

TRANSDNISTREA: The DMR Political System

17 December 2002

INTRODUCTION

The Transdnistrea n region formally separated from what was at that time the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic on 2 September 1991 as a result of collapse of the USSR. Powerful secessionist tendencies on the left bank of the Dnestr had been noted since 1989 as a response to the national-radical movement headed by the National Front of Moldova (NFM) which had gained power throughout the territory of Bessarabia. In early 1990, the NFM ended its second congress with a declaration that the Republic of Moldova was the second Romanian state and the ultimate goal of the Front was the unification of Moldova and Romania into a single state.

In a situation of political confrontation all level deputies from the left bank of the Dnestr and Bendery have gathered on 2 June 1990 in the village of Parkans between the cities of Tiraspol and Bendery (a right-bank city with the majority of Russian population which supported the autonomists) to held the I Congress of Transdnistrea deputies of all level. The meeting called upon the official Kishinev to give the region the status of a Free Economic Zone (FEZ). Central authorities of Moldova have turned down this call.

From 3 December 1989 to end of August 1990, referendums on the issue of creation of Transdnistrea Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the USSR were held in the region under the auspices of local authorities. On 2 September 1990, the II Congress of Transdnistrea all level deputies was held in Tiraspol, where they declared creation of Transdnistrea Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic within the USSR. The PMSSR included the territory Dnestr left bank, the city of Bendery and a number of right-bank villages. The capital of the PMSSR was declared Tiraspol, and the initial autonomous status was rejected since the Declaration of Moldova Sovereignty of 23 June 1990 did not say anything about Kishinev's intention to sign a Union Agreement with Moscow. The population of the PMSSR was said 752 thousand people (as of 1989-1990).

Since the 1990-1992 negotiations and consultations between Kishinev and Tiraspol failed to achieve any compromise, the subsequent hostilities, which broke out on 2 March 1992 left thousands of people dead, injured and perished. The signature of the Peace Accord of 21 July 1992 ended the war. As a result, Transdnistrea has lost several villages on the left bank of the Dnestr (Koshnitsa, Kochiery, Dorotskoye and others), but preserved its riverside enclaves.

Since 1992, negotiations are being held between the parties of different levels. The fundamental law – Constitution of Transdnistrea Moldovan Republic (as of 1991 no longer Soviet and no longer Socialist) has been adopted as a result of national referendum of 24 December 1995. In August 2000, the Supreme Soviet introduced in its fundamental changes, which in the opinion of experts have turned PMR into a superpresidential republic. The President of the PMR is Igor Smirnov (elected on 1.12.1991, 22.12.1996 and 1.12.2001), Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Gregory Marakutsa (since 1991), and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is Olga Ivanova.

TRANSDNISTREA POLITICAL SYSTEM: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Initially, in 1990-1991 Transdnistrea was a parliamentary state. On 25 November, elections were held to the Supreme Soviet. Before that the Republic was governed by Temporal Supreme Soviet headed by Igor Smirnov, which had been formed at the I Congress of Transdnistrea deputies. As of 25 November 1995, I. Smirnov was no longer Chairman of the Temporal Supreme Soviet, but Chairman of the PMSSR (later PMR). Such a model was taken from the constitution of the socialist China. As a result of 1 December 1991 national elections in the region I. Smirnov was elected President of the PMR. The basis was taken from the updated Constitution of the Soviet Moldova. Legislative functions were performed by elected on 25 November 1990 the Supreme Soviet which consisted of two houses: the House of the Republic and the House of Nationalities.

As of 2 September 1990 and until present, the PMR includes 7 administrative-territorial units:

- Tiraspol
- Bendery
- Rybnitsa and Rybnitsky District
- Dubossary and Dubossarsky District
- Slobodzeya and Slobodzeysky District
- Kamenka and Kamensky District
- Grigoriopol and Grigoriopolsky District.

