

The Conflict of Transnistria

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Abstract

The aim of this work is to give an overview of the conflict in Transnistria. Transnistrian history is presented in this article according to Romanian and Moldavian history. Transnistria has suffered a lot of changes in the past centuries, but the turning point of this region's history was in 1812, when Russia annexed Moldavia from Romania and named it 'Bessarabia'. During the time, the territory was used as a geostrategic point for Russia's reaching Black Sea coast, for spreading communism to Eastern Europe and nowadays for settling an important military base. The paper will examine the Russian methods used for destabilizing the pace in the region and it will present the details of the 1992 war. The causes that led to the conflictual situation, the involvement of the regional and international actors and a perspective for a possible conflict settlement will be presented in the essay as well.

Keywords: Bessarabia, Dniester, Deportations, Penta-lateral Negotiation Process, Military conflict, Russia

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Introduction

History is the one that can make the things clear when it comes about the conflict in Trnsnistria. And because Transnistria is strongly connected to Moldavian and Romanian histories, the two countries will be presented as well. According to them, Transnistria was part of the actual Romania since the Dacia Empire. During the time, it was incorporated in Moldavian region, still not united with Transylvania and Wallachia, but its inhabitants were Romanians.

In 1812, Russian Empire took the Moldavian Principality's Eastern Part and named it Bessarabia, including Transnistria. This was a consequence of the Treaty of Bucharest signed in 1812, at the end of the Russo-Turkish war, but the region was occupied by Russians since 1792. Within the Great Union from 1918, the Romanian politicians from Transnistria initiated movements for gaining the right of using their language and posed against the process of Ucrainization. On 5 May 1919 the Bessarabian Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed in Odessa, and then established on 11 May 1919 in Tiraspol as an autonomous part of Russian SFSR.

Later, in 1924, the Soviets created the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Bessarabia was taken again by Soviet Union in 1940 as part of the decision between Hitler and Stalin. In the same year, Bessarabia became Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, including in its composition an important part of Bessarabia plus 4 from the 14 MASSR regions. The final borders were settled by November in the same year. Territories with the Ukrainian ethnic majority went to Ukraine, while a small strip of Transnistria, east of the Dniester River, with an important Moldavian population passed to MSSR.

In order to regain the lost territories, Romania under Antonescu leadership joined German invasion of Russia in June 1941 in order to recover Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia. Finally, Romania was awarded by Germany with Transnistria (the territory between Dniester

River and Southern Bug), but it had to build the concentration camps for extermination the Jews as part of the agreement. After Romania changed the allies in the Second World War, Russian troops took back Bessarabia on their way to Romania and their settlement in Romanian territories brought inevitably a Communist takeover. At the end of World War II, Northern Transylvania was returned to Romania while Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and Southern Dobruja were left to USSR and Bulgaria. A part of these territories together with a region of the former USSR formed the Moldavian SSR, which late in 1991 became an independent state as Moldavian Republic.

The problems linked with alphabet and deportations represented two main factors that contributed to the conflict. There were so many demands for reintroducing Latin-based alphabet during the Moldavian SSR, which was seen as more appropriate for the Romance of the language. Firstly, the demands were rejected, but in 1989 when it was finally reintroduced according to the law changing. On the other hand, deportations were a political repressive way used by the Soviet authorities. These displacements took place in the period between 1940 and 1953, and it aimed the replacing of the Romanian ethnic groups from Transnistria with some other ethnic groups from the Soviet Union. In this way, the number of Romanian people from the region decreased and they could not represent a danger for an eventual unity with Romania.

After granting the status of State Language for Romanian Language, named Moldavian language, and excluding Russian language from the system, so many protests in the South and East of Moldova started in 1989. As a State Language, Romanian was refused by the communities living in South and East of Moldavia. The Moldavian National Flag, almost identical to Romanian one, which was voted and introduced in April 27th, 1990, was not accepted by those communities as well.

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In June 23rd, 1990, the SSR Moldavia declared its sovereignty. Fearing that Moldavia was going to follow the example of the Baltic States and reunite with Romania, the administration from Kremlin provoked the separatist movements in the southern (Gagauzia) and eastern (Transnistria) zones of Republic of Moldavia. In September 2nd, 1990, the deputies from the left bank of Dniester River took the decision to establish their own Transnistrian (Pridnestrovian) Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, subordinate to Soviet Union instead of Moldavian authorities.

In December 13th, 1991, the separatist policy started the direct confrontations and attacked the Moldovian Police stations from Dubasari city. In March 2nd, 1992 Republic of Moldavia became UN members together with 8 other countries, all former Soviet members. In the same day, the Guards attacked another Moldavian Police stations and started shooting people who were trying to cross the Dniester to Moldavia. As a consequence, Moldavian President, Mircea Snegur, authorized a military intervention on the left side of Dniester, against the separatist forces which were still attacking Police Stations linked to Kishinev. The rebels, helped by the Soviet and Russian forces (after 1991), strengthened their control over the most over most of the disputed area.

The Ministers Foreign Affairs from Four countries, Moldavia, Romania, Ukraine and Russia met at Helsinki within OSCE Summit. Their goals were to find some peaceful solutions for the Transnistrian conflict. This Commission worked only for a short period of time, until another agreement, which replaced the old one, was signed; this time between Mircea Snegur and the Russian President, Boris Eltin. At the end of March, President of Moldavia signed an agreement with The United Armed Forces of CIS.

The conflict turned to a war, Moldavian authorities fighting actually not against separatists but the Russian 14th Guards Army. For hushing up the Russian involvement in the conflict, in May 21st, 1992,

Igor Smirnov signed a decree through 14th Army passed under the rule of so-called Republic of Transnistria. This decision taken by Smirnov and approved by Eltin was designed to legitimate the presence of 14th Army in the conflict. The Refugee Committee from Transnistria made a call to the American Congress asking for help in restoring peace on the left side of the Dniester River. Republic of Moldavia was warned as well to avoid any possible conflict with Russia, because in the eventual situation of such a conflict, Moldavia will not receive any support from the International Community.

