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**STATEMENT BY MR. SERGEY GUBAREV,
AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT
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**Working session I: Early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management,
conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation:
Lessons learned and the way ahead**

Mr. Chairperson,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be able to present the Russian view on the current situation regarding the Transdnestrian settlement to the participants at such a representative conference.

The Transdnestrian conflict today is most “satisfactory” (if one can apply such an expression at all to a conflict situation) from the point of view of its threat to security in the region and a possible aggravation of the situation.

What is the nature of the problems at present?

The negotiations suspended in February 2006 at the instigation of Moldova were resumed following efforts by the international mediators in September 2011 after the second meeting in Moscow of the parties to the conflict (Moldova and Transdnestria), the mediators (Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE) and the observers (the United States of America and the European Union). There have been regular meetings in the “5+2” format since February 2012. It is essential that the sides – Moldova and Transdnestria – are recognized as equals in the negotiation process.

Following the resumption of official talks, the leaders chose a tactic of “small steps”, i.e. the search for ways of resolving questions of practical co-operation on either side of the Dniester. This is the only possible tactic given the problems that have accumulated over decades in the relations between the two parts of the former single Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. The six-year break in contact between 2006 and 2012 was also not conducive to facilitating greater understanding. The tactic of “small steps” ultimately aims at the creation and painstaking building of confidence between the two sides of the river. And it is yielding small but concrete results. For example, solutions have been found in large measure to the question of resuming passenger and freight rail traffic through the territory of Transdnestria,

trouble-free pension coverage for inhabitants of Moldova and Transnistria moving to the opposite bank, resumption of operation of the Dubăsari hydroelectric power plant, dismantling of the cable car between the cities of Rîbnița and Rezina, which has not been used since the early 1990s, removal and disposal of radioactive elements left at industrial sites in Transnistria from the time of the Soviet Union, etc.

One frequently hears that the talks are proceeding slowly. How can one reply to that? Only by pointing out that it would be naïve to think that problems that have accumulated over decades can be solved in months, especially when existing difficulties also give rise to new ones. One example: it is well known that the talks planned for April were postponed until June because the Government of Moldova adopted a decision – one which I should like to make a point of stressing even the Government itself subsequently realized was a mistake – to impose what was effectively a discriminatory tax on companies in Transnistria, particularly ones that made an important contribution to the economy. The Government of Moldova undertook to repeal the decision but had not done so by the beginning of the talks. Even now that the decision has been repealed at the legislative level, the corresponding secondary legislation has still not been drafted and, according to my information, at the end of last week Transnistrian companies were still paying this patently discriminatory tax on imported raw manufacturing materials.

In order to elaborate the proposals required to tackle the existing problems, contacts between the experts and working groups created by the two sides need to be stepped up. As demonstrated by the June meeting in the “5+2” format held here in Vienna and the follow-up high-level OSCE review conference on confidence-building measures in Germany, these working groups are still encountering a number of difficulties, the main one being the absence of regular contact. Some of these experts and working groups, who are a vital component of the negotiating process, meet just once or twice a year. It was to a large extent because of this that no progress was made in any one of the outstanding issues at the June meeting. Taking realistic stock of the situation, Russia and Transnistria proposed that the talks scheduled for July be postponed until September 2014 to give time to work out practicable proposals. It’s a pity that the Moldovan authorities saw this proposal as some kind of “pretext” for “slowing down the negotiation process”. I get the impression that our Moldovan partners need “meetings for their own sake”, holding them, regardless of the outcome, just for the record, so to speak. This approach is extremely disappointing.

Obviously, the crisis today in Ukraine cannot be ignored in the negotiations, above all its negative influence on the socio-economic situation in the region. I should like merely to cite one statistic: in the last five months, there has been a sevenfold decrease in the number of vehicles crossing the border between Transnistria and Ukraine. Given the close economic ties of the region with Ukraine, this is affecting the lives of ordinary people, on whose behalf the talks to settle the problem are in fact being carried out. In that context, we trust that Ukraine will fully assume the responsibility it accepted earlier of acting as a mediator in the resolution of the Transnistrian problem and as one of the guarantors of the settlement.

Since last November, a number of the participants in the negotiation process have been actively discussing the possibility that the signing by Moldova of an Association Agreement with the European Union and the creation of a free trade zone between Moldova and the European Union would open up some “new perspectives” and that the tempo of the process would be stepped up in a way that had not been seen before. It is not clear how this might happen, particularly given the fact that all of the negotiations on these subjects have

taken place practically without the participation of Transdniestria. The “silent” First Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs has served at the negotiations merely as a “mailbox” for transmission to Tiraspol of the documents issued to him. This optimism is doubly incomprehensible given the very different orientations of the economies of Moldova and Transdniestria. Meanwhile we are left with the impression that on the road to settlement we can expect not “bright perspectives” but new problems and difficulties.

Finally, since the resumption of work by the Permanent Conference on Political Issues within the Negotiation Process for a Transdniestrian Settlement and the adoption of its agenda, there have been persistent appeals, particularly by Chişinău, to open up the “third basket” of the negotiation process agenda and to start discussion of political issues and models for settling the Transdniestrian conflict. There is no better way of obstructing and bogging down the settlement process in general than to take this approach. It is well known that both Chişinău and Tiraspol, each in its own way, have already resolved the problem of the region’s political future. For Chişinău, the solution was included in the 2005 Law on the Special Legal Status of the Localities on the Left Bank of the Dniester. For Tiraspol, the answer was the result of the referendum in September 2006. Opinions vary as to whether its legitimacy should be recognized or not – it has become fashionable of late for some people to ignore the will of the people – but it would be short-sighted to say the least not to recognize that this referendum reflects the sentiment of the people. As the representative of the Russian Federation in the Permanent Conference, I have said repeatedly that in order to proceed to the political component of the negotiation agenda, the sides must, as they say, clear the political space. I shall be willing to start considering the solution of any political questions on the day after the Moldovan Parliament repeals the 2005 law. As it is, I see one thing – the desire to discuss these issues but not to resolve them. Don’t we already have enough empty rhetoric in our political lives?

Thank you for your attention.