On 24 December 1995, elections were held to the two-chamber PMR Supreme Soviet in accordance with the new Constitution. Out of 67 deputies, 32 made the House of Legislators who were elected on single

member constituencies and worked on professional basis, and 35 deputies made the upper House. Gregory Marakutsa again headed the Supreme Soviet. According to the new Constitution, the President has the right to appoint heads of city and district administrations.

In the opinion of I. Smirnov's supporters, the PMR President still did not have enough powers. Besides, the 1995 Constitution restricted presidency for more than two terms. There started campaign for its change, which was supported by almost complete monopoly of the institute of presidency in Transdnistrea mass media. As a result, in August 2000, the PMR Constitution was de-jure changed, but de-facto replaced with a new one. The term limitations were lifted. The PMR Government was abolished, and the Cabinet of Ministers headed by the PMR President was introduced instead. I. Smirnov got the right to create and abolish ministries and departments and appoint and dismiss ministers without coordination with the Supreme Soviet, which has been altered into one-house body, where deputies did no longer worked on professional basis.

At the end of 2000 elections were held to the Supreme Soviet, where the majority made I. Smirnov's supporters.

The initial negotiations between Moldova and Transdnistrea have started already in September 1990, and then RM President Mircha Snegur's reaction was the following: "We cannot negotiate with inferiors". (I Channel of the USSR TV, 6 September 1990).

In 1991, the negotiations now started and now interrupted getting into a dead-end on then the main issue: Kishinev refused to sign the new Union Treaty, and in July 1991, Transdnistrea Supreme Soviet set up a Commission for the participation in the work on a new Union Treaty. After collapse of the USSR the Commission was also disbanded.

In 1992, the Moldova diplomacy initially had some success: a quadripartite body for negotiations was set up with the participation of Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Rumania without Transdnistrea. After the end of military operations on 21 July 1992, this mechanism was abolished and transformed into a tripartite one: Russia, Moldova and Transdnistrea. Ukraine has temporary withdrew itself, and Romania was removed with common efforts.

All subsequent years the negotiations have been held sluggishly, but there were a number of important meetings:

- 10 May 1993: the meeting of I. Smirnov and M. Snegur marked the end of immediate military atmosphere
- 18 April 1994: the meeting of I. Smirnov and M. Snegur
- 1995: Accord on non-application of forces
- 8 May 1997: Moldova President Peter Luchinsky and Transdnistrea President Igor Smirnov signed a Memorandum in Moscow which in particular gives the region the right for free external economic activities.
- 22 March 1998: Odessa Accords
- 1999: Kiev Accords. Transdnistrea has expressed its principal readiness to share one legal and defense space with Moldova.

It should be noted that during the 1996 presidential elections in Moldova, Transdnistrea authorities de-facto supported the left candidates, including nationalist forces representative Mirche Snegur. Evidently, they wished to avoid revival of the threat of PMR joining Rumania.

Peter Luchinsky's term of office in Moldova (1997-2001) was characterized with a relative composure of relations between Moldova and Transdnistrea, however with the victory of Communist Party during the 25 February 20012 parliamentary elections in Moldova everything has started to change rapidly.

RUSSIA'S MILITARY PRESENCE IN TRANSDNISTREA AS A FACTOR OF MOLDOVA-TRANSDNISTREA RELATIONS

During the domination of right Rumania-oriented political forces in Moldova, deployed there 14th Soviet (since 1992 Russian) Army took neutral position and favored the official Tiraspol. That had been the case since September 1990 and until the end of 1992. Thus, according to memoirs of Colonel Mikhail Bergman, former Commandant of Tiraspol (the book "On the Ring of the Epoch", Moscow, 2001), in 2001 Igor Smirnov was guarded by several Russian paratroopers. Moldova's People Front called the 14th Army an occupation force that was lenient towards the separatists and dreamed to finish with Smirnov's faction. Later, from the autumn of 1991 and until June 1992, when Major General Yuri Netkachev commanded the Army relations with Transdnistreans were cool. The military dumps were mine-strewn; part of equipment was deactivated. Evidently, Transdnistrea Guard that had been created by PMR deputies in 1991 was simultaneously equipped. That reflected the undetermined external policy of Russia of that time. Besides, Moscow waited to see how the things would go in Kishinev.

