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SUBJECT: UKRAINE/MOLDOVA/TRANSNISTRIA: GOU BLAMES TIRASPOL FOR TRANSNISTRIA BORDER STAND-OFF

Classified By: Political Counselor Aubrey A. Carlson for reasons 1.4(b, d)

1. (C) Summary: In a March 15 briefing of OSCE member state reps, GOU officials accused Transnistrian authorities of purposefully engineering the ongoing border standoff and refusing GOU attempts to discuss the situation. GOU officials appealed to EU states to advise their shippers to avoid transiting Transnistria and to require Moldovan customs documentation on Transnistrian shipments. The GOU is also making its case in the media. End summary.

2. (U) DFM Andriy Veselovsky and Ukrainian Special Envoy for Transnistria Dmytro Tkach provided the latest developments to diplomats from OSCE member states March 15 on the dispute with Moldova's Transnistria region over UKRAINE's enforcement of its customs protocol with Moldova. A deputy minister of the Transportation Ministry and deputy heads of the State Border Guards Service (SGBS) and State Customs Service provided additional information in the nearly two-hour briefing.

3. (SBU) Tkach said he had returned to his current Ambassadorial posting in Budapest March 12 after a four-day vacation and rushed to Odesa the following day to join the Ukrainian government working group monitoring the border situation. He and SGBS Deputy Head Pavel Shisholin provided details substantiating that the Transnistrian authorities were engineering an atmosphere of crisis, including by busing in demonstrators to perform before television news cameras. Drivers of transport trucks backed up at the border were unable to leave because Transnistrian border guards had confiscated their documents and vehicle registrations. First the SGBS and now the Ukrainian Ministry of Emergency Situations had provided tents for the stranded drivers and were feeding them.

4. (C) Tkach said the Ukrainian government had proposed to meet with Transnistrian representatives in Odesa March 16, but the Transnistrians had refused, first orally and to be followed up with a written response. He had heard that



Transnistrian leader Igor Smirnov had gathered business leaders together and threatened retaliation if their companies shipped exports to or received goods from UKRAINE. In telephone conversations, his contacts in the Transnistrian business community had told Tkach that they were afraid to stand up to Smirnov.

5. (C) Saying that 50 of the 77 vehicles stranded at the border were from EU countries, Tkach appealed to EU member state diplomats to advise their companies to choose routes that do not transit Transnistria. He urged the EU companies not to send trucks to the closed crossing points so as not to aggravate the situation or overwhelm the emergency facilities that had been established. Tkach also asked EU governments to require companies not to accept Transnistrian shipments that lacked Moldovan certificates and carried only Transnistrian documents.

6. (C) Note: In a March 13 meeting with EUR DAS Kramer (septel), 2nd Territorial Department Director Ponomarenko expressed his concern that the Ukrainian government was losing the "information war" over the customs protocol. We passed a set-up for a press briefing on Transnistria as we exited MFA that evidently would take place immediately after the diplomatic session. MFA has clearly mobilized to more aggressively present its case, by going directly to the media and by seeking assistance from fellow OSCE member states. Subsequent media coverage of the press conference reported Tkach's call for Russian influence on Transnistria to reopen the border. He also said GOU officials would meet March 14 with Transnistrian businesses but, according to unofficial indications, Transnistrian authority representatives would talk "only to Moscow."

7. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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