

MOLDOVA

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LOUIS F. LICHT III **Deputy Chief of Mission** **Chisinau (1994-1996)**

Mr. Licht was born in Maine and raised in New York. Educated at Yale University and the Fletcher School, he served in the US Army in Vietnam and joined the State Department in 1974. Mr. Licht served in Washington, dealing with Latin American Affairs as well as Arms Control and Nuclear matters. His foreign posts were Santo Domingo, Lima, Canberra, Yerevan and Chisinau (Moldova). Mr. Licht was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: Well, you served then in Moscow from when to when? Was it Moscow?

LICHT: No, I didn't go to Moscow. I served in Moldova, whose capital is Chisinau. The question was whether I should take Romanian or Russian. I took Russian, and my wife took Romanian. It didn't work out terribly well. There was a time we were at the dinner table, and we had a translator translate what each other would say to each other.

Q: You were in Moldova from 1994 to when?

LICHT: 1994 to 1996, under Ambassador Mary Pendleton, and under Ambassador Todd Stewart. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Pendleton served from August 1992 to August 1995 and Ambassador Stewart served from November 1995 to August 1998.]

Q: What were your duties in Moldova?

LICHT: In Moldova, I personally was a number two in a small embassy. In fact, Ambassador Pendleton was the first ambassador there. Essentially, I was DCM and chief of the joint Political/Economic Section and eventually a DCM position was established. In Moldova, we had a concern that the split of the Transnistria area, which continues today, was a problem. It

probably is the most important issue out there. The other concern was to try to make Moldova a viable place, to promote democracy, and give assistance. While we were there, one of the things we did was establish a stock market. AID had contractors and one of the big eight accounting firms there working on that sort of project. I spent a fair amount of time monitoring projects such as that. I would attend meetings that the organizers had. They would come to my office when they had problems, and we would try to work them out.

The Moldavians were going through a period of privatization of industry, through a very complicated process of distributing vouchers to all citizens, and trying to avoid mistakes that were made in Russia. They had their own system of doing that. Moldova was a country that was the most rural of the former Soviet Union states. Half of the people still live on the land. It is also the most populous per mile, although it doesn't seem that way. Chisinau is an undistinguished city with a nice park in the middle, with a center that still has the one-story buildings, old houses, but not terribly interesting old houses. Then, it is surrounded by the larger apartment houses of the type the Soviets built.

The people in Moldova are nice people. They are sort of Romanian, and sort of Russian. They are sort of confused about who they are. At the time we were there, there was some progress being made. I think Moldova was being considered a success, as far as U.S. aid was concerned. When I got there, a mission was there. I think since then Moldova hasn't done so well. I think there has been some more difficulty with drugs, that sort of problem. Transnistria was a nut that wasn't going to easily be cracked.

Q: That's essentially an area on the other side of the Nester River, which is Russian, isn't it?

LICHT: Yes, it's more of a Russian mixing pot. More Russian population, Russian army. People who retire to Transnistria. So, there's a larger Russian speaking population. Those who speak Romanian there still read it in Cyrillic, whereas in Moldova, they changed back to the Romanian alphabet. So, the people are really confused. Moldavians have been part of Romania, part of the Soviet Union, they are independent, they don't know if they want to be part of Romania again. Some people think it's like being the Appalachia of Romania, so why do that? It's a place, of course, where a lot of people have studied and operated in Russian and now they have to operate in Moldovan, which is really Romanian.

Q: Your wife was doing what then?

LICHT: Her background is in computers, and she worked as a systems analyst for IBM. She was able to get a job working with the systems there. She really didn't find it satisfying. In fact, she was pretty frustrated.

Q: During the 1994 to 1996 period, were we trying to do anything about the Transnistria issue, or was this something that was going to be settled by Moldova?

LICHT: No, we were deeply involved. The OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) has a mission there. The second head of it was an American. There have been other Americans who have been head of it. We were involved in trying to mediate that dispute and we

had a negotiator named Joe Proessel, who when I was there would come frequently and talk to the president, and would go over to Transnistria. It was really interesting. You would go over to Transnistria which some wags call a museum of Communism. You would talk to those people. There was a lot of discussion going on and there were people from the outside who would come in and hold seminars, or take everyone away to Norway, or some other place. It was sort of like what you said about Palau.

Q: When the Soviet Union broke up, every advanced European country, United States and Canada sent experts or non-governmental organizations. The place was full of advice givers. I did it myself. I went to Kyrgyzstan to tell them how to set up a consular service. But, one wonders how really effective this all was. Sometimes it didn't seem that much was being accepted; although it was great for those who received grants.

LICHT: We were wondering about that all the time. We tried to monitor it from the embassy. We tried to get a good idea of how money was being spent, and whether it was being spent in the right way. Intellectually, it was hard to get around it, and from the point of view of people coming in with big plans; to make those plans work, they had to have good relations with the government. They had to understand what was going on. They would come with models that would or would not fit.

The embassy did its best to keep up with all these people who were coming. People would come down from Ukraine, and come down to make a promise that could not be fulfilled. You would have to go in and explain that these guys misspoke. It happened once in a while. One thing I always thought about doing somewhere along the line was try to figure out just how much good all these programs were. I think there is a recent book about some of them. There are probably scads of books about them. It's a rich area to study. I was convinced that a certain amount of good was being done. If you were setting up the stock market, or the privatization exercise. Those things pushed ahead the free market in those places and was of some advantage to the country's long-term interest. Assisting in helping set up the courts. It often came down to how good an individual was, and what sort of relations he had with the government. You often would think a certain amount of money was being wasted.

Q: Would you say in Moldova, which was on one side of the Dniester, change was happening, but on the other side (Transnistria) it was pretty much as it was during communism?

LICHT: That's a pretty good way of looking at it. Not much was happening on that side of the Dniester. It was the old ways as far as you could go.

Q: Did you have a feel for whether there was concern there about maybe the Ukraine gobbling up this area?

LICHT: No. The Ukraine was of assistance in the Transnistria program, in the Transnistria negotiations, but it wasn't... It was more of the Russians not wanting to solve this particular problem at this point. Why should they at this point? They had their Russia, they had their troops there. The other thing was that there was this huge number of arms there. That is where Army had its arsenal [Kolbasna]. There was an untold number of everything, and they didn't quite

know themselves. A lot of it was rusting, and it's still there. To get the troops to leave wasn't exactly the solution, because the ammunition and explosives were still there and who would be guarding it? You wanted it guarded.

Q: It sounds like, in a way, it was duplicating a little bit of what we had to contend with in the Panama Canal or the French Algerians. The people who were living there don't want to be taken over or give up. In Transnistria they probably had, comparatively, a pretty good life.

LICHT: Yes, it didn't look as if Transnistria was going anywhere in particular, more from stagnation than from an industrial point of view, but the people turned themselves over to Moldova, which to them wasn't necessarily the homeland. But, also, [Igor] Smirnov, the fellow who ran it, and probably still runs it, and his troops were also known for getting involved in a number of crooked dealings and getting rich. They had some pretty ugly histories behind them. These were people you wouldn't necessarily invite to dinner. There were some very clever people there. There was a man who attended all these conferences, and was available. It was kind of fun to deal with him, but he was making a career of being foreign minister.

Q: When you left there in 1996, wither Moldova, what did you think at the time?

LICHT: I thought there was some chance for advance, that some Moldavians were probably getting the idea of what they needed to make the economy work. A certain amount of affection for them probably inspired a little bit of optimism. But, nobody expected anything to happen really fast. They were working out of the old mentality, which is not very fast. After we left, there was a project there that succeeded quite nicely. It was an offshoot of one that my wife worked on briefly for AID. AID tried to establish a system where Moldavians were trained to be consultants to new business. This sounded a little flaky to me because you are training some people to be consultants, something they haven't done in the past. There was a man there whose name was Vince Moravito, who has an interesting history and was hired by AID and the Soros Foundation to run this project. He knew someone who was, in fact, Moldovan, who had been reportedly in the Land Redistribution and Parks for Russia. He came up with a plan; he imported this man and together they came up with this plan that would help prioritize the cooperative parts, in a more logical way than saying, "Here's the farm, everyone gets one-eighth of it," and some people got the pond. They came up with a way to engage the people who were in the cooperative in the first place, to decide how it was fair to divide it up, giving people who wanted to get out, an out, like teachers. In fact, they started privatizing land, and since that program started, they privatized quite a bit of land. There would be a situation where the American ambassador would go and hand someone a deed. People would embrace him in tears. It was quite wonderful.

JOHN TODD STEWART
Ambassador
Moldova (1995-1998)

Ambassador Stewart was born in New Jersey and raised in New York City and

San Francisco. He attended Stanford University and the Fletcher School and entered the Foreign Service in 1962. His first post in Munich was followed by posts in Venezuela, Geneva, Moscow, Jamaica, Costa Rica, Canada, and an ambassadorship to the Republic of Moldova. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1999.

STEWART: '95. I was off to the Republic of Moldova. I had served in Moscow in the '70s, and I still had a lot of contacts in the Department from my time there. I hadn't done anything in that area since Moscow, but I was certainly interested in a chief of mission assignment. So I went to see one of the deputies in the pseudo-bureau S/NIS, which was responsible for the newly independent states. The head of S/NIS is a special assistant to the Secretary, and he had a small office with a couple of deputies. The line offices are theoretically part of European Bureau but actually report to this person. The idea was to make it a formal bureau, but both Jesse Helms and Joe Biden, agreeing on something for once, opposed that concept.

Q: Two Senators.

STEWART: Yes, and both were opposed so I don't think that S/NIS is going to survive the change of administration. In any case, S/NIS wanted me for an ambassadorship and Dick Moose and Genta Hawkins, the Director General of the Foreign Service, said they would support me also, so I was able to get nominated by the President as Ambassador to Moldova.

Q: Were there any political candidates or was this a job for the professionals?

STEWART: There was no political interest as my predecessor had been doing her dishes in the bathtub. She had operated under difficult circumstances.

Q: Who was it?

STEWART: Mary Pendleton. An administrative officer by cone, she'd done a very good job in getting the post in shape. She had rented a nice house for us which wasn't fully furnished by the time we arrived, but it was at least functioning. It was a lot better than her accommodations, which consisted of a hotel suite without a kitchen.

Q: You were there from when to when?

STEWART: I was there from '95 to '98.

Q: What's the capital of Moldova?

STEWART: Chisinau.

Q: Your Senate hearing. Any problems?

STEWART: None whatsoever. That all went quite smoothly. The fun began after the hearing, though, because the Administration and our good friend Mr. Helms got into it over the question

of amalgamating the foreign affairs agencies. The administration was resisting this idea which, bizarrely enough, originated in the State Department. Christopher pushed it but was overruled by the White House. Helms then espoused the idea and took it into his head that he would hold up all ambassadorial nominees to put pressure on the White House. The logic of this escaped me as I was unaware of anyone in the White House who really cared about the nominees. In any case, about 30 of us were put on hold for several months. We were actually reduced to begging Senators and their staff members for help in getting released. I called up Diane Feinstein's office and importuned Nancy Kassebaum on a plane flight. It was that bad. I got released in the second tranche, which was comparatively fortunate.

Q: What was Moldova like when you got there? What were the American interests? Talk a little about the government and what it was doing. We can pick it up here next time.

Today is the 19th of April, 2000. We are going to talk about Moldova. You were there from when to when?

STEWART: I arrived in November of 1995 and left in August of 1998.

Q: When you arrived there, what was the state of the government and the country? What were our interests at that point?

STEWART: Moldova had declared its independence on August 27, 1991, as the USSR was breaking up. At that time a problem was developing with a secessionist faction on the eastern bank of the Dnister River, a sliver of land along the Ukrainian border which is called Transnistria in Romanian. That dispute worsened into armed hostilities during 1992. By the time I got there, there was still an armed truce between the Transnistrian separatists and the government in Chisinau.

Q: What were they after?

STEWART: The situation is theoretically complicated but a good deal simpler in reality. Most Transnistrian residents are native speakers of Russian or Ukrainian--Slavic speakers--while the majority of the population on the west bank of the Dnister are native Romanian speakers. The ostensible cause of the conflict was the fear, which was not beyond reason, that Moldova would merge with Romania. And these Slavic speakers in Transnistria did not want that to happen as they would become a minority in greater Romania. This was the ostensible cause of the conflict, which was exacerbated by the fact that there was a concentration of Russian troops in Transnistria that sided with the rebels and provided arms and manpower to resist the attempt by the central government to retake the area.

As a merger with Romania became less and less likely in succeeding years and no solution to the separatist problem was reached, it became clear that the real difficulty lay in the fact that Transnistria was being run by a small clique which was making a good deal of money from the area's unique status. Transnistria, where the ruling clique had formed an unrecognized

government, served as a base for the supply of drugs, arms, and tax-free liquor and cigarettes to other parts of the region. In addition, the regime received free energy in the form of gas from the pipeline that ran from Russia to the Balkans. They were able to sell this energy to industries in Transnistria and pocket the income. They also received a percentage of the profits from the other illegal activities which were based in the area. In charge of what amounted to a robbers' nest, they were doing quite well financially from the unrecognized statehood that they had created.

Q: How about the Ukrainian government?

STEWART: The Ukrainian government officially was helping Chisinau find a solution to the problem of separatism. But the entire situation was complicated greatly by the strong probability that the Transnistrian regime was making pay-offs all through the region, to people in Kiev, Moscow, and probably Chisinau as well. Many people had a financial stake in the continuation of the impasse, therefore.

Q: This situation is just another instance of the general problem after the break-up of the Soviet Union where "entrepreneurs," who were basically equivalent to robber barons, were milking the whole situation for what they could.

STEWART: That is certainly true although these people went a step further. Boris Berezovsky may not be a Boy Scout, but he has not displayed pretensions to statehood as these characters did. And in addition to simply buying influence, they were able to play off the interests of some nationalists in Moscow in keeping a Russian force in Transnistria. Whether this really made any sort of geopolitical sense for Russia is something else again. But despite the best efforts of the OSCE membership in demanding the removal of these Russian troops and their arms and ammunition, they are still there. The Russians recently agreed to pull them out within the next year or two, but it remains to be seen whether that actually happens.

Q: Did we have any position on this, or was this just a local problem?

STEWART: No, we definitely did take a stand. Our position was coordinated through the OSCE, and we, like the rest of the OSCE membership, including the Russians - it was a consensus decision - agreed that yes, these Russian troops had to be removed along with their arms and ammunition. The arms and ammunition are important because there was a very large dump of Soviet armaments in a town called Kolbasna in northern Transnistria that was supposed to supply the Red Army in the event of hostilities in the Balkans. This was a considerable problem because a lot of these armaments were quite old and unstable. Moving them would have been a dangerous proposition. The Transnistrian regime was putting up all sorts of objections to the evacuation or destruction of the Kolbasna materiel because they were almost certainly conniving in the sale of usable weapons and ammunition to one insurgent group or the other in the region. I would not be at all surprised if a number of them ended up in Chechnya or the former Yugoslavia. That's why the obvious strategy was to get rid of the arms and ammunition, then to get rid of the Russian troops, and then to put pressure on the Transnistrian regime to come to terms with the government in Chisinau. However, despite some very active efforts by the OSCE during the majority of my time there, very little progress was made in this direction.

Q: How about Moldova as a geographic unit when you arrived there? I am old enough to remember when Stalin grabbed Bessarabia. And this is essentially Bessarabia, is it not? Because there are oil fields there.

STEWART: No, not in Bessarabia. You are thinking of Romania, where the oil is.

Q: I thought Bessarabia had oil or something.

