

THE ROLE OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND
CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE) IN THE TRANSDNIESTR CONFLICT
AND THE RUSSIAN FACTOR

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE) IN THE TRANSDNIESTR CONFLICT AND THE RUSSIAN FACTOR

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This thesis aims to explore the Transdnestr conflict in Moldova by examining the involvements of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Russian Federation in their attempts at finding a working solution to this conflict. The thesis focuses on the reasons for the emergence of the Transdnestr conflict, the initiatives for the settlement of this conflict, and the causes, as of today, why the conflicting parties and the mediators have not been successful in reaching a working settlement. Contrary to the line of thinking on this conflict which suggests that the conflict has its roots in domestic factors in Moldova and Transdnestr such as ethnicity, socio-economic underdevelopment and the weakness of democratic institutions, this thesis argues that the primary reason behind the persistence of this conflict is international. It is the radically different definitions of the conflict by the OSCE and the Russian Federation that makes the conflict very difficult to solve. Russia tends to value the Transdnestr region as a geostrategic tool for maintaining its influence over post-Soviet Moldova and its neighbourhood. Since the involvement of the OSCE in this conflict limits Russia's capacity to use the Transdnestr region as a geostrategic tool, it becomes extremely difficult to alter the status quo that contributes to the existing impasse rather than to its opening of new avenues for the peaceful settlement of this conflict.

Keywords: Moldova, Transdnestr, Russia, OSCE, Frozen Conflicts.

ÖZ

TRANSDİNYESTER ÇATIŞMASI'NDA AVRUPA GÜVENLİK VE İŞBİRLİĞİ TEŞKİLATI'NIN (AGİT) ROLÜ VE RUS FAKTÖRÜ

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Bu tez Moldova'daki Transdinyester çatışmasını, Avrupa Güvenlik ve İşbirliği Teşkilatı (AGİT) ve Rusya Federasyonu'nun soruna çalışan bir çözüm bulma çabaları çerçevesinde müdahil olmalarını gözönüne alarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Tez, Transdinyester sorununun ortaya çıkış nedenleri, sorunun çözümü için yapılan girişimler ve çatışan tarafların ve arabulucuların bugün itibarıyla çalışan bir düzenlemeye ulaşmada başarısız olma nedenleri üzerinde odaklanmaktadır. Sorunun nedenlerini, Moldova ve Transdinyester'deki etnisite, sosyo-ekonomik az gelişmişlik ve demokratik kurumların zayıflığı gibi iç faktörlere bağlayan görüşün aksine, bu tez sorunun devam etmesinin ardındaki temel faktörün sorunun uluslararası boyutu olduğunu savunmaktadır. Sorunun çözümünü çok güç hale getiren ana faktör, AGİT ve Rusya Federasyonu'nun sorunun tanımlanmasında ortaya koydukları radikal farklılıktır. Rusya Transdinyester bölgesini Sovyet sonrası Moldova'da ve onun komşuları etrafında jeo-stratejik bir araç olarak değerlendirme eğilimindedir. AGİT'in bu sorunda Rusya'nın, Transdinyester bölgesini jeo-stratejik bir araç olarak kullanma kapasitesini sınırlandırması, bu sorunun barışçıl çözümüne yönelik yeni ufuklar açmaktan çok varolan çıkmaza neden olan mevcut durumu değiştirmeyi son derece zorlaştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Moldova, Transdinyester, Rusya, AGİT, Dondurulmuş Çatışmalar.

*To my dearest wife Banu Karaaslan
and our son Koray....*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDPF	The Christian Democratic Popular Front
CFE	Conventional Forces in Europe
CIS	The Commonwealth of Independent States
CPM	The Communist Party of Moldova
CPSU	The Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCE	The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	The European Union
JCC	Joint Constitutional Commission
JCC	Joint Control Commission
MASSR	Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
MSSR	Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OGRF	Operational Group of Russian Forces
OSCE	The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreements
PCRM	The Party of the Communists of the Republic of Moldova
PfP	Partnership for Peace
TMR	Transdniestrian Moldovan Republic
UN	The United Nations
USA	The United States of America
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Scope and Objective

This thesis aims to portray the Transdniestr conflict in Moldova within the context of the participation of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Russian Federation in their efforts at reaching a long-lasting resolution to this conflict. The thesis focuses on the historical background of the Transdniestr conflict, the attempts and the plans for the settlement of this conflict, and causes, up to the present, why the conflicting parties and the mediators have not been able to reach a working settlement.

This thesis is primarily concerned with the causes and the present situation of the Transdniestr conflict within the framework of the Russian Federation and the OSCE in their efforts in settling this conflict. While the Moldova has successfully resolved its other major regional conflict with Gagauzia, Transdniestr conflict has been an intractable problem. Consequently, the Moldovan case provides a unique opportunity to examine both successful and unsuccessful attempts at resolving regional conflicts.

The thesis aims to explain the main factor behind the continuation of the Transdniestr problem. In order to do this, this thesis will try to answer the questions such as why the Moldovan and Transdniestrian parts could not been able to reach a peaceful settlement of this conflict and how we can identify the role of the Russian Federation and the OSCE in the Transdniestr dispute.

1.2. Review of the Literature

The historical context in which the Transdnestr conflict evolved has been shaped by the post-Cold War international order in Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, the security situation in Europe has been fundamentally transformed. The military confrontation between the two Cold War alliances of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact has been replaced by a political-military fragmentation of the continent, especially on the territory of many of the post-Soviet states. The fact that the Soviet Union ceased to exist both as a 'subject of international law and as a geopolitical reality in December 1991 is very important in this respect.¹ The Soviet collapse created major security problems when the fifteen of the former Soviet "union republics", which emerged as fully sovereign and independent states by early 1992.²

The break-up of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was accompanied by a series of ethnically and ideologically motivated local armed conflicts. These stemmed from consequential historical facts (including, in particular, the USSR's nationality policy) and from gradual political, social and economic disintegration.³

James Hughes points out that the rapid retreat of communism from Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s created violent upheavals that are almost universally referred to as 'ethnic' or 'nationalist' conflicts. Soviet communism was an 'intervening' force that 'defeated' nationalism as long as it captured and controlled the state. In this sense, communism had been a deep freeze for

¹ Mark Webber, 'Russian Policy towards the Soviet Successor States', in Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross (eds), *Russia after the Cold War*, London: Longman, 2000, p.239.

² P. Terence Hopmann, 'An Evaluation of the OSCE's Role in Conflict Management', in Heinz Gärtner, Adrian Hyde-Price and Erich Reiter (eds), *Europe's New Security Challenges*, London: Lynne Rienner, 2001, p.219.

³ Jacek Wrobel, *Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Region. Present Situation. Prospects for Settlement. Consequences*, Warsaw: Prace OSW/CES Studies No: 9, 2003, pp.47-50.

nationalism. Similarly, Eric Hobsbawam argued that ‘fear and coercion kept the USSR together’ and helped to prevent ethnic and communal tensions.⁴

After the demise of the Soviet Union, the principle of the territorial integrity of states was directly challenged by the call for self-determination. In all of the newly independent states, each of these two objectives appeared to be achieved simultaneously. The dominant nationalities were able to realize self-determination through the creation of sovereign and integrated territorial states. However, the status of persons belonging to national minorities in these new states became increasingly problematic. In the wake of being identified as minorities, suddenly many national groups claimed the right to self-determination to control their own destiny. As a result fighting between secessionist movements, appeared as Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan; Abkhazia and South Ossetia within Georgia; Chechnya within the Russian Federation; and Transdnestr in Moldova.⁵

The Russian Federation perceived these conflicts in the former Soviet Union as an opportunity to restore the influence it had lost with the break-up of the USSR. Russia treated these conflicts as a convenient instrument of political pressure on excessively independent republics. It played a key role in shaping their future by actually supporting the forces that opposed the independence-oriented elites of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova. Without Russia, these conflicts would not have reached the present phase of development. In this context, Russia’s position in relation to the conflicts has been and continues to be immensely important.⁶

These conflicts have become a permanent element of the political landscape not only for directly affected countries and Russia. Neighbouring countries are also

⁴ James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, ‘Comparing Regional and Ethnic Conflicts in Post-Soviet Transition States’, in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.1.

⁵ P. Terence Hopmann, ‘An Evaluation of the OSCE’s Role in Conflict Management’, in Heinz Gärtner, Adrian Hyde-Price and Erich Reiter (eds), *Europe’s New Security Challenges*, London: Lynne Rienner, 2001, pp.221-222.

⁶ Krzysztof Strachota, ‘Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Region. Present Situation. Prospects for Settlement. Consequences’, *Prace OSW/CES Studies*, Warsaw., No: 9, 2003, p.44.

involved in the conflicts, more or less indirectly, and have tried to use them for the pursuit of their own interests. Hence, conflicts appear to be the most important area of activity for international organizations, for example the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).⁷

The Republic of Moldova, one of the former Soviet Union republics, is a small-size country, whose economy is heavily dependent on energy imports and on foreign markets. Since its declaration of independence on 27 August 1991, the Republic of Moldova has confronted many of the same challenges facing the other ex-Soviet republics - economic decline, political turmoil, intractable separatist conflict, and an uncertain relationship with the Russian Federation.⁸

The internal situation in the Republic of Moldova is strongly influenced by the Transdniestrian conflict. Russia instigated separatism in Transdniestria and supported actively separatist leaders with the force of arms as well as through political and economic means. Moldova has faced a short-term armed conflict which turned into a frozen conflict because of Russia's interference and keeps being frozen for 13 years.⁹

A key challenge to Moldova stems from the demographics of the republic's ethnic mix. Rising Moldovan nationalism has caused other ethnic minorities in the republic to struggle. Each ethnic group in the republic has asserted its own nationality claims, challenging the Moldovan authorities since 1989. The Gagauz and a Russian-Ukrainian coalition living across the Dniestr River each announced secession from Moldova and proclaimed their own republics in 1990. This is both an ideological confrontation as well as an ethnic one, since there are some ethnic Moldovans who remain faithful to the Communist Party, as well as a small

⁷ Ibid. , pp.47-50.

⁸ Ibid. , p.1.

⁹ Valeriu Gheorghiu, 'Moldova on the Way to the European Union: Distance Covered and Next Steps to Be Done', Available At <http://ipp.md>, February 2005, Accessed on 10 March 2006, p.2.

number of ethnic Russians who have been involved in the Moldovan Popular Front.¹⁰

The Republic of Moldova considers itself the rightful successor state to the Moldavian Soviet Socialist republics (MSSR). By the principle of territorial integrity, Moldova claims that any form of secession from the state without the consent of the central Moldovan government is illegal. For these reasons it considers the current Transdniestrian government to be illegitimate, and not the rightful representative of the region's population. It insists that Transdniestr cannot exist as an independent political entity and must be reintegrated into Moldova. Transdniestr has not been internationally recognised and is generally considered to be a part of Moldova.

Transdniestr region is a small strip of land on the eastern bank of the Dniestr River between Ukraine and the rest of present-day Moldova. Russians are a minority in the region, but they dominate the politics of the region. The Transdniestr territory had always been ruled from Moscow; its history was different from that of the west bank, or Bessarabia.¹¹ Although not recognised by any other country, Transdniestr has succeeded in establishing and consolidating its de facto statehood after a short war with the central authorities in the spring of 1992. As a result, Moldova is not able to control the Transdniestrian section of its border with Ukraine.¹²

An ongoing issue has been the status of the 14th Russian Army in Transdniestr. Although in October 1994, an agreement was signed between Russia and Moldova guaranteeing that the 14th Army would leave Transdniestr within three

¹⁰ Daria Fane, 'Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow', Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.137.

¹¹ Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia-Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2002, pp: 204-205.

¹² Claus Neukirch, 'Coming Closer to a Solution in Moldova?', *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 4, 2003, pp: 333-334.

years, the agreement was never ratified by the Russian Duma. In November 1999, at the OSCE summit in Istanbul, Russian President Boris Yeltsin agreed that all Russian arms and equipment would be withdrawn or destroyed by the end of 2001, and all Russian troops would withdraw by the end of 2002. Between 1992 and 1999, the Russians decreased their troops in the TMR from 9,250 to 2,600 and destroyed a significant amount of munitions.¹³

In strategic terms Moldova has become the most visible example of the realities of Russian military policy towards the 'near abroad'. The 14th Russian Army stationed in Moldova has been active in supporting a separatist regime in eastern Moldova. Since 1992, additional Russian peacekeepers have been deployed in the region to help keep Moldovan and Transdnistrian Moldovan Republic (TMR) forces apart, and voices in Moscow have called for a permanent military presence to protect the republic's sizeable Russian minority and to guarantee regional stability.¹⁴

Aside from the conflicting parties, Russia and Ukraine, we can see an international involvement into the Transdnistrian conflict by the mediation of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE is the only universal European security forum that includes the United States, Canada and the Russian Federation as full members. Its primary functions have included setting the normative framework for European security, developing military confidence- and security-building measures to reduce fear of war, and enhancing the human dimension of security, including human rights, democratization, and the rule of law.¹⁵ The OSCE has been engaged in conflict prevention and conflict

¹³ ---, 'Thawing a Frozen Conflict: Legal Aspects of the Separatist Crisis in Moldova', *The Report of Special Committee on European Affairs Mission to Moldova*, New York, 2006, pp: 17-18.

¹⁴ Charles King, 'Post-Soviet Moldova: A Borderland in Transition', Russian and CIS Programme-The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London: 1995, p. 1.

¹⁵ P. Terence Hopmann, 'An Evaluation of the OSCE's Role in Conflict Management', in Heinz Gärtner, Adrian Hyde-Price and Erich Reiter (eds), *Europe's New Security Challenges*, London: Lynne Rienner, 2001, pp: 226-227.

management in almost every hot spot in the OSCE area after 1992, and the Transdniestrian conflict in Moldova is just one of them.¹⁶

The OSCE established a long-term mission in Moldova on 27 April 1993. The Mission was mandated to facilitate the establishment of a comprehensive political framework for dialogue and negotiations and assist the parties to the Transdniestrian conflict in pursuing negotiations on a lasting political settlement of the conflict, consolidating the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova along with an understanding about a special status for the Transdniestr region. Based on this mandate, the OSCE Mission has supported the negotiation process over the last decade. Together with Russia and Ukraine, the OSCE Mission has drafted a series of documents which have been used as a basis for the negotiations on a final status for Transdniestr and has mediated between the two sides in conflict situations.¹⁷

Sherman Garnett argues that the Transdniestrian crisis can be well described by some factors. The first is sharp ethnic and political differences between Moldova on the western side of the Dniestr River and Transdniestr. Ethnicity is not a cause of the conflict itself, but it helped define Transdniestr as a distinct political, economic, and cultural entity. Secondly, the political situation of the late Soviet period gave rise to the Moldovan Popular Front and a new assertiveness among the majority population. Key intellectuals and political figures in the Popular Front spoke openly of reunification with Romania. Although both the inevitability and the popular support for such a step had been greatly exaggerated, opposition to “Romanization” became the rallying cry of local officials in Transdniestr, seeking to maintain both their local influence and their place in a Moscow-dominated world.¹⁸

¹⁶ Claus Neukirch, ‘Transdniestr and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr’, *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, p. 122.

¹⁷ Claus Neukirch, ‘Coming Closer to a Solution in Moldova?’, *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 4, 2003, pp: 334-335.

¹⁸ Sherman W. Garnett, ‘Ukraine Joins the Fray’, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Nov/Dec 1998, Vol. 45, No. 6, p.23.

Jeff Chinn observed that the Transdnestrian secession must be seen in its historic, demographic, and political context. Historically the region has been influenced by Russia to an even greater extent than the rest of Moldova. Stalin located the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) in 1924 on the Transdnestrian territory by symbolizing Soviet claims on the land lost to Romania. Consequently, the Transdnestr region has never known either independence or Romanian control, having been under Russian or Soviet rule for its entire modern history. Further still, the left bank differs demographically from the rest of Moldova. Russians are primarily urban and control most of the political and economic structures in Transdnestr. Thus, ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers have greater influence in Transdnestr than in Moldova as a whole. Also, from the political perspective, Transdnestrians had a disproportionate influence on party and state structures during the Soviet times. Since the left bank was not part of Romania during the inter-war period, Moscow viewed the Transdnestrians as more politically reliable than the Bessarabians. Until the development of the Moldovan Popular Front in the late 1980s, cadres from Transdnestr had monopolised the top positions within the structures of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). For this reason, the “rediscovery” of Moldovans’ historical and cultural ties to Romania, under the leadership of the Moldovan Popular Front, had implications for the direction of public policy.¹⁹

James Hughes has argued that in the Transdnestrian case, the overwhelmingly Russophone regional population felt threatened by the nationalizing policies pursued by Moldova’s post-independence governments, in particular the privileging of the Romanian language. It was feared that the promotion of Romanian would be a first step towards unification with Romania. While the linguistic concerns of the ethnic Russian and Sovietized population of

¹⁹ Jeff Chinn, ‘The Case Transdnestria (Moldova)’, Lena Jonson and Clive Archer (eds), *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996, pp.104-106.

Transdniestr were a salient factor behind the outbreak of conflict, interelite centre-periphery economic competition was also a significant factor.²⁰

Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky point out that in the war of 1992, Orthodox Christians were killing Orthodox Christians and members of the same ethnic groups-Moldovans, Ukrainians and Russians-participated on both sides. It is therefore a gross oversimplification to present the conflict as a showdown between the ethnic Moldovan and the ‘Russian-speaking’ part of the Moldovan population. Although the mass media have regularly referred to the war as an ethnic conflict, neither side agrees to this description. Both insist that it is essentially political in character. Although all conflicts in the former Soviet Union might be said to have an ethnic component, this is probably less true of the Dniestr conflict than of most others.²¹

Nicola J. Jackson points out that the Russian debate over Moldova after 1991 focused on four historically intertwined Russian interests: the need to prevent Moldova’s reunification with Romania; the protection of Moldova’s ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking peoples; the continuation of Russia’s military presence in the region; and the preservation or renewal of Russia’s economic ties with the region.²²

1.3. Argument

Within the framework of above the mentioned points, the main argument of this thesis is that contrary to the established line of thinking on the Transdniestr conflict which suggests that the conflict has its roots in domestic factors in

²⁰ James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, ‘Comprising Regional and Ethnic Conflicts in Post-Soviet Transition States’, in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, pp: 26-27.

²¹ Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, ‘The Dniestr Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.45, No. 6, 1993, pp. 975-976.

²² Nicole J. Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS Theories, Debates and Actions*, New York: Routledge, 2003, pp: 83-84.

Moldova and Transdniestr, such as ethnicity, socio-economic underdevelopment and the weakness of democratic institutions, this thesis argues that the primary reason behind the continuation of this conflict is international. It is the radically different definitions of the conflict by the OSCE and the Russian Federation that makes the conflict very difficult to solve. Russia tends to value the Transdniestr region as a geostrategic tool for maintaining its influence over post-Soviet Moldova and its neighbourhood. On the other hand, involvement of the OSCE in the Transdniestr problem limits Russia's capacity to use the Transdniestr region as a geostrategic tool. Consequently, it becomes extremely difficult to alter the status quo which further contributes to the existing impasse rather than finding new ways of the conflict resolution.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on Neorealist approach to International Relations. Political Realism seeks to describe and explain the world of international politics as it is, rather than how we might like it to be. In their account of the conflictual nature of international politics, realists give high priority to the centrality of the nation-state, considering it as the supreme political authority. International conflicts are explored from this perspective by looking at the role of power and the importance of the most powerful-the Great Powers. According to the Realists, the international realm is characterised by conflict, suspicion and competition between nation-states.²³

According to Kenneth Waltz, it is important to focus on the structure of the system rather than human beings who create or operate the system. State leaders are seen as prisoners of the structure of the state system and its determinist logic which dictates what they must do in their conduct of foreign policy. There is no

²³ Scott Burchill, 'Realism and Neo-realism', in Burchill, Scott, Devetak, Richard, Linklater Andrew, Paterson, Mathew, Reus-Smit, Christian and True Jacqui (eds), *Theories of International Relations*, London: Palgrave, 1996, p. 70.

room in Waltz's approach for foreign policy-making that is independent of the structure of the system.²⁴

This thesis is in line with the Waltzian perspective of IR. Since the key question for Waltz is why states exhibit similar foreign policy behaviour despite their different domestic political systems and contrasting ideologies, Waltz cites the example of superpower behaviour during the Cold War to refute the argument that it is possible to infer the condition of international politics from the internal composition of states. The Soviet Union and the United States comprised quite different, if not antithetical political and social orders. As Waltz points out, their behaviour during the period of East-West tension is remarkably similar: their pursuit of military power and influence, their competition for strategic advantage and the exploitation of their respective spheres of influence were strikingly parallel. In his view, the explanation may be found in the systemic constraints on each state rather than their internal composition. These systemic forces homogenise foreign policy behaviour by interposing themselves between states and their diplomatic conduct. The identification of these systemic forces is perhaps neo-realism's most important contribution to theory of IR.²⁵

According to Waltz's neorealist theory, the character of the units in the system are identical or, in other words, all states in the international system are made functionally similar by the constraints of structure. In Waltz's own words, the state units of an international system are distinguished primarily by their greater or lower capabilities for performing similar tasks. In other words, international change occurs when great powers rise and fall and the balance of power shifts accordingly.²⁶

²⁴ Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations Theories and Approaches*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p.86.

²⁵ Scott Burchill, 'Realism and Neo-realism', in Burchill, Scott, Devetak, Richard, Linklater Andrew, Paterson, Mathew, Reus-Smit, Christian and True Jacqui (eds), *Theories of International Relations*, London: Palgrave, 1996, pp.89-90.

²⁶ Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations Theories and Approaches*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp.84-85.

1.4. Structure of the Chapters of the Thesis

This thesis is comprised of four chapters. The first chapter will explain the origins of the Transdnestr conflict in Moldova up to 1990. This chapter also covers a brief history of Bessarabia and Transdnestr regions, the annexation of Bessarabia by Tsarist Russia, Moldova as a part of Greater Romania after the First World War, the formation of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic including Transdnestr after the Second World War, and the development of Moldavian SSR's relations with Moscow under Mikhail Gorbachev after 1985.

In the second chapter, the independence process of Moldova, Transdnestr region's reactions to Moldova's new policies, the causes of the escalation of the conflicts between two conflicting parties and finally Moscow's involvement into the short intense war between the central government of Moldova and Transdnestr authorities. This part of the thesis will examine a number of important developments, which happened after signing the cease-fire agreement. These issues include the unification question with Romania in the Moldovan public eye, the withdrawal of the Russian troops from Transdnestr, Moldova's future orientation to the west or the east as a country, new governmental elites backing independent Moldova and regional problems with Gagauzia region.

In the third chapter, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's participation as an international organization in settling the Transdnestrian problem will be studied. Also problem-solving attempts (Moscow Memorandum, Odessa and Kiev documents) put forward for the conflict between 1993 and 1999 will be examined.

The fourth chapter will be the analysis of international efforts (1999 Istanbul OSCE Summit, 2002 OSCE's federalization plan, 2003 Moldova's new constitution initiatives, 2003 Kozak-Russian Plan and 2005 Ukrainian Plan), which have taken place since 1999 to help attain a possible solution of the

Transdniestr problem. In addition to this, several factors which have obstructed an end to the conflict will be portrayed in detail.

Finally, the concluding chapter will summarise the findings of this thesis.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TRANSDNIESTR CONFLICT

In this chapter, political, economic, cultural and demographical developments, which occurred under different administrations in Bessarabia and Transdniestr regions from the 14th century to 1990, will be explained in detail. Within this context, the historical reasons of the emergence of the Transdniestrian conflict will be stressed.

