

## Russia announces new sanctions against Moldova

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A spokeswoman for the Russian Federal Immigration Service has announced in an interview for the Moldovan edition of *Kommersant* on 30 September that 190,000 Moldovan nationals were currently staying in Russian territory in violation of the immigration laws. She also confirmed the press claims that 6,900 Moldovan nationals had been refused entry to Russia since the beginning of the year. The statements constituted another element of Russian pressure on Moldova, which has been mounting in recent weeks. On 2 September, the Russian deputy Prime Minister, Dmitry Rogozin, warned Moldova during a visit to Chisinau that further rapprochement with the EU would have negative consequences for the Russian-Moldovan trade, could push Russia to revise agreements, including the gas deal with Moldova, and could lead to restrictions on the ability of Moldovan nationals to work in Russia. On 10 September, the Russian sanitary authority Rospotrebnadzor issued a time-unlimited ban on imports of alcoholic products from Moldova (Transnistria was exempted from the ban on 12 September), officially justified by the discovery of harmful chemical substances in Moldovan products. Russia has also signalled that it could stop importing fruit and vegetables from Moldova, and several batches of those products were stopped at the Russian border.

### Commentary

- Moldova's sales of alcoholic products to Russia were worth around US\$ 60 million in 2012 and accounted for 3% of the country's total exports, and 30% of its wine sector's exports. Moldova would be much harder hit by a Russian ban on fruit and vegetable imports from the country (which account for 6% of Moldova's exports) or expulsion of Moldovan migrant workers from Russia. Remittances from migrant workers play a very significant role in the Moldovan economy, and nearly half of the country's 700 to 800 thousand migrant workers are employed in Russia. It has been estimated that Moldovans working in Russia remit a sum corresponding to 15% of Moldova's GDP each year. However, Russia is unlikely to opt for mass deportations of Moldovan migrant workers, although it may expel smaller groups of Moldovan citizens and publicize those cases through the Russian media in order to unsettle the public in Moldova.
- The news concerning repressive measures towards migrants is another in a series of steps undertaken since the beginning of September to pressure Moldova in the run-up to the summit of the Eastern Partnership that will take place in Vilnius in November, and

during which Moldova is expected to initial an association agreement with the EU. Moscow's objective seems to be to highlight the deleterious consequences of European integration for public opinion in Moldova. The prospect of losing the ability to work in Russia, and the concerns about a possible fall in employment levels in the wine industry, which is one of the most important sectors of the Moldovan economy, may prompt some Moldovans to vote for the Communists in the nearest elections (the Communist Party advocates integration with the Russian-led Customs Union). Russia's objective may also be to harm the popularity of the current government in the hope that the coalition will collapse as a result of internal tensions after initialling the association agreement, leading to early elections. Such a scenario could prevent the signing of the association agreement, expected to take place in autumn 2014 at the earliest.