STEWART: No, no. Theoretically it has some, but there has never been any substantial commercial production. What you say is essentially correct, with two caveats. First of all, Bessarabia does not include Transnistria, the part of Moldova across the Dniester River. And second of all, Khrushchev redrew the map at one point, giving northern Bessarabia and southern Bessarabia to Ukraine and thereby cutting off the direct access of Moldova to the Black Sea and putting some traditional Romanian-speaking areas into Ukraine. Admittedly, borders are rather fluid in that part of the world. You have to remember that in northern Moldova you are a stone's throw away from Chernowitz, which was the eastern-most provincial capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The influences in that area were Romanian, Russian, and Austrian, with lingering Turkish influences as well.

Q: Hungarian, too?

STEWART: Not Hungarian. The Magyars went through Moldova, and some of the place names are actually Magyar, but there is really no Magyar influence. There were some German towns there through World War II, in fact up until around 1990, but the population then came west.

Q: Before we get to what you were doing, at the time you arrived was it still possible that Moldova might become part of Romania?

STEWART: By the time I arrived, there was really no prospect of Moldova's integration into Romania. There are a couple of reasons for this. First of all, a third of the population are native Slavic speakers, so you would have had immediate problem with that significant minority. Russian is not an official language but it is widely used, particularly in commercial circles. Integration into a greater Romania would have certainly been resisted for all sorts of reasons, some quite understandable, by the Russian-speaking minority.

However, the situation is complicated in that respect because there are really two kinds of Slavic speakers in Moldova. One group has lived in the area for generations, and these people by and large speak Romanian to some degree. There are towns that have some Russian speakers, some Ukrainian speakers and some Romanian speakers. The people tend to speak each other's language, and that is how they get on. I remember talking to Foreign Minister Popov about this. He explained that he had grown up in Transnistria in a town with native Russian speakers, native Ukrainian speakers, and native Romanian speakers like himself, where the lingua franca was Romanian. Thus, you have people who are not ethnically Romanian but nonetheless speak the language—that is one group, and their integration into a Romanian-speaking society would not represent a huge problem. However, you have another group of Russian speakers who came to Moldova from other parts of the U.S.S.R. and don't speak a word of Romanian, know nothing

about Romanian traditions, and feel about Romanian culture as Russians living in Tashkent presumably feel about Uzbek culture.

Q: These were engineers and skilled workers who came?

STEWART: It was a combination of things. The people who control Transnistria are very much in this group. Smirnov, the president of the so-called Transnistrian Republic, came in the mid-1980s from another part of the Soviet Union to run a factory, and the head of the security forces there came after independence from Latvia, where there is reportedly still a warrant for his arrest. It was a wonderful place to come and take a piece of the action. But in addition to people like Smirnov, there are a great number of pensioners who came during Soviet days. All things are relative, of course, but Moldova was the Florida of the U.S.S.R., the republic with the most temperate climate, which was attractive to retirees. These people do not speak Romanian and have no connections with the area, period. With independence and the economic problems that followed, they suddenly became some of the most disadvantaged members of society because the ethnic Ukrainian and Russians from the area, like the ethnic Romanians, had village roots.

City dwellers with village roots can travel out to their villages and do a little informal barter, bringing some goodies from the markets in Chisinau and getting in return apples, eggs, and chickens. They are able to subsist in that way. The society is very heavily agrarian in that sense as most people have one foot in the village. Some still maintain houses there and visit them on weekends. These are not dachas but real houses in a village. This is where male Moldovans make wine, far and away the favorite hobby of the country. Everybody makes his own wine. If you go to a Moldovan's home, you often get the *vin de casa* that the head of household has made back in the village and aged in his wine cellar there. We drank some remarkable wines there, some very good, others not so.

Q: I take it that the Russian pensioners, their pensions either devalued or non-existent, didn't have a support system?

STEWART: That's exactly it. They got hammered.

Q: I hear about this, and I've been to Bishkek and seen little old babushkas sitting there with a pack of cigarettes and three light bulbs on a board in front of them. You have to have food in order to live. How did they exist?

STEWART: There were many solutions. The connection to the countryside was the principal one. You may also have some relative who has immigrated and is sending money home, and you may have something you can rent or sell that gives you a little bit of income. A lot of Moldovans, the class I dealt with, still owned apartments in Moscow from the days when they were Soviet officials. Those could be rented out to produce income. You get a little bit here and a little bit there, including something from the factory where you work, for converting state property to your use wasn't considered stealing. Many factories hadn't been effectively privatized, and the assets were up for grabs. People grabbed.

Q: Let's talk about your going there. Can you talk about the Embassy itself, the staff, the

building, and then we'll talk about dealing with the government, presenting credentials and so on?

STEWART: We were quite fortunate, my wife and I, because we succeeded an ambassador who was an administrative officer. She'd done a very good job of bringing along the embassy as an institution so that it was a functioning place when we arrived. As you'll recall, when we recognized the newly independent states after the break-up of the Soviet Union, James Baker, who was Secretary of State at the time, decided not to ask Congress for money to open embassies there. Consequently, halfway solutions were reached in constructing or renting chanceries in lots of places. The situation in Chisinau, while not ideal, was among the better outcomes. We took over a building which had been the Polish consulate between the wars, when Chisinau was part of Romania, and subsequently had several other incarnations. It was a delightful late Edwardian building which we gutted and carved up into office space in the cheapest possible way. However, that space was far superior to the consular section, which was located in a trailer out back. This turned out to be a considerable problem shortly after I arrived because Chisinau had a very cold winter and the trailer did not have adequate insulation in the floor. Our consular officer actually developed frostbite on the soles of her feet.

Q: As a consular professional, I consider this our normal life. I assume that as the ambassador, you had warm feet?

STEWART: I was quite warm although we had a close call. A new heating system had been installed, but the boiler, which had not been properly serviced, was about to shut down. Fortunately a new administrative officer with a facilities maintenance background arrived shortly after we did, and he managed to fix the boiler by getting on our tie-line to Washington and calling up the 800 service number at the factory in Texas. He was down under the boiler holding the phone while somebody in Texas explained to him what to do. But he got it fixed. Fortunately, the following spring FBO, the Foreign Buildings Office, did snap into action and constructed in a very short period a consular annex. It was supposedly a rehabilitation of a building which existed next door, but for all intents and purposes we had an entirely new building with adequate heating. It was far and away the best constructed part of the whole complex.

Q: What was the size of your staff?

STEWART: When I arrived, we had about 10 Americans assigned from Washington, plus a contract facilities manager and about 30 Foreign Service Nationals. However, there were also some 30 American AID contractors and their Moldovan employees so the entire mission consisted of around 100 people. The AID contractors were very much integrated into mission operations. There was no division as far as I was concerned, and I looked on them as members of my staff.

Q: We'll come back to the various parts of the mission and what they were doing. What was the government of Moldova and how did you deal with it?

STEWART: The government of Moldova was formed under a constitution the country had adopted in the mid-1990s, and it was a most peculiar constitution indeed. It read as if someone

had laid out the aspects of different constitutional forms--presidential, parliamentary, etc.--and then chose certain aspects from one form and other aspects from another. It didn't really hang together. The president's position was not very powerful on paper, but yet it was an elected presidency and the population probably believed the position to be much more influential than it actually was. This was a cause of considerable difficulty. The president had no real veto power over legislation, and the parliament was free under the Constitution to vote down proposals by the government with no threat of dissolution from either the president or the prime minister. The possibilities for gridlock were legion in the constitutional arrangements. It's strange that the constitution came out this way, for the Moldovans did have advice from the Council of Europe in drawing up its provisions. There would have been no difficulty if the president and the majority of parliament were on the same wavelength, but sad to say, that didn't happen very much during my tour. The upshot was that much time was wasted, and some serious problems of economic and political transition remained unaddressed. The disputes were all too often rooted in personal differences rather than policy differences.

Q: Who was the president?

STEWART: The first president was Mircea Snegur. Unfortunately, he had a falling out with the government a few months before I arrived, and there was no way that he could dismiss the government. In fact, he was actively working against the government in parliament for much of the time. The upshot was that there were many delays in passing legislation that was quite necessary for the political and economic transformation of the country.

The second president was Petru Lucinschi, who ran on a very progressive platform. However, the old parliament was still in business when he came into office. Parliamentary elections were held during my last six months, and a group of parties that supported Lucinschi's policies won a majority in parliament and were able to form, after torturous negotiations, a coalition to support a government which espoused these reforms. Indeed, the president did appoint such a government, but personality clashes got worse and worse, and a few months after my departure and the economic collapse in Russia, the coalition fell apart. Regrettably, it has not been possible to form an effective government since that time.

Q: When you arrived there, you had a president who was on the outs with his parliament. When you had certain things you wanted to explain--American positions, votes in the U.N., the normal round of things--to whom would you go? How did you deal with the government?

STEWART: It depended on the issue. If it was routine delivery of mail, we went to the foreign ministry. That was usually adequate, for in the UN the Moldovans would vote with the U.S. as long as the issue did not involve a serious conflict between us and the European Union or the Russians. In those cases they would usually abstain. For more sensitive bilateral issues, especially in the area of defense, I would ordinarily go to the president, who called the shots in that area. Although the constitution is far from clear about this, the president is the commander in chief of the armed forces and that gave him authority in defense matters. I'll give you one example, the sale of the MIG 29s, which was certainly the most noteworthy event that occurred in Moldova during the time I was there.

Q: What was the context?

STEWART: Moldova had some 27 MIG 29s that they inherited from the USSR. These planes were the original wasting asset. The Moldovans didn't have enough money to buy the fuel to fly them, nor the airspace to fly them in.

Q: It was pretty much the Soviet top-of-the-line advanced fighter, was it not?

STEWART: Yes. The Moldovans ended up with their share of the booty, but the question was what they were going to do with them. They wanted to sell them, but there were a limited number of countries that would want to buy MIG 29's and could buy MIG 29's without the U.S. violently objecting. There were repeated rumors that the Moldovans were going to sell the planes to the Iranians, perhaps through some sort of cut-out.

Q: A cut-out meaning a third party who would resell them to the Iranians.

STEWART: Exactly. As a result, the Pentagon exercised its authority under legislation to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction to buy almost all the MIGs from the Moldovans. The Moldovans eventually agreed to the terms in the fall of 1997. The planes were then picked up by U.S. freighter aircraft and hauled back to the U.S.

Q: Just take them out of the game, was that it?

STEWART: Yes, that was it. The idea was just to take them out of the game. Where they ended up, I am not sure. I think some of them may be on display somewhere, and others may be used for pilot training, but they ended up here.

Q: How did you do this? You went to the president to work out this deal?

STEWART: That's right, but the details were negotiated by the Ministry of Defense and a team from our Defense Department.

Q: Where they surprised, when you said we wanted to buy the planes?

STEWART: The sale was quite a happy solution, I think, as far as the Moldovans were concerned because they got money for the MIGs but did not incur the wrath of the U.S. The only problem was whether the price was adequate, and that was a sticky issue.

Q: I assume you had a military attaché or attachés there?

STEWART: We did not for the great majority of my time. We had a series of temporary attachés, who certainly were better than nothing, but the permanent attaché did not arrive until the last months of my tour.

Q: Were you running around airfields looking at MIG 29s, kicking the tires and slamming doors?

STEWART: I went up to watch a couple of the planes being shipped off, but in general, no. Our temporary attaché was doing that kind of thing, and then we had a team of specialists from Washington who understood something about MIG 29s.

Q: How about economic ties with Moldova? Did we have any interest other than to see that the country survived?

STEWART: Our goals in Moldova were, first of all, to facilitate the political and economic transformation of the country into a democratic, prosperous state, and then second of all, to solve the Transnistrian problem in a manner consistent with OSCE principles. The main tool that we had to achieve the first objective was our AID program, and that was sizable. During my last year, it was around \$25 million, which for a country of 4.4 million is quite large these days. On per capita basis, it was second largest in the newly independent states after Armenia.

Our biggest program by far, which was developed during my tenure, was the so-called Land Program, which was responsible for breaking up and privatizing the former collective and state farms. This was a huge program because it involved the surveying of the 1000-odd farms into individual plots, the deeding of those plots to members of the former collective, and the issuing of title documents. This required the expenditures of over ten million dollars over the course of several years because the U.S. government paid for the surveying and titling. The process was quite complicated because the former members of the collective farm had to decide which parcels they wanted to have. Then provisions were made for people who didn't intend to work their land to lease or sell it to aspiring agricultural entrepreneurs. Moldovan land is extremely fertile as it is largely a continuation of the black soil region which runs down from Ukraine. Horticulture is especially renowned, and grapes are certainly the most famous crop. But there were far too many people involved in agriculture in the past, and the productivity of labor was very low indeed. A fair migration to the cities occurred during the late communist days, so about half the beneficiaries of privatization were retired people who didn't want to work the land but wanted to sell or lease it. Thus, the Land Program was a first step in the complete reorganization of Moldovan agriculture, and with it the Moldovan economy, since primary and processed agriculture accounts for about half the country's GDP.

Q: Was there a solid agricultural class there that could get out and do the work or did they have to be trained?

STEWART: No, there was definitely an agricultural class. The country had a number of institutes at the university level which trained agronomists so there was no shortage of agricultural specialists. What was lacking, however, was the economic framework for agricultural production. And that is what we were attempting to establish. During the communist period collective farm workers did as little as possible, for there was no incentive to do more. With the fall of communism Moldovan agriculturalists found themselves in an incentive system, but one without the institutions and information of a properly functioning market. That's a tough adjustment to make.

Q: What about the infrastructure of farming? To run a productive farm is really quite

complicated. You have to have spare parts and you have to have organizations to deliver the inputs that are needed to grow crops. The Soviet system, from what I gather, really didn't have much of this. Was this a problem?

STEWART: It was a tremendous problem. You had, by the time I arrived, a great amount of rusting machinery or machinery that was just being held together with the proverbial baling wire. One of the things that we concentrated on during my last year, which has gone forward, I gather, since my departure, was the development of more investment in agricultural inputs on the part of western businesses and Moldovan entrepreneurs. The model was a village farm service center that would sell seed, fertilizer and herbicide and rent tractors and other equipment in exchange for a part of the crop. This sort of institution had existed in a sense in the communist system, but the idea of making money at the end of the line was not a part of it, of course. Still the notion that had to be overcome in rural Moldova that all this should be provided free by somebody, and of course it doesn't work that way in a market economy. You have to pay for it.

Q: I assume that agriculture was probably the primary focus for Moldova, sitting on that very good hunk of soil, its greatest resource.

STEWART: Absolutely, no question about it.

Q: Were other parts of Europe taking pieces of this action to help Moldova?

STEWART: The European Union did have an active technical assistance program called TACIS. There was some investment coming from Western Europe into Moldovan factories, into a rug factory, for example, that turned out quite good quality rugs for international markets. That factory was eventually bought out by a German firm. More and more of these kinds of investment were occurring during the time I was there, but still you didn't see any major breakthroughs. No one was constructing factories to employ 5,000 people. That was not happening.

Q: How about the neighbors on both sides, Romania and Ukraine? Ukraine was not going through a very positive development at that point, from what I gather?

STEWART: To put it mildly, and of course it still isn't.

Q: I don't know about Romania, but I would think Ukraine would have been a drag.

STEWART: That was a terrible problem, frankly. Many American companies had gone into Ukraine and had, by and large, awful experiences that soured the reputation of the area, including Moldova. A lot of those companies would have been able to operate quite successfully in a Moldovan context, but they were not going to take a shot at it because of their bad experience in Ukraine. An additional problem was the lack of clear leadership in the Moldovan government because of the trifurcated power division I mentioned earlier. The Moldovans lacked a coherent investment policy, and their negotiators didn't have the authority to offer something attractive to a foreign investor.

