

The first visit by a German foreign minister to Moldova

On 25 June, the German Minister of Foreign Affairs Guido Westerwelle paid a brief visit to Chisinau. Presumably his main goal was to consult with the Moldovan authorities over the resumption of talks on the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict, and especially on the issue of the presence and status of Russian troops in the conflict zone.

This was the first ever visit to Moldova by a German foreign minister. It is a sign of increasing and unprecedented interest that Germany has begun to demonstrate recently in Moldova and in the unresolved conflict over Transnistria. This conflict was mentioned in a joint German-Russian declaration issued on 5 June 2010, after the meeting of Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Dmitry Medvedev. This was the first occasion that the Transnistrian conflict was included in a German-Russian document adopted at the highest level. The conflict was also discussed during the meeting of the foreign ministers representing the Weimar Triangle countries (Germany, France and Poland) with the Russian minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov on 23 June 2010 in Paris. It is also known that consultations regarding conventional arms control in Europe are taking place in Vienna, in which the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria is a key impediment to a an agreement between Russia and the West.

Westerwelle's visit to Chisinau has raised fears among a section of Moldovan public that German diplomacy will pressure Moldova to accept some form of Russian troops presence in its territory in order to ease the way for an agreement between the Western countries and Russia on the issue of conventional arms limitation in Europe.

It appears that the new level of interest demonstrated by German diplomacy in Moldova is due to the increasing awareness in Berlin that the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict and the solution of the dispute concerning the presence and status of Russian armed forces in Transnistria could be a key precondition for reaching an agreement on conventional arms control with Russia. Moreover, a successful resolution, together with Russia, of the conflict in Moldova would provide a strong impulse for intensification of political, economic and security cooperation between the European Union and Russia within the framework of a 'strategic partnership' which Berlin has been trying to promote. <wrod>