

Transdnestr Calls for Union With Russia

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TIRASPOL, Moldova — The leader of Moldova's breakaway region of Transdnestr on Tuesday urged Moldova to cede the region to Russia after 20 years of de facto independence.

"One cannot make our people live differently. ... We have Slavic roots; we will always be with Russia," Igor Smirnov said on the eve of the 20th anniversary of Transdnestr's declaration of independence.

Its independence has not been recognized by any UN member nation, including Russia. But Smirnov thanked Moscow for support that he said had stopped bloodshed that claimed "over 800 lives" in the early 1990s.

"Transdnestr is the Russian empire's frontier," he said.

Transdnestr, a narrow sliver of land between the Dnestr River and Ukraine, broke away in 1990, fearing that its mainly Slavic population could be marginalized if Moldovans united with ethnic kin in Romania, a prospect that has never materialized.

The separatists fought a brief but bloody war with Moldovan troops in 1992. In 2006,

Transdnestr voted in a referendum to become part of Russia. Moscow has 1,200 troops, who guard its Soviet-era facilities, and 450 peacekeepers in the region.

Smirnov said he opposed a proposal by Moldova to replace the Russian peacekeepers with an international mission led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

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