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## INDEPENDENCE OR DOUBLE DEPENDENCE: THE EAST-WEST FOREIGN POLICY GAME IN SLOVAKIA AND MOLDOVA

*Grigore Pop-Eleches*

### ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the opportunities and limitations of foreign policy maneuvering for small states in the context of the redefinition of power constellations in post-Cold War Europe. The analysis focuses on the attempts of the governments of Slovakia and Moldova to engage in classical balance-of-power bargaining in order to take advantage of the latent rivalry between Russian and western interests in the region. The evidence from the two cases suggests that the success of such strategies is seriously limited not just by country-specific factors (such as economic dependence and security threats), but also by the gradual crystallization of spheres of interest in the post-Cold War era. Thus, in the case of Slovakia, Russia proved unable to provide more than a temporary and often ineffective counter-pole to western dominance in the region, whereas in the Moldovan case the West appeared reluctant to interfere with Russia's interests in its own backyard.

The end of the Cold War and the emergence of a considerable number of new states in Europe have triggered a complex process of foreign policy negotiations meant to redefine power constellations in Europe. This realignment raises questions about the challenges and strategies available to the small states of the former Soviet bloc. On the one hand we see the rise of western influence exercised by both economic and political means. On the other, the continued, if latent, rivalry between Russia and the West remains a source of temptation on the part of elites in small post-Communist states to resort to classical bargaining strategies in the process of the gradual redefinition and crystallization of spheres of influence in the borderlands between the European West and East. The latest example of such maneuvers is provided by the Kosovo crisis and the ultimately unsuccessful attempt of the Yugoslav government to "play the Russian card" as a counterweight to western pressures for internal and external conformity.

These developments of the early post-Cold War period may be best approached from the perspective of patron-client relations between strong and weak states. This literature focused on the role of weak third world states in the Cold War superpower competition,

and pointed out that under certain circumstances small states could take advantage of their quality as "scarce resources", and thus were often able to extract resources and gain influence beyond their own capabilities (Rothstein 1968:247). In order to make the most of the superpower competition, many third world countries pursued active strategies of non-alignment, which provided them with more powerful bargaining positions vis-a-vis their potential superpower patron (Shoemaker&Spanier, 1984:12).

From this perspective the more reluctant Westernization of many of the former Communist countries can be interpreted as a conscious foreign policy bargaining strategy rather than as a developmental deficiency. However, as regional differences during the Cold War suggest, this balance-of-power bargaining strategy represents a viable option only in situations where the influence of the two superpowers is sufficiently evenly matched to allow small states to effectively maneuver between the interests of the two would-be patrons. Thus, the strategy was successfully pursued by a variety of countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, whereas for Eastern Europe and Latin America the constraints were much tighter given the tacitly accepted hegemony of one of the superpowers in their respective "backyards."<sup>1</sup>

Steering clear of the ongoing drama in the Balkans, this essay addresses the foreign policy challenges and failures of two countries of the northern tier of the region: Slovakia and Moldova. The choice of these two countries is warranted by a number of commonalities: both have emerged after 1990 as successor states of multi-national former Communist states, both started out with the handicap of small, ethnically diverse populations, both faced significant identity dilemmas as a result of close historical and cultural connections to larger and more powerful brother-states. Furthermore, both countries had the handicap of externally vulnerable economies, which invited foreign policy bargaining strategies to compensate for what in effect were developmental deficiencies impeding easy adjustment to competition in international markets. For the purpose of this paper, however, the most important similarity between Slovakia and Moldova lies in the internal divisions and the external ambiguity regarding their foreign policy orientation along the East-West divide. Yet next to these common denominators, the large variation in the geopolitical context of the two countries created significant differences in the opportunities and constraints of their foreign policies. Thus, while Slovakia belonged to the Visegrad group and was therefore considered a top candidate for European integration, Moldova embarked on the transition journey from the position of an isolated, economically backward country in Russia's near abroad. As a consequence both Western and Russian expectations differed drastically for the two countries, and the following analysis will proceed within the framework of these differences. The ultimate failure of the two countries' balance-of-power bargaining attempts suggests that small countries in the post Cold War era are severely limited in their maneuvering space between the conflicting demands of Russia and the West.

The essay will first analyze the UN voting record and the attitudes towards NATO expansion of the two countries in order to determine the orientation of their foreign policies along the East-West divide. The second section will analyze the internal and external constraints, which have shaped these policies. The final section will discuss how these constraints effectively limited Moldova's and Slovakia's maneuvering room in the post-Cold War power constellation.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, one can cite the examples of Cuba, Nicaragua and Yugoslavia as exceptions to this rule, but in each case the "deviation" was associated with significant degrees of political and/or military threats and pressures.

## MEASURES OF FOREIGN POLICY OF ORIENTATION

In contrast to the clear ideological demarcation lines that dictated foreign policy during the Cold War period, the current "new world order" has led to a considerable blurring of alliances and objectives. As a result politicians in the post-Communist states have faced considerable dilemmas in trying to frame a coherent foreign policy and a large portion of these dilemmas is reflected in the myriad of often-contradictory rhetorical statements<sup>2</sup>. But while I think that political rhetoric needs to be taken seriously at least as a signaling device, I want to first establish a basis for evaluating the foreign policy orientation of Slovakia and Moldova. In order to do so I will rely on Shoemaker & Spanier's (1984:17-20) analysis of patron-state goals, which they place in three broad categories: ideological compliance, international solidarity and strategic goals. Given that the end of the Cold War has practically marked the demise of Marxism-Leninism as a serious ideological challenge to Western liberalism, I will only discuss the ideological dimension of the two countries' foreign and domestic policies in the context of their relationship to the West.<sup>3</sup> In order to evaluate the international solidarity function of patron-client relationships in the post-Cold War era, I will analyze the voting records of the two countries in the UN General Assembly. With regard to the strategic importance of patron-client relationships this analysis will focus on the attitudes of Moldova and Slovakia towards NATO enlargement, which has undoubtedly been the most important security dilemma of post-Communist Europe.

### THE UN VOTING RECORD

The following tables summarize the voting records for Moldova, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Romania, Russia and the United States between 1993-1996. The choice of timing was dictated by the fact that Slovakia only became an independent state in 1993. The countries were chosen in an effort to enable comparisons with the most important poles of Eastern European foreign policy<sup>4</sup> as well as with control cases of other former Soviet bloc countries.

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<sup>2</sup> A later section of this paper will address the content and the functions of this rhetoric in more detail.

<sup>3</sup> I will argue that Russia did not harbor any ideological interests in its interaction with Slovakia and Moldova, largely because post-Soviet Russia is undergoing a severe ideological identity crisis during the time period discussed in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> The decision of adding Germany to the traditional US-Russia tandem is warranted by the powerful influence of Germany in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as by the concern that the US may not necessarily be representative of the West's foreign policy stance (particularly, but not restricted to questions regarding the Middle East.)