2.1. Origins of the Moldovans

‘Moldavian’ is the name given to the Romanians who live in the Eastern Carpathian region. The forefathers of the Moldavians on both the eastern and the western side of the Prut river, as of the Romanian people as a whole, were the Dacians or the Getae. In the first century BC they were united by the king Burebista into a single state. In AD 106 the Dacians’ state was crushed by force of arms, and part of its territory became a province of the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire’s rule over Dacia (106-275) played an essential role in the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people both in the Roman province and in the other Dacian lands around it. The Romanization of the Dacians proceeded at an intense pace. From the sixth century, the Slavs settled in this area, who cohabited with the locals and were absorbed by them. Between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries, waves of Pecheneg, Cuman, and Tartar migrations occurred.

The emergence (after the end of the migratory movements) of the first administrative-political formations of the people inhabiting the Carpathian-Danubian region began long before the setting up of the Transylvanian state (the second half of the twelfth century), of the Wallachian state (the beginning of the

fourteenth century), and of the Moldavian state (the middle of the fourteenth century).

The development of Transylvania as an independent state was interrupted by the Hungarian conquest. Wallachia's and Moldavia's rulers also had to face the danger threatening from invaders (from the Hungarians, the Tartars, the Poles, the Turks), but they succeeded in safeguarding or regaining independence during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. But both principalities were ultimately obliged to accept Turkish suzerainty and to pay tribute to the Ottoman Empire.²⁷

At the height of its power under Ștefan cel Mare (Stephan the Great, 1457-1504) the independent Principality of Moldova extended from the Carpathian Mountains and the forests of Bucovina in the west and north to the Danube and Dniestr rivers and the Black Sea. Ștefan cel Mare ruled between 1457 and 1504, a period of nearly 50 years.²⁸

In 1538, the central and northern parts of Bessarabia, as part of the principality of Moldavia was formally a vassal of the Ottoman Empire. In July of 1600, Wallachia, Transylvania and Moldavia constituted, for the first time, the political union of three Romanian principalities. Although it was short-lived, the brief union of the Romanian principalities under Michael the Brave survived as an ideal for later generations, especially during the nineteenth century when intellectuals worked for the unification of the Romanian lands into a national state.²⁹

According to the terms of the Peace of Kuchuk Kainarji, which terminated the Russo-Turkish war of 1772-1774, the Wallachian and Moldovan principalities remained under Ottoman rule, but with extended political liberties. Under the terms of the same treaty Russia received the 'right of patronage' over all

²⁷ Michael Bruchis, *The Republic of Moldavia from the Collapse of the Soviet Empire to the Restoration of the Russian Empire*, Translated by Laura Treptow, New York: East European Monographs, 1996, pp.7-9.

²⁸ Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, 'The Dniestr Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.45, No. 6, 1993, p.976.

²⁹ Kurt W. Treptow, *A History of Romania*, Romanian Civilization Studies, Vol. VII, Iași, 1996, pp.150-151.

Christians in the Danubian principalities. The terms of the Peace of Iasi in 1791 basically established the Dniestr river as the new border between the Russian and the Ottoman empires. This meant that the entire northern coast of the Black sea from Azov to the east and the Dniestr to the west passed into Russian hand.³⁰

2.2. Moldova and the Russian Empire (1812 – 1905)

By the Treaty of Bucharest of May 28, 1812, concluding the Russo-Turkish War (1806-1812), the Ottoman Empire ceded the Eastern half of the Principality of Moldavia to the Russian Empire. That region was then called “Bessarabia”. The remaining Moldavia united with Wallachia in 1859 in what would become the Kingdom of Romania.

Bessarabia enjoyed considerable autonomy within the Russian empire, and initially Moldovans comprised 86 per cent of the population. However from the mid-nineteenth century, Russia began to actively assimilate the Moldovan population of Bessarabia.³¹ In 1859, after the union of Moldavia and Wallachia into one state, the process of Russification in Bessarabia was strengthened. After 1867, the Romanian language was eliminated from the teaching curriculum in Bessarabia and Russian came to be the only teaching language allowed in the schools. The policy of Russification was also implemented using the Church. Romanian schools were closed; Romanian priests who did not speak Russian were dismissed; and religious books in Romanian were burned.³² Moreover, from the very beginning the Tsarist authorities pursued a policy of altering the demographic situation in the newly-conquered territory. Along with the immigration from the provinces of the Russian Empire, the immigration of Gagauz, Bulgarians, Germans, Jews, and people of other nationalities from

³⁰ Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, ‘The Dniestr Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.45, No. 6, 1993, p.977.

³¹ Steven D. Roper, ‘Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdniestr and Gagauzia’, in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.102.

³² Kurt W. Treptow, *A History of Romania*, Romanian Civilization Studies, Vol. VII, Iași, 1996, p.336.

foreign countries into Bessarabia was encouraged.³³ Thus, as Russian statistics indicated, the percentage of the Romanian population in Bessarabia diminished from 86 percent in 1834 to about 67 percent in 1871. In 1871, Bessarabia also lost its last vestiges of local autonomy, becoming a simple province of Russia.³⁴

The Berlin Congress of 1878 acknowledged Romania's independence from the Ottoman Empire. The creation of the state of Romania led to calls for the unification of all Romanians, including Bessarabia, in one state. But there was little revolutionary or nationalist activity in Bessarabia before the revolution of 1905, which as a mainly rural country without big cities lacked a significant domestic intelligentsia and industrial proletariat. During and after the 1905 revolution a Moldovan national movement briefly emerged in Bessarabia.³⁵

When the united and independent Romanian state was proclaimed in 1878, 'Moldova' disappeared from the political map of Europe as a separate entity while the name was retained as a designation of a historical and cultural region. Although both Bessarabia and left bank Dniestr now belonged to the Russian empire, the cultural and economic development of the two areas was rather different. Bessarabia was almost exclusively an agricultural region with a very low degree of urbanization. On the left bank, Slavic cultural and demographic influence was much more pronounced. In this area more people were engaged in trade and the density of urban settlements was higher. The Slavs on the banks of the Dniestr belonged to different social and cultural sub-groups.³⁶

³³ Michael Bruchis, *The Republic of Moldavia from the Collapse of the Soviet Empire to the Restoration of the Russian Empire*, Translated by Laura Treptow, New York: East European Monographs, 1996, p.13.

³⁴ Kurt W. Treptow, *A History of Romania*, Romanian Civilization Studies, Vol. VII, Iași, 1996, p.336.

³⁵ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnestr Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, p.2.

³⁶ Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, 'The Dniestr Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.45, No. 6, 1993, p.977.

2.3. Moldova between Greater Romania and the USSR (1905 -1939)

The Russian revolution of 1905 forced Tsar Nicholas II to repeal some legislation against ethnic minorities. Thus, for example, newspapers and magazines were once again permitted to appear in the languages of the non-Russian nationalities of the Empire. Under these circumstances, a group of patriotic-minded intellectuals founded a Moldavian newspaper called 'Bessarabia' in May 1906. The editor of Bessarabia strived to arouse the national-ethnic self-consciousness of the Moldavians. They organized patriotic plans and believed in the need for education and propaganda among the masses in the spirit of the essential demands of the time: "Justice, Freedom, and Land."³⁷

As early as the spring of 1917, as an effect of the Russian revolution of February 1917, the revolutionary movement spread inside Bessarabia. All the national organizations of the province supported the idea of the Council of representatives of Moldavian soldiers and officers on the Romanian front to convene a national assembly in Chisinau with a view to obtaining the autonomy of Bessarabia. As a result, the "National Assembly (Sfatul Tarii)" was founded in Bessarabia, which was made up of deputies representing various societies, associations, cooperatives, the Congress of the Moldavian Soldiers in Russia, the Gubernial Council of Peasants, and the Moldavian Party.³⁸

The Sfatul Tarii met for the first time on 4 December 1917, and declared the creation of the Moldovan People's Republic on December 15, envisaged as an autonomous part of the proposed Russian Federation.³⁹ On 5 February 1918, the Sfatul Tarii voted to form the independent Moldovan Democratic Republic of Bessarabia, with borders extending from the Prut to the Dniestr River.

³⁷ Michael Bruchis, *The Republic of Moldavia from the Collapse of the Soviet Empire to the Restoration of the Russian Empire*, Translated by Laura Treptow, New York: East European Monographs, 1996, p.13.

³⁸ *Ibid.* , pp.14-15.

³⁹ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnestr Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, p.2.

Significantly, the area of modern-day Transdnestr was not included in the new republic. On 27 March 1918, the Sfatul Tarii voted to unite with Romania, and by the end of 1918, the areas of Bucovina and Transylvania joined Bessarabia to form 'Greater Romania'.⁴⁰ Through the union of 1918, the Romanians achieved, for the first time in their history, a state in which political frontiers approximated the ethnic borders.⁴¹

The First World War, agreement was reached on all of Romania's borders except the one with Russia at the Paris Peace Conference. A special committee on Bessarabia was established, and in spite of Soviet protests, on 28 October 1920 a special treaty on Bessarabia was signed by Romania, France, Britain, Japan and Romania and provided guaranteed protection by these four powers of the border along the Dniestr. Soviet Russia broke off diplomatic relations with Romania in 1918, which were not restored until 1934. Although there were several rounds of bilateral Romanian-Soviet negotiations on the 'Bessarabian question', the Soviet Union never recognized Bessarabia as a part of Romania, and provided support for local Bolsheviks in Bessarabia.⁴²

The Russian-Romanian conference that took place in Warsaw at Russia's initiative in September 1921, and ended in failure because of Moscow's refusal to recognize the legitimacy of Bessarabia's incorporation in the Romanian state. Even then the possibility of reaching a solution to the Bessarabian question that would have been acceptable to both sides was not possible. With Russia's position strengthened due to the end of the civil war, Moscow's attitude toward the Bessarabian question hardened. Nevertheless, on 20 November 1923 the Soviets signed an agreement with Romania called "Statue on Ways and Means for Prevention and Solution of Conflicts that May Arise on the Dniestr River". The

⁴⁰ Kurt W. Treptow, *A History of Romania*, Romanian Civilization Studies, Vol. VII, Iași, 1996, p.400.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* , p.394.

⁴² Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnestrian Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, pp.2-3.

signing of that agreement stipulated the resolution of border incidents by a joint-Romanian commission. All this demonstrated that together with the hardening at that time of Moscow's position on the Bessarabian question, the Soviet Union was interested in establishing a strict border regime along the Dniestr river that would prevent any kind of infringement on the part of Romania.⁴³

Following the victory of Bolshevik Russia in Russian Civil War, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) was created in 1922, and in October 1924, the Moldovian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) was established as part of the Ukrainian SSR, including today's Transdnestr as well as large areas to the east in present-day Ukraine.⁴⁴ The MASSR served as a bridgehead of Soviet influence in the region. The existence of the MASSR was proffered by the Soviets as evidence of the fact that, far from being part of a single pan-Romanian nation. Moldovans and Romanians actually formed two wholly separate ethnic groups speaking separate east-Romance languages.⁴⁵

Moscow's policy aimed at severing the ties of the Moldavians east of the Prut with Romanian history and culture. Historians, linguists, literary scholars, and critics were encouraged to produce publications which would not only justify the annexation of Bessarabia by Tsarist Russia in 1812 and by the Soviet Union in 1940, but which would also bolster a theory that the Moldavians east of the Prut became a separate nation with their own language as early as the past century.⁴⁶

⁴³ Michael Bruchis, *The Republic of Moldavia from the Collapse of the Soviet Empire to the Restoration of the Russian Empire*, Translated by Laura Treptow, New York: East European Monographs, 1996, pp.18-19.

⁴⁴ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnestrian Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, pp.2-3.

⁴⁵ Charles King, 'Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism', *Slavic Review*, Vol.53, No. 2, 1994, p.348.

⁴⁶ Michael Bruchis, *The Republic of Moldavia from the Collapse of the Soviet Empire to the Restoration of the Russian Empire*, Translated by Laura Treptow, New York: East European Monographs, 1996, p.23.

2.4. The Soviet Occupation of Moldova (1940)

On June 26, 1940, as a consequence of the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed between the Soviets and Germany on 23 August 1939, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) issued an ultimatum note that required Romania to cede Bessarabia and northern Bucovina. The two provinces were inhabited by about 3.75 million people, mostly Romanians. Two days later, Romanian administration started to retreat from the provinces. Soviet troops entered Bessarabia and incorporated it into the USSR. Bessarabia's northern and southern districts (largely inhabited by Romanians and some Ukrainians and Germans) were exchanged with parts of Transdnestr (the districts on the left or eastern bank of the Dniestr, largely inhabited today by Ukrainians and Russians). On August 2, 1940, a Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) was established. The Moldovan constitution was ratified in February 1941, followed by nationalisation of industry, collectivisation of agriculture, and the deportation of Moldovans to Siberia.⁴⁷

In the Second World War, when Romania joined the German military campaign against the Soviet Union in summer 1941, not only Bessarabia but also left bank Dniestr temporarily came under Romanian administration. The territories beyond the Dniestr were administered by a Romanian-appointed governor and given the name Transdnestr. After the collapse of the Axis powers the administrative division of the area reverted to the 1940 arrangement.⁴⁸

By 1944, the Red Army was finally able to capture Bessarabia and later that year, Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) was formed by joining Bessarabia with the six districts that had constituted the MASSR. Consequently, Moldova inherited a large Russian-speaking community from the MASSR, and immigration, particularly of ethnic Slav industrial workers, furthered the

⁴⁷ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnestrian Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, p.3.

⁴⁸ Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, 'The Dniestr Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.45, No. 6, 1993, p.978.

Russification of Moldova's urban areas. The percentage of ethnic Russians in Moldova almost doubled from 6.7 per cent in 1941 to 13 per cent by 1989. As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, ethnic Russians enjoyed disproportional representation in important political and economic institutions. As Kaufman points out, ethnic Moldovans perceived that they were under-represented in the more desirable professions while they dominated the inferior agricultural positions. This ethnicized socio-economic cleavage became part of the demands for reform by the nationalist movement of the late 1980s.⁴⁹

Under the Soviet Administration, the MSSR became again the subject of a systematic policy of Russification. Part of this policy was a strict isolation of the country from the Romanian cultural sphere and the imposition of the Cyrillic alphabet for the Romanian language. In public life Romanian - called "Moldovan" - took only a second place behind Russian.⁵⁰

In the new MSSR, famines and forced deportations in the 1940s, the "voluntary" relocation of Moldovan families in the 1950s and 1960s, and the immigration of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians altered the demographic landscape and literally made the former Bessarabia more "Soviet" than Romanian. Historians discovered age-old links between the Moldovans and the other nations of the USSR and linguists stressed the fundamental differences between the two major-east-Romance languages, Moldovan and Romanian.⁵¹

To sum up, after the Soviet Union occupied the region of Bessarabia during the Second World War, the Soviet government began a campaign to promote a

⁴⁹ Steven D. Roper, 'Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdnestr and Gagauzia', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.103.

⁵⁰ ---, 'Transdnestrian Conflict - Origins and Main Issues', *CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre*, Vienna, 1994, Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html>, Accessed on 10 September 2005, p.1.

⁵¹ Charles King, 'Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism', *Slavic Review*, Vol.53, No. 2, 1994, p.349.

Moldovan ethnic identity, different from the one of the Romanians. The Soviet official policy also stated that Romanian and Moldovan were two different languages and Moldovan was written in Cyrillic alphabet, as opposed to Romanian, which was written in Latin alphabet. In the new MSSR, Soviet policy concentrated on creating barriers between the Moldovans and the Romanians west of the Prut River.

2.5. Relations between the Moldavian SSR and Moscow (1945 -1985)

After the Second World War, Bessarabia and Dniestr region were governed by the same Soviet political culture and ruled by the same administrative practices from the same centres, Chisinau and Moscow. After the Second World War the MSSR was actively incorporated into the Soviet economy. The Slavic population increased considerably in both Bessarabia and Dniestr, while in all large Moldovan cities the Russian-speakers either predominated or constituted a substantial minority.⁵²

The rapid industrialisation which took place in the MSSR during the 1960's and 1970's brought over 500.000 Russian-speaking workers and specialists from all parts of the Soviet Union into the Republic. Russian became the sole important language in the MSSR. The state and party structures as well as the economic sphere were dominated by Russians or Russified Moldovans, mainly from Transdniestr.⁵³

William Crowther points out that after Moldova's integration into the USSR, indigenous political elites were decimated by purges in 1940-41. The combination of purges and emigration of the intelligentsia left few native political cadres in the republic, and many of those remained outside the system of power. Most members

⁵² Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, 'The Dniestr Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.45, No. 6, 1993, pp.978-979.

⁵³ Claus Neukirch, 'Transdniestr and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, pp.122-123.

of the Bessarabian section of the Romanian Communist Party were refused entry into the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), apparently due to concerns about their loyalty to the Soviet Union. After the Second World War, leadership in MSSR shifted to non-Moldavians.⁵⁴

Communist Party membership among Moldavians has remained at or near the lowest percentage among any nationality of the USSR. As of the early 1960s fully one-third of the Communist Party of Moldavia's (CPM) membership was Russian, and another one-third was Ukrainian, leaving only one-third for the Moldavians, who made up more than 65 percent of the republic's population.⁵⁵

Language policy, a highly charged issue across the Soviet Union since 1985, is also a particularly sensitive problem in Moldavia. Linguistic compliance served for decades as a measure of Moldavians loyalty to the Communist Party. According to the official position set during the interwar period, Moldavian was a separate language from Romanian, and was best understood when written in Cyrillic script. Affirmation of this view became a litmus test of one's acceptance of the legitimacy of Soviet rule. Furthermore, in the post-war years, fluency in Russian became increasingly important for participation in skilled employment in the republic's multiethnic cities. Between 1950 and the late 1970s Moldavian publications lost significant ground relative to Russian-language publications in the republic.⁵⁶

On the one hand, in the post-war period, the Soviet leadership basically encouraged the creation of a distinct Moldovan identity as one of the 'brother' nations of the USSR. New Russification policies changed the alphabet for the Romanian language back to Cyrillic, and Russian was promoted as the dominant language of inter-ethnic communication, higher education and public life. A new

⁵⁴ William Crowther, 'The Politics of Ethno-National Mobilization: Nationalism and Reform in Soviet Moldavia', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 50, 1991, p.186.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* , pp.186-187.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* , p.189.

mythology was created in which Soviet scholars spoke of a distinctive Moldovan language that was the foundation of a distinctive non-Romanian Moldovan national identity. The legacy of the Soviet period has created a unique Moldovan ethnicity and identity apart from Romania.⁵⁷

On the other hand, Soviet post-war economic policy was to develop Western Moldova as an agricultural area, but industry, often military-related was mainly located in Transdniestr. Immigrants from other parts of the Soviet Union, mainly Russians, whose share of the total population nearly doubled between 1936 and 1989, as well as Ukrainians and Belorussians, were brought into work at the new plants. This entailed that the two sides of the Dniestr river diverged in demographic and economic terms: a rural, Moldovan, agricultural region to the West, and a more urban, Slavic and industrial area on the left bank over the period between 1945 and 1985.⁵⁸

Briefly, after the Second World War Moldavia was subjected to intense Russification. Tens of thousands of Bessarabians were imported. Romanian was eliminated as the language of government, commerce, technical education and industry.⁵⁹ The Kremlin attempted to justify its rule in Moldavia since the Second World War with the claim that Moldavians are a different ethnic group from the people of Romania. A central postulate of this claim is that the two speak different languages.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Steven D. Roper, 'Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdniestr and Gagauzia', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.103.

⁵⁸ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdniestrian Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, p.4.

⁵⁹ ---, 'The Bessarabians', *Economist*, 1991, Vol. 319, No. 7701, p.49.

⁶⁰ Daria Fane, 'Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow', in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp.121-122.

2.6. Relations between the Moldavian SSR and Moscow under Gorbachev (1985-1990)

Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika and Glasnost policies had a great impact on Moldovan politics and society against intense Russification policies.⁶¹ In the late 1980s, Gorbachev's new policies provided more opportunity to pro-Romanian intellectuals to voice their opposition against Russian domination in Moldova. Moldavians began to reclaim their Romanian heritage. During this period, language issues constituted a central part of the Moldavian national movement.⁶²

In 1987, Moldovan intellectuals organized discussion groups that demanded greater cultural and linguistic freedom. By mid-1988, these informal pro-reform groups organized "the Democratic Movement in Support of Restructuring" to press for democratization and for redress for discriminatory practices imposed upon the Moldovan majority and certain ethnic minority populations. While the Democratic Movement pressed for the recognition of Moldovan as the official state language (using the Latin rather than Cyrillic alphabet), it also articulated a linguistic agenda that focused on cultural and linguistic freedom for ethnic Gagauzi, Ukrainians and Bulgarians. In essence, this was a typical civic umbrella movement resembling that in other Soviet republics in the mid-stage of Perestroika. The main division in Moldovan society was among the political elites and those counterelites that aspired to power. Therefore, some scholars argue, 'It is a gross simplification to present the Transdnestr conflict as a showdown between ethnic Moldovans and the "Russian-speaking" part of the Moldovan population, because the conflict is essentially political in character'.⁶³

⁶¹ Jeffrey Chinn, 'The Politics of Language in Moldova', *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1994, p.309.

⁶² Daria Fane, 'Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow', in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp.121-122.

⁶³ Steven D. Roper, 'Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdnestr and Gagauzia', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.104.

At the same time, the Democratic Movement demanded socio-political reforms and democracy as well as more important positions for ethnic Moldovans. On the other hand, “National Moldovan Movement” was led by the Alexei Mateevici Literary and Musical Club which initially focused on cultural demands. The two movements united in May 1989 and formed “the Moldovan Popular Front”.⁶⁴

The issue of a separate Moldovan language provided the central weapon in the arsenal of Moldovan oppositional groups. The Soviets had long seen linguistic criteria as fundamental to national identity and, so long as the notion of a separate Moldovan language could be maintained, the idea of a non-Romanian, Moldovan nation remained a viable proposition. Moldova’s writers, artists, historians and linguists-concentrated in the Moldovan Popular Front began to argue for the rejection of the Cyrillic script in favor of the Latin script, the official recognition of the unity of the Romanian and Moldovan languages, and the declaration of Romanian as the state language of the MSSR.

In the late 1980, the language question initially represented an issue on which intellectuals and some members of the Moldovan political elite could agree. The mutual interests of the ethnic Moldovan/Romanian political figures were clear: they hoped to engender a rebirth of Moldovan national culture, a goal towards which many had been working since the 1970s.⁶⁵

The Moldovan language law was a turning point for the republic that moved the Moldovan people forward on the path toward independence. Moldova was the first of the Soviet republics to initiate language legislation aimed at reinstating its

⁶⁴ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, ‘Moldova and the Transnistrian Conflict’, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, p.5.

⁶⁵ Charles King, ‘Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism’, *Slavic Review*, Vol.53, No.2, 1994, pp.349-350.

previous alphabet, which reflects the importance of language for Moldovans in reclaiming their national identity.⁶⁶

Unlike the Baltic States where national language continued to be used after the states' incorporation into the Soviet Union, the Romanian language was excluded from almost all aspects of public life in Moldova during the period of Communist rule. While under both Tsarist and Soviet rule, Russian was the language of the educated classes and dominated city life. Romanian was used in the villages by the peasantry.⁶⁷

On 31 August 1989 the Moldovan Supreme Soviet adopted three new language laws which declared Moldovan the state language of the republic, used in political, economic, social and cultural life and functioning on the basis of the Latin script. According to language laws, "Russian would be used as the language for inter-ethnic relations ('language of communication'), the Gagauz language was to be protected and developed, and was to be the official language alongside Moldovan/Romanian and Russian in areas of Gagauz population. The use of other minority languages such as Ukrainian and Bulgarian was to be protected". While the language law required those working in public services and education to acquire facility in both Moldovan and Russian, it allowed a period of five years to gain language facility.