July 21st, 1992 Presidents Snegur and Eltin signed at Moscow a Convention regarding the peaceful settlement of the armed conflict. Peacekeeping forces could be only Russian because Russia excluded from the very beginning any involvement in the conflict. Actually, these Russian forces used peacekeeping excuse to come and occupy the territory. Being forced to leave Transnistria, due to the July 21 Convention, Moldavians let the separatists command over the region until nowadays.

In November 2003, Russia released a memorandum which contained the most detailed idea of a state building for an asymmetrical Moldavian Federation until that time. The same document considered the settlement of Russian Army forces for 20 years more. The Moldavian administration refused to sign such an agreement without any guidance from international organizations. This convention and Moldavia represented important subjects for the OSCE Ministerial meeting from Maastricht in December 2003.

Since the declaration of the “Transnistrian Moldovan Republic” in September 2nd, 1990, Igor Smirnov has claimed himself as the legitimate representative of the state, albeit not recognized at that time. Russian citizen, Igor Smirnov, promoted a policy for the consolidation of the separatist regime and the destruction of the

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Moldovan state. He has never accepted any compromise in favor of the process of the reunification of the Republic of Moldavia, unless it served Russian interests. Igor Smirnov was used only as a 'marionette' by Russia in order to reach its targets in the region.

This conflict brought the involvement of some regional and international actors like: Russia, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldavia and OSCE within the Decision-Making Procedure of the Penta-lateral Negotiation Process. The penta-lateral format, along with the operations of the peace-keeping forces was enforced by Russia for preventing the settlement of the conflict in Transnistria and for gaining total control of its progression. The settlement of the conflict in the eastern zone of the Republic of Moldavia can be achieved only by taking in consideration the overall situation in the Moldavian state. The origins of the conflict should be considered while working out any settlement strategy.

1. A brief history of Romania and Moldavia

The present-day Romanian and Moldavian territories correspond to the Dacia Kingdom lands since the first century BCE. Under king Burebista (82 BCE - 44 BCE), Dacia became a powerful state which threatened the Roman's regional interests. The borders of this kingdom were drawn from the Black Sea coast, to nowadays Bulgaria in South, and then along Balkans to Morava. From that point it continued to North-West until Danube, and then to North to Bratislava. From Bratislava the Kingdom's border went through Northern Carpathians until it reached Nistru River and then to Parutino back to the Black Sea.

Roman Emperor Trajan led campaigns and won the battles against Dacians in 101-102 AD and 105-106 AD and Dacia became a Roman province. Recent historical discoveries (2007-2008) show that Dacians were not "Romanized" and the Latin language has the origins somewhere in Dacian territory. An increased number of researchers

and studies conclude that the lower Danube basin is the origin of the European civilization. Schela and Cladova towns from Romania are the places where evidences of the first European activities in agricultural sector have been discovered. They are older than 10 thousand years.

The Roman rule was short, in 3rd century the cost of defending Dacia from ‘barbarians’ became too hard. The Roman Empire was withdrawn to South of Danube by Emperor Aurelian in 271. Until the 7th century waves of immigrants, among Huns and Slavs, came to the nowadays Romanian territories. Then, Romania progressively settled down and a feudal command was established. Hereupon in the 10th century a stubborn nation named Magyars (modern Hungarian’s ancestors) arrived in Transylvania and they started ruling the region by 13th century, Hungarian kings convincing Germans to go and settle there as well. Yet, even though the Magyars and the Germans were residents of Transylvania, the most population was constituted by the Romanians.

First Romanian principality, Wallachia, was formed in the 14th century by Radu Negru (1310-1352) in a process of unifying some Romanians. Moldavia principality was formed one century later. 14th century brought the Ottoman threat from South of today’s Romania and both Wallachia and Moldavia fought with the Turks. Prince of Wallachia, Vlad III the Impaler, named Vlad Dracula, is well-known for his attacks and victories against the Ottoman Empire. On the other side, Moldavian Principality under Stephen the Great (1457-1504) achieved its best success. However, 16th century is marked in the Romanian history by Ottoman triumph in taking Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia under Ottoman control, but with fully internal autonomy until the 18th century.

The second attempt to unify the regions inhabited by the Romanian people was made by Michael the Brave. He became ruler of Wallachia in 1593 and then he fought and defeated the Ottomans 2

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years later. He defeated Transylvania and became its prince in 1599 and conquered Moldavia and declared himself prince one year later. Becoming the ruler of these three regions made him one of the creators of actual Romania even for a short time, because he was killed in 1601 and the union ended. After his death Transylvania became part of Habsburgs' Austrian Empire, while Wallachia and Moldavia came again under the Ottoman rule, keeping their internal autonomy and some external independence until 18th century when they lost them. In 1775, Austrian Empire occupied the North-West of Moldavia, region named Bucovina, while in 1812 Russia took the other Eastern part of the principality. They gave the name 'Bessarabia' to the region.

The wave of the European revolutions from 1848 reached Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania as well. These uprisings were not successful, Great powers rejected the Romanian's expressed desire to officially unite in a single state, but they helped the people from these three principalities to create the unity of language consent and to protect their interest. This rejection made the Romanian people fight alone against Turks who were administrating the regions in a very bad way and demanding so many taxes. In 1859 Alexandru Ioan Cuza was elected in both Moldavia and Wallachia as the ruling Prince of the Romanians, act which constitute another step in the formation of Romania. Transylvania was kept firmly under Hungarian rule until the 19th century.