**Table 1:** Illustrates the correlation between the votes of the seven aforementioned countries for the 278 votes on the agenda of the UN General Assembly between 1993-1996

	CZ	GER	MOL	ROM	RUS	SLO	USA
CZ	1	0.95	0.85	0.96	0.56	0.96	0.56
GER	0.95	1	0.83	0.95	0.53	0.95	0.55
MOL	0.85	0.83	1	0.87	0.55	0.89	0.52
ROM	0.96	0.95	0.87	1	0.60	0.97	0.53
RUS	0.56	0.53	0.55	0.60	1	0.58	0.38
SLO	0.96	0.95	0.89	0.97	0.58	1	0.53
USA	0.56	0.55	0.52	0.53	0.38	0.53	1

Even a preliminary analysis suggests several interesting conclusions. While the foreign policy divide between Russia and the United States still exists, the European countries don't take clear sides in this dispute. Instead the Eastern European countries tended to vote much closer to Germany's line, and to that of the other Eastern European countries. However, given the generally high correlation of voting records, I propose a different indicator for voting patterns, which intends to focus on the instances where countries disagree, and at the same time account for the degree of disagreement<sup>5</sup>. The *deviance factor* between two countries is calculated by adding up all the instances where they vote differently and by giving double weight to second degree deviance: thus if country A votes yes, while B votes no then two points are added to the deviance score, while if A abstains and B votes yes or no then only one point is added. Consequently, the value of the deviance factor becomes a measure of the propensity of two countries to disagree on issues on the UN General Assembly agenda.

1. While the Eastern European countries are still closest to Germany in terms of voting behavior, they also appear to be significantly closer to Russia than to the US<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that deviance scores are the lowest for the relationships among Eastern European countries, which points towards a shared set of constraints and preferences in the power game between the "big guys".
2. Neither Moldova nor Slovakia appear to be closer than Romania and the Czech Republic to Moscow's voting record. Thus, at least from the perspective of UN

<sup>5</sup> The simple correlation of voting only measures whether countries voted the same way, but fails to differentiate between first and second degree deviance (i.e. between yes/abstain or no/abstain and yes/no disagreements).

<sup>6</sup> However this fact is less of a reflection of the foreign policy of Eastern European countries than on the willingness of the US to "go alone" where its perceived goals are concerned. This notion is further reinforced by the fact that Germany, a traditional US ally, displays almost identical voting patterns as the Eastern European countries. This finding points in the direction of a growing cleavage between the US and Europe after the disappearance (or at least drastic reduction) of the common security threat from the Soviet bloc. This discussion, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.



voting, the assumption of a distinct "Eastern path" for Moldova and Slovakia seems unwarranted.

3. Moldova has the highest deviance score among the Eastern European countries for all three potential hegemon. The somewhat counterintuitive conclusion of this finding is that Moldova pursues a more independent foreign policy than the other Eastern European countries in the sample. This finding is further supported by the high total deviance score of Moldova, which can be seen as a proxy for foreign policy decision-making independence<sup>7</sup>.

**Table 2** Summarizes the deviance factors for the seven countries in the sample. The analysis of the deviance factors reinforces the initial conclusions drawn from the study of voting correlation, but adds several interesting nuances:

	<b>CZ</b>	<b>GER</b>	<b>MOL</b>	<b>ROM</b>	<b>RUS</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>USA</b>
<b>CZ</b>	0	13	33	12	92	10	200
<b>GER</b>	13	0	37	15	95	14	197
<b>MOL</b>	33	37	0	29	93	27	204
<b>ROM</b>	12	15	29	0	83	7	203
<b>RUS</b>	92	95	93	83	0	87	225
<b>SLO</b>	10	14	27	7	87	0	202
<b>USA</b>	200	197	204	203	225	202	0
<b>Total</b>	360	371	423	349	675	347	1231

The possible explanations for these findings will be discussed in a later section of the paper in the context of the economic and internal as well as external political factors, which largely framed the foreign policy of Slovakia and Moldova. Before proceeding with a more detailed analysis of these influences, the paper will evaluate another indicator of the two countries' foreign policy orientation: their attitude to post Cold War security in Europe and particularly the question of NATO enlargement.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS NATO EXPANSION

### Slovakia: Ambivalence and Controversies

Slovakia's position towards NATO membership is indicative of the general ambivalence of its overall attitude towards the West. On one hand numerous public statements have qualified NATO membership as a key official goal of Slovak foreign

<sup>7</sup> The usefulness of this measure has yet to be tested for a larger number of countries and situations. However, for the countries in this sample (with the exception of Moldova) the proxy makes intuitive sense, since the US receives the highest score, followed by Russia, Germany and the Eastern European countries.

policy: thus President Michal Kovac called NATO membership "a safeguard of security" and his country's "number one priority" (*TASR*, 11/4/93) and even Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar declared that only NATO could meet Slovakia's security needs (*TASR*, 10/3/93). On the other hand Meciar's speech on the first day of Slovakia's independence Meciar mentioned that "we intend to guarantee our security within the framework of the all-European system of collective security." (*BBC*, 1/4/93) Meciar repeatedly expressed his concerns about "creating a security system for everybody" by taking into consideration the interests and military potential of Russia and the Ukraine. This ambiguity at the level of official statements reflected not only the internal power struggles within the Slovak leadership<sup>8</sup>, but the mixed attitudes of the Slovak population on the subject: according to a June 1993 poll only 44.7% of respondents favored NATO membership for their country (*RFE/RL*, 12/10/93).

The actions undertaken by the Slovak government in connection with NATO membership were no less contradictory than the rhetoric coming from Bratislava. Thus Slovakia was an active participant in the Partnership for Peace initiative and received praise from NATO officials for its "exceptional results in its ability to cooperate with NATO units." (*CTK*, 5/5/97) However these achievements were largely overshadowed by a series of political problems, which resulted in Slovakia's exclusion from the first tier of NATO expansion. Among the most prominent factors that provoked this outcome were Slovakia's oft-criticized minority policies, Meciar's questionable commitment to democracy<sup>9</sup> and the unusually close ties to Russia. While the first two factors were common to several other applicants to NATO, the last factor was a particularly pressing concern in the West's assessment of Slovakia. As a result of several high-level diplomatic contacts, Slovakia and Russia signed a series of military cooperation accords, which according to the Russian ambassador to Slovakia, Sergei Zotov, could be far-reaching enough to complicate any future cooperation attempts between Slovakia and NATO. (*Independent*, 4/29/97)

Another symbolically important setback in Slovakia's quest for NATO membership was the failed popular referendum on May 23-24, 1997. The referendum was supposed to contain three questions on NATO membership<sup>10</sup> and one on direct elections for president. When the Slovak Interior Minister ignored a court ruling and distributed ballots without the fourth question, the Slovak opposition parties called for a boycott of the referendum. The resulting low voter turnout led to the invalidation of the referendum and was regarded both inside and outside Slovakia as another blow to the country's pretense of democracy and Western integration. But while the referendum provided a good

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<sup>8</sup> The connection between internal political struggles and foreign policy orientation will be analyzed in more detail in a later section.

<sup>9</sup> The main accusations of this account were Meciar's unsavory choice of political allies (the far-left ZRS and the far-right SNS), as well as his heavy-handed suppression of internal opponents.

