



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to HOM Moldova, Ambassador Hill

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 5, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to join the EU and other colleagues in welcoming Ambassador Hill back to the Permanent Council, and to thank him for his thoughtful (as always) report on the continuing troubling situation in Moldova.

Mr. Chairman, the United States shares Ambassador Hill's positive assessment of the outcome of last week's meeting in Sofia of the mediators in the Moldova-Transnistria conflict. It is significant that the mediators expressed their full support for the five-sided negotiating format. While the U.S. appreciates the increased attention that senior Russian authorities have devoted to the conflict, as I stated here in November, the separate negotiating track that led to a proposed agreement between the parties was not transparent and did not advance the peace process.

The United States calls on all the parties to continue seeking a comprehensive political solution in Moldova. Now is not the time to give up or to wait. Time that passes with no progress works against all parties to this continuing conflict. No one gains, but we all lose. "Peaceful but not stable," as Ambassador Hill has just said, is not enough.

Mr. Chairman, the United States viewed the withdrawal of ten trainloads of ammunition from Colbasna to the Russian Federation between October and December 2003 as very positive.

Nonetheless, unfortunately over six weeks have now passed since we last saw any evidence of further movement on withdrawal. While this may have been due to the holidays or to bad weather, as Ambassador Hill points out, neither the Russian Federation nor the Transnistrian authorities have offered an explanation. It is indeed regrettable that the Russian Federation has still not fulfilled the commitment it undertook in Istanbul in November 1999 to fully withdraw all of its military forces from Moldova.

As the largest donor to the Moldova Voluntary Fund, the United States has stated and demonstrated repeatedly its willingness to use its funds to assist the Russian Federation to defray the cost of the withdrawal of this ammunition from Moldova.

We call on the Russian Federation to resume the ammunition withdrawal as soon as possible, and to inform the OSCE Mission of the plans for and status of this removal. As Ambassador Hill has noted, it is still possible that the withdrawal could be completed

by the middle of this year, but time is running out. If achieved, this would be a key step toward fulfillment of Russia's Istanbul commitment to withdraw its military forces from Moldova.

It is also unfortunate that the Transnistrian authorities have resumed their tactics of regularly refusing OSCE Mission personnel access to the Colbasna depot, except on those days when trains are to depart.

Mr. Chairman, while the political settlement talks and the ammunition withdrawal are the dominant issues in Moldova today, it is clear that respect for human rights on both sides of the Nistru River must also be strengthened. We commend Ambassador Hill for his mission's efforts to tackle such issues as trafficking in human beings, humanitarian conditions of the remaining prisoners of the "Ilascu group" in Transnistria, the harassment of Moldovan language schools in Transnistria, and the attempts to silence independent journalists on both banks. We share his frustration at the limited progress in these areas, due not to any lack of effort on the part of the OSCE but to a lack once again of political will on both sides.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to express the hope that we will see substantive progress toward a political settlement in Moldova this year, and I would add that the OSCE's continued engagement in this area is crucial.

Finally, I would like to thank Ambassador Hill and his staff for their hard work during what has clearly been a frustrating year. They deserve great credit for their commitment to the OSCE's ideals of democracy and respect for human rights, and I am certain that their work does make a difference in the daily lives of the people of Moldova.

Thank you.