



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Continuing Tensions in Transnistria, Moldova

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 23, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Despite tireless efforts of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, two schools with almost 1,000 pupils remain closed 23 days into the new school year.

The United States has raised this issue at the last three sessions of the Permanent Council. Others, including the EU, Russia, Ukraine and Moldova, have all intervened in the Permanent Council and called on the Transnistrian authorities to allow the reopening of the schools and the orphanage in Bendery.

Nonetheless, the Transnistrian authorities, in addition to continuing their occupation of the train station in Bendery, refuse to take the final steps to end this reckless and unnecessary drama. The continuing stalemate over the reopening of the last two Moldovan schools is absolutely unconscionable, and unnecessarily threatens to further destabilize an already precarious and much too emotional situation.

We again call on all Transnistrian authorities to abandon evasion and deceit and to move immediately to reopen the remaining Moldovan-language, Latin-script schools. We understand the Rybnita school registration has now been accepted by the Transnistrian authorities and we urge those authorities to accept the school's use of a building repaired with Moldovan government funds.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the efforts of Russia and Ukraine in attempting to resolve this grave crisis. The Russian chargé in Chisinau has closely coordinated with the OSCE Head of Mission, Ambassador Hill, and has met with Transnistrian authorities in an attempt to persuade them to end the crisis. Russian and Ukrainian Embassy officers joined the OSCE Mission's Human Dimension Officer Tuesday on a trip to Ribnita to meet with school officials and city authorities. This good cooperation sends a message to the Transnistrian regime that all the mediators are speaking with one voice and we urge the Russian Federation and Ukraine to continue exerting their influence on the Transnistrian leadership to bring this crisis to an end.

At last week's Permanent Council, the distinguished representative of Ukraine informed us that his government was prepared to enter into consultations with Moldova on how to implement practical measures to restrict the flow of goods into Transnistria. We understand those consultations are scheduled to take place today and we look forward to a progress report in this regard from the Ukrainian and Moldovan delegations. While Transnistria's authorities continue to demonstrate a notable lack of concern and caring for these children trying to attend school, we believe economic pressure would rapidly lead to their reengagement and a solution.

Mr. Chairman, as we stated here last week, this situation cannot continue indefinitely. If the schools do not re-open and the orphanage is not allowed to operate with water and electricity, there will be severe long-term consequences for all the people of Moldova. Although the Transnistrian authorities are not present, I hope they will open their eyes and that they will hear the clear message from the international community which is that children should not be held hostage to larger political negotiations.

Thank you.