<sup>10</sup> Opposition politicians complained about the wording of the questions, which included tendentious formulation regarding the stationing of nuclear troops and foreign troops on Slovak territory. (*RFE/RL* 5/22/97).

illustration of the internal political obstacles to NATO integration<sup>11</sup>, its timing had little influence on Slovakia's failure to be admitted to NATO at the Madrid summit a month later, since at that point Slovakia did not even figure on the extended list of potential first-round candidates.

### **Moldova: Limited Options**

Moldova's policy towards NATO started from a drastically different position than Slovakia's. The continuous presence of the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army on Moldovan territory despite the diplomatic efforts of the Chisinau officials to negotiate the withdrawal of these troops effectively limited the scope of Moldova's security policy. Thus Moldova's attitude towards NATO needs to be analyzed in the context of the country's overarching concern for territorial integrity, which is undermined by the existence of the Transdniestri Republic within the frontiers of the Moldovan Republic. Having experienced the disastrous consequences of open confrontation with Russia during the Transdniestri conflict<sup>12</sup>, Moldova based much of its security policy on the constitutionally sanctioned doctrine of permanent neutrality. Though inadequately defined from a strategic standpoint<sup>13</sup>, this doctrine nevertheless consistently shaped Moldova's stance on both NATO and CIS security arrangements through its refusal to accept foreign troops and military bases on the country's territory. As a result Moldova achieved a compromise solution for both internal and external conflicts of interest. On one hand Moldova never expressed any desire for NATO membership, and it voiced concerns about becoming a buffer zone if NATO enlargement proceeds at variance with Russian interests<sup>14</sup>, but on the other hand Moldova was one of the first former Soviet states to join NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative, and it also consistently resisted Russian pressures to join the CIS security structures. (Gabanyi 1996:13) Like in the case of Slovakia this mixed strategy reflects the fragile compromise between different factions of the local political elite, as well as the ambivalence of the masses: thus in a 1996 opinion poll about the importance of foreign policy orientations, 31.6% of respondents emphasized relationships with Russia, 23% with Romania and 21.6% with the West. (*Arena Politica*, 1996)

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<sup>11</sup> These obstacles were further illustrated by the pre-referendum campaign, in which Meciar's HZDS refrained from taking public position, while its coalition partners (SNS and ZRS) openly campaigned against NATO membership.

<sup>12</sup> The willingness of Russia to provide open support for the separatist forces in Tiraspol and the failure of the West to provide any support to the Moldovan government will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

<sup>13</sup> Moldovan Foreign Minister, Mihai Popov, quoted in Negru (1997:7)

<sup>14</sup> Moldovan Ambassador to Washington, Nicolae Tau, quoted in Negru (1997:5).

## On Reconciling the Two Measures

Unlike the UN voting record, the attitudes towards NATO expansion substantiate the initial assumption about a special path of Moldova's and Slovakia's foreign policies. While the apparent discrepancy between the two measures of political orientation can be interpreted as invalidating at least one of the measures<sup>15</sup>, I would argue that they just reflect different instances of the two countries' foreign policies. The two measures differ in at least two significant ways: the UN voting record is much less subject to internal constraints than the NATO debate, and furthermore – particularly in the case of Moldova – the stakes of the NATO/security debate were considerably higher<sup>16</sup>. These differences provide important cues to understanding the degree to which small states like Moldova and Slovakia can maneuver around the interests of the great powers. But in order to do so, one needs to first turn to a more detailed analysis of the economic and political factors, which shaped the foreign policies of the two countries.

## FACTORS SHAPING FOREIGN POLICY

### Economic Dependence

One of the most obvious mechanisms, which interferes with an autonomous foreign policy is economic dependence. From this perspective both Moldova and Slovakia started out with a handicap in comparison with their peers, even though, again one has to emphasize that there are significant differences in degree. Both were heavily dependent on Russian gas and both had economies traditionally oriented towards Eastern markets, but while Slovakia has been somewhat of a success story even by Central European standards, Moldova found itself in the unenviable position of being the poorest among the non-Central Asian former Soviet republics. While much has been written about the politics of Moldova's and Slovakia's economic dependence – in particular on Russia – the following analysis will only attempt to provide a concise summary of the main economic factors that have influenced the two countries' foreign policy towards Russia and the West.

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<sup>15</sup> The argument can go either way, but I think that the more powerful objection would be to dismiss the UN voting record as a mere formality, which provides an easy opportunity for Slovakia to pretend adherence to the West or for Moldova to emphasize its neutrality. Nevertheless, I would argue that one shouldn't underestimate the UN as a forum for foreign policy expression. Furthermore, a 4-year voting record may be less susceptible to subjective interpretations than the often disputable rhetoric surrounding the NATO expansion debate.

<sup>16</sup> After all Russia has been adamant about trying to impose its security interests on Moldova, but has made no comment about Moldova's stance at the UN.

## Moldova: Extreme Poverty and Dependence

Moldova's economy displays all the ingredients for economic disaster: a large, unreformed agricultural sector, an outdated, rapidly shrinking industry and an almost complete dependence on external energy. Agriculture, which makes up 50% of Moldova's GDP, has suffered from limited land reforms<sup>17</sup> and was hard hit by the 1994 drought, during which agricultural output declined by 22%. (*European Review World of Information*, 4/97) Industrial output fared even worse during the early transition years: its contribution to total GDP declined from 35% in 1990 to 25% in 1995. This decline was due in part to the quasi-disappearance of traditional markets for Moldovan products<sup>18</sup> as well as to the situation in Transdnistr, where 40% of Moldova's industry was located, and where Russian-backed local authorities enacted a ban on privatization. (*European Review World of Information*, 4/97) To make things worse, Moldova continues to import 98% of its energy from Russia, Ukraine and Transdnistr<sup>19</sup>, and it made little progress to reduce its extreme dependence on external energy sources. (Bercu 1997:5)

The overall weakness of the Moldovan economy contributed to the country's external dependency in two significant ways. Firstly, Moldova had to apply for credits from the IMF and the World Bank, as well as the US and the European Community in order to keep the state functioning<sup>20</sup>. In order to ensure IMF support, the center-left government of Andrei Sangheli engaged in an unexpectedly radical reform program following IMF guidelines, including quite successful initiatives of large scale privatization and monetary stabilization. (*RFE/RL*, 3/11/94)

At the same time Moldova developed an even more visible dependence on Russia through the large accumulation of energy-related debts. By early 1997 Moldova owed Russia more than \$740 million, which represented almost half of the country's increasingly problematic foreign debt<sup>21</sup>. This self-reinforcing economic dependence<sup>22</sup> provided Russia with very visible levers to influence Moldovan foreign policy, since Russian leaders did not hesitate to threaten to cut-off energy supplies – and thereby bring Moldova's economy to a virtual standstill – if Moldova resisted Russian interests in the

<sup>17</sup> The leading Agrarian Party (PDAM) has consistently opposed land reform and has imposed a ban on the sale of farmland until 2001. (*European Review World of Information*, 4/97)

<sup>18</sup> As William Crowther mentions, trade accounted for more than 50% of Moldova's GDP before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the vast majority of this trade was with directed to other Soviet republics. (Crowther 1996, pp.128) When these markets collapsed, so did many of the industries that were oriented towards these markets.

