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FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
2021 ANNUAL SECURITY REVIEW CONFERENCE**

31 August 2021

Working session I: Conflicts and crises in the OSCE area – building security and confidence

Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I should like to share with this representative forum some of the Russian Federation's assessments of the current state of the Transdniestrian settlement process.

I am regretfully forced to state that since the last conference the situation with regard to Transnistria has not changed significantly for the better. It is true that there have been some positive developments in the interaction between the banks of the Dniester in combating the joint challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also true that after a difficult year for the region owing to the pandemic in 2020 the momentum of meetings of the political representatives of the Sides and of the expert working groups, whose findings should form the basis for the negotiation process in the "5+2" format, is gradually being restored. On the whole, however, it must be recognized that last year's crisis in the Transdniestrian settlement process has not yet been overcome.

It is obvious that much in the relationship between the banks of the Dniester will depend on the attitude of the new leadership of the Republic of Moldova, the place occupied by the Transdniestrian settlement among the priorities of the new Moldovan Government and, ultimately, its willingness to continue dialogue on an equal basis with the Transdniestrian authorities with a view to finding a sustainable and comprehensive solution to the Transdniestrian problem.

A working visit to Chişinău and Tiraspol by the mediators and observers of the "5+2" format, which took place in early June this year at the initiative of Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the Transdniestrian Settlement Process, was useful. The meetings revealed serious differences in the Sides' positions on most of the key issues on the current agenda for collaboration between the banks of the Dniester River: freedom of movement, customs co-operation and the functioning of accounts of Transdniestrian economic operators with Moldovan banks, and telecommunications. And yet all these issues were reflected in the decisions of the Vienna and Rome "5+2" meetings and in essence constitute the "Berlin plus package", as it is called.

Some new issues have also emerged that could have an impact on the Transdniestrian settlement process in the second half of this year. In that respect, we believe that the Moldovan Government's decision to delay the transition to the second phase of Moldovan-Ukrainian customs control at the Kuchurgan checkpoint is a step in the right direction.

We are convinced that any blockade affecting Transdniestria, which will inevitably be followed by a response from it, is counterproductive and will bring the settlement process to a standstill. The question also remains as to how these intentions are compatible with Ukraine's status as a guarantor and mediator of the Transdniestrian settlement.

We are unwavering supporters of the "small steps" tactic of resolving specific aspects of the interaction in the interests of the population on both banks of the Dniester, with the aim of reaching a mutually acceptable and viable compromise. It is also important that the Sides fulfil the bilateral and international commitments they have already made.

Painstaking work remains to be done to restore positive momentum to the Transdniestrian settlement and to reinvigorate the mediation efforts of the "5+2" format, to which there is no alternative. In that context, there are calls for an early opening of the third negotiating "basket" in the work of the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transdniestrian Settlement and to move on to discussing political issues and devising a model for settling the question of status in the Transdniestrian problem.

I should like to explain our position. As a guarantor and mediator in the settlement process, the Russian Federation is committed to finding a comprehensive and viable solution to the Transdniestrian problem. At the same time, we believe that the hasty launching of political negotiations without first creating the necessary conditions, the main one being a qualitative improvement in the atmosphere of dialogue and mutual trust between the authorities in Chişinău and Tiraspol, is futile and doomed to failure. Obviously, the only way forward is to gradually form a socio-economic and humanitarian fabric for interaction between the banks of the Dniester. And the convergence must be reciprocal.

Despite these problems, Russia is optimistic about the future of a Transdniestrian settlement. We welcome the invitation by the Swedish OSCE Chairmanship to hold the long-overdue formal meeting of the "5+2" format in the second half of the year. Of course, there is still a lot of work to be done to fill its agenda effectively. We are willing to contribute to this.

Thank you for your attention.