

Russia's superficial concession on Transnistria

On 29 March, after talks in Moscow with Moldova's Foreign Minister Iurie Leanca, the Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov signalled his acceptance of Chisinau's position that Transnistria should accept autonomous status within the unitary Moldovan state. However, this is merely a verbal concession, as Lavrov simultaneously re-confirmed Moscow's refusal to put any real pressure on the Transnistrian regime in order to force it to resume negotiations within the '5+2' framework created by the OSCE (the name refers to the parties to the conflict, Russia, Ukraine, the OSCE; plus the EU and USA as observers) for settling the conflict.

So far, Moscow has taken the position that a definitive settlement of the conflict should be based on federalisation (in practice a *de facto* 'confederalisation') of the Moldovan state. However, their withdrawal from this idea is of no real importance, as Lavrov has still left the decision to resume negotiations in Tiraspol's hands, by refusing to put pressure on the Transnistrian regime (which is financially and militarily dependent on Russia). Meanwhile, the authorities in Tiraspol have refused to participate in the negotiations, demanding the fulfilment of preconditions which amount to a recognition by the Chisinau government of Transnistria's sovereignty. Lavrov also rejected Chisinau's proposals to transform the military peacekeeping operations (dominated by Russia) into an international civilian mission; to evacuate the military depots in Colbasna; and to equalize the status of the USA and the EU with that of Russia in the '5+2' negotiating format.

Russia's position shows that the so-called Meseberg initiative, which was put forward by Germany and Russia in June 2010, and which provides for concessions by Russia on Transnistria in exchange for the institutionalisation of a mechanism for joint decision-making by the European Union and the Russian Federation in security matters, has not as yet brought about the expected results. <wrod>