The new language laws implicitly recognised the identity of Moldovan and Romanian, and restored the Latin alphabet. Following their annexation of Moldova in 1940, the Soviets insisted that Moldovan, written in Cyrillic script, was a different language from Romanian in order to promote the idea that Moldovans and Romanians are separate nations. So important was the adoption of the Language Law within the context of the flowering of a non-Soviet, Moldovan

⁶⁶ Daria Fane, 'Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow', in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.132.

⁶⁷ Jeffrey Chinn, 'The Politics of Language in Moldova', *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1994, p.311.

national identity, that 31 August, Limba Noastra ('Our Language Day'), was subsequently declared a national holiday.

Michael Bruchis pointed out that the language laws were of indisputably positive importance for Moldovans. But, for the people who do not speak Moldovan, and first of all for the Russian newcomers, the law on the Moldovan language was not only unsatisfactory, but at the same time of negative significance. From the Slavic people's point of view, new language laws had very dangerous implications on them. If Moldovan was the official language and at the same time one of the two languages of discourse on the republic's territory, then it could be expected, for example, that one of the next demand of the patriotic-minded Moldovan intellectuals would be that Moldovan be transformed into the number one subject of study both in the Moldovan and in the Russian language elementary schools, into the language of study in the higher schools. Or it could also be expected that one of the next demands would be the knowledge of the official language by those who are eligible for important positions in the Party and governmental bodies of the republic.⁶⁸

The strong opposition to the replacement of the Slavic alphabet by the Latin one can be explained by the fact that the Russians and the Russified people in Soviet Moldova, who always felt that they belonged to the dominant nation in the USSR, were afraid for their position, because at the same time with the Latin alphabet the patriotic-minded national intelligentsia demanded that Moldovan be declared not only the official language in Soviet Moldova, but also the language of discourse among the republic's nationalities. The meaning of this was that knowing Moldovan would be obligatory for those occupying official positions in Soviet Moldova. Thus, the substratum of the quarrel with the indigenous population about the status of Moldovan and its alphabet was a matter of vital importance to both the Moldovans and the Russians. Because, if Russian ceased to be the language of discourse among the nationalities of Soviet Moldova, the Russian inhabitants of this republic would lose their dominant position.

⁶⁸ Michael Bruchis, *The Republic of Moldavia from the Collapse of the Soviet Empire to the Restoration of the Russian Empire*, Translated by Laura Treptow, New York: East European Monographs, 1996, pp.42-43.

Therefore, the Russians in Soviet Moldova and their supporters gave a hostile reception to demands of vital importance to the overwhelming majority of Moldovans.⁶⁹ On the contrary, for many ethnic Moldovan/Romanian intellectuals, the adoption of the language laws represented a historical affirmation of the “true identity” of Moldova’s ethnic majority.⁷⁰

The main focus of criticism by Russian speakers on both sides of the Dniestr was the de facto abolition of Russian as official language, and Article 7 of the language law, which was perceived as a threat to their existence. Article 7, although seemingly balanced, has an asymmetric impact, since practically all Romanian speakers know Russian, but not all Russophones speak Romanian.⁷¹

At the same time, the Popular Front adopted a much more radical and ethnicized platform than the earlier Democratic Movement. The pan-reform agenda of the Democratic Movement was rejected in favour of a pro-Romania agenda. This shift in focus and the exclusivist elevation of the Moldovan language sparked an immediate response by the Russian-speaking community that Crowther has labelled ‘reactive nationalism’. According to Crowther, ethnic minority-led conflict was instigated because of a threat to the status quo. The promotion of the Moldovan language, particularly in an area such as Transdnestr, threatened the existing Slavic elites. Transdnestrians had dominated economic and political institutions in Tiraspol and in Chisinau. At the same time the newly dominant Moldovan elites in the Popular Front such as Mircea Druc, Iurie Rosca and others, used the language and cultural issues to consolidate their position in the fast-changing political environment.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid. , p.36.

⁷⁰ Charles King, ‘Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism’, *Slavic Review*, Vol.53, No.2, 1994, pp.349-350.

⁷¹ ---, ‘Transdnestrian Conflict - Origins and Main Issues’, *CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre*, Vienna, 1994, Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html>, Accessed on 10 September 2005, p. 3.

⁷² Steven D. Roper, ‘Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdnestr and Gagauzia’, in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.105.

To sum up, when the political control loosened under Gorbachev, language became the first and most important point of contention, on the one hand mobilizing the Romanians and making them more cohesive, and on the other hand triggering the Russian backlash. Since language was initially characterized as a cultural issue, it provided a safer vehicle for national expression. Russians in Moldova felt that giving Romanian superior (or even equal) status to Russian was just the first step toward union with Romania. Fear of such a union resulted in a strong Russian reaction. Making Romanian the state language and changing from the Cyrillic to the Latin script were the key issues of the national movement in 1988 and 1989. The question of alphabet was especially symbolic and was used by nationalists to provide an example of Russian cultural dominance.⁷³

2.7. Conclusion

The second part of the thesis has focused on the historical background of the Transdnestr conflict within the historical framework. The Moldavian SRR was subjected to intense Russification policies especially in the post-Second World War period. These policies caused a “reactive nationalism” of the ethnic Moldovan peoples in 1980s. But, with Mikhail Gorbachev’s coming to power in the Soviet Union, ethnic Moldovans started to demand more socio-economic and political reforms for themselves. In 1989, the language issue was the turning point for the beginning of the problems between two parties. Russian and Ukrainian coalition in the Transdnestr region has reacted very strongly to ethnic Moldovans and their claims. In this chapter, the historical reasons of the emergence of the Transdnestr conflict up to 1990 have been explained. In the following chapter, the causes of the escalation of the conflict between Moldova and Transdnestr within the context of the Russian role and policies will be introduced.

⁷³ Jeffrey Chinn, ‘The Politics of Language in Moldova’, *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1994, p.310.

CHAPTER III

RUSSIA AND THE ESCALATION OF THE TRANSDNIESTR CONFLICT (1990-1992)

In this chapter, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Transdniestr's secession process from Moldova as a reaction against the independence of the country will be examined. At first, the causes of the escalation of the Transdniestrian ethno-political conflict and 1992 military fighting which took place between Moldova and Transdniestr will be analyzed. Finally, within this framework, after the 1992 war, several issues such as changes in Moldova's internal policy, the unification process with Romania, the withdrawal of the 14th Russian Army from Transdniestr, Moldova's relations with CIS, and the Gagauzia problem with central government of the Republic of Moldova will be discussed.

3.1. Independence of Post-Soviet Moldova

Following the Moldovan Supreme Soviet elections on March 1990, the Popular Front formed a parliamentary coalition with other parties that held over 66 percent of the seats. The parliament confirmed a government composed almost entirely of ethnic Moldovans. Mircea Snegur, a leading Front supporter, was elected president by the parliament, and Prime Minister Mircea Druc was a strong advocate of union with Romania.⁷⁴

One of the first acts of the new Supreme Soviet was the adoption of the state flag on April 27, 1990. Further nationalist changes followed. The Moldovan Language Holiday, August 31, was added. These changes set a separatist tone

⁷⁴ Steven D. Roper, 'Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdniestr and Gagauzia', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.105.

for the republic, distancing it from elements of its identity in the Soviet era and beginning the switch to a non-communist base.

Another amendment was introduced into the republic's constitution on June 5, 1990, which changed the republic's name from 'Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic' to 'Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova'. The name was further modified on May 23, 1991, when the Moldavian Supreme Soviet dropped the words 'Soviet' and 'Socialist' and adopted the official title, "Republic of Moldova".⁷⁵ Another important milestone in Moldovan legislation was the passing on 23 June 1990 of a declaration of state sovereignty of the Moldovan republic and of an evaluation of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact. The pact was denounced as an act of aggression leading up to the Soviet occupation of a part of Romania. The document declared illegal the decision of the USSR Supreme Soviet to create an MSSR and its incorporation into the USSR.⁷⁶

Other symbolic steps were taken toward reclaiming a non-Soviet identity. After the passage of the language law, and as Moldovan nationalism grew, many places throughout the republic were renamed. Names with Soviet symbolism were rejected, and original Romanian names were reclaimed, or new names with Moldovan nationalist significance were selected. The Moldovan government decided to introduce its own currency, and planned to begin printing money within one year. The republic also decreed the nationalization of all Soviet enterprises in the republic's territory. All customs posts were subordinated to the State Department on Customs Control, and plans were made for a border service. The republic also set up a Ministry of National Security to replace the disbanded KGB.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Daria Fane, 'Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow', in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp.136-137.

⁷⁶ Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, 'The Dniestr Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.45, No. 6, 1993, p.981.

⁷⁷ Daria Fane, 'Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow', in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.126.

Moldovan opposition to signing the Union treaty advocated by Mikhail Gorbachev throughout much of 1991 was at the heart of its nationalist political stand. The Moldovan Popular Front organized a popular demonstration at which hundreds of thousands of Moldovans demonstrated against signing the treaty. Despite the Moldovan Parliament's February 19 decision not to hold the referendum, the Dniestr and Gagauz area councils adopted resolutions announcing their intention to do so. Moldovan President Snegur sent an ultimatum to Tiraspol, demanding the annulment of that decision. But Tiraspol held firm, responding that they were proceeding from the "primacy of the laws of the USSR over the laws of republics".⁷⁸

Moldova declared its independence from the Soviet Union on 27 August 1991. On 30 January 1992, the Republic of Moldova became a member State of the CSCE, and was admitted to the United Nations on the following 2 of March.

3.2. Reactions of the Transdniestr ASSR to Moldova's Independence

The largely Russian and Russified Ukrainian population of the Dniestr area has a different history than that of the rest of the republic. This region is not part of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina, and was not part of Romania during the interwar period. The Transdniestr area was part of Ukraine until 1940 when it was joined with the annexed Bessarabia to form the MSSR.⁷⁹

In the late 1980s, local Transdniestrian leaders increasingly saw their positions and livelihood threatened by the Moldovan nationalist movement, especially by the terms of the 31 August 1989 language law, which proclaimed Moldovan in

⁷⁸ Ibid. , p.132.

⁷⁹ Daria Fane, 'Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow', in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.138.

Latin script as the state language, and required all employees of state enterprises to pass a written examination in that language by 1994.⁸⁰



Map 1: Map of the Republic of Moldova.⁸¹

⁸⁰ William Hill, 'Making Istanbul a Reality: Moldova, Russia, and Withdrawal from Transdnistr', *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 2, 2002, pp.130-131.

In January 1990, a referendum on territorial autonomy was held in Tiraspol and passed by 96 per cent of the population. Kaufman stated that even those who view the conflict as an ‘ethnic’ one admit that the ‘Dniestrian Russophones are not an ethnic group; they are a coalition of ethnic interests. In essence, this is a conflict between Moldovans and a regionally concentrated Russophone population that has a ‘Soviet’ identity.’⁸²

Parallel to Moldova’s process of emancipation from the Soviet centre, 1989 onwards protest movements in the regions with predominantly non-Moldovan populations, i.e. in the left bank areas and in the south of the country, began organizing themselves to resist Moldovan independence efforts. This resistance was mainly motivated by the fear that Moldova, once fully independent, would wish to reunite with Romania. In such a case, the Slavic population that mainly inhabited the left bank of the Dniestr feared that its members, who did not speak Romanian, would become second-class citizens. These sentiments were exploited by the communist nomenklatura, which enjoyed a strong position on the left bank of the Dniestr. It intended to maintain control over the industrial establishments located there.⁸³

In response to Moldova’s declaration of Sovereignty, a congress of representatives of the Gagauz minority announced the formation of a “Republic of Gagauzia” (Gagauz Yeri) on 19 August 1990, and on the following 2 September, a “Transdnistrian Moldavian Republic” (TMR) was proclaimed in Tiraspol, on the left bank of the Dniestr river. That same year, both self-styled independent entities elected their respective parliaments and presidents. In both cases, the

⁸¹ ---, Moldova Map, *Lonely Planet*, Available At <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mapshells/europe/moldova/moldova.htm>, Accessed on 25 August 2006.

⁸² Steven D. Roper, ‘Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdnistria and Gagauzia’, in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.106.

⁸³ Jacek Wrobel, ‘Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Region. Present Situation. Prospects for Settlement. Consequences’, *Prace OSW/CES Studies*, Warsaw, No. 9, 2003, p.54.

elections were boycotted by the Moldovan population and declared invalid by the authorities in Chisinau.⁸⁴

In 1991, Moldova and other Soviet Republics were moving towards decentralisation and sovereignty, but Transdniestr remained a staunch advocate of the Soviet centre. The leadership of both Transdniestr and Gagauzia supported the continuation of the union during the spring 1991 referendum and backed the anti-Gorbachev coup in August. The leadership in Chisinau refused to participate in the spring referendum and immediately voiced opposition to the Emergency Committee. This contrast supports the interpretation that Transdniestrian secession was as much political as ethnic. Not only was the Transdniestrian leadership threatened by a new elite that was mobilising Moldova's titular population, but its Soviet way of life and privileges were being challenged by Gorbachev's political and economic reforms.⁸⁵

When Moldova declared independence on 27 August 1991, Transdniestr quickly followed suit on 2 September and adopted its own constitution and started to create its own armed forces. On 1 December 1991, Igor Smirnov was elected the first President of the 'Transdniestrian Moldovan Republic' (TMR) whose independence under this name was approved in a referendum on the same day.⁸⁶ The newly proclaimed TMR declared that only Union laws would be recognized on its territory, suspending legal validity of Moldovan laws adopted since 1989. The TMR also rejected the Moldovan version of history. In particular it disagreed with Parliament's interpretation of the events of 1940. The Dniestr continued to

⁸⁴ ---, 'Transdniestrian Conflict - Origins and Main Issues', *CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre*, Vienna, 1994, Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html>, Accessed on 10 September 2005, p.2.

⁸⁵ Jeff Chinn, 'The Case Transdniestr (Moldova)', in Lena Jonson and Clive Archer (eds), *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996, p.107.

⁸⁶ Claus Neukirch, 'Transdniestr and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, p.124.

celebrate “Reunification Day,” the June 28 anniversary of the 1941 incorporation of Bessarabia.⁸⁷

Today, the TMR occupies the area of the former MSSR situated on the left bank of the Dniestr River and comprises the right-bank city of Bendery. The capital city is Tiraspol. Transdniestr has not been recognised by the international community but is in fact a sovereign political organism with full control over its territory and has all the attributes of a state. Transdniestr is internationally considered to be part of the Republic of Moldova, and previously part of the MSSR. This separatist republic has a president, a parliament, an army, a police force and its own currency (the Transdniestrian Ruble).

The Russian authorities contributed both militarily and politically to the creation of a separatist government in Transdniestr. The TMR remained under the effective authority, or at the very least under the decisive influence of Russia, and in any event it survived by virtue of the military, economic, financial and political support that Russia gave it.⁸⁸

3.3. Escalation of the Conflict and Its Causes

The Russian government has argued that this conflict has been driven by ethnic rivalry, pitting Moldovan nationalists against ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers. 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.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Daria Fane, ‘Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow’, in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.139.

⁸⁸ Jacek Wrobel, ‘Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Region. Present Situation. Prospects for Settlement. Consequences’, *Prace OSW/CES Studies*, Warsaw, No. 9, 2003, p.53.

⁸⁹ Dov Lynch, *Russian Peackeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, Palgrave in association with The Royal Institute of International Affairs Russia and Eurasia Programme, 2000, p.113.

The conflict between Chisinau and Tiraspol quickly accelerated with the formation of the TMR in September 1990. The first armed clashes between the Transdnestrian separatists and Moldovan police for control of municipal bodies occurred in Dubasari on the left bank as early as 2 November 1990, which resulted in three civilian casualties. By early 1991, several Transdnestrian cities including Tiraspol, Ribnitsa, Dubasari and Bendery began to form paramilitary organizations. Paramilitary formations began to take over, step by step, previously Moldovan public institutions such as police stations, administrative bodies, schools, radio stations and newspapers.⁹⁰

The August 1991 Soviet coup clearly demonstrated the division between Moldova and Transdnestr. While the Moldovan leadership denounced the coup leaders, the Transdnestrian leadership, including future president Igor Smirnov, supported the coup. Transdnestr attracted unreformed communists throughout the former Soviet Union. The Moldovan government viewed the new Transdnestrian leadership, especially its leader Smirnov, as traitors and terrorists rather than as a legitimate government of a separate republic.

During 1991 and 1992, the Transdnestrian paramilitary force was strengthened by the transfer of men and arms from the 14th Russian Army, and from the huge stockpile of weapons and ammunition stored in the Transdnestrian town of Colbasnia. In practice, the distinction between the Transdnestrian regulars and the 14th Army was blurred. Soldiers were often placed under the command of the Transdnestrian military, and in December 1991, the 14th Army's commander, General Gennadii Yakovlev, accepted the position of Transdnestrian Defence Minister.⁹¹

⁹⁰ ---, 'Transdnestrian Conflict - Origins and Main Issues', *CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre*, Vienna, 1994, Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html>, Accessed on 10 September 2005, p.2.

⁹¹ Steven D. Roper, 'Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdnestr and Gagauzia', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, pp.106-107.

Edward Ozhiganoz points out that the main cause of the armed conflict in Moldova was the attempt to create a unitary, ethnic state with power concentrated in the hands of ethnic nationalists in what was actually a multiethnic society. If the growth of ethnic nationalism proceeds unchecked, sooner or later it leads to a situation where the use of force becomes inevitable, especially if there are other groups who fear forced assimilation into the new nationalist program. The armed conflict in Moldova was complicated by the existence of two strains of ethnic nationalism—Romanian and Moldovan. The disagreements between nationalists who considered themselves Romanians and those who considered themselves Moldovans aggravated the conflict and introduced a new split in society. At the same time, the presence of Russian and Ukrainian minorities, ethnically related to the majority of the population in two large neighboring states automatically increased the tension in the region of conflict.⁹²

Dov Lynch argues that the roots of this conflict are more political and economic. As Igor Smirnov candidly recognized, ‘this is not an ethnic but a political conflict.’ Under Soviet rule, the republic had been governed by elites from the TMR. A new generation of leaders from Bessarabia challenged Dniestr predominance. Moreover, the Moldovan movement towards political and economic independence threatened Dniestr control of local industrial and economic potential.⁹³

3.4. Moscow and the Militarization of the Conflict

In the Post-Soviet era, Russia initially followed a very moderate policy toward the former republics of the Soviet Union. It sought good relations with them based upon shared interests, mutual cooperation, and the negotiation of differences.

⁹² Edward Ozhiganoz, ‘The Republic of Moldova: Transdnistr and the 14th Army’, in Alexei Arbatov, Abram Chayes, Antonia Handler Chayes and Lara Olson (eds), *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives*, Cambridge: MA: MIT Press 1997, pp.204-205.

⁹³ Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacemaking Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, Palgrave in association with The Royal Institute of International Affairs Russia and Eurasia Programme, 2000, p.113.

Russia's main priority at this time was to promote improved relations with the major Western powers, to secure foreign economic assistance, and to focus on urgent domestic concerns, most notably the transformation of the economy and the construction of new political institutions.⁹⁴

However, in 1992 and 1993, the pro-Western direction of Russian policy was increasingly criticized by a wide spectrum of 'moderates and hard line nationalists, communists.'⁹⁵ In 1993, the popular stress was upon the restoration of Russia's great power status, the protection of Russian rights and a new Russian assertiveness in the former Soviet Union, the 'Near Abroad'. The Russian leadership moved to adopt policies which reflected the new mood, a 'Russia first' stance.

Russia claims the right to a dominant position in the former Soviet space, which remains its special sphere of influence. This claim has a range of implications. For Russia, the external border of the CIS is perceived as the geopolitical boundary of the Russian Federation. Russia sees itself as the sole guarantor of security within that area, bearing the main responsibility for conflict resolution and peacekeeping in the CIS. This assumption has an economic dimension as Russia increasingly asserts a right to be involved in the disposition of major reservoirs of natural resources in the CIS, such as oil and gas.⁹⁶

During 1992, open warfare flared up in a number of states near Russia in Tajikistan, Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan. The duration and intensity of the conflict varied from case to case, as did Russia's particular interests and policy responses. Despite this all raised some alarm within the Russian leadership.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Fergus Carr and Theresa Callan, *Managing Conflict in the New Europe: The Role of International Institutions*, Palgrave, 2002, pp.45-46.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.45-46.

⁹⁶ Christoph Bluth, 'The Post-Soviet Space and Europe', in Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (eds), *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs-Russia and Eurasia Programme, 1998, pp.324-325.

⁹⁷ Mark Webber, 'Russian Policy towards the Soviet Successor States', in Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross (eds), *Russia after the Cold War*, London: Longman, 2000, p.243.

Russia has assumed the main responsibility for conflict management in the former USSR and continued to carry this burden despite all internal hardships and external objections.⁹⁸ Russia has also militarily intervened in the 'Near Abroad' under the title of 'peacekeeping'. The 'Near Abroad' is precisely the space where Russia could 'defend its interests' with minimal Western interference. Russian forces have been deployed in a number of former Soviet republics. The Russian military doctrine of 1993 gives more emphasis to regional threats and local conflicts. The doctrine envisaged the protection of 'ethnic Russians' in the 'Near Abroad'.⁹⁹

Within this framework, Centrist and radical forces inside and outside the Russian government seized the initiative on the Dniestr issue, presenting it as a test case for Russian resolve in the former Soviet Union. Without authorization from Moldova, Vice President Aleksander Rutskoi visited the TMR in early April. Rutskoi pledged Russian support 'so that the people of the TMR can gain independence and defend it'.¹⁰⁰

By late June 1992, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' position towards including nationalist and military views on resolving the conflict on exclusively Russian terms. Independent 14th Army actions were also influential in leading Russian policy away from the MFA's initial approach. In April, Kozyrev had already rejected the option of international peacekeeping. In General Alexander Lebed's view, 'the TMR is of tremendous importance to the Russian military-

⁹⁸ Pavel Baev, 'Peacekeeping and Conflict Management in Eurasia', in Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (eds), *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs-Russia and Eurasia Programme, 1998, p.217.

⁹⁹ Fergus Carr and Theresa Callan, *Managing Conflict in the New Europe: The Role of International Institutions*, Palgrave, 2002, pp.47-48.

¹⁰⁰ Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS-The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, Palgrave in association with The Royal Institute of International Affairs Russia and Eurasia Programme, 2000, p.115.

industrial complex'. Lebed also argued that without the 14th Army Russia would lose its key position in the Balkans.¹⁰¹

At the same time, military fighting escalated between Moldova and Transdnistr in mid-March 1992, when TMR Guards and Don Cossacks attacked Moldovan police units in three villages in the Dubasari region in an attempt to eliminate the last remaining Moldovan police presence on the left bank of the Dniestr. On 29 March Mircea Snegur declared a state of emergency throughout Moldova and called on TMR separatists to surrender their arms and acknowledge the Moldovan government's authority.¹⁰²

Various international mediation attempts had been made as fighting escalated in spring 1992. On March 23, the Foreign Ministers of Moldova, Ukraine and Romania as well as Russia met on the sidelines of a Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) ministerial meeting in Helsinki and adopted a declaration on the principle of peaceful settlement, agreeing to establish a joint consultative mechanism to coordinate their efforts. A Quadripartite Commission and a group of five military observers from each country to monitor an eventual cease-fire agreement was established.¹⁰³

Moreover, a final agreement was reached, and a cease-fire commenced on 7 April 1992. The agreement established a four-party commission to monitor the cease-fire and the withdrawal of military forces. Eventually, though, Russian demands that the 14th Army should be used as a peacekeeping force and that representatives from Transdnistr be formally included were rejected by Moldova, Romania and Ukraine, and led to a breakdown in the negotiations.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Andrew Williams, 'Conflict Resolution after the Cold War: The Case of Moldova', *Review of International Studies*, 1999, p.74.