Q: Did you find yourself in an odd position, trying to attract American investors to Moldova?

STEWART: The position wasn't really odd, for promoting American investment is certainly high on the list of any ambassador's responsibilities. It was difficult, though. We worked primarily through the AID program, first in encouraging Moldovans to sell their major state assets to foreign investors with the help of U.S. merchant banks whose services were financed in part by AID. We also had quite a successful program, which continues today, through the Citizens' Network for Foreign Affairs, a non-profit organization here in Washington that encourages investment by U.S. agribusiness firms abroad. Indeed some small, but not insignificant, investments were made through that channel. Working through Citizens' Network, AID provided some backing in technical assistance for the investments. For example, a Minneapolis company with AID support bought controlling interest in two dairies and started producing milk with a long enough shelf life for sale in Chisinau markets; they also started producing yogurt, some of which was exported. This is stuff that would sell at western-style prices because it was a western-style product. McDonald's opened their first restaurant on Chisinau's main drag during my tour and then opened two more after I left. Things were happening, but it was not on a scale that one could point to an investment and say, "My God, that is going to make a huge difference." Collectively, though, a good deal of difference was made. If you compared the main street in Chisinau when we arrived in '95 to the street when we left in '98, you would be amazed at the difference.

Q: How did your wife find living there?

STEWART: I think she enjoyed herself tremendously. We both studied Romanian before going, and we were both able to operate in the language when we arrived. It was certainly a requirement, for you can't establish meaningful contact through interpreters. We had a residence that my predecessor was kind enough to find for us, which was, although it had its peculiarities, probably the finest home in Chisinau. We were able to entertain well and did a lot of entertaining. Certainly Moldovans appreciated invitations to the Ambassador's residence, for diplomatic life was previously not available to them.

Speaking Romanian, my wife served as a bridge between the Moldovan and English-speaking communities. She founded an international spouses club to involve foreign spouses in Moldovan life and took a special interest in the local medical community for whom she helped to organize significant charitable support.

Q: Were the Moldovans developing an interest in private organizations as they learned what was going on in the U.S. and Western Europe?

STEWART: Very much so. This is something that we encouraged through our own program of exchanges, which sent Moldovans to the U.S. for different periods of time, as long as a couple of years for graduate study, but mainly for shorter trips, a couple of weeks typically. We had one program called Community Connections, which took key people from a town in Moldova and sent them off to a community in the U.S. to spend three or four weeks. They would live with families there to see how the U.S. operated. There was a good deal of travel to Western Europe and to Central Europe as well. Hungary was an obvious destination since there was a flight a day

each way between Chisinau and Budapest. The Hungarians had, of course, gone through the same sorts of transition that Moldovans were going through, and their experiences were thus relevant to the problems Moldova was facing at that time.

Q: Were you running into the problems that arose in Ukraine where Kuchma was suspected of human rights abuses? Was this a problem at all?

STEWART: No. The worst thing on the human rights front was the fact that the conditions in prisons were pretty bad, but conditions outside the prisons were pretty bad, too, so one couldn't assign the problem much priority. Of course, this judgment leaves aside Transnistria, where there were all sorts of human rights abuses.

Q: Was Transnistria almost outside the pale as far as you were concerned? Could you operate there at all?

STEWART: Yes, we could. We had contacts with--"opposition groups" is too strong a word--groups that didn't see eye to eye with the regime. We were supporting a radio station there, for example, that provided an independent source of news. I did not have regular dealings with people in the regime there, but I designated an officer to act as a liaison because periodically there were things that we had to talk to them about. This officer would go over on a weekly basis to make his rounds, talking to both unofficial people in Transnistria and to the regime as well. I did make a couple of trips to the steel mill in northern Transnistria as it played down the fact it was in Transnistria and had some ties to Chisinau as well. I tremble to think who all was getting pay-offs from that operation in exchange for the virtually free energy it probably received. That certainly helps the bottom line if you're running an electric arc furnace. In any case, I would go into Transnistria if there was some good reason to go, such as to the Russian commander there, who was a fixture on the Moldovan scene. We had a regular relationship with him, and the military attaché would deal with his staff.

Q: Did you have any concern about implying official recognition of the regime by your presence there?

STEWART: That was a part of my concern, and I never put myself in a situation where I was subjecting myself to any "border controls." When I went to the steel mill, my car was simply whisked through the "border" because the head of the steel plant pretty well ran that part of Transnistria.

Q: Was the leadership in Moldova, including Transnistria, basically former Communists?

STEWART: With a very few exceptions, everybody had been a party member. There was no overt political activity in Moldova before the break-up of the USSR except during the last couple of years when a wave of Romanian nationalism swept the country. It was all tied up in the language question. This is complicated enough to write a book about it--in fact, Charles King of Georgetown University did just that in *The Moldovans*. Suffice it to say that the Romanian language in Moldova had been called Moldovan under communism, and it had been written with Cyrillic rather than Roman letters. With perestroika and the electoral success of non-communists

in 1990, the republic's legislature changed the script back to Roman. This was one of the key events in the post-war history of the country.

Q: When you were there, was language a big divisive issue or were they sort of working things out?

STEWART: That's a good question and there is no easy answer. I maintained that any educated Moldovan would have to be able to speak Romanian, Russian and English. I think that observation is essentially becoming true. Kids who have gone through high school since 1990 are trained in all three languages and can operate in all three. This is colossally important in terms of their understanding of the world because the domestic media are God awful. The newspapers had some Moldovan news, but there was no investigative reporting and only cryptic analysis. They also did not circulate outside the capital. As the radio is also weak, the main source of information for most people is television. Cable existed in Chisinau, and service was pretty ubiquitous. The cable offerings included not only Moldovan TV, one private and one public channel, but also Moscow channels, Bucharest channels, and then all the international channels--CNN, Spanish, Italian, German, British, etc.--so it was perfectly possible to get from the tube all sorts of international news in the strict sense and in a more general cultural sense if you could understand the language of transmission. In the countryside it was more difficult. In a lot of towns there was a cable network, formal or informal. In the villages you generally just had three broadcast channels, one from Moscow, one from Bucharest and the Moldovan station.

Q: In the television business, most of these networks, the international ones, have English programs so that English is sort of the lingua franca, to use the wrong term, for understanding what's going on.

STEWART: This is true, and the kids that are coming out of high school are able to understand it. Certainly one of the most successful programs that the U.S. government had in Moldova was the Peace Corps program in teaching English. We put a lot of volunteers into this work and some are still out in the regional high schools where they are having an enormous impact.

Q: I would have thought that this would have been a very positive experience for the Peace Corps people.

STEWART: I think it was. We had a lot of volunteers in the country, over a hundred, which again is a lot for that population. They certainly did very, very well.

Q: You mentioned that the AID program in Moldova was second only to Armenia on a per capita basis. Well, Armenia has a huge, or very powerful, lobby in the U.S., and that is why Armenia is getting so much assistance. Was there any equivalent Romanian or Moldovan group in the U.S.?

STEWART: No. There are, of course, Romanian groups, but by and large they have a pro-unionist agenda that doesn't really have much relevance. I should mention in that regard that there is also very little enthusiasm in Romania for unionism, in large measure because of the Slavic minority in Moldova. The Romanians already have enough problems with the Hungarians inside the borders. Taking in a bunch of Russians - or people they consider Russians - they need

that like they need a hole in the head.

Q: What about Romania? Did it exert much influence while you were there?

STEWART: I would say surprisingly little. One thing the Romanians did have was an active program of scholarships. Moldovan kids were able to study in Bucharest, Iasi or some other Romanian city on scholarship. And that was quite attractive.

Q: The role of the OSCE. Did it function almost as another foreign power? How did the OSCE fit into the Chisinau diplomatic scene?

STEWART: Let me give you a little more context. The main international organizations in Chisinau during my tenure were the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the OSCE. Aside from the IMF for one year, the heads of these organizations were all Americans. By and large, I think we got along quite well. On the economic side, the Bank and Fund reps and I were the big players. We met regularly to keep things well sorted out, and we brought in the European Union and the Germans, who had a bilateral program also, as the need arose. As far as the OSCE was concerned, the first head of mission and I overlapped for only about six months, and I really didn't have enough feeling for the situation to be critical or commendatory about what he was doing. The second head adopted a rather different policy, one that I applauded.

Q: Who was he?

STEWART: Don Johnson, Ambassador Johnson, who had been Ambassador to Mongolia. Don was pushing very, very hard for an agreement to get the Russian troops and materiel out. And then for a deal to end the Transnistrian secession which would be consistent with OSCE principles. That last part is important because the real question with a Transnistrian settlement was whether democratic principles would be respected in the area. The last thing the ruling clique wanted to have was a free election. I am sure they realized they would be voted out and that would end their sources of income. As a result, we had to be very careful about any solution that was proposed. The Moldovans were quite willing to grant considerable autonomy to the region, even in cultural affairs, for they had no problems in making Russian an official language in Transnistria. The real sticking point was the question of democratic rule. If Chisinau insisted on retaining authority for organizing elections, they would be free and fair, and that is what the Smirnov clique, which we called the kleptocracy, would not tolerate.

Q: Were the Russians - this would be Yeltsin's period, I guess - playing a game there at all?

STEWART: Not a very coherent game. Part of the problem resulted from the chaos in Moscow. There was no clear line on Transnistria or much else for that matter. Sometimes the Russians seemed to be promoting a reasonable settlement, and other times they appeared obdurate. There were plenty of good reasons, by my lights, for the Russians to want a settlement along the lines I described because the kleptocracy's involvement in arms trading only served the interests of internal instability in the Russian Federation. Even the idea of having a Russian base in the area struck me always as nonsensical. What good is a small force separated from the Russian

Federation by 500-600 kilometers in this little sliver of land east of the Dnister? If the Ukrainians wanted to sweep in, they could mop up the 2,000 men without much difficulty. It made no earthly sense.

Q: More inertia than anything else?

STEWART: I think that's probably true. The idea was that this had been part of the old USSR and the Russian Empire, and therefore we will not pull back. We conquered this land, it's ours and we have an obligation to keep it.

Q: You are in a place where two thirds of the country is speaking a Romance language. I would think this would be a place where the French would want to launch a cultural offensive, pushing French and all that. Did you find much of that there?

STEWART: Not a great deal. The French ambassador had a rather odd position. He divided his time between Paris and Chisinau. He didn't even have a residence in Chisinau, but stayed in a hotel during his visits. Sure there were French language days and that sort of thing, but English was by far the predominant western language. During Soviet times, if you were studying in Romanian, you studied French as a second language. And if you were studying in Russian, you studied English as a second language. That all came to a screeching halt with independence, and almost everybody switched to English.

Q: Speaking of English, this was the beginning of the time of the Internet - in other words, the ability to connect distant locations with the rest of civilization via computers? Was this beginning to happen in Moldova?

STEWART: Sure it was. In fact, we put some money into building computer centers at universities and government offices so that people there could get on the net.

Q: What was your impression of the youth coming out of the universities? Are they a different cut than the old leaders, or will they be?

STEWART: Let me say one thing about the Internet before getting off the subject. I have bookmarked on my computer here a site that's run by the Independent Journalism Center in Chisinau. If I am interested in some news from Moldova, I just click on that bookmark and I get a daily summary in Romanian, Russian and English. The people there are Internet literate, and they have made that sort of progress.

There is a generational shift in Moldova. The person that became prime minister after I left--unfortunately he later lost his job as a result of the personality conflicts I was describing--is almost a perfect example of the new breed. He's turned 40 this year, he's been in charge of an agricultural processing company with several factories that turned apples into apple juice and exported the juice to Western Europe. A very interesting guy. He speaks enough English for cocktail parties, and he was interesting to talk to--immediately western. The current prime minister, although God knows he's got problems right now, is another representative of this breed. Again around 40, he was Moldova's chief negotiator for WTO accession. An even

younger example is the number two WTO negotiator, who is about 30 and smart as a whip. I was talking about him to friends of mine at USTR who dealt with him, and their reaction was, "Wow!"

Q: I take it that Moldova can be included in the Balkans, but this is not an area riven by tribal disputes like the former Yugoslavia.

STEWART: No, the Moldovans do not get their jollies by carving their next door neighbors into small pieces - thank God.

Q: Before we end this segment, how did you find your relations with Washington? Was Moldova a place where you had to jump up and down and say, "Hey, remember us!?" I sense you got fairly good support.

STEWART: Certainly in terms of money for the AID program we did. And that's interesting in view of the lack of a Moldovan diaspora. So much of our policy in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is driven by hyphenated Americans that came out of a particular area in the region. That is not true for Moldova. The only significant group of Americans that came out of my area was Bessarabian Jews, and they have no family connections at all to present-day Moldova. There is a not insignificant Jewish community of about 40,000 in Chisinau, but they came from other parts of USSR after the war.

Given this lack of domestic political support in the U.S., the relatively large AID program is a tribute to the successful use of previous AID allocations. I was bitching earlier about the Moldovans' failure to move faster in dealing with the problems of transition, and that's quite true. And yet compared to the other countries, they've done pretty well indeed. In terms of holding democratic elections, their performance has been almost flawless. There is also freedom of speech. The speech may not always be very sensible, but that happens in other places, too.

In terms of economic progress, the Land Program is a model for the rest of the newly independent states. I didn't go into other aspects of the economic assistance program although it staggers me how much had to be done and how much progress has been made.

One of the things that we and the World Bank were working on was the transformation of the accounting system. It sounds rather prosaic, but if you think for a moment, unless an accounting system is modeled on western standards, the economy can't function very well. The factory manager doesn't know what to produce because he doesn't know what lines are profitable. The government can't collect income taxes because the tax collectors don't know what a company's net income is. The country can't attract investment because nobody knows enough about a company to say whether it is profitable or it could be profitable. Nobody is going to loan money for the exact same reason.

The first thing a country has to do is to make the conversion to international accounting standards. We put a lot of resources into that program and achieved considerable success. Some companies had switched over on their own, just by hiring an international accounting firm to work with them. There are three or four such firms that have Chisinau offices now. But you have

to go further and help the accountant in a small plant someplace. We had programs to do this, and to help the Ministry of Finance and the accounting association to develop standards that were Moldova-specific but yet were based on international norms. Finally, a lot of tax legislation was passed during my time, but there is still a problem with how to enforce it.

Q: Much can depend on how effective the country's embassy in the U.S. is with Congress and the Executive Branch. My only experience in this area is with Kyrgyzstan, and they had a woman ambassador who was very effective. Did the Moldovan embassy carry its weight, do you think?

STEWART: Not during my time, but the new Moldovan ambassador is much better.

Q: Anything else we should mention?

STEWART: You'd asked about Washington. I certainly was getting financial support, which is in the end most important. However, I was chagrined during the time I was there by the lack of high-level visitors from Washington. The highest ranking was the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and he was there one week before he left office. A good guy, but this was...

Q: A farewell junket almost.

STEWART: Yes. It wasn't quite the right signal although the Deputy Secretary did important substantive work. We didn't see one member of Congress. We'd been trying, particularly in connection with the MIG sale, to get Lucinschi an appointment with the President. And that attempt failed utterly to my great disappointment.

Q: You left there in '98?

STEWART: In '98.

Q: What happened then?

STEWART: I came back to Washington, went up to New York for six weeks on the General Assembly delegation, returned for the career transition course, and retired.

Q: In the UN what were you dealing with?

STEWART: The newly independent states.

