

Ire over Russian peacekeepers after youth's death

Discontent flares in the breakaway region of Transnistria following an incident on a bridge over the Nistru River.

Hundreds of people gathered on Tuesday (January 3rd) in Transnistria to protest against the killing of a Moldovan youth on Sunday. The 18-year-old boy, hailing from the village of Parata, was shot by a Russian peacekeeper and died a few hours later at a Chisinau hospital.

Protesters signed a letter addressed to the Moldovan government, the OSCE and the international community, asking for immediate withdrawal of all 15 peacekeeping points in the Nistru River area. Meanwhile, the incident has revived a decades-old debate over security in Moldova.

The shooting victim, Vadim Pisari, was crossing a bridge by car when troops signaled to him to stop. He did not heed the warning. Gunshots rang out, and the boy died a few hours later.

"It was not the duty of military forces to stop a civilian. They have to deal only with military cars or with those who are carrying guns or such materials," said Ion Manole, head of Promo-LEX, an NGO that promotes implementing internationally recognised standards in Moldova and the Transnistrian region. "The [boy] had nothing dangerous on him, nor in the car, he was just going back home," he told SETimes.

The NGO has asked Moldovan authorities to take into account the human rights of many thousands of people living in the area of the peacekeeping posts.

"It is not the first time that peacekeepers have committed such crimes," Manole said. We have called attention to many

cases of abuse. It would be better to remove this military force from here for the sake of human rights.”

After the Russian-Moldovan war in 1992, an agreement was signed to keep a mixed mission of peacekeepers in the Moldovan region of Transnistria. The peacekeeping mission was installed at 15 points on bridges on the Nistru River, which separates the region from the rest of Moldova.

Today, Transnistria remains a separatist enclave that is not recognised by any country in the world.

While the peacekeepers’ points are maintained by military forces from Moldova, Russia and Transnistria, the forces are headed by Russian soldiers.

The day after the young boy was killed, protests were held in front of the Russian Embassy in Moldova, as well as on the bridge where the young man was shot.

“We had an urgent session of the local council, where we invited representatives of the government,” Parata village Mayor Iurie Soltan told SETimes. “We asked them to remove ... the peacekeeping mission nearby our village, as it is not a peacekeeping mission any more but rather an aggression towards our citizens.”

But Aurel Fondos, the head of the Moldovan peacekeeping mission, says such demands are unrealistic.

“The rules were settled in 1992, and we are not able to change them now,” he told SETimes.

Moldovan authorities have asked the Russian Ambassador in Chisinau to investigate the crime, due to the fact that the soldier who shot the young Moldovan was under Russian military authority.

“Nothing justifies the death of a person. We will take all steps to investigate the case,” Moldova Prime Minister Vlad Filat said Tuesday.

Meanwhile, government officials tasked with helping to improve the quality of life for citizens living in the area say they face steep hurdles.

“Every step from our side needs to be discussed and agreed to by the Russians and the Transnistrians. Very often it becomes impossible,” said Gheorghe Balan, whose agency is taking the lead on Transnistrian issues.

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