¹⁰² Ibid. , pp.59-60.

¹⁰³ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnistriean Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, pp.7-8.

By May, the level of violence had greatly increased. The heaviest fighting occurred close to the border between Moldova and Transdniestr, particularly in the cities of Dubasari and Bendery. In the summer of 1992 Bendery became a flash point for the conflict. Bendery's strategically important location on the right bank of the Dniestr linked Moldova to the rest of the former Soviet Union. During the spring and summer, Transdniestrian regulars captured most of Bendery's police stations. On 19 June, Transdniestrian elements attacked the last police station that was still loyal to Chisinau. Initially, the Moldovan military was able to repel the attack, but on the night of 20–21 June, 14th Russian Army tanks rolled into the city and within a few short hours, Transdniestr captured Bendery. The capture of Bendery was a turning point in the military conflict as the Moldovan side realized that it could not defeat the Transdniestrians as long as they enjoyed the support of Russia's 14th Army. Estimates of casualties vary, but perhaps as many as 1,000 died during the military conflict.¹⁰⁵

It became very clear that the Russian 14th Army, stationed on the left bank, directly or indirectly supported the secessionists. Although officially neutral, the Russian commanders played a vital role in the conflict. Furthermore, there were strong indications that elements of the 14th Army actively intervened on the side of the separatists during the fighting in Bendery, using their heavy weapons to turn the tide in the fighting.

Discussions on a potential peacekeeping force in Moldova took place within the CIS from late June 1992, and a preliminary agreement on the deployment of a CIS peacekeeping force was reached at the CIS summit on July 6. Even as the Moldovan parliament issued the required invitation for a CIS peacekeeping force, which was to consist of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarussian forces, as well as

¹⁰⁴ Steven D. Roper, 'Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdniestr and Gagauzia', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.108.

¹⁰⁵ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdniestrian Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, pp.6-7.

non-CIS Romanian and Bulgarian troops, the following day some of the countries involved withdrew their consent to participate, and the CIS-led force did not materialise. The Moldovan government then turned to the CSCE and the UN. At the CSCE summit on July 10, Moldova requested that a CSCE peacekeeping mechanism in Moldova be considered. However, one of the main conditions for this – an effective cease-fire – had not been met yet.¹⁰⁶

Following these rejections, the Moldovan government turned to Russia, and an agreement was signed between Presidents Snegur and Yeltsin in Moscow on 21 July. The Snegur-Yeltsin accord provided for an immediate cease-fire and the creation of a demilitarized zone extending 10 km from the Dniestr on each side of the river, including the important town of Bendery on the right bank. “A set of principles for the peaceful settlement of the dispute” was also announced, including respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova, the need for a special status for Transdniestria and the right of its inhabitants to determine their future in case Moldova were to unite with Romania. The 21 July Agreement also provided for the establishment of a Joint Control Commission (JCC) to monitor and implement the cease-fire agreement. The JCC was authorised to take ‘urgent and appropriate measures’ in case the cease-fire was broken to restore peace and reestablish law and order. Approximately 6,000 peacekeeping forces consisting of 6 Russian, 3 Moldovan and 3 Transdniestrian battalions under a Trilateral Military Command subordinate to the JCC was also provided and were deployed from July 29 onwards.¹⁰⁷

The loss of Transdniestria had an enormous impact on the Moldovan economy besides the political impact. Most of Moldova’s light industries and energy facilities are located in this region. Almost 25 per cent of the country’s industrial production is located in Transdniestria, and 87 per cent of Moldova’s electricity and

¹⁰⁶ ---, ‘Transdniestrian Conflict - Origins and Main Issues’, *CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre*, Vienna, 1994, Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html>, Accessed on 10 September 2005, p.2.

¹⁰⁷ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, ‘Moldova and the Transdniestrian Conflict’, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, pp.7-8.

100 per cent of its large electric machinery output come from this region. This is the reason why Transdnistrians held so much economic power in Soviet Moldova and continue to have a negative economic influence on Moldova today.¹⁰⁸

3.5. Consequences of the Militarization of the Conflict

On the one hand, after signing the cease-fire agreement, negotiations for resolution of the conflict between the conflicting parties and OSCE's involvement into Transdnistran conflict began. On the other hand, some significant developments have taken place in Moldova. These issues involve the Moldovan governmental change, the withdrawal of Russian troops, unification debates with Romania, Moldova's entry to the CIS, and regional problem with Gaguzia. In this part of the thesis, these developments will be analysed.

At its third congress in February 1992, the Popular Front transformed itself from a "mass movement" into a political party (the Christian Democratic Popular Front). The Christian Democratic Popular Front maintains its status as a national, unionist movement, whose major objective is the reintegration of the unitary Romanian State. The refashioned Front even rejected the name "Republic of Moldova" "in favour of Bessarabia." While the radicalization of the Popular Front accomplished the goal of forcing Moldovan politicians to speak out for or against union with Romania, it also seriously weakened the numerical strength of the organization itself.

On the other hand, the Agrarian Democratic Party was formed in November 1991. The Agrarians, composed largely of members of the former agricultural nomenklatura, have repeatedly stressed that Moldova should become neither "a province nor a gubernia of another country". The Agrarians have maintained a

¹⁰⁸ Steven D. Roper, 'Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdnistr and Gagauzia', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.110.

version of the former Soviet view that Moldovans are ethnically separate from Romanians west of the Prut River. Such affirmations are clearly in the interest of the Agrarians in general: holding the most powerful posts in Moldova's largely agrarian economy, these collective farm presidents, agro-industrial managers and heads of local government understand that moving too close to Romania could jeopardize their positions of power. Moreover, since Moldova's agricultural and other trade links are still oriented chiefly towards the former Soviet republics, the Agrarians have not been eager to break essential ties by rushing into the arms of the Romanians. The Agrarians abjured the notion of union with Romania and underscored the need for consolidating Moldovan independence and territorial integrity.¹⁰⁹ In the February 1994 elections, the Agrarians emerged with over 43 percent of the popular vote and an absolute majority of seats in the new 104-member parliament, while the pan-Romanianists, divided between the Front and the more pragmatic Congress of the Intelligentsia, won collectively only 20 seats.¹¹⁰

During Perestroika two parallel ideas captured the attention of the Moldovan Republic: the idea of creating an independent state and the idea of uniting with Romania. The Moldovan Popular Front led the struggle for political independence from Moscow. In June 1989, the Front stated that it took as a starting point for its activities 'the necessity of consolidating the statehood and sovereignty of the MSSR'. Gradually however, the idea of Moldovan sovereignty was abolished, and the Front stood as the most consistent champion of unification with Romania.¹¹¹ The question of reunification was so controversial that it polarized Moldavian society. Its supporters saw independence only as a temporary stepping stone on

¹⁰⁹ Charles King, 'Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism', *Slavic Review*, Vol.53, No.2, 1994, pp.352-354.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.356-357.

¹¹¹ Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, 'The Dniestr Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.45, No. 6, 1993, p.979.

the path to unification, while those who opposed reunification saw independence as a goal in itself.¹¹²

After the March 1990 Parliament Elections, Front MPs and the Druc government pursued a pro-Romanian and pro-unionist agenda that further alienated the Russian minority. Iurie Rosca, president of the Front's parliamentary faction, stated that "Moldova will unify with Romania-it is inevitable. We need time for Russia to lose power in Moldova. People do not remember what it is like to be part of Romania." However, individuals such as President Snegur maintained a policy of 'one people, two states' that rejected reunification.¹¹³

For fairly straightforward historical, cultural and ethnic reasons, Moldova has developed a very close relationship with Romania. The country is mostly Romanian-speaking, although this has been substantially reduced by Russian influence over the past 50 years.¹¹⁴ At the same time, the post-Ceausescu Romanian government was wary about pressing any claims to Moldova for fear of antagonizing the Soviets and opening up the possibility of other claims on Romanian territory, specifically Hungarian claims on Transylvania.¹¹⁵

However, the idea of unification with Romania was clearly becoming less fashionable among ethnic Moldovans since 1992. It became evident quite soon that a majority of the population of Moldova would not support a merger with Romania. There were obviously several reasons for this. For one thing, the democratization process in Romanian society was proceeding slowly, and many

¹¹² Daria Fane, 'Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow', in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp.121-122.

¹¹³ Steven D. Roper, 'Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdnestr and Gagauzia', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, pp.105-106.

¹¹⁴ Stephen Iwan Griffiths, 'Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict-Threats to European Security' *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Research Report, No. 5*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p.83.

¹¹⁵ Daria Fane, 'Moldova: Breaking Loose from Moscow', in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.128.

Moldovans began to fear that the political and cultural freedoms they had achieved since independence could be jeopardised again by unification.

In addition, Romania had not much to offer in economic terms. The living standard in Romania was lower than in Moldova, and the economic structures of the two countries were too similar to complement each other. The prospect of becoming a small rural province in a relatively centralised country which, had grave economic problems, became less and less attractive. Continued trade with the former Soviet Union was more important to Moldova than expanded exports to the Balkans. The anxieties of the minorities were also taken into consideration. Should unification come about, ethnic tensions in Moldova were certain to be badly aggravated. The prospect of unification was totally unthinkable for Moldova's Slav minorities on both sides of the Dniestr, and became one of the motors of the Transdnestr and Gagauz secession.

Finally, as Moldovan state-building was mounting, a large number of intellectuals had got prestigious jobs in the new Moldovan state apparatus, and thus had a very strong vested interest in the continued existence of this state.¹¹⁶ Within this framework, throughout 1993, Moldova continued to distance herself from Romania and abandoned her notion of 'two independent Romanian states'. Throughout the 1990s Moldova strove to establish a truly independent, multi-ethnic state and there was no desire to trade a Russian 'big brother' for a Romanian one. According to Moldovans Romania should let Moldova 'be master in its own home' and strictly respect the right of Moldova's people to determine their own future.¹¹⁷

In 1992, surveys carried out by William Crowther showed that less than 10 per cent of the ethnic Moldovan/Romanian population supported union with Romania

¹¹⁶ Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, 'The Dniestr Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.45, No. 6, 1993, pp.984-985.

¹¹⁷ Trevor Waters, 'Security Concerns in Post-Soviet Moldova', in Graeme P. Herd and Jennifer D. P. Moroney (eds), *Security Dynamics in the Former Soviet Bloc*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, pp.142-143.

in the short or long term and, when given a choice between the ethnic tags “Romanian” and “Moldovan,” some 87 per cent of Moldovan/Romanian language speakers chose the latter.¹¹⁸

Article 13 of the new Constitution of the Republic of Moldova adopted in 1994 proclaimed “Moldovan”, not Romanian, the official language of the country. Thus, the Soviet policy of Moldovanism as opposed to Romanian, which was initiated in 1924 with the creation of MASSR on the eastern border of Great Romania, was resumed.

Based in Moldova since 1956, the Soviet 14th Army, headquartered in Tiraspol, was transferred to the CIS Armed Forces in January 1992. President Yeltsin’s decree of 1 April 1992 subsequently placed what remained of the 14th Army under Russian jurisdiction. By late June 1992, General Aleksandr Lebed was appointed army commander. Numerous rounds of negotiations between Moldova and Russia took place on the withdrawal of the 14th Russian Army. The principle of withdrawal has been accepted by the Russian side and was confirmed in the Moscow Agreement of 21 July 1992. During 1992-1993 Russian and Moldovan representatives devoted considerable effort to the negotiation of key bilateral agreements, including a treaty on the status and gradual withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova.¹¹⁹

In October 1994, Moldova and Russia concluded an agreement for the complete withdrawal of the 14th Army from Moldova over a period of three years of the treaty’s entry into force, which for TMR president Smirnov was ‘unacceptable’, and for Lebed a ‘crime’.¹²⁰ But, Russia’s position, contested by the Moldovan

¹¹⁸ Charles King, ‘Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism’, *Slavic Review*, Vol.53, No.2, 1994, pp.356-357.

¹¹⁹ William Hill, ‘Making Istanbul a Reality: Moldova, Russia, and Withdrawal from Transdniestr’, *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 2, 2002, p.134.

¹²⁰ Trevor Waters, ‘Security Concerns in Post-Soviet Moldova’, in Graeme P. Herd and Jennifer D. P. Moroney (eds), *Security Dynamics in the Former Soviet Bloc*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p.140.

authorities, is that the withdrawal should be synchronized with a political settlement of the conflict in the left bank areas.¹²¹ In reality, the agreement never came into force, since it was not ratified by the Russian Duma, which decided to examine the “inadmissibility of withdrawing the 14th Army from Transdnestr”.¹²² Yet again, Russia began its withdrawal in 1995, coinciding with the reorganization of the 14th Army. General Lebed was replaced and the Russian Forces in Moldova were renamed the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF). However, the Russian Duma stalled the withdrawal and the changing status of the Russian forces created uncertainty about Russia’s legal obligation to withdraw its forces.¹²³

The concept of ‘synchronization’ drew passionate criticism from critics in Moldova and in the OSCE community, who characterized it as an attempt to water down the commitment to withdraw the Russian forces from Moldova. The idea has never been endorsed in any OSCE documents, or in other documents from the negotiating process. All OSCE summit and ministerial documents call for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Moldova without reservation or qualification. Nonetheless, the idea resurfaces periodically. For example, following the OSCE Istanbul Summit, a Russian Federation Foreign Ministry statement from late December 1999 referred to the need for the troop withdrawal to be synchronized with a political settlement.

Official Russian policy since 1992 has been that the Russian Federation will fulfill its commitments to withdraw its forces from the Republic of Moldova. However, the timing and practical implementation of this commitment have

¹²¹ ---, ‘Transnistrian Conflict - Origins and Main Issues’, *CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre*, Vienna, 1994, Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html>, Accessed on 10 September 2005, p.4.

¹²² Liliana Vitu, ‘Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova: Does Moldova’s Eastern Orientation Inhibit its European Aspirations?’, Available at http://www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/70/en/vitu_teza.pdf, 2004, Accessed on March 5 2006, p.27.

¹²³ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, ‘Moldova and the Transnistrian Conflict’, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues*, No. 1, 2004, pp.8- 9.

been complicated by continuing opposition and outright resistance both from inside Russia and from Moldova's Transdniestrian region.¹²⁴

On the one hand, in January 1994, Foreign Minister Kozyrev warned that a departure of Russian troops from the "near abroad" would create "a security vacuum" which would be filled by forces "directly hostile to Russian interests". In the case of Moldova, Lieutenant General Lebed refused to withdraw Russian forces, in order to sustain a military presence there and in the Balkan region in general. A Russian military presence in Moldova represented (1) an effort to counter-encircle Ukraine; (2) an attempt to block Moldova from merging with Romania; and (3) pressure to impel Moldova to join the CIS.¹²⁵ On the other hand, as a sovereign state, Moldova repeatedly asked that the Russian troops withdraw from Moldovan territory. In response, Moscow claimed that the 14th Army was 'playing a peacekeeping role and preventing bloodshed' in the Transdniestrian region.¹²⁶ On the other hand, Russia continues to view the Russian military force as a stabilizing factor. Many inhabitants and officials of the self-proclaimed TMR believe that the 14th Army protects them against the right bank and contributes to a stable political situation in the region, whereas in Chisinau, its presence is regarded as creating an atmosphere of instability.¹²⁷

After the 1992 cease-fire, the Transdniestrian regime has seen the presence of Russian troops, both those in the Joint Peacekeeping Forces and those based in Tiraspol, as a guarantee of its de facto independence against a possible attack.

¹²⁴ William Hill, 'Making Istanbul a Reality: Moldova, Russia, and Withdrawal from Transdniestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 2, 2002, p.134.

¹²⁵ Hall Gardner, *Dangerous Crossroads – Europe, Russia and the Future of NATO*, London: Praeger Publishers, 1997, pp.199-200.

¹²⁶ Alexander V. Kozhemiakin and Roger E. Kanet, 'Russia and its Western Neighbours in the 'Near Abroad'', in Roger E. Kanet and Alexander Kozhemiakin (eds), *The Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, London: Macmillan, 1997, pp.36-37.

¹²⁷ Dmitri Trenin, 'Russian and Western Interests in Preventing, Managing and Settling Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union', in Bruno Coppieters, a. Zverev and Dmitri Trenin (eds), *Commonwealth and Independence in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998, p.182.

Tiraspol leaders have lobbied hard in Moscow against any steps, including withdrawal of Russian forces. Tiraspol's efforts found considerable support among certain conservative and nationalist segments of the Russian legislature.¹²⁸ William Hill argues that the continued presence of a Russian army in this area - more than 1,000 km west of Russia's borders - also raises concerns in the neighboring states of Moldova and is viewed by them as internationally destabilizing. In this context, the strategic importance of the territory of Moldova, lying at the crossroads of the Slav world, the Black Sea and the Balkans, needs to be kept in mind.¹²⁹

Despite independence, Moldova has been dependent on Russia because of powerful political factors (an influential minority, politically and economically active), cultural elements (the dominant role played by the Russian language and culture in the Soviet Union), economic links (import/export trade and dependency on gas and electricity imports from Russia) and military reasons (the presence of Russian troops on Moldova's territory since 1992 which still keep Moldova deep in the Russian sphere of influence). All these factors have been used by Moscow diplomacy that declared the relationship with former Soviet space a priority of Russia's foreign affairs, including its relations with Moldova.¹³⁰

On 8 December 1991, the Republics of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine concluded in Minsk the Convention of Creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and put an end, to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a subject of the international law and a geopolitical block. The Republic of Moldova adhered to the CIS on 21 December when its first president, Mircea Snegur, signed the Additional Protocol to the Convention at Alma Ata with the further mention that

¹²⁸ William Hill, 'Making Istanbul a Reality: Moldova, Russia, and Withdrawal from Transdnestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 2, 2002, p.134.

¹²⁹ Ibid. , p.5.

¹³⁰ Liliana Vitu, 'Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova: Does Moldova's Eastern Orientation Inhibit its European Aspirations?', Available at http://www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/70/en/vitu_teza.pdf, 2004, Accessed on March 5 2006, p.17.

Moldova would not be part of the political-military component, because of its status of neutrality.¹³¹

In 1992, the Russian government applied pressure on Moldova to become a full member of the CIS. However, the pro-Romanian Popular Front in the Moldovan parliament succeeded in blocking this. After the parliament failed to ratify the CIS agreements, on 1 August 1993 the CIS imposed high taxes on all Moldovan goods, placing immense strain on the Moldovan economy.¹³²

The picture changed completely after the 27 February 1994 parliamentary elections when the parties favorable to joining the CIS obtained a comfortable majority. On 8 April 1994, the Moldovan Parliament ratified the CIS documents, agreeing by 80 votes in favor to 18 against. However, according to the government spokesman, Moldova's membership of the CIS would not entail joining the system of collective security or any military/political blocs.¹³³

When CIS membership was finally placed on the parliament's agenda, it sparked the most significant confrontation between pan-Romanianists and pro-independence forces since the declaration of independence. As Romania moved closer towards membership in the Council of Europe in summer 1993, many Moldovan parliamentarians began to see the vote on ratifying CIS membership as a choice between "West" and "East", between orienting Moldova's future development towards Romania and Europe or towards Russia and the former Soviet Republics. As the pan-Romanianists in the parliament argued, ratifying the Alma Ata accords would "legitimize the expansionist policy of Russia in this

¹³¹ Ibid. , pp.19-20.

¹³² Dov Lynch, *Russian Pecakeeping Strategies in the CIS The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, Palgrave in association with The Royal Institute of International Affairs Russia and Eurasia Programme, 2000, p.119.

¹³³ ---, 'Transdniestrian Conflict - Origins and Main Issues', *CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre*, Vienna, 1994, Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html> , Accessed on 10 September 2005, p.1.

region, undermine the movement for national rebirth and wound our national dignity”.¹³⁴

A comparison with Gagauzia is in order, here. While Gagauzia’s demographic and socio-economic background are different than Transdnestr, the concentration of a Russophone population made for some similar demands. However, unlike the conflict with Transdnestr, Moldova was able to successfully resolve the dispute involving the ethnic Gagauzi located in the country’s southern districts. The Gagauzi are a Turkic language-speaking people of Orthodox Christian faith who were highly russified during the Soviet period, and even today, Russian remains their primary language of commerce and education. The Gagauzi initially participated in the meetings of the Popular Front under their umbrella organization, Gagauz Halki (the Gagauz People). However as the Front transformed from a reformist to a pan-Romanian organization, the Gagauz Halki demanded independence for the Gagauzi. In August 1990 the Gagauzi announced the formation of their republic with Comrat as the capital. They adopted national symbols and organized a local defence force.

In Gagauzia, the context of conflict with the Moldovan government was also very different from the Transdnestr one. Gagauzia lacked an industrial base to its economy and was much more dependent on Chisinau for its economic viability and lacked a compelling foreign policy issue that would have been of interest to Russia (for example, a 14th Army or significant ethnic Russian population). Yet these factors, combined with the Moldovan military defeat in Bendery, created a positive environment for compromise. Discussions occurred throughout 1993, but after the February 1994 parliamentary elections, the repudiation of the Popular Front elites and overwhelming victory of the former nomenklatura, the Moldovan government entered into a final phase of negotiations with the elected Gagauz elite.

¹³⁴ Charles King, ‘Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism’, *Slavic Review*, Vol.53, No.2, 1994, p.353.

In late 1994, a solution to the problem of the status of the Gagauz was reached. In negotiations between the Moldovan authorities and Gagauzia undertaken by an inter-parliamentary commission, both parties agreed to a change in the terminology of the draft agreement: the term “national state autonomy,” which the Gagauz had insisted on, was to be replaced by the term “national territorial autonomy,” which was preferred by Chisinau. The provisions for the status of national territorial autonomy were set out in Article 111 of the new Moldovan draft constitution and included elements of self-government. Finally, on December 23, 1994, the Moldovan Parliament passed a law, “On the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia,” formally granting the region the status of an autonomous territorial entity. Article 1 of the law states that Gagauzia is a ‘constituent part of the Republic of Moldova’.¹³⁵

To conclude, the Moldovan government and international organizations like the OSCE hoped that the special status of Gagauzia would serve as a model for Transdnistr. The irony is that many Transdnistrians are unwilling to accept territorial autonomy precisely because of developments in Gagauzia since 1995.¹³⁶ The Gagauz solution did not influence negotiations over the status of Transdnistr, as Transdnistr had little interest in attaining this kind of special status. The dominant position of the Transdnistr leadership was to gain formal independence and then enter into a negotiated relationship with the Moldovan government.

3.6. Conclusion

The third part of the thesis has studied the important events taken place related to the Transdnistr problem in the period between 1990 and 1992. The Russian Federation has played an important role in the Transdnistr conflict by providing

¹³⁵ Edward Ozhiganoz, ‘The Republic of Moldova: Transdnistr and the 14th Army’, in Alexei Arbatov, Abram Chayes, Antonia Handler Chayes and Lara Olson (eds), *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives*, Cambridge: MA: MIS Press, 1997, pp.191-193.

¹³⁶ Steven D. Roper, ‘Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdnistr and Gagauzia’, in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, pp.117-118.

political, economic and military support to the Transdniestrian authorities since the disagreements between the conflicting parties began. Because, Russia has tended to value the Transdniestr region as a geo-strategic instrument in the post-Cold War era. In this chapter, the main causes of escalation of the Transdniestr conflict and the Russian factor in this conflict have been examined. In the following chapter, as an international organization, the OSCE's involvement and its role in the Transdniestr problem will be studied in the period between 1993 and 1999.