Cuza was exiled in 1866 and Prince Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringer from Germany was sent to Romania and he became Prince Carol of Romania or the Ruling Prince of the United Principality of Romania. After the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878), Romania, which fought on the Russian side, declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire. Treaty of Berlin from 1878 recognized the official independence of the Romanian state by the Great Powers. Romania had to give in return the district of Bessarabia to Russia as "an exchange" for accessing the ports of the Black Sea shore and

obtaining the region of Dobruja. On 26 March 1881 Romania became a kingdom lead by the King Carol I of Romania. The period between 1878 and 1914 was dominated by equilibrium and growth for Romania. Romania joined Greece, Serbia and Montenegro against Bulgaria during the Second Balkan War. The peace Treaty of Bucharest from 1913 was elaborated in the aftermath of the war and it decided that the Southern Dobruja will pass under Romanian domination rule.

At the beginning of the World War I, Romania declared its neutrality. After two years, on 14/24 August 1914, Romania joined the Allies under the pressure of France. The Allies guaranteed support for gaining the national unity together with recognition of Romanian rights over Transylvania, territory still part of Austria-Hungary. Pushed by the desire of gaining all these advantages, Romania declared war against Austria-Hungary. In 1918 Romania succeeded in taking back Transylvania from Hungary and Bessarabia from Russia. Treaty of Trianon from 1920 settled the border between the Romanian Kingdom and the independent Republic of Hungary and recognized the sovereignty of Romania over the Transylvanian territories. Treaty of Versailles was ratified in 1920 when the union of Bukovina and Bessarabia with Romania was established. As a consequence, Romanian territory and demography increased greatly from an estimated population of 7.5 million to 12 million adding the Southern Dobruja gained in the Second Balkan War in 1913.

The union from 1918 is known in Romanian history as The Great Union and it brought together most regions with obvious Romanian majorities into the boundaries of a single state. Inside of the new created state, different sizable minorities such as Magyars, Germans, Jews, Ukrainians and Bulgarians were included, their total demography being estimated to a total of 28% of the population. The minority found in Bessarabia and Bukovina was the Ukrainian one. Even after 1918 Bessarabia was under Romanian administration for the next 22 years, fact stipulated in the 1920 Treaty of Paris, but the

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newly communist Russia did not want to recognize the Romanian Jurisdiction over Bessarabia. On 5 May 1919 the Bessarabian Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed in Odessa and then established on 11 May 1919 in Tiraspol as an autonomous part of Russian SFSR. Russians kept considering the region a Soviet territory under foreign occupation, attempting in so many diplomatic ways to take it back. Meanwhile, Transnistria, part of the Ukrainian SSR at that time, became the Moldavian ASSR (or MASSR) in 1924 as a result of the failure of the Tatarbunary Uprising. The capital of MASSR until 1929 was Balta, and then it was moved to Tiraspol. This revolt was led by the pro-soviets who wanted to bring the end of the Romanian occupation in Bessarabia and then to unify the region (South Bessarabia which was under Romanian rule) with Ukrainian SSR.

Even if Romania was neutral at the beginning of the Second World War, in 1940 it had to surrender to Bessarabia, and two more other regions in favor of Russia. Two thirds of Bessarabia were combined with Transnistria (a small region, part of USSR) and formed the Moldavian SSR. Northern Bukovina and Bujek (Eastern Bessarabian territory) were allocated to Ukrainian SSR. Moreover, Romanian administration was forced to give Southern Dobruja to Bulgaria, while Hungary received Northern Transylvania. After annexation of the territories, Soviet republic did not respect the Bessarabia's traditional borders. On 2 August 1940 when The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was established, it had already six and a half counties of Bessarabia in its structure, and then added the westernmost part of the MASSR (an autonomous entity within the Ukrainian SSR). The final borders were settled by November the same year. Territories with the Ukrainian ethnic majority went to Ukraine while a small strip of Transnistria east of the Dniester River with an important Moldavian population passed to MSSR.

After losing all these territories, King Carol popularity has diminished and he was forced to abdicate, being succeeded by his son Michael who had no real power at that time. Furthermore, the army

supported Marshall Ion Antonescu who declared himself a fascist dictator leader of Romania. In order to regain the lost territories, Romania under Antonescu leadership joined German invasion of Russia in June 1941 in order to recover Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia. Finally, Romania was awarded by Germany with Transnistria, but it had to build the concentration camps for extermination the Jews as part of the agreement. Following the Nazi policy of oppression and massacre of the Jews and Romas, Antonescu played an important role in the Holocaust. In 2004, according to an international commission report initiated by the Romanian government, he was responsible for the murders and executions which took place during deportations to the concentration camps of Jews mostly on Romanian Territories and in the conflict areas of Transnistria, Bukovina and Bessarabia.

Since 1943 it was obvious that Germany was losing the war and one year later, Antonescu was removed in a coup and arrested by the King Michael I of Romania. Then Romania declared war on Germany (by the end of October 1944 Transylvania became part of Romania again), but this changing of allies was learned too late by Soviets, who already had crossed the Romanian borders, forcing King Michael to abdicate and leave the country later in 1947, when the Communist regime had been established. Russian troops took back Bessarabia on their way to Romania and their settlement in Romanian territories brought inevitably a Communist takeover. However, Antonescu together with thousands of Romanians were shot in 1946 as war criminals.

At the end of Second World War, Northern Transylvania was returned to Romania while Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and Southern Dobruja were left to USSR and Bulgaria. A part of these territories together with a region of the former USSR formed the Moldavian SSR which late in 1991 became an independent state as Moldavian Republic. Between 1947 and 1989 Romania was under Communist regime, being lead by Gheorghiu Dej and Nicolae

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Ceaușescu. After Romania went out of the Communist regime, it started a transition to democracy. In 2004 Romania joined NATO and three years later, on 1 January 2007 its EU membership was accepted.