Q: Did we have much clout with them? We lumped them together, but I imagine they would be all over the place in terms of policy.

STEWART: What I was doing didn't make a whole heck of a lot of sense. It was one of those things that we had done in the past and therefore we continued doing it, but I did not really feel that I was making much of a contribution to American foreign policy. However, it was very pleasant to live in New York for six weeks. My wife had spent 20 years there so we enjoyed ourselves.

I'm sorry, but I got sidetracked when we talked earlier about my wife. I said that she spoke Romanian and had all sorts of contacts in Moldova. She did a number of valuable things, one of which was to organize an international women's club that gave spouses in the international community a range of worthwhile activities. From the standpoint of mission morale, it was very valuable, especially for the spouses of the AID contractors, who were often older women without children who spoke neither Romanian nor Russian.

My wife was also one of the founders of the international charity association, which sponsored an annual ball to raise money for causes related to children's health. The proceeds one year bought equipment for the burn unit at a children's hospital. The next year the beneficiary was a juvenile diabetes program. This is the kind of event that really needed her involvement to get going, and the amounts of money raised were considerable. We are talking about \$40-50,000 each year.

JOHN M. EVANS
Chief, OSCE Mission to Moldova
Chisinau (1997-1999)

Ambassador Evans was born and raised in Virginia and educated at Yale University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1971 and became a specialist in Soviet and Eastern European Affairs. His foreign posts were Teheran, Prague, Moscow, Brussels, St. Petersburg, Chisinau (Moldova) and Yerevan, Armenia, where he served as Ambassador from 2004 to 2006. In his assignments at the State Department in Washington, the Ambassador dealt primarily with Russian and former Soviet states' affairs. Ambassador Evans was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

Q: -the 5th of December 2009, with John Evans. And John, where did we leave off?

EVANS: I had just finished my assignment as consul general to St. Petersburg. I was without an onward assignment because of security problems or alleged security problems which in the end I grieved and won that grievance but I only won it on Labor Day and by that time most of the normal jobs that I might have aspired to were gone. But over the summer the undersecretary of defense, John White, had come through St. Petersburg and we'd had lunch and he had suggested that I put my hat in for an international job, namely with the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) mission to Moldova. And so in September, right after Labor Day when I went into the department I decided that was my best option.

Q: Okay. And we'll talk about the whole process and- I mean, how long were you doing this, from when to when?

EVANS: The OSCE head of mission in Moldova had traditionally been an American. The mandate of that mission and of the individual heading it crept forward by six-month increments

in Vienna. It had to be renewed every six months but from the U.S. point of view a secondment was normally for one year. Now, I ended up staying there for 22 months because the State Department had a difficult time deciding on my successor and I felt it was terribly important to have contact with my successor so I stayed on and on until Bill Hill was confirmed.

Q: Okay, let's talk about what is OSCE, what were they doing in general, and then your impressions of the organization, you know, particularly as you got to it. Now, we can talk about other things as they develop but I mean when you got there, what were you getting from the department and you know, I mean sort of in what order was it and all that?

EVANS: The State Department had always had a strong preference, as did the U.S. Government overall, for NATO as its main instrument in Europe, and it was telling that the CSCE, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which after 1991 became the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, was put into the Office of NATO Affairs, EUR-Regional-Political-Military: EUR/RPM. And it had a very small supporting staff there but CSCE and later OSCE were subsumed into that office. Because the CSCE, originally 35 members included all of the European states, included the Vatican, the Holy See, and Luxembourg and Iceland and lots of small countries, and because it worked by consensus effectively, it was seen as unwieldy, it was seen as more of a talking shop than anything serious. But after the Wall came down and the communist empire collapsed, really it was the OSCE that, well, the CSCE turned itself into the OSCE, got a small staff together in Vienna, and where there were problem areas, and it turned out there were several, it very quickly deployed field missions to deal with some of those problem areas, the conflicts that arose as the big glaciers of communism melted and these other problems reappeared I think the OSCE was rather quick to respond. Now, one can argue about whether those responses, whether the field missions, had been effective but what they certainly have done, I think, is to prevent further violent conflict. In many cases, not all.

Q: Yes. Well I, as a retired Foreign Service officer I went out twice to Bosnia under the OSCE auspices to monitor elections there. I was impressed. I mean, you know, I had my five years service in Belgrade so I knew the Balkans and I mean this is not an easy place in which- the Balkans deservedly have a name for disorder and all that. But you know, the elections that I observed were held very well, we were well trained, and I'm not sure we'd like to conclude- how they- how the elections came out but I mean that's not our business in a way.

EVANS: The field missions...of course elections were a big part of what was going on as these countries went from being ruled by communist parties and had to get the hang of free elections. But there was a lot more involved as well between the elections, and the job to which I was headed in Moldova had to do with... the mandate involved setting up a negotiating structure between the separatist regime that had emerged in Transnistria, a little sliver on the eastern side, and the main government. It also involved trying to work out a special status for that region which would preserve the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and its sovereignty. And then we also had a human rights component and a reporting component to the permanent council of the OSCE in Vienna.

Q: Alright, you were doing this from when to when?

EVANS: I arrived in Vienna September 23, 1997, and after initial meetings with the secretary general and our ambassador, who at that time was Sam Brown, and various other folks in Vienna, the conflict prevention center was the organ that deployed the field missions and supported them. And after just a couple of days of consultations there I headed off to Chişinău, which is the former Kishinev and the capital of Republic of Moldova.

Q: Okay, let's explain what is Moldova. As a kid I used to read about Bessarabia, you know, and the oil fields of Bessarabia at one point were a major focus. I mean, this is before- As a kid I used to look at maps and you'd see oil derricks on the maps and all that. But could you explain what the situation was at the time and why we were concerned.

EVANS: The present day Republic of Moldova is composed of basically two distinct parts; Bessarabia, as you rightly recalled, which between the wars was the easternmost province of Romania. And then the second part is this little sliver of land along the Dniestr River, which between the wars was part of Soviet Ukraine. Now, it gets complicated when you... when the war breaks out, there's the Hitler-Stalin pact at which point things started to change in that part of the world and then there was the war during which the Nazis and the Iron Guard in Romania moved in through the south into Soviet territory on their way to Stalingrad. After the war Soviet power was extended to the River Prut in the west, which was the western border of Bessarabia and so the Soviet Union acquired a territory which linguistically and ethnically was primarily Romanian speaking. It had in distant times past, five centuries ago, it had been part of Greater Moldavia and there is still a province of Moldavia in Romania and that plus Bessarabia was the Kingdom of Moravia in those days. But for our purposes-

Q: Not Moravia.

EVANS: I meant Moldavia, because Moravia's up there in Czechoslovakia.

Q: Czechoslovakia, yes.

EVANS: No, right. For our purposes the problem was this: that as the Soviet Union started to collapse the sliver of the Republic of Moldova -- which was more Slavic in its ethnic makeup, about 60 percent if you counted Russians and Ukrainians, even more if you counted those Moldovans who were educated in Russian and were Slavophone, although ethnically very likely of Romanian background -- that sliver of land did not want to join the bulk of what had been the Moldavian SSR and at the time General Lebed's 14th Army was stationed there and when clashes broke out between the two sides, the ethnically Romanian side and the more Slavic side, General Lebed used his 14th Army to quell the violence and effectively to create a ceasefire between the separatist group mostly on the east of the Dniestr River and the bulk of the country on the west. So there was a split. Now basically there was a conflict of two groups, politically important groups, who had different ideas for the future of their state, two different state building projects.

Q: Well wasn't there another dynamic going on? In other words people in the sliver there were between the Ukrainians and they really didn't owe allegiance to the Ukraine, did they? They

were more Russian stuck in the middle of this- between the Romanians and the Ukrainians, weren't they?

EVANS: Well, during the inter-war period when Transnistria had been part of the Ukraine, it had enjoyed the status of an autonomous region in deference to its slightly different political history. Now originally, going back to the time of Catherine the Great, this had all been a conquest of the Russian army all the way to the River Prut. So this is an area that had gone back and forth, and you're right that the Transnistrians did feel themselves distinct not only from Ukraine: from Moldova but also from Ukraine.

Q: So the usual. And so the Americans come in or you come in to settle this. What were you up to?

EVANS: First of all, I wouldn't say it was the Americans because this was an operation of the OSCE altogether. I was sent there to head a completely international mission. There were, at that time, seven of us, of all different nationalities, only one American. I had in addition a Czech military officer, a Dutch military officer; my deputy was a Georgian. We had a German human rights officer and a Polish public affairs officer as well. So this was an international group, civil and military, and our lingua franca was Russian. It was the only language that all of us spoke sufficiently well to do our work.

Q: Okay. When you went out, first place, what were sort of- your headquarters, what were you instructed to do and how were relations with the next step up in the chain of command?

EVANS: First of all we ultimately reported to the troika because the OSCE has been governed since its establishment by a troika of countries, something like the EU. There is one country that is the chairman-in-office. When I signed on, the Danes were the chairman-in-office but the previous and future chairs also participate in the troika. So the Swiss were the previous one and the Poles were the next nominee to be chairman. So ultimately my boss was the Danish foreign minister but we reported through the Vienna Conflict Prevention Center to the permanent council and ultimately to the chairman-in-office. And our standing instructions were the so-called mandate of the mission, which everybody knew and all countries had agreed to. But there were, if you will, that was our strategy but there were also, you might say, tactical instructions, and in September '97 the scenery had recently changed because in May of '97 the sides had agreed to something called the "Moscow Memorandum." Under the aegis of Prime Minister, I mean Foreign Minister, Primakov the two sides had agreed to a so-called "common state" and our immediate tactical negotiating challenge was to elaborate what a "common state" would mean, what would be the legal and...it was a division of functions, which attributes of statehood would be carried out by the central government in Chişinău and which functions would be devolved or left with the government in Tiraspol, which was the separatist capital. So that was our immediate focus, elaborating what had been agreed in the Moscow Memorandum.

Q: Okay. What were the various size, the personalities and forces arrayed on all sides that you had to deal with?

EVANS: Well, I got a very fast introduction to all those personalities for the following reason. When I left Vienna I was told that the ambassadors of the troika countries were all going to descend on me the following week; that is, within a week of my arrival in Chisinau.

Q: Oh, joy.

EVANS: Oh joy, oh rapture.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: So I arrived in Chişinau, staying at a hotel. My first day at work I met the members of my mission. The second day I called on the president, the foreign minister, the chief negotiator and several other people in the Moldovan Central Government. The following day I called on President, so-called President Smirnov of the separatist state, which is called the Prednistrovian Moldovan Republic or we just called it Transnistria, and their so-called foreign minister and speaker of parliament. So I, in two days in a whirlwind of calls, met all of these people. President Lucinschi was then president of Moldova; he'd been elected less than a year earlier. And then on the third...on the next day the troika arrived from Vienna, re-enforced from capitals, and they wanted not only a briefing they wanted to look into everything to do with the situation there.

Now, I should say that this posed a major problem because the Moldovan position had been for many months to insist that any official delegation going across the line into separatist territory had to be accompanied by a high ranking Moldovan official, and what typically happened, because of this insistence, was that the foreign visitors would get up to the border and be turned back by the Moldovan, I mean by the Transnistrian, border guards because they did not accept the writ of the Moldovan official who was escorting. And so there'd be a scandal at the border; they would be turned back, there would be news reports and general rancor. I knew that that troika of officials wanted to get over to Transnistria and wanted to meet the separatist officials and hear their side of the story. So the challenge was how to get that to happen instead of just adding another incident. And what I devised was that the Moldovan side would indeed appoint an escort but a lower-level escort than had normally been the case, not a deputy foreign minister who, after all, everybody would recognize, but rather a second secretary. And that the Transnistrians would agree to overlook this person, agree not to recognize him as an official and so the group would be able to proceed. And that's exactly what happened.

Everybody thought this was brilliant; I got all kinds of bouquets thrown in my direction for having figured out this way of getting the meetings to happen. And indeed the troika had a very successful visit.

Q: Well would you say in a way the time was right? I mean, the Transnistrians, you know, wanted to get these people in. I mean, you don't turn down the head of the OSCE lightly over, you know, the usual dispute over papers of one official probably doesn't make it a hell of a lot- It wasn't to anybody's advantage except maybe the Moldovans.

EVANS: You're right that it was a matter of timing and both sides had to be ready for it, they had to cooperate to let this go forward. The Moldovans had to reduce the rank, the Transnistrians

had to sort of shut their eyes and admit that there was, to themselves only privately, that someone was there. The surprise to me was I was then invited to, within a day or two after this, thinking that I had done a pretty good job of making this troika visit successful, I was invited to the home of the American Ambassador, Todd Stewart, and his very charming wife.

Q: Whom I've interviewed.

EVANS: Yes. And so he asked me how things had gone and I explained it and he said, "well John, they pissed all over you, didn't they?" I said "Todd, what do you mean? Everybody thinks this was a very wise way to proceed." And he said "you let those guys, the Transnistrians, get away with hosting an international official; this just makes them more of a presence on the international stage, you know, you're doing a terrible job and you ought to, you know, rethink your approach."

Well, I was rather taken aback but we concluded the evening on...it was a very nice dinner and we had lots to talk about. What had happened in the past, my predecessor there, mostly before the Moscow Memorandum, had taken a very pro-Moldovan stance, that is, pro-central government. Now of course even our mandate spelled out the need to preserve sovereignty and territorial integrity and that's what we were trying to do. But his tone towards the Transnistrian side was one of hectoring, badgering, questioning and generally denigrating the Transnistrian side to the point where, although he was present for the Moscow Memorandum, he was eventually effectively PNGed (declared persona non grata); he could not proceed any longer to visit Tiraspol and deal with the Transnistrian officials. And I felt that it was important as mediator to enjoy the trust of both sides; I felt it was essential to have the trust of both sides.

Q: Also you were wearing a non-American hat-

EVANS: Exactly.

Q: -and your bosses wanted to go there.

EVANS: Absolutely.

Q: And it wasn't your job, you know, in a way one has to, you know, the stance of the American ambassador could be one thing but your job was to facilitate what your organization-

EVANS: Yes, to carry out our mandate. And there's a very good reason why these jobs are entrusted in the main to international or at least internationally-hatted Civil Servants and not left to national authorities. In fact the OSCE had a code of conduct which prohibited members of OSCE missions from accepting national instructions from their own authorities because we were working for all 34...

Q: Absolutely.

EVANS: By that time it was 54 countries.

Q: Yes, yes.

Well how did those talks go?

EVANS: The troika visit was primarily an information-gathering visit and I do believe also that the troika wanted to show strong backing from me as I entered into my duties. And that, in fact, was the way it worked out. With the troika breathing at my back I had to get right into the work and I had to meet all the top people and so it was a very good way to begin the job.

Within a month there was a major event scheduled, mainly a conclave of all the post Soviet leaders from the old Soviet Union, the so-called CIS, or Commonwealth of Independent States, were going to meet in Chişinau on the 22nd of October, and it was expected that there would be some progress made on the Transnistrian issue at that time. So about a week after the visit of the troika the two sides and the three mediators... I have neglected to mention that there were three of us mediating there; it was the head of the OSCE mission plus a presidential representative of Ukraine, a Ukrainian diplomat, and a representative of the president of Russia. So the three of us worked as another kind of troika together, mediating. All the work, all the negotiation was done in Russian; the texts were in Russian; it was the lingua franca.

We were all invited to Moscow in early October for a drafting session that was to prepare an agreement that would be signed on the margins of the big summit. We were taken to a foreign ministry dacha in Meshcherino, a little village near Domodedovo Airport, and we were... we weren't precisely locked in a room there but there were two and a half days of tough negotiations on elaborating these functions...

