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Ukraine supports the Russian position on Transnistria

A joint declaration signed by the presidents of Ukraine and Russia, Viktor Yanukovych and Dmitri Medvedev, on 17 May concerning the conflict between Moldova and Transnistria marks a significant change in Ukraine's attitude and its shift towards the Russian position on this issue. The announcement of this declaration, one week before the meeting of all interested parties (the so-called 5+2 format) scheduled for 25 May, suggests that Russia is taking advantage of a change in the ruling team in Kyiv and the lack of political stability in Chisinau to activate its policy towards the frozen conflict in Moldova. It is possible that Moscow is counting on bringing about a resolution to the conflict on its own terms. In turn, the concessions from Kyiv are opportunistically motivated, and for the time being, largely declarative. The declaration does not mean that in the future Kyiv will necessarily provide Moscow with consistent support in this matter.

The declaration contains three important elements of the Russian position which Ukraine had hitherto rejected. Firstly, it emphasises the equality of Chisinau and Tiraspol in the negotiation process. Secondly, it accepts Moldova's neutral status as a condition for agreement between the parties to the conflict. Thirdly, it supports the current format of the peacekeeping operation in Transnistria (which is dominated by Russia), and makes its transformation into a multilateral operation under OSCE supervision dependent on the prior conclusion of a final agreement between the conflict's parties. However, this last conditionality has been made less explicit in comparison with the trilateral Russian/Moldovan/Transnistrian declaration of March 2009.

Similarly to that trilateral declaration, the current Russian/Ukrainian declaration also reflects Russia's desire to shift negotiations on the resolution of the Transnistria conflict from the so-called 5+2 format existing since 2005 (Moldova and Transnistria as the conflict's parties; Russia, Ukraine and OSCE as intermediaries, and the USA and the EU as observers) onto bilateral or trilateral formats, in which Russia would be the dominant party.

The Russian/Ukrainian declaration also introduced a new formula for the resolution of the conflict on the basis of a uniform legal, economic and military space, thus implying minimal political links between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria. <wrod>