2. Early factors that contributed to the conflict

2.1. Alphabet Issues

In the 1860s, Romania changed the Cyrillic alphabet with the Latin one, using the Latin-based orthography. Until 19th century, Romanian Cyrillic alphabet was used since The Middle Ages in the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. (Deletant, 1991) It was, in fact, Romanian language written with Cyrillic letters. This alphabet was abandoned for the Latin one during the Union-wide Latinisation process in 1932 and officially reinstated in 1938 in the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. It became the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic's official alphabet as well until 1989, when standard Latin-based Romanian alphabet was reintroduced according to law changings. There were so many demands for reintroducing Latin-based alphabet during the Moldavian SSR, which was seen as more appropriate for the Romance of the language. However, it was unusual to speak a Latin language and write it with Cyrillic letters. The 3rd Congress of Writers of Soviet Moldavia's demands were rejected in 1965 by the leaders of the Communist Party for not being in accordance "to the interests of the Moldavian people and not reflecting its aspirations and hopes" (Bruchis, 1984).

2.2. Deportations during Stalin's Regime

Deportations were a political repressive way used by the Soviet authorities. There are not exact numbers of those people who had suffered from this kind of repressions, but the estimations indicate some hundred thousands of people deported in 28 June 1940-5 March 1953 period (Moraru, 1995). There were three deportation waves of

Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina's inhabitants, but this process of resettlement occurred even between these three movements.

The first wave of deportations started in June 1941 and it considered the so-named activist bourgeois parties and organizations from Bessarabia. After the annexation of Bessarabia to USSR, the heads of these political configurations fled to Romania. Those who were left in Bessarabia were highly supported by the Romanian Espionage Services and increased their anti-Soviet activities. In the same category were included anti-Soviet elements, landowners, traders, policemen and gendarmes, mayors, refugees from the Soviet Union, foreign social elements and people who collaborated with Romanian administration. These people were named criminals and they had to be moved together with their families in North and East of USSR. On 7 June 1941, NKVD from Moldavian SSR asked for 1315 train wagons for transporting the deported people.

The mission started on 12 to 13 June 1941 night and it included the territories annexed from Romania by USSR in June 1940. People were taken from their houses without any advertisement or without their consent by soldiers during the night and sent to the train stations. Once they got there, they were separated by their families; heads of the families in one side, youth over 18 years old in other side and women with their children and old people apart. From Bessarabia, included actual Transnistria, there were sent 90 wagons, each one filled with approximately 100 people. The road to the destination took three weeks. The living conditions inside the train were awful. In the midst of summer people had no water, the daily apportion being only 200ml per person. The only one food resource was salted fish. Because of these conditions so many of them got sick from the spreading infections and finally found their end. Their dead bodies were thrown on the fields, left as food for animals. Nobody had benefited from medical assistance in all this time. In case of escape attempts, those people were shot directly, having actually no escape from that "Train of Death".

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Then, the head of the family was arrested, isolated from wife and children and brought in forced labor camps in Gulags. The other members of the family, from the children to the oldest ones were sent to Siberia or Kazakhstan where they had to work in forest industry enterprises, in state farms and in craft cooperatives. The money taking in return was covering only the minimum necessary for living. The estimated victim numbers is fluctuating according to different sources from 22000 (Petrencu, 1999) people to even 30000 (Pantiru, 2009) people.

The second wave of deportation took place in 1949 and it is considered to be the greatest deportations of people from Bessarabia. It included all rich peasants, former landowners, important merchants, and accomplices of German occupiers, people who collaborated with the German police and Romanian authorities, members of political parties, members of illegal sects together with their families (Soare, 2007). All these people had to be moved forever to Southern Kazakhstan and to other Russian regions under KGB. The legal pretext of the 1949 deportation was “Achieving Soviet citizenship by the inhabitants of Bukovina and regaining Soviet citizenship by the Bessarabia’s inhabitants”. According to this decree, Romanian people from Bessarabia who were declared Soviet citizens collaborated during the war with Romanian administration and betrayed in this way the “Soviet homeland”. Yet, Romanians from Bukovina have never requested Soviet citizenship and people from Bessarabia have never had it in order to “regain” it (Olaru, 2009).

The operation started again during the night between 5 and 6 July 1949 and lasted until 7th of July. Even if those charged with this mission kept the entire information secret, people expected or learned somehow and took some preventive measures to escape from the repression (Gribincea, 1995). Those who tried to escape in that night were shot to death and the others were forced to get in the cattle wagons. All their belongings together with their houses and machinery were taken under the state farms possessions or they were offered to

NKVD officers. So many deported householders have never come back to their homelands, most of them being shot on the way to destination, dying from famine, illnesses or gall, or dying from the fierce work conditions. According to the official sources, the number of people who were deported from Moldavia on 6 July 1949 reached more than 35000 people. However, unofficial sources claim that the number was not real, because it was calculated considering only 3 family members, while there were so many families with even more than 7-8 children, or 14.

The third wave of mass deportation of people from Bessarabia took place during the night between 31 March and 1 April 1951 and targeted this time the religious elements considered a potential threat for Stalinist Communist Regime, more exactly the members of a religious organization named “Jehovah's Witnesses” and their families (Șișcanu, 1998). The process of deportation was similar to the other two waves and the trains reached Siberia on 13-14 April 1951. Similar events continued until 1956. Meanwhile, similar things were happening in Romania. The majority of people who were displaced from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina have never met their families again. According to laws, after 1990s, those who have returned were supposed to be indemnified and being given back the properties or a compensation for their lost goods during the Soviet nationalization. Moreover, they could not access to any function in state administration structures, thing which is still happening nowadays in Transnistria for example.

