

Transnistria's Republic Day Tests a Fraying National Myth

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Moldova held a large-scale Independence Day military parade on August 27. Moldova's Russia-aligned breakaway Transnistria region held its "Republic Day" six days later but did not repeat the military parade it restored in 2025. Transnistrian leader Vadim Krasnoselsky's Republic Day messaging shifted from the explicit independence- and recognition-seeking language of the 2025 holiday. On August 28, Krasnoselsky said he believes Chișinău opposes using military force against Transnistria and positively assessed Moldovan President Maia Sandu for that position. Chișinău began phasing Transnistrian businesses into Moldova's tax system on September 1, with full unification targeted by January 2030, the same year that Moldova has set as its target for EU accession.

On August 27, Moldova marked 35 years of independence with one of the largest military parades in its history. More than 2,000 troops and roughly 100 pieces of equipment moved through Chișinău Great National Assembly Square, including armored personnel carriers and drones supplied by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states. Moldovan President Maia Sandu reviewed the columns alongside Romanian President Nicușor Dan, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy joined them after the parade (TASS, August 27). Sandu framed the parade as a demonstration of what Moldova's defense investment has bought, rather than a demonstration of force (Moldova 1, August 6).

Moldova's Russia-aligned breakaway region of Transnistria marked 36 years of self-proclaimed independence on September 2. Celebrations in Tiraspol included music on Suvorov Square, a craft exhibition, sports in Catherine Park, a traveling petting zoo, an evening concert, and fireworks. Wreath-laying at the Memorial of Military Glory opened the day's celebrations, but the published program contained no military parade (Novosti Pridnestrovyia, August 28).

For most of the past three decades, the symbolic balance of Transnistria's so-called Republic Day ran the other way. Tiraspol's September 2 celebration has been built around armor rolling across Suvorov Square in the presence of the Operational Group of Russian Forces. Chișinău, in contrast, typically held military parades less frequently and on a far smaller scale. That balance has now inverted, and within a single year.

Transnistria's 2025 parade involved more than a thousand personnel from the Tiraspol garrison and opened with the raising of the Transnistrian and Russian flags. Transnistrian leader Vadim Krasnoselsky told the assembled units that the parade should stand as confirmation of a readiness to defend what had been built, and said, "Our goal is the international recognition of Transnistria" (@Novosti, September 2, 2025).

Nothing in Krasnoselsky's messaging this year approaches that register. Krasnoselsky's anniversary address described a state that "successfully overcomes existing challenges" and assured residents that "the world knows about us, we are not left alone with our problems," phrasing that presumes the audience suspects otherwise (NewsMD, September 2). In a Republic Day interview, he attributed the region's difficulties to "hostilities in Ukraine" and to Chișinău's "pressure" on Transnistrian economic entities. Asked about Chișinău's recent steps to integrate Transnistria into Moldova's tax system, he invoked the region's survival across the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, adding, "Everything passed in the end, but the people remained" (Novosti Pridnestrovyia, September 2).

Recognition as an objective has been replaced by existence as an assertion.

On September 1, one day before Transnistria's holiday, Moldova's phased introduction of value-added tax (VAT) and excise duties on goods entering Transnistria took effect, covering alcohol, tobacco, caviar, perfumes, precious metals, jewelry, furs, and vehicles. Petroleum products, base metals, and mineral concentrates will be added in January 2027, and natural gas and electricity in April 2027, with all remaining exemptions abolished by January 2030, unifying Transnistria's tax and customs regimes with the rest of Moldova (Logos Press, August 26). Tiraspol's reporting claims that full implementation could halt industrial enterprises, including a metallurgical plant that depends on ferrous inputs.

This change follows the February "Basic Approaches to the Process of Gradual Reintegration of the Transnistrian Region" working paper. This is the first comprehensive Moldovan reintegration document since the rejection of the Kozak Memorandum in 2003. The new document proposes unilateral extension of uniform fiscal, customs, and trade rules; a convergence fund to cushion the transition in exchange for political concessions; and a provision for Moldova to accede to the European Union with EU law in Transnistria suspended for a period (Militarnyi, March 18). The 2030 goal for Transnistria's tax integration with the rest of Moldova is not arbitrary. The European Union and Moldova opened formal accession talks on June 15, and Chişinău is working to conclude negotiations by 2028 and enter the bloc by 2030 (Interfax, June 16). Fiscal absorption of the left bank, another name for Transnistria, and accession are being run on the same clock.

Moscow has only contributed comments in response. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin warned on August 10 that armed provocations by Kyiv or Chişinău against Transnistria would be treated as an attack on the Russian Federation. Galuzin said it would use every available means to protect Russian citizens, including the Operational Group and Russian peacekeepers. According to Galuzin, however, Moscow assesses the risk of armed provocations as low (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, August 10). Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu went further in April, comparing Chişinău's conduct toward Transnistria to Ukraine's treatment of Donbas after 2014, accusing both of causing chronic energy shortages and idle enterprises (The Moscow Times, April 21). Moldovan Parliament Speaker Igor Grosu read the remarks as posturing for Russian domestic audiences ahead of Russia's recent State Duma elections rather than a threat to Moldova (NewsMaker, April 22).

Tiraspol is not echoing Moscow's framing. Krasnoselsky said he believes Moldovan politicians when they say they oppose a military resolution to the Transnistrian issue and specifically credits Sandu for this point. He acknowledged countervailing signals, naming Moldova's rearmament and the participation of its special units in NATO programs, but treated them as a separate matter from any intent to use force (Jurnal.md, May 6). Set against Galuzin's comments, the divergence is hard to miss. Moscow warns of armed provocations that it simultaneously rates as unlikely, while the Transnistrian breakaway leadership, whom those warnings purport to protect, publicly credit Chişinău's peaceful intent.

Four pillars have historically underwritten Transnistria's effective break-off from Moldova—Russian material patronage, a rent-generating economy anchored by the Sheriff Holding business conglomerate, elite cohesion within the security apparatus, and a supra-ethnic identity distinct from Moldova's (Small Wars, July 17). Russian support is now largely rhetorical. Sheriff's economic and political dominance faces pressure from Transnistria's state-asset privatization program, which will kick off in earnest in 2027, and the cohesion of the region's political and security elites could face a test in the Transnistrian presidential election scheduled for December 13. The fourth is the only one Tiraspol still controls outright, and Transnistria's Republic Day is where it is performed.

Krasnoselsky is probably right that the region will absorb the September tax integration. The harder question is what remains to be defended by 2030, when the fiscal boundary between the two banks is scheduled to disappear, and Moldova intends to enter the European Union.

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