

Lost Settlement Year. Why Did Chisinau-Tiraspol Talks Reach a Complete Deadlock

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It seems that the differences between Moldova and Transdnistria are becoming almost irreconcilable

Last week, the Moldovan public witnessed another outreach around the Transdnistrian settlement. As you know, the left bank issue has long lived its own life, occasionally getting 'on the radar' of a wide Moldovan audience. The already difficult year for Moldova's domestic policy could not but affect the nature of relations between Chisinau and Tiraspol. Which, apparently, are not going through the best period in their history.

The only 5+2 meeting this year ended without any visible results. Which was fine – hardly anyone would pay special attention to this pretty much pass-through event. But this time the parties really 'distinguished themselves'. Chisinau and Tiraspol failed to overcome mutual contradictions and agree on the final Protocol of the meeting for the first time since 2016. Thus, environment was created in Bratislava for the crisis development of the situation, which eventually happened. As a result, for the second month there has been a high concentration of international attention at the negotiation process and frantic attempts by the mediators to bring the parties closer to a compromise for the signing of the notorious Bratislava Protocol.

However, it never got off the ground. Despite the rapid stopping of the internal political crisis after the collapse of the PSRM-ACUM coalition and the appointment of a new person as the Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister for the reintegration,

neither Chisinau nor Tiraspol rush to hold meetings. On the contrary, last week the chief negotiators had a distance war of words and exchanged their positions openly through the media. This confrontational rhetoric, oddly enough, was started by the Moldovan side, through Alexandru Flenchea, who told about the efforts made by international partners to sign the Bratislava Protocol in the optimal parameters. At the same time, the Moldovan official noted that in the medium term Chisinau will place special emphasis on four priorities: freedom of movement in the Security Zone, human rights, proper operation of Latin script schools and unification of fiscal standards and customs tariffs.

Tiraspol, in its turn, accused Chisinau of deliberately creating preconditions for further degradation of the negotiation process and weakening of the 5+2 platform by including previously not discussed topics in the agenda. According to the statements of representatives of the left bank, this will make it impossible to agree on a common list of key issues in the near future.

At the same time, the main problem is not even that the Moldovan issues were not previously discussed at the negotiating table, as Tiraspol insists. Most likely, it is precisely the topics proposed by Moldova, some of which are inextricably linked to the final settlement of the conflict. Apparently, by raising such issues, Chisinau is trying to achieve its main task – to launch negotiations not only to solve social and humanitarian problems, as it has been in recent years, but also to determine the political status of the region, which Tiraspol has long opposed. If this is true, then the contradictions between the conflicting parties actually look insoluble.

The current situation in the negotiation process will certainly affect the outcome of the next annual meeting of OSCE Ministerial Council, which will take place this week in Bratislava. As you know, at such meetings, the OSCE member

states express their common position on the Transdniestrian settlement in a statement, as well as speak about the current situation in the negotiation process.

In this sense, the sudden surge of attention around the Transdniestrian conflict is quite understandable. Its settlement has been recently meant to be almost a locomotive and model for resolving territorial conflicts in the European space. Now there is every chance that for the first time since 2016, mediators and observers will have to acknowledge the complete lack of results in the negotiation process. The dialogue between Chisinau and Tiraspol has finally reached an impasse, and this cannot but cause a reaction of international mediators. Considering this state of affairs, it is likely that already in Bratislava, all participants in the process will analyze in detail the reasons for what is happening and outline a plan of action for the coming period. They are unlikely to want to allow another lost year for the Transdniestrian settlement.