As a result of these displacements, the majority of population with Romanian roots living in Bessarabia and Bukovina had decreased drastically. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of these repressions, the Romanian speakers from the formal Romanian regions became less and less. During the USSR domination approximately 2.344.000 people original from ASSR Moldavia, Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia were victims of all kind of repressions. The Soviet target was the elites from Bessarabia and Bukovina who did not flee to

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Romania. After the Second World War, Soviets searched for filling the gap created by the death or leaving of the intellectual class. They wanted to repopulate the region because they needed to make up the Communist Party and State System's organizations. Thus, Stalin triggered scale colonization and a Russification de facto of the nowadays regions of Cernauti, SSR Moldavia and Ukrainian Budjak.

So many Russians, Ukrainians and other ethnic groups migrated from the rest or Soviet Union to Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, and settled almost exclusively in order to make up the devastated economy after the war; to repopulate the region with the immediate result of changing the area's ethnic composition. The hostility between the Moldavians/Romanians and the newcomers persisted throughout the period of SSR Moldavia's existence, bursting powerfully during the anti-Soviet and anti-communist events from 1988-1992. These rivalries were an important trigger of the war in Transnistria from 1992. Compared to Bessarabia and North Bukovina, the cities from Transnistria were the most affected by this mass colonization/Russification. There, Romanians/Moldavians are threatened in a bad way and they cannot access any high ranked job.

3. The Military Conflict

The conflict in Transnistria is different from all the other conflicts which occurred after the collapse of the USSR because it is not based on ethnic or religious reasons. About twenty years ago a big conflict raised in area because the Soviet ideology imposed to Moldavians for more than five decades was against their national revival movement, which started at the end of 1980s in SSR Moldavia. During the USSR domination, the territory from the left bank of Dniester River was strong militarized, the place being seen by the Soviets as the perfect location for settling the bases of the Soviet 14th Guard Army. This settlement's geostrategic aim was being close to the Balkan Peninsula. At the beginning of 1990s the number of military in whole country increased and reached 30.000, mostly being

sent to the East of the country, starting with Ribnita and ending with Tiraspol. For Kremlin, the Army forces were the last hope in keeping the USSR alive.

The movements from South and East of Moldova started in 1989 when in August 31st, Supreme Soviet from Kishinev voted the law regarding the use of spoken languages inside SSR Moldavia, granting the status of State Language status for Romanian Language, named Moldavian language and excluding Russian language from the system. Local Soviet administration from Tiraspol, Ribnita and Comrat rejected the State Language law and initiated a disobedience movement towards the authorities from Kishinev. As a State Language, Romanian was refused by the communities living in South and East of Moldavia. The Moldavian National Flag, almost identical to Romanian one, which was voted and introduced in April 27th, 1990, was not accepted by those communities as well.

In June 23rd, 1990, the SSR Moldavia declared its sovereignty. After this historical moment, being left with no powers over controlling Moldavia, the heads of the new independent state were summoned to go to Moscow. There, Gorbachev together with the other USSR leaders threatened them with two other separatist republics in case of they will not give up to their process of independence and return to the Soviet system. Fearing that Moldavia was going to follow the example of the Baltic States and reunite with Romania, the administration from Kremlin provoked the separatist movements in the southern (Gagauzia) and eastern (Transnistria) zones of Republic of Moldavia.

Convinced that they are not able to change the decision taken by the government from Kishinev, in August 19th, 1990, in South of Moldavia, more exactly in Comrat city, the Gagauz minority declared their independence from Moldavia and the new republic passed under USSR control. Gagauz minority was used by Moscow as an additional pressure instrument on the Romanian majority from SSR Moldova.

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According to Moscow, the conflict reasons were based on ethnic issues. Two weeks later, in September 2nd, 1990, the deputies from the left bank of Dniester River took the decision to establish their own Transnistrian (Pridnestrovian) Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, subordinate to Soviet Union instead of Moldavian authorities. Next day, Mircea Snegur became the first President of the Moldavian Republic. In the same day Igor Smirnov was elected as the President of the Temporarily Supreme Soviet of the Proclaimed Transnistrian Republic. Once they proclaimed themselves independent from Moldavia, people from Transnistria started to attack all the Moldavian State Institutions.

At the beginning of 1990, the Transnistrian secessionist forces started a process of training and production of weapons and munitions. These things made Moldavian Government worried about their plans. In 1991, the leaders from Tiraspol created an impressive armed force on the left bank of Dniester River, having on their side the police, the army, the labor parties, the Cossacks as volunteers and the Soviet 14th Guard Army settled on the left bank of Dniester River. Moldavian authorities could not really control the left bank of Dniester River since 1990 because of the powerful 14th Army which supported the secessionists. Its placement in the region was meant to keep Transnistria in Soviet side in case of any changing of Moldavian and Bessarabian politics and it was used as a blackmail tool against Moldavian decisions.

In August 19th, 1991 a coup d'état occurred in Russia, the rebels having full support from separatist leaders from Tiraspol. After the rebels were defeated, the Russian President, Boris Eltin, demanded that all those who were involved in the coup should be punished. So it happened with Igor Smirnov and his accomplices, they were captured by Moldavian authorities and arrested. Being the Russia's mainstay, he was released in short time and went back to the activities he was charged to manage. Therefore, Smirnov together with some other

leaders from Tiraspol continued to fortify their system and even compete with the Moldavian authorities.

In December 8th, 1991, citizens from Republic of Moldavia went to vote their president. On the other side of the Dniester River, the leaders from Tiraspol organized the presidential elections before the Moldavian ones, on December 1st. In order prevent any intervention from Moldavia; the Guards blocked the city from November 27th to December 2nd, 1991. After the elections held in the cities from the left bank of the Dniester River, 69% of the voters legitimate Igor Smirnov as President in Transnistria. In December 3rd, before even taking the full power, Smirnov released a decree through all Moldavian Police Stations from Transnistrian territory, claiming that they are totally illegal and they passed under the Transnistrian rule. During the Moldavian elections from December 8th, 1991, the city was blocked again, only two pooling sections being able to work. The aim was to not allow the ballots cross to the other side of the Dniester, but no event had happened and they were transferred to Kishinev safely. Mircea Snegur, the only one candidate for presidency, won the elections with 98.17% votes from the citizens of Moldavia.