Q: Well were the various Moldovan parties there too?

EVANS: Yes. Yes, the chief negotiators of both sides were there with supporting staff.

Now, I should back up just a little bit and say that the first weekend I was in Chişinau, on a Sunday -- I must have arrived on a Friday and it was the Sunday before the workweek began -- I was wandering around the capital, Chişinau; it's not a very big city, and I stumbled onto the museum of the great Russian poet, Aleksandr Pushkin. In my study of Russian at Yale I had read a lot of Pushkin and he's truly a fine poet, and he had spent a good bit of time in Bessarabia, as it then was, in a kind of comfortable exile after he had made some unflattering remarks about the tsar. He was sent and attached to a local military staff. So there was a museum of Aleksandr Pushkin there and I wandered in and met the staff and we talked about Pushkin's stay in Bessarabia and it turned out to be the hundredth anniversary of the Soviet poet Yesenin, and they were having a little concert and program there so I stayed for it. And I must have been asked in my first TV interview in Moldova what I had seen in Moldova.

Well, I'd only been there a week and I said that on my first weekend I had walked around Chişinau and had seen the sights and visited the Pushkin museum. That struck a very raw nerve. The Moldovans immediately complained that I must be a Russophile because I had visited the Pushkin museum. Well, that's all by way of saying what happened in Meshcherino outside Moscow. At a certain point in the deliberations, which were not pleasant, there was a lot of tough

talk, and I spoke up at one point and I said, “gentlemen, this is not a court of law where people are accused of things; rather, our purpose here is to agree on dividing the competencies within a common state. So I implore you, please get back to the real business here and let’s have less invective and more sensible talk.” Something like that; I paraphrase. The Moldovans at the next break came over to me and said “you are totally abandoning OSCE principles, you have changed the entire negotiating approach, we reject this and want you to help us.” And I of course said, “well, I am doing my very best,” and I had my staff there too, and we talked about what the approach should be and I stuck to my guns. Later in the day the two sides were, I observed, in deep conversation, you know, and ended up hugging each other, the two lead negotiators, so they certainly were communicating and we made progress in that drafting session.

Then came the summit in Chişinău. Yeltsin was on hand for the Russian side, Kuchma from the Ukrainians, President Lucinschi. But by bad luck the summit fell on the birthday of Transnistrian self-proclaimed “president” Igor Smirnov and Smirnov did not show up. So no progress was really made. President Lucinschi said “we’re not going to make a tragedy out of this” but it was clear that an opportunity to move things forward had been lost.

Q: Well what were the- what was at stake? I mean, outside of amalgamating this group? My understanding is, and I may have been getting this from prejudiced sources because having been in the Balkans for awhile you realize what you get is where you’re sitting. But I understood that the Transnistria was a pretty nice place for Soviet army officers to settle. I mean, this- And they really had a stake in don’t screw up things; we don’t want to be ruled by a bunch of flighty Hungarians, number one, and number two, they were running a wonderful little smuggling business, and number three, they were selling equipment to whoever wanted it, including the CIA, and they pretty well had a good thing going there.

EVANS: Well, a lot of those points are exactly right. In addition to the legal problem of an unrecognized state having been proclaimed within the juridical territory of another there was another big problem, and that was that, at an old storage facility in Colbasna, in the north of the Transnistrian territory, there was a huge amount of old Soviet weaponry, much of which had been rather hastily deposited there after the Soviet forces exited Eastern Europe after the fall of the Wall. My successor estimated that the explosive power of what was stored in Colbasna might be that of two Nagasakis. No one really knows and there was a lot more besides explosives there. But one of the additional challenges that we faced was attempting to persuade the Russians to remove that weaponry from Transnistrian territory, or, as the Moldovans claimed, Moldovan territory. Right after my arrival as head of mission a big train with about 47 wagons did leave Colbasna carrying a lot of this material and we had reason to believe that another one would go in December. So there was some progress being made on this.

But, as the next part of my story will tell you, bickering over the value of these weapons in Colbasna was a major difficulty underlying these talks. So I might as well come ahead to that. But I think you were seeking a little bit more characterization of the Transnistrian regime and its problems or its differences with the central authorities.

You know, when I first arrived in Moldova the first thing I heard was “the key to this dispute lies in Moscow.” Well I found out that that was a gross oversimplification. And while the image of a

key opening a lock is a nice simple one, in fact this lock was a combination lock and it was necessary to dial numbers in various locations before it would come open. There were, indeed, retired Soviet army officers and their families who, largely because the climate is warm compared to most of the Soviet Union, had settled in Transnistria. There was a long history of military activity, military production there, and indeed there was kind of a Russophilia in what had been a borderland of Russia for many years. There were also, though, real grievances on the part of completely ordinary people in Transnistria. We once ran into an old granny selling apples by the side of the road and when she found out who we were she said "those Moldovan police aren't going to come back again to terrify us, are they?" And this went back to the most unfortunate decision that was made by a previous Moldovan president in 1992 to try without any preparation or proper training to just send Moldovan security and police forces over to Transnistria and particularly to Bendery, which was actually on the right bank, that is the western bank of the Dniester, to try to just undo the independent stance and to get rid of the leadership there. And it resulted in a...I wouldn't call it a war exactly, but it was a succession of quite violent skirmishes in which about 1,000 people were killed. And so there were memories of this sort of nationalist emotional attempt to retake territory from 1992.

Also the Moldovan authorities, in setting up their new constitution in parliament, had not left any empty seats for the Transnistrians in the future, as a gesture to them, and there were many Transnistrians...in fact on the first day I was there Valeriy Litskai, the so-called foreign minister, said you know, "we don't believe in taxation without representation." There was a great fear that because Transnistria had been the wealthier part of Moldova, with most of the industry...the old Soviet economy had mainly consisted of agricultural production in the Bessarabian part on the western side of the Dniester River, agricultural production was then canned and processed in Transnistrian factories and sent on to metropolitan markets in Kiev and St. Petersburg -- or Leningrad -- and Moscow. So Transnistria had been the wealthier part and the more urban part of the old Soviet republic. So, in short, there was no single factor; there were many factors. And as time went on through the 1990s the factor of crime and illegal smuggling and trafficking in various products started to become more and more of a difficulty.

Q: Well okay then, let's- How about, what was your impression of Moldova proper? I mean how was it being run and was it a city on a hill or example or what have you?

EVANS: Moldova then, and unfortunately still today, is just about the poorest country in Europe. For awhile there was competition between Albania and Moldova as to which was more impoverished and I think that since Albania is better placed geographically it has edged ahead of Moldova. Moldova, although the people are charming and there are some quite beautiful parts, it was a very sad place undergoing some very difficult transitions, first of all from the old Soviet safety net, social safety net, to a market economy. There was lots of crime in Moldova, as in Transnistria, and there was a political turmoil in Moldova which had to do with a dispute between the pro-Romanian ultra nationalist forces represented most notably by Iuri Rosca, who was a very, I would say, rabid Romanian nationalist who wanted Moldova to join Romania as it had been between the wars, forget to turn completely to the west or to the southwest, join Romania, make Romanian absolutely the language of the state. They rejected the idea of any independent Moldovan identity. And then on the other side there were those who believed that Moldova was something distinct from Romania, that to join Romania would mean...instead of

being an independent state it would mean being a second class province of a...as some of them put it, a third class state. And then of course there were the Transnistrians who took a different view altogether. But you asked me about Right Bank Moldova.

So that whole debate was going on. There were rabid nationalists who wanted to rejoin Romania and then there were Moldovans who liked the idea of being an independent state and wanted to keep some of their special characteristics.

Q: What was, would you say, was there a consensus of the OSCE, I mean the European Union- I mean, was the OSCE sort of a creature, had become a creature of the European Union would you say or not?

EVANS: I wouldn't say that it was a creature of the European Union. Until recently, as you know, the European Union had not really centralized its foreign policy thinking and still the United States and Russia and the non-European Union member-states, participating States of the OSCE had -- like Switzerland -- had an important role. So I think it was really all of... the OSCE belonged to the Euro-Atlantic community.

Q: Well I mean, basically you had these separatist- these various groups in Moldova, Greater Moldova but the OSCE, I mean, sort of was your basic mandate let's get this all together so we have a Greater Moldova?

EVANS: I think the goal was multiple. It was to regulate or bring into conformity with modern state practice a situation that was seen as out of sync, not correct. Now there's an old legal principle, "uti possidetis," we don't need to go into the legalities of it, but basically when we recognized the republics of the old Soviet Union we recognized them in the borders as they then existed. Those borders had been, for all intents and purposes, administrative borders when it was one big Soviet Union; by recognizing those borders we stepped on certain groups' toes because they had different ideas as to whom their allegiances were owed and how they would like to be ruled.

Q: Ukraine being the prime example. I think the borders of the Ukraine had just been manipulated, I mean, back in Khrushchev's time, weren't they?

EVANS: They were and they had been...well, first of all they weren't that important as I was just saying. They were more important, the borders were more important to groups in the Caucasus, for example, where you had something like 52 different ethnic groups in the Caucasus and trying to fit those into nice, neat nation states is a terrible job. Basically, looking at the big picture here, you had an immense multinational, multiethnic, multi-confessional -- because there were also religious differences -- empire, which all of a sudden collapsed, leaving its constituent parts to try to establish states on the basis of nationality. And the trouble is that those old republic borders did not conform...were not congruent with the actual ethnic and national groups on the ground. You know, it wasn't as terrible as in Africa in the process of decolonization.

Q: But it was of the same thing, well let's freeze it as it is, otherwise it's disaster, I mean, a complete disintegration; it cuts across tribes, it cuts- I mean, anything you could think about.

EVANS: Yes. Well, exactly. Of course we forget in the late 20th and 21st century that at an earlier time in European history these adjustments to borders were much more easily made. It's only in the mid 20th century that we really decided that there was only one model of a state. The statesmen at the Congress of Vienna and earlier thought nothing of tweaking borders and moving Alsace this way or that way, and it was because the principles of what constituted a state were at that time largely the principles of monarchy. So in a sense the international system is less flexible today than it was a couple of hundred years ago.

Q: And you were sitting with your job on one of the major fault lines.

EVANS: Well, it is one of the major fault lines and it was misleading to tell me that "the key to this problem lies in Moscow." There were lots of other difficulties.

Now, fortunately the Transnistrian problem, unlike the problems in the Caucasus -- like Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia -- the level of violence in 1992 had not been so terrible. It's terrible that 1,000 people were killed but in Karabakh there were more like 25,000.

Q: Well for one thing you didn't have a religious difference.

EVANS: Well. Ha! I didn't think we did. But as it turned out there were. The nominal religion of most of the vast majority was Orthodox Christianity, but some looked to the Romanian patriarch and others looked to the Moscow patriarch and I imagine there were also some who began to look to the Ukrainian Church. But what I also found out was that there...and I had known this from our old friend Paul Goble many years ago but I'd forgotten, that there was a little Turkish Christian group in Moldova called the Gagauz.

Q: Good God.

EVANS: And they were in the south of...to the south of Chişinău. They had migrated from Ottoman lands some 400 years earlier so they spoke a kind of Turkish but they were Christian and their main industry was making sweet communion wines for the Russian Orthodox Church.

There was also a Bulgarian minority group in the southern district of Taraclia and that also came up at one point as an issue, as did lots of human rights questions. And one of our jobs was to keep an eye on human rights issues, you know, on both sides. We had a mandate to report on human rights questions on both sides of the Dniester.

Q: And you have a staff which includes Czechs and Poles- a Czech, a Pole and other; how did they operate together? You know, because I would think that there would be an anti-Soviet/Russian prejudice.

EVANS: Your assumption was not borne out by my experience. What I discovered was that in the main this international group saw itself as serving all 54 participating states, they saw it as an international effort to help the Moldovans and the Transnistrians solve their problem for the good of all of us, to prevent violence, further violence, and to find a way for people to get on with their

lives without the difficulties inherent in that unusual situation.

Now there was... It turned out there was one exception on my staff. And I discovered this... well I've told you that the Moldovans were criticizing me for visiting the Pushkin museum; they criticized me for the way I participated in the consultations outside Moscow; and as we went ahead I discovered that the Moldovans really were campaigning against me because I had changed the tactics of the mission from one of siding almost 100 percent with the central government to one that I thought had a better chance of success, one in which I maintained the trust or developed the trust of both sides. And I felt that there needed to be at least something of what the experts call a "parity of esteem" in the process in which one side was not treated as the leper and the other side as the angel in this discourse. There had to be more of a chance for both sides to...

Q: Otherwise it doesn't work.

EVANS: That's my view. I mean, you can beat up on the weaker side but you're not going to... it just creates more of a defensive crouch. So what I discovered was that the Moldovans were really trying to... they felt that I was not doing what Don Johnson had done, not doing their job for them, in fact, and the Moldovan chief negotiator was heard, at one point, boasting that he had never prepared a single document for use in this process. He was going to let the OSCE people do the work for him. And indeed, we worked very hard. We worked weekends and holidays and evenings; there was no rest partly because another aspect of our mandate was to participate in the so-called Joint Control Commission, which was a tripartite body that met every Tuesday to discuss incidents along... in the security zone between the two sides, and various crimes that might have taken place and so on, and we were active participants in that. And one of the things I engineered in my time there was that we were not only observers but we were... we had a voice in the Joint Control Commission. We also got the number of peacekeepers, which had been excessive, reduced from something like 1,500 to 500.

Q: Who were the peacekeepers?

EVANS: Well the peacekeepers were drawn from Russian... the remains of the 14th Army which had become a Russian "operational group," the Moldovan side and the Transnistrian side. So all three, the two parties to the conflict plus the Russians, were actually the ones with peacekeepers on the ground.

Q: Well this brings a, you know, this thing is so complicated but all right, you had this Russian with the 14th Army or something; was it a real Russian army or was it one of Caesar's lost legions off in the middle of Romanian steppe or something?

EVANS: Well, it had been, at one point, the 14th Army and that's when Alexander Lebed had been commander...

Q: Who was a major- became a political figure until he was killed.

EVANS: That's right.

Q: Sort of the top Soviet general who flew himself with honor from Afghanistan.

EVANS: That's right. And a book was even written about General Lebed right before he was killed called "The Man Who Would Be President of Russia" or something like that. I mean, he did have political ambitions. But by this time, by '97 when I got there, it was already very much scaled down. It was a Russian operational group and the commander of it with whom I had most dealings was from the peacekeeping division of the Russian armed forces, General Yevnevich, who had been a big supporter of Yeltsin at the time of the attempted coup against Yeltsin, and presumably was rewarded with this important rank and command. The main reason for the Russians being there was, first of all, to guard this large arms depot at Colbasna and also some other facilities, including, most importantly, a military airport near Tiraspol. Now interestingly, when Yeltsin came for that summit meeting in the fall, in October 1997, his aircraft was too big to land at the Chişinău commercial airport and it landed instead at the Tiraspol military airstrip, which was longer.

But it was very clear quite shortly after I arrived there that the Moldovan side, and I think it originated with the Moldovan ambassador in Vienna, Ambassador Dascal, a rabid pro-Romanian nationalist; they caught...he and his fellow ultra nationalists in the foreign ministry, headed by Foreign Minister Tabacaru, found fault with much of our reporting, even down to...it was at the level of nitpicking. But they also seemed to think that I was being too evenhanded; I was trying to be evenhanded and they didn't like that.

Q: Well when you say that they were Romanian ultra nationalists or Moldovan ultra nationalists?

