

# TRANSNISTRIA: THE “HOT” NATURE OF A “FROZEN” CONFLICT

A Monograph

by

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## ABSTRACT

TRANSNISTRIA: THE “HOT” NATURE OF A “FROZEN” CONFLICT, by LTC Mihai-Cristian Statie, 59 pages.

Over the past 20 years a conflict reminiscent of the Cold War has raged on in Eastern Europe, rarely making the headlines in the West. A source of regional insecurity and transnational threats, the Transnistrian conflict remains a major issue for the European community. Although considered “frozen,” the conflict between Moldova and its separatist region of Transnistria is a real geopolitical challenge, with all attempts to terminate it ultimately resulting in failure. A cause of this situation is that there is a tendency of the factors involved in resolving this conflict to focus the main effort in finding solutions for the problem while neglecting to define the problem properly at the outset. This study suggests that this is the *sine qua non* precondition for resolving the problem, which in the case of the Transnistrian conflict is to determine the very nature of the conflict itself.

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## INTRODUCTION

The precarious and ambiguous security situation from one corner of Europe, a Europe defined by General Charles de Gaulle as stretching from Atlantic to the Urals, elicited the interest for this study and conducted the first steps toward it.<sup>1</sup> The Transnistrian “frozen” conflict from Moldova, along with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, are regarded as “the most disturbing heritage of the USSR.”<sup>2</sup> As sources of geopolitical challenges, transnational threats, and regional insecurity, these “frozen” conflicts consistently make headlines today as they have done for the past twenty years.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, these conflicts are only artificially frozen and resolving them seems even more remote today than ever before.<sup>4</sup>

The issue of frozen conflicts presents a relevant topic of interest because they continue to create a permanent state of uncertainty within the European community and affect security and economic development throughout the region. Understanding their nature and how the situation morphed throughout time might give important clues about their dimension and how they affect the regional and the European security environment. Therefore, this study’s objective is to determine the characteristics or nature of one such frozen conflict, that of Transnistria. Subsequently, this study will seek to explain the complex relationships undergirding this conflict and between it and the European security paradigm. In seeking to answer the primary research

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<sup>1</sup>Max Jakobson, “Collective Security in Europe Today,” in *Order and Disorder after the Cold War, A Washington Quarterly Reader*, ed. Brad Roberts (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 43.

<sup>2</sup>Mykola Kapitonenko, “Resolving Post-Soviet Frozen Conflicts: Is Regional Integration Helpful?” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* (2009): 37.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 38.



question, “what is the nature of Transnistrian conflict?” this paper will analyze the background and evolution and the current state of the conflict.

What makes the Transnistrian case significant is the fact that to many observers it appeared to be the most solvable of all frozen conflicts in Europe.<sup>5</sup> Also, there are two categories of scholars which see different the nature of the Transnistrian conflict. One category argues that it is an ethnic conflict, while the other claims that this conflict has a different nature than the other frozen conflicts – which are generally regarded as either interethnic or religious conflicts.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, due to its close proximity to Western Europe, the Transnistrian conflict has the greatest potential to negatively impact European regional security and economic development. Finally, the strong identity and divergent international political orientations of the two antagonist parties, Moldova being European centric and Transnistria leaning toward Russia,<sup>7</sup> present an interesting case study that may shed light on the challenge of resolving a conflict between entities that do not share a common vision of the future.

In the first section, this monograph provides a brief retrospective of the evolution of the Eastern European security situation. This background builds the foundation of this study and reveals how the author arrived to the research question. Furthermore, this section presents the significance of this study and includes the limitations of the research. The second section describes the methodology used to conduct the research. In section three, the relevant historical notes presented offers a broad image and an understanding of the Transnistrian conflict. Section

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<sup>5</sup>Nicu Popescu and Leonid Litra, “Transnistria: A Bottom-Up Solution,” *European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)*, no. 63 (September 2012): 1.

<sup>6</sup>Ion Varta, “Geneza Conflictului Transnistrean,” *Cohorta*, no. 1 (2013): 26; and Cristian Urse, *Transnistria: Prospects for a Solution* (Occasional Paper Series, no. 7, European Center for Security Studies “George C. Marshall,” Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, January 2007), 4.

<sup>7</sup>Witold Rodkiewicz argues that Moldova and Transnistria have divergent international political orientations, pro-EU and respectively, pro-Russia. See: Witold Rodkiewicz, “Russia’s Strategy towards Moldova: Continuation or Change?” *Centre for Eastern Studies Commentary*, no. 74, (2012): 1-6.

four presents and analyzes the causes of the Transnistrian conflict, the past attempts to resolve it, and its current status. The study's conclusions and recommendations are stated in the final section, section five.

### Background

The political arrangements established following the end of World War I and the Treaty of Versailles seemed to restore the principles of the Westphalian state system and bring about a potential stable security order in Europe.<sup>8</sup> After only two decades, however, World War II (WWII) unraveled these arrangements and its conclusion set the stage for ethnic and territorial issues, notably in Southeast and Eastern Europe.<sup>9</sup> The bipolar system *de facto* established at Yalta Conference in 1945 had only postponed and temporarily silenced these unresolved grievances.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and breakdown of this system in 1989, "Eastern Europe's security environment became increasingly uncertain and unstable."<sup>11</sup> The dissolution of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) were just two developments which contributed to this situation, perpetuating intense feelings to the present day.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of the former Yugoslavia Europe witnessed in this period at least six conflicts involving warfare – the majority originating due to ethnic issues and territorial disagreements; almost the same was also the case within some territories encompassing the former USSR. When the collapse of the USSR was evident, large ethnic groups which inhabited its territory began to

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<sup>8</sup>Stephen F. Larrabee, *East European Security after the Cold War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1993), xi.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

make known their struggle for self-determination and self-governance. This struggle, which was limited only to declare the independence, precipitated the emergence of fifteen independent and international-recognized states, including the Russian Republic (renamed the Russian Federation in 1993).<sup>13</sup> But the former USSR, as James Minahan stated, was the “home of more than one hundred recognized national and ethnic groups and many other distinct groups that were never recognized as official nationalities by Soviet authorities.”<sup>14</sup> Inherently, within several new republics, some of these ethnic groups and minorities, which were not contented with the new settlement, decided to pursue their own independence. Therefore, several other regions proclaimed themselves independent “states.”<sup>15</sup> However, in the immediate aftermath, many of these self-proclaimed separatist regions did not achieve full state independence and became no more than “de facto states,” which in many cases led to armed intrastate conflict.<sup>16</sup> During the period from 1992-1994, the parties in many of the conflicts reached ceasefire agreements and these conflicts became what we know today as “frozen” conflicts,<sup>17</sup> conflicts characterized by “a situation of no peace – no war.”<sup>18</sup>

These frozen conflicts remained a major security issue for the international community and especially for the European Union’s (EU) political agenda, due to the hazardous situation

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<sup>13</sup>Dov Lynch, *Engaging Eurasia’s Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and De Facto States* (Washington, D.C.: United State Institute of Peace, 2004), xi.

<sup>14</sup>James Minahan, *The Former Soviet Union’s Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 3.

<sup>15</sup>Lynch, *Engaging Eurasia’s Separatist States*, xi.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 6-8.

<sup>18</sup>Dov Lynch, “Unrecognized States in Eurasia: ‘Frozen Conflicts’,” *The World Today* (August/September 2001): 36, <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/The%20World%20Today/2001/wt010835.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2012).

extant in these separatist regions.<sup>19</sup> In the foreword of Dov Lynch's 2004 book, *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and De Facto States*, Richard H. Solomon, president of the United States Institute of Peace, describes the situation as it was then and as it exists today:

For more than ten years, a group of self-proclaimed states in the southwestern corner of what used to be the Soviet Union have maintained a precarious existence. Unrecognized by the international community, prey to organized crime, mired in economic misery, scourged by ethnic cleansing, and seared by recent memories of war, these hard-pressed territories have clung to their independence, ever fearful that the states from which they seceded will reabsorb them.<sup>20</sup>

Another major concern regarding the frozen conflicts has to do with the impossibility of predicting what events and consequences may occur even in this state of "freeze." Their changing nature could bring them to the point where the conflict "thaws" and returns to armed conflict and destruction, impacting regional and economic security. Although international organizations (e.g., UN, EU, NATO, etc.) and other entities have appropriate mechanisms to prevent a possible spread of these conflicts in case they become "hot" again, there still remains anxiety related to the realistic possibility of not finding viable solutions to resolve them. Unlike the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, where the warring parties eventually reached a common understanding and agreed to a political resolution, efforts in frozen conflict regions tend only to maintain that state of "freeze."<sup>21</sup>

The 2008 war in Georgia highlights the unchanging disagreement about who has the legitimate right to govern a territory and shows how frozen tensions can quickly lead to open conflict once again. These events demonstrate that the hatchet of war was never buried in the case of frozen conflicts.

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<sup>19</sup>Kapitonenko, 37.

<sup>20</sup>Lynch, *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States*, vii.

<sup>21</sup>Kapitonenko, 37-38.

### The Research Question

The primary research question, as presented at the beginning of this study, is to determine the nature of the Transnistrian “frozen” conflict. This question includes three secondary research questions that underpin the assessment:

1. What is the Transnistrian conflict about?
2. What was the nature of the Transnistrian conflict?
3. Has the nature of Transnistrian conflict changed since it “froze”?

### Significance

Security plays an essential role within human society, providing an environment which shapes all other aspects of human existence. Existing definitions of security highlight and emphasize this importance. The UN defines security as “a condition in which states consider that there is no danger of military attack, political pressure or economic coercion, so that they are able to pursue freely their own development and progress.”<sup>22</sup> A similar definition is offered by Wolfers, who argued that security is measured by “the absence of threats to acquired values,” and “the absence of fear that such values will be attacked.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, security is an important human need.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>United Nations, “Concepts of Security” (New York, NY: United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, 1986), <http://www.un.org/disarmament/HomePage/ODAPublications/DisarmamentStudySeries/PDF/SS-14.pdf> (accessed 15 September 2012), 2.

<sup>23</sup>Arnold Wolfers, “‘National Security’ as an Ambiguous Symbol,” *Political Science Quarterly*, LXVII, no. 4 (December 1952): 485.