CHAPTER IV

THE OSCE INVOLVEMENT IN THE ATTEMPTS AT SOLVING THE TRANSDNIESTR CONFLICT (1993-1999)

This chapter, first of all, will explore the OSCE involvement into the Transdniestrian conflict and its attempts to solve this problem. Furthermore, plans and initiatives such as Moscow Memorandum, Odessa and Kiev Documents offered and implemented for the settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict until 1999, will be discussed.

4.1. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is a pan-European security body whose 56 participating states span the geographical area from Vancouver to Vladivostok. As a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter (UN), the OSCE is a primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. The OSCE's unique approach to security is both comprehensive and co-operative: comprehensive in that it deals with three dimensions of security: the human, the politico-military and the economic/environmental. It therefore addresses a wide range of security-related concerns, including arms control, preventive diplomacy, confidence and security-building measures, human rights, democratization and economic and environmental issues; and it is co-operative in that all the States participating in OSCE activities are equal in status and not bound by treaty, so that decisions are taken by consensus on a politically, but not legally-binding basis.¹³⁷

The origins of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) lie in the brief of détente between East and West during the early to mid-1970s.

¹³⁷ ---, 'OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe)', Available At <http://www.osce.org>, , Accessed on 5 January 2005.

Established by the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, it had 35 signatories including all European states (except Albania but including the Soviet Union), Canada and the United States.¹³⁸

The resulting 1975 Helsinki Final Act defined ten principles on which all CSCE signatories agreed to base their relations: respect for each state's sovereignty; refraining from the threat or use of force; acceptance of the inviolability of frontiers; respect for the territorial integrity of states; pursuit of the peaceful settlement of disputes; non-intervention in each other's internal affairs; respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; recognition of the equal rights and right to self-determination of peoples; commitment to co-operation among states; and fulfilment of obligations under international law.¹³⁹

The Cold War situation was characterized by two politico-military blocs separated by a clear dividing line. The CSCE was an essential instrument for the leaders on both sides. The CSCE's basic approach consisted in establishing a framework for continuous dialogue and elaborating a comprehensive set of security-related principles and commitment. The CSCE's dominant functions at that time concerned norm-setting and security-building.¹⁴⁰

The CSCE formally proclaimed a new era for Europe and itself in the 'Charter of Paris for a New Europe'. This charter announced that 'a new era of democracy, peace and unity in Europe' had started. To secure its place within this terrain, the CSCE undertook to institutionalize and consolidate its process. At the Budapest meeting, the CSCE officially changed its name to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to be effective from 1 January 1995.

¹³⁸ Ibid. , p. 95.

¹³⁹ Andrew Cottey, 'The OSCE Crowning Jewel or Talking Shop?', in Martin A. Smith and Graham Timmins (eds), *Uncertain Europe: Building a New European Security Order?*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp.44-45.

¹⁴⁰ Fergus Carr and Theresa Callan, *Managing Conflict in the New Europe The Role of International Institutions*, Palgrave, 2002, pp.96-97.

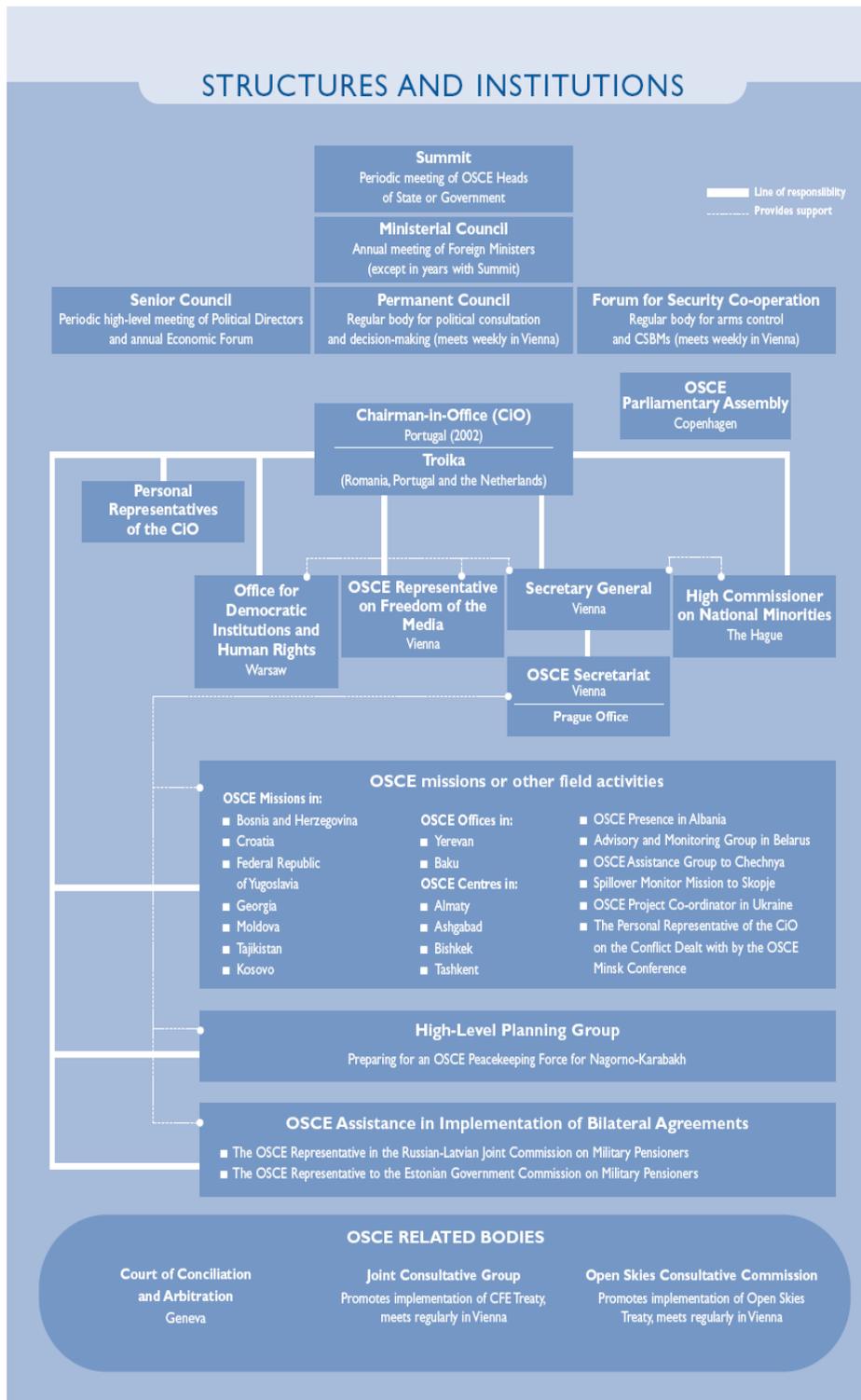


Figure 1: OSCE's Structures and Institutions.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ ---, 'OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe)', Available At <http://www.osce.org>, Accessed on 5 January 2005.

Since the early 1990s the OSCE has developed a leading role in conflict management, in particular in the fields of conflict prevention and post-conflict peace-building. In response to the growing challenge of complex, ethno-political conflicts, the OSCE has developed a number of innovative practices. The Conflict Prevention Centre is one such remarkable innovation one of the 1992 Helsinki summit, the new post of High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) is another. The HCNM is mandated to provide 'early warning' and 'early action' in relation to potential conflicts involving national minorities.

The option of peacekeeping, enshrined in the 1992 Helsinki Document, is based on the traditional interpretation of the concept. As a regional organization under Article 52 of the UN Charter, the OSCE may deploy a peacekeeping force but only with the consent of the warring parties and in the context of a cease-fire in place.¹⁴² The OSCE has also developed an extensive network of semi-permanent missions based in areas of potential conflict. By the end of the 1990s, the OSCE had missions (or similar field operations) deployed in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Chechnya, Georgia, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

These missions have become involved in a wide range of activities relating to post-conflict peace-building, democratisation and demilitarisation, including the organisation of democratic elections, promoting dialogue between antagonistic political forces, supporting the re-establishment of governmental institutions, encouraging respect for human and minority rights and facilitating arms control agreements.¹⁴³

The Lisbon Summit of 1996 strengthened the key role of the OSCE in fostering security and stability in all their dimensions. It stimulated the development of an

¹⁴² Ibid. , pp.96-97.

¹⁴³ Andrew Cottey, 'The OSCE Crowning Jewel or Talking Shop?', in Martin A. Smith and Graham Timmins (eds), *Uncertain Europe: Building a New European Security Order?*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp.49-50.

OSCE Charter for European Security, eventually adopted at the Istanbul Summit, in November 1999. This was instrumental in improving the operational capabilities of the Organization and co-operation with its partners. A revised CFE Treaty was also signed at the Istanbul Summit by 30 OSCE participating States.¹⁴⁴

4.2. The Inclusion of the Transdniestr Problem in the OSCE Agenda

Historically, the OSCE's primary role has been as a pan-European framework for the negotiation of agreements on human rights, confidence-building and arms control. Since the Cold War, however, Europe's security problems have become increasingly diverse and often subregional in character. Subregional conflicts have broken out in the former Yugoslavia, Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia, Chechnya and Tajikistan.¹⁴⁵

Accordingly, since 1992 the OSCE has played an active role in trying to resolve regional and ethnic conflicts in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. The OSCE's involvement in post-Soviet regional and ethnic conflicts stems from its prominence in Europe's post-Cold War security architecture, for the OSCE is the primary institution for responding to substate sources of conflict and challenges to security. Conflicts are understood in terms of violations of OSCE principles and norms which govern sub-state behaviour and serve as the foundation for state stability and security. The OSCE has an approach to security which prominently features a concern with sub-state threats arising from the failure to implement OSCE commitments, including respect for democratic freedoms, the rule of law and the protection of national minorities. The protection of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, is considered by the OSCE to be 'an essential foundation of democratic civil

¹⁴⁴ ---, 'OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe)', Available At <http://www.osce.org>, , Accessed on 5 January 2005.

¹⁴⁵ Andrew Cottey, 'Subregional Cooperation and the New European Security Architecture', in Andrew Cottey (ed.), *Subregional Cooperation in the New Europe-Building Security, Prosperity and Solidarity from the Barents to the Black Sea*, London: Macmillan Press, 1999, p.186.

society'.¹⁴⁶ On this basis, the OSCE has intervened to prevent, manage and settle regional conflicts featuring these elements. In particular, its efforts have been based on a predetermined interpretation of the outcome of these regional conflicts whereby the state's territorial integrity must be respected at all costs.

The OSCE Mission to Moldova was established on 4 February 1993 and started to work in Moldova's capital Chisinau in April of the same year. It opened a branch office in the Transdnestrian administrative centre Tiraspol in February 1995 and an Office in Bendery in May 2003. The Mission's primary task is to facilitate a lasting political settlement of the Transdnestrian conflict. Besides the political status negotiations, its activities cover a broad spectrum of issues, including democratic transformation, human rights, combating trafficking in human beings and military security.¹⁴⁷

The mandate of the Mission consists of the following points: facilitate the achievement of a lasting political settlement of the conflict, and assist parties in consolidating the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova along with an understanding about a special status for the Transdnestrian region; gather and provide information on the situation in the region, including the military situation; investigate specific incidents and assess their political implications; encourage the implementation of an agreement on the complete withdrawal of foreign troops from the country; provide advice and expertise on human and minority rights, democratic transformation, repatriation of refugees, definition of a special status of the Transdnestrian region; initiate a visible OSCE presence in the region and establish contacts with all parties to the conflict, local authorities and population. On 9 December 1999, the scope of the mandate was expanded by Permanent Council decision no. 329 to include: ensuring transparency of the

¹⁴⁶ Natalie Mychajlyszyn, 'The OSCE and Regional Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.197.

¹⁴⁷ ---, 'OSCE Mission to Moldova-Overview', Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html>, Accessed on 10 August 2005.

removal and destruction of Russian ammunition and armaments; coordinating financial and technical assistance to facilitate withdrawal and destruction.¹⁴⁸

Since 1993, the definition of the status of the Transdnestrian region is the most important and challenging task for the OSCE Mission to Moldova. Alongside Russia and Ukraine, the OSCE Mission acts as co-mediator in a five-sided negotiation process aimed at finding a final and comprehensive settlement of the Transdnestrian conflict.

The Mission facilitates meetings between the two parties and works together with the co-mediators and both parties in a five-sided negotiation process. The aim of the negotiations is to find a lasting political settlement of the conflict. In its Report No. 13 of November 1993 the Mission laid out for the first time basic principles on a special status for Transdnestr. Since then, together with the co-mediators, it has tabled different proposals on a final settlement and brokered agreements on confidence-building measures and on the fundamental basis of the relationship between the two sides. The Mission also organized several conferences where foreign, Moldovan and Transdnestrian experts discussed different models for a final settlement.¹⁴⁹

The OSCE's 1993 report for the final status of Transdnestr states that:

The Mission's 1993 report calls for a lasting political settlement 'consolidating the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova along with an understanding about a special status for the Transdnestr region'. The Mission considers the restoration of Moldova's territorial integrity the prime objective of its work. Due to the linguistic, historic, and partly ethnic differences between the left and the right bank of the Dniestr and against the background of the armed conflict, the Mission considers the CSCE's call for a special status to be justified.

¹⁴⁸ ---, 'OSCE Mission to Moldova-Mandate', Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13174.html>, Accessed on 10 August 2005.

¹⁴⁹ ---, 'OSCE Mission to Moldova-Conflict Resolution and Negotiation', Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13426.html>, Accessed on 10 August 2005.

The Mission's 1993 report states that granting a special status to Transdniestr is key to a peaceful settlement of the conflict:

Transdniestr cannot successfully be governed within a centralized state. On the other hand, it cannot hope to obtain international recognition or a 'confederalization' of Moldova, as its leadership proposed. The Mission proposes the setting up of a Special Region of Transdniestr with its own regional executive, elective assembly, and court. This status will be established by agreement between both sides and implemented by a Moldovan law. It should be guaranteed by a provision in the new constitution. The Special Region will be an integral part of the Republic of Moldova but enjoy considerable self-rule.

The OSCE's report has some statements concerning the future of Transdniestr in terms of political governance:

In case Moldova chooses to give up statehood in order to merge with another country, the Special Region of Transdniestr would be guaranteed the right of 'external self-determination', i.e. to determine its own future. Finding a special status for Transdniestr will not solve every problem. In addition to it, a proportional representation of Transdniestr in the Moldovan Parliament and some central key bodies (such as the top courts and some central ministries) must be assured. Ethnic and linguistic minorities will have to be protected on both sides of the Dniestr.¹⁵⁰

Finally, this report remarks the necessity of the withdrawal of the Russian troops and equipments.

Finally, the Mission's mandate calls not only for an agreement on the future status of Transdniestr but, in this context, also for 'the early, orderly and complete withdrawal of foreign troops'. The Mission, therefore, recommends that Russia speed up the withdrawal of her 14th Army from Moldova.¹⁵¹

Changes in the Mission leadership very often led to a change in style and strategies. However, some basic principles were fixed by the mandate and other OSCE documents: respect for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova,

¹⁵⁰ ---, 'Report No. 13 by the CSCE Mission to Moldova', 1993, Available At http://www1.osce.org/documents/mm/1993/11/454_en.pdf, Accessed on 5 October 2005, p.1.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. , pp.7-8.

the understanding that a broad autonomy has to be arranged for Transdniestr and the call for the complete and orderly withdrawal of Russian troops. On 28 April 1994, the parties declared their willingness to solve the conflict peacefully according to OSCE principles.¹⁵²

4.3. The OSCE Involvement in the Transdniestr Conflict between 1993 and 1996

From the OSCE point of view, reinforcement of the territorial integrity of Moldova along with an understanding about a special status for Transdniestr is the declared policy of all OSCE States.¹⁵³ The July 1992 cease-fire agreement provided for joint meetings of Moldovan and Transdniestr working groups charged with drafting principles for a peace settlement. At the first joint meeting, major differences were evident. The Moldovans proposed a draft that envisioned granting Transdniestr local self-government, whereas the Transdniestr working groups suggested establishing a Moldovan confederation and clearly defined the powers of the confederation's members.¹⁵⁴

Direct talks between Moldovan authorities and the Transdniestrian leadership on a political settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict were initiated in early 1993. The Transdniestrian legislature tabled a 'draft treaty on the separation of powers between the subjects of the Moldovan confederation', which would yield virtual independence for Transdniestr. The two subjects would be equal independent states subject to international law, but with a single membership in the CIS. This virtual independence for Transdniestr was vehemently opposed in Chisinau, and

¹⁵² Claus Neukirch, 'Transdniestr and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, pp.126-127.

¹⁵³ ---, 'Transdniestrian Conflict - Origins and Main Issues', *CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre*, Vienna, 1994, Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html>, Accessed on 10 September 2005, p.5.

¹⁵⁴ Edward Ozhiganoz, 'The Republic of Moldova: Transdniestr and the 14th Army', in Alexei Arbatov, Abram Chayes, Antonia Handler Chayes and Lara Olson (eds), *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives*, Cambridge: MA: MIS Press, 1997, p.189.

was met by a counter-proposals in the shape of a draft law on a special status for Transdnestr within the Republic of Moldova, which was discussed in the Moldovan parliament during 1993. However, this was rejected by Transdnestr.¹⁵⁵

TMR parliamentarians proposed the establishment of a “Moldavian Confederation” as a member of the CIS, consisting of equal and independent states subject to international law. Moldovan representatives aimed at restoring national unity with a “special constitutional and legal status being granted to the Transdnestrian regions of the Republic”.¹⁵⁶

In the early days of independence the Moldovan government advocated a unitary state, probably in reaction to long decades of Russification. Since then, Moldova has been ready to recognize a special status for Transdnestr, even declaring that everything is negotiable with the exception of the idea of granting it a status as a subject of international law. A draft law on a special status for Transdnestr was discussed in the Parliament in Chisinau in 1993, but without the participation of the Transdnestrian delegates.¹⁵⁷

Moldovan President Mircea Snegur has accepted the proposal that Transdnestr should have a special legal status within Moldova. Indeed, on the basis of the accord signed between Snegur and Boris Yeltsin in July 1992, which established a joint Russian-Moldovan-Transdnestrian peace-keeping force along the Dniestr River, the president worked to hammer out a comprehensive settlement on local autonomy for the east-bank region. A set of “Basic Principles” proposed by the Moldovan government would recognize the special “historical, social and cultural characteristics” of the current “Transdnestrian Moldovan Republic’. The five

¹⁵⁵ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, ‘Moldova and the Transdnestrian Conflict’, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, p.10.

¹⁵⁶ ---, ‘Transdnestrian Conflict - Origins and Main Issues’, *CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre*, Vienna, 1994, Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html>, Accessed on 10 September 2005, p.5.

¹⁵⁷ ---, ‘Transdnestrian Conflict - Origins and Main Issues’, *CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre*, Vienna, 1994, Available At <http://www.osce.org/moldova/13173.html>, Accessed on 10 September 2005, p.5.

east-bank raions and the city of Tiraspol would be defined as the “Transdnestrian Self-Administered Territory” with power over budgetary decisions, minimum wage levels, taxation, export/import licenses, foreign economic relations, health care and social services, police forces and other fields.¹⁵⁸

As a result, pro-Romanian nationalists lost their position in government after elections in February 1994, and in a referendum shortly afterwards, 95 percent backed the concept of a fully independent Moldova. In response, the Chisinau government introduced a new constitution in July which backed up the earlier cease-fire agreement and guaranteed minority rights to all people in Moldova.¹⁵⁹

The Russian side suggested that the mission’s report dated November 13, 1993, should serve as the basis for the negotiations. This report asserted that the key to a peaceful settlement was recognition that the return of Transdnestr to its former status as a subordinate part of a unitary Moldovan state was impossible, and recommended that Transdnestr should be given a special status in the Moldovan Republic.¹⁶⁰

With the Gagauz dispute resolved using a “national territorial” approach, a similar outcome was likely for Transdnestr. Article 111 of the Constitution, adopted in 1994, states that special conditions and forms of autonomy, defined according to special statuses by organic laws, can be granted to the localities on the left bank of the Dniestr. Tiraspol, however, argues that the Gagauz approach is unacceptable. According to Transdnestrian Parliament Chairman Grigory Maracutsa: “The recipe is unacceptable for Transdnestr not because Tiraspol is ruled by prouder leaders, but because Transdnestr has matured as a separate state”. Jeff Chinn

¹⁵⁸ Charles King, ‘Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism’, *Slavic Review*, Vol.53, No.2, 1994, p.359.

¹⁵⁹ Mike Bowker, *Russian Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War*, London: Dartmouth, 1997, pp.194-195.

¹⁶⁰ Edward Ozhiganov, ‘The Republic of Moldova: Transdnestr and the 14th Army’, in Alexei Arbatov, Abram Chayes, Antonia Handler Chayes and Lara Olson (eds), *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives*, Cambridge: MA: MIT Press, 1997, p.192.

argues that this differentiation is important: Transdniestr has been establishing state administrative structures throughout the left bank and Bendery since 1992. It has indeed “matured as a separate state”, in much the same way that the successor states themselves have matured during this time.¹⁶¹

In 1995, at the end of January, representatives from Moldova and the Transdniestr approved the basic principles for resolving the conflict in the region. Colonel Nicolae Kirtoaca, the state adviser to the president of Moldova, said the text of the agreement, when finalized, would include principles for “recognition of distinctive features of the formation of regions and will dictate what kind of status the Transdniestr region receives in the Republic of Moldova.” He added that “we mainly agreed that the Transdniestr region is a part of the Republic of Moldova. We reached a general consensus that Transdniestr has its distinct features in comparison with other regions of the republic. Therefore, it should be given special status, but not at the expense of the republic’s territorial integrity and sovereignty.”¹⁶²

In 1995, Ukraine became the third official ‘mediator’ in the Transdniestrian conflict and eventual ‘guarantor’ of a settlement. On 19 January 1996, Russia, Ukraine and Moldova signed a Joint Declaration recognising the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova.¹⁶³ In order to facilitate the withdrawal of Russian troops by putting in place a stable political settlement, in 1995 Moldovan President Snegur and Transdniestrian leader Smirnov signed an agreement to refrain from the use of military force or political, economic, or other forms of pressure against each other. The two sides also requested Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE to serve as guarantors of a political settlement between them. This agreement in effect accepted Transdniestr as an equal partner in the

¹⁶¹ Jeff Chinn, ‘The Case Transdniestr (Moldova)’, in Lena Jonson and Clive Archer (eds), *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996, p.115.

¹⁶² Neil V. Lamont, ‘Ethnic Conflict in the Transdniestr’, *Military Review*, Dec 1994-Feb 1995, No. 1, pp.65-66.

¹⁶³ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, ‘Moldova and the Transdniestrian Conflict’, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, p.11.

political settlement negotiations, and called for the establishment of ‘state-legal’ relations.¹⁶⁴

4.4. 1997 Moscow Memorandum

In spring 1997, Russian Foreign Minister Evgeny Primakov suggested the formation of a ‘common state’ as a way out of the deadlock. This led to the signing a ‘Memorandum of Understanding on the Bases for the Normalization of Relations between the Republic of Moldova and Transdnistr’ on 8 May 1997 in Moscow with Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as guarantors.¹⁶⁵

The Moscow Memorandum stipulated a “common state” by reaffirming the territorial integrity of Moldova. The two parties and the three guarantors agreed that “the Parties shall build their relations in the framework of a common state within the borders of the MSSR as of January of the year 1990.” The text established what was called “state-legal relations” between the two sides, the details of which were to be determined later. Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE were invited to continue as mediators. The text further welcomed the willingness of Russia and Ukraine to act as guarantor states for observance of the settlement, requested the assistance of the OSCE and the CIS, and determined that the presence of the peacekeeping force would continue.

