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## Possible implications of Kyiv's Decision to Ban the Transit of Russian Troops

*The decision taken by Ukrainian Parliament on 21 May 2015 to denounce military cooperation's agreements with the Russian Federation will determine the future reconfiguration of peacekeeping arrangements in the Transnistrian region. Under given conditions, the Ukrainian authorities are facing now the obvious need for developing clear policy regarding further involvement in maintaining security on the Nistru (Dniester) river.*

On 21 May 2015, Ukrainian Parliament (the Verkhovna Rada) voted a package of amendments, which annulled a number of agreements between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. In particular, Ukraine terminated all bilateral military cooperation measures with Russia, including in the military intelligence area, on transiting Russian military contingents temporarily deployed in Moldova, on international military transportation, and classified information protection, to list a few. Thus, the contingent of Russian peacekeepers was prohibited from transiting the Ukrainian territory.

In this context, one should remind about Russia's commitments undertaken at the NATO Istanbul Summit in 1999 to withdraw its military personnel and equipment from the territory of the Republic of Moldova by the end of 2002. However, the Russian Federation has not fulfilled this commitment for over past 12 years.

All statements and requests of both the Moldovan authorities and international community to respect international commitments were treated by the Russian Federation with superficiality and ignorance. In providing respective explanations on this matter, the Kremlin tried usually to refer to the fact that Russia is the only actor respected by the secessionist administration, and the presence of Russian peacekeeping troops, according to Moscow, would represent a guarantee for peace

in Transnistria. At the same time, Russia claimed that it was unable to withdraw its munitions and armaments due to the fact that the secessionist administration had not allowed doing this. Such excuse, which has been invoking for over past 12 years, makes one wonder, if Russia wants to change at least something in Transnistria, and reveals the intention of Moscow to maintain geopolitical control over this breakaway region.

Coming back to the denunciation of above agreements, it is worth mentioning that such an evolution of the relationship between Moscow and Kyiv was quite predictable one, and particularly in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Russia's annexation of Crimea. However, it seems that this decision was a surprise for the Moldovan authorities and bothered a lot the Russian Federation.

Having that in mind, the above decision of the Verkhovna Rada would have at least three important aftereffects being further considered.

Firstly, as a result of this denouncement, Russia will be formally exonerated from the previously assumed obligations to withdraw its troops and military equipment from the left bank of the Nistru (Dniester) river. Thus, if until recently they used to invoke obstacles imposed by Transnistria, from now on they may claim that they

cannot withdraw the troops because the agreement with Ukraine was denounced. Under current backdrop, transiting of the Russian munitions via Western Ukraine does not seem feasible, given that Eastern Ukraine is involved in a military conflict with the same party.

Hence, Russia may invest efforts to present to the international community that it is Ukraine who does not facilitate the withdrawal of the Russian armaments from the territory of the Republic of Moldova so that impeding the final settlement of the Transnistrian dispute. On the other hand, from the perspective of its national security, Ukraine would be also not interested in having foreign military troops and considerable amount of armaments, and munitions on the ground at a distance of several kilometers only from its Western border. Therefore, it will be necessary to find a proper way to evacuate all this ammunition.

The second aspect refers to the prohibition of transiting Russia's military contingents towards the Transnistrian region. Actually, until recently soldiers and officers of the Russian army used to enter the Transnistrian region freely and without any control executed – neither by Ukraine, nor by Moldova. They have already got accustomed for free transiting through the territory of Ukraine to be further engaged not only in the military activities of the Russian military contingent deployed in Transnistria but also in the activities of Transnistrian para-military forces. Moreover, almost all managers of the law enforcement bodies from the Transnistrian region have completed a military career in the Russian army.

As for the peacekeeping troops, they generally are located on the territory uncontrolled by the Moldovan authorities. In spite of the plenty of agreements signed in 1992-1994, which formally allowed Chişinău to check the new military contingent brought to the region, all of these documents remain merely perfunctory arrangements that Russia failed to adhere. Therefore, all the actions of the Moldovan authorities aimed at prohibiting access of the Russian militaries to the left bank of the Nistru river are justified and seem to be necessary.

In April-May 2015, a number of decisions was brought to the public on the prohibition for many Russian soldiers, travelling to the Transnistrian region, to enter the Republic of Moldova. The Russian militaries were supposed to provide military support to para-military groups, carrying with themselves the respective personal files, uniforms and other attributes.

Vladimir Komoedov, chairman of the defence committee of the lower house of the Russian Parliament said that

Russian authorities would not give up Transnistria. Such statement can be interpreted as a threat to use force, unless a compromise is reached with the Ukrainian authorities. The main reason for such statement is that transit through Ukraine is the only way for Russian troops to reach the Transnistrian region, either by air or by land. Obviously, the Russian military aviation could be also banned from transiting via the Romanian territory, as this country is part of the North Atlantic area.

General Yuri Yakubov, the coordinator of General Inspectors Department of the Defense Ministry of Russia said that Russian contingent in Transnistria would be maintained in any conditions, possibly via the military aviation.

Hence, it is important to see, whether Ukraine allows the transit of the Russia's military ammunition and troops via its airspace. If transiting by air is allowed, the Republic of Moldova will lose any control over the military situation in the region. It should be noted in this context that the Tiraspol airport is capable to receive military loads.

Therefore, unless the transportation of military loads to Tiraspol by air via the Ukrainian airspace is supervised, the denunciation of the Transit Agreement will have no significance, for it will not hamper Russia from rotating its military contingent or transporting ammunition in this region. It will only imply additional costs.

As the Moldovan authorities have not announced their official position yet, it seems that they were not consulted preliminarily by the Ukrainian authorities. The right to allow transiting of its sovereign territory is obviously an absolute right of Ukraine; however, such decision will affect the integrity of the neighboring country as well. The Russian and separatist authorities have complained previously that the Moldovan authorities block the rotation of Russian militaries in the Transnistrian region.

Last but not least, the third aspect refers to the aggravation of situation with ethnic Ukrainians residing in the Transnistrian region. After detention of a journalist of Ukrainian origin, who participated in the EuroMaidan events, it seems that the secessionist administration starts implementing a massive propaganda against Ukraine. The rebroadcasting of Russian TV channels, which are propagandistic in nature, indoctrinates the population of the region and generates hatred against the Ukrainians. The statement of Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin about the alleged "betrayal" by Ukrainian authorities of own compatriots in Transnistria, is an alarming sign for Kyiv.

Under given conditions, the Ukrainian authorities are facing now the obvious need for developing clear policy regarding further involvement in maintaining security on the Nistru river, to prevent escalation of the situation.

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