<sup>24</sup>In his hierarchy of needs, Abraham Maslow placed security on the second position, right after biological needs (needs for oxygen, food, water, and a relatively constant body temperature). See Janet A. Simons, Donald B. Irwin, and Beverly A. Drinnien, *The Search for Understanding* (New York, NY: West Publishing Company, 1987), <http://web.archive.org/web/20100211014419/http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teach tip/maslow.htm> (accessed 15 September 2012).

The investigation offered here into the nature of this conflict and its implications will show that the Transnistrian conflict remains a serious challenge to the regional and European security environment, and ultimately for international security. Further significance of this study is also reflected in the hypothesis that, although the Transnistrian conflict appears as an ethnic conflict, it has remained in essence a political conflict with a significant economic dimension; and that the conflict has not been resolved to this day because the antagonists lack the political will to compromise.

#### Limitations

The most significant limitation of this paper is the lack of access to classified material on the Transnistrian conflict, access to which would allow the author to more accurately address many aspects of the conflict. Another challenge for this research is that rapid political changes on the international scene and within the region are quite possible. To account for this, the research will take into consideration only the events that occurred up to April 2012. Finally, the research conclusions offered here are not aimed at solutions for resolving the conflict, but rather seek to facilitate further investigation and studies.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was preceded by summary research aimed at identifying a topic that would combine research approaches of history, operational art, strategy, and policy. Post-Soviet conflicts, in particular the so called “frozen” conflicts, meet this requirement well. The scope of the paper was narrowed to one specific case, the Transnistrian conflict, based on the considerations presented in the previous section.

Different methodological approaches will be used to answer the primary question and three sub-questions. An historical approach will be used in section three to provide a clear image of Transnistrian frozen conflict. This approach was based on the assumption that the roots of the conflict can be traced to the 1992 Transnistrian War. This assumption is based upon an

understanding the origins of 1992 Transnistrian War suggested by Charles King in his book, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*. King argues that although the Transnistrian War is often regarded as an ethnic war based on ancient hatreds between eastern Latinity and Slavdom, it was actually a result of many political, economic, and cultural changes and transformations in the region throughout history.<sup>25</sup> This historical overview will prepare and inform the analysis that will be made in the following section where the other sub-questions will be addressed. This section will explore the roots and causes of the Transnistrian conflict in order to establish its nature at the moment of “freezing.” It then analyzes past attempts at conflict resolution. The findings will reveal not only the current nature of the Transnistrian frozen conflict but also how the conflict morphed throughout time and what the implications are for the future. Finally, the conclusion will confirm or will infirm the theory which argues that although the Transnistrian conflict appears to be an ethnic conflict, it has remained in essence a political conflict with a significant economic dimension; furthermore, because there remains a lack of political will to compromise on the part of both parties, the conflict is not resolved and will likely remain frozen until such political will emerges.

#### HISTORICAL NOTES: THE TRANSNISTRIAN CONFLICT

The Transnistrian conflict is not well-known by many outside the region, especially those outside of Europe. To the extent that this conflict is known, it is commonly assumed that this conflict is a short, post-Soviet-era bloody conflict, fought between the newly independent Republic of Moldova and its breakaway territory on the eastern bank of the Nistru River, the *Transnistria*, with fighting taking place between pro-Moldovan forces and pro-Transnistria forces, and that ceasefire was reached after a short period of fighting, leading the conflict to become “frozen.” Perhaps even less is known about the regions of Moldova and Transnistria,

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<sup>25</sup>Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1999), 179.

their peoples and cultures, and how these populations came to blows. Using the historical approach, this section attempts to fill these gaps in order to answer the first sub-question, “what is the Transnistrian conflict about?”

### The Underpinnings of the Transnistrian Conflict

Today, Moldova (officially the Republic of Moldova), is a landlocked state situated in Southeastern Europe, bordered by Ukraine to the north, east, and south, and by Romania to the west along the Prut River.<sup>26</sup> Moldova became an independent and sovereign state on 27 August 1991, in the context of Soviet Union’s dissolution, having the same boundaries as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (see figure 1).<sup>27</sup> The capital of the republic is its main city, Chisinau.

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<sup>26</sup>Helen Fedor, ed., *Belarus and Moldova Country Studies* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), 113.

<sup>27</sup>Republic of Moldova, “About the Republic of Moldova,” 2013, <http://www.moldova.md/en/home/> (accessed 15 December 2012) and Fedor, 113.





Figure 1. Political Map of Republic of Moldova

Source: One World Nation Online, “Moldova Country Profile: Political Map of Moldova,” <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/moldova.htm> (accessed 15 December 2012).

The history of Moldova should not begin before its central challenge as a unified country is presented. In this regard, Helen Fedor stated that:

The history of the Republic of Moldova is the history of two different regions that have been joined into one country, but not into one nation: Bessarabia and Transnistria. Bessarabia, the land between the Prut and Nistru rivers, is predominantly ethnic Romanian in population and constitutes the eastern half of a region historically known as Moldova or Moldavia (the Soviet-era Russian name). Transnistria is the Romanian-language name for the land on the east bank of the Nistru River; the majority of the population there is Slavic-ethnic Ukrainians and Russians – although Romanians are the single largest ethnic group there.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Fedor, 105.

Bessarabia's<sup>29</sup> history can be traced back two millennia, along with the other present-day Romanian provinces, to the Dacian kingdom. Charles Upson Clark, an historian who contributed greatly to the study of the history of Bessarabia, reveals the lineage of this region to the ancient kingdom of Dacia in his research. He argues in 1927 that "Dacia was a closely-knit province; excellent roads bound together Transylvania, the Banat, the Bukovina, Moldavia (of which Bessarabia is the eastern half) and Wallachia. These formed Dacia, just as today they form Romania; their bond of union is the Romanian language, the modern form of Dacian Latin."<sup>30</sup>

In 106 A.D., a portion of Dacia was conquered by the Roman Empire and transformed into a Roman province. The Roman occupation lasted until Aurelian withdrew from Dacia in 271 A.D. Throughout this period the Romans began a Romanization process which marked the genesis of what later would be called the Romanian people, the Bessarabians being just its eastern offshoot.<sup>31</sup>

In the period after the Roman legions departed, several migratory groups of people, such as the Vandals, Huns, and Ostrogoths, passed through Bessarabia's territory.<sup>32</sup> In the sixth century, during their advance toward West, the Slavs came in contact with Daco-Romans from Bessarabia. For the next 1,400 years or so, allegedly, both ethnic groups cohabitated in an area that largely corresponds to the current territory of Transnistria. The last major invasion before

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<sup>29</sup>In order to avoid any confusion the term Bessarabia will be used here to refer to the territory that stretches between the Prut River and the Nistru River and which almost matches the current territory of the Republic of Moldova except for the region of Transnistria. The term Moldova will be used to refer to the territory that stretches between the Carpathian Mountains and the Nistru River, including the Romanian region also named Moldova that is in present-day Romania, Bessarabia, and northern Bukovina and two and a half other counties in present-day Ukraine. See: Stefan Purici, "Istoria Basarabiei," (Institutul Eudoxiu Hurmuzachi, Editura Semne, Bucuresti, 2011), 9.

<sup>30</sup>Charles Upson Clark, *Bessarabia: Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927), 32.

<sup>31</sup>Clark, 30-32; King, 2; Fedor, 95, 106; and Minahan, 98.

<sup>32</sup>Fedor, 105 and Clark, 33.

Moldova came into being as a more permanent state was the thirteenth century invasion by the Tatars.<sup>33</sup>

At the beginning of the fourteenth century Dragos, a Wallachian (Romanian) prince from Maramures (a region in northern Transylvania), conducted a campaign against the Tatars and drove them out of Moldova.<sup>34</sup> This was the first step toward the foundation of the Moldovan principality. It occurred at the middle of the same century, in 1349, under Bogdan, another Wallachian prince from the same region as prince Dragos. The new principality encompassed the territory between the Carpathian Mountains and the Nistru River and was initially called Bogdania (after its ruler), but was later renamed Moldova after the Moldova River (currently in modern Romania).<sup>35</sup> The territory's inhabitants were known as either Moldovans or Wallachians, and with time they would be referred to as Romanians as well.<sup>36</sup> Also during the fourteenth century, the southeastern part of Moldova (the Budjak region) began to be called Bessarabia after a Wallachian ruler, Mircea the Old, whose family name was Basarab.<sup>37</sup>

Due its strategic position at the mouths of the Danube, the greatest navigable river of Central and Eastern Europe, and its possession of a series of ports on the Nistru River, Moldova quickly became an important and contested region between Austrians, Hungarians, Poles, Russians, and Ottoman Turks.<sup>38</sup> Thus, toward the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century, Moldova came to face the menace of Ottoman power. Even though

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<sup>33</sup>Fedor, 105 and Clark, 33.

<sup>34</sup>King, 13-14.

<sup>35</sup>Fedor, 95, 106.

<sup>36</sup>King, 14-15.

<sup>37</sup>Clark, 33. The name Bessarabia was later extended to the entire region annexed by the Russian Empire after the Russo-Turkish War of 1806-1812.

<sup>38</sup>Clark, 30 and King, 15.

during the reign of Stephen the Great (1457-1504) Moldova achieved significant military victories against this power, in 1512 the principality became a tributary of the Ottoman Empire, a situation that would last for the next 300 years. As a tributary state of the Ottoman Empire, Moldova retained its internal and partial external autonomy.<sup>39</sup> Moldova challenged the Ottoman Empire's suzerainty from time-to-time, however. At the beginning of seventeenth century, the Wallachian Prince Michael the Brave united Moldova with the other two Romanian principalities, Wallachia and Transylvania, forming one country that closely resembled the old Dacian kingdom. This union, although lasted for only a short period of time, and its mutineer attitude toward Ottoman authority, helped Moldova to preserve its ethnic and cultural identity.<sup>40</sup>

In the second part of the eighteenth century, the balance of power in Southeastern Europe began to shift, which inevitably affected Moldova's territorial situation and status. In 1775, the Ottoman Empire was forced to cede its control Bukovina, a territory in north-western Moldova, to the Habsburg Empire, and in 1792 it was forced to cede Transnistria to the Russian Empire. Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1806-1812, Russia then annexed Bessarabia.<sup>41</sup> Not long after, the Russian Empire sought to solidify its control of Bessarabia and launched a Russification campaign. The tsarist government encouraged and assisted thousands of non-Romanian colonists, such as Russians, Ukrainians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, and Poles to settle in Bessarabia in an attempt to dilute the extant Romanian population (86% Romanian-speaking) of the region.<sup>42</sup> In 1828 the status of autonomy enjoyed by Bessarabia since 1818 was revoked, and in the following year the constitution was abrogated and replaced with a new code drafted by the Russian governor of the

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<sup>39</sup>Minahan, 99; Fedor, 95, 106; and King, 15.