By June 1992, in Moldova prevailed pro-Rumania group (the Parliament Speaker Alexander Moshanu, Defense Minister Jon Kostash and others), under the influence of which Moldovian President Mirche Snegur sanctioned on 19 June 1992 military operation to attack Bendery. The operation itself have failed, but as a consequence 14th Army since 27 June 1992 commanded by General Lebed has handed over Transdnistrians considerable quantities of arms and in its turn delivered a blow on Moldavian groups. Since then and until the end of 1992 lasted the honeymoon in relations between Transdnistrea leadership and the 14th Army headquarters. However in late 1992-early 1993 General Lebed and his supporters tried to achieve resignation of Igor Smirnov, State Security Minister General Vladimir Antyufeev and several others. This fight with the use of mass media, actions of special services etc. continued up to May 1995, when General Lebed was dismissed and called to Moscow. Presumably, in this confrontation Lebed reflected the point of view of the part of Russian political and financial elite that considered necessary liberation of the economy and democratization of the political life of Transdnistrea. In 1995, the 14th Army was abolished, and an Operative Group of Russian Forces (OGRF) has been created on its basis. After General Lebed's resignation General Valeri Yevnevich commanded the Group. Under him the political activities of the Russian Military in the region was reduced to zero, and contacts of the OGRF with mass media have stopped.



In November 1999, RF President Boris Yeltsin declared in Stambul the intention to withdraw the Russian forces (with the exception of peacekeepers) from Transdnistrea until 31 December 2001. Furthermore, there was declared the intention to take out the equipment and property of the OGRF from the region. This intention has immediately lead to noticeable consequences.

First of all, in Tiraspol they declared all OGRF property ownership of Transdnistrea people (according to some information, in the second half of the 1990-ties the OGRF warehouses stored the equipment and ammunition amounting to 3-4 billion \$). Secondly, I. Smirnov's team headed towards evident intimacy with Ukraine. In early 2001, two representative s were appointed to Ukraine: former Information and TV Communications Minister Boris Aculov and Supreme Soviet vice-speaker (1993-1995) Vladimir Bodnar.

As of 2000, most likely at the instructions and with the active assistance of Transdnistrea Presidential Administration, public organizations under Smirnov's control picketed OGRF and convened meetings by the building

of Russian Groups headquarters. These included June 2000 action dated to RF President Vladimir Putin's visit to Kishinev, the action of spring 2002, etc. As of 2001, at the instructions of Transdnistrea leadership trains with the OGRF property heading to Russia have been detained. Thus, Transdnistrea leadership authorized the shipment of the 4th train from Kolbasna Station in Rybnitsky District only on 4 October, on the eve of the summit of leadership of the CIS countries of 6-7 October 2002.

In early 2002, the same public organizations wrote and disseminated declarations demanding the deployment of Ukrainian and Belarussian forces to Transdnistrea, as pro-Smirnov activists said, "since Russia betrays us".

THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IN TRANSDNISTREA SINCE THE COMMUNISTS CAME TO POWER IN MOLDOVA

It should be said that the process of creation of a real multi-party system is left far behind similar processes in Russia, Ukraine or Moldova because of the implanted by the PMR official propaganda of besiege fortress psychology. Specific political decisions are chiefly taken in the administration of Transdnistrea President and the Supreme Soviet, but are principally taken in a narrow circle of persons close to I. Smirnov. In early 2001, Tiraspol's official propaganda foretold success of Rumania-oriented unionist forces. They did not believe (at least in outward appearance) that Communists may win in Transdnistrea. In detail was covered the pre-election campaign of Yuri Roshka's Christian-Democratic People's Party. For the sake of justice it should be noted that even the unbiased analysts did not expect such a large-scale Communist triumph and the establishment of power monopoly in the Parliament by Vladimir Voronin's party. In the opinion of a number of independent observers in Transdnistrea, Igor Smirnov's team would be most satisfied by the left pro-Rumania oriented Parliament and a pronounced nationalist as Moldova President. As it has been said earlier, such a distribution of forces could allow to at least freeze if not break negotiations on the Transdnistrea status within Moldova. A number of left-radical political formations of Transdnistrea have openly declared their full support to PKRM in early 2001. Many activists of these formations have attacked Igor Smirnov from the left side accusing him of bourgeois and exorbitant reforms and in the destruction of social conquests of the Soviet power.

