

Transnistrian Conflict Resolution in the Context of the Ukrainian Crises

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Abstract. *The article presents a broad analysis of the Transnistrian situation in the context of the newly developed Ukrainian crises, focusing on the conflict roots and the sources for a potential conflict resolution. Then, as an exploratory study, it reveals the results of a questionnaire applied on Moldovan citizens, regarding their perception on the Transnistrian frozen conflict.*

Keywords: *Transnistria, Ukrainian crises, Moldavia, conflict analysis, conflict perception.*

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Introduction

Nowadays, on international level, Transnistria region has the potential to be a new source of geopolitical tension between Russia and Europe. According to a recent study (Toal & O'Loughlin, 2014), the option of joining Russia is favoured by ethnic Moldovans, Ukrainians and Russians from Transnistria, while the Tiraspol government sent recently a letter to Moscow for asking to join the Russian Federation. In the same time, Republic of Moldova has one of the most complicated political situation from Europe being between Russian threatened sanctions and the current impossibility to EU accession despite the free trade agreement signed in 2013, at the Vilnius Summit (Solomon, 2014).

The Ukrainian crises had revived the topic of Transnistria issue not only among politi-

cian elites, but also among ordinary citizens of Moldova Republic who expressed more concerns than before for a close settlement of the conflict. The recent annexation of Crimea to Russia is an evidence of the power that this country still holds in the region, which led to rumors regarding the next targets after the precedent in Ukraine.

To understand better the Transnistrian conflict, the article will present first an analytical framework, using a United States Institute of Peace model (Education and Training Center, 2008). Then, as part of an exploratory study, the results of a questionnaire applied on Moldovan citizens, about their perception on the conflict, will be revealed.

Analytical framework of the Transnistrian conflict

The methodology used for this section of the article relies on the instrument described in *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators* (Harris, 2003, pp. 52–53) and the USIP model of conflict analysis (Education and Training Center, 2008). This analytical framework provides a method for the study of conflict within a clearly defined time period and consists of five key themes which will be developed under a series of questions that, in the opinion of Mike Lekson, 'ensure a look at the essential elements of what the conflict is in order to be able to decide how to approach it and what to do about it' (Harris, 2003, p. 7).

Actors

Situated between Ukraine and Romania, with a surface of 33,371sq km, Moldova became an independent state in 1991, after USSR dissolution, being lately a point of unofficial dispute between Russia and Romania. Historically known as Bessarabia, Moldova was under Ottoman Empire until 1806, then passed under Russian Empire (Russo-Turkish War), declared its independence and united with Romania in 1918, but the consequences of Molotov-Ribbentrop from 1940 lead to the occupation of Moldova by the Soviet Union. The various historical backgrounds resulted today in a mixed population with different ethnic groups where the majority are Moldovans, followed by Russians and Ukrainians (around 10%), Gagauz, Bulgarian, Roma and others. The notable percentage of Russians is explained by the Russian migration (during Soviet time) with the purpose of industrializing the region, and by the presence of Russian 14th Army sent at the south border to protect from NATO members. The almost four million of Moldova Republic population is affected by migration, thousands of people leaving annually to find a better life in other countries and also in Russia (their preferred destination). The high rate of inflation, unemployment, and poverty classified Moldova as the poorest country in Europe with a wide criminal activity (weapons trafficking, drugs, human organs). The democratization reforms and the Europe integration direction were drafted by Vladimir Voronin (the 2001 elected president from the Communist Party) and today are continued and intensified by actual leadership (Nicolae Timofti) but still without many positive results (Sanchez, 2009).

The Transnistrian Moldovan Republic led by Igor Smirnov is a state recognized only by Russia, having a surface of 180 km long and 30km wide with a population of 630 (8% of Moldova population) but that generates about 40% of industrial production of Moldova Republic. Even though Transnistria is an important producer of steel, without the Russian economic support, the country could not survive (in 2012, the budget deficit was around 70%, 3 billion dollars being owned to the giant Russian company Gazprom). Since 1990, the regime from Transnistria strengthened the idea of USSR perpetuation after its collapse by promoting the policy of 'new identity' and cultivating that of anti-Romanian moldovanism. Being a multi-ethnic population, Transnistria also promoted a policy of forced russification of population that aimed to create Transnistrian people with multi-ethnicity that have a future linked with that of Russian Federation. The majority of inhabitants from Transnistria (60%) are Moldovan citizens, but for increasing the influence in the region, Ukraine and Russia provided citizenship to the inhabitants leading to a competition of identities with deep political roots. The Transnistria regime made efforts to present Republic of Moldova as the most important enemy so the most aggressive segment of population entirely rejects the integration within Republic of Moldova's borders, while an important sector of population still considers themselves citizens of the same republic (Oazu, 2013).