<sup>40</sup>King, 15 and Clark, 48-49.

<sup>41</sup>Minahan, 99 and Fedor, 95, 106.

<sup>42</sup>Clark, 79-110 and Minahan, 99.

province.<sup>43</sup> Also, the Moldovan legal and administrative systems were replaced by a tsarist system, and all ethnic Romanians who held administrative positions were replaced with ethnic Slavs.<sup>44</sup> By the middle of the century, Russian was imposed as the official language of Bessarabia, a measure that led to the closure of all Romanian-language schools in the province and to a purge of the use of Romanian in the remaining schools.<sup>45</sup> Even the Romanian Church from Bessarabia was affected by the Russification process. Many Russian priests were brought in to replace native priests and many Russian seminaries and monastic schools were established and offered to the Moldavian students as the single alternative.<sup>46</sup> A last significant measure was taken in 1871 when the tsarist government “changed Bessarabia’s status from an imperial region (*oblast*) to a Russian province (*guberniia*), as an indication that it formed an inseparable part not only of the Russian Empire but of the Russian heartland itself.”<sup>47</sup>

From the beginning these actions encountered the permanent resistance of the Moldovan population. At the middle of the century this resistance merged into a nationalist movement that primarily sought the establishment of a pan-Romanian union. The nationalist movement gained force in the 1870s and 1880s when Moldovans realized that even the relative political and cultural autonomy that they enjoyed in the first half of the century had been taken away by the tsarist government.<sup>48</sup> In the meantime, some of the effects of the Russification process in the Budjak region were alleviated by the Romanian authorities when this region was returned for 22 years

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<sup>43</sup>Minahan, 99 and King, 22.

<sup>44</sup>Minahan, 99.

<sup>45</sup>King, 22 and Minahan, 99.

<sup>46</sup>Clark, 102-104.

<sup>47</sup>King, 23.

<sup>48</sup>Minahan, 99 and King, 23.

(1856-1878) to west Moldova, respective to Romania (the west Moldova united with Wallachia in 1859 forming the base of modern Romania).<sup>49</sup>

During the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Moldovan nationalist movement in Bessarabia became a political movement that eventually led to the creation of a National Council. On December 2, 1917, the National Council proclaimed Bessarabia the independent Democratic Moldovan Republic, and on March 27 of the following year it voted in favor of the republic's union with Romania.<sup>50</sup> In 1924, in an attempt to delegitimize this union and as a sign of consolidating power at its western border, the Soviet Union created an artificial Moldovan state on the eastern bank of the Nistru River, the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Moldavian ASSR), within the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Ukrainian SSR).<sup>51</sup>

The 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact allowed the Soviet Union to occupy Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and a part of Herta (a small Romanian region north of Bessarabia), on June 28, 1940. In the same year, on August 2, the Soviet government joined most of the core of Bessarabia with a portion of the former Moldavian ASSR (the current Transnistria) to form a new republic within the Soviet Union, the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (Moldavian SSR), while transferring southern Bessarabia (the Budjak region) and the rest of the territories acquired from Romania to the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>52</sup>

On June 22, 1941 Romania entered the WWII as an ally of Germany, and within one month it regained the Romanian territories occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940. The name Transnistria was brought into use at this time, being applied by the Romanian authorities to a

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<sup>49</sup>King, 22 and Fedor, 95, 106. Henceforth the term Moldova will be used interchangeably with the term Bessarabia to refer to the territory that stretches between the Prut River and the Nistru River.

<sup>50</sup>Fedor, 95, 106.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 95, 106-107.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 95, 107.

territory that they administrated between August 1941 and January 1944, and which stretched between the Nistru and Bug rivers, limited in the north by the Bar town and in the south by the Black Sea (the current territory of Transnistria represents just 10.5% of this territory).<sup>53</sup> By August 1944 the Soviet Union had reoccupied Transnistria, Bessarabia, and northern Bukovina, and after the 1947 Paris Peace Conference these territories returned to their prewar boundaries.<sup>54</sup>

After the war, Stalin's policy regarding the Moldavian SSR was to resume the Russification process of the nineteenth century, in an attempt, as Helen Fedor observed, to "destroy any remaining ties that the republic had with Romania: secret police struck at nationalist groups; the Cyrillic alphabet was imposed on the 'Moldavian' language; and ethnic Russians and Ukrainians were encouraged to immigrate to the Moldavian SSR, especially to Transnistria."<sup>55</sup> This policy continued until after Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power in the Soviet Union in March 1985. His radical domestic reforms, including *perestroika* and *glasnost*, permitted the peoples of the Soviet Union to more freely express their national feelings.<sup>56</sup>

### The Conflict

The climate of openness created by Gorbachev's reforms allowed the Moldavian SSR to distance itself from Moscow beginning with the summer of 1988.<sup>57</sup> A first sign of its political assertiveness was the creation in May 1989 of the Moldovan Popular Front (MPF), an organization that quickly became the proponent of the democratic movement of ethnic

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<sup>53</sup>Fedor, 95, 107 and Vasile Stancu, "Administratia civila romaneasca din Transnistria (1)," July 2012, <http://www.art-emis.ro/istorie/1083-administratia-civila-romaneasca-din-transnistria-1.html> (accessed 30 January 2013).

<sup>54</sup>King, 94.

<sup>55</sup>Fedor, 107.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 96, 108.

<sup>57</sup>Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan* (London, UK: Palgrave, 2000), 111 and Fedor, 96, 108-109.

Romanians. MPF led large demonstrations against the Communist regime and campaigned for the introduction of the Latin alphabet and the Romanian language as the official language of the republic.<sup>58</sup> Eventually, the Communist leadership from the Moldavian SSR was replaced and a new language law was adopted. As a response to this law and to the MPF's call for the reunification of the republic with Romania, the United Council of Work Collectives, an organization that represented the Slavic movement in the Moldavian SSR, organized strikes in the major cities of Transnistria.<sup>59</sup>

In the spring of 1990 the first democratic elections within the Moldavian SSR were held, with the MPF becoming the primary political formation in the republic and with Mircea Snegur as its leader.<sup>60</sup> In June, the new government changed the name of the republic to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova and declared its sovereignty.<sup>61</sup> The reaction of ethnic Slavs to this development came in September, when they proclaimed Transnistria the Nistru Moldovan Autonomous Republic (RMN) with its capital at Tiraspol, and declared that only all-Union laws would be obeyed.<sup>62</sup> These last actions eventually led to a period of both political and ground confrontation between Moldova's ethnic Romanians and Transnistria's ethnic Slavs. The Moldovan government, in an effort to maintain rule over the Transnistria region and protect the ethnic Romanians residing in that area, overturned the Transnistrians' proclamation of sovereignty. They were not, however, able to enforce this decree, further complicating their efforts to rule this separatist region.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 111.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Fedor, 96, 110.

<sup>61</sup>King, 146-147 and Fedor, 96, 110.

<sup>62</sup>Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 111; Urse, 5; and Fedor, 96, 110.

<sup>63</sup>Urse, 5.



The year 1991 saw more important political transformations within Moldova. In May, the country adopted the official name, Republic of Moldova, and the Supreme Soviet was renamed the Moldovan Parliament.<sup>64</sup> In August, the Moldovan and Transnistrian leadership again collided over support for the military coup against Gorbachev. Mircea Snegur, who would become the president of Republic of Moldova later that fall, sided with Gorbachev, calculating that such a move gave him the best chance of securing Moldova's independence. The Transnistrians, led by Igor Smirnov (an ethnic Russian), sided with the coup plotters, calculating that the preservation of the Soviet Union would secure their influence over the region and access to the most economically-secure sector of Moldova. Unfortunately for the Transnistrians, the coup failed. They now concentrated their efforts on securing and administrating their self-proclaimed state.<sup>65</sup>

Immediately after the coup, both the Republic of Moldova and the RMN declared their independence. However, in the case of the separatist region, its independence was neither recognized by the Moldovan Parliament nor by any other international entities. By the end of the year, the clashes between Moldova and the RMN had moved beyond a political divide and had taken on a violent character. Initially, these clashes were limited to the Dubasari region, where small Transnistrian paramilitary forces attacked Moldovan police forces.<sup>66</sup> Also, at the end of the year, Igor Smirnov was elected president of RMN.

By March 1992, the conflict had grown into a war. The clashes had expanded into other areas and reportedly involved Transnistrian elements using weapons acquired from the deposits of the (former) Soviet 14th Army, aided by other Slavic volunteers and Cossacks who had begun

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<sup>64</sup>Fedor, 96, 110.

<sup>65</sup>King, 191 and Urse, 5.

<sup>66</sup>Urse, 5.

to arrive from Russia and Ukraine.<sup>67</sup> The escalation of violence prompted president Snegur to declare a state of emergency within the republic. He also attempted to consolidate control over the units of 14th Army, decreeing that all former Soviet armies and equipment in Moldova were now part of the emerging Moldovan defense forces.<sup>68</sup> If successful, this decree would have denied the Transnistrians a viable aid to contest the Moldovan authority over the entire state of Moldova. It was not, however, successful. Instead the 14th Army remained committed to defending the ethnic Russians in the RMN.<sup>69</sup> Russian president Boris Yeltsin further solidified this commitment when on April 1, 1992, he laid claim to the 14th Army. Since the 14th Army was predominantly Russian, there was little doubt that when faced with competing, ethnically-based governments, the Army would abide by the Russian order.<sup>70</sup>

These events show that the 14th Army played a significant role during the Transnistrian conflict. In May, units of the 14th Army began an offensive against Moldovan elements across the Nistru River. As King put it, “the ostensible goal was to pacify the conflict, but more often it resulted in openly assisting the Transnistrians.”<sup>71</sup> It established a buffer zone and strengthened the position of the Transnistrians. In June, the Moldovans pushed back their opponents and were about to take the city of Tighina (Bender). This led to the bloodiest battle of the conflict during which the Transnistrian forces, now supported officially by the 14th Army, battled against the

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<sup>67</sup>Neil V. Lamont, *Territorial Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict: The Moldovan Case* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 1993), 7; King, 190; Urse, 5; and Fedor, 96, 111.

