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## European Union's confrontation with Russia raises tensions in Moldova

By Markus Salzmann

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The European Union's (EU) confrontational course toward Russia is intensifying social and political tensions in Moldova. Following the Moldovan government's signing of an association agreement with the EU at the end of June, Russia has restricted previous economic benefits and imposed sanctions.

In response to the EU's integration of Moldova into its offensive against Moscow, the Russian government banned the importing of fruit from the Republic of Moldova to the Russian Federation at the end of July. In addition, Russia plans to remove customs waivers for Moldovan wine and cereals. The impoverished republic will thereby lose its most important source of income, since Russia is its most significant bilateral trading partner.

Russia indicated on several occasions that it would retaliate economically against any further integration of the former Soviet republic into Europe. EU representatives had been pressing Moldova for months to sign the association agreement in order to push back Russian influence in the region. Together with the US, the EU orchestrated a coup led by fascists to impose a similar association agreement in Ukraine.

Moscow's sanctions will have grave consequences for Moldova. Estimated losses for this year alone stand at €80 million. An EU announcement that it would double the import quotas for

Moldovan fruit and vegetables will not even begin to offset this loss. According to Vlad Filat, leader of the Liberal Democrats and former prime minister, the export of apples to the EU is to rise to 80,000 tonnes.

As the next step, Russia has announced the expulsion of Moldovan immigrant workers from the Russian Federation. The Moldovan Diaspora Association revealed that Moscow has already refused to extend work permits for Moldovan citizens. According to the association, 265,000 Moldovan workers could be sent home. Russian statistics suggest there are between 500,000 and 700,000 Moldovan immigrant workers.

The money which they send back to relatives in Moldova makes up a significant part of the country's economy. In 2013, remittances from Russia amounted to around €1 billion or 19 percent of the country's entire GDP. If these remittances drop further, this would have catastrophic consequences for the living standards of Moldovan workers.

A further decline in living standards is to be expected through the imposition of the association agreement. It obligates the Republic of Moldova to open up previously protected industries to foreign competition and to eliminate subsidies for energy and transport. In Ukraine, the agreement has already led to a sharp increase in gas prices. In addition, the country is to reduce the size of the public service, which will drive up unemployment further.

The Moldovan government is using the agreement to impose social attacks on the population and to deepen its ties with the EU. Prime Minister Iruie Leanca declared that Russia was solely responsible for the current conflict. By contrast, he praised Germany's key role in the integration into the EU.

Moldova's parliamentary speaker Igor Corman met last Friday in Chisinau with an EU parliamentary delegation led by Manfred Weber, chairman of the European Peoples Party parliamentary fraction. The talks were concerned with closer cooperation and the overcoming of the country's dependence on Russia. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has promised the former Soviet republic additional EU assistance in order to cope with Russian economic sanctions.

Elmar Brok, chairman of the foreign affairs committee in the European parliament, spoke out in favour of binding the country more closely to the EU, and noted that while Moldova was a small country, it was strategically important for the EU.

The same applies to the US. On 23 July, the US Senate unanimously passed a resolution to improve relations with Moldova. The resolution also contained an appeal to the EU to strengthen its economic and political ties with the country.

The aim of the EU and US is to transform Moldova into a source of cheap labour for their own corporations. Average wages at present are just €100 per month. Just as in Ukraine and Georgia, the conditions in the European country with the lowest GDP per head of population are to be used to reduce wage levels across the entire continent.

But above all, Russian influence is to be pushed back. In the process, the imperialist powers are reckoning with the prospect of a civil war as in Ukraine. The US Senate resolution included barely veiled threats against Russia not to increase economic pressure on Moldova and to avoid support for any separatist movement on Moldovan territory.

Moldova, which has been independent since 1991, has a border with Romania and has around 3 million inhabitants. Since 1992, a conflict has been raging with the separatist eastern region of Transnistria, where Russian soldiers are stationed. The EU's aggressive policies could produce an escalation in this and other ethnic conflicts in the country.

Domestic political tensions are already increasing. Media reports in recent months have repeatedly noted that the republic of Transnistria could become a second Crimea. The regional government, which is not recognised internationally, is hoping to be accepted into the Russian Federation, which looks unlikely at present.

Parliamentary elections are due in Moldova in November. The opposition Communist Party has traditionally oriented to Moscow, and according to polls, it has a large lead over the pro-EU parties. Former President and Communist Party leader Vladimir Voronin condemned a policy hostile to Russia and declared, "We cannot lose our partner and restrict our possibilities for development."

Measures are already being taken in Kiev to escalate the situation. Ukraine has begun digging a three-metre wide and two to three metre deep trench along the 450 kilometre border with Transnistria, stated Alexander Yakovenko, spokesman for the regional administration of Ukraine's border protection service. The border protection service's special equipment is operating 24 hours a day and is completing around 2.5km per week, said the spokesman.

On 12 March, without any justification, Russian citizens age 17 to 65 with permanent residency in Transnistria were banned from crossing the Ukrainian border. Around 180,000 residents of Transnistria are in possession of Russian passports.

The online magazine *antikrieg.tv* published a video recently on its YouTube channel in which the President of the Moldovan Social Democratic Party, Viktor Shelin, drew attention to US war preparations in his country. According to him, US soldiers have been stationed in the country while the Moldovan army conducts military exercises.