unit, EUBAM identified key areas of smuggling which were not paid much attention to. Having disproved the myth on massive weapons and narcotics smuggling, the Mission attracted attention of the border control agencies on other forms of trafficking that divert millions of Euros from the state budgets of Moldova and Ukraine in the forms of tax evasion, customs under-valuation and smuggling through the poorly controlled borders. Through its activities EUBAM also pointed out on the car business, which generates enormous profits and hardly takes place on case-by-case basis. Still, the Commission gives a rather restrained evaluation on combating illegal economic activities on the Moldovan border, and especially on Transdnistrian part by pointing out that despite a certain progress, the border “is not properly controlled” (Commission 2008, p.3).

The major incentive of access to the preferential trade schemes with the EU if a company registers in Chisinau led to massive registration of Transdnistrian companies within the last two years and a full accountability of exports operations from Transdnistria. On 1 March 2008, the EU introduced autonomous trade preferences for Moldova. (Council of the EU 2008). Accordingly, almost all categories of Moldovan and Transdnistrian goods<sup>17</sup>, registered in Chisinau, have a duty free access to the European market. Transdnistrian goods can benefit these trade preferences on the equal conditions with the Moldovan goods, if they accomplish all requirements on registration and certification. This step from the EU is partially a result of EUBAM activities, which contributed to the improvement of the certification procedures by the Moldovan customs. Overall, the EU

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<sup>17</sup> Except for certain sensitive commodities, such as sugar, dairy products etc.

led to the extension of the preferential scheme to the successful implementation of the EU-Moldova Action Plan. Thus, given a right incentive is in place, it became possible to change the dynamics of trade flows.

The visibility of EUBAM in fight against illegal economic activities and corruption plays a certain 'deterrence' effect. Decreasing levels of illegal activities show that economic operators, who have been involved into illegal schemes, started behaving differently. They have either become more aware of risks to be detected and consequently stopped their activities, or found other ways of conducting them. At the same time, it is rather difficult to conduct impact assessment, because as one interviewee rightly pointed out, "we don't know what was going on in Transdnistria before our involvement" (Interview with an official 2008). It would be also wrong to argue that presence of the Mission has ended all illegal activities on the border. In order to achieve this effect, more structural changes are needed. Still, the presence of the Mission is a certain 'attraction pole' for the journalists and international mass media outlets. Media attention should be also taken into consideration as one of factors that have had a positive influence on the decreasing levels of illegal activities and increased efficiency in detection of cases.

While EUBAM managed to ensure its presence on the Ukrainian-Moldovan border by having established controls on the ground, air borders are not controlled. Operations of the military airport in Tiraspol are out of control of both EUBAM and Moldovan authorities. Moreover, the Ukrainian party has been constantly refusing to provide information on air traffic from and to Transdnistria. This issue remains open, and an opportunity of transporting illegal goods is very high (Ursu 2008). It should be noted, however, that EUBAM is not authorised to have any contacts or be present on the territory of Transdnistria, therefore, this problem should be tackled by the Moldovan authorities.

As it was previously mentioned, in order to achieve fruitful results, extensive administrative reforms as well as changes in the way of thinking in the partner agencies should take place. In this respect, a several years long Mission might not have a considerable impact. Therefore, more commitment from the EU is needed. Still, the prolongation of EUBAM mandate is possible only upon a joint request of the Moldovan and Ukrainian Presidents, supported by the Commission. In 2007 the mandate of the Mission was prolonged for two more years until 2009. Further prolongation of the Mission will depend on the willingness of the Ukrainian and Moldovan governments to host it. Therefore, any change in the political

environment one of these two countries might lead to the suspension of mandate after 2009. Within this context it should be also noted that the Commission has no strategic plans on its involvement into conflict resolution after 2009 (Interview with an official 2008). On the one hand such short-term strategy that includes steps only until 2009 is based on the current mandate of the Mission. On the other hand, the Commission, being a technical body, is not responsible for the strategic policies per se. Still, such a limited horizon is rather worrisome, as 'wait-and-see' approach does not necessarily justify itself in the long term. Moreover, it may hamper all the activities, taken earlier, as the sustainability of EUBAM impact in case of suspension of its operations in 2009 will be under question.

### Conclusion

The EU involvement in the Transdnistrian conflict has intensified since 2003. This gradual shift from total neglect to concrete actions on the ground became possible due to a mixture of external and internal factors. Guided by its security and political interests, the EU could not miss this 'window of opportunity' that was created by the dramatic change in the political environment in neighbouring Ukraine and took concrete steps to ensure security in the wider region. Thus, one can clearly observe the evolution from the general policies, based on standard PCA and small technical assistance packages, to democracy promotion and conflict resolution via the enhancement of capacities of the law enforcement agencies, fight against corruption and introduction of administrative reforms. These soft methods of involvement to ensure security 'from within' in combination with cooperation in the sphere of JHA allow the EU to be both physically present in the region and act in its 'near abroad' within the context of the EU-Russia relations.

With the EUBAM involvement, the EU was able to tackle the very core of the survival of the Transdnistrian authorities. A change in the external environment evolved into the protests both from the Transdnistrian and Russian parties. Though EUBAM managed to bring more visibility to the problems of illegal trade, corruption on the border and assisted in legalising export flows from Transdnistria, the success of its operations and of the EU policies to ensure stability in the wider region are considerably limited by several crucial factors. Given this, quelle finalité for the EU policies in Transdnistria?

Firstly, Transdnistria is a point of intersection of Transdnistrian, Russian, Moldovan and Ukrainian economic interests. Some of these groups are not keen on changing the status-quo and may impede further steps to bringing transparency into import-export activities. Thus, the actual impact of the

EU is still limited by the level of Russian involvement. For instance, the recognition of Kosovo may lead to the change of Russia's position on Transdnistria. This issue should be researched further.

Secondly, the issue of inter-agency cooperation is very important, as the border has to be secured from the two sides. Recent years have shown how the change of the political climate in Ukraine might affect its willingness to cooperate. Therefore, the situation in Ukraine needs to be also properly monitored and assessed.

Thirdly, the mere fact that the EU has no concrete strategy in respect of conflict resolution after 2009 is rather worrisome. The goal of democracy promotion and creating stability and security is impossible to achieve through a short-term commitment and partial involvement. One of the most interesting issues in referral to EUBAM is the sustainability of results achieved after the Mission stops its activities. Confidence-building measures as well as administrative reforms take a long time. In order to achieve results, the way of thinking in the agencies that is based on Soviet legacy, should be changed. Otherwise, such problems as corruption and ineffective governance will always be a hindrance for a positive development. Another factor to be taken into consideration is a relatively weak leverage the EU has to make neighbours comply. As discussed in the thesis, a membership perspective has always been a very 'tasty' incentive. However, the motivation for conducting painful reforms without such a perspective might be too weak to bring considerable changes.

In conclusion, there is no way for the EU to turn back. The fact is that the frozen conflict is on the EU border. The geographical proximity implies that everything that will be going on in Transdnistria and in Moldova will have an effect on the neighbouring countries and, consequently, on the EU. Thus, it is in the EU interests to ensure a long-term practical commitment to the conflict resolution. Otherwise, regional stability will remain an unattainable objective of the European Security Strategy.



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