<sup>68</sup>Mihai Gribincea, *The Russian Policy on Military Bases: Georgia and Moldova* (Oradea, Romania: Edit. Cogito, 2001), 157 and Urse, 5.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>King, 192; Gribincea, 157; and Urse, 5.

Moldovan forces, over control of the city. The 14th Army was again successful and established conditions to bring the Moldovan government to the negotiating table.<sup>72</sup>

On July 3, 1992, Snegur met Yeltsin in Moscow to discuss the conditions for ending the war and determining the political status of the RMN. Representatives from the RMN, however, did not participate in the meeting. Russia agreed that the Republic of Moldova should remain a unitary state with Transnistria as a constituent element, but with a special political status.<sup>73</sup> An agreement on a cease-fire was reached on July 21, 1992, when both presidents Yeltsin and Snegur signed a Peace Accord.<sup>74</sup> It established a “security zone (see figure 2)” along the Nistru River, where a peacekeeping force comprised of Russian, Moldovan, and RMN battalions, “under the supervision of a Joint Control Commission (JCC)”, would operate.<sup>75</sup> Likewise, Russia conditioned the withdrawal of 14th Army based upon Moldova awarding certain constitutional privileges for Transnistria.<sup>76</sup> In the meantime, Transnistria would enjoy a special status within the republic and retain the right to secede if the Republic of Moldova were to reunite with Romania.<sup>77</sup> The Transnistrian conflict thus froze at this point.

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<sup>72</sup>Urse, 5.

<sup>73</sup>Igor Botan, “Reglementarea transnistreana: o solutie europeana” (Chisinau: Adept, 2009), 13.

<sup>74</sup>Urse, 5 and Fedor, 96, 111.

<sup>75</sup>King, 196 and Urse, 5.

<sup>76</sup>Fedor, 111.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

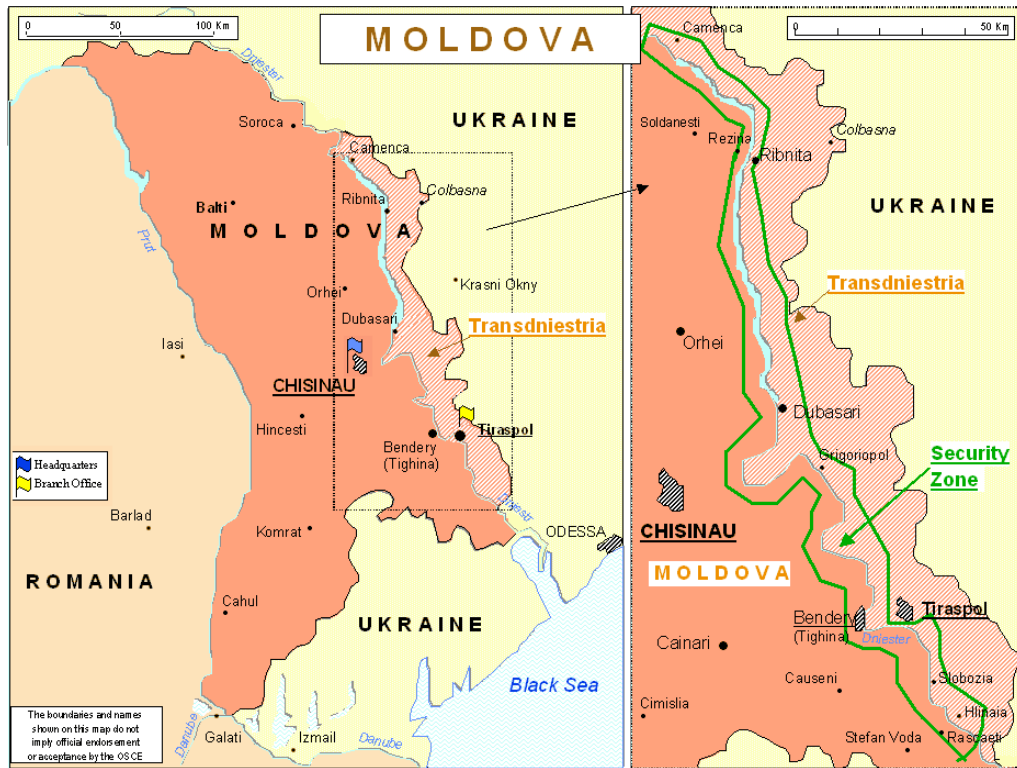


Figure 2. Map of Transnistrian Region of Republic of Moldova: Security Zone

Source: Federation of American Scientists, “Russian Military Districts: Operational Group of Russian Forces in Moldova,” <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/agency/mo-md.htm> (accessed 8 August 2012).

## ANALYSIS

In this section, the historical data about the Transnistrian conflict provided in section three, as well as other relevant points of view, will be analyzed in order to answer the other two sub-questions and to create the premises to draw the conclusions of this study.

### The Nature of Transnistrian Conflict

The purpose of this subsection is to answer the question “what was the nature of Transnistrian conflict?” In order to answer to this question it is necessary to establish the roots of this conflict and to analyze its causes.

## Roots of Conflict and Historical Causes

Looking back at the history of the Republic of Moldova, one could argue that the genesis of the Transnistrian conflict began in the sixth century A.D. when the Slavic tribes came in contact with the Latin (Daco-Romans) population in the region. This assumption, however, fades once we take into consideration Clark's observation that "we must not forget that in Bessarabia, Slavs and Daco-Romans have been in close and friendly contact for 1400 years."<sup>78</sup> One could also argue that there was a period of 300 years when Bessarabia was under Ottoman suzerainty – a fact which might imply the lack of continuity of any possible latent conflict between ethnic Slav group and ethnic Latin group in the region. A case can be made if the roots of the Transnistrian conflict are traced back to the period of the Russo-Turkish wars at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth, when both Transnistria and Bessarabia were annexed and incorporated by the Russian Empire. The Russification process of the ethnic Romanian population from these regions, conducted initially by the tsarist government and later continued by the Soviet government, led to important demographic transformations with significant social implications. If in Bessarabia this process was prevented to a certain extent by the Moldovan nationalist movement, in Transnistria the denationalization and assimilation measures were more severe and remained affixed for a longer period. In the long term, the colonization policy eventually achieved its goal as it led to the Slavs (ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians) becoming the majority population within Transnistria, although Romanians remained the largest single ethnic group.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Clark, 33. Charles Upson Clark made this statement in 1927, and he was referred to the lack of any major conflicts between ethnic Latin groups and ethnic Slav groups, although after Transnistria and Bessarabia came under Russian domination there were many animosities.

<sup>79</sup>Varta, 21.

Table 1. Population of Transnistria 1936-1989

	1936		1989	
Moldovans	122,683	41.8%	239,936	39.9%
Ukrainians	84,293	28.7%	170,079	28.3%
Russians	41,794	14.2%	153,393	25.5%
Jews	23,158	7.9%	-	-
Other	21,873	7.4%	38,252	6.4%
TOTAL	271,928	100%	601,660	100%

Source: Adapted from Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, Stanford University, 1999), 185.

A constant and very active pro-imperial and pro-Soviet propaganda policy occurred in Bessarabia and in Transnistria, in parallel with the colonization policy. This action reached its peak in Transnistria in the inter-war period when Bessarabia was a part of Romania.<sup>80</sup> The Soviets, in their attempt to prepare public opinion for an export of Communist revolution in southeastern Europe, began to build an image of Romania as the enemy of the proletariat and peasants from the Soviet Union and the Moldavian ASSR.<sup>81</sup> Romania would have become the first target of this export, and therefore everything that was Romanian or related to Romania was defamed.<sup>82</sup> The same propaganda style was used at the end of 1980s to prevent the national emancipation movement which aroused in the Moldavian SSR.<sup>83</sup> Until this time, however, the expression of national feelings of by ethnic Romanians from Transnistria and Bessarabia was suppressed by the Soviet leadership, which used drastic measures and suppression policies such as forced collectivization, mass deportation, and political persecution.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Varta, 21.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Fedor, 107-108.

It can be observed that throughout the common history of the Romanians and Slavs within Bessarabia and Transnistria, the state of conflict was rather manifested between Moldovan nationals and the tsarist/Soviet/Russian leadership; only when this leadership saw that it was losing control over this part of the population did it begin to use ethnic Slavs against ethnic Romanians. This assertion finds particular support in an observation of a Moldovan historian, Viorica Olaru-Cemartan, who, when referring to the Transnistrian conflict, argues that “Russia and the leaders from Tiraspol... having the support of the 14th Army and Cossacks volunteers, provoked this conflict, using the pretext of national discrimination and that the rights of minorities were violated within the RMN.”<sup>85</sup> The Moldovan historian based her point of view on several considerations. First, “the Transnistrian leaders were Russian citizens and they represented Russia’s interests in the RMN, and their purpose was to keep the situation under control and, if the situation got out of control, to apply a policy of *divide et impera*.”<sup>86</sup> At this point, Olaru-Cemartan incorporates the American analyst Thomas Goltz’s observation that “in the former Soviet Union there is no separatist conflict without Russian involvement.”<sup>87</sup> Secondly, “the 14th Army represented without doubt, that Russia has deep interests in the region, its leadership having a strong Russophile orientation.”<sup>88</sup> Third, “the Cossack volunteers who came to support the separatist regime were citizens of the Russian Federation – fighting for Russia, not defending the rights of an allegedly-oppressed minority.”<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the same historian argues that “after the Transnistrian conflict broke out, it was reduced from the tripartite scheme:

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<sup>85</sup>Viorica Olaru-Cemartan, “Fenomenul Transnistrean si natura sa,” *Cohorta*, volume no, no. 1 (2013): 47-48.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>87</sup>Olaru-Cemartan, 48 and Iftene Pop, “Basarabia din nou la rascruce” (Bucuresti: Edit. Demiurg, 1995), 99.