<sup>19</sup> 80% of Moldova's energy generation capability is located in Transdnistr, over which the Moldovan government has not exercised de facto control since 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Combined credits from the IMF, the World Bank and EBRD amounted to almost \$600m of the \$1.5bn debt of Moldova by early 1997 (Bercu 1997:2; *European Review World of Information*, 4/97)

<sup>21</sup> The \$1.5bn foreign debt represented 51% of Moldova's GDP as of December 1996. The servicing of this foreign debt amounts to 7% of the 1997 state budget and the figure could rise to 15-20% in the near future. (Bercu 1997:3)

<sup>22</sup> One of the mechanisms of reinforcement were the debt for equity swaps, which enabled Russia to acquire large shares in Moldovan energy sector enterprises and associated oil-gas pipeline networks (*European Review World of Information*, 4/97), as well as in Banca de Economii, the largest Moldovan savings bank. (IPS, 10/27/95)

region (Bercu 1997:4-5). Another significant instance of Russia's ability to dictate Moldovan foreign policy through economic threats occurred during the debates surrounding CIS membership. When the Moldovan parliament refused to ratify the CIS membership declaration in August 1993, Russia excluded Moldova from the CIS tariff and tax agreements, which would have had catastrophic consequences for the heavily trade-oriented Moldovan economy. As a consequence, one month later Mircea Snegur, Moldova's president, signed the CIS treaty, which was ratified by the newly elected, PDAM dominated parliament in April 1994. (Gabanyi 1996:14)

Even this brief summary of Moldova's economic woes illustrates the high degree of double dependence of Moldova towards both Russia and the West. Faced with this difficult situation Moldovan authorities tried to engage in attempts to balance one potential hegemon with the other. Thus, Moldova received support from EBRD to build an oil terminal on the Danube in an effort to reduce its dependence on Russian oil (Interfax, 11/29/94). Also, Moldova received a \$250m loan from the World Bank to repay Russian oil debts after Russia had temporarily shut off oil supplies in late 1994 (Journal of Commerce, 12/8/94), but as noted before the energy related debts towards Russia have again substantially risen since then. In the other direction Moldova has even less leverage to defend itself against potential pressures from the West, given that neither Russia nor Romania are capable of offering the financial assistance Moldova desperately needs during its difficult transition. A partial reprieve was provided by Romania's politically motivated economic support, but its scope was limited<sup>23</sup> and it subjected Moldova to a new kind of political conditionality. (Gabanyi 1996:20-21) Thus, at least from an economic perspective Moldova has essentially no room to play the balance of power game between Russia and the West, but is instead forced to walk the thin line between the conflicting requirements dictated by its double dependence.

### **Slovakia: Politically Exacerbated Structural Problems**

Compared to Moldova, Slovakia started its independent journey from a privileged economic position: its GDP per capita, while lower than that of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia, was nevertheless higher than that of Poland and the other Eastern European countries. (*PlanEcon Report*, 4/30/93) From a structural perspective, however, Slovakia's economy was burdened by the preponderance of an antiquated heavy industry with a large military component. This industry relied heavily on energy and raw material imports from the former Soviet Union, and produced relatively uncompetitive semi-finished products directed primarily at former CMEA markets. (Janos 1997:19)

While a more detailed analysis of Slovakia's economic restructuring efforts is beyond the scope of this paper, I will focus on the special case of the Slovak arms industry as an illustration of the connection between economic interests and foreign policy outcomes. Between 1988-1992 the Slovak arms industry shrunk by almost 90%, resulting in layoffs

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<sup>23</sup> Part of the problem was Romania's own economic difficulties, as well as the lack of economic complementarity between the two countries, which are both agricultural exporters.

of 42,000 out of 52,000 workers employed in the industry, and even though these layoffs accounted for only 13-15% of total unemployment in Slovakia, the problem became heavily politicized. (*RFE/RL*, 9/24/93) The crisis became a key element on the political agenda of Slovak Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar, who used it to build internal electoral support<sup>24</sup> and to justify his foreign policy objectives. With regard to the latter objective the arms industry debacle offered ideal grounds for Meciar's agile political maneuvers. After the collapse of Communism Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel and Prime Minister Jiri Dienstbier (both ethnic Czechs) declared that the country would halt all weapon exports in an effort to improve Czechoslovakia's image in the West. Furthermore, as Meciar pointed out, "no one helped us with privatization and no one uttered a word of thanks," while the gap in the world market was filled by Poland and Russia. (*Washington Times*, 5/20/93) Having thus blamed Slovakia's woes on the West, Meciar promptly provided a solution to the problem, by pointing out that since a large part of Slovakia's unused economic capacity used to be oriented towards Russia, it made sense to revive mutual economic relations. (*BBC*, 7/6/93)

The policies of the Slovakian government with regard to economic cooperation with Russia were largely consistent with Meciar's rhetoric. In other words, Slovakia was willing to build a preferential relationship with Russia as a way to buy extra freedom from the demands of the West. As mentioned before, the West was highly skeptical of Slovakia's arms industry<sup>25</sup>, but provided little practical assistance to facilitate conversion to civilian use. (*RFE/RL*, 9/24/93) In a wider context not just the arms industry, but much of Slovakia's heavy industry was threatened by a close adherence to Western reform prescriptions, since many of these firms were poorly equipped to survive under market conditions. Thus, at least for a certain part of Slovak society (and its political exponents) cooperation with Russia provided distinct advantages:

1. Heavily subsidized raw materials and fuel imports at rates well below world market prices, which has enabled several key Slovakian industrial giants to remain profitable despite minimal restructuring<sup>26</sup>.
2. Cooperation in the domain of military technology, both in terms of technological exchanges as well as in joint manufacturing, such as the project to manufacture jet engines for the Russian Yak-130 aircraft in Slovakia. (*BBC*, 3/18/95) Even though there is little evidence that Russia actually bought significant quantities of Slovak weapons, Slovakia's ability to export weapons was contingent on Russian support, given that a large proportion of Slovak arms relied on Russian technology.

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<sup>24</sup> This aspect will be discussed in a later section of the paper that deals with the interaction between internal and external politics.

