



HELSINKI COMMISSION BRIEFING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Alcee L. Hastings

Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Thank you, fellow Members, honored guests, and ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this briefing of the U.S. Helsinki Commission entitled “East or West: The Future of Moldovan Democracy.”

Today we turn our attention to a small nation that has been both a literal and figurative battleground since the achievement of independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

I say a literal battleground because, as we recall, the “Transdnistria” region seceded from Moldova via civil war in 1990-92. This self-proclaimed “Dniestr Moldovan Republic” is not recognized by the international community, but it enjoys strong economic and political support from Moscow.

The conflict between Russia and Georgia has also cast its shadow on the Transdnistria situation. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev recently warned Moldova against using force to seize back control of Transdnistria.

I doubt seriously the Moldovan government in Chisinau would make such an attempt, but I can easily believe that certain forces might try to create such an “attempt” in order to further their own political or economic interests.

Moldova has also been a figurative battleground of ideas. Many political activists have called for closer association with the West and its concepts of civil society, democratic governance, and rule of law as embodied in the documents of the OSCE. Others, regrettably in my opinion, find their inspiration in the Communist past.

As Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I would note that the Commission has been, on occasion, critical of Moldova in some areas of human rights: for example 1) human trafficking, 2) government attempts to control the media, 3) questions of judicial procedure and police practices.

These are problems that should be faced and overcome, but Moldova is challenged not only by economic distress, but also a historic tradition that includes long periods of outside authoritarian control rather than national sovereignty and democratic traditions.

Moldova is preparing for parliamentary elections next spring. The European Union is on record as saying that “these elections are a good opportunity for the Republic of Moldova to achieve decisive, comprehensive and irreversible progress in view of implementing democratic electoral standards and practices.” I look forward to any thoughts our guests may have about these elections in the context of that statement.

I would also be interested in learning how Moldovans view the new militancy of the Putin/Medvedev government in Moscow. Do they see Russia as a threat to their country? If so, will this be reflected at the voting booth?

And how does Russia’s role as a traditional market for Moldovan agricultural products and a major energy supplier affect domestic politics in Moldova?

Our guests today are uniquely qualified to address these questions. We are honored that Ambassador Nicolae Chirtoaca, Moldova’s ambassador here in Washington, has been so kind as to join our discussion today.

We welcome also Mr. Vlad Lupan of the Soros Foundation program in Chisinau, Moldova.

And finally, we are pleased to see again our friend Bill Hill from the National Defense University and former head of the OSCE Moldova Mission.

Their bios are available on the table in the corridor. We will entertain questions from the floor after the presentations, and now I would invite Ambassador Chirtoaca to make the first statement.