<sup>88</sup>Olaru-Cemartan, 48.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

Republic of Moldova, RMN and Russian Federation, to a bipartite scheme: Republic of Moldova, which attempted to defend its independence and integrity, and Russia, which tried to dismantle this.”<sup>90</sup>

### Political, Geopolitical, and Geostrategic Causes

There is significant evidence that at the base of the Transnistrian conflict were mainly Russia’s geopolitical and geostrategic interests. Russia always manifested a special interest in Transnistria and Bessarabia, taking special consideration to the geographical positions of these regions in relation to Europe. The Russian Empire, and later the Soviet Union, used these regions as an interface to project its policy and influence toward Europe, particularly toward southeastern Europe. Therefore, the Transnistrian conflict seems to have been just a feature of, if not a continuation of, this same policy. One of the commanders of the 14th Army during the Transnistrian conflict, major general Alexander Lebed, affirmed that “Transnistria is Russia’s key toward the Balkans” and that the “RMN is just a small part of Russia.”<sup>91</sup>

In the wake of the Soviet Union’s dissolution, Russia found itself at a distance of over 1000 km from Europe, with its only important physical presence on the continent being represented by just one small bridgehead, the Kaliningrad exclave.<sup>92</sup> Also, Moscow realized that its internal policy now emerged as part of its foreign policy. Indeed, as long as the Soviet Union existed, the leadership from Moldova, due to its predominantly Slavic composition, would remain faithful to Moscow and implement Soviet policy in the republic without any major problems. Once this union ceased to exist, and the leadership from the republic began to be composed primarily of national Moldovans who declared themselves independent and sovereign, Moscow’s

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<sup>90</sup>Olaru-Cemartan , 47-48.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 47, 49.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 50.



policy had to change. These assertions are supported by the observations of a notable analyst of the Transnistrian conflict, Dov Lynch. Lynch argues that under Soviet rule, “the republic had been governed by elites from RMN” and that “a new generation of leaders from Bessarabia, such as Mircea Snegur and Petru Lucinschi, challenged Transnistrian predominance.”<sup>93</sup> In these circumstances, Russia’s support to the Transnistrian separatist leadership came almost naturally.

As the following two tables on the national/ethnic composition of the Communist leadership from Moldova prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union illustrate, the Soviet/Slavic influence in this republic was significant.

Table 2. National Composition of the Communist Party of Moldova

	Moldovan	Ukrainian	Russian	Jewish
1925	6.3%	31.6%	41.6%	15.7%
1940	17.5%	52.5%	11.3%	15.9%
1989	47.8%	20.7%	22.2%	2.5%

Source: Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, Stanford University, 1999), 99. The figures for 1925 are referring to the Moldavian ASSR.

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<sup>93</sup>Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 112.

Table 3. First Secretaries of the Communist Party of Moldova, 1941-1991

	Period in Office	Place of Birth
P. G. Borodin	1941 – 1942	Ukraine
N. L. Salogor	1942 – 1946	Ukraine
N. G. Coval	1946 – 1950	Moldova (Transnistria)
Leonid I. Brezhnev	1950 – 1952	Russia
D. S. Gladkii	1952 – 1954	Ukraine
Z. T. Serdiuk	1954 – 1961	Ukraine
Ivan I. Bodiul	May 1961 – Dec. 1980	Ukraine
Semion K. Grossu	Dec. 1980 – Nov. 1989	Moldova (Transnistria)
Petru K. Lucinschi	Nov. 1989 – Feb. 1991	Moldova (Bessarabia)
Grigore I. Eremei	Feb. 1991 – Aug. 1991	Moldova (Bessarabia)

Source: Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, Stanford University, 1999), 100.

Russia needed to keep Transnistria somehow bound to it in order to dominate the Republic of Moldova and to exercise its influence in the former Communist states from eastern and southeastern Europe, using this separatist region as a bridgehead. For Russia, an eventual reunification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania could usher in a serious challenge to its influence in the Balkans.<sup>94</sup> This was actually the primary reason for which Russia, thru the 21 July, 1992 Peace Accord, imposed on the Republic of Moldova the condition that RMN will secede if a reunification with Romania were to occur. Likewise, controlling Transnistria would have given Russia more opportunities to influence and to keep pressure on Ukraine and on the other European members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>95</sup>

There were other important Russian geopolitical and geostrategic interests in the area. With an unstable security situation in the region, an eventual NATO enlargement would have been easier to prevent. Actually Russia attempted to create the appropriate conditions that would have averted any further enrolment of Slavs and Orthodox from the Balkans into Western military

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<sup>94</sup>Olaru-Cemartan, 49-50.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

and non-military organizations. Russia's purpose was to perpetuate pan-Slavism in the region, assuming as it had in the past the role of the leader of this movement.<sup>96</sup>

### Military Causes

The dissolution of the Soviet Union caused the dissolution of the existing military system. Many military objectives and installations with strategic importance were now outside of Russia's borders. In the vicinity of Tiraspol, there were units of the 14th Army, an important armament industry, and the largest Soviet weapons depot from Europe.<sup>97</sup> Thus, according to Olaru-Cemartan, "the Russian military requested the creation of Russian military bases in the territories of the newly independent states making the following arguments: the necessity to protect the Russian and Russian-speaking population from outside the Russian Federation's borders; to protect the large number of war veterans and reservists settled in these republics; and the need to prevent and keep under control possible conflicts on and at the borders of the Russian Federation."<sup>98</sup>

During this period, there were two antagonistic trends in Russia's foreign policy which related to the military problem. One was the president of Russia (Boris Yeltsin) and the civilian leadership's policy, and the other one was the vice-president of Russia (Alexander Rutskoy, a former Soviet military officer) and the military leadership's policy. The first group advocated for a new approach to this problem while the vice president voiced support for maintaining the traditional approach, arguing that NATO and the UN represent the principal threats for Russia's

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<sup>96</sup>Olaru-Cemartan, 49-50.

<sup>97</sup>Olaru-Cemartan, 52-53 and FIRD, "Transnistria: Evolutia unui conflict inghetat si perspectiva de solutionare" (Bucuresti: Institutul "Ovidu Sincai," Septembrie 2005), [http://leader.viitorul.org/public/555/ro/raport\\_romania%20on%20transnistria\[1\].pdf](http://leader.viitorul.org/public/555/ro/raport_romania%20on%20transnistria[1].pdf) (accessed 5 February 2013), 3.

<sup>98</sup>Olaru-Cemartan, 53.

security.<sup>99</sup> Reportedly the Russian civilian leadership confronted the military leadership several times over this issue. On May 27, 1992, Yeltsin faced the disdain of many Russian generals when he announced Russia's intention to withdraw its troops from Moldova.<sup>100</sup> Despite this declaration, the Russian military leadership even developed a plan to annex Transnistria to Russia.<sup>101</sup> In time, the opposition's ideas prevailed. Yeltsin adopted the same position as his vice-president, affirming that "the former Soviet Union's borders are now Russia's borders" and that "Russia will further defend the rights of Russians who are living in other CIS states."<sup>102</sup> He also declared that "these represent priorities for Russia and that if it is necessary Russia will make use of force to protect them."<sup>103</sup>

#### Socio-Ideological Causes

The dissolution of the Soviet Union enabled the Moldovan population to explore other ideological ideas, rather than Communism. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the beginning of the conflict took place in this period of socio-ideological transition. Olaru-Cemartan identified an ideological incompatibility between Moscow/Tiraspol and Chisinau, which in her view could be expressed by the following antonyms: "Soviet – anti-Soviet; communist (totalitarian) – anti-communist (anti-totalitarian); anti-national (brotherhood of the people – to be read: the right of 'big brother') – national; the class struggle and the 'creation of the Soviet man' – general-human conception; historical false – historical true."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Olaru-Cemartan, 54.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>101</sup>Gribincea, 12.

<sup>102</sup>Olaru-Cemartan, 56.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 57.

Transnistria was just the “theater” of an “ideological battle” between Moldova and Russia. The “Moldovan nationalist” who tried to follow and pursue the path of democracy, encountered the “big brother’s” resistance, the last attempt to maintain further the Soviet type nomenclature.<sup>105</sup> In this struggle, Russia used the Transnistrian and Russian mass-media, which was monopolized by the Russophiles, to frighten and divide the local population to become obedient to the separatist regime.<sup>106</sup>

#### Socio-Economic Causes

From an economic perspective, Moldova was divided into two parts. Bessarabia was basically an agricultural region, a source of cereals, vegetables, fruit, and wine, while Transnistria was the main industrial region of the country.<sup>107</sup>

Table 4. Transnistria in the Moldovan Economy, 1991  
(Regional Production as Percentage of National Total)

Large electrical machines	100%
Power transformers	100%
Gas containers	100%
Cotton textiles	96.6%
Electric energy	87.5%
Cement	58.1%
Low-horsepower electric engines	55.8%
Sheet metal	23.5%
Agricultural products	13.1%

Source: Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, Stanford University, 1999), 186.

<sup>105</sup>Moldovenii, “Cauzele care au stat la baza conflictului transnistrean si evolutia sa,” <http://www.moldovenii.md/md/section/565> (accessed 1 March 2013) and Olaru-Cemartan, 48.

<sup>106</sup>Olaru-Cemartan, 48.

<sup>107</sup>Wilbur E. Gray, “The Chivalrous Republic: Intrarepublic Conflict and the Case Study of Moldova” (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1993), 2-3; and Lamont, 4.

The Transnistrian leadership was aware that the independence of Moldova would have implied the redistribution of the control of the economic resources within the republic and implicitly within Transnistria. The Transnistrian leadership induced a fear of losing economic security among the ethnic Slav population. This fear was exploited later to mobilize this population to fight against the Moldovan authorities who were also aware that losing Transnistria would have meant an economic disaster for the rest of the country.<sup>108</sup>

#### Cultural-Linguistic and Ethnic Causes

The ethnic Slav and Russian-speaking population from Transnistria, and from the entire Republic of Moldova, was not pleased with the language law adopted by the Moldovan government in September 1989. Although the new legislation regarding the state language and the functioning of the ethnic groups was permissive and tolerant compared to similar legislation from other ex-Soviet states, the new law was perceived distrustfully by the Slavic and Russian-speaking population from Moldova, mostly due to anti-Moldovan and anti-Romanian propaganda.<sup>109</sup> Again, as in similar instances, this part of the population was infused with the fear of losing its social status and cultural identity.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, according to some Moldovan scholars, “the Transnistrian separatist leaders invented the concept of ‘Transnistrian people,’ followed by speculations regarding the right of nations to self-determination.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>Varta, 22-23; Lamont, 4; Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 111-112; and Gray, 3.