The draft initially suggested making the CIS the leading institutional structure for implementing any concrete peace agreement. After strong objections from Ukraine and Moldova, the draft went through several revisions until the OSCE was given that role instead. In the memorandum the OSCE was given responsibility for the institutional framework and the CIS was only offered the role of providing cooperation. The common state concept confirmed Moldova’s

¹⁶⁴ William Hill, ‘Making Istanbul a Reality: Moldova, Russia, and Withdrawal from Transdnistr’, *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 2, 2002, p.135.

¹⁶⁵ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, ‘Moldova and the Transdnistriian Conflict’, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, p.11.

status as a single subject of international law. At the same time it authorized Transdniestr to pursue its own foreign economic relations, and subjected Moldova's foreign policy to Transdniestr's consent in matters involving Transdniestr's interests.¹⁶⁶

Moldovan President Petru Lucinschi and TMR president Igor Smirnov have held a number of face-to-face meetings to translate the Memorandum's principles into a specific agreement that balances autonomy for Transdniestr with the unity and territorial integrity of Moldova itself. This process produced agreements on military confidence-building measures and economic cooperation. Yet the two principal parties remain far apart on basic political questions, with the Transdniestrians still seeking a measure of autonomy that is barely distinguishable from full sovereignty itself, including demarcated borders and independent membership in the CIS.¹⁶⁷

The Moscow memorandum reflected greater efforts by Moscow to find a political solution and end the conflict around Transdniestr. The common state concept was an innovation, but was subject to different interpretations and did not bring the negotiations on Transdniestr closer to a settlement.¹⁶⁸

Moreover, the memorandum was heavily criticized, in Moldova in particular by the CDPF, and in Transdniestr by the 'ultra-left', proindependence, pro-Russian opposition, such as the Union of Defenders of Transdniestr. There were also widely diverging interpretations of what had actually been agreed. On the Moldovan side, the signing of the Moscow Memorandum was interpreted as providing Transdniestrian acceptance of the territorial integrity of Moldova and thus reunification, while on the left bank it was seen as Moldova's implicit

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. , p.11.

¹⁶⁷ Sherman W. Garnett, 'An Incomplete Settlement in Eastern and Central Europe', in Alexei G. Arbatov, Karl Kaiser and Robert Legvold (eds) , *Russia and The West The 21st Century Security Environment*, London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999, p.146.

¹⁶⁸ Lena Jonson, *Keeping the Peace in the CIS – The Evolution of Russian Policy*, London: International Affairs, 1999, p.40

recognition of the Transdnestrrian republic, which had no intention of becoming an integral part of the Republic of Moldova.¹⁶⁹

4.5. 1998 Odessa - 1999 Kiev Summits

Further negotiations between Moldova and Transdnestr occurred in 1998 which seemed to indicate a more important role being played by the OSCE and Ukraine.¹⁷⁰ With the active support of Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, Lucinschi and Smirnov concluded an agreement in Odessa in March 1998 that called for a reduction in the number of peacekeeping forces and the re-building of the bridges that were destroyed or damaged during the fighting in 1991 and 1992. While the two sides made no progress on the core issue of Transdnestr's status, these confidence-building measures were important and by the summer of 1999, most of the recommendations had been implemented.¹⁷¹

The purpose of the Odessa document was to further develop the Moscow memorandum. Among other things it prescribed a demilitarization process, including reducing the peacekeeping troops and transporting superfluous Russian military material from Transdnestr to Russia, further measures in the negotiation process for developing economic and energy cooperation, and action against drug-trafficking.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnestrrian Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, p.11.

¹⁷⁰ Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS - The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, Palgrave in association with The Royal Institute of International Affairs Russia and Eurasia Programme; 2000, p.124.

¹⁷¹ Steven D. Roper, 'Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdnestr and Gagauzia', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, p.113.

¹⁷² Lena Jonson, *Keeping the Peace in the CIS - The Evolution of Russian Policy*, London: International Affairs, 1999, p.40

At a summit in Kiev on 13 July 1999, both leaders, Lucinschi and Smirnov, together with the Ukrainian President Kuchma and the Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin, signed a joint statement in the presence of the Head of the OSCE Mission.¹⁷³ In Kiev, the signatories noted that “in the absence of historical, religious, national and other contradictions there are no objective obstructions to achievement of a political settlement.” The two sides agreed to intensify negotiations on the status of Transdnestr based on their own proposals presented at the Kiev meeting, as well as those of the mediators.¹⁷⁴

In Kiev, the two sides agreed to establish five ‘common spaces’ including a common border, defence, judicial, economic and cultural space. Lucinschi and Smirnov left it to the expert groups to elaborate these spaces, and even in Kiev, it was clear that they had different interpretations. Lucinschi stated that a common defence space would be based on the creation of a single military force while Smirnov insisted that Transdnestr would maintain a separate military. Moreover, Smirnov argued that any discussion concerning weapons and ammunition in Transdnestr was a matter for Moscow and Tiraspol.¹⁷⁵

On the other hand, in the Kiev Summit, the differences concerning the Transdnestr’s status issue remained fundamental. The Transdnestrian position, according to which the common state consists of two equal subjects, Moldova and Transdnestr, who work together in all spheres of activities, including the political one, on a contract basis was unacceptable not only to the Moldovan side, but also to the OSCE. The latest drafts produced by the Transdnestrian side have not detracted from this extreme position, whereas the Moldovan side has not been

¹⁷³ Claus Neukirch, ‘Transdnestr and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr’, *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, p.129.

¹⁷⁴ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, ‘Moldova and the Transdnestrian Conflict’, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, pp.11-12.

¹⁷⁵ Steven D. Roper, ‘Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdnestr and Gagauzia’, in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, pp.114-115.

ready to drop the idea of a 'unitary state'. The latter stance is not only unacceptable to Tiraspol but is also disapproved of by the OSCE.¹⁷⁶

Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, has been a significant actor in this conflict. Prior to his June 2000 visit to Chisinau, many Moldovan politicians hoped that Putin would unequivocally support the Istanbul declaration and revitalize the negotiation process. In fact, Putin's discussions with Lucinschi focused on the rescheduling of Moldova's gas debt and the status of Transdnestr. While Putin expressed his support for Moldova's independence and territorial integrity, he also stated that Russia would only 'try' to withdraw troops from Transdnestr as required by the Istanbul declaration. At the end of his visit, Putin announced the formation of a new commission to resolve the conflict. Significantly, he appointed Yevgenii Primakov, former prime minister and architect of the 1997 memorandum, as the head of the commission. Leading Moldovan politicians expressed anxieties over Primakov's ability to be even-handed. Gheorghe Marin, a leading Moldovan parliamentarian, stated that he was concerned whether Primakov would interpret the concept of a 'common state' from the Transdnestrian perspective. Putin's policy, consequently, appears to have returned to the pre-Istanbul position of Russia on the 'synchronization' of an agreement on the status of Transdnestr with the removal of Russian forces.¹⁷⁷

On 25 February 2001 the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) won the Moldovan parliamentary elections by a large margin. With slightly over 50 percent of the popular vote, the PCRM received 71 out of the 101 mandates in the Moldovan parliament. Thus, the Moldovan Communists have gained control of parliament, have been able to change the Constitution, have formed a government and elected their First Secretary as Head of State. On 4 April 2001, Vladimir Voronin was elected President of the Republic of Moldova with significant implications for the settlement of the conflict.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Claus Neukirch, 'Transdnestr and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, p.129.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.115.

In the new government's programme, the settlement of the Transdniestrian crisis and wider economic co-operation with the former Soviet republics will be the primary objectives of the new government. Claus Neukrich argues that at first glance, one might actually argue that after the Communists came back to power in Chisinau, the prospects for the solution to the Transdniestrian conflict increased considerably.¹⁷⁹ However, the Transdniestrian conflict is fuelled by different issues now than it was in 1990/92. Today, the stabilisation of the status quo is mainly based on the interests of power in Tiraspol as well as of 'profiteers' in Chisinau. It is further reinforced by the interests of the Russian Federation in the region, which in the past has used the Transdniestrian conflict to gain maximum influence in Moldova and to prevent the withdrawal of its troops. Thus, even the landslide victory of the Moldovan Communists might not defrost the conflict instantly – although the new leadership might be more ready to accept a federalisation of Moldova and although it might be closer to the current leadership in Tiraspol in terms of ideology.¹⁸⁰

President Voronin made achievement of a political settlement with Transdniestria the top priority of his new administration, and met with Transdniestrian leader Smirnov on his third day in office. The first two Voronin-Smirnov meetings, in April and May 2001, went well, with some Moldovan concessions producing a spate of modest agreements. However, President Voronin rapidly grew critical of what he perceived as Smirnov's refusal to reciprocate his concessions. When Tiraspol stalled on a Moldovan proposal to establish joint customs posts along the Transdniestrian controlled stretch of the border with Ukraine, Voronin attempted to implement the plan unilaterally with Ukraine. In conjunction with its entry into the WTO, Chisinau also introduced new customs stamps and refused to allow Transdniestrian enterprises to use the new stamps and seals unless they cleared their exports and imports through Moldovan customs on 1

¹⁷⁸ Claus Neukrich, 'Moldovan Headaches – The Republic of Moldova 120 days after the 2001 Parliamentary Elections', *Working Paper Centre for OSCE Research*, Hamburg, 2001, pp.1-2.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.22-23.

September 2001. The Transdniestrian authorities, which had been able to use Moldovan customs stamps and seals to support their foreign trade and economic ties under a 1996 bilateral customs agreement, complained vehemently against these actions by Chisinau, describing them as “economic blockade” representing a breach of the 1996 agreement. Because, the Moldovan government had provided Transdniestrian authorities with legal customs stamps for Transdniestrian exports since 1996. Both sides ultimately withdrew from the negotiation process.¹⁸¹

4.6. Conclusion

The fourth part of the thesis has primarily been interested in the OSCE’s participation in settling the Transdniestr conflict since 1993. The OSCE has established a mission in Moldova to facilitate the achievement of a working settlement of the conflict. The OSCE has backed the territorial integrity of the republic of Moldova and a broad autonomy to be arranged for the Transdniestr region. The OSCE has also called the complete and orderly withdrawal of Russian troops and equipment from the Transdniestr region of Moldova. As a result, since Russia and the OSCE have had extremely different views on the resolution of the Transdniestr conflict, they have failed in reaching a peaceful settlement of the conflict. In this chapter, the inclusion of the Transdniestr problem in the OSCE agenda has been introduced. In the following chapter, 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit decisions on the Transdniestr issue and Russia’s reactions to these decisions will be analyzed.

¹⁸¹ William Hill, ‘Making Istanbul a Reality: Moldova, Russia, and Withdrawal from Transdniestr’, *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 2, 2002, pp.142-143.

CHAPTER V

RUSSIA'S RESISTANCE TO THE OSCE INITIATIVES CONCERNING THE TRANSDNIESTR CONFLICT (1999-2006)

This chapter, firstly, will aim to explain the decisions of the OSCE Istanbul Summit on Transdnestr issue and Moscow and Transdnestr's reactions to these decisions. Besides, this chapter will focus on resolution efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of this problem since 2002. Finally, different factors which have led an impasse at this conflict will be analyzed in detail.

5.1. The 1999 Istanbul Summit of the OSCE and Its Decisions on the Transdnestr Problem

Apart from the question of the status of Transdnestr, the other key issue is the removal of the Russian forces from Transdnestr. The agreement to withdraw all Russian forces was initially signed in 1994, and while there are less than 2,500 troops remaining, there is an immense stockpile of ammunition and equipment. While Russia has destroyed several tons of ammunition and has transported equipment from Transdnestr, the status of the OGRF has not fundamentally changed since 1995. These forces are a tangible sign of Moldova's conditional sovereignty. Moldova's dependency on Russian energy as well as the Russian market has limited the country's ability to press for a conclusive agreement to resolve the status of these forces.

At the OSCE summit in Istanbul in late 1999, Russia accepted formal deadlines for the destruction or withdrawal of its equipment by the end of 2001, and total troop and stockpiled munitions' withdrawal by the end of 2002 without any conditions and without any linkage to resolving Transdnestr's status.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Liliana Vitu, 'Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova: Does Moldova's Eastern Orientation Inhibit its European Aspirations?' Available at

On 19 November 1999, it was stated in the OSCE Istanbul Summit Declaration that:

We welcome the encouraging steps which have been recently taken in the process of the settlement of the Transdniestrian problem. The Summit in Kiev (July 1999) became an important event in this regard. However, there have been no tangible shifts on the major issue - defining the status of the Transdniestrian region. We reaffirm that in the resolution of this problem the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova should be ensured. We stand for the continuation and deployment of the negotiation process and call on all sides and in particular the Transdniestrian authorities to demonstrate the political will required to negotiate a peaceful and early elimination of the consequences of the conflict.

The Summit Declaration points out some expectations about the Russian military equipment and the Russian troops in Transdniestr:

Recalling the decisions of the Budapest and Lisbon Summits and Oslo Ministerial Meeting, we reiterate our expectation of an early, orderly and complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova. In this context, we welcome the recent progress achieved in the removal and destruction of the Russian military equipment stockpiled in the Transdniestrian region of Moldova and the completion of the destruction of non-transportable ammunition. We welcome the commitment by the Russian Federation to complete withdrawal of the Russian forces from the territory of Moldova by the end of 2002. We also welcome the willingness of the Republic of Moldova and of the OSCE to facilitate this process, within their respective abilities, by the agreed deadline.¹⁸³

William Hill observes here that there were three major new elements in the Istanbul decisions on Moldova: a deadline at the end of 2002 for complete withdrawal; expansion of the mandate of the OSCE Mission to ensure transparency of the withdrawal process and coordination of financial and

http://www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/70/en/vitu_teza.pdf, 2004, Accessed on March 5 2006, p.28.

¹⁸³ ---, 'Istanbul Summit Declaration, 19 November 1999', in Victor-Yves Ghebali and Daniel Warner (eds), *The Operational Role of the OSCE in South-Eastern Europe- Contributing to Regional Stability in the Balkans*, London: Ashgate, 2001, p.106.

technical assistance; and the establishment of a fund for voluntary international financial assistance to be administered by the OSCE. Agreement on a specific deadline, with an interim deadline at the end of 2001 for the withdrawal or destruction of CFE Treaty-Limited Equipment, was the major new step in the Istanbul decisions. The deadline inevitably lent an increased sense of urgency to all parties working to facilitate Russia's implementation of its commitment to withdraw its troops and arms from Moldova. Almost as important was the decision of the Istanbul Summit to give OSCE institutions authority to become involved operationally in supporting the Russian withdrawal. This action enabled the OSCE to offer practical assistance, and not simply political pressure or encouragement in pursuing the withdrawal of Russian arms and troops.¹⁸⁴

With the coming to power of Putin in January 2000, however, the Russian Foreign Ministry backtracked from this commitment and made public a note addressed to the Transdniestrian leadership stating that the military withdrawal would have to coincide with a political agreement on the status of Transdniestria by 2002. But, the Moldovan Foreign Ministry pointed out that the Istanbul declaration made no mention of synchronization, while the Moldovan Foreign Ministry noted that the Istanbul declaration was a binding commitment within the OSCE framework.¹⁸⁵

Although Russia respected its engagements in regard to the first deadline (due to heavy diplomatic pressure and promises of considerable financial support), it missed the second one because of the so-called "technical" obstacles. Up until March 2003, the Transdniestrian authorities used various administrative means and impediments to prevent, or at least to slow down, the withdrawal of Russian troops and equipment, including ostensibly independent groups such as Cossacks and the 'Women of Transdniestria'. As a result, the withdrawal process was not completed in time and the OSCE participating States decided at the Porto

¹⁸⁴ William Hill, 'Making Istanbul a Reality: Moldova, Russia, and Withdrawal from Transdniestria', *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 2, 2002, p.138.

¹⁸⁵ Steven D. Roper, 'Regionalism in Moldova: The Case of Transdniestria and Gagauzia', in James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (eds), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, pp.114-115.

Ministerial to extend the Istanbul deadline to the end of 2003 for the withdrawal of remaining troops and ammunitions, but potentially for a longer period, given the introduction, on Russia's insistence, of the clause that the withdrawal should be conducted "provided the necessary conditions are in place", although the 1999 Istanbul agreement had mentioned no conditions.¹⁸⁶

5.2. Reactions of Moscow and the Transdnestr Region to the OSCE Istanbul Decisions

In November 1999, it was decided at the Istanbul OSCE Summit that the Russian troops and armaments in Transdnestr would be completely and unconditionally withdrawn before the end of 2002. Although this decision was taken with the consent of the Russian government, its implementation might still cause considerable problems. The Russian government clearly aims to maintain its troops in the region until an eventual political deal concerning Transdnestr's political status in the future.¹⁸⁷

Russia was not willing to comply with the terms of the Istanbul agreement, and the OSCE Ministerial Council in Porto in December 2002 agreed to extend the deadline. However, unlike the Istanbul declaration, upon Russian insistence, the Statement in Porto mentioned only a "complete" withdrawal, not an unconditional one. Moreover, the withdrawal had to take place by 31 December 2003, at the latest, "provided necessary conditions are in place". In addition, the Porto statement only acknowledged a Russian "intention" to withdraw, not a clear-cut "obligation". This was perceived as a serious step back and an indication that Russia would be interested in the maintenance of its troops after the agreed

¹⁸⁶ Liliana Vitu, 'Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova: Does Moldova's Eastern Orientation Inhibit its European Aspirations?' Available at http://www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/70/en/vitu_teza.pdf, 2004, Accessed on March 5 2006, p.28.

¹⁸⁷ Arie Bloed, 'Yugoslavia Returns to the International Community', *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 4, 2000, pp.81-82.

deadline. Eventually, however Russia failed to comply even with the Porto deadline.¹⁸⁸

Moscow's position has for a long time been that the withdrawal of its troops and armaments could only be discussed after a political settlement concerning Transdnestr's status has been achieved. This so-called 'synchronization' was definitively discarded by the Istanbul Summit, which fixed a firm deadline for the troop withdrawal, even if a political solution would not have been attained by this time.¹⁸⁹

On the other hand, Transdnestrian authorities reacted with suspicion and hostility to the developments and events during 1999. Transdnestrian authorities refused to permit the dispatch of three trainloads of dual-use military equipment in November 1999 until senior Russian officials promised compensation. In addition, Tiraspol leaders refused absolutely to cooperate or permit work at OGRF facilities in Transdnestr by the OSCE Assessment Mission. Finally, Tiraspol objected that their representatives had not participated in the OSCE Istanbul meeting, and asserted that the Istanbul decisions therefore were not valid or binding for Transdnestr. Tiraspol also advanced the argument that the presence of Russian peacekeeping forces had successfully prevented a resumption of hostilities along the Dniestr, and that withdrawal of Russian forces before a stable political settlement had been reached would endanger peace and stability in the region.¹⁹⁰

The Transdnestr conflict became a major issue at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Maastricht (1-2 December 2003) after the failure by President Voronin to sign

¹⁸⁸ Valeriu Gheorghiu, Oazu Nantoi and Nicu Popescu, 'External Factors in Transdnestrian Conflict Settlement: A Role for the European Union', Institute for Public Policy, Available At <http://ipp.md>, 2004, Accessed on 12 April 2006, p.1.

¹⁸⁹ Arie Bloed, 'Yugoslavia Returns to the International Community', *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 4, 2000, pp.81-82.

¹⁹⁰ William Hill, 'Making Istanbul a Reality: Moldova, Russia, and Withdrawal from Transdnestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 2, 2002, p.139.

the so-called Kozak Memorandum on the principles of federalisation of Moldova. During the Maastricht Council, the US, EU, OSCE and practically all the OSCE member states, except Russia, urged for a sustainable political solution of the conflict settlement, and supported the position of Moldova asking for a multinational peacekeeping force to Transdnistr under the OSCE aegis. Despite an almost general consensus, due to Russia's opposition to include references to the situation in Moldova and Georgia in the final statement, the Council failed to adopt a final position on the two countries. In fact, Russia demonstrated its intention to keep its troops in Moldova and Georgia for an indefinite period of time. Russia's position in Maastricht as well as its references to the "so called Istanbul Russian commitments" expressed in its official statement at the OSCE Council was a clear manifestation of a full contempt not only for Moldova and Georgia, but also for the OSCE as an organization as well as its member states.

From the Moldovan point of view, the Maastricht Council proved once again, that the OSCE's problem is that the Organization does not have the necessary mechanisms for the implementation of its decisions. In addition, it is subject to the veto power of all its member states. Consequently, the rigidly consensual nature of the OSCE prevents the organization from acting more coherently when it comes to issues eventually affecting the interests of other member states, such as the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova.¹⁹¹ Meanwhile, Russia continues to argue that withdrawal must be part of a comprehensive political settlement of the Transdnestrian situation, a policy which is generally referred to as "synchronization."¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Valeriu Gheorghiu, Oazu Nantoi and Nicu Popescu, 'External Factors in Transdnestrian Conflict Settlement: A Role for the European Union', Institute for Public Policy, Available At <http://ipp.md>, 2004, Accessed on 12 April 2006, pp.1-2.

¹⁹² ---, 'Thawing a Frozen Conflict: Legal Aspects of the Separatist Crisis in Moldova', *The Report of the Special Committee on European Affairs Mission to Moldova*, New York, 2006, pp.22-23.

5.3. The Kiev Document (The OSCE's Plan) and Moldova's New Constitution Initiative

In July 2002, ambassadors from Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE officially submitted to Moldova and Transdniestr a project to federalize Moldova under joint mediation and guarantees by all three parties. The plan (the Kiev Document) for Moldova to be transformed into a federation comprised of two parts: Transdniestr and the "proper" Moldova. This federation was to have one president, one government and a two house legislative body. Its laws were to bind on the entire territory. Moldova and Transdniestr would have separate constitutions and symbols. The official language of the entire state would be Moldovan written in the Latin script, but individual parts of the federation could have their own official languages. In order to safeguard the implementation of the agreement, foreign troops would be stationed in the Moldovan Federation under the auspices of the OSCE during the transition period.¹⁹³

The Federation was to have a single currency, the Moldovan leu, and the internal customs taxes were to be abolished. On the international level, the Republic of Moldova had to be under the political and juridical "guarantees" of Russia, Ukraine and OSCE.¹⁹⁴ According to the Kiev document, the three guarantors would supervise the internal working of the federation, its constitution, legislation and the functioning of its institutions. These guarantors would have power to referee the disagreements among federal entities.¹⁹⁵

While Moldovan authorities accepted the OSCE document as the basis for future agreement, Tiraspol chose to treat it as starting point for further negotiations and

¹⁹³ Jacek Wróbel, 'Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Region. Present Situation. Prospects for Settlement. Consequences – Transdniestr', *Prace OSW/CES Studies*, Warsaw, No. 9, 2003, p.55.

¹⁹⁴ Adrian Pop, Gabriela Pascariu, George Anglitoiu and Alexandru Purcaruș, 'Romania and the Republic of Moldova – Between the European Neighbourhood Policy and the EU Enlargement', *European Institute of Romania-Pre-accession Impact Studies*, No. 5, 2005, pp.71-72.

¹⁹⁵ Liliana Vitu, 'Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova: Does Moldova's Eastern Orientation Inhibit its European Aspirations?' Available at http://www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/70/en/vitu_teza.pdf, 2004, Accessed on March 5 2006, p.29.

to lay down conditions demanding recognition of Transdniestra's sovereignty prior to the formation of a Moldovan/Transdniestrian federation or confederation, and the lifting of the "economic blockade" by Moldova.¹⁹⁶

The OSCE plan assumes that the two components of the future federation may be equal. In Moldova the ruling communists and the right wing opposition differ considerably on this matter. The former accept the plan, and a more important role for Moscow in the safeguarding of the future agreement, while the latter are criticising the OSCE plan and voicing fears concerning excessive dependence on Russia, and would even like to exclude Russia from the peace process as they consider it a party to the conflict. On the other hand, Moldova supports the participation of Western states in the safeguarding of the future agreement and the presence of Western troops in the peacekeeping forces.¹⁹⁷

The Kiev Document was powerfully criticized by the opposition and the civil society in Moldova, and by various international analysts and organizations. Over fifty percent of Moldovans considered the idea of federalization as unacceptable, according to an opinion poll published by the Institute of Development and Social Initiative "Viitorul" in 2003, and almost forty percent said the federalization would lead to the disintegration of Moldova as a state.¹⁹⁸

After the OSCE's federalization plan, on 10 February 2003, Moldovan president Vladimir Voronin announced that it was necessary to formulate a new constitution for the federalised Moldova and to involve experts from Transdniestra. This plan, termed "Voronin's initiative", is a follow-up to the OSCE plan. The draft details the main assumptions of the future constitution, namely the formation of a two-tier state apparatus, the creation of a single customs, defence and monetary space

¹⁹⁶ Jacek Wróbel, 'Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Region. Present Situation. Prospects for Settlement. Consequences – Transdniestra', *Prace OSW/CES Studies*, Warsaw, No. 9, 2003, p.55.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.56-57.

¹⁹⁸ Liliana Vitu, 'Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova: Does Moldova's Eastern Orientation inhibit its European Aspirations?', Available at http://www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/70/en/vitu_teza.pdf, 2004, Accessed on March 5 2006, p.29.

that will include the entire federation, and granting Transdnistr the right to regulate language issues in its own territory, Moldovan being the state language and Russian the official language throughout the Moldovan state. Finally, Transdnistr is to be granted the right to self-determination in the event of a change in the international legal status of the Republic of Moldova. This is a means to protect Transdnistr in case Moldova is united with Romania.¹⁹⁹

At the same time, President Voronin invited the Transdnistrians to form a Joint Constitutional Commission (JCC) in February 2003. The Commission was composed of three Moldovan and three Transdnistran negotiators. The formation of the ministry of reintegration and the JCC were part of a larger conflict resolution.²⁰⁰ According to the Voronin initiative, JCC would be established to draft a new constitution within six months. The Commission would be co-chaired by Chisinau and Tiraspol, and supported by the three guarantors as well as the Council of Europe and the EU. Following a two-month period of public consultation on the new constitution, Voronin envisaged a referendum no later than February 2004, with parliamentary elections to take place before February 2005.²⁰¹ The draft was initially approved by Igor Smirnov on 14 February. On 4 April, the Moldovan parliament approved the protocol on the mechanism for the development of the new federal constitution and, on 9 April, the Supreme Council of Transdnistr accepted it.²⁰²

In terms of the basic framework of the federation, one of the most contentious issues was the number of state-territorial entities that should be created. Article 4

¹⁹⁹ Jacek Wróbel, 'Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Region. Present Situation. Prospects for Settlement. Consequences – Transdnistr', *Prace OSW/CES Studies*, Warsaw, No. 9, 2003, pp.55-56.

²⁰⁰ Steven D. Roper, 'Federalization and Constitution-Making as an Instrument of Conflict Resolution', *Demokratizatsiya*, Fall 2004, p.534.

²⁰¹ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnistran Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, pp.13-15.

²⁰² Jacek Wróbel, 'Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Region. Present Situation. Prospects for Settlement. Consequences – Transdnistr', *Prace OSW/CES Studies*, Warsaw, No. 9, 2003, pp.55-56.

of the draft only stated that “state-territorial entities shall be established within the Republic of Moldova.” The proposal did not specify how many territorial formations were to be created and did not provide a mechanism for constitutional revision.²⁰³

The number of entities is an important issue because it deals with the way in which representation will be handled in the new federation. One of the concerns of many opposition parties with the Kiev proposal was the significant legislative power provided to the parliament’s upper house, which represented the federal entities. Article 26 of the proposal provides that “state-territorial entities are represented in the Chamber by an equal number of votes.” Opposition politicians argued that this provision provided an effective Transdniestrian veto over all legislation. In addition, this provision allowed for a substantial overrepresentation of Transdniestrian interests vis-a-vis the rest of the country. During negotiations in summer 2003, the Transdniestrian delegation to the JCC refused to consider any proposal on the upper house that did not provide for 50 percent of the seats allotted to Transdniestrian MPs.²⁰⁴

When we look at Moldova’s relations with the European Union and its impact on Transdniestrian issue, we see some important developments since 2002. In 1994, Moldova was among the first Newly Independent States (NIS), to sign a Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with the European Union which applied the standard framework for cooperation offered to all Soviet successor states.²⁰⁵ In 1999, the new Moldovan government declared European integration the prior strategic objective of its foreign policy. Hence, Moldova has been involved more and more actively into the European and world circuits,

²⁰³ Steven D. Roper, ‘Federalization and Constitution-Making as an Instrument of Conflict Resolution’, *Demokratizatsiya*, Fall 2004, p.534.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* , pp.534-535.

²⁰⁵ Andrei Zagorski, ‘EU Policies Towards Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus’, *Occasional Paper Series*, No. 35, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 2002, pp.4-5.

establishing co-operation relationship at European regional and sub-regional levels.

Concerning the internal situation in the Republic of Moldova, it would be worthwhile to mention that public opinion has tended to be more and more favorable towards European integration. Most political parties and all parliamentary factions adopted declarations related to the European integration option of the Moldovan society. At the same time, the EU is getting closer to Moldova as a result of its enlargement to the east. After the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2003, two extremely important events happened in 2004: on the 2nd of April 2004, seven new states, including Romania, joined NATO and the western border of Moldova became a border with NATO. On the 1st of May 2004, as a result of the accession of ten new states to the EU, Moldova got closer to the EU. In the same period, Moldova, the first western member-state of the CIS, started negotiations on the Action Plan.²⁰⁶

As an important actor for the Transdniestrian conflict, since the beginning of 2003, the EU has taken a series of measures vis-a-vis Moldova and Transdniestr. One can list 10 such initiatives: in February 2003, the EU instituted a visa ban on the Transdniestrian leadership; in March 2003, the EU initiated and mediated negotiations between Moldova and Ukraine on customs and border agreements; from spring 2003, there have been internal discussions in the EU on a possible EU-led post-conflict 'peace consolidation' operation in Transdniestr; during 2003, the EU advised the Joint Constitutional Commission on a new constitution for a united Moldova; in November 2003, EU High Representative Javier Solana intervened to advise the Moldovan government against accepting the so-called 'Kozak memorandum'; in February 2004, the visa ban on Transdniestrian leaders was renewed; from late 2003 to autumn 2004, the EU consulted and then negotiated a bilateral Action Plan with Moldova, as part of the ENP; in August 2004, the visa ban was expanded to include additional Transdniestrian leaders,

²⁰⁶ Valeriu Gheorghiu, 'Moldova on the Way to the European Union: Distance Covered and Next Steps to Be Done', Available At <http://ipp.md>, 2005, Accessed on 10 March 2006, p.3.

and then renewed again for another year in February 2005; in March 2005, an EU special representative to Moldova was appointed; and in autumn 2005, a European Commission delegation was established in Chisinau. Consequently the series of EU initiatives over the last two years have exercised a significant impact on the development of the situation in Moldova and Transdnestr.²⁰⁷

5.4. The Russian Plan (The Kozak Memorandum)

Russian deputy head of administration, Dmitri Kozak, was appointed by President Vladimir Putin to mediate between Moldova and Transdnestr and produce a memorandum that would serve as the basis of a new constitution. Throughout the summer and early fall of 2003, Kozak was engaged in shuttle diplomacy between Moscow, Chisinau, and Tiraspol. Although the exact nature of these discussions was secret, mediators such as the OSCE were aware that Kozak was engaged in a dialogue with the two parties. Indeed, the OSCE wanted to work with Kozak on drafting an agreement, but Putin's presidential Office refused to work with the OSCE.²⁰⁸

Kozak memorandum was elaborated in secrecy and by passing OSCE and Ukraine as mediators, under the guidance of Dmitri Kozak. On November 17, 2003, Russia gave the OSCE and Ukraine a final draft, titled "Memorandum on the Basic Principles of the State Structure of the United State" (also known as the Kozak Memorandum). The Transdnestrians had been very successful in changing many of the institutional features and competencies.²⁰⁹

The Kozak Plan proposed the basic principles of a new constitution for what would become the Federal Republic of Moldova, consisting of a federal territory

²⁰⁷ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnestrian Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, pp.10-11.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. , p.535.

²⁰⁹ Steven D. Roper, 'Federalization and Constitution-Making as an Instrument of Conflict Resolution', *Demokratizatsiya*, Fall 2004, p.536.

and two 'subjects' of the Federation – Transdnestr and Gagauzia. The federal territory would consist of the rest of Moldova, excluding these two subjects. The term 'asymmetric federation' is being used to describe the proposal, since the federal territory and the two subjects would not have equal status. The federal government would be responsible for both the federation's competences and government of the federal territory.²¹⁰

According to Kozak Memorandum, the Moldovan language was to become "state language", with Russian getting the status of "official language". The two entities would have had the right of secession by referendum in the case of union between the federal Moldova and another state or if Moldova would have lost its status as subject of international law. The main federal institutions were to be the Presidency, the Parliament and the Constitutional Court.²¹¹

Steven D. Roper argues that several features of the Kozak Memorandum were highly objectionable. The document provided for a senate in which 50 percent of the twenty-six members would be chosen by the Transdnestrian and Gagauzian territorial units. This is extremely important, because the upper house became the most important veto locus within the federal institutional framework.²¹² In other words, a lower house, elected by proportional representation, would pass legislation by simple majority. All laws would also need the assent of the senate, however, whose representation would be highly disproportionate with respect to population figures: 13 senators elected by the federal lower house, 9 by Transdnestr and 4 by Gagauzia. An alliance of the two subjects could block any law. However the voting strength of Transdnestr would be even stronger since representatives from Transdnestr in the federal lower house could use their votes to elect some more senators from Transdnestr. This disproportion would be even more serious during a transitional period lasting until 2015, before which federal

²¹⁰ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnestrian Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, pp.13-15.

²¹¹ Steven D. Roper, 'Federalization and Constitution-Making as an Instrument of Conflict Resolution', *Demokratizatsiya*, Fall 2004, p.536.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.536.

‘organic laws’ could only be passed with a three-quarters majority in the senate, where Transdnistr would have 34 percent of the seats, and therefore an outright blocking minority. The Senate had extensive powers with the right to veto any piece of legislation regarding the federation. There is a similar situation for the Federal Constitutional Court, which would have nine judges appointed by the lower house, four by Transdnistr and one by Gagauzia. Until 2015, decisions by the court would require no less than nine votes, again giving an outright blocking minority to Transdnistr.²¹³

These institutional features were designed to provide Transdnistr a veto over any legislation that would threaten the leadership. In addition, the Kozak Memorandum included clauses that could be interpreted easily to dissolve the federation. For example, the Kozak Memorandum allowed for subjects of the federation to have the right “to leave the federation in case a decision is taken to unite the federation with another state and (or) in connection with the federation’s full loss of sovereignty.”²¹⁴ On the other hand, the Memorandum had unclear and incomplete security guarantees. A number of 2,000 Russian peacekeeping troops were supposed to watch over the implementation of the Memorandum but the withdrawal calendar was vague, following the progress in achieving the complete demilitarization of the federal territory.

According to Cieslav Ciobanu, this asymmetric federal set-up, if accepted, would have legalized and consolidated the Transdnistriean leadership, condoned the stationing of Russian troops and ammunitions for another 15-20 years as “guarantors” of federalization; and given Tiraspol veto-powers in federal policy-making because of substantial over-representation of Transdnistr and Gagauzia in Moldova’s federal (central) authorities. If implemented, the Moscow’s “federalism model for Moldova”, could be invoked as a precedent for similar

²¹³ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, ‘Moldova and the Transdnistriean Conflict’, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, pp.13-15.

²¹⁴ Steven D. Roper, ‘Federalization and Constitution-Making as an Instrument of Conflict Resolution’, *Demokratizatsiya*, Fall 2004, p.536.

federal solutions in Georgia for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, or in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.²¹⁵

Initially, the Memorandum was welcomed by the Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin as “a realistic project, a compromise for overcoming the territorial, political and economic disunity of Moldovan state”. This characterization could be corroborated with the one made by the leader of the Communist parliamentary majority Victor Stepaniuc who opined that “the Russian proposal is a positive step” by proposing “an asymmetric federalization”. Moscow has adopted the Chisinau stance.²¹⁶

President Smirnov of Transdnestr characterised the document as a compromise able to normalise relations between Moldova and Transdnestr. However, he also wants military guarantees, which are not mentioned in the proposal, and a Treaty providing for a Russian military deployment in Moldova for 30 years. But assuming that the proposal would, in the end, have been endorsed by the Transdnestrian leadership, the Kozak memorandum represented a break with their long-held position that Transdnestr should have equal status with the rest of Moldova.

Most Moldovan opposition parties joined forces against the Russian proposal, insisting instead on unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops from Transdnestr and on EU, US, Romanian and Ukrainian participation in the process.²¹⁷ The Moldovan independent press proved to be an important unifying factor for strong popular opposition both by criticizing the Kremlin proposals and by accusing the

²¹⁵ Ceslav Ciobanu, ‘NATO/EU Enlargement: Moldova and the “Frozen and Forgotten” Conflicts in Post-Soviet States’, *United States Institute of Peace Papers*, Washington DC: 2004, p.10.

²¹⁶ Adrian Pop, Gabriela Pascariu, George Anglitoiu and Alexandru Purcaruș, ‘Romania and the Republic of Moldova – Between the European Neighbourhood Policy and the EU Enlargement’, *European Institute of Romania-Pre-accession Impact Studies*, No. 5, 2005, pp.72-73.

²¹⁷ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, ‘Moldova and the Transdnestrian Conflict’, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, pp.17-18.

Moldovan President for accepting such a plan.²¹⁸ Moldovan civil society and opposition groups felt that the Kozak Memorandum was a betrayal of the state and reinforced in their minds that federalization was an anti-Moldovan plan orchestrated by Russia. The international community was equally concerned about the document. Soon after the Kozak Memorandum was formally announced, a flurry of diplomatic efforts centered around Chisinau. Voronin was in touch with the OSCE Mission to Moldova as well as the Dutch OSCE chairmanship, which stated that there was no consensus in favor of the document. The EU and the U.S. embassy in Moldova also expressed their reservations. Only the Ukrainians, in concert with the Russians, publicly accepted the document. President Voronin realized that the document and process had no domestic or international support and therefore indicated that he would not sign. Eventually, the Moldovan President chose to reject the Russian Plan against the background of Moldovan public pressure and Western diplomatic messages of disapproval.²¹⁹

President Voronin stated that Moldova's European integration option obviously requires the support of the European organizations, in particular of the OSCE, for this settlement plan. Under these conditions Moldova's leadership has described the signing of this memorandum as premature. A visit announced by President Putin to Moldova was cancelled. According to Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Voronin had refused to sign due to interference from Western countries. Moldova and the Kozak memorandum was a key issue at the OSCE ministerial meeting in Maastricht on 1-2 December 2003, and disagreement on Moldova was one of the principal reasons why a final joint declaration was not adopted after the meeting.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Adrian Pop, Gabriela Pascariu, George Anglitoiu and Alexandru Purcaruș, 'Romania and the Republic of Moldova – Between the European Neighbourhood Policy and the EU Enlargement', European Institute of Romania-Pre-accession Impact Studies, No. 5, 2005, p.74.

²¹⁹ Steven D. Roper, 'Federalization and Constitution-Making as an Instrument of Conflict Resolution', *Demokratizatsiya*, Fall 2004, p.536.

²²⁰ Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, 'Moldova and the Transdnestrian Conflict', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No. 1, 2004, pp.17-18.

5.5. The Ukrainian Plan (Yushchenko Plan)

On the 16th -17th of May 2005, during five-side consultations held in the Ukrainian town of Vinnitsa, Ukraine submitted its “Plan for Settlement of the Transdnestr Conflict” based on the seven steps presented on the 22nd of April in Chisinau, as a draft of the Plan for Conflict Settlement.²²¹

New Ukrainian President Youshchenko put forward a Ukrainian settlement plan, entitled towards a settlement through democracy. The Ukrainian Plan’s main idea is to have internationally observed free and fair parliamentary elections in Transdnestr in December 2005, which would bring to power more representative leaders in Transdnestr with whom Chisinau would negotiate a new status for the region. In addition, a new peacekeeping format, and greater involvement of the United States and the EU, is envisaged in all the aspects of conflict settlement. Ukraine also agreed to invite an EU monitoring mission to its border with Transdnestr.²²²

The Yushchenko Plan proposes a status of special territorial administrative entity “in the form of a republic within the Republic of Moldova”. That should have its own constitution, symbols and official languages (Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian) and the right to develop foreign relations in the economic, scientific, technological and humanitarian field, “according to the legislation of the Republic of Moldova”, which would have to be amended in a federal sense. The fundamental law for this new legal order would have to be the one of “basic provisions on the status of Transdnestr” which would have to be adopted by the Moldovan Parliament and include first of all the right of secession (by

²²¹ Oazu Nantoi, ‘The Ukrainian Plan on Transdnestr: Pros and Cons’, *Eurojournal*, 2005, Available At <http://eurojournal.org/files/nantoi1.pdf>, Accessed 1 March 2006, pp.7-8.

²²² Nicu Popescu, ‘The EU in Moldova – Settling Conflicts in the Neighbourhood’, *European Union Institute for Security Studies, Occasional Paper*, Paris, October 2005, pp.26-27.

referendum) if the Republic of Moldova decides to unite with another state or if it loses its status as subject of international law.²²³

The Moldovan authorities and public opinion have constantly opposed the federalization scenario as envisaged by the OSCE Plan and by the Kozak Memorandum. Oazu Nantoi points out that this Plan and the Kozak Memorandum are in fact similar. The first critical aspect is that the Transdnestrian de facto authority gets an implicit recognition because it has been proclaimed in the preamble as “part of the negotiation process”, entitled to sign and adopt the agreement. The document also says nothing about the withdrawal of the 14th Russian Army and its arsenal, either as a prerequisite for fair elections, or as a consequence of a possible normalization of the situation in TMR.²²⁴

The Ukrainian Plan proposed to organise democratic elections in December 2005 for the Transdnestrian Supreme Soviet under international monitoring. Nicu Popescu argues that to organize democratic elections in Transdnestr is unrealistic. This is, Transdnestr lacks civil society, independent media, independent political parties and any trace of credible opposition. Thus the result of such elections would most likely strengthen the existing ruling elite in Transdnestr, with a slightly modified internal power balance. Popescu also believes that if a new parliament is democratically elected and starts to negotiate with Moldova on Transdnestr’s status, there is no guarantee that such negotiations would not drag on for another decade – but this time, the Transdnestrian authorities would be legitimate and internationally recognised as representatives of the population of the region and with a strengthened mandate to ask for independence.²²⁵

²²³ Adrian Pop, Gabriela Pascariu, George Anglitoiu and Alexandru Purcaruș, ‘Romania and the Republic of Moldova – Between the European Neighbourhood Policy and the EU Enlargement’, European Institute of Romania-Pre-accession Impact Studies, No. 5, 2005, p.75.

²²⁴ Oazu Nantoi, ‘The Ukrainian Plan on Transdnestr: Pros and Cons’, *Eurojournal*, 2005, Available At <http://eurojournal.org/files/nantoi1.pdf>, Accessed 1 March 2006, pp.7-8.

²²⁵ Nicu Popescu, ‘The EU in Moldova – Settling Conflicts in the Neighbourhood’, *European Union Institute for Security Studies, Occasional Paper*, Paris, October 2005, pp.26-27.

Similarly, Oazu Nantoi also argues that free and fair election is unfeasible in Transdnestr as long as the region is under military occupation of the Russian Federation and the key positions in the TMR are held by Russian citizens. There is no guarantee that after its recognition by the central power of Chisinau, the Supreme Council will not conduct a referendum to force “the Transdnestrian people” to vote for the independence of the TMR.²²⁶

According to Oazu Nantoi, the first stage of the implementation of the Vinnitsa Plan will legalize the Transdnestrian Supreme Council in the context of the international community, without granting any guarantee that the Moldovan state will afterwards be reunified. In addition to this, the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova (article 111) provides expressly for the prospects of granting the special legal status of an autonomy to some localities on the left bank area of Dniestr river Thirdly, according to the Ukrainian Plan, some competencies to be granted by Chisinau should reach the confederative level of the relationship between Chisinau and Tiraspol. Consequently, the Vinnitsa Plan aims at the federalization of Moldova as a result of the legalization of the totalitarian regime of the TMR.²²⁷

As a whole, such an agreement is incompatible with the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova. The Vinnitsa Plan does not aim at the reunification of the Republic of Moldova and, implicitly, contravenes Moldova’s interests. The Vinnitsa Plan also aims at the legalization of the existing separatist regime of the TMR, but does not guarantee anything to the Moldovan state.²²⁸

²²⁶ Oazu Nantoi, ‘The Ukrainian Plan on Transdnestr: Pros and Cons’, *Eurojournal*, 2005, Available At <http://eurojournal.org/files/nantoi1.pdf>, Accessed 1 March 2006, p.10.

²²⁷ *Ibid.* , pp.10-11.

²²⁸ *Ibid.* , p.12.

5.6. The Impasse

Since 1992, a political process of negotiations on the status of Transdniestr has occurred, involving Moldova and Transdniestr, as well as Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediators. The negotiation mechanism is often referred to as the 'five-sided format'. There were many attempts to settle and rehabilitate the situation but the Transdniestrian conflict is now considered "unresolved and frozen", making evident that the prior attempts of negotiations have failed. Several factors represent the obstacles in the way of the negotiation process for settling the conflict in Transdniestr.²²⁹

Claus Neukirch points out that in order to find an explanation concerning the continued "cold peace" in the Dniestr region after over thirteen years of OSCE conflict management, one has to look not only at the causes of the 1992 war and the mediation efforts of the OSCE Mission but also at some factors and divisions, which have emerged since 1992 and have added to the complexity of the Transdniestrian conflict.²³⁰

Besides these, we can mainly see different approaches, ideas concerning the conflict settlement, particularly the final status of Transdniestr. Officially, Moldova aspired toward reintegration with Transdniestr in a common state characterized by territorial integrity and central government, simultaneously giving autonomy to Transdniestr. In its turn, Transdniestr aspired to the establishment of independent statehood, with its independent political structures and endeavors to obtain international recognition to subject to international law. After the federalization issue in 2002, Chisinau tends to the asymmetric confederation, with central government, while separatist authorities pledge to the confederation of two equal subjects, Moldova and Transdniestr endowed with the

²²⁹ Irina Ghiduleanov and Tamara Galusca, 'Frozen Conflict in Transdniestr – Security Threat at Future EU Borders', *Master of Science in International and European Relations*, Available At <http://www.ep.liu.se/exjobb/eki/2005/impier/009/>, Linköping: 2005, pp.64-66.

²³⁰ Claus Neukirch, 'Transdniestr and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, p.131.

right of veto. In addition to this, several factors have produced together a sustainable status quo until now in the Transdniestrian conflict.²³¹

For the present impasse, one factor is Moldovan weakness. Moldova is a very weak state. Formerly one of the USSR's poorest republics, Moldova is today Europe's poorest country. An estimated 700,000 Moldovans have left the country as economic migrants. In addition, Moldova has heavy external debt, with servicing accounting for over 50 per cent of the budget. Moldova owes significant debt to Russia, which provides all of its energy needs.²³² Oazu Nantoi stated that since the summer of 1992, no Moldovan government adopted a plan for the country's reunification, based on a realistic approach to the essence of the conflict, whose implementation would require mobilization of the whole society's resources. The Republic of Moldova did not become an attractive example for the people of the TMR.²³³

Nicu Popescu also argues that Moldova's weakness as a state and its lack of attractiveness for ordinary Transdniestrians have become a touchstone of Transdniestria's survival. While many Transdniestrians are not satisfied with their situation, Moldova is not an alternative that would encourage significant parts of the population in Transdniestria to actively support reunification. Worrying aspects of Moldovan democracy and economic development have always been used by the authorities in Tiraspol to justify Transdniestrian independence.²³⁴

²³¹ Valeriu Gheorghiu, Oazu Nantoi and Nicu Popescu, 'External Factors in Transdniestrian Conflict Settlement: A Role for the European Union', Institute for Public Policy, Available At <http://ipp.md>, 2004, Accessed on 12 April 2006, p.2.

²³² Dov Lynch, 'Russia Faces Europe', *European Union Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Papers*, Paris, May 2003, pp.96-97.

²³³ Oazu Nantoi, 'The Ukrainian Plan on Transdniestria: Pros and Cons', *Eurojournal*, 2005, Available At <http://eurojournal.org/files/nantoi1.pdf>, Accessed 1 March 2006, p.5.

²³⁴ Nicu Popescu, 'The EU in Moldova – Settling Conflicts in the Neighbourhood', *European Union Institute for Security Studies, Occasional Paper*, Paris, October 2005, pp.20-21.

Secondly, since its declaration of independence on 2 September 1990 the TMR has successfully established and consolidated its own state-like structure. Alongside a President and a Parliament in Transdniestria one can also find a Supreme Court and a National Bank, which issues its own currency, the Transdniestrian rouble. Customs Services, the Police, Internal Security and Border Guards serve next to the army as important pillars of power; strong symbols like the Constitution, the national anthem, the coat of arms, flags and several monuments commemorating the 1992 war, have strengthened Transdniestria's ideological base.²³⁵ The TMR also participates in the 'Union of Unrecognized States', established in 1993 by representatives from Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and other unrecognized constituents of the former Soviet Union.²³⁶

Very recently, on 17 September, 2006, the administration of the Transdniestrian region organized and conducted a referendum on the region's political self-determination. The government of the Republic of Moldova, like the entire international community such as the EU, the United States of America (USA), the OSCE and Romania, does not recognize the referendum results and does not believe it is possible to consider that undertaking in the context of a peaceful and lasting settlement of the conflict.²³⁷

The participants in the referendum were proposed to answer two questions: "Do you support the course towards independence of the Transdniestrian Moldovan Republic and its future free accession to the Russian Federation?" and "Do you consider it possible for the Transdniestrian Moldovan Republic to give up its independence and then join the Republic of Moldova?" Data put out by the region's central election commission show that 97.1 per cent of the voters answered yes to the first course, and 2.3 per cent – no, while the second one

²³⁵ Claus Neukirch, 'Transdniestria and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, p.131.

²³⁶ Charles King, 'Post-Soviet Moldova: A Borderland in Transition', Russian and CIS Programme-The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1995, pp.23-24.

²³⁷ ---, 'Reactions on Referendum in Transdniestria', *Moldova Azi*, Available At <http://www.azi.md/print/41023/En>, Accessed on 18.09.2006.

grabbed 3.4 per cent of positive answers and 94.6 per cent negative ones. The voter turnout was of 78.6 per cent of the total number of people included into the voter slates – 306,000 eligible voters.²³⁸

The Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova Ambassador Louis O'Neill stated that the OSCE does not recognize either the referendum held in Transdnestr or its results. Because it was organized unilaterally, without providing democratic conditions for holding it, with pressure and intimidation put on voters, so the voting could not be free. Louis O'Neill reiterated that the OSCE keeps on standing for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and for equipping Transdnestr with a special legal status within the Republic of Moldova.²³⁹

Another major obstacle to conflict settlement is a lack of interest in Chisinau to change the status quo. Various parts of the political classes in Chisinau apparently profit from contraband and illegal trafficking in Transdnestr. There are also parties in Chisinau who fear that they might lose their political influence, if there is a political settlement.²⁴⁰ So far, for Tiraspol, the best alternative to a negotiated agreement has been the preservation of the status quo. Transdnestr's leaders see little benefit in agreeing to a fundamental change in their current political status. When we look at the Transdnestrian side, politics in Transdnestr has been determined by the imperative of its elites to retain power. These elites benefit politically and economically from the status quo.²⁴¹

A major cause of the failure of the negotiation process is the economic issue. Contraband and illegal trafficking are said to be strong sources for the

²³⁸ ---, 'Transdnestr, 17 September: Referendum and Its Echoes', *Moldpres*, Available At <http://www.moldpres.md/>, Accessed on 28.09.2006.

²³⁹ ---, 'OSCE Does not Recognize Outcome of Referendum in Transdnestr and Calls to Resume Conflict Settlement Talks', *Moldova Azi*, Available At <http://www.azi.md/print/41064En>, Accessed on 20.09.2006.

²⁴⁰ Claus Neukirch, 'Transdnestr and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, pp. 131-132.

²⁴¹ William Hill, 'Making Istanbul a Reality: Moldova, Russia, and Withdrawal from Transdnestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 2, 2002, p.139.

Transdniestr economy. Transdniestr has become a 'black hole' in the region from where organized crime can operate, goods can be smuggled and money can be laundered. In addition, the illegal traffic of drugs, weapons and human beings and related criminal activities are also widespread in the region.²⁴² Simultaneously the non-payment of taxes to the Moldovan budget does not strengthen the economy of Moldova, instead considerably damages it. The incomes from such illegal activities have been used to corrupt key persons, such as politicians, officials, journalists etc, in Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, assuring in this way a multilateral support for the existing status-quo in Transdniestr.²⁴³

Another very important actor is the Russian Federation in the Transdniestrian conflict. Russian interests in the region have to be taken into account when discussing the reasons for the continued "cold peace" in the Transdniestr region. Over the years, stabilizing support for Transdniestr has especially come from the red-brown forces in the State Duma. There is a strong interest in keeping Moldova within the Russian orbit. Leverages for his purpose exist in the economic (gas, ownership of Moldovan enterprises), military (in the former 14th Army) and political (Transdniestr) fields. To keep pressure on the Moldovan government by retaining Russian troops in Transdniestr and by helping the TMR to survive, serve this interest very much. Some scholars argue that the strong Russian interests in the region might even be identified as impeding factors for a quick conflict resolution.²⁴⁴

Charles King has argued that a complicating factor in the Transdniestr dispute is the 14th Russian Army, headquartered in Tiraspol. This army has been an

²⁴² Claus Neukirch, 'Transdniestr and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, p.131.

²⁴³ Valeriu Gheorghiu, Oazu Nantoi and Nicu Popescu, 'External Factors in Transdniestrian Conflict Settlement: A Role for the European Union', Institute for Public Policy, Available At <http://ipp.md>, 2004, Accessed on 12 April 2006, p.2.

²⁴⁴ Claus Neukirch, 'Transdnestr and Moldova: Cold Peace at the Dniestr', *Helsinki Monitor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, p.134.

essential source of support for the separatists.²⁴⁵ Transdniestr's survival in security terms has been assured by Russia. Russian military support was important for the TMR's victory in 1992. In the 1990s, Russia was reluctant to abandon its military presence in Moldova, given its strategic position on Ukraine's flank and as a forward position in the Balkans.²⁴⁶ Aside from all other factors, geopolitical calculations basically determine Russian views of Transdniestr. The Russian government perceives many of the changes occurring in Europe as directed against its spheres of interests. Should Russia retreat from Moldova, the vacuum left would be filled by "unfriendly forces".

Based on this argument, Russia gives Transdniestr military, economic, financial and political support. Therefore, Transdniestr cannot have emerged without Russia, nor can it survive. As a patron state, Russia has not only encouraged Transdniestrian secessionism, it has also provided Transdniestr with the resources to fight, including military assistance and training, as well as economic subsidies. The nature of Russian interests is manifold. Russia has business interests in Transdniestr, and important actors in Russia have benefited from corrupt links with the Smirnov regime. Russian support for Transdniestr is the result of a coalition of vested interests inside the Russian Federation.²⁴⁷

It is very useful to analyse the negotiating format for this conflict. From the Moldovan point of view, the failure to settle the conflict is also partly the result of an ineffective and unfair five-sided negotiating format. This structure consists of Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediators, and Moldovan and Transdniestrian authorities as parties to the conflict. According to its logic, Russia and Ukraine are to be external guarantors of any agreed solution.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Charles King, 'Post-Soviet Moldova: A Borderland in Transition', Russian and CIS Programme-The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1995, pp.23-24.

²⁴⁶ Dov Lynch, 'Russia Faces Europe', *European Union Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Papers*, Paris, May 2003, pp.98-99.

²⁴⁷ Nicu Popescu, 'The EU in Moldova – Settling Conflicts in the Neighbourhood', *European Union Institute for Security Studies, Occasional Paper*, Paris, October 2005, pp.23-25.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.20.

According to the Moscow Memorandum in 1997, Moldova and Transdniestr are “parties” with equal rights; Russia and Ukraine are “guarantor-states” as well as mediators along with OSCE. This memorandum foresees that decisions should be taken within this framework. It is evident that this format of negotiations ensures Russia supervision over the entire negotiation process along with Transdniestr. Thus, the right of veto has been offered by Russia to the separatist regime.²⁴⁹

Oazu Nantoi argues that the Transnistrian conflict is frozen. This is due to the fact that, in the 1990s Russia imposed and Moldovan governments accepted a conflict perception scheme which allowed obstruction of the process of reunification of the Republic of Moldova. According to the scheme proposed by Russia, the conflict emerged and persists exclusively between two parties: the Republic of Moldova and the Transdniestr region. Therefore, an anti-constitutional regime becomes automatically a party in the process of negotiation, having the right to reject the position of official Moldovan authorities. It also becomes possible to deploy peace-keeping troops, and people of the TMR have their own particularities which are not compatible with the unitary Moldovan state. The TMR can claim the “right to self-determination” and require “equal rights with the Republic of Moldova as a constituent part of a confederation”.²⁵⁰

Nicu Popescu states that the five-sided negotiating format has helped to block conflict settlement. With each party having a veto, and important forces benefiting from the status quo around Transdniestr, the format in fact was doomed to fail from the start. The OSCE has always been in a weak position, due to the internal constraints imposed by some member states and its own lack of capabilities. Russia’s primary interest has been to either maintain the status quo or secure a settlement agreement that would preserve Russia’s decisive influence over a reunified Moldova, and where Russian troops would be

²⁴⁹ Valeriu Gheorghiu, Oazu Nantoi and Nicu Popescu, ‘External Factors in Transnistrian Conflict Settlement: A Role for the European Union’, Institute for Public Policy, Available At <http://ipp.md>, 2004, Accessed on 12 April 2006, p.2.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. , p.1.

maintained. The Russian objective here has been to create a ‘common state’ composed of two equal constituent entities. Such a solution would preserve Transdnistr in its current state, with the same leadership and behaviour.²⁵¹

The Republic of Moldova has stressed that there is a need to change the existent format of negotiations. So far, the three mediators, Russia, Ukraine and OSCE have failed to find consistent solution. OSCE decisions and actions are subject to Russia’s veto power. This is why talks about the need to change the format of negotiations have intensified lately. As a result, the U.S. and the EU have both joined the Moldova-Transdnistr mediation process as official observers. The new “5+2” talks include Chisinau, Tiraspol, Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE as the main five stakeholders and the U.S. and the EU as the official observers.

Ukraine has also played an important role in the conflict settlement process. Transdnistr is situated between Ukraine and Moldova and the secessionist region controls 452 km of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border. This allows it to conduct external trade through Ukraine, and also be a transit point for smuggled goods into Moldova. Transdnistr could not survive without Ukraine’s implicit support. All of the alleged Transdnistriean smuggling, trafficking and export of arms passes mainly through Ukraine. Serious interest groups in Ukraine have secured benefits from such activities in Transdnistr.²⁵²

As a result, generally speaking, both the peacekeeping operation and the five-sided format have failed to help settle the conflict for more than a decade, because Transdnistr has preferred to consolidate independence rather than agree to a new status within Moldova. These mechanisms have supported rather than challenged the status quo. Indeed, the peace-keeping and negotiating formats

²⁵¹ Nicu Popescu, “The EU in Moldova – Settling Conflicts in the Neighbourhood, *European Union Institute for Security Studies, Occasional Paper*, Paris, October 2005, p.20.

²⁵² *Ibid.* , pp.25-26.

have contributed to sustaining Transdniestr's de facto independence, while providing de facto legitimacy to the status quo.²⁵³

5.7. Conclusion

The fifth part of the thesis has covered the OSCE Istanbul Summit decisions concerning the Transdniestr problem and Russia's reactions to this summit decisions. In Istanbul, Russia agreed to withdraw all troops and equipment from the Transdniestr region by the end of 2002 without any conditions to resolving Transdniestr's final status. However, with the Vladimir Putin's coming to power in Russia, Moscow has showed clearly that the withdrawal of its troops would have to coincide with a political agreement on the status of Transdniestr. On the other hand, the Moldovan Government and the Transdniestr authorities have not been successful to find a mutual view on the discussions of the 'common state' since 2002. Finally, it can be easily said that there are several factors contribute to the existing impasse in the resolution process of the Transdniestr conflict. But, the main factor behind the persistence of the conflict is Russia's tendency to use the Transdniestr region as a geo-strategic instrument in the post-Soviet Moldova and its neighbourhood.

²⁵³ Charles King, 'Post-Soviet Moldova: A Borderland in Transition', *Russian and CIS Programme-The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, London, 1995, pp.21-22..

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been mainly interested in the Transdniestr conflict in the post-Soviet Moldova. Especially, in the period between 1989 and 2006, the Transdniestr problem with conflicting parties and mediation efforts have been analyzed within the scope of this thesis. The questions as to why the Moldova and Transdniestr parties have not been able to solve the problem, and how could the role of Russia and the OSCE be characterized in this conflict, have been explored and an attempt made to answer them.

In chapter II, I have focused on the historical reasons of the emergence of the Transdniestr problem. After the Second World War, the Moldavian SSR became a subject of an intense policy of Russification in the political, cultural, and linguistic fields. The Kremlin attempted to create a different Moldovan language and ethnicity from Romanian. But, with Gorbachev's coming to power in the Soviet Union, ethnic Moldovans demanded socio-political reforms and democracy. Owing this period, the language issue was a considerable element in Moldova. Russian and Russified people on the left bank of the Dniestr river opposed new language laws which declared Moldovan the state language of the republic written in Latin alphabet. The Russophones felt that giving Romanian superior status to Russian was just the first step toward union with Romania. Fear of such a union resulted in a strong Russian reaction. The promotion of the Moldovan language threatened the existing Slavic elites in Transdniestr.

In chapter III, I have tried to show the causes of the escalation of the crisis between the central government of Moldova and the Transdniestr authorities. In this chapter, I have also studied the Russian support for the secessionist movements in Transdniestr. After 1991, growing anti-Russian sentiments and discussions concerning a possible unification with Romania added more to the

unease among the minorities. On the other hand, Moldova began to free itself from its Soviet past and declared independence on 27 August 1991. The Transdnestr region began organizing itself to resist Moldovan independence efforts. Transdnestrian people developed a reactive nationalism against the Moldovan nationalism. On 2 September 1991, the establishment of the TMR was declared. At the same time, pragmatic nationalist ideas became dominant in Russia's foreign policy debates concerning Moldova and suggested a road map which guided Russian policies towards remaining involved in obtaining peace in the region, establishing military presence, and securing general economic interests. Since its beginning, Russia has played an important role in the Transdnestr conflict because of its geo-strategic attention to Transdnestr and its neighbourhood. Although officially neutral, the 14th Russian Army, deployed in Transdnestr, has played a vital role in the fighting by supporting the paramilitary groups in Transdnestr.

In chapter IV, I have presented the main developments and conflict resolution plans in the period between 1993 and 1999. In 1993, the OSCE mission to Moldova was established. The main task of this mission was to facilitate the achievement of a long-lasting political settlement of the conflict and assist parties in consolidating the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova along with an understanding about a special status for the Transdnestr region. The OSCE offered respect for the territorial integrity of Moldova, on the understanding that a broad autonomy would have to be arranged for Transdnestr, and call for the complete and orderly withdrawal of Russian troops. In the 1990s, Transdnestr's fundamental political goal was to win international recognition of its independence. This proved to be impossible to achieve and, for this reason, Tiraspol reformulated its goal equal status within a "joint state" or confederation formed with the Republic of Moldova. Tiraspol could accept the formation of a Moldovan Federation with Transdnestr as one of its two components. Tiraspol demanded economic, political and cultural sovereignty, the legalisation and the preservation of its own armed forces and maintenance of the Transdnestrian Ruble. The right to self-determination for Transdnestr in the event of Moldova's

union with Romania is a sine qua non condition of all agreements. According to Tiraspol, the peacekeeping forces to guarantee implementation of the future agreement should include a Russian and, possibly, Ukrainian contingent. On the contrary, Moldova's fundamental goal is to reunite the country and recover territorial integrity. So far, Chisinau has been ready to grant Transdniestr a maximum degree of autonomy within Moldova, but it has refused to recognise the TMR's sovereignty or grant it a status equal to that of the "proper" Moldova.

In chapter V, I have first summarised the decisions of the OSCE Istanbul Summit on the Transdniestr issue. In this summit, Russia agreed to withdraw all troops and equipment by the end of 2002 without any conditions and any linkage to resolving Transdniestr's status. However, with the coming to power of Vladimir Putin in 2000, Russia stated that the military withdrawal would have to coincide with a political agreement on the status of Transdniestr. The Russian government clearly aims to maintain its troops in the region until an eventual political deal concerning Transdniestr's final status in the future. On the other hand, the particularities and characteristics of a common state have been discussed since 2002. Still, it has been very difficult to find a compromise between the opposing views between the two parties on the idea of the common state. The Moldovan party saw a common state Republic of Moldova as a state, sovereign formation with territorial integrity, with a central government, subject to international laws, within which Transdniestr possesses a vast regional autonomy. Transdniestr has understood a common state as a confederation of two equal subjects which by common consent created certain structures and that in mutual agreement performed some state functions. Transdniestr wants the Transdniestrian and the Moldovan constitutions to have equal status. The Moldovan government has maintained that the Transdniestrian constitution must be subordinate to the Moldovan one. Transdniestr wants its final status ratified as a state-to-state treaty. All relations between Transdniestr and Moldova must be based on a treaty rather than a law. The Moldovan government wants to grant Transdniestr autonomy using a law, as in Gagauzia, rather than a treaty which denotes

statehood. Consequently, the definition and division of economic, military, political and social competencies remains unsettled.

Finally, in the last chapter, it has been argued that the inconsistent format of negotiations, lack of motivation, corruption, economic interests, opposing directions and lack of political will of the conflicting parties involved in the conflict show us that the conflict resolution process faces an impasse. The existence of special elites interests in Tiraspol and Chisinau alike, has made conflict resolution a complicated task in Moldova. However, primarily, it is Russia's strategic views on Transdnistr and its neighbourhood, which give rise to the impasse rather than finding a working settlement to this conflict.

In the literature, there are several different arguments concerning the persistence of the Transdnistr conflict. But, the Russian interests and the Russian military presence in this conflict is the most important factor that keeps the Transdnistr conflict still alive but frozen. The separatist conflict in Transdnistr is formally an internal problem of the Republic of Moldova since the internationally recognized central government does not control a part of its territory. However, the Transdnistr problem has mainly a geopolitical and international nature, given the intervention of the Russian Army which aims to preserve the influence of the Russian Federation in the region and the uninterrupted political, financial, diplomatic, military and technical support given to the Tiraspol leaders by the Russian authorities.

After 1991, the Russian elite as a whole continued to accept the need to retain a military presence in Moldova in order to prevent war and protect its strategic position vis a vis Ukraine and the Balkans. A military base in Moldova was considered necessary in case Russian peacekeepers were required to solve or prevent conflicts in the area. A permanent base for Russian troops in the Transdnistr area was generally regarded to be a useful means to retain regional influence. The Russian Federation considers its presence, including the presence of military forces, on the territory of Moldova as a level of influence

over the Balkans. In Transdnier, the presence of the OGRF is considered as “protection” on land for the Navy on the Black Sea dislocated in Sevastopol. This nuance is very often circulated by the Russian military experts that consider that without military forces from Transdnier and without infrastructure the presence of the Russian Navy becomes practically useless.

It can be said that with the end of the Cold War, the collapse of communism and the demise of the Soviet Union, Moldova has lost its global strategic significance. But, it remains interesting to note that General Aleksandr Lebed, commander-in-chief of Russian forces in the TMR (1992-95), described the Dniester area as ‘the key to the Balkans’, observing that ‘if Russia withdraws from this little piece of land, it will lose that key and its influence in the region’. For Lebed, the withdrawal of the 14th Army would have been detrimental to conflict management in the area of the former Soviet Union by Russia, as it would lose control over its military presence.²⁵⁴

Notwithstanding international non-recognition of Transdnierian self-proclaimed republic, it is deeply dependent on Russian economic, material and political support. It has its own interests and strategies insisting on the official formation of the confederation of two separate independent states “on contractual ground”. Russia has played an important role in the Transdnierian secession since its beginning and has successfully used it as a means to manipulate relations with Moldova.

Russia’s political and economic circles have been considered key in supporting the Transdnierian secessionist movement. It is a widely accepted opinion that Russia’s support for the self-proclaimed and unrecognized TMR has prevented resolution of the conflict. The most widely circulated opinion is that Russia wishes to control Moldova through the means of supporting Transdnier. This would allow its presence both military and politically in this important region.

²⁵⁴ Trevor Waters, ‘Security Concerns in Post-Soviet Moldova’, in Graeme P. Herd and Jennifer D. P. Moroney (eds), *Security Dynamics in the Former Soviet Bloc*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p. 136.

However, from the OSCE point of view, the withdrawal of Russian troops is key in the conflict resolution process. The Russian troops are a security pillar for the Transdniestrian regime. Breaking the status quo is unimaginable without a full withdrawal. Maintaining a military base in Moldova creates an obstacle to conflict settlement, which throws doubts over Russia's status as a neutral mediator. On the contrary to the OSCE's position, Russia has rejected the involvement of any foreign presence and influence in the former Soviet Union that has been declared an exclusive zone of Russian interests. This zone of influence, also known as the "near abroad", covers all the countries of the CIS and is artificially maintained by Russia, given its geopolitical and geo-economic interests in the region.

Within the framework of the thesis, it can be argued that the Transdniestr conflict has a predominantly geopolitical and international nature because of the Russian geo-strategic considerations. In this thesis, it was demonstrated that the Russian Federation, as the greatest power involved in the Transdniestr conflict resolution process, has a role of supporter of the Transdniestr region, defending by this means its geostrategic and political interests over post-Soviet Moldova. Therefore, the most important factor for the persistence of the Transdniestr conflict is international. The geographic position of Transdniestr region has been favorable for the Russian political and security interests in the post-cold war period. The OSCE as a mediator and Russia have extremely different conflict definitions for the resolution of this problem. Because the OSCE has tried to restrain Russia's using the Transdniestr region as a geopolitical and geo-strategical instrument, finding a long-lasting solution to the Transdniestr problem has been extremely difficult.

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