In response, the state-owned mass media under Transdnistrea President's control blamed the opponents for betray of PMR interests and for the desire to surrender the Republic to Moldova. The democracy-minded people in Transdnistrea society came out for the unconditional

defeat of pro-Rumania forces, which would have allowed continuing the search of compromise between Kishinev and Tiraspol. If during the 1998 parliamentary elections in Moldova the PKRM newspaper Communist was printed in Transdnistrea printing-houses, then now those who in early 90-tes persuaded for the unification with Rumania started to criticize Communists and personally Vladimir Voronin in official mass media of the region.

The Transdnistrea authorities were concerned with several facts from Vladimir Voronin's biography that supporters of the latter used in their own goals. Also they did not like Voronin's feverish energy. But if Smirnov was born in Russia, then Voronin was born in Dubossary suburb Korzhevo. Thus, Voronin was born immediately in Transdnistrea, while Smirnov arrived to Tiraspol only in 1987, when he was elected director of Electromash factory. Prior to 1989 Voronin headed the city committee of Moldavia Communist Party, where he gained the reputation strong-willed leader, although sometimes inclined to authoritarianism.

While heading the newborn Communist Party since 1994, Voronin tried to attract to his side veterans and pensioners, which are numerous in Transdnistrea cities. And the attempts of Transdnistrea authorities to create their own Communist organizations under control did not achieve any success: these formations were not numerous and did not have any influence. They consisted of marginal and lumpen without any serious financial basis. For example, if Voronin's communists entered into alliance with such powerful forces as Gennadi Zyuganov's Communist Party in Russia and Peter Simonenko's Communist Party in Ukraine, then Transdnistrea Communist Party headed by Vladimir Gavrilchenko headed at closing in with radicals and sectarians which had grouped around experienced party organization man of the times of Mikhail Gorbachev and member of the GKCHP Oleg Shenin. And Zyuganov was accused of revisionism.

A lot of noise was made by Vladimir Voronin's sortie of summer 1997 in Transdnistrea, when Moldova's Communist No. 1 came out with the initiative to unite Communist organizations on both sides of the Dnestr. In the framework of this initiative he decided to meet with communists and veterans in Bendery (June 1997). In a light vehicle Voronin reached Bendery where he addressed several hundreds veterans and communists. His speech was repeatedly interrupted by applause, however when he came out of the closed building his vehicle was blocked by an official vehicle of Transdnistrea Ministry of State Security. According to mass media, head of SSM Department for Constitution Protection, senior lieutenant Dmitry Soim said that Voronin might be detained and sent to Tiraspol since that step by Voronin was illegal: only Transdnistrea political parties may function on Transdnistrea territory.

In the end Voronin was released. This way if in Bendery Voronin had considerable amount of supporters, then in Tiraspol and Rybnitsa one could feel the influence of Transdnistrea official propoganda that described Voronin first of all as a national-communist.

On 25 February 2001, Transdnistrea leadership in fact blocked all ways of delivering of Transdnistrea inhabitants with Moldova citizenship to the right bank of the Dnestr for voting on the transport provided by Kishinev. Already this incident has determined the subsequent watchfulness in the relations between Kishinev and Tiraspol.

I. Smirnov was concerned over the fact that he himself did not have a serious party and political structure at hand. In contrast to Moldova People's Front, in 1989 they created in Transdnistrea the United Soviet of Labor Collectives (USLC). However by 2001 this organization could no longer function without the assistance from above, and its leader Vladimir Yemelyanov (he later combined the title of an official leader of the labor movement with the post of Transdnistrea Privatization Minister) turned out to be unable to give the USLC the second breath.