<sup>109</sup>Varta, 22-24 and Moldovenii.

<sup>110</sup>Varta, 22-24.

<sup>111</sup>Moldovenii.

Table 5. Language and Ethnicity in the Moldova SSR, 1989  
(Percent of Total Ethnic Group)

	Total Population	Native Language			Fluent Knowledge of Another Soviet Language		
		Language of own ethnic group	Moldovan	Russian	Language of own ethnic group	Moldovan	Russian
Moldovans	2,794,794	95.4	-	4.3	1.7	-	25.7
Ukrainians	600,366	61.6	1.6	36.7	8.6	12.8	43.0
Russians	562,069	99.1	0.6	-	0.6	11.7	-
Gagauz	153,458	91.2	1.1	7.4	1.6	4.4	72.8
Bulgarians	88,419	78.7	2.4	18.1	-	6.9	68.3
Jews	65,672	25.9	0.8	72.9	6.9	15.2	23.1
Gypsies	11,571	82.0	13.5	3.6	1.2	30.6	41.9
TOTAL	4,335,360	88.9	0.5	10.3	2.6	3.9	45.2

Source: Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, Stanford University, 1999), 118.

Lynch pointed out that although “the Russian government has argued that the Transnistrian conflict has been driven by ethnic rivalry, pitting Moldovan nationalism against ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers,” in fact, “the conflict has been ethnic to the degree that the language issue and the prospect of reunification with Romania aroused fears among the Slavic elites of Moldova.”<sup>112</sup> He also stated that “the accusation of Moldovan discrimination against ethnic minorities were spurious and that investigations by the UN, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), and the Council of Europe have found these claims to be unfounded.”<sup>113</sup> Even Igor Smirnov, the president of RMN, according to Lynch, “candidly recognized, ‘this is not an ethnic but a political conflict.’”<sup>114</sup>

<sup>112</sup>Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 112.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

## Findings

If the catalyst of the Transnistrian conflict was the “fear” of losing economic independence “felt” by a part of Transnistrian population, and the “unfriendly nationalistic” Moldovian legislative measures, the conflict was about a confrontation between the Soviet past of Moldova and the desired future of the republic. Likewise, the conflict was about a struggle between the old Soviet regime, represented by the elite from Transnistria and the newly-democratic Moldovan administration represented by a new generation of Bessarabian leaders. Eventually, it was in some aspect also about the geopolitical and geostrategic power considerations from a greatly weakened Russia.

Therefore, though the Transnistrian conflict had multiple causes, they can be reduced in fact to only two: political and economic. Both represent the essential nature of this conflict. This ascertainment is synthetized and presented in the following table:

Table 6. The Nature of the Transnistrian Conflict

CAUSES	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Historical	X	-	-
Political, Geopolitical, and Geostrategic	-	-	X
Military	-	X	-
Socio-Ideological	-	X	-
Socio-Economic	-	-	X
Cultural-Linguistic and Ethnic	X	-	-
NATURE	Political and Economic		

*Source:* Created by author.

### The Nature of the Transnistrian “Frozen” Conflict

The purpose of this subsection is to answer the question “has the nature of the Transnistrian conflict changed since it ‘froze’?” In order to answer to this question, this part of the analysis will focus on the past attempts at conflict resolution and on the current status of this conflict.



## Immediate Post-War Period

After the July 21, 1992 cease fire, the Republic of Moldova focused on the security issues posed by the conflict. Moldova attempted to internationalize the conflict. Moldovan Foreign Minister, Nicolae Tiu, gave a speech during the 47<sup>th</sup> session of General Assembly of UN (October 1, 1992), entitled “The 14th Army – A Permanent Source of Tension.”<sup>115</sup> The echo of this speech had the expected effect. The international community made its first step toward the case of the Transnistrian conflict during the third meeting of the foreign ministers of the participating states to the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, successor organization to the CSCE), held at Stockholm on December 14, 1992. The participants expressed their intention to involve the OSCE in the process meant to identify a solution for the situation created on the left bank of the Nistru River. The foreign ministers called for a solution to the “problem of the past” and for the ratification of a “bilateral accord designated to establish the status and the complete and organized evacuation of the foreign armies” stationed on the territory of the Republic of Moldova.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, on February 4, 1993, an OSCE mission was established in the Republic of Moldova. It began its activity on April 23, 1993.<sup>117</sup>

Moldovan authorities worked to keep international focus on security. In June 1994 an accord was signed between the JCC and OSCE regarding cooperation in the Security Zone. In October 1994, Moldova and Russia signed several important documents meant to establish the juridical status, the modality and the withdrawal terms of the Russian military forces temporarily

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<sup>115</sup>Igor Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” in *Moldova – Transnistria: procesul de negocieri* (Chisinau: Edit. Cu drag, Chisinau, 2009), 21.

<sup>116</sup>Ipp.md, “Solutionarea Conflictului Transnistrean. Caracteristica Succinta a Procesului de Negocieri,” [http://www.ipp.md/public/files/Proiecte/blacksee/rom/Aparece\\_ROM.pdf](http://www.ipp.md/public/files/Proiecte/blacksee/rom/Aparece_ROM.pdf) (accessed 23 January 2013), 10.

<sup>117</sup>Ministerul Afacerilor Externe si Integrarii Europene al Republicii Moldova, “OSCE: Misiunea OSCE în Republica Moldova,” <http://www.mfa.gov.md/osce-md/misiunea-osce-rm/> (accessed 23 January 2013).

stationed on Moldovan territory. The two parties agreed to synchronize the military forces withdrawal with the political settlement of the conflict.<sup>118</sup>

The Transnistrian authorities began to work against this development, a fact that eventually led to the beginning of a crisis. According to the Moldovan political analyst, Igor Botan, the separatists affirmed that “Moldova fell into a trap of a vicious circle,” arguing that “there will be no Russian military force withdrawal because there is no political solution to the conflict, and that the political solution is missing because the Transnistrians do not want it.”<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, in March 1995, RMN held a referendum regarding the withdrawal of the 14th Army. Sixty-eight percent of the population voted, with 98% of them voting to maintain Russian military forces in the region. Moldova’s reaction was predictable: it ceased to participate in the negotiation process.<sup>120</sup> However, Moldova resumed the negotiation process in April, hoping that Russia would eventually ratify the memorandum guaranteeing the withdrawal of the 14th Army (which was renamed Operational Group of Russian forces, OGRF).<sup>121</sup> Russia postponed ratification, even though Moldova was willing to give RMN autonomous status, a fact that should have been a big step in resolving the political settlement of the conflict. In the meantime, Ukraine showed interest in participating in the negotiation process.<sup>122</sup>

Toward the end of 1995, the crisis began to deepen. In November, the Russian Duma highlighted the fact that Transnistria represents a special zone for Russian interests, and asked President Yeltsin to consider the possibility of granting sovereignty to Transnistria.<sup>123</sup> One month

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<sup>118</sup>Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 22.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid.

<sup>121</sup>Botan, 22 and King, 190.

<sup>122</sup>Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 22.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

later, Transnistria held another referendum. This time, the Transnistrian population (58.2%) voted for the accession to the CIS (90.0%) and for the creation of a new constitution (81.8%) that would grant sovereignty and independence to the separatist region. As was expected, Moldova had the same reaction as in springtime.<sup>124</sup>

Despite this course of events, in February 1996 the Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities, in the presence of Russia, Ukraine, and OSCE representatives, signed a common declaration intended to normalize the customs services. Both parties agreed to remove the barriers that existed between the two regions and to install common customs posts at the border with Ukraine. Likewise, Moldova gave Transnistria the right to use the Moldovan official stamp for the customs procedures at the eastern border.<sup>125</sup>

These initiatives represented, as George Balan stated, were “a significant step in restoring control of the Moldovan customs authorities over the entire customs territory and, respectively, on the traffic of goods and people to/from the region.”<sup>126</sup> But this state of cooperation lasted only briefly. The administration from Transnistria began to act in total disagreement with what was previously established with the authorities from Moldova. The analysts observed and argued that “while Moldova suspended any control at the transit points from Transnistria, the latter tightened this control at the transit points from Moldova,” attempting in fact to ‘legitimize’ its own borders within the republic.”<sup>127</sup> Also, the analysts observed that although these initiatives led initially to

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<sup>124</sup>Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 22.

<sup>125</sup>George Balan, *Place of the Confidence Building Process in the Policy of Solving the Conflict in the Eastern Region of Moldova – Case study* (Chisinau: Institutul de Politici Publice, 2010), 4; and Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 22.

<sup>126</sup>Balan, 4.

<sup>127</sup>FISD, 4 and Paul D. Duta, Teodor Frunzeti, and Ion Panait, “Operatiuni si misiuni OSCE. Studiu de caz: Moldova,” Sibiu, 2008, [http://www.technomedia.ro/links/29\\_moldova.htm](http://www.technomedia.ro/links/29_moldova.htm) (accessed 20 February 2013).

significant economic growth in Transnistria, later, when the Transnistrians understood to use in their own interest the Moldovan official stamp, the economic revival stopped, and moreover, the region became “a haven of organized crime, tax evasion, and illicit trafficking.”<sup>128</sup>

At the end of 1996 the Transnistrian conflict was still frozen. It can be seen that little progress had been made in this case, although there were many attempts to find a viable solution for resolving the conflict, especially from the Moldovan side which agreed to make many concessions and compromises. Also, the nature of the conflict did not change much. It remained a political and economic conflict with a military dimension, taking in consideration the presence of Russian military forces in region. In addition, the security issues began to increase.

#### Primakov Memorandum

Negotiations were resumed in 1997. On 8 May, at Moscow, the new president of Moldova, Petru Lucinschi, and Igor Smirnov, signed a memorandum prepared by Russian experts under the supervision of Russia’s foreign minister at that time, Yevgeny Primakov. The memorandum was intended, as the Moldovan analysts claimed, to bring Moldova and Transnistria to the same table in order to begin the negotiations intended to establish the nature of the “state-legal relationship” between them within what was supposed to become a “common state” defined as “a single and common social, juridical and economic space.”<sup>129</sup> Also, during these negotiations, both parties would have determined the details regarding Transnistria’s status within this “common state”. According with Balan, in principle, it was agreed that Transnistria will reserve the rights “to participate in Moldova’s foreign policy making in matters affecting its interests, the decisions would have been taken with the consensus of both parts, and to establish

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<sup>128</sup>FISD, 4; Duta et.al.; Balan, 4; and Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 22.

