

# A Moldovan Perspective on War in Ukraine 2

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Because Moldova is one of the states most affected by the Ukrainian war and by Russia's apparently expanding role in East Europe, it is important to consider the Moldovan perspective on this conflict.

Shortly after the election of Donald Trump and JD Vance there was great interest in their statements about the Ukraine war. One made by Vice President-elect Vance regarding plans to end the war in Ukraine attracted special attention. Citizens as well as politicians in both Moldova as well as Romania expressed their alarm about the Vance statement and the prospects it raised.

Most people generally favor an end to war, whether it is the Ukrainian war or any other conflict. As the Middle East is also involved in an extremely bloody war there are increasing urgent calls for peace.

The Vance statement made clear several important preconditions for an end to the Ukrainian war. First, it meant that there will be a high price that must be paid for peace in Eastern Europe, a price to be borne by both Ukraine as well as its neighbors. Undoubtedly, it is obvious that the Ukrainian nation would face restrictions on its ties with the west.

The most important restriction that an immediate end to the war would require is that Ukraine to abandon its goal of joining NATO. The most Ukraine could hope for would be the status of a neutral state. Such a status would not resolve the situation of the Ukrainian territories that are now occupied by Russia, territories that constitute an objective that is greatly desired by Putin. Moldovans understand what neutrality means when Russian troops remain in our territory.

During the period 1990 through 1992, Moldova's status was such that Russian interests were represented by Russia's 14<sup>th</sup> Army, a force that was clearly imposed on Moldova during a time of war. The West in general and the USA in particular did not understand what was happening in Moldova. Transnistrian authorities were supported by the 14<sup>th</sup> Army and relatively helpless Moldovan citizens armed themselves in an effort to maintain their independence from Russia. This "neutrality" meant that Soviet era restrictions continued to be imposed on this small nation and its citizens.

In this desperate situation, many of us in Chisinau appealed to Romania which at that time not yet a NATO member and had limited resources. Moldovan leaders, including myself, were routinely denounced as nationalists when they sought any form of outside assistance.

Russia carefully calculated its actions and openly sided with the separatists from the Transnistrian region, whose ranks had been strengthened by Russians who came to Moldova and the Transnistrian region during the Soviet period to "industrialize Moldova". Many who arrived as troops of Moscow's 14th Army remained there when the service ended. Over the years, there were countless high rise apartments in cities like Chisinau to accommodate the new Russian arrivals.

Thus, they contributed to the establishment of the separatist regime on the east bank of the Dniester River in that region of our country, ensuring their military presence on both bank of the Dniester river as well as on the border of Romania. Under these conditions, the 1991–1992-armed conflict between the legal authorities in Chisinau and the separatist forces in Tiraspol supported by troops of Moscow's 14th Army ended with a humiliating armistice for Moldova, which helped Moscow force Moldova to declare its "neutrality", a neutrality that is now imposed on Ukraine. This outcome has led to NATO and other Western states being unable to do almost anything meaningful to help Moldova develop and democratize in order to make it attractive for accession to Euro-Atlantic structures and the EU.

As a result of its "neutrality", Moldova endured three decades of stagnation. over three decades. It could not integrate itself into Western institutions as the Baltic region had done. Most people failed to realize that Moldova as well as the Baltic nations were all victims of the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939. In an effort to break through such historical ignorance, in June, 1991, the Moldovan Parliament hosted a conference on "The Consequences of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact" and numerous Western scholars attended and made presentations about how Moldova had suffered along side Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia.

Over time, it became clear that Russia would not allow Moldova to enter the European Union and other important institutions. In fact, since then, Russia has chosen to use corruption in its relations with its former colonies as its special and preferred weapon to control their leadership and block their attractiveness in the eyes of the West. This led to that even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moldova was prevented from developing its economy and riding itself of corrupt leaders who were indebted to Moscow. Thus, Moscow turned Moldova into a testing ground for the regions frozen conflicts and its status was no better than that of Georgia or Armenia.