<sup>25</sup> In view of the generally low quality of Slovak arms, Western specialists worried that Slovakia would have to sell to third-world countries (e.g. Syria, Iran), which have trouble buying weapons from the West. (Samson 1997:36)

<sup>26</sup> Since March 1993 Slovakia was the only non-former Soviet Republic that participated in the Surgut project (the CIS version of OPEC). While prices have not been disclosed, based on data from other countries, they could be as much as 50% below market prices. (Samson 1997:27)

3. In another example of balance of power manipulation, Slovakia obtained \$150m in Russian support for the completion of the Mochovce nuclear plant, when an expected EBRD credit was delayed due to protests by Austria and other neighboring countries. (CDPSP, 3/15/97)

The economic benefits of cooperation with Russia during the mid 1990s may at least partially explain Slovakia's unexpectedly solid economic performance<sup>27</sup>, as well as Meciar's ability to dominate Slovak politics despite criticism from the West. But while Meciar and his supporters in the military-industrial complex certainly benefited from the close ties to Russia, the overall effects on Slovakia are somewhat more questionable. From an economic perspective the \$1.5bn trade deficit in 1996 suggests that Russia displayed little interest in the Slovakian products, despite the numerous trade agreements between the two countries. Furthermore, Slovakia under Meciar did next to nothing to reduce its quasi-total dependence on Russian gas (100%) and oil (80%), which rendered the country vulnerable to Russian political and economic developments. Another problematic aspect of Russian-Slovak relationship is the issue of the repayment of Russia's \$1.8bn debt: contrary to calls from the Slovak opposition, Meciar's government accepted Russian weapons instead of gas as a form of repayment<sup>28</sup>.

More importantly, though, the much-hailed special relationship between Bratislava and Moscow<sup>29</sup> raised major concerns in the West about Slovakia's commitment to Western integration. While the overall costs of this estrangement are impossible to evaluate, Slovakia's failure to be included in the first wave for NATO and the EC was at least partially due to Meciar's flirtation with Moscow. Even though Slovakia arguably fell short on several other criteria (minority rights, freedom of the press etc.) Western officials gave several explicit warnings to the Slovak government. Thus, Meciar renounced the proposed creation of a free trade zone with Russia after the EU warned Slovakia that such a step would jeopardize the country's chances of membership in the bloc. (Reuters, 4/27/97) Even if the timing and the benefits of EU and NATO membership can be questioned in view of the West's increasing reluctance to open its gates to Eastern Europe, Slovakia's undefined position between East and West has entailed tangible economic costs. Thus foreign investment in Slovakia was only a fraction of that of its neighbors<sup>30</sup>, and credits from international financial institutions also suffered due to political interference<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, since the bulk of Slovakia's exports were still

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<sup>27</sup> Since 1994 Slovakia has had consistently high growth rates and low inflation in comparison to other countries in the region (*World Development Indicators*).

<sup>28</sup> Given that most of the equipment is obsolete by NATO standards, the move can be interpreted as either an economic error or a deviation from the professed commitment to NATO membership.

<sup>29</sup> For example in March 1993, Meciar told Russian journalists that "the Slovak Republic and Russia may serve as an example of cooperation that will be followed by the countries of Eastern Europe." (CTK, 3/23/93)

<sup>30</sup> Through September 1996 Slovakia received \$800 million in foreign investments, in comparison to \$13bn for Hungary, \$10bn for Poland and \$6bn for the Czech Republic. (*Transitions*, 7/97)

<sup>31</sup> Telling with respect to the conditionality imposed by Western creditors is the fact that Slovakia received a large portion of its support from the IMF and the European Investment Bank during the short period (March-December 1994) when Meciar was not in power. (Kirschbaum 1995:24)



oriented towards the EC, the potential losses of a continued deterioration of the relationship with the West would have entailed considerable economic losses for Slovakia.

The possibly most relevant question, whether Slovakia's unorthodox *Wirtschaftswunder* would have been sustainable in the long run, can unfortunately not be answered without resorting to speculation<sup>32</sup>, given that Meciar's loss in the 1998 elections lead to a significant change in the country's economic and foreign policy. Regardless of the verdict on the economic sustainability of the Slovak model, Meciar's electoral defeat suggests the political limitations of such gambles. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that in contrast to Moldova's extreme dependence, Slovakia's superior strategic situation enabled the Meciar government to pursue a relatively successful balance of power strategy between Russia and the West in the economic realm.

## SECURITY THREATS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Slovakia and Moldova also differed along another significant factor influencing foreign policy independence: real or perceived threats to their political autonomy and territorial integrity. These threats have to be taken seriously at both the rhetorical and the action level because their effect on the orientation of foreign policy is likely to be amplified by Slovakia's and Moldova's short experience with independent statehood and the resulting high levels of insecurity about their identities.

### Slovakia: Threats from the West?

Slovakia's history and geographic location in Central Europe go a long way in explaining its foreign policy choices since independence. Its common border with Austria, its proximity to Vienna and its historical ties to the Habsburg monarchy provided a favorable starting point for Western integration. And even though Slovakia doesn't border any of the pre-enlargement NATO members, its location between Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland constituted a strategic advantage in the race for NATO membership. Firstly, Slovakia's admission to NATO along with its three Central European neighbors would have prevented the geographic isolation of Hungary within the alliance<sup>33</sup>, and secondly the country's cooptation into NATO would have preempted Russian attempts to reestablish its influence in the region. Yet, this promising potential was not fulfilled during the first six years of independent Slovak statehood, as illustrated by the country's failure to be included in the first wave of candidates for NATO and EC expansion.

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<sup>32</sup> Speculations on this subject abound, especially because IMF pressures on Russia may have eliminated preferential pricing for Russian energy resources after mid 1997.

<sup>33</sup> At least for now, Hungary will have no direct borders with any NATO member when it joins the alliance.

Slovakia's ambivalent attitude towards Western integration can also be traced to historical roots. Unlike Poland and to a lesser degree the Czech Republic and Hungary, Slovakia had no tragic historical experience with Russia to look back upon, and did not perceive Russia as a potential security threat. However, historical memories of Hungary's hegemony still resonated with a large part of the Slovakian electorate, and these fears were promptly exploited by a part of the Slovak political spectrum. In the eyes of many Slovaks the demands for greater autonomy of the substantial Hungarian minority in Southern Slovakia, combined with Hungary's vocal minority rights campaign amounted to a threat to Slovakia's territorial integrity<sup>34</sup>. The situation was further complicated by repeated Western insistence on minority and human rights as a precondition for joining Western institutions. Meciar managed to use the frequently arrogant tone of Western conditionality to justify his government's foreign policy orientation. Thus, when EU Commissioner Hans van den Broek conditioned Slovakia's participation at EU accession talks to an acceleration of democratic reforms, Meciar responded that nobody could make ultimatums to a sovereign state. (*CSM*, 7/9/97) Along similar lines Meciar employed the image of Slovakia as victim of an international conspiracy directed at undermining the country's integrity and autonomy. When questioned about Slovakia's purchase of Russian weapons, Meciar retorted his country was only responding to the arms race initiated by Hungary<sup>35</sup> and added that, unlike Hungary, "Slovakia was not receiving anything from Germany." (*CTK* 1/17/94) Thus, at least from a rhetorical standpoint, the threats to Slovakia's integrity and autonomy came from the West rather than Russia.