In December 13th, 1991, the separatist Policy started the direct confrontations and attacked the Moldavian Police stations from Dubasari city. Some forces were sent from Kishinev for helping them, but 4 policemen were killed on the Dubasari's Bridge. In March 2nd, 1992 Republic of Moldavia became UN members together with 8 other countries, all former Soviet members. In the same day, the Guards attacked another Moldavian Police stations and started shooting people who were trying to cross the Dniester to Moldavia. As a consequence, Moldavian President, Mircea Senegur, authorized a military intervention on the left side of Dniester, against the separatist forces which were still attacking Police Stations linked to Kishinev. The rebels, helped by the Soviet and Russian forces (after 1991), strengthened their control over the most over most of the disputed area.

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The most difficult fights took place on the tablelands of Cocieri, Coșnita and at Tighina. The majority of the Moldavian forces sent from Kishinev (8 people) had not so many weapons and they were in numerical minority compared with the troops sent from Tiraspol. The locals (around 60 people) came to help the Moldavian forces and in three days they succeeded to take back from the territories ruled by the secessionists. It was so hard for Moldavians to fight against the rebels because they were strongly supported by the 14th Army and their military technology was not comparable with the Moldavians'. So many people lost their life and more were wounded. Besides all these factors, Moldavian fighters were taking back slowly their territories. People from Transnistria, who supported the integrity of the Moldavian country, were abused and beaten by the separatists.

The Ministers Foreign Affairs from Four countries, Moldavia, Romania, Ukraine and Russia met at Helsinki within OSCE Summit. Their goals were to find some peaceful solutions for the Transnistrian conflict. The President, Mircea Snegur was forced to establish exceptional situation all over Republic of Moldavia. The Commission formed from the four Ministers of Foreign Affairs started its activity and the ceasefire agreements were signed, but the secessionist violated the agreement for so many times. This Commission worked only for a short period of time, until another agreement, which replaced the old one, was signed; this time between Mircea Snegur and the Russian President, Boris Eltin. At the end of March, President of Moldavia signed an agreement with The United Armed Forces of CIS. According to this new agreement, 150 former-Soviet military bases and some other configurations from territory of Republic of Moldavia passed under Kishinev jurisdiction and other 50 were supposed to be withdrawn within a year. But Russian President, Boris Eltin, broke the accord when he released in April 1st, 1992, a decree which 14th Army will be directly subordinated to Moscow.

The conflict turned to a war, Moldavian authorities fighting actually not against separatists but the Russian 14th Guards Army. In

1 May 1992 people from three Transnistrian localities were evacuated on the right bank of the Dniester after the secessionists started opening the fire on them. There were bombs thrown even on the right side of the Dniester. The Moldavian President asked Russian Army to stop the aggressions committed against Republic of Moldavia. For hushing up the Russian involvement in the conflict, in May 21st, 1992, Igor Smirnov signed a decree through 14th Army passed under the rule of so-called Republic of Transnistria. This decision taken by Smirnov and approved by Eltin was designed to legitimate the presence of 14th Army in the conflict.

Simultaneous, partial calls are made to mobilize reservists. At the end of May, an airplane with 600 Cossacks from Don landed at Tiraspol, while in Moscow and Sankt Petersburg battalions of volunteers were formed by delinquents who will terrorize Dubasari area during the summer. In Tiraspol, Moldavians were trying to keep their national values in a Russified city, most of them being arrested. In June 10th, 1992, the Guards attacked a Police Station from Tighina which refused to obey the separatist's rules. Next day, Moldavian Policemen were arrested, abused and killed for being against the regime.

In June 19th, the same Police Station was attacked and the Moldavian policemen respond to it. A Special Brigade was sent from Kishinev and together with so many volunteers from all over the country succeeded until the next day to pass Tighina city back under the Moldavian control. The secessionist forces did not want to give back to the fight; the 14th Army which was passed under administration from Tiraspol one month before participate actively in bombing the area. Hundreds of people were killed at that time, so many of them among the civilian population. Because of the panic, the majority of people sought for refuge on the right side of the Dniester.

Russian President, Boris Eltin, charged Moldavia with assault, threatening that The Russian Army will be ready to respond. This

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meant a declared war against Moldavia. It was clear that the belligerent forces were not equal regarding the armed forces and the military technique used. Even though Moldavia was so weak from this point of view, it continued struggling, without giving up to its territories.

In June 22nd, the Presidents Snegur, Eltin, Iliescu and Crapciuc signed a Statement dictated by Moscow at Istanbul. According to that Statement, Tiraspol and Kishinev, the two sides involved in the conflict were urged ceasefire. This statement's purpose was to make clear that the conflict was not between Kishinev and Moscow, but between Kishinev and Tiraspol. The separatist leaders from Tiraspol enjoyed the victory and started bringing more military troops from Russia. At Kishinev, the Moldavian President tried to explain the reason for giving the Transnistrian territory to the rebels: a humanitarian action for saving human lives.

The Refugee Committee from Transnistria made a call to the American Congress asking for help in restoring peace on the left side of the Dniester River. The State Department of the USA warned Romania to stop sending weapons to Moldavia (Humphires, 2001) (Rupesinghe & Tishkov, 1996) (Sislin & Pearson, 2001, p. 99) (Arbatov, 1997, p. 178). Republic of Moldavia was warned as well to avoid any possible conflict with Russia, because in the eventual situation of such a conflict, Moldavia will not receive any support from the International Community. This new situation created was very favorable to Russia because Romania was removed from the negotiations as well as from the conflict settlement process.