At that time, the Ukrainians did not understand what was happening and many of them joined the ranks of the Moldovan separatists who were based in Transnistria and fought against the Moldovan "nationalists". The many Ukrainians in the region were simply regarded as Russified Ukrainians who did not embrace a distinct Ukrainian identity.

The negotiation format imposed on the conflict insured that Romania was taken out of the game without the West lifting a finger in pursuit of Moldovan or Romanian interests. Under this policy, for over three decades there no viable solution for a

situation that had been imposed by Moscow and consistently managed by the Russian leadership.

Now, if America, driven by political interests determined to accommodate Putin, forces Ukraine to cede to Russia its territories which are now occupied by Moscow, peace will not alleviate the pressures faced by East European leaderships determined to resist the Kremlin. In explicit terms, this means that Ukraine will give up its dream of NATO membership and Moldova and Georgia will suffer the same fate. Without intervention by NATO, Moscow will impose a well-tested formula that will ensure subservience by both Georgia and by Moldova even when Moldovan voters re-elected a pro-Western president in 2024 and voted by referendum in favor of European integration. Ukraine and both of these nations will face long-term vulnerability because of continuing Russian domination. They will be dependent on Moscow in both political and military terms.

However, if the United States remains steadfast in its support of Ukraine, Kiev will be able to secure its independence and its territorial integrity. Success in this endeavor will undermine the separatists in Tiraspol and prevent Transnistria from assuming a disruptive role in the region. The result of such a policy need not be a horrifying Third World War but rather the disappearance of the separatist regime on the Dniester River and an era of stability and prosperity for Moldova and Romania.

In a broader sense we will find that most part of the northern shore of the Black Sea will be controlled by Russia. Moscow will be able to monitor and spy on NATO forces and, if necessary, also be able to attack NATO member states at will. In the absence of military actions, it will be able to influence and control the political and economic lives of neighboring countries.

In the modern era most of the great colonial powers have offered freedom to their former colonies. The UK, Spain, Portugal, and Netherlands have been most notable in this process. By contrast, Russia continues to openly fight, contrary to most international arrangements, in an effort not only to keep its colonies in Siberia and the Far East, but to regain the territories lost after the collapse of USSR. Putin has proclaimed that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was an historic tragedy that should be corrected.

Meanwhile, the USA and most of the West stands by helplessly as Russia has turned on Ukraine and Georgia. After the end of World War Two, the democratic states did everything they could to exclude the future appetite of Germany should it decide to reclaim the territories it absorbed into the Third Reich. There has been an explicit rejection of any suggestions about uniting the all-Germanic territories. One of the most common declarations of the post-World War Two era was the inviolability of national borders and a belief that sovereign states have the right to defend their territory from aggression. Yet, today the Russians are allowed to engage in aggressions against post-Soviet states. They have forcibly occupied the territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk

regions while also claiming Nicolaev and Odesa in Ukraine not to mention Tiraspol in Moldova.

Imagine the Western reactions should Romania attempt to incorporate the Moldovan Republic by citing that both nations were victims of the Hitler-Stalin pact? Or consider their reactions should a significant portion of Romania's citizens embrace the memory of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu who had been a leader of the Iron Guard. Romania would certainly be held to a higher standard. Why should Russia be allowed to do this?

The lessons learned from the wars in Crimea (1853-1856) and those in Europe (1914-1917 and 1939 – 1944) demonstrated the dangers of a non-democratic but large and colonialist Russia, not just for Eastern Europe but also for the whole world. Such a regime under the leadership of a former KGB operator who embraces nationalistic aspirations for creation of a greater Russia empire will never leave the world in peace.

In conclusion, we Moldovans as well as Romanians, know well what would follow if the suggestions by Vice-President-elect Vance should be implemented in Ukraine. We are deeply saddened and worried about the changes that might occur in Eastern Europe if the Trump administration accepts a "peace" in Ukraine which largely corresponds to Putin's current ambitions.