

Conference on Confidence Building Measures on the Transdniestria Conflict Settlement Process

Freising, Germany 10-11 June

Closing remarks by Ambassador Jennifer Brush, Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova

Good morning. First of all, let me thank all of the participants in the conference for your hard work yesterday and this morning. The work in the thematic groups was intensive, and though we were tantalizing close to a number of results, I am disappointed the sides failed to find the political courage to reach decisions that would improve the lives of people on both sides of the river – their educational opportunities, their economic opportunities and their opportunity to travel freely. Our conclusion remains that for the burning issues – education in particular – there is an urgent need for more focused meetings once we all return home. And we have agreed that such meetings will take place. I would like to thank all of the experts in particular for their contributions to our discussions.

We do indeed have a difficult regional context to work in, and I commend all of the participants for coming together here in spite of that. However, we should not use the regional context as an excuse for inaction. To do so is irresponsible and only plays into the hands of those who would like to see the conflict on the Dnestr - and the local population's sense of an uncertain future - perpetuated indefinitely.

As Dani Dayan, a leader on one of the sides in the Palestinian conflict, recently wrote, “Despair is not an acceptable policy. There are practical issues that can and should be solved. First and foremost, Palestinians deserve drastic and immediate improvements in their everyday lives.” Though thank goodness the Transdniestrian Conflict is not the Middle East, the wisdom of putting people first applies just as much to the work we have been focused on for the past two days here.

With that in mind, I would like to appeal to both sides to take a more constructive, trusting and open approach to the settlement process. To my colleagues in Chisinau, I would ask that you never stop thinking of the residents of Transdniestria as your own citizens. Although there may be tension between the

sides, this should not be manifested in a punitive approach toward the people who live in this region which remains part of your country.

To my colleagues in Tiraspol, I would ask that you search in your heart for decisions to help people who live in Transdniestria rather than holding them hostage to a rigid political agenda. Part of this should involve easing your authorities' increasingly tight grip on the political environment. The international community had very high hopes for your leadership team and would like to see you embrace the democratic ideals which brought you to power two and a half years ago. Above all, I implore you to think about what is best for your people.

This will likely be my last time attending one of these conferences as the Head of the Mission to Moldova. I would therefore like to take a moment to reflect on what I have observed in this process in recent years. Two years ago, at the conference in Rottach-Egern, we saw a completely different attitude from both sides than we have today. Participants from the sides were open to all sorts of ideas and were at ease with each other in discussing proposals both formally and informally.

There are no doubt many reasons for the deterioration in the atmosphere and in the level of trust during the past two years, but I would focus on the role of the leaders, which I mentioned in my remarks yesterday. I can only reiterate that we regard meetings of the Moldovan and Transnistrian leaders as an essential component of the settlement process. Two years ago, Mr. Filat and Mr. Shevchuk agreed on a number of steps forward, including the reopening of the Gura Bicului-Bychok bridge. While we are still working towards that goal, a substantial amount of progress was made thanks to the impetus provided by the leaders' decision to prioritize the bridge as something which has the potential to bring benefits to the population on both banks of the river.

We are going through tumultuous and difficult times in the region. There is change in the air, along with the fear and uncertainty which sometimes accompanies change in the absence of a convincingly articulated vision of the future. The first step towards building trust and confidence is overcoming fear. In a region where conflict has been woven into the fabric of history over the course of centuries, building trust is especially challenging. But this is what leadership is all

about, and the involvement of leaders in resolving this conflict, which should be a first-order priority for both sides, is essential. I therefore appeal to the sides to organize a meeting of the leaders at the earliest possible opportunity.

I want to give special thanks to our international experts who contributed to our sessions. I was surprised in some cases to witness reluctance even to listen to some of the expertise being presented. In response to future requests for “experts” I would only caution that you may not hear expert views that correspond to your political position. But this advice is offered to help and to provide perhaps alternative approaches, I encourage you always to listen .

In conclusion, I would like to thank the German government once again for their support of this event, to thank my colleagues from the OSCE Chairmanship and to thank all of you for joining us and for continuing to believe in this process and pushing for progress.