

Towards a plan: Moldova's non-paper on the reintegration of Transnistria

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In mid-March, a document prepared by the Moldovan government titled 'Basic approaches in the process of the gradual reintegration of the Transnistrian region' was leaked to the media. Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration, Valeriu Chiveri, presented the so-called non-paper, a non-binding working document, to Moldova's Western partners during visits to Bucharest on 10 March and Brussels on 12–13 March. This is not the long-awaited plan for the country's reunification, but merely a conceptual outline envisaging the general framework and principles that should guide the reintegration process, in the view of the ruling Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) and its de facto leader, President Maia Sandu. While the non-paper does not contain any breakthrough proposals, it sets out the approach of this political camp to the Transnistrian issue and constitutes the first document of this kind prepared at the level of government administration in more than two decades.

Origins and status of the document

The document was disclosed on 13 March by Moldovan journalist Vladimir Soloviev. Deputy Prime Minister Chiveri confirmed its authenticity, stressing that it is neither a plan nor an official strategy, but a working document intended for preliminary consultations with external partners. It was drafted primarily in response to pressure from Moldova's European partners. Both EU member states and EU institutions expect Moldova, which is on an accession path, to take decisive steps towards reintegration. In particular, they are calling for the government to prepare a plan, or a so-called roadmap, that would present a clear picture of the reintegration process across economic, administrative, security, and other dimensions. Formally, Moldova could join the EU without first resolving the Transnistrian issue, as illustrated by the case of Cyprus; however, Brussels regards this scenario as undesirable and remains reluctant to accept it. While the EU has declared its readiness to provide assistance, it maintains that the initiative in this process must rest with the Moldovan government.

Content and structure

The main part of the document runs to just under four pages, while the remaining ten pages consist of annexes devoted to: (1) the functioning of the so-called information exchange mechanism, a format that enables the transfer of knowledge to sectoral experts from Transnistria regarding accession-related reforms being implemented by the government in Chişinău; (2) steps taken towards reintegration between 2022 and 2025; and (3) the Moldovan government's priorities in this area for 2026.

In the main section, the authors correctly identify the risks and obstacles to restoring Moldova's control over Transnistria. These include the fundamental divergence of objectives between Chişinău, Moscow, and the separatist authorities, Tiraspol's unwillingness to engage in talks, Russia's military presence in the region, and its tendency to use military force to achieve political aims. They also accurately point to internal challenges, notably the structural weakness of Moldovan democracy. Integrating a territory governed by an oligarchic regime, whose population has functioned outside a democratic system for decades, may prove challenging for Moldova's stability. The authors further emphasise that the course of reintegration may be influenced by a peace agreement bringing an end to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Not without reason, they identify the lack of political will on the part of the Russian and Transnistrian authorities as the principal obstacle to initiating genuine dialogue with Tiraspol. This phrasing signals to Western partners that Moldova stands ready to engage in the reintegration process, while underlining that the absence of a detailed plan stems from objective constraints.

Reintegration: a broad framework, but on new terms

Although very general, the non-paper sets out the key elements of the ruling camp's approach to the Transnistrian issue, which have already appeared in the public sphere in recent years. It also helps to clarify the overall framework within which, according to the current administration, the reintegration process is expected to unfold.

First, the Moldovan government is moving away from the concept of a 'special status' for Transnistria, offering instead a system of guarantees: the right to Moldovan citizenship, an amnesty (excluding those responsible for human rights violations), the recognition of property rights, and the maintenance of social support at a level no lower than before reunification. Whereas previously Chişinău was prepared, in principle, to grant the separatist region an undefined special status (autonomy) within the Moldovan state, the currently governing PAS calls for incorporation.

Second, Moldova is *de facto* abandoning the 5+2 negotiation format (Chişinău and Tiraspol, plus Russia, Ukraine, the United States, the EU, and the OSCE) in favour of a 1+1 format involving direct talks with Tiraspol, which implies sidelining Russia from the process. It should be noted that the 5+2 format has not functioned since 2022, as two of its participants are in a state of open war.