As far as the reformatory and democratic forces of the region are concerned, by February 2001 they found themselves in an extremely complicated situation. In August 1995, Movement for Transdnistrea Development (MTD) was created in Tiraspol with the participation of famous politicians, businessmen, directors of industrial and agricultural enterprises of the region. MTD participated and achieved certain success in December 25, 1995 PMR Supreme Soviet elections. However, in May 1997, on the day when Moscow Memorandum was signed, the MTD leader Victor Konstantinov (a businessman and president of Tour-Pri Company and Transdnistrea Trade House) was riddled with bullets by two killers with sub-machine guns in the outskirts of Tiraspol. V. Konstantinov was a moderate politician and supporter of compromise with Moldova. During Soviet times he chaired Tiraspol Executive Committee and enjoyed broad connections and wide support among Transdnistrea officials. In early 1990-toes, together with another moderate politician, director of Bendery Electrofarfor Factory Gimn Pologov he thought it possible (until the 1992 conflict) to resolve conflict with Kishinv by creating Free Economic Zone (FEZ) in Transdnistrea. This suggestion was bitterly criticized by I. Smirnov's supporters. The MTD collapsed soon after V. Konstantinov (who was considered one of potential candidates for PMR presidency) had been killed, and his killers were never found.

With the forthcoming Transdnistrea Supreme Soviet elections in 2000, while drawing attention to Putin's power party in Russia, the industrial directorate has taken the decision to create Transdnistrea Public

Movement Unity. The Russian bear was chosen as the emblem of the party. The preparatory work boiled up in the summer of 2000. The "Transdnistrea bears" differed in sufficient negative attitude to communist ideas, and they kept silence about relations with Moldova hinting that settlement of relation with Moldova is desirable since that was the will of Russia and of the West.

But this also caused immediate reaction of Transdnistrea authorities. The letters were evidently afraid of the Unity due to the following reasons:

1. The Movement could inevitably establish its own political contacts in Moscow beyond the control of Smirnov and his supporters.
2. Possible emergence of financial flows in Transdnistrea beyond I. Smirnov's control through Russian investments at factories where directors were Transdnistrea Unity activists.

In the autumn of 2000 a full-scale political and propagandistic attack was launched on the "Transdnistrea bears". They were accused of the same things as other oppositionists had been, i.e. the desire to hand Transdnistrea over to Moldova. According to some information, the most influential directors were called to the State Security Ministry, where the Minister Vladimir Antyufeev personally shown them big discrediting files. And though during Supreme Soviet elections the bears managed to get a certain number of mandates, in many respects they were compromised by the official propaganda. Their political activities have abruptly reduced by the beginning of 2001.

KISHINEV AND TIRASPOL'S HONEYMOON (25 FEBRUARY – MAY, 2001)

Victory of the communists has lead to the following important consequences:

1. Defeat of pro-Rumania forces meant that the official Tiraspol would have had to negotiate with Moldova, which created difficulties for Smirnov's team.
2. It had predetermined the resignation of Moldova President Peter Luchinsky.

The point is that at the initiative of the Communists, on 5 July 2000, the Moldova Parliament introduced fundamental amendments into the Constitution abolishing all-national elections of the head of the state. In April P. Luchinsky resigned, and V. Voronin assumed the office. The first official meeting of Voronin and Smirnov took place already on 9 April,

and it was widely covered by state-owned mass media on both sides of the Dnestr in a pronouncedly constructive way. Soon each side has undertaken its own steps. Thus, at V. Voronin's request (and under strong pressure from Russia) I. Smirnov released Iliye Ilashku, a radical supporter of the union with Rumania who had been arrested in Tiraspol on 2 July 1992 on terrorism charges and sentenced by Transdnistrea Supreme Court to death on 9 December 1993. His execution was postponed, and as is known, the mane of I. Ilashku became a source of different political manipulations. As soon as Ilashku has been released and taken to Kishinev (early May 2001), on 5 May 2001, during the meeting with reporters on the occasion of their professional holiday – Press Day, Transdnistrea President I. Smirnov advanced the following demands to Moldova:

1. To officially apologize to Transdnistrea for the 1992 events
2. To compensate property damages suffered by PMR as a result of the war.
3. To punish those guilty of the aggression against PMR.