The leaders from Tiraspol started replacing all the Moldavians charged in state institutions with their people, showing anti-Romanism feelings and claiming that those replaced people represented a threat of unifying them with Romania. At the beginning of June, there were great concentrations of armed forces and munitions on the left bank of

Dniester River. The rebels attacked so many areas (the most craved being Tighina city from the right bank of the Dniester River), using forbidden weapons and artillery projectile. After a heavy fight, Tighina city was retaken back by Moldavians. Their victory did not last for a long time, because in July 21st, 1992 Presidents Snegur and Eltin signed at Moscow a Convention regarding the peaceful settlement of the armed conflict. The document signed between Republic of Moldavia and Russia Federation stipulated the creation of three security zones. The peace keeping process was supposed to be maintained by 400 soldiers: 6 Russian, 2 Moldavian and 2 separatist's battalions. Peacekeeping forces could be only Russian because Russia excluded from the very beginning any involvement in the conflict. Actually, these Russian forces used peacekeeping excuse to came and occupy the territory.

Being forced to leave Transnistria, due to the July 21 Convention, Moldavians let the separatists command over the region until nowadays. In July 29th, the peacekeepers entered in Tighina and Moldavians had to leave the city, giving them the control over the territory. The destiny of all the Moldavian population from Tighina became gloomy. Likewise, almost the same critical situation happened in Kishinev, because the sense of betrayal felt among the volunteers and battalions of soldiers who fought in the conflict. They gathered in center of Kishinev, showing their discontent regarding to the signed document. Despite the Kishinev geographical position, not being between the conflict areas, peacekeeping forces were sent to Kishinev as well. Moreover, the actual peacekeeping operation from Dniester does not have any mandate from International Organizations empowered in this regard. The direct involvement in this operation with military contingents of Kishinev and Tiraspol is an exception from the international standards.

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4. Kozak Memorandum

In November 2003, Russia released a memorandum which contained the most detailed idea of a state building for an asymmetrical Moldavian Federation until that time. The same document considered the settlement of Russian Army forces for 20 years more. (Voronin, 2005) This memorandum was strongly promoted by an important political person close to Russian President, Vladimir Putin – Dmitri Kozak. The Kozak Memorandum represented a breakage for Transnistrian standing and required equal status for Transnistria and Moldavia. After publishing the Russian proposals, so many people came to protest against them at Kishinev. The Moldavian administration refused to sign such an agreement without any guidance from international organizations. This convention and Moldavia represented important subjects for the OSCE Ministerial meeting from Maastricht in December 2003.

5. Igor Smirnov's Politics

Since the declaration of the “Transnistrian Moldovan Republic” in September 2nd, 1990, Igor Smirnov has claimed himself as the legitimate representative of the state, albeit not recognized at that time. Even though it was clear that his regime was playing only Russian's game, being only a “marionette”, Igor Smirnov was accepted within the penta-lateral process of negotiations as an independent “party” linked to Russia, enjoying equal rights with the Republic of Moldavia. The penta-lateral format of the negotiation process was part of the first Memorandum signed in May 8th, 1997 in Moscow by Russian Federation, OSCE, Ukraine, Republic of Moldavia and Transnistrian Moldavian Republic. The participant countries in the negotiation process and decision-making procedure, determined the efficiency of the Memorandum established in 1997. Smirnov's “independent party” was used by Russia as an advantage; an example consisted when Smirnov “opposed” the withdrawal of Russian troops and ammunition. During his mandate as the President

of TMR for a period of 20 years, the Russian citizen, Igor Smirnov, promoted a policy for the consolidation of the separatist regime and the destruction of the Moldovan state. He has never accepted any compromise in favor of the process of the reunification of the Republic of Moldavia, unless it served Russian interests.

The plan established the construction for the asymmetrical federation. In July 2002, OSCE together with Russian and Ukrainian mediators signed a document which contained premises for a reunification of Moldavia in a federation. The document was impossible to be enforced because the disagreements regarding the division of powers. Smirnov declared that the November 22, 2003 Kozak Memorandum proposed by the Russian Federation promoted only Russian interests. This in another example that he carried out with obedience the orders released by Kremlin and played an influential agent (marionette) role of Russia.

6. Penta-Lateral Mediators Involvement

6.1. The Russian Federation Involvement

With regard to the Transnistrian issue, the Russian federation, initially the USSR, promoted a clear and substantial policy aimed at maintaining the Republic of Moldavia within Russia's sphere of influence. Since the establishment of the separatist regime, Russia has been always supporting it in every possible way. Russian Federation used different resources in strengthening its control over Transnistria:

- giving Russian citizenship;
- educational system from TMR was changed according to the Russian one;
- separatist benefited from political, economic and informational support;
- the military of the "TMR" have been strengthened;

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- strategic commodities of the “TMR” have been privatized.

Russia seeks for an international accepted “settlement” that will guarantee its complete control over the “reunified” Republic of Moldova, thing that assumes the legalization and transformation into a Russian protectorate.

6.2. The Ukraine Involvement

The Ukraine policy regarding the Transnistrian issue was from the very beginning ambiguous. For example, within the framework of the Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Russian Federation, Ukraine, Romania and the Republic of Moldova held in April 6 and 17th, 1992 in Chisinau, the Ukrainian delegation showed its position, favoring the separatist regime and Russian representation as well. On the other side, Ukraine did not support an irreversible intensification of Russia’s position towards Transnistria and came to help the separatist regime when the latter’s relations with Russia became cool. Considering the historical events, the eastern region of the Republic of Moldavia (Transnistria) had been part of the Soviet Ukraine’s territory until 1940. Thus, some representatives of the Ukrainian political elite considered that the crisis was the perfect moment for claiming “historical” rights over the territory. Taking examples from Moscow, Ukraine tries to strengthen its position in the TMR by granting Ukrainian citizenship to the Transnistrian inhabitants, creating channels for the economic survival of the “TMR”, supporting Ukrainian-speaking educational institutions and so many other policies. The solid fusion between the Kiev officials with the separatist regime could be determined by some acts of corruption done by some influential political people charged in state structures of Ukraine too. An example can be the rejection (for not fulfilling the Constitution reason) of establishing on its territory of a temporary unit Moldavia-Ukraine custom posts and in contrast, justification for authorizing the presence of the Russian military base in Sevastopol. So many other policies were introduced by Ukraine as a

guarantor and participant in the penta-lateral process of negotiations, like the Russian Memorandum, all of them supporting the separatist regime to the detriment of Republic of Moldavia's sovereignty.

6.3. The Republic of Moldova Involvement

According to the Moldavian officials, The Republic of Moldavia was the only participant in penta-lateral process of negotiations that really wanted the settlement of Transnistrian conflict. The Republic of Moldavia accepted this penta-lateral format by signing the Memorandum in May 8th, 1997. This agreement and some other actions taken by the Republic's administration proved a certain degree of incompetence (President Vladimir Voronin's case) or lack of motivation to find a solution due to the corruption factors.

6.4. The OSCE Involvement

The inability of OSCE to ensure the withdrawal of the Russian military from Transnistria and not involving in the massive and systematic violation of fundamental human rights in the region under the control of the separatist regime, have proven the incapability of this international organization in finding a solution for ending this conflict.

6.5. The Decision-Making Procedure

Once Moldavia signed the Memorandum in 1997, it agreed that "Transnistria's future and status had to be created on reciprocal agreements". The case of the Kozak Memorandum was another decision taken by Moscow which proves to be favorable to the TMR and against the politics imposed by the Republic of Moldavia. Some positive results can be achieved in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict by either modifying or ignoring and creating some alternative methods of the existing penta-lateral format. By attempting to impose the Kozak Memorandum, Russia ignored both OSCE and the penta-lateral format. EU and USA acted in a similar way when they banned

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the traveling for 17 representatives of the Tiraspol administration in February 27th, 2003, thing which created a rough situation within the Russian diplomatic representatives.

7. Federalization – Not a Way for Conflict Settlement in the Republic of Moldavia

The idea of a new Federative Moldavia was perceived as a universal remedy by the international and Moldavian powers. The Draft Agreement introduced in Kiev in 2002 represented the only cure for the Transnistrian conflict. The constitution and the Kozak Memorandum could be changed only after through a referendum. Therefore, making ‘TMR’ part of a new federative state of Moldavia needs a referendum. There are some issues important to be mentioned if both the modification of the Constitution and the formation of a federative state will be introduced.

- a) An eventual federation could be possible only if Russia had no influence in the region;
- b) As a federation, Moldavia should give some right to people from ‘TMR’, rights which will later make them able to gain autonomy.
- c) There will be a referendum for idea of federalization which will take place in different way in ‘TMR’ compared to the rest of Moldavia, thing which can create some other conflicts and can lead to rejection of the idea.
- d) There are no specific regulations for agreeing which inhabitants from the ‘TMR’ are able to vote or to organize the elections.
- e) Mass media will have a bad influence in both sides of Dniestr River and the results of an eventual referendum will be negative.

8. Strategy for the Conflict Settlement

The settlement of the conflict in the eastern zone of the Republic of Moldavia can be achieved only by taking in consideration the overall situation in the Moldavian state. If Republic of Moldavia will be transformed into a stable, viable and democratic state due to the conflict settlement, then a series of measures that focus on the official reunification the Republic should be considered as part of the settlement strategy. Complete reconstructions of the state and its democratic system within internationally-recognized borders have to be done as well. The political, social, economic, informational and military field should be taken into consideration, along with the psycho-social realities of the conflict zone.

The ‘3-D Strategy’ was planned since the summer of 2002 and it could represent a possibility in achieving the settlement of the conflict:

- Demilitarization of the separatist zone;
- Decriminalization of the region;
- Democratization of the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova.

The Republic of Moldavia is a significant factor in international arena. It is believed that the Western countries have no interests in creating some other way for settling the conflict in Transnistria. For example, the relations between Russia and EU or the US should not be damaged by a future intervention of the westerns in Moldavia’s issue.

Conclusion

According to history, Transnistria was part of Romania for centuries until Tsarist Russia annexed it to its territories. As in Moldavia, Transnistrian inhabitants were ethnically Romanians. People’s wish for a unity with Romania was expressed since this region was for the first time taken by Russians in 18th century.

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There were many modalities used by Soviet Union for making Romanians from Bessarabia and Transnistria forget about any unification with Romania, but the most important were: the alphabet issue and the deportations/displacements of so many Romanians from the region. These factors contributed to what it is recently named the conflict in Transnistria. Russia wanted to take the complete control over the territory, region with geostrategic importance, and destroy any idea of an eventual or a possible unification with the homeland, Romania.

There are so many ideas of settlement the conflict in Transnistria, one of them referring to the creation of a Moldavian Federation. This cannot be legally done without a referendum in both sides of Dniester River. Because Romanians in Transnistria became an ethnic minority, their vote for unifying with Moldavia would not be enough and the majority of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic's citizens would never agree with such an idea. The conflict from Transnistria affects very much Moldavian foreign politics, the country being seen as incapable for solving its internal problems. This affected obviously Moldavia on its way for gaining EU membership.

In conclusion, the conflict of Transnistria is has so many historical causes. The Russian involvement in the region brought so many disadvantages for Romania and Moldavia and lead to the emergence of the war. Even if there are so many people wishing the re-unifying Transnistria with Moldavia, this thing seems impossible to be achieved. The same will for unifying Romania and Moldavia exists in both countries, but again, a possible unification seems hard to realize, at least in the very next future.

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