<sup>129</sup>Balan, 4 and Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 23.

and maintain international contacts independently in the economic, technical, scientific and cultural and other areas – with the agreement of the parts.”<sup>130</sup> After the memorandum was signed, there was a long series of negotiations which were permanently hampered by the divergences between Moldovan and Transnistrian points of view. Transnistria continued to bring into the discussion the issue of RMN statehood, an aspect that Moldova did not agree with.<sup>131</sup> In parallel with these negotiation, OSCE and Russia worked together to find a solution that would assure the withdrawal of Russian military forces from the Moldovan territory. Thus, during the OSCE summit held in 1999 at Istanbul, Russia accepted the obligations to evacuate up to the end of 2002 its military forces from eastern raions of the Republic of Moldova.<sup>132</sup>

In 2000, Moldova faced a constitutional crisis. It led to the anticipated parliamentary elections which brought the Communist Party to power. Eventually, these political changes caused the slowing of the negotiation process intended to realize the “common state”.<sup>133</sup>

It is easy to summarize the achievements toward a solution in the case of the Transnistrian frozen conflict for this period of time. With the exception of Russia’s promise to withdraw its troops from the Republic of Moldova, there was not much progress. Perhaps an impediment was the fact that Transnistria, as Botan argued, “secured its right to negotiate from equal positions with Moldova.”<sup>134</sup> However, the conflict gained more political weight throughout this period.

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<sup>130</sup>Balan, 4.

<sup>131</sup>Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 23.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>134</sup>Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 23.

### The Border Incident and the Customs Blockade

Since 2000, when he was elected president of the Republic of Moldova, Vladimir Voronin attempted to reinstate the negotiation process. He met Igor Smirnov in April 2000 and again in May 2001. Three days prior to the last meeting, while he, his presidential suite, and representatives of the mass-media, were heading toward Tiraspol, they were stopped at the border with Transnistria and denied access to the region. It is unknown if this incident motivated the later decision of Moldovan authorities, from September 2001, to suspend the Transnistrians' right to use the republic official stamp for the customs services. What is known for sure is that in retaliation to this measure, the Transnistrian authorities instituted a so-called "customs blockade" at the region's borders.<sup>135</sup> What could be observed at this time is that in addition to the political side of the conflict, the economic aspect gained more importance.

### The OSCE Plan

When it became obvious that the "common state" objective had become obsolete, the mediator/guarantor-states/entities (OSCE, Russia and Ukraine) concentrated their efforts on finding alternative solutions for the Transnistrian frozen conflict. Along this reasoning, it was envisioned that the federalization of the Republic of Moldova could be a solution to resolve the conflict. In this respect, "in July 2002, the OSCE proposed a plan based on occidental principles of federalism, respectively, proportionality in representation at the center, and equality between the parts that would compose the federation."<sup>136</sup> The same analysts argued that although "some European states, OSCE members, agreed over this plan," it could not be implemented because "it

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>136</sup>FISD, 4 and Duta et.al.

contained a condition that allowed Russia to maintain a tacit influence in Republic of Moldova.”<sup>137</sup>

Though at the level of 2002 the Transnistrian frozen conflict did not register any progress toward its resolution, later it will be observed that the OSCE plan brought a new idea – “federalization” – that would be used for the next initiatives.

#### Kozak Memorandum

Indeed, in November 2003, Dimitri Kozak, a member of President Vladimir Putin’s staff, proposed a similar plan for the federalization of the Republic of Moldova, although in essence it was a distinctive plan. The plan, named “The Basic Principles of State Construction of a Unified State,” and known as the “Kozak Memorandum,” was in fact, according to outside analysts (of which observations and arguments will be used further to assess this memorandum) “a draft of the constitution for the future Moldovan federation.”<sup>138</sup> According to this plan, Republic of Moldova would have become an “asymmetric federation” through the fact that “Transnistria would have been given an unequal status from that of Bessarabia.”<sup>139</sup> This “unequal status” resided in the fact that “Transnistria would have acquired the right to hold a referendum at anytime to decide whether or not it wants to belong to the Republic of Moldova and the right of veto over matters of domestic or foreign policy that would be ‘contrary to its interests’.”<sup>140</sup> Additionally, the Kozak Memorandum came with a proposal meant to address the military aspect. According with this

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>Balan, 4; FIRD, 4; Duta et.al.; and Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 25.

<sup>139</sup>FIRD, 4-5; Duta et.al.; and Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 25.

<sup>140</sup>FIRD, 5 and Duta et.al.

proposal, “Republic of Moldova would have been demilitarized” and in exchange, Russia would provide “stabilizing peace forces” of around 2,000 people.<sup>141</sup>

It was observed, as Balan pointed out, that the Kozak Memorandum “caused a real furor in the Moldovan society and in the same time scandalized the international community too – the European institutions, OSCE, EU, Council of Europe and the US, have formed a common front against this project.”<sup>142</sup> As a result, Moldovan President Voronin did not sign the memorandum.<sup>143</sup>

The analysts regarded the Kozak Memorandum as “a controversial plan” arguing that it was designated to serve Russia’s interests in the region.<sup>144</sup> They claimed that “Russia’s plan was not directed toward a settlement of the conflict, but rather to preserve that current conflictual state.”<sup>145</sup> They highlighted especially that “Russia’s central objective with this plan was to maintain military control over Transnistria.”<sup>146</sup> However, Moscow denied all of these allegations and moreover, both Russian and Transnistrian authorities criticized the Moldovan president and complained that he “had yielded to pressure from the West.”<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, according to Balan, these authorities indicated Voronin as “responsible for the political-diplomatic and economic counter-offensive in the country: crisis schools and railway war that followed the attack of police of the breakaway regime in the region of Moldovan on schools teaching in Latin script and violent occupation of property Moldova Railways on the left bank and municipality Bender,

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<sup>141</sup>FISD, 5; Duta et.al.; and Balan, 6.

<sup>142</sup>Balan, 6-7.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

<sup>144</sup>Balan, 6; FISD, 5; and Duta et.al.

<sup>145</sup>FISD, 5 and Duta et.al.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Balan, 6-7.



halting the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova and suspending the participation in the negotiation format representatives of Chisinau.”<sup>148</sup>

#### The Pact of Stability and Security for Republic of Moldova

The situation created with the Kozak Memorandum cooled relations between Moldova and Russia and sent attempts at negotiations into a period of stalemate. Thus, there were efforts to find an international solution for the internal problem. In June 2004, the Moldovan president proposed a plan, the “Pact of Stability and Security for Republic of Moldova” which had as a central idea, as Botan stated, “the reaching of a ‘multilateral compromise’ between Russia, US, Romania, Ukraine and EU regarding ‘a series of fundamental problems of Moldovan state.’”<sup>149</sup> The plan, as the same analyst noted, demanded a consensus on the above-mentioned parts over the following aspects: “achieving territorial integrity of Moldova; creating conditions for guaranteed participation of the whole society in free democratic process from the whole territory of the republic; cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity as a fundamental value of the Republic of Moldova as a poly-ethnic state; forming a unique defense space of the Republic of Moldova on the basis of development and strengthening of permanent neutrality of the country; full and final settlement of the Transnistrian conflict on the basis of the principles of the federal form of government.”<sup>150</sup>

The Moldovan authorities, according to Botan, argued that this plan could become “the key for a long stabilization of the situation.” They also presented the reverse face of the coin, stating that if these international entities do not reach a consensus, there will be “evident

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<sup>148</sup>Balan, 7.

<sup>149</sup>Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 25-26.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 26.

consequences for stability and security in the region.”<sup>151</sup> This plan did not find enough international support, and therefore it failed to materialize.<sup>152</sup>

#### “5+2” Format

In September 2005, the authorities from Chisinau and Tiraspol invited the EU and the U.S. to be observers in the negotiations, which would have been resumed.<sup>153</sup> The “5+2” format implied five external entities: OSCE, Russia, and Ukraine as mediators, and the EU and the U.S. as observers; and two mediated and observed parts, Moldova and Transnistria. This new format had its roots in the “Pact of Stability and Security for Republic of Moldova.”

As Balan stressed, this “pentagonal” format had “opened new perspectives in efforts to identify an adequate solution to the conflict.”<sup>154</sup> Perhaps it would have found a solution to the conflict, but the representatives from Tiraspol obstructed the negotiations, which eventually were suspended in February 2006 after only five meetings.<sup>155</sup>

#### Voronin’s Attempts

In October of 2007, President Voronin initiated a series of working groups “to stimulate the regulatory process and create additional leverage which could reduce tensions between conflicting parties in the absence of a consistent process of negotiations.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Botan, “Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei,” 25-26.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>153</sup>Balan, 7.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

<sup>156</sup>Balan, 9-10.

## Current Situation

The formal negotiations between Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities were resumed at the end of 2011 (November 30 – December 1) at Vilnius, Lithuania. Prior to this moment, there were only consultative reunions that began in 2010. During the last one, held in Moscow on September 22, 2011, the participants decided to resume negotiations. Both authorities agreed to continue these negotiations in the same “5+2” format.<sup>157</sup> Since 2011, the Moldovan and Transnistrian representatives have met several times in the presence of the mediators and observers. During the negotiations, as a Romanian analyst, Stanislav Scieru, noted, they managed to prepare a “guide of negotiations” and establish an agenda which included “socio-economic problems, humanitarian and human rights aspects, and security and political regulations of the conflict” as principal themes.<sup>158</sup> The last round of negotiations took place in Lvov, Ukraine, on February 18-19, 2013. The next meeting in the “5+2” format is scheduled for May 23-24, 2013, and will be held in Odessa, Ukraine.

The U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Moldova, William Moser, considers the resumption of these negotiations an important step toward a solution for the Transnistrian conflict, especially considering the six years when nothing significant was accomplished. He pointed to the advantage and importance of Ukraine currently holding the presidency of the OSCE. Likewise, Ambassador Moser added that the resolution of this conflict will not be easy or

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<sup>157</sup>Unimedia, “Negocierile in formatul 5+2 de la Vilnius s-au incheiat. Urmatoarea runda - februarie 2012,” Decembrie 2011, <http://unimedia.info/stiri/negocierile-in-formatul-5-2-de-la-vilnius-s-au-incheiat--urmatoarea-runda---februarie-2012-41805.html> (accessed 27 February 2013) and Stanislav Scieru, CRPE Policy Memo, nr. 26, “Cum sa evitam capcanele eurasiatice? – Dosarul transnistrean si parcursul european al Republicii Moldova dupa ultima runda de negocieri 5+2” (Bucuresti: Centrul Roman de Politici Europene, Mai 2012), 3.