EVANS: You've put your finger on a very important point. As I said, there was this debate among people in Moldova about whether they were more Romanian or more Moldovan. This debate was so sensitive that the name of their language...it was impossible to, or it was dangerous politically, to call the language either Romanian or Moldovan; instead, everyone called it "limba de stat," which means "state language." They knew they were speaking the state language but couldn't agree whether it was Romanian or Moldovan and in the Soviet Union it had been written Cyrillic as part of a Soviet policy to have the languages in the same alphabet as Russian. One of the first reforms brought in was to change the language into Latin letters so that it was compatible with modern day Romanian, except east of the Dniestr in Transnistria where they retained the Cyrillic script for the same language.

Q: You know, you remind me of dealing with Macedonia. I mean, the language, the- God, the Balkans can really do things, can't they?

EVANS: Well, they can but so can the OSCE and I can remember that Bob Frowick headed a special mission in Macedonia at one point which was quite successful in preventing some of these nationalist quarrels from spreading into Macedonia.

In any case there was this little whispering campaign going on among some of the Romanian officials and they didn't come to me to complain about things; it turned out they went to

Ambassador Stewart and it turned out also that they had a confederate in my mission who happened to be the Georgian, my deputy, and Georgia also had its problem with separatists and there was a group that had been formed, I must say with some American patronage, called the GUUAM Group, and this was Georgia, Ukraine, at one point Uzbekistan although they dropped out, Armenia, I mean Azerbaijan, and Moldova. So for short they called it the GUUAM Group and it was basically an anti-Russian caucus in the OSCE.

Q: Now of course Georgia has today, I mean they've got almost a little war- they don't have the war going now but I mean it's- they've got somewhat the same situation there; in a way it sounds like a poor choice to put into your group because they've got somewhat a similar situation.

EVANS: Well, as it turned out it was a poor choice and this is how I found out. I came back to the United States...this was an unaccompanied tour; I had to leave my wife behind here in Washington; it was not the kind of place where she would have had anything to do and I wasn't supported by the embassy, I had to find my own apartment and so on, so my wife had stayed behind...but I went home for a holiday at one point, came here to Washington, and while I was here I discovered that there had been a back-channel message from the U.S. embassy in Chişinău using the CIA station as the medium and in that back-channel message I was being criticized, virtually denounced, by Ambassador Stewart for carrying out a policy that was not in the interests of the Republic of Moldova and so on and so forth. Well, this was leaked to me by a friend in, I think, in INR, and the source of this testimony against me was said to be my Georgian deputy. So when I returned to Chişinău I called in my Georgian deputy and confronted him with this criticism, which was way beyond what the facts would support, and I did something I've never had to do before or since: I composed, in Russian, a statement which I forced him to sign and it was a statement admitting his...the impropriety of what he had said to the American embassy and I kept that statement after he had signed and dated it and admitted that he was in the wrong on this; I kept it in my safe in case I needed to blackmail him. Well, actually it was to keep him in line. I did not fire him, I did not want to humiliate him, but I also found out at that time -- we'd worked very closely together -- but I found out that he was violating one of the chief OSCE rules, which was that one does not take instructions from one's national authorities. He was not only taking instructions from Tbilisi, he was running a little Georgian embassy under the cover of the OSCE mission. And I knew that he would from time to time disappear with no explanation and what he was doing, he was over at the Moldovan foreign ministry carrying out bilateral business on behalf of the government of Georgia on the OSCE payroll, because it was the OSCE that was paying his living expenses in Chişinău.

Now, by this time it was the Polish chairmanship and the good people in Warsaw, when they discovered what a difficulty I was having with my Georgian deputy, they promptly dispatched to my assistance General Roman Harjoza, former chief of the Polish Air Force, to be my new deputy. And with General Harjoza I had a true loyal deputy and we accomplished a lot.

Q: Okay, well let's talk about- Did the Georgian disappear?

EVANS: No, not immediately. He eventually went back to Tbilisi but I basically started to work with Harjoza for everything important and kept the Georgian at...we accorded him every personal respect but we just...I did not trust him with important duties, and I have to say I also

had a very harsh conversation with Ambassador Stewart.

Let me say about Todd Stewart that he was a fine bilateral ambassador. If you entered a reception or a public event you immediately knew who was the U.S. ambassador. He had great presence and he was, I think, a superior bilateral ambassador and representative of the United States. He did a lot to help the fledgling Republic of Moldova. But, as has often been said, what you think depends on where you sit and he did not know about how to mediate between opposing parties. I, oddly enough, had learned quite a bit from Michael Young, the legal advisor at that CSCE meeting in Malta on peaceful settlement of disputes where for three weeks, with all kinds of experts present, we talked about the various methods of trying to mediate and solve disputes between various parties. So...and I had done a good bit of consulting on this and talking to experts at the U.S. Institute of Peace, for example, I knew what I was doing and it was not a one-man show; I had an international staff, we always took decisions after long discussion and we had our instructions from Vienna and I was not going to take instructions from the U.S. ambassador who had a different agenda and frankly he talked about trying to “topple,” -- “topple,” that was the word -- the Smirnov regime.

Another one of the things I was told on first arriving in Moldova was, “hey, it’s just a half a dozen crooks over there, Igor Smirnov and four or five others; if they were gone then the Transnistrians would rejoin Moldova.” That was absolutely not true. Certainly by the time I was there the insecurity of the people, the fear of another Moldovan invasion, the distrust between the two sides and, I must say, the support that the Transnistrian regime had among the populace was undeniable. So it was not a question of going and arresting the Transnistrian elite, which was another idea that was broached to me the first fall I was there by the Moldovans: “oh,” they were saying, “we’ll just go and arrest Smirnov.” Well, it wasn’t that simple. And in Vienna the U.S. delegation and the Europeans viewed Ambassador Stewart’s idea of “toppling” the Smirnov regime as “cowboy diplomacy.”

Q: Well did- The OSCE, I mean your mandate was really try- I mean was it to just sort of deal with the situation; in other words not really amalgamate the thing but just keep them from shooting at each other or what?

EVANS: The stated goal in the mandate was definitely to devise a special status for the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova while preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of that republic. So our goal was definitely to try to bring the two sides together to regularize the situation, preserving the Republic of Moldova, perhaps with some autonomy for the Transnistrians. But in the process of seeking that goal what we clearly were doing was stabilizing the situation. Absent our work toward that goal, the instability in the situation would have been much worse. The fact that there was at least a diplomatic track stabilized the situation because, absent that, there really would have been no way forward other than some serious moves, such as fortifying the border.

Q: Well you know you are pointing out in a good number of situations, certainly in the diplomatic international field, that you don’t really- often you don’t really kind of solve something by saying okay, we’ll get you all to join together and you’ll be a- you manage the situation. In other words you’ve got this thing and what you do to keep them from shooting at

each other and maybe to enjoy a viable life rather than-

EVANS: That's right. And of course these situations greatly impinge on the daily lives of individuals.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: And, as I often expressed it, the Transnistrian so-called state may not have validity under international law or any rights in international law but the individuals living there do have rights that are inherent in them as individuals and we have to do something to improve their lives.

One of the things that happened at the beginning of every school year is that there were disputes about which textbooks were going to be used and which authorities were responsible for the schools, particularly in areas that were...there were some areas of more or less shared competency, for example in Bendery, which was on the right bank, that is the west bank of the Dniestr; it was basically under Transnistrian control but there were...for example, there was a school for orphans there and for mute and deaf children that was under joint supervision and we actually found a way to funnel some funds to support that school. But every year there were...schools were in danger of not opening because of these things and we tried to deal with these very real day-to-day situations.

Q: Well first place, did you see your mission there, I mean technically, looking at it, I mean, it's a temporary position, eventually you'll get out and all that, but did you really see this as a long-term thing?

EVANS: Well, one of the other untruths that I was told when I first arrived in Moldova was that this conflict was ripe for solution and that I should be able to bring it to a solution within a year. Which was very convenient and within about six months I accepted an onward assignment to...I was asked by Intelligence and Research to come and head their division on the former Soviet states and I accepted that as of the following September. As it turned out this conflict was not so simple, there was not one key which lay in Moscow, it was not simply a group of half a dozen leaders who had seized power against the will of the people in Transnistria and it was not going to be solved in short order.

Q: Why had the misapprehension developed?

EVANS: I think the Moldovans had an interest in presenting to the outside world that the Transnistrians were simply crooks and good-for-nothing sorts, that they enjoyed no popular support and that it was all Russia's fault, because it just simplified things and it made it...it put all the onus on Russia and a few other people and I think they thought that would win the world's sympathy. As it turned out the Moldovan side, the central government, made one mistake after another; they failed to show up for various meetings, I mean, as much as we tried to help them they were always saying "oh, the OSCE mission has to do more." Well, we were working ourselves to a frazzle coming up with all sorts of ideas and initiatives and suggestions and textual improvements while they were just sort of taking potshots at the mission and going to

Vienna and complaining that we weren't doing enough. And at one point I remember I had... one of the great things about the OSCE is that there is talent in 54 countries that is just unimaginable and one of my best recruitments was of a young Lithuanian, Darius Jurgelevicius, who at the time was serving as legal advisor for the Lithuanian Foreign Minister. He had studied law in Russian, or Soviet, universities, spoke fluent Russian, and he had also studied law at Stanford and so his English was fluent. We brought him aboard our mission and he actually drafted... towards the end of my time there we had him drafting an agreement on dividing the competencies of the state. But I went with him to call on the deputy foreign minister at one point in the Moldovan foreign ministry to be met by a complaint about one letter, literally one Russian letter, in a document that had been agreed to. It was the difference in Russian... I don't want to get into the details but it was the difference between two forms of the verb "to exit," which conveys whether the Russians leave by conveyance or leave on foot.

Q: Oh yes, oh my God, when I took Russian when you're going and coming back and how you're going to go and-

EVANS: Yes, exactly. So-

Q: -aspect; what do they call it?

EVANS: Right, "verbal aspect." By this time I had been heckled so many times, usually not to my face; usually there was this whispering campaign, they would run off and complain to Ambassador Stewart or there would be complaints in Vienna or at one point the Moldovans complained to the Poles about Evans and usually they mentioned that I'd gone to the Pushkin museum and things like that. But on this occasion they complained about that Russian wording and then they said "and we think the OSCE mission isn't doing enough." And I finally had had enough; I got up with my Lithuanian colleague and I said "I don't have to listen to this garbage," and I walked out.

Q: Yes. Well, okay, first place-

EVANS: Let me mention one other thing if I may, Stu.

Q: Yes.

EVANS: It was our job to try to be a sparkplug for this process, to try to throw out ideas that would be helpful. At one time in an interview in my first year there I threw out the idea that perhaps there could be some sort of federal solution. I talked about my own country, the United States, where the way we had found to square the circle between local authority and central authority was through the federal principle, which has a long history going back to the Athenian League. I realized this was a controversial subject but I thought there ought to be some discussion of the possibility of a federal solution. I was set upon in the press and by various officials for using the so-called "f-word," meaning "federalization." Now, as I've recently discovered, there is lots of talk about a possible federal solution in the Moldova case.

Q: Well sort of in the Moldovan body politic was the fact that they had this separate entity

they're dealing with, was that taking care of their problem about whether they're Romanian or Moldovan? In other words, you know, sometimes you've got a major quarrel and you pick on-you have something else that you can concentrate on.

EVANS: I think there was a kind of diversionary effect here. The governing authorities in Moldova were able to blame a lot of their problems on the fact that they had this breakaway territory and had to turn a lot of attention to that. The reality was that the Moldovan side was very much in cahoots with the Transnistrian side, at least on the level of business. There were all kinds of scams that were being practiced. One of the most notable was the smuggling of fuel oil and gasoline, which mainly came, in their case, from Romania. You rightly mentioned the oil fields and what would happen is that gas tankers or gasoline trucks would come into Moldova proper with papers suggesting they were going all the way through. So they had transit papers for Moldova but in fact they would get into Transnistria and turn around and sell untaxed gasoline to Moldovan consumers. A similar scam was going on with tobacco products because the border was still... First of all, there was a lot of corruption between the Transnistrians and the Moldovans and so goods went back and forth fairly easily. Also the Moldovans had enacted a VAT tax, a value added tax, but Transnistria had not imposed such a tax so Moldovan consumers gladly went over to Transnistria and bought imported products like German beer in the Transnistrian stores and then returned home. So there was... and the criminal structures, which were clearly evident all through the former Soviet Union, clearly there were criminal connections between Transnistria and right bank Moldova. There were big villas being constructed in Chişinău apparently with money made in Transnistria. And one thing we noticed since we frequently traveled to Transnistria, we noticed that almost every weekday morning there was the equivalent of a Brinks armored truck that would come from Transnistria over to Chişinău. Now, I never had the opportunity to inspect what was in that truck but it was certainly the case that there were financial relations of some sort between the two sides.

Q: Well okay you're there from '97 to '99ish.

EVANS: I have to tell you one more story though because that first summit where Transnistrian leader Smirnov failed to show up because it was his birthday didn't produce a big result but there was another summit that was held in Odessa, and this would have been in the... probably March of 1998 and we understood that Prime Minister Chernomyrdin at that time and President Kuchma would be in Odessa and that both Smirnov and Lucinschi would be there and that a deal would be done. So with my Georgian deputy and a couple other people we went to Odessa and indeed there was a big meeting and there was a final session from which we were excluded. Something was done in that final session and I eventually found out about it.

There was a fourth so-called "secret protocol" to this agreement and it had to do with dividing the proceeds from the Colbasna arms depot. And the formula for dividing these proceeds, which were considered to be in the millions, was a 50/50 formula dividing the spoils between Smirnov and Chernomyrdin or, to put it more charitably, the Transnistrian region and Russia. A couple of days after the Odessa Summit President Yeltsin fired Chernomyrdin. The secret protocol, the fourth protocol, was still unknown but by the time I next reported to the permanent council of the OSCE in Vienna I knew enough about it to be able to make reference to it in my report, my verbal report to the council, and I smoked it out and the Russians had to come clean on what was

in it. I finally was shown a copy of it and all the world saw that there was this nitty-gritty monetary issue and furthermore that President Lucinschi of Moldova had been a party to it.

Q: Now when you're saying- sometimes when you talk about presidents or prime ministers you're talking about them as a shorthand for- about the country. But are we talking about personally with Chernomyrdin?

EVANS: Well, I hope not. There was never...the Russian position was that those arms were now the property of the Russian Federation but of course a lot of property of the old Soviet Union -- and these were originally Soviet arms -- in the end descended to the successor states and what the Transnistrians were saying was that those arms stored in Colbasna, which were Soviet, that they had a right to some of that value as well as the Russians. And of course the Moldovans also claimed that some of the value was theirs rightfully.

Q: Well you know when you talk about arms the Soviets by this or the Russians by this time had no particular call on a whole bunch of rapidly being outmoded tanks and stuff like that. I mean it's all very nice- I mean from our point of view outside of maybe the CIA heading or our army getting some tanks to practice with or something, you know these were concerns that they might end up in Somalia or Afghanis- you know, who knows, Iran; I mean, what was the concern- Well it would have been Iraq too. I mean, in other words what was our concern about what was happening there?

EVANS: Just at this time in the first year I was there it came out that the Republic of Moldova had basically sold its air force of 21 MiGs to the Pentagon, and if you interview Wayne Merry sometime you'll find out that he was involved in doing that while he was working at the Pentagon. And, just as you say, the rest of the world's concern was that these arms not be sold on the gray markets and in fact the impetus for buying the Moldovan air force in toto was suspicion that there was an Iranian attempt to buy those MiGs.