Even though it may be tempting to dismiss Meciar's occasionally shrill rhetoric as the manipulative ramblings of a populist would-be dictator, I would argue that a closer look at the tone and language of both sides of the dispute can provide important clues about the reasons for Slovakia's estrangement from the West. Even before Slovakia's independence the country suffered from an image problem in Western diplomatic and journalistic circles. Thus in the wake of Slovakia's independence a Western diplomat was quoted as referring to Bratislava as "this is where the Balkans start", and an assessment by a Western embassy pointed out that "while Prague is turning into a major European business center, Bratislava is more like Ruritania." (*Washington Times*, 12/15/92) Another Western analysis expressed concerns about "the creation of a state (...) with unclear ties to its allies and an uncertain future." (*ibid*, 12/15/92) Through their timing and their condescending tone such statements may have been self-fulfilling prophecies because, as Weber pointed out, "a nation forgives if its interests have been damaged, but no nation forgives if its honor has been offended," (Weber 1975:118) the West's insensitivity towards or underestimation of the easily offended pride of the Slovak leadership was further underscored by the reluctance of most high ranking Western European officials to meet with Meciar. (*Transitions*, 2/9/96)

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<sup>34</sup> One of the most frequently invoked proofs of Hungarian revisionism was an unfortunate public statement by Hungarian prime minister Antall, who declared that he considered himself Prime Minister over 15 million Hungarians (which included 5 million ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring countries.)

<sup>35</sup> The accusation was based on the fact that Hungary agreed to Russian weapon deliveries as a payback for Russia's debt to Hungary.

In contrast to the approach of the West, Russia tried to foster a harmonious relationship with the Slovak leadership. In order to forge closer ties to Slovakia, which they correctly diagnosed as the weak link among the Visegrad countries, Russian politicians not only cultivated frequent high-level contacts with Bratislava, but they repeatedly emphasized Russia's tolerance and support for Slovakia's political goals. For example Russian deputy foreign minister Aleksandr Avdeyev promised that Russia would fulfill Slovakia's trade demands and be "as attentive towards Slovak proposals as never before." (CTK, 10/13/97) Several Russian politicians have echoed Meciar's evaluation of Russian-Slovak relations as a model for other former Communist countries. Even with regard to the dispute about NATO enlargement, Sergei Zotov, the Russian ambassador in Bratislava, emphasized that "we recognize Slovakia must decide its own political line and we do not wish to force our opinion on her." (Reuters, 4/27/97)

Despite the differences in tone between the Russian and the Western diplomatic approach towards Slovakia, Russia did not hesitate to use its economic leverage<sup>36</sup> to influence Bratislava's foreign policy. Thus Zotov pointed out that even though Russia does not interfere in Slovakia's domestic affairs, "the sphere of economic and technological cooperation will objectively narrow if Slovakia enters NATO." (CTK, 4/27/97) Zotov even took this blackmail one step further by suggesting that NATO expansion would lead to higher defense budgets in Russia and thus negatively impact the country's ability to repay its debt towards Slovakia. (CTK, 4/27/97) At the same time Russia tried to take advantage of internal political cleavages in Slovakia by supporting the idea of a Russian-guaranteed neutrality for Slovakia proposed by the two extremist junior coalition partners of Meciar's government. (RFE/RL, 5/22/97)

The combination of Russian and Western conflicting claims on Slovakia's loyalty points towards a rather limited space for maneuvering for Slovak foreign policy, despite Meciar's conviction that closer economic ties with Russia would not conflict with his country's objectives of NATO and EC membership. (CDPSP, 3/15/95) Even though Meciar's "best-of-both-worlds" vision of Slovak foreign policy could have theoretically worked even for such sensitive areas as arms compatibility<sup>37</sup>, it underestimated the degree of polarization that still exists between Russia and its former Cold War enemies. This conflict was aptly expressed by Zotov, who predicted that the Slovak-Russian arms accords "could be far-reaching enough to complicate any further attempt of Slovakia and NATO to get together." (Independent, 4/29/97) Thus, Meciar's concerns about Slovakia getting "crushed again between Germany and Russia" (Reuters, 12/5/96), appear justified at least from an ideological perspective. In conclusion, most of the evidence suggests that Slovakia's balance of power strategy did not pay off. Regardless of whether this failure

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<sup>36</sup> As discussed in an earlier section of this paper, Slovakia's reliance on cheap Russian raw materials and energy led to dependence on Russia. Given the disparity in size between the two countries and the limited demand for Slovak goods in Russia the reverse was hardly true.

<sup>37</sup> According to an interesting analysis in *Aerospace America* (5/95) Slovakia was able to get the best of both worlds by buying Russian aircraft (which were both cheaper and more reliable than their Western counterparts) and adapting their communication systems to NATO standards.

was due to miscalculation<sup>38</sup> or the existence of a hidden agenda<sup>39</sup> Slovakia's choices were severely limited by the strict conditionality that the West imposed for EU and NATO membership, as well as by Russia's strategy to tie economic support to political cooperation.

### **Moldova: Existential Security Threats**

If for Slovakia the costs of its foreign policy "adventure" were primarily a delay in admission to the EC and NATO, in the case of Moldova the stakes were much higher. After gaining its official independence during the chaotic days of the August 1991 coup in Moscow, Moldova had to confront a series of threats not only to its territorial integrity but also to its very existence as a sovereign state.

The first and arguably most fundamental threat to Moldovan independence came from the reformist Popular Front of Moldova, which had won the first free elections in 1990 and which actively pursued reunification with Romania. Though many outside observers had anticipated this reunification as an inevitable consequence of the close ethnic and cultural similarities between the two countries, the reunification movement lost momentum starting in early 1992 and has steadily declined ever since. From an internal perspective, popular support for reunification suffered due to mixed memories of Bucharest's inter-war rule of the region, fears of ethnic unrest from Moldova's large and vocal ethnic minorities, and to a certain degree as a result of 40 years of intense Soviet indoctrination. Moldova's largely russified elite had good reasons to believe that joining Romania would prove to be a bad career move and deprive them of prestigious posts in the new state. (Kolsto, 1996:123) From an external perspective, the separatist crisis in Transdnestr constituted a clear signal that Russia was willing to defend its regional interests through the use of force, and that neither Romania nor the West would be able or willing to intervene.<sup>40</sup> As Moldova has increasingly rejected the possibility of reunification, its ideologues have made sustained efforts to popularize the doctrine of Moldovanism, which emphasizes the distinctiveness of Moldova's cultural and historic heritage<sup>41</sup>.

By avoiding reunification with Romania, the Moldovan government ensured the survival of Moldova as a state. But this survival only marked the beginning of a difficult struggle to define the country's position in the international arena in the context of

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<sup>38</sup> Some analysts argue that Slovakia over-estimated its own strategic importance to NATO and therefore mistakenly thought it could get away with ignoring Western demands. (Samson 1997, pp.41)

<sup>39</sup> Meciar has been frequently accused by the Slovak opposition of either being an agent of Moscow, or of placing his private interests above the state interests of Slovakia. (*RFE/RL*, 5/22/97)

<sup>40</sup> According to former Romanian Prime Minister Adrian Nastase reported that he had received more or less direct warnings from Western politicians against pursuing an active unification policy towards Moldova (*Dimineata*, 9/2/94)

<sup>41</sup> While this unexpectedly successful effort constitutes a fascinating and original approach to the identity crisis facing Moldovan society, its details are beyond the scope of this essay. For an interesting analysis of this topic, see Igor Munteanu's article '*Moldovanism' as a Political Weapon* (*Transition*, 10/4/96)

formidable internal and external constraints. Along with the country's aforementioned extreme economic dependence, the most difficult trial for Moldova was the Transdnestr crisis, which has undermined Moldova's territorial integrity and played a decisive role in shaping both Moldova's internal politics and its foreign policy. While ostensibly an internal ethnic conflict, the Transdnestr crisis was the core of the heated debate about Moldova's international status and Russia's role in the region.