<sup>158</sup>Scieru, 3.

quick, and that finding a solution “depends on how the Moldovans from both sides of Nistru negotiate.”<sup>159</sup>

In the meantime, the newly-elected second president of RMN, Evgheni Sevciuk (an ethnic Ukrainian), made a declaration that could jeopardize the negotiation process between Moldova and Transnistria. In an interview for a Russian television channel, he claimed that “the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria would lead unconditionally to an armed conflict in the region.”<sup>160</sup> He justified his statement by saying “there will be only Moldovan and Transnistrian peacekeepers, and if we consider that some political circles in Chisinau stand for fast resolution of the Transnistrian conflict, then within the region may appear a new military conflict.”<sup>161</sup> He also affirmed that “Transnistrian authorities will do everything possible for the peacekeepers (Russian troops) to remain in the region.”<sup>162</sup> According to sources from Chisinau, Russia maintains in Transnistria “a military contingent of about 1,500 people, some of whom are designated to protect the remaining stockpiles from the Soviet period, estimated between 20,000 and 40,000 tons of arms and ammunition.”<sup>163</sup> Finally, the separatist leader from Tiraspol concluded his declaration with “the Transnistrians would like a quick integration in the Russian

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<sup>159</sup>Maria Ursu, “Ambasadorul SUA in Moldova despre rezolvarea conflictului transnistrean: Federalizarea ar putea fi o solutie,” *Adevarul.md*, 26 Martie 2013, [http://adevarul.ro/moldova/actualitate/ambasadorulsua-moldova-despre-rezolvarea-conflictuluitransnistrean-federalizarea-putea-solutie-1\\_515139a100f5182b8550903e/index.html](http://adevarul.ro/moldova/actualitate/ambasadorulsua-moldova-despre-rezolvarea-conflictuluitransnistrean-federalizarea-putea-solutie-1_515139a100f5182b8550903e/index.html) (accessed 30 March 2013).

<sup>160</sup>G.C.P., “Lider de la Tiraspol: ‘Retragerea armatei ruse ar duce la un conflict armat’,” *Antena 3.ro*, 27 Martie 2013, <http://www.antena3.ro/externe/lider-de-la-tiraspol-retragerea-armatei-ruse-ar-duce-la-un-conflict-armat-208621.html> (accessed 30 March 2013).

<sup>161</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup>*Capital.ro*, “Retragerea trupelor ruse din Transnistria: Pretinsul presedinte de la Tiraspol agita spectrul unui razboi cu Romania,” *Capital.ro*, 29 Martie 2013, <http://www.capital.ro/detalii-articole/stiri/retragerea-trupelor-ruse-din-transnistria-pretinsul-presedinte-de-la-tiraspol-agita-spectrul-unui.html> (accessed 30 March 2013).

Federation and they reject the unification with Moldova.”<sup>164</sup> According to another source which cited the same interview, Sevcuiuk also stated that “it is difficult to reach a compromise between Transnistria and Moldova due the significant influence that Romania has on the Republic of Moldova’s policy.”<sup>165</sup>

Looking to Sevcuiuk’s entire declaration, one could easily figure out why in fact it is difficult to reach a compromise between Transnistria and Moldova. However, the worst part which can be deduced from this declaration is that the negotiation process between Moldovans from both sides of the Nistru River is prefigured to be long and arduous.

#### Overall Findings

Since the Transnistrian conflict froze, its nature has not changed much. The confrontation between the past and the future of Moldova did not cease, but became protracted. The administrations from Chisinau and Tiraspol remained staunch in their views and engaged in the same political and economic struggle, although there were many internal and external attempts to change this state and find an ultimate solution to solve the conflict. While there is not active warfare, the security situation continues to present many issues. These security issues are now part of the causes that “feed” the Transnistrian “frozen” conflict. Likewise, although Russia had and still has an important contribution to the negotiation process, its intentions seem to be further motivated in part by geopolitical and geostrategic interests in the region. The enduring presence of Russian troops on Moldovan soil is one stark example.

The nature of the Transnistrian “frozen” conflict, according to the findings of this study, is shown in the following table:

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<sup>164</sup>G.C.P.

<sup>165</sup>Capital.ro.

Table 7. The Nature of the Transnistrian “Frozen” Conflict

CAUSES THAT FEED THE “FROZEN” CONFLICT	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Historical	X	-	-
Political, Geopolitical, and Geostrategic	-	-	X
Military	-	X*	-
Socio-Ideological	-	X	-
Socio-Economic	-	-	X
Cultural-Linguistic and Ethnic	X	-	-
Security Issues	-	X	-
NATURE	Political and Economic		

*Source:* Created by author. The “Military” as a cause that feeds the Transnistrian “frozen” conflict, is listed because of the Russian troops, other than peacekeeping forces, present on Moldovan territory.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the preface of his book *The Former Soviet Union’s Diverse Peoples*, James Minahan argues that “the Soviet leadership’s lie that ethnic diversity had been transformed into glorious new Soviet nationality was one of the first casualties of the collapse of the Soviet Empire during the formation of fifteen newly independent states.”<sup>166</sup> Upon closer examination, it appears that this lie also made in turn its own casualties. The Moldovan ethnic Romanians and Transnistrian ethnic Slavs were perhaps indirect victims of the Soviet leadership’s lie, engaging in the short but bloody war in 1992. They could be considered casualties even before the war started. Moldova was among the many nation-building projects that the tsarist and later Soviet governments attempted to realize. The tsarist government conducted a Russification process in Moldova meant to incorporate the ethnic Romanians from this region into one single nation within the Russian Empire. Later, the Soviet government resumed this process by attempting to create a new people, the Moldovans – which would have been “different” from Romanians, especially with a new “Moldovan” language. The Soviets intended to use this “new” nation, along with the other nations from the union, for its ultimate project – the creation of the Soviet nation. Eventually,

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<sup>166</sup>Minahan, xv.

history demonstrated that these projects failed, and moreover, they left behind many wounds, part of them still unhealed. One of these wounds is the Transnistrian frozen conflict.

Even after this conflict broke out, there were attempts to continue the nation-building projects, at least on a small scale. One such attempt was the so-called “Transnistrian people” advocated by the Transnistrian separatist leaders. The Transnistrian leaders, confident in Russia’s support, did everything possible to contest the new Moldovan leadership and its authority, and to stay hinged to the old system. Only this system, which obviously began to be obsolete, would give them the authority and the power that they needed. They pointed to the new “language law,” claiming that this was a nationalistic measure meant to discriminate against the non-Romanian ethnic population. Likewise, they capitalized on speculation regarding “economic insecurity” and the specter of an eventual reunification of Republic of Moldova with Romania, arguing that Transnistrian ethnic Slavs would become, as Wilbur E. Gray argues, “a second class people” if these developments would occur.<sup>167</sup> Eventually, they moved this contest to a political level when they separated from the constitutional republic, declaring RMN an independent entity and by forming a government to represent them and their new “country.” From this point it was clear that the conflict between the constitutional Moldovan authorities and the Transnistrian separatist authorities was a political one; although, when it emerged in an armed confrontation, and even after it froze, it was seen as an ethnic conflict.

Russia’s behavior regarding this conflict sustains the idea of a political conflict in Transnistria. Despite the fact that Russia did not officially recognize the independence of RMN, eventually the 14th Army intervened in support of the Transnistrian separatists, although with a declared pacifying purpose. This aspect, combined with the fact that the terms of the 1992 Peace Accord granted Transnistria “special status” within the republic, lead to the conclusion that

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<sup>167</sup>Gray, 5.

Russia's deeds from that period of time were motivated by geopolitical and geostrategic interests in this region.

The right gained by Transnistria to have a "special status" within the Republic of Moldova established the political nature of the Transnistrian frozen conflict. The political aspect was the principal feature which drove and still drives the negotiations in the case of the Transnistrian conflict. The economic aspect also has significance, but it is tied to the political aspect. These observations converge with Botan's point of view regarding the principal features of the Transnistrian frozen conflict and how these features shape the negotiations process. The political analyst also claims that "the historical, ethnic, linguistic and others factors can be overcome as long as there exists the will and the interest to solve the conflict."<sup>168</sup>

Certainly, the fate of the Transnistrian frozen conflict depends mainly on a political compromise between Moldova and Transnistria, but the other five international entities involved in this case can heavily influence its future trajectory. The "5+2" format shows that these international entities are willing to share the efforts for a solution regarding the Transnistrian frozen conflict. The primary goal of these mediators and observers should be to keep Moldova and Transnistria at the negotiation table. This is necessary since the conflict continues to create serious internal and international problems. Another goal of these external actors should be to eliminate any reminiscence of a Cold War mentality that could prevent progress in the negotiation process. In this way, Moldova and Transnistria might come closer to a compromise; otherwise, the Transnistrian conflict will remain a potential "hot" conflict with "frozen" solutions, as a continuation of the Cold War on a small scale.

The primary argument of this paper is that although the Transnistrian conflict appears as an ethnic conflict, it has remained in essence a political conflict with a significant economic dimension; furthermore, the conflict has not been resolved to this day because the antagonists

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<sup>168</sup>Botan, "Procesul de negocieri ca modalitate de amanare a solutionarii problemei," 35.



lack the political will to compromise. Perhaps, the nature of the Transnistrian frozen conflict will transform in the future. Therefore, it is important that this nature be analyzed again in the future in order to have an accurate image of this conflict and to see its influence on the regional political, economic, and especially the security environment. This study, using an historical approach, investigated the background of the Transnistrian conflict and established the nature of this conflict at the moment when it “froze.” Likewise, analyzing past conflict resolution attempts to resolve the conflict and its present status, the study elicited an image of the evolution and current state of the Transnistrian frozen conflict’s nature. Future studies of this conflict should focus on how and to what extent the conflict impacts different sectors of activity and social life (political, economic, cultural, social, personal security, etc.) from the Republic of Moldova.

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