Q: So this was preventive?

EVANS: It was preventive. Purchasing and the idea of...The Russians had agreed to take the arms out of Colbasna and take them back to Russia but the Transnistrians at one point had actually lain on the railroad tracks, and these were old women and ordinary citizens, to prevent those Russian trains from moving, at an earlier stage. So there was a fight between the Russians and the Transnistrians and also the Moldovans over that source of wealth.

Q: Obviously a rapidly diminishing source of wealth or maybe not.

EVANS: Well, how rapidly we don't know. We did know that there were certain items that were...there was some bridging equipment, for example, that had been a big feature of Soviet armies, bridging equipment. But that, there was no need for that anymore; that was taken back to Russia we know, and various other categories of arms. But what the Russian commander told me at one point was that, not in Colbasna but in association with the airfield there were cluster bombs and possibly some chemical weapons, in fact very dangerous stuff was there and it had to be guarded.

Q: Yes. Okay then, 22 months; at the end, what had happened by the time you left?

EVANS: We were going along pretty well, making progress on the documents in the spirit of the Moscow Memorandum. We also brought in the European Union to fund the reconstruction of one of the bridges that had been bombed during the hostilities, the Gura-Bicului Bridge, and we were making progress working with the ministries of education on school issues, so there were a lot of small issues on which we were making progress. But what brought everything to a halt was the NATO attack on Serbia. When that happened...

Q: This was over Kosovo.

EVANS: Over Kosovo. When that happened we had an immediate reaction in Transnistria; the Transnistrians felt that the West had overstepped its bounds, that the Serbs, whom they saw as old allies, were being unfairly targeted, and the first thing that happened was I was told that my military officers were no longer welcomed in Transnistria, in the Zone of Security.

Q: And your military officers were from where?

EVANS: Well, by this time there was still a Dutch military officer, a very fine one, and by this time there was a Slovak rather than a Czech, another fine officer. There was then a... The first thing I was told was neither colonel could visit, then I was told that only the Dutch colonel could not visit because Slovakia was not at that time in NATO. And then I was told that my deputy, the Polish air force officer, General Harmoza, was not free to visit Transnistria, and we were further advised that it would be unsafe for members of the mission to spend time in Transnistria as there might be someone "not wishing us well."

One of the achievements of my time there was to open a proper office of the OSCE mission in Tiraspol. We had been operating in a very substandard office on the road to Odessa on the outskirts of Tiraspol; we found ourselves, though, a nice representational office in downtown Tiraspol and we had been in the habit of having one mission member there 24/7. Every week we took a turn because there was a bedroom where people could sleep and a little kitchen and so we -- partly to keep an eye on human rights matters -- we staffed that office constantly on a rotational basis. I did my week over there as well. But when the war broke out in former Yugoslavia...or that is the attack on Serbian positions in Kosovo and so on...we ceased dispatching our people to the Transnistrian side and the negotiating process basically ground to a halt.

Q: Did you have a- What was your feeling towards the central government of Moldova?

EVANS: You know, there were some very fine people in the central government. I always maintained -- despite these strains that came out of the anti-Evans whispering campaign and the really puerile complaints about some of the things we had done -- I still maintained very good relations with all of the major players and Deputy Foreign Minister Capățina, for example attended our daughter's wedding in Brussels later in 1998 after he'd been reassigned to Belgium.

RUDOLF V. PERINA
Ambassador
Moldova (1998-2001)

Ambassador Perina was born in Czechoslovakia when that country was under communist control. He escaped with his family to Morocco, then Switzerland and finally the United States. The ambassador was educated at the University of Chicago and Columbia University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1974, Mr. Perina specialized in Military-Political Affairs at posts abroad, including Moscow, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna and Belgrade. In Washington he served on the National Security Council, specializing in Soviet issues. From 1998 to 2001 Mr. Perino was US Ambassador to Moldova. Ambassador Perina was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006

Q: How did the Moldova assignment come about?

PERINA: I wanted to go somewhere in the former Soviet Union. I was tired of the Balkans and realistically not going to get an ambassadorship in Western Europe. Moldova was what I was offered. It was one of the republics I had never visited in the Soviet Union, and I did not know much about it. But it turned out to be a very pleasant surprise for us. It was a much more pleasant place than we had imagined. The people were extremely friendly and hospitable, and the country was very interesting to work in. It had all the economic and political problems endemic to other parts of the former Soviet Union plus an unresolved conflict over the secessionist region of Transnistria. Working on this conflict in fact then lead to my subsequent assignment as the Special Negotiator for Eurasian conflicts.

Q: You were there from when to when?

PERINA: I was in Moldova from September of 1998 until September of 2001.

Q: Can you give a brief summary of Moldovan history leading up to the time you got there?

PERINA: There is no such thing as brief history in this part of the world, as I am sure you know. Moldova's history is interesting because it has always been a border region between different empires. Even in ancient times it was right on the border of where the Roman Empire ended. In modern times it was on the border between the Ottoman and Russian empires and then between Romania and the Soviet Union. It was always going back and forth between big neighbors. The ethnic mix reflects this. It is a classic multiethnic state that is roughly 60% Romanian speaking and 40% Slavic speaking, primarily Ukrainian and Russian.

Q: I remember reading about Bessarabia, which is how people used to refer to it.

PERINA: Right. That was a name often used up until World War II. It used to have an even greater ethnic mix. It had a large Jewish population in the nineteenth century. Some cities were

over 50% Jewish. A good part of this population emigrated, often going to the United States, early in the twentieth century. Many of those that remained were killed by the fascist regime during World War II. The Jewish population is making a gradual comeback, and there are now about 50,000 Jews in Moldova in an active, well-organized community. The country also has a sizeable Bulgarian minority and an ethnic group called the Gagauz, who are basically Turks who settled there over the centuries and converted to Christianity. So you see it is a considerable ethnic mix, and it cannot be geographically divided. It is a leopard skin, as some people there said, of ethnic groups dispersed throughout the country. Basically, Moldova is one of those multiethnic states that exists because it has to, because the population cannot be integrated into any neighboring state without a significant conflict.

The ethnic tensions in fact erupted with the break-up of the Soviet Union. Some of the Romanian speakers started calling for unification with Romania, which sparked resistance among the Slavic speakers. A conflict erupted, and in 1990 the region called Transnistria, a long narrow strip east of the Dniester River which has a slight majority of Slavic speakers, declared independence from Moldova. The Soviet 14th Army helped the Transnistrians in a war that continued until 1992 when a ceasefire was declared. But the conflict remains unresolved to this day, with the country divided. So Transnistria is a secessionist region, unrecognized by any country in the world but not under the control of the Moldovan government. However, Transnistria is being *de facto* supported by Moscow because without Russian assistance it could not survive for very long. Russia is keeping the secession alive.

Q: The other border of Moldova and Transnistria is Ukraine. How does that fit in?

PERINA: Ukraine is very much involved in the mediation effort and is a key country that can help resolve the conflict because it can clamp down on Transnistria's borders. Recently, it has started doing that more seriously. Ukraine is in fact one of the three official mediators that were agreed upon in the 1990's to find a solution to the conflict. These three are Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE. The OSCE representative has in recent years been an American, so we have a role as well. The problem is that Russia and Ukraine both are not impartial to the conflict. Many of the Slavic speakers in Transnistria, for example, are ethnic Ukrainians. There are more of them than of the Russians. So Kiev says it politically cannot impose very stringent sanctions because it would be punishing its own ethnic brethren. The Russians use a similar line. For the Russians, Transnistria provides sort of an outpost of influence in the region. True, Russia and Transnistria are not contiguous, but there are many economic and political links nonetheless. It is also a symbolic issue for Russian nationalists. Zhirinovskiy visited Transnistria several times to show his allegiance to the Russian population.

Q: How does Romania fit in?

PERINA: Romania has a big interest in all of Moldova because it sees it as historically a part of Romania. There is a Romanian province of Moldova-Wallachia, and it was really one region in the middle Ages. Bessarabia fell under Russian control during the time of Katherine the Great and has thus been part of Russia or the Soviet Union for over two centuries, with the exception of the twenty-year period between World War I and World War II when it was part of Romania. So it is an ancient and disputed territory—a little like Macedonia in the Balkans which is an

independent country but also has historic links to the Macedonian region of Greece. There were Romanian nationalists on both sides of the Moldovan-Romanian border calling for unification with Romania. But in my time and in recent years only about 10% of the population favors unification with Romania, and all the Slavic speakers oppose it so it would just lead to another war. Now a further complication is that Transnistria was really not a part of Bessarabia historically but rather a part of Ukraine. It was part of the border changes that Stalin implemented to make escape of ethnic republics from the Soviet Union less likely. He took the southern tip of Bessarabia and gave it to Ukraine, and he took Transnistria from Ukraine and gave it to Moldova to create a kind of interlocking jigsaw puzzle. He did this in the Caucasus as well, and it accounted for many of the regional conflicts when the Soviet Union broke up.

Q: Did you have any problem getting the appointment to be Ambassador?

PERINA: No. The hearings were straightforward and everything went well. The clearance process is of course long but it gave me time to study Romanian and brush up my Russian so that was not a problem.

Q: Who had been Ambassador before you?

PERINA: A fellow named Todd Stewart who was an economics officer. He was the second Ambassador and I was the third.

Q: Let's talk about what American interests were when you went out there?

PERINA: Well the American interests were to preserve and promote stability in this part of Europe. We saw how the Yugoslav conflict had destabilized the Balkan region, and we did not want another conflict destabilizing the Eastern Balkans, particularly a conflict that could draw in Russia and Romania. So our interest was to try to resolve the Transnistrian conflict and to help Moldova develop into an economically and politically successful country.

Q: What was the government of Moldova like at the time?

PERINA: There were some big changes in the government while I was there. When I arrived there was essentially a center left government under President Petru Lucinschi. He had been a Communist Party functionary in the Soviet Union but after the Soviet break-up renounced Communist ideology and moved toward the center, although he really had interests on all sides and very cleverly played the entire political spectrum. There were many such leaders with leftist pedigrees but re-born views in the new republics that emerged from the Soviet Union. But about halfway through my tour, there was an election and the unconverted Communist Party candidate won. It drew a lot of attention because Moldova was billed by the media as the first country emerging from the Soviet Union which elected a Communist president. This seemed to forget about Lukashenko in Belarus, but I guess he wasn't considered freely-elected. In any case, this was Vladimir Voronin who was the head of the unreformed Communist Party in Moldova, although he turned out to be a far more complex and difficult to categorize President than most of us expected. He and the Communist Party were quite left-wing in rhetoric and ideology prior to gaining power but then began changing to a more pragmatic course. Indeed, Voronin

eventually broke with the Russians over Transnistria and has become one of the more pro-Western leaders in the former Soviet Union.

The main reason the Communists got elected was because the center and center-right parties were incapable of working together. The leaders of these parties were just not used to making alliances and compromising in order to cooperate with one another. Everyone wanted to be the king. This is in fact a problem of democratic parties in many of the post-Soviet states. So the Communists remained the single largest party and best organized party. The majority of the country would have preferred a more centrist government but the center right parties could not agree on a slate or single candidate so their votes were split up.

Q: Was the land still collectivized from Communist days?

PERINA: It was one of the earliest countries where a land privatization program was initiated. This was the major USAID program in Moldova and considered quite successful. It was started under my predecessor, Todd Stewart, and concluded during the time I was there. Basically, all the collectivized farms were divided up among members of the collectives. The idea was that this would motivate efficiency and productivity because people would have a vested interest in their little plot as opposed to the large collective farms that were generally collapsing. Some people did criticize the privatization with the argument that inefficiency was created by going from large to small economies of scale. Subsequently we found the truth was somewhere in between. There is a loss of efficiency with small plots but the argument was academic because the large farms were dysfunctional. No one had loyalty to them, people stole from them, machinery was not taken care of and so on. Our idea was that the new owners would in fact work together in voluntary associations but preserve the vested interest that comes from ownership.

Q: Did our assistance programs help the economy?

PERINA: I think so. We had a lot of assistance programs. We were in fact the single largest donor of humanitarian and technical assistance, and in my time we gave more than all other donors combined. We gave about \$50 million a year in assistance, which is a significant amount for a country of a little over four million people. Moldova had on a per capita basis the third highest level of U.S. assistance in the former Soviet Union. Armenia and Georgia were the two higher recipients, and their assistance levels were largely earmarked by Congress for political reasons. Moldova earned the assistance because it cooperated on programs and was making real reform efforts. There was a certain concern if this would continue after the Communists came in because they had been critical of the land privatization program and initially made moves against it. But then they backed off and recognized that reforms were needed, particularly if they wanted continued assistance from the West. One of the good things in recent years has been that the EU has taken greater interest in Moldova and now is perhaps giving more than the United States. With Romanian entry into the EU, Moldova became a neighboring country to the EU and thus they have taken greater interest.

Q: How about the OSCE, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe?

PERINA: The OSCE has a large mission and is very active, especially since it is one of the three

mediators of the Transnistrian conflict. It also does all the other things that OSCE missions do: monitor human rights conditions, monitor and observe elections, and so on. The last three heads of the OSCE mission have been Americans, primarily because that is what the Moldovan government wants. They want someone to balance off the Russians in the Transnistria negotiations and think that only the Americans can really stand up to Moscow. I think on this point they are right.

Q: Were Americans well accepted there?

PERINA: We were very well accepted. The people were extremely friendly. We had a large Peace Corps presence, over a hundred volunteers, and whenever I met with some they told me how much they liked the country and how hospitable the people were. I was very proud of our Peace Corps volunteers. They lived under some terribly difficult conditions in small towns throughout the country and yet they were so upbeat and dedicated. It was very inspiring to see this American commitment and idealism. I had not worked in a country previously that had a Peace Corps program, and I was very impressed with it. The other great thing we did was in the area of exchange programs. We had the funding to send several hundred Moldovans a year to the United States, mostly on shorter visits of three to four weeks under the International Visitor Program. I am a great believer in exchange programs. Many of our participants had never been to the West, and had never imagined they would visit the United States. For so many of the Moldovans who participated, it seemed to be a life-changing event. I had one idea to send a group of local museum directors to the United States to see how museums are run. They came back astounded. It was very gratifying to be able to do this for people.

Q: But you send Moldovans to the United States, the world opens up, and it is hard to go home. How did you handle that?

PERINA: True, this is often a problem, particularly with students and younger people. They see the limited opportunities for themselves in Moldova, and it is difficult to go back. But it was less of a problem for the older, professional people we sent. They had families in Moldova, established homes, and usually a much weaker command of English than the young people. For the most part, they did not want to start over in another country. Most of the Moldovans trying to go abroad were either young students or unskilled workers who went to Russia and Western Europe to earn money that they could send home. This was a serious problem. Some rural villages were almost empty of working-age men. Children were growing up without their fathers in the household. On the other hand, it did bring money and hard currency into the country and helped a lot of families survive difficult times.

The economy was in bad straits, and still is. The per capita income in my time was between \$50 and \$100 per month. It was very hard to measure and in fact may have been higher because there was such an enormous black or underground economy by people who did not declare their income in order to avoid taxes. This then meant the government did not have money for pensions, schools and social programs. Pensioners were particularly hard hit. You know, Moldova was the republic with the most moderate climate in the Soviet Union. As a result of this, many pensioners went there to retire, especially military pensioners who had weak ties to any other place. In this respect, it was a bit like the Florida of the Soviet Union. Well, when the

Soviet Union fell apart, suddenly the new Moldovan government had responsibility for all of these pensioners who had previously gotten their pensions from Moscow. Imagine if Florida suddenly became responsible for all the social security payments there. It was one of the many problems Moldova faced and one of the many complications from the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Q: How was the Embassy involved in dealing with the Transnistrian issue? Was Transnistria just a separate world or what?