The importance of the Transdnestr conflict in the wider context of the debate about Moldova's international status and Russia's role in the region was probably best summarized by Nicolae Nau, Moldova's ambassador to the UN, during a speech in front of the UN General Assembly. Nau emphasized that the crisis was not – as Russia had claimed – an inter-ethnic but rather a political conflict used by Russia as an excuse to justify the continued presence of its armed forces on Moldova's territory. He furthermore accused Russia of ultimately pursuing the goal of “restoring the old imperial structures with the blessing of the international community.” (*Moldova Suverana*, 10/14/93)

Nau's strong claims are supported by a series of key events and several declarations by Russian officials. The key strategic importance of maintaining Russian troops in Transdnestr was emphasized among others by General Lebed, the Commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Russian army, who called Transdnestr “Russia's key to the Balkans” and emphasized that if Russia left this strategic crossroads between the Ukraine, Romania and the Black Sea, it would lose its influence on the entire region (quoted in Gabanyi, 1996:9). While the fact of Russian political, economic and military support for the self-proclaimed Dniestr Republic has never been questioned<sup>42</sup>, Russia's initial justification of defending the endangered rights of Russian nationals in the region has become increasingly untenable as a result of Moldova's extremely liberal minority policy<sup>43</sup>. Instead, several facts suggest that Russia's primary goal was to use the Transdnestr crisis as leverage against Moldova's resistance to Russian interests in the region. Thus, the violence in Transdnestr, which eventually escalated into a full-scale war, erupted less than a week after Snegur had attacked the Russian military presence in Moldova during a visit to the West and suggested the rapid resolution of this conflict in accordance with the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference (Cojocaru 1996:7). Another similarly questionable “coincidence” occurred several months later, when units of the 14<sup>th</sup> Russian army joined the Dniestr rebels less than a week after Moldova had refused to sign the CIS collective security pact. And while these timing questions can be cast aside as mere speculations, Russia explicitly acknowledged that the importance of its armed presence in the region extended beyond the scope of the Transdnestr conflict and that the timing and order of the troop withdrawal was contingent on Russian-Moldovan relations<sup>44</sup>. (Cojocaru 1996:4)

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<sup>42</sup> Moscow did not just arm the separatist rebels, but units of the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army actually joined the Dniestr forces in their open battles with the Moldovan forces. (Crowther 1996:345)

<sup>43</sup> All the other mother countries of Moldova's ethnic minorities (Ukraine, Bulgaria, Turkey and Israel) have openly acknowledged the country's climate of ethnic tolerance. (*RFE/RL*, 4/22/94)

<sup>44</sup> It is worth mentioning that Russia seems to have at least partially achieved its objectives, since the agreement about the 14<sup>th</sup> army withdrawal includes a clause that allows Russia to use the military airport in Tiraspol and to fly over Moldova's territory. Furthermore, an additional protocol to the treaty contains a

Nau's final claim about Russia's attempt to pursue its imperial ambitions with the blessing of the international community hints at the pivotal role of the West in the Transdnestr conflict and in the larger context of Russian-Moldovan relations. The changing nature of Western geo-strategic interests provides the second element needed to understand the constraints on Moldovan foreign policy strategies during the 1990s. During the early part of the decade the West was willing to sacrifice Moldovan interests for regional stability. Before the August 1991 coup in Moscow, the United States was willing to sanction Soviet non-Baltic territorial gains as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact in order to prevent the potentially dangerous destabilization of the Soviet Union. Consequently the West used its influence to encourage Moldova from staying in the Soviet Union and to discourage any potential reunification plans between Moldova and Romania. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the West exerted considerable pressures on Moldova to join the newly formed CIS structures.

As one would expect, during this period Moldova had essentially no chance to pursue an independent foreign policy and even less of an opportunity to play a balance of power game, since both superpowers were pushing it into the same direction. Thus, Snegur and other Moldovan politicians have hinted that Moldova's signing of the CIS economic agreement had occurred as a result of IMF and World Bank pressures, who had conditioned support for Moldova to CIS membership<sup>45</sup>. It was during this period that most of the fighting in Transdnestr took place, and as one would expect, there were only subdued reactions from the West about the crisis. In this sense Moldova suffered from the typical predicament of a small state unfortunate enough to find itself in a generally recognized exclusive sphere of influence of a hegemonic power. As Handel (1981:171-172) points out, such countries lose their freedom to maneuver and implicitly the ability to gain political and economic advantages by playing one power against another.

After 1994, the strategic interests of the West in the region changed, and thus created an altered set of foreign policy constraints and opportunities for the government in Chisinau. Thus, Moldova (along with the Ukraine and Belarus) was assigned the function of a *cordon sanitaire* between Europe and an increasingly assertive Russia. (Gabanyi 1996:29-30) As a consequence Moldova not only received recognition from the West for its stable democracy, exemplary minority policy and successful economic reforms, but the also West expressed its active support for Moldova's territorial integrity and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transdnestr<sup>46</sup>. However, these changes were driven not only by the changing strategic priorities of the West, but also by the careful maneuvers of Moldova's foreign policy attempts to balance its dependence on the two superpowers. Much of this strategy had to do with the close cooperation between the

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clause about reciprocal support in the case of a third party aggression, which Moldova had refused to accept as part of the CIS security arrangements. (Gabanyi 1996:31)

<sup>45</sup> According to Alexandru Mosanu, the head of the Moldovan parliament "we were pushed into CIS by several large Western powers. They have counseled us in this direction and even reproached us because we, as democrats, do not want to join the CIS." (quoted in Gabanyi 1996:28) If Mosanu's claims are true, we are here dealing with one of the most cynical perversions of Western conditionality.

<sup>46</sup> During a meeting with Snegur in Chisinau, Madeleine Albright emphasized that the withdrawal of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army was one of Washington's top priorities. (*Romania Libera*, 9/3/94)

Moldovan government and the OSCE mission in Moldova in trying to solve the Transdnistr crisis. Moldova followed OSCE recommendations on minority policies and language rights, and thereby not only gained the approval of the West, but also weakened the legitimacy of Russian and Transdnestrian claims that Chişinău's policies were the main reason for the continuation of the crisis.