Third, the document places strong emphasis on the involvement of Western partners, including their participation in the administration of Transnistria during a transitional period. It envisages the establishment of an international civilian administration that would oversee the demilitarisation and democratisation of the region before gradually transferring authority to Chişinău. Western partners are expected to exert pressure on Russia to withdraw its military forces (around 1,500–2,000 poorly armed troops with low morale, a contingent that includes roughly 200 personnel deployed from Russia, while the remainder are Transnistrian residents holding Russian passports), to cooperate in transforming the current Russia-dominated peacekeeping mission from a military into an international civilian one, and to support demilitarisation, including the removal of ammunition from the depot at Cobasna.

Fourth, the document separates Moldova's European integration and the country's reunification into two distinct processes. While its authors emphasise that the ideal scenario for Moldova would be to join the EU with a reintegrated Transnistria, they note that, given the positions of Moscow and Tiraspol, these two processes are likely to proceed at different speeds. Consequently, the non-paper envisages the possibility of temporarily suspending the application of the *acquis* on the left bank at the point of accession, pending the region's full incorporation.

Finally, in view of the challenges associated with political reintegration, the Moldovan government is prioritising economic reintegration, understood as the gradual incorporation of Transnistria into Moldova's legal and economic space. Since 2024, Transnistrian companies have been required to pay customs duties to the Moldovan budget, having previously been exempt from this obligation for nearly a quarter of a century. They now use Moldovan documentation in foreign trade, following Transnistria's inclusion in the DCFTA regime, which forms part of the 2014 EU Association Agreement. The non-paper also mentions the possibility of extending environmental taxes and energy efficiency contributions to the left bank. A convergence fund, announced by Deputy Prime Minister Chiveri on 11 February, is intended to serve as one of the instruments for building trust (see: ['Moldova: a convergence fund instead of a reintegration plan'](#)).

Limitations of the document and context

The non-paper can hardly be regarded as comprehensive or as fully meeting the expectations of Western partners. The EU recognises that it will be difficult for Moldova to develop a comprehensive reunification plan, but it expects Chişinău to at least present a general timetable of actions, indicating concrete steps ('milestones') and objectives which, if implemented consistently, would lead to the reintegration of Transnistria with the rest of the country. This would necessitate a comprehensive approach, including analyses and estimates assessing the impact of individual measures – such as the imposition of further taxes and charges on Transnistrian companies, or other elements of integrating the left bank into Moldova's legal and economic space – on the situation in the region and its potential for destabilisation. By contrast, the non-paper presents only piecemeal measures, without broader reflection on their cumulative impact on the Transnistrian economy. This is particularly significant given that the region is currently experiencing its most severe economic crisis since the 1992 war (see: ['Transnistrian gas crisis as Moscow's political tool'](#)).

The document clearly indicates that the Moldovan government is seeking to shift the burden of reintegration onto external partners on issues such as the removal of Russian troops from Transnistria, the establishment of an international administration over the region, and the provision of expert and financial support. At the same time, the non-paper serves as a tool for deflecting accusations of passivity on the Transnistrian issue. It is intended to demonstrate to the EU that the reunification process is complex and difficult, and that it remains beyond Moldova's control in certain key areas. This assessment underpins the argument that achieving progress requires the involvement of external actors with a stake in the success of reintegration.

Outlook

The content of the document confirms a broader pattern: Moldova consistently does not treat reintegration as a priority, regarding it as an issue that cannot be resolved at least until

the end of the decade, by which time the country is expected to achieve readiness for EU accession. Government resources are focused on aligning legislation with the *acquis* and implementing accession-related reforms, while the Transnistrian issue is primarily regarded as a source of costs and risks. In this way, Moldova is in effect preparing its EU partners for a Cyprus-style scenario, in which the country's accession takes place with Transnistria remaining outside the control of the central government.

At the same time, the very fact that the document has been produced marks a certain breakthrough. A structured set of ideas, discussed within the ruling camp and submitted for discussion with the country's key European partners, represents a step forward. If pressure on Moldova is maintained, it could serve as the basis for developing a more precise concept of action towards the separatist region.