PERINA: We did quite a bit. I did not participate in the mediation negotiations since the U.S. was not one of the three mediators. That was done by the American who headed the OSCE Mission. But we in the Embassy were active in other ways. I had a lot of discussions with the two presidents, Lucinschi and Voronin, on policy toward Transnistria. I also tried to be more active within Transnistria. In particular, I initiated a dialogue with the Transnistrian so-called President, Igor Smirnov. We had not engaged with the Transnistrians on that level before except through the OSCE Mission, and Washington agreed it was worth making the effort from a bilateral standpoint. Smirnov was, of course, a thug but I had experience in dealing with those from Belgrade. He was not even a Moldovan. He had come to Transnistria from Russia after the Soviet break-up and led the secession effort, and afterward he turned the territory into a big money-making machine. You have to understand that, while the war had its origins in some real ethnic tension that arose when the Soviet Union broke up, by 1998 the ethnic component of the conflict was kept alive artificially. Relations between Romanian and Slavic speakers were much improved. There was no real threat of unification between Moldova and Romania. Transnistria still existed because it was turned into an economic fiefdom for Smirnov, his family and his cronies. I used to call it Europe's biggest duty free shop. It was basically a big staging area for smuggling operations. Enormous amounts of money were made by smuggling goods into Ukraine and Moldova proper through Transnistria to avoid taxes and customs duties. Many people in both Moldova and Ukraine were complicit in this and made money from it.

Q: How did this work?

PERINA: The basic scenario was something like this. A shipment of goods would come into the port of Odessa marked as destined for Transnistria. The Ukrainians would allow it to pass duty free to Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria. Then it would be smuggled across the border back into Ukraine or into Moldova without payment of any duties. This was relatively easy to do. Moldova had no checkpoints because it did not want to imply that Transnistria was a separate country. As for Ukraine, there were many entry points along the lengthy border. People on the Ukrainian side who were in on the scheme also paid off customs officials, and so on. With high duty items like cigarettes and liquor, the profits were enormous but many commodities besides these were also smuggled. I heard estimates of hundreds of millions of dollars generated through such a scheme. Clearly many people in Moldova and Ukraine were involved and had a vested interest in keeping this going, including very high-ranking people in the Ukrainian government. That is a major reason why it was so difficult to get Ukraine to put pressure on Transnistria.

But getting back to Smirnov, when I arrived and Lucinschi was president of Moldova, the conflict had become fairly benign. There were still formal talks to resolve it but the tensions

were low. In fact, Smirnov sometimes actually visited Chisinau from Transnistria. I first met him at a Russian Embassy reception that he was attending. The relationship between Transnistria and Moldova became much tenser after Voronin became President. In any case, Smirnov was hardly isolated, and we saw no benefit in avoiding talking to him. I received the Department's concurrence to have some meetings and try to persuade him to find a resolution to the conflict. This had to be done carefully because Smirnov was of course looking for ways to make any contact with Westerners look like recognition of an independent Transnistria. During my first visit to Tiraspol, the Transnistrians wanted to have television cameras, a formal lunch and so on. I refused all this and said I would only come for a meeting and no protocol functions. The Transnistrians agreed because they wanted a dialogue. Altogether I met with Smirnov about half a dozen times during my tour. They were frustrating talks.

Q: How so?

PERINA: Well, he felt under no real pressure to change a profitable arrangement. His only interest was in keeping it going. It was clear that the ethnic issue was no longer a concern even for him, although he still used it publicly as a pretext for secession. The real issues were all economic. He wanted to retain Transnistria as a money making operation. Unlike in other secessions, say Kosovo or Abkhazia, the Transnistrians did not insist on being recognized as an independent country, having a UN seat and so on. Their so-called foreign Minister Valeri Litskai once told me that they would be happy to be like Taiwan: not recognized as a separate country but free to have all their own economic relations. "Just let us do our business," he would argue. The problem is we could not allow that because it was hurting all of Moldova badly. Tax revenue was lost by the Moldovan government. Foreign investors were afraid to go into a country with an unresolved conflict. It was draining resources that were needed for development. We wanted Moldova to be stable and successful, and Transnistria was clearly an obstacle to that.

An additional problem was that a lot of Moldova's industry was located in Transnistria. This had been done since the days of Stalin so that the industrial base would not be directly on the frontline. But it was industry that Moldova as a whole needed badly for its economy. It was unfair for just the Transnistrians to exploit it. There was, for example, a steel plant which was one of the largest and best in the former Soviet Union. When I was preparing for my confirmation hearings, I looked at the trade figures and I saw that the U.S. had a trade deficit with Moldova. I could not believe this. I asked the desk to look into this, and it turned out that we were one of the importers of rolled steel from Transnistria. These are the steel rods that are most often put into construction concrete, and importing them was not illegal because there were no U.S. sanctions in place against Transnistria. On the contrary, the U.S. was purchasing so much Transnistrian steel that on paper we had a trade deficit with Moldova.

Q: How did the Russian troops in Transnistria fit into all this? Were they selling their tanks in the background?

PERINA: There were two categories of Russian troops, with the distinction between them often deliberately blurred by the Russians. One category was several hundred Russian peacekeepers who were there ostensibly to maintain a ceasefire. The Moldovans had agreed to these but regretted the agreement almost before the ink was dry. The second category was several

thousand troops who were remnants of the Soviet 14th Army that had been stationed in Moldova during the Cold War. They were ostensibly there to guard the military weapons and stockpiles left over from the 14th Army and not yet withdrawn. This included over 40,000 tons of ageing ammunition stored at a military base in Transnistria called Cobasna. The Moldovans wanted the stockpiles plus the Russian troops out of Moldova but the Russians claimed that Smirnov would not let them withdraw the weapons and ammunition and they could not let this materiel fall into his hands by leaving. There was a lot of theater in this because the Russians in fact had means to put pressure on Transnistria if they really wanted Smirnov to let them leave. But Smirnov did claim that all of this materiel belonged to Transnistria, just as other Soviet assets fell to the republics where the assets were located when the Soviet Union dissolved.

Q: We were doing a lot to help the Russians dismantle weapons in many parts of the former Soviet Union. Were we doing anything of that nature?

PERINA: Yes, we were. The background to this is that at the 1998 OSCE Summit meeting in Istanbul where there was agreement on an adapted CFE treaty, we prevailed on Yeltsin to make public commitments that Russia would withdraw all its remaining troops from Moldova and Georgia, where there was a similar problem. These became known as the Istanbul commitments and were quite controversial later because Moscow tried to weasel out of them and we refused to ratify the adapted CFE treaty until they were fulfilled. In any case, we wanted to help the Russians withdraw or destroy these armaments because they were destabilizing, and destroying weapons is in fact very expensive if done safely. The experts who came told me that it costs far more today to destroy a Soviet tank than it cost to build it. So the OSCE created this voluntary fund to help with the arms withdrawal, and the U.S. was the major contributor to the fund. We made several million dollars available for this, and the fund was administered by the OSCE Mission in Chisinau. Well, to make a long story short, there was some limited destruction of tanks and one or two trainloads of weapons and ammunition were withdrawn but then the withdrawals stopped, and the Russians and the armaments are in Moldova to this day. It became pretty clear to me that the Russians did not really want to withdraw all this materiel because it provided a pretext for them to stay militarily in Moldova, even if with just a token force.

Q: Were these weapons being sold? Were they being shipped off to someplace like Syria or Iraq?

PERINA: There were many rumors to this effect but I never saw any evidence of sales. The fact is that most of the armaments were not worth much and were dangerous. Smirnov, of course, argued that they were very valuable. He once told me that he would sell them all to the U.S. for four billion dollars. This is probably more than all of Transnistria was worth. We once had reports that the Transnistrians tried to sell some of these stockpiles, as did the Russians, but no one was interested. The materiel was all old, unstable and dangerous. I think the Russians thus concluded that its greatest value came from providing a pretext for an indefinite Russian presence in Moldova.

Q: What were the Russian troops doing? Were they isolated on bases or visible on the streets?

PERINA: Occasionally you would see some on the streets of Tiraspol but for the most part they were on the bases, which were ostensibly still under Russian control. Some of the Russian troops

had been there for so long that they had basically gone native. They married spouses in Transnistria, acquired families and were pretty well settled in. They also did not want to leave for some new posting in Siberia.

Q: Still, it strikes me that all of this was sort of a wasting asset for Smirnov. Time was not on his side.

PERINA: That is exactly what I tried to convince him of in our meetings. But he and his cronies were making a lot of money, and they wanted to keep the business going as long as they could.

Q: Were you working with our Embassies in Moscow, Kiev and Bucharest? Was this a joint effort?

PERINA: We coordinated closely. Those three embassies were the key ones as well as our OSCE Mission in Vienna, given all the OSCE involvement.

Q: When you talk about the conflict, were people still getting killed?

PERINA: No. By the time I was there it was not a hot conflict like Nagorno Karabakh or the other ones in the Caucasus. There was tension, especially after Voronin came in because he and Smirnov really got to hate one another, but no one was being killed. Occasionally there were confrontations between police forces on the boundary line or something like that but both sides usually backed away from real violence. It had become largely an economic conflict, and not even an ethnic one. By the time I arrived, Moldova actually had very good ethnic relations between Romanian and Slavic speakers. Both Russian and Romanian were accepted in public. A politician would speak in Russian on the seven o'clock evening news and then in Romanian on the eight o'clock news. A politician would be finished if he spoke Russian on television in Estonia, for example. This good relationship between the ethnic groups in Moldova was why most people believed that the Transnistrian conflict should be the easiest of all the conflicts in the former Soviet Union to resolve. In theory it should be. But as Yogi Berra said: In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice but in practice there is.

Q: How active could the Embassy be in the Transnistrian area?

PERINA: We did things that were possible to do without going through the local authorities. We did not want to do that anything that would imply official recognition of Transnistrian authorities as an independent state. My going to see Smirnov was OK because we viewed him as a provincial leader in a country to which I was accredited. I never called him President, and we made our point that he fell under the US Embassy in Moldova. But we would not deal with Tiraspol as though it was a sovereign government. Thus we could do things like exchanges and certain assistance programs that did not need to go through the government, things we could carry out directly with the people concerned. We did not give any technical or humanitarian assistance that had to go through the Transnistrian government. Transnistria did get much less U.S. assistance than Moldova proper because of this restriction.

Q: How did economic conditions compare between Transnistria and Moldova? Was the situation

in one better than in the other?

PERINA: This was an issue of much debate between the two sides, and it is difficult to judge because the statistics are so unreliable. I think that people in Transnistria were worse off because of the isolation and the control and exploitation of the economy by Smirnov and his people. The Transnistrian currency, the ruble, was a joke and had no value outside of Transnistria. At least the Moldovan leu was convertible within Moldova and relatively stable. But the hard fact is that the economic situation was bad on both sides of the Dniester. That is why human trafficking, for example, became such a problem in the country.

Q: Could you explain what you mean by that?

PERINA: Moldova became one of the main source countries in the region for young women who were sent overseas for prostitution. It was a terrible problem. In some cases, the girls knew what they were getting into and chose to do so just to escape the poverty in Moldova and get to the West. In many cases in my time, however, the victims did not know they would be forced into prostitution and thought they would be working as nannies, waitresses, or something like that. Most often, it was women and girls from the countryside who were tricked in this fashion. Moldova became notorious as a source country for such trafficking. Most often the victims were sent to Western Europe or the Balkans and the Middle East but one NGO even found two Moldovan girls in a brothel in Cambodia. Fortunately, the matter got so much publicity that a lot of international donors started giving money to deal with the problem. Also, trafficking was not unique to Moldova. It was a big problem in Ukraine, Russia, the entire region. By the time I was leaving, there were many NGO's and programs dedicated to fighting human trafficking.

Q: What could the Embassy do about this?

PERINA: We directed a good chunk of our assistance money to supporting such programs. Primarily these were educational programs to warn young women of what could happen to them. The Embassy financed production of a documentary film that gave testimony from real victims of trafficking. It was shown in schools and on Moldovan television. There were even billboards in Chisinau warning against the dangers of being recruited. So we did a lot, and I think the problem diminished but of course the roots of the problem were economic, and the only long-term solution was to raise the standard of living.

Q: Was Moldova lobbying for NATO and European Union membership?

PERINA: Not for NATO membership. Moldova's constitution stated that the country would be neutral, and lobbying for NATO membership would have complicated any reconciliation with Transnistria. Moldova was a member of the Partnership for Peace program and cooperated with NATO in that respect. There were even several NATO-related training exercises in Moldova with international participation. The Embassy also had a very active military assistance and training program run by the Defense Department. We had very good relations with the Moldovan military.

As for the European Union, most Moldovans are very Western-oriented and would have loved to

become members. I think they hope to do so someday. In my time, they recognized that it was unrealistic to expect membership but they did want closer relations and economic ties with the EU. Unfortunately, the European Union was not very active in Moldova at the time. They have become much more active in recent years after Moldova became a neighboring country to the EU.

Q: You left Moldova in 2001. Is there anything else we should talk about from this period?

PERINA: Yes, I left in 2001. There are two things I would mention briefly. The first was the Y2K episode. Remember that? It was the technical crash that all the experts said would occur when computers tried to switch from 1999 to 2000. I still don't understand why this was supposed to be the case but that is another matter. The thing I want to mention is that Moldova together with Ukraine and Belarus was one of the three countries in the world granted the right of voluntary departure for Embassy family members and non-essential staff. I don't know how this happened. Somehow Embassy Kiev got this for its people, and then it was extended to Moldova and Belarus. A lot of our Embassy people got free Christmas trips to the U.S. because of this. The bottom line was that the experts believed disaster would occur: computers would collapse, lights go out, utilities fail, and so on. We were all instructed to stock up on food and water, and I as the Ambassador was instructed to be in the Embassy building at the stroke of midnight on December 31, 1999 to assist with the impending chaos. Well I was in the Embassy at midnight. It was a New Year's Eve I will never forget. The clock struck 12:00, and we all waited with bated breath to see what would happen. Of course nothing happened. Absolutely nothing. If anything, things worked better than before because the Moldovans had taken some of our advice to heart about improving their computer systems. But even without that, I doubt anything would have happened. The experts were totally wrong and did not seem to understand how few things actually were computerized in that part of the world. It was a lesson to me about how you cannot always believe the experts. And the Moldovans, of course, all thought we were a little crazy.

Q: It reminded me of the religious groups that expect the world to end, give away all their possessions and go up on the mountain to sing hymns and await judgment day. I remember how nothing happened after Y2K.

PERINA: The other episode I wanted to mention was about the tragedy that did happen and we did not expect, and that is 9/11. We were scheduled to leave Moldova on September 15, 2001. We had our tickets arranged and a full week of farewell dinners scheduled. And of course 9/11 made it a completely different week that I will never forget. The reaction of the Moldovans was incredible. I would never have imagined such a spontaneous outpouring of sympathy and support. The entire sidewalk in front of the Embassy was covered with flowers and candles that people brought. Classes of schoolchildren sent condolence letters to the Embassy. We opened a condolence book that even President Voronin came to the Embassy to sign, and a special memorial service was held by the Orthodox Church in the city's main cathedral. It was a very touching experience because the sympathy was so genuine and sincere. Of course, we cancelled all our farewell dinners but had a very moving farewell with the Moldovan people. We flew to the U.S. on September 23 after U.S. airports were reopened.

End of reader