Another important actor is EU that helped both Moldova and Transnistria in building a mutual trust by financing since 2009 the 'United Nations Development Programme' in order to promote cooperation in areas like health, environment or social affairs. The Vilnius Summit from November 2013 brought for Moldova the approval of Free Trade Agreement and the confirmation of being prepared for the liberalization of visas for those who have biometric passports. The Moldovan Prime Minister Leanca considers that the European Integration of Moldova will be a continuation of the actions started in 1991 (the independence from USSR), the process of full membership being a soft power that will attract the citizens from both banks of Nistru. Anyway, the ethnic minorities seemed not to be too optimistic judging on the referendum from February 2014, when the People's Assembly of Gagauzia asked the minority if they prefer the EU rapprochement or the Russian Customs Union, apart from the independence from Moldova if it unites with Romania. The results were more than clear: with a participation of 70%, people voted in proportion of 98,4% for Russian Customs Union being against joining the EU, voting also for independence from Moldova more than 98% of them. In the light of recent events of Ukraine crises and the Crimea independence (and its annexation by Russia), the support for EU in Moldova is decreasing, the recent opinion polls indicating that 55% of Moldovans prefer European orientation while 28% are against and only 13% of ethnic Russians, 26% of ethnic Ukrainians and 15% of other ethnic groups from Moldova are in favour of European Union (Gonzales, 2014).

Among EU's members, Romania proved to be an important supporter of finding a consensus that will respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Moldova. Even though

Bucharest currently has not an exemplary political situation, the ex-president Traian Basescu declared in many occasions that Romania will try to facilitate the relations between EU and Moldova through various mechanisms (establishing consulates general in Moldovan cities, offering scholarships and citizenship for students and workers in Romania). Another significant European Union member state that showed interest in the Transnistria conflict resolution is Germany. The visit of Chancellor Merkel to Chisinau in 2012, the conference for confidence building mechanisms by the German government as well as the Meseberg process were direct opportunities that engaged both Germany and Russia over issues regarding Transnistria region. Because German Chancellor enjoys a high-profile respect in Chisinau and Moscow as well as within the European Union, Germany could lead the Transnistria conflict settlement even without a formal position (Solomon, 2014).

The role of OSCE (CSCE until 1995) in the conflict was played from the beginning through the Mission established in Moldova as well as through its seat near Ukraine and Russia in the first negotiations format between Moldova and Transnistria. Under its framework, the 1999 Summit from Istanbul fixed that the withdrawal of Russian troops will happen within three years, but in 2002 (Oporto Summit), Russia asked for one year extension due to technical difficulties. Anyway, the Russian departure stopped because of Moldova's refusal to sign the Kozak Memorandum. United States of America and European Union were included in the negotiation format in 2004, the process being renamed 2+5 (Moldova and Transnistria, Russia, Ukraine, OSCE, EU and USA), but due to a tensioned period between Russia and West powers, the activity of negotiations was interrupted. In April 2012, the process was restarted and was established a three areas agenda in a package of institutional, political and security terms. The facilitation of free movement of Transnistria inhabitants who have Russian or Ukrainian passports was facilitated by the legislation modification of Moldova as a result of the dialog and efforts of negotiations meetings (Gonzales, 2014).

Root Causes

The historical roots of Transnistrian conflict can be found in the Russo-Turkish wars period from the ending of 18th and beginning of 19th century when Russian Empire incorporated Transnistria and Bessarabia. The Romanian ethnic population from both regions suffered a Russification process, started by tsarist government and conducted later by Soviet government, which brought demographic changes with social implications. The denationalization measures have been hampered in some limits by the Moldovan nationalist movement from Bessarabia, but in Transnistria, the Russian assimilation was stronger and better affixed due to the larger number of Slavs (Russians and Ukrainians), despite the fact that Moldovans remained the largest ethnic group (in 1936, the Transnistrian population was: 41,8% Moldovans, 28,7% Ukrainians and

14,2% Russians while in 1989, the percentage was the following: 39,9% Moldovans, 28,3% Ukrainians and 25,5% Russians) (King, 1999, p. 185).

The pro-soviet propaganda was intensified in Transnistria during the membership period to Romania of Bessarabia region (inter-war period), when the public opinion was prepared by Soviets to export the Communist revolution, assigning to Romania an image of enemy of peasants and proletariat, everything related to Romania being defamed. The national emancipation movement from Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was prevented using the same style of propaganda through which the Soviet leaders suppressed the ethnic Romanians national feelings by drastic measures as mass deportation, forced collectivization or political persecution (Fedor, 1995).

The geostrategic and geopolitical causes of Transnistrian conflict were always of great interest for Russia. Taking into consideration the geographical positions in Europe of Transnistria and Bessarabia, both regions were used as interface instruments to spread the Russian influence. The dissolution of Soviet Union put Moscow in the situation to change its policy toward the leadership from Moldova who declared independent and sovereign. So, the only Russian physical presence on the continent, in Transnistria, at just 1000 km from Europe, received natural support for the separatist objectives. Keeping Transnistria somehow linked was a method to dominate The Moldova Republic and to spread influence in Balkans a fact that could be hampered by a possible reunification with Romania. This fear was expressed under concrete terms during the 1992 Peace Accord when Russia stated as a clear condition the seceding of Transnistria (RMN) if the reunification of Moldova with Romania will take place. If Transnistria was controlled, Russia could maintain pressure on Ukraine and other states (Commonwealth of Independent States members) so that a possible NATO enlargement could be prevented in a region with unstable security. Perpetuating the pan-Slavism of region and assuming the leader position of this movement was the purpose for which Russia tried to avoid any integration of Balkans states (Slavs or Orthodox) in Western Organizations (with or without military specific) (Olaru-Cemartan, 2013).

The military causes of Transnistria conflict were generated by the dissolution of the existent Soviet military system that had installations and military strategic objectives outside the remaining Russia after the dissolution of Soviet Union. The units of 14th Army, an armament industry situated near Tiraspol, is representing the biggest Russian weapons deposit from Europe and initially was created to protect the Russian-speaking population that lived outside the borders, to protect the war veterans and also to keep an eye on eventual conflicts of the Russian Federation's borders. The Russia's foreign policy approached the military issue from Transnistria in two opposite directions: firstly, the civilian leadership and the president Boris Yeltsin wanted to withdraw the troops (despite developing a plan to annex Transnistria) while the military leadership and the vice-president Alexander Rutskoy advocated for maintaining the troops due to the

reasons stated in the traditional approach because NATO and EU were threatening the security of Russia. In time, the president reached the same position as his vice-president and said that Russia will continue to protect the Russians living in other states defending their right even by force if it was necessary (Ibid, 2013).

The socio-economic causes of Transnistrian conflict were based on the economic division of Moldova in two parts: the agricultural region represented by Bessarabia (cereals, fruits, vegetables, wine) and the industrial area represented by Transnistria that hold the total production of gas containers, power transformers, cotton textiles, large electrical machines and more than half from total production of cement and low-horsepower electric engines of the country (King, 1999). Losing Transnistria could have strong negative effects for the whole country's economy, and the leadership of both sides of the conflict was aware of this. Inducing the fear of economic security problems was an instrument used by Tiraspol leaders to mobilize the Slav population in the fight against Moldova's leaders (Olaru-Cemartan, 2013).

The linguistic and ethnic causes of the conflict started mainly because of the adoption, in September 1989, by the Moldovan government, of the language law. Due to anti-Moldovan/Romanian propaganda, the Slav and Russian-speaking population was dissatisfied and defined as distrustfully the legislation that was even tolerant with the language of ethnic groups. The separatist leaders invoked and spread among Slav population the concepts of losing cultural identity and their social status reasons which should motivate the fight for self-determination of nations. Although Russian government argued that the ethnic rivalry was driving the conflict, in reality, the conflict started to be ethnic only when the Slavic elites saw the language issue as a sign of eventual reunification with Romania. The investigations of Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe found as false the accusations of 'Moldovan discrimination against ethnic minorities' and even the president of Transnistrian Republic, Igor Smirnov, admitted that the conflict is political, not an ethnic one (Lynch, 2000).

What is driving the conflict?

As can be noticed, the Transnistrian conflict has multiple causes, but its primary driver remains the political and economic aspect. The confrontation between the elite from Transnistria, who support the old Soviet regime, and the new leaders from Bessarabia, who claim a newly democratic Moldova, started with the fear of losing the economic independence of Transnistrian people due to the nationalistic Moldavian measures (Statie, 2013).

What are the needs and fears of each group?

In terms of needs and fears, taking into consideration all above could be said that the Transnistrian side of conflict, fears of a disadvantaged economic position and a possible loss of cultural identity due to the new Moldavian legislation measures that seek the

independence of Russian influence. In this context, the separatist leaders of Transnistria state the need of maintaining the Russian support, invoking the Slav ethnicity protection, in order to obtain independence from Moldova and eventual to be annexed to Russia under international recognition.

On the other side, leaders from the Moldova Republic have more than one fear to deal with when comes about Transnistria conflict situation. Firstly, if they lose Transnistria, this will mean automatically negative consequences in the industrial economy that had the headquarter within Transnistria territory. If they try to keep by force Transnistria, they will attract Russian punitive military measures. If they make efforts toward European integration they also raise Russian disciplinary measures regarding trade market. In this context the Moldavian need is pretty clear: to leave the Russian vicious circle by assuming the risks of punishment that could be compensated if the European countries members will help in redressing the economic situation by spending political and economic capital. This raise another fear: could Moldova find trustful partners ready to help even if this means assuming a position against Russia? Until present, there was no affirmative answer.

Russia's fears and needs are even harder to define, but in the Transnistrian conflict, the Russian need was to conserve as much as possible the power over the ex-members of Soviet Union using the pretext of military and economic protection. Supporting Transnistria through cooperative business relations, Russia is maintaining a strategic position in southeast Europe and is controlling the Republic of Moldova using its military presence and trade punishment measures to make harder its European community orientation. The constant fear of Russia was losing this power in the detriment of western powers.

The western powers (OSCE, EU, NATO) main need is to achieve the region stability that mean the withdrawal of Russian troops from the periphery of Union and in the same time the recovery of Chisinau after the internationalization of the conflict. Their main fear is an eventual changed status from a frozen to a hot conflict because of Russian intervention.

Stage, key issues of conflict

At the end of 2011, at Vilnius, the formal negotiations between two sides of conflict in the format '5+2' were resumed after almost six years without any direct results. At that conference, the authorities prepared a guide of negotiations planning an agenda that includes as principal themes socio-economic, humanitarian, security and political aspects (Scrieru, n.d.). Despite of all negotiations, the declaration of Evgheni Sevcuik (Ukrainian ethnic), the new-elected president of Transnistria Republic, underlined the fact that the withdrawal of the peacekeepers from Transnistria (Russian troops) could lead to an armed conflict in the region. More than that, according to the same declaration

for a Russian TV channel, Sevciuk affirmed that Transnistria's wish is the integration in the Russian Federation because reaching a compromise with Moldova is difficult because of Romania's influence on Moldova's policy ("Retragerea trupelor ruse din Transnistria: Pretinsul presedinte de la Tiraspol agita spectrul unui razboi cu Romania", 2013).

In other words, the stage of the conflict remains frozen without changing much because the protracted confrontation between Chisinau and Tiraspol remains blocked in the same political and economic issues. The security aspect is feeding the conflict because Russian military presence has significant contribution for the negotiation process, the behavior of Russia sustaining the idea of a political conflict. Even if, Russia still had not officially recognized the Transnistria independence, under a pacifying objective, it continues to give support. Obtaining the status of special region within Republic of Moldova, Transnistria underlined also the political nature of the frozen conflict because every each of ethnic, linguistic or even economic factors could be solved as long as exists a political will to solve the conflict (Boțan, 2009).

The part that is suffering the most in this context of the conflict will be Republic of Moldova which is blocked in its way to integrate into the European Union due to Transnistria issue. Because Russia has not yet recognized Transnistria as independent and neither accepted to withdraw the military forces of 14 Army stationed there, the Western powers have no clear position regarding the situation of region and their capacity to intervene and help Moldova.

Power, Resources and Relationships

The power and resources of the two direct sides in the Transnistria conflict will not differ much if will not be outside help that change the entire situation. The Russian support for Transnistria side puts Republic of Moldova on inferiority foot regarding the military resources. According to Chisinau sources, Russia keeps in Transnistria about 1,500 people to protect the stockpiles (estimated around 30000 tons of ammunition) remained from the Soviet time so the power with which Transnistria could be helped is not insignificant ("Retragerea trupelor ruse din Transnistria: Pretinsul presedinte de la Tiraspol agita spectrul unui razboi cu Romania", 2013).

On Moldova's side, the degradation process of military equipment from 1993 was stopped at the middle of 2014, when in the context of Ukranian context, the fighting technique was re-established with a 500% rating. The defence minister of Moldova, Viorel Cibotrau, in an interview for Unimedia, said that until 2018, Moldova will have modern military bases with new technique and new mechanism for identification of future soldiers still in high school. The 'Nordic Shield 2015' from April 2015, was a tactical exercise with shooting demonstration for testing the preparation, organization and internal linking military staff (Calugareanu, 2015).

The current relationship between leaders of Transnistria (supported by Russia) and those of Moldova is in a continuous state of tension. The insistence of Timofti President on the unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops from the end of 2012 had increased the tension between Chisinau and Moscow. Announcing the intention of Moldova to adopt the EU 'Energy Packages' which are against the companies that are both suppliers and distributors (the Gazprom situation) made Russia to offer a discount of 30% on gas price for Moldova if it will abandon the adoption of the above EU legislative packages. The South-East Europe supply is monopolized by Gazprom that tries to build a gas pipeline thorough The Black Sea in order to strengthen its position, but if the Balkan countries implement the European Community rules, Gazprom will fail.

Regarding the Moldova's trade agreement with EU, during his visit to Chisinau in 2013, the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin stated as consequences for Moldova the following measures: the Russian market will impose access restrictions on Moldavian agricultural products, the Moldovans workers in Russia could have problems with their continuity, the gas supply could be cut if the debt of government is not settled and also the European integration will lead to a permanent loss of Transnistria. Even though the territorial integrity of Moldova within the established borders was official recognized by Kremlin, in fact, the Russian leaders kept separated relations with Tiraspol and Chisinau. A denial of Moldova sovereignty being even the presence of Russian troops in Tiraspol.

Moldova's authorities are aware of Russia's capacity to penalize the EU orientation but they declare to accept paying the high price in order to eliminate the combined Russian punitive measures with incentives for a better relation with Moscow. The assumed risk will be the scenario in which the Moldovan citizens will blame their government and the EU agreement for the Russian punishment that will be hard to stand in the summer-fall period when the most important customer of Moldovan wine and fruits products will raise problems. Regarding the remittances sent by the Moldovan workers in Russia, their annual amount of 1,000,000,000 \$ gives a significant support for the local economy. Taking into consideration the illegal situation of more than half of Moldovans from Russia and the recent repatriation of 20,000 of them, it is clear that the new agreement on migration between the two countries from 2014 will be used as an instrumental tool by Kremlin (Socor, 2014).

The existing channels of communication in both parties of the conflict resemble much with the media market form other post-Soviet states: local politicians are controlling media for advancing personal objectives. In Moldova are few independent media outlets that are not financed by politicians, among them could be found: Ziarul de Garda Adevarul (sponsored by Soros Foundation), Kommersant.md and Unimedia websites. One of the most influential media person in Moldova is Vladimir Plakhotnyuk (holds four television networks and two radio stations) that keeps controlling the content in order to present critics only for Party's opponents, but never for Democratic Party.

However, the World Press Freedom Index from 2014 placed Moldova on 56th out of 180 countries in terms of freedom of speech, in fact, the best result among non-EU post-soviet countries. Still, even could be called free media, there is no influence on it on political process in Moldova, for example the conflict of interest presented by journalist is not taken into consideration by High Commission of Magistrates (Soloviev, 2014).

History of the Relationship

Although the nature of this paper has no historical purpose, the origins of the conflict and the actors involved today could be better understood only returning a few years back in the history.

The traditional Principality of Moldova, inhabited mainly by Romanian population with Orthodox faith, consisted of three different regions: Bessarabia (situated between Prut and Dniester Rivers), the actual Romanian region of Moldova (between the Carpathians and Prut River) and Bukovina in the northeast part (with capital of Suceava). Starting with 16th century the Ottoman Empire occupied the region until 1775 when Bukovina was taken by Austro-Hungarian Empire, then in 1812 Bessarabia was conquered by the Tzarist Empire and in 1859 the remaining Moldova region joined Wallachia and formed the first Romanian State (with capital of Bucharest). In the context of World Word I, the map of Eastern Europe was changed and for fighting against Central Powers, Romania received Southern Bukovina and insisted for the independence of Bessarabia which in 1918 became part of Romanian Kingdom. In 1944, USSR recovered definitively Bessarabia changing its internal borders in order to oblige to live together distinct ethnic groups respecting the following Kremlin decisions: the north of Bessarabia and Bukovina were attached to the Ukraine Socialist Republic, the current territory of Transnistria (mainly with Russian and Ukrainian inhabitants) was incorporated to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova (situated between Dniester and Prut Rivers), while the autonomous Moldavia was formed by the region assigned to Ukraine (with capital of Balta) and also by the Transnistria region. All in all, the local language (Moldavian) used the Cyrillic alphabet instead of Latin one, but starting with the moment of USSR disintegration the latent conflict between its socialist republics became more evident (Gonzales, 2014).

The situation of present Moldova was influenced by the events happened in 1989-90 when the Romanian ethnicity Moldavians leaded by Mircea Snegur (the head of the first political party of republic) decided the returning to the Latin alphabet, adopting the tricolor flag and the national anthem of Romania. These facts exercised over the minority inhabitants of Moldova with non-Romanian ethnicity the fear of an independent Moldova, which seek the reunification with Romania (after the precedent of 1918-1940 period). The reaction of the resistance movement (formed by Slavs leaded by Igor Smirnov) was to proclaim on 2nd September 1990 the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic even before Moldova obtained, in August 1991, the independence from USSR. Apart the fact that the independence was not recognized neither by Moldovan Parliament nor

by international entities, the political confrontation between Transnistrian Moldovan Republic and Moldova exceeded the political level and received a violent character in Dubasari city, where Moldovan police was attacked by Transnistrian paramilitary forces (Statie, 2013).

By March 1992, the clash expanded and transformed into a war where Transnistrians, using the weapon deposits of the Soviet 14th Army, were aided by volunteers from Russia and Ukraine. On April 1, the president Boris Yeltsin strengthened his help by claiming to the 14th Army to defend the ethnic Russians in Transnistria. An offensive against Moldova was launched in May by the 14th Army, which played a significant role during the conflict, and in June, the Moldovans tried to answer back to their opponents fighting over Tighina city (the bloodiest battle), but they lost control. The conditions of ending the war and clarifying the political status of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic were discussed by President Snegur and Yeltsin on July 3, 1992 in Moscow (without the participation of Transnistrian representatives). The agreement stated that the Republic of Moldova will remain a unitary state, but Transnistria will have a special political status. The cease-fire agreement was met on July 21, 1992 when the Peace Agreement was signed by Russian President Yeltsin and the Moldovan President Snegur. Along the Nistru River was established a security zone where the peacekeeping forces will include Russian, Transnistrian and Moldovan military. The withdrawal of 14th Army was conditioned by Russia if the Transnistria will receive constitutional privileges from Moldova (a special status) having at the same time the right to detach if Moldova will reunite with Romania (Fedor, 1995).

What were the previous attempts at a settlement, and why did they fail?

During the last two decades since the ceasefire agreement was signed, the Republic of Moldova's leadership tried several times to reach a settlement. The first approach was a combination of direct negotiations with Tiraspol trying in the same time to cultivate good relations with Moscow that could pressure Tiraspol to accept reunification. This approach, adopted by Mircea Snegur President (1993) and followed by Petru Luchinski and Vladimir Voronin until 2002-2003 had not reached the reunification objective of Chisinau. Having a conciliatory attitude in order to convince Tiraspol and Moscow that there is nothing threatening regarding reintegration, Chisinau ended by signing documents that helped to strengthen the legal and political side of Transnistria. In this way, the Transnistrian administration obtained by legal claim, an equal status with the Moldova's government and the situation had an international recognition being the object of international negotiating format. More than that, by recognizing the separatist regime's documents and by providing with customs stamps internationally recognized, Chisinau indirectly helped Transnistria to survive economically by having access to legitimate foreign trade. Accepting that their agreements with Tiraspol should be

guaranteed by a third party (Russia, that, in fact, used this conflict for its own strategic aim in the region) proved the agreement of Moldovan authorities about the erosion of their power over Transnistria. Also, signing (on October 21, 1994) the document that regulated the Russian armed forces presence on Moldova's territory linked the attempt to reach a political settlement of Transnistria conflict with the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova, representing in this way the fundamental position of Russia. Also, Moldova signed the authorisation of using Tiraspol military airport for the Russian military. Through all this documents signed by the Republic of Moldova, the Tiraspol is claiming the parity status in negotiations for engaging in international trade and for legitimizing the Russian military presence (Rodkiewicz, 2011).

The second approach of reaching an agreement with Tiraspol, adopted by President Voronin after the failure of joint constitution drafting, was concentrated on direct negotiations with Russia. As a result, the Russian negotiator Dmitry Kozak seemed to convince Smirnov to accept reunification with Moldova in a context that at first, was favorable for Voronin. When the agreement was ready to be signed, November 2003, the Russian side introduced the condition of keeping the troops in Transnistria for the next 20 years, but the mass public manifestation, the United States and EU criticism determined Voronin's refusal to sign.

The third approach, after the failure of Kozak plan, put Voronin in the situation of asking for help to reintegrate from other foreign actors keeping in the same time, pressure on Transnistria. He requested to be assisted in dealing with the conflict by Ukraine, European Union, United States and Romania. Among the results obtained, the most important was the increased involvement of Western powers: in 2005 the United States and the European Union took the observers' position in the OSCE consultations on the conflict from Transnistria (alongside OSCE, Russia, Ukraine, apart from Chisinau and Tiraspol), the so-called 5+2 format negotiations. During the same year, a Special Representative for Moldova conflict was established by the European Union in order to help Moldovan and Ukrainian customs services in limiting the contraband activities along the Transnistrian side. In the 2006 spring Voronin obtained a partial cooperation with Ukrainian government to block the railway connections of external world and Transnistria, but this led to a Russian relations crises against Chisinau according to which was banned the import of wine and agricultural products from Moldova and the double price for Russian natural gas paid by Moldova (while Transnistria was supplied almost for free). Because Russia was the main export market for Moldova, its economy was strongly affected. More than that, because of political changes from Ukraine (prime minister Yulia Timoshenko was replaced by Viktor Yanukovich), the previous state of neutrality in Transnistria conflict was recalled by Ukraine (Ibid, 2011).

Was there a pattern to the failures?

In the end, the approach of solving the conflict by using economic pressure backed by Western powers for punishing the non-cooperative Transnistrian regime was another failed attempt. The failure was due to Russian punishment for Moldova economy, to the unwillingness of Western to cover the effects of Russian sanctions and to the unstable political scene of Ukraine. Although the Western powers were included in negotiations, as long as they were not willing to help with political capital for a right balance between Chisinau on one side and Tiraspol and Moscow on the other one, their inclusion was without positive effects. To sum up, none of the above attempts of Chisinau for solving the conflict proved to be effective. Anyway there could be learned some lessons: the negotiations with Smirnov regime for reaching a solution were unsuccessful, Moscow keeps as a top priority its military presence in Moldova and direct confrontations with Russia are not the best option when the Western countries are not really interested to help if they have to spend political capital for limiting Moscow's destructive attitude (Ibid, 2011).

Moldovan's perception about the Transnistrian conflict

Methodological approach

The research method used was the survey applied to a number of 30 Moldovan citizens, aged between 20 and 30 years. The instrument used was the questionnaire, most questions were closed, with predetermined answer options, but with the possibility of free expression (choosing the so-called 'another' option). The determination of the sample was non-probabilistic, the arbitrary selection being possible through the voluntary participation of respondents. The proportion of 2/1 of respondents are explained by higher accessibility of the author to the category of students (considering that the Ministry of Education is annually offering approximately 2,500 places to Moldovan youths who want to continue their studies in Romania). The 10 questionnaires completed by adults are the outcome of one chain (snowball method), students respondents helped by distributing the questionnaire to their family members or acquaintances. The questionnaire focused on channeling the information from general to specific, giving a slight difference in perception between the two categories of respondents.