The presidential forces in Transdnistrea immediately started propagandist campaign in the support of these demands. But Smirnov's team was prevented from direct accusations of Voronin by Russia's evident satisfaction with results of February 25, 2001 elections. On 13 May 2001, Moldova President Vladimir Voronin and Moldova Metropolitan Vladimir moved with vehicle escort from Kishinev in the direction of Bendery as they said later, in order to attend prayer service in Novo-Yamitsky Monastery of the right-bank village of Kitskany, that became part of PMR in 1990. At the checkpoint near Bendery the procession was stopped by border guards of Transdnistrea SSM. Voronin was told that he had not agreed his trip with Transdnistrea authorities, and therefore could not pass. After spending some time at the checkpoint and failing to communicate with his Transdnistrea counterpart over the mobile phone V. Voronin went back to Kishinev. Later there was information that that day, I. Smirnov had gone fishing and turned his mobile phone off.

It seemed that meeting of the two leaders, which had been planned for May 16, would not take place, but it did (possibly mechanically). The negotiations ended with the signing of several documents, including the Agreement on mutual recognition of a number of documents issued to citizens on both banks of the Dnestr, and on unhindered mutual dissemination of mass media. In that way it became possible to sell Transdnistrea newspapers without registration in Moldova and vice versa. But soon there have occurred a sudden and unpredictable change in relations between Kishinev and Tiraspol.

THE CUSTOMS WAR AND GENERAL COLDNESS (AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2001)

Evidently, Transdnistrea authorities were seriously concerned that the new administration of Moldova could have started getting positive image in the eyes of Russia, Ukraine and the West. They thought in Tiraspol that in this case they could have demanded serious concessions from Tiraspol, which would be fraught for Smirnov's team with the loss of economic and political monopoly in the region.

On the other hand, the new authorities of Moldova have rather taken the decision to teach their counterpart a good lesson, i.e. to do what M. Snegur and P. Luchinsky did not managed (or did not want) to do. V. Voronin enjoyed favorable attitude of the Kremlin. Under such conditions I. Smirnov and his supporters have taken the decision to wage war on two fronts.

On 31 August 2001, at the press-conference on the occasion of the 11th anniversary of PMR President Smirnov said that:

- 1) Moldova refused to provide Transdnistrea new samples of customs seals
- 2) Results of the audit on Moldova Metallurgical Plant (MMP) in Rybnitsa revealed unaccounted state property in the amount of 50 billion \$. Smirnov said that therefore, the Itera Co. International Group that shared 75% of the stock would no longer own control stock of the MMP.

It was also announced that the meeting of Voronin and Smirnov that was supposed to take place on the same day in Moldavian village Golerkany (a resort area) would not be held. Part of pro-Smirnov mass media hastened to put forward a theory that Kishinev leader will try to seize or even liquidate his Tiraspol counterpart. The 31 August press-conference marked the beginning of an open confrontation of Kishinev and Tiraspol. It was a sort of Fullton's speech. The negotiation process was de-facto broken, and there started bitter political and propagandist confrontation. From now on, Transdnistrea propaganda has been putting forward the following themes:

1. Full-scale economic blockade of PMR
2. Equality between Voronin and the unionists
3. Revival of the new threat of war on the Dniestr

THE PRESIDENTIAL HEAT IN TIRASPOL & THE OFFICIAL KISHINEV ROLE

On 10 September 2001, in Transdnistrea officially started election campaign of the head of region. Incidentally, after Moldova communists have come to power it became popular in Tiraspol to compare national elections of the PMR president and the election of Moldova leader through the Parliament. Therefore the President of Moldova is often called the boyar tsar.