Moldova's strengthened international position resulting from this rapprochement to the West was illustrated by Moldova's threat to vote against the admission of Russia to the Council of Europe unless Russia withdrew its troops from Transdnistr. (Gabanyi 1996:29) Despite Moldova's improved strategic position in recent years, it would be premature and even misleading to consider it an escape from Moscow's orbit. First, Russia is still postponing the withdrawal of the 3000 troops and the massive weapons arsenals of the 14<sup>th</sup> army from Transdnistr. Second, despite OSCE's continued involvement in the Transdnistr negotiations, Moldova is unlikely to receive more substantial Western support, given that NATO has specifically indicated that it would not get involved in the issue (*DPA* 2/11/2000). Finally, the election of the outspokenly pro-Russian former Communist Party Secretary Petru Lucinschi as President of Moldova suggests that Moscow still plays an important role in Moldova's domestic politics. While it is hard to assess to what degree Lucinschi's election can be attributed to declarations like that of Russian CIS Minister Aman Tuleev, who told *Pravda* that Russia should give no more credits to Moldova if Snegur was reelected president (*Transitions*, 11/16/96), Lucinschi's certainly played the Russian card by promising to use his "close personal contacts with the Russian leadership" for Moldova's benefit (*RFE/RL*, 12/30/96). Even though there is little evidence that under Lucinschi's presidency Moldova has drifted closer to Russia, it is safe to say that the alternative option is not less dependence but only a differently distributed dependence in both the economic and the political spheres.

However, there are significant differences between the two camps in terms of the expected degree of influence and compliance, and these differences are clearly reflected in the rhetoric employed in their relationship to Moldova. As seen from other statements quoted in this paper, Russia found it hard to adjust its rhetoric to the reality of Moldova's post-Soviet independent statehood, and instead treated Chisinau on the basis of old center-periphery relations. Indicative for this approach was Lebed's threat to hang Snegur "from the nearest telegraph pole" if he opposed Russia's policies in the Dniestr region. (quoted in *Transition*, 11/15/96) By contrast Western interaction with Moldova was characterized by an unusually tolerant and flexible tone, such as Javier Solana's declaration that "Moldova is not forced to choose between East and West," but instead could pursue its constitutionally sanctioned neutrality, which is in accordance to NATO's strategy for European security.

## COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Several more general conclusions arise from this analysis of Moldova's and Slovakia's foreign policy dilemmas. First, even though the two countries shared a special position between East and West, these positions were subject to different expectations and interpretations by both Russia and the West. Thus, Slovakia was regarded as a "natural" candidate for Western integration, and therefore its decision to deviate from the expected path was scorned by the West and supported by Russia. In the case of Moldova the reverse was true: as a result of its location in Russia's near abroad, Moldova was expected to accept Russia's hegemony in matters of security and foreign policy. When it failed to comply, it was promptly sanctioned by Russia, and – after an initial reluctance – supported by the West in its endeavor. These responses suggest that the end of the Cold War has resulted in an eastward shift of the line dividing Russian and western spheres of influence: thus the West has replaced Russia as the primary hegemon in Eastern Europe, but at the same time has been more careful and more tolerant of Russian excesses in the non-Baltic former Soviet republics. This tacit understanding may explain NATO's assertive role in Yugoslavia despite vocal protests from Russia, as well as the West's willingness to largely ignore Russia's Chechen war.

Second, the aforementioned spheres-of-influence expectations also played an important role in defining the rhetorical tone used in diplomatic interaction. Thus, the primary hegemon (the West for Slovakia and Russia for Moldova) was more likely to try to dictate conditions to their 'natural subordinate', while being more cautious and courteous in dealing with the other hegemon's 'natural subordinate'. However, there are significant differences between the punishment/rewards strategies of Russia and the West. These differences appear to be largely a function of the hegemon's particular strengths: thus Russia tended to emphasize military cooperation/threats and delivery/blocking of natural resources, while the West focused more on membership in various "clubs" (EC, NATO) and access to funding from multilateral institutions (World Bank, IMF) as a way to reinforce loyalty. On the other hand the NATO intervention in Kosovo has demonstrated the willingness of the West to resort to the stick in situations where the carrot proves insufficient to bring about the desired policies. Another important difference between Russia's treatment of Moldova and the West's treatment of Slovakia, is that while the former conflict centered around compulsory membership in a supra-national organization (CIS), the latter involved denial of membership in supra-national organization (EC, NATO). Thus Russia focused on punishments to prevent deviance, while the West withheld rewards as an incentive for compliance.

Finally, Russia and the West also differed in terms of their threshold for punishments/rewards. Russia's expectations of Moldova centered primarily on military and economic participation in CIS structures and to a lesser degree to the treatment of its co-nationals in Moldova. These requirements appear more narrowly focused than the demands that the West placed on Slovakia, which were usually only vaguely described under the generic categories of democracy, human rights and economic reforms. But while the West imposed both broader and more fundamental demands on the identity of



its would-be allies, Russia used more drastic measures to punish transgression of its admittedly less stringent requirements. At the risk of over-generalizing, I would argue that Russia's interest in Moldova was primarily strategic (a key to the Balkans), whereas the West pursued more ideologically charged objectives and expected Slovakia to adopt a much broader *Weltanschauung* before being accepted to the community of Western states<sup>47</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

This final difference may go a long way in explaining why Russia was willing to tolerate relatively high levels of deviance in Moldova's UN voting record, but intervened with maximum force when Moldova tried to take an independent stance on regional security issues. Furthermore, if we regard the UN voting record as an expression of international solidarity, we can provide at least a tentative explanation for the discrepancy between the two measures of foreign policy orientations proposed at the beginning of this paper. Thus, I would argue that Moldova and Slovakia correctly identified the UN as a forum where they could deviate from Russia's position without risking serious retaliation, given that in the post-Cold War period Russia had retreated from claims to being a world power to a more modest regional role. This leeway could then be used either as a low-cost way for both Slovakia and Moldova to express adherence to Western values or as in the case of Moldova as a safe arena in which to exercise a foreign policy independence otherwise restricted by a variety of threats and dependencies. On the other hand, the advantages to be gained from such a strategy by the two countries was arguably limited by the West's focus on ideological and strategic objectives rather than displays of international solidarity such as UN voting.

The evidence presented in this paper then suggests that neither Moldova nor Slovakia had much leeway to pursue a successful balance-of-power strategy. For Moldova the main reason lies in its extreme economic dependence on both Russia and the West, which combined with its strategically vulnerable position practically precluded any attempt to maneuver between the two super-powers. In other words, the most that Moldova can hope for under current conditions, is to choose a slightly less oppressive mode of domination. Slovakia, on the other hand, had better cards both economically and strategically, but - as the country's trajectory until Meciar's defeat in the 1998 elections suggests - its attempts to play a balance-of-power game between Russia and the West have been severely limited by the West's stringent compliance requirements and Russia's failure to provide a credible alternative for Slovakia's future development. Therefore, it appears that in the current context of the post Cold War power constellation small countries such as Moldova and Slovakia are strictly limited in their ability to pursue balance-of-power strategies. And even though it may be tempting to speculate how a renewed security threat from a neo-imperialist Russia would impact the strategic

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<sup>47</sup> This is not to say that the West had no strategic priorities in Eastern Europe, but rather to emphasize the much greater role of ideology in Western than in Russian conditionality.

importance of the small Eastern European buffer states, the question lies in the realm of speculation and thus goes beyond the scope of this essay.

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