The sample involved had the following characteristics: the educational level completed by adult respondents varies from lower high school (vocational), higher secondary to university degrees and their professions are diversified from teachers, educators, engineers, PR specialist, tailors or chefs, most respondents being woman (7 out of 10), currently residing in Moldova. The student respondents are enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate degrees (BA and MA) at different specializations: chemical engineering, economics, engineering, sociology, political science within the Universities of Cluj-Napoca and Iasi. Most of the respondents were male students (14 out of 20) with current residence in Romania.

Data analysis

In the following lines, will be presented the respondents answer for the 18 questions completed by a short description of the real situation regarding the issue discussed.

How do you approximate the level of difficulty arising from the Transnistria conflict in Moldova's internal problems?

Questioning the difficulty resulted from Transnistria conflict in Moldova's internal problems, most students consider that it has a moderate difficulty, Transnistria is not the most serious problem that faces the Republic of Moldova. On the other hand, the adult sample, consider in proportion of 90%, that the issue has a high difficulty, Moldova's development being hampered in concrete terms. According to National Development Strategy for 2008-2011, the Moldovan government admitted that a delayed conflict resolution is a threat for socioeconomic development on long term due to the obstacles in free movement of services, goods and citizens who also deal with administrative trade prohibitions (Republic Moldova Government, 2008).

What percentage of Moldovans do you consider that desire EU integration? To what extent do you think the problem of Transnistria hinders the EU integration of the Republic of Moldova?

If Transnistria issue hampers or not the EU integration of Moldova share the same respondent sample percentages: half of the students and adults surveyed believe that integration is very largely prevented because of Transnistria conflict, the other half of respondents considering that Moldova's EU integration is just largely avoided because of the conflict. The integration of Republic of Moldova in the European Union, in the opinion of students is desired by 70% of the population, while adults believe that only 55% of Moldova's population want this becoming reality.

Are you familiar with the Ukrainian situation following the 2014 crisis? How do you think it will influence the situation from Transnistria the annexation of Crimea?

Regarding the familiarity with the situation from Ukraine after the 2014 crisis, most students said they are not really familiar; they know only general issues, while the majority of adults have responded positively, saying that indeed, they know the situation and consequences of the crisis. Asking if the 2014 annexation of Crimea region will influence the Transnistria conflict situation, nearly half of each group of respondents (8 out of 20 students and 4 out of 10 adults) responded affirmative, that this will largely influence the proximity to Russia, while the other half of the adult group said this will not change the situation at all, at the opposition with the remained students who agreed that Crimea will have a minor influence on the current status of Transnistria.

Regarding the hypothesis in which Moscow authorities look for achieving the same result as in the Ukraine crisis (the annexation of new territory) by maintaining the

Transnistria conflict, most of the respondents answered affirmatively, only 4 out of the 30 respondents answered negatively.

Russia ensures a better life for Transnistrians compared with Moldovans?

Questioning whether Russia ensure a better life to Transnistria inhabitants compared to those of Moldova, the majority of respondents, in percentage of 50% (10 students and five adults) answered negatively, the remaining half of adults have chosen the option of not knowing how to respond, while the other half of student sample is at the opposite extreme answering affirmative, that yes, Russia ensure a better living for Transnistria habitants.

What are the advantages for good relations with Russia versus European Union?

Evaluating the most important advantages of Transnistria regarding the close ties with Russia, the highest share among both students and adults had the following answers: the provision of lower price of energy resources (79.3%), financial support to the pension system (17%) and better working opportunities in Russia

Identifying the most significant advantages of Moldova regarding the close relations with the European Union, according to the largest share among respondents these were the following: the free circulation of goods, people and capital (49.3%), financial support for infrastructure through European funds (28%) and the possibility of a better living (12%).

What are the worst consequences of Transnistrian conflict?

Identifying the worst effects of Transnistria conflict, the adult respondents chose the following possible answers: the imposition of Russian language and alphabet related to it (30%), the inability to use agricultural land beyond the borders, but held by the inhabitants of Transnistria (30%) and the existence of restrictions in movement towards the Republic of Moldova (40%). The student respondents classified as the worst consequences of the conflict from Transnistria the following: imposition of Russian language (60%), instability of Russian support (20%) and non-recognition of diplomas obtained in Transnistria by other countries.

Why Russia has not accepted the Transnistria request for annexation?

Regarding the reasons why Russia does not approve the Transnistria request for acceptance in Eurasian Economic Community, 50% of respondents answered that Russia thus will give 'green light' for integration of Moldova into the EU so this is a way to avoid European orientation. Next reason chosen by a third of adult respondents was that Transnistria does not represent a big interest for Russia, while a quarter of student respondents pointed out that Russia fears the reaction of the Western powers.

What are doing the Chisinau authorities to settle the conflict?

The efforts to solve the conflict of Transnistria by the authorities from Chisinau were evaluated by more than 50% of respondents as being insufficient negotiations without clear results. The other half of adult respondents believes that negotiations tendency is to favor the position of Transnistrian authorities, while half of the student respondents believe that Chisinau authorities have an unclear position regarding the proximity to the EU or Russia.

How is evaluated the international format of negotiation of 5+2?

About the international negotiation format of the Transnistrian conflict that involves five other actors (Russia, Ukraine, OSCE, USA and EU), most respondents (44.8%) believe that there are too many players involved that slows down the decision-making, also a quarter of respondents (24.1%) think that the format is right, but the decisions remain without concrete effects. Unanimity in answers resulted from the question to what extent Transnistria State can be recognized at international level, most respondents considering that this is possible only to a small degree.

What are doing the Tiraspol authorities to settle the conflict?

The actions of the authorities from Tiraspol on Transnistrian conflict settlement are assessed by 40% of adult respondents as being aggressive negotiations with the authorities in Chisinau because Tiraspol is not willing to compromise, making even abuse of power in relation to citizens who want proximity to Russia (25%). On the other hand, 50% of student respondents consider that Tiraspol leaders rely too much on help from Russia, 20% also pointing that Transnistrian authorities use their resources better to achieve international recognition.

What consequences will have for Moldova the independence of Transnistria?

Regarding the effects on Moldova of total detachment of Transnistria region, according to the adult respondents (60%) were: strengthening political stability that favors access to the EU, while 30% of them pointed the diminishing of resources and economic power of the country. Student responded, in percentage of 25% believe that Transnistria detachment will improve the political relations with Russia, 25% agree with the effect of diminishing resources and only 40% agree with the effect of strengthening political stability.

What will be the most appropriate conflict resolution option?

The possibility of settlement of the Transnistria conflict is evaluated by the majority of respondents (60%) as positive, only 20% of respondents answering negatively. The most appropriate conflict resolution, in the opinion of most respondents is the union of Transnistria with Moldova under the authority of the Chisinau government. A sec-

ond variant chosen by student respondents (25%) was that of organizing Moldova as a federation in which Transnistria region remain independent, while 25% of adult respondents saw as a second option the international recognizing of Transnistria independence and keeping the status of independent state.

Conclusions

The majority of studies conclude that the Transnistrian separatism was provoked, orientated and maintained by Moscow support through various ways of putting pressure (military, economically, political, psychological, and even informational. Many writers think that Transnistrian separatism is not an ethnical conflict, but rather a political one: Russia is satisfying its desire to accomplish the political and geostrategic interests and the reason for the Russian military presence in Moldova is the maintenance of influence in the East Europe (Prisac, 2008).

According to the results of collected data, the first main hypothesis of the present research paper which states that the 2014 Ukrainian crises made Moldavian citizens more concerned about Transnistria conflict resolution, is infirmed. Even though, mass-media had constantly presented news about the request of Transnistria's leaders to integrate the separatist within Russia economic framework after the Crimea precedent, the refusal of Russian side keeps the situation unchanged. Because there is no real threaten or constrain that ordinary people could perceive, the state of indifference is characterizing the Moldovan attitude.

Regarding the second hypothesis of the research paper could be concluded that indeed, regardless their life experience or their access to information, the sample involved has noclear opinion about the resolution of Transnistria conflict. This is not surprising since even the Chisinau government authorities have not managed to adopt a clear situation between European Union and Russia orientation in the context of signing the European trade association and accepting the Russian economic punishment for these. The Moldavian vital need to leave the Russian vicious circle by assuming the risks of punishment could be realized if the European countries members will help in redressing the economic situation by spending political and economic capital as compensation. Then arises another Moldavian need of finding trustful partners ready to help even if this means assuming a position against Russia.

Judging on the almost seven months of monitoring the mediatization phenomena of Transnistria conflict, could be said that the real context is not that passive as it is general perceived by the survey's respondents. The lately military Russian exercises held on Transnistria territory, the threaten of leaving the format negotiations of Transnistria, the recent interdiction of Ukraine for military transit on its territory as well as the monitoring mechanism for military circulation on Chisinau airport could be signs of an active conflict situation. The things will be changed sooner than expected if Russia

keeps its feature of extending its power and if the Western countries will not concentrate their efforts on finding a solution of reformation process that will address the root causes of the conflict.

Limitations of the research

Among many limitations of the research paper, the most important will be a lack of specialized understanding on political issues and the limited methodology used. The thirty questionnaires completed on voluntary basis and spread by snowball method could not gather representative data for the subject surveyed.

Being an exploratory research, the results are not generalizable at large but helped to gain familiarity with the conflict situation in order to develop a relevant hypothesis for further investigation. Also, it was needed a secondary research based on a qualitative approach on latest events presented by media concerning the issue questioned by the survey. The information gathered could not be useful for decision-making policies, but could give an insight into the current situation of Transnistria conflict resolution in the opinion of Moldovan citizens.

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