As a result of economic difficulties, the authority of I. Smirnov had considerably lost prestige by the autumn of 2001, and therefore the confrontation with Kishinev started in the nick of time. After the pressing vis-a-vis Transdnistrea bears the Kremlin's attitude to Smirnov evidently became cooler, and Vladimir Putin met him only once, in the autumn of 1999, when he was Russian prime-minister. How did Transdnistrea authorities been acting at that period?

1. They actually mobilized several tens pro-Smirnov activists from such public organizations as OCTK, Galina Andreeva's Women's Strike Committee and from some others. These people were transported in state-owned transport and hold in different parts of Transdnistrea meetings under the general slogan "Against economic blockade from Moldova".
2. By the instructions from above, in the precise spirit of the Soviet times, literally since 10 September dozens of enterprises started nominating Igor Smirnov as candidate for PMR presidency. Simultaneously, state-controlled mass media started talking that the leader in office did not have any alternative. The most authoritative directors of plants (with whom according to some information preliminary work was done) called in mass media upon Transdnistrea people giving votes to Igor Smirnov.

Apart from above-mentioned conversations with the SSM staff, such a unanimity could be explained by another, precisely economic reason: most Transdnistrea enterprises are state-owned, and therefore it is not difficult to dismiss any director and replace him with another one. And since every director has his own company (or several ones), including as branch organizations of the enterprises they are heading, the formula of the attitude of the power to directors could be actually explained in the following expression: steal as much as you can, but don't get into politics!

This is the reason why the Transdnistrea director never became a real political force. Apparently at that moment advisors to Moldova president

made the biggest political mistake. Official Kishinev staked on the head of Bendery state administration Tom Zenovich. He was born in 1938, in 1990-ties took extremely radical position, even more uncompromising than the one of Smirnov's himself. Zenovich came out from labor movement, and according to mass media, he had 7 forms of education. He and his brother-in-arms Fedor Dobrov, chairman of Bendery City Council (and pluralistically leader of the labor committee) declared themselves Transdnistrea Unity Movement supporters. Dobrov was also known as a radical promoted worker of lumpen layers of the population. Why did they take such a strange decision in Kishinev? When summing up isolated information one can put forward the following theories:

1. They have counted on the administrative resource Tom Zenovich supposedly had. At that they ignored constitutional powers Igor Smirnov had as PMR president, which allowed him to dismiss Zenovich any time.
2. Allegedly the republican and patriot Smirnov could be defeated by only more republican and patriot like they have pictured Zenovich.
3. Evidently they supposed that Zenovich would have been able to attract to his side a part of pensioners, Smirnov's well-trying electorate.

Despite expectations of part of Moldova and Transdnistrea politicians, during presidential elections campaign in Transdnistrea Moscow did not render any assistance neither Zenovich, nor any of the opposing candidates. Actually, the Transdnistrea issue is not a priority for the Kremlin but rather a provincial one. Naturally, by his Decree Igor Smirnov dismissed Tom Zenovich from the position of the Head of Bendery Administration accusing his former brother-in-arms of numerous failures and mistakes, and Zenovich's administrative resource was lost within an hour. For the publication of his election documents he had to resort to the services of "Novaya Gazeta", an independent Transdnistrea weekly which he restricted to publishing in Bendery "Poligrafist" publishing house in summer 1998, when he was in favor with Smirnov.

The characteristic feature of that period (10 September-9 December 2001) was the use by I. Smirnov of not so much public organizations under his control as of the administrative resource (that Zenovich was deprived of).

For example, they planned to hold the Congress of Transdnistrea Unity Movement in Bendery on 20 October. With the assistance of heads of local administrations part of the buses with delegates were resent to Tiraspol where they told the real bears were going to meet instead of those pretenders in Bendery. Nonetheless the Bendery congress supported Zenovich's candidacy whereas F. Dobrov was elected the Unity

leader. The last decision was hardly a successful one: Dobrov did not enjoy any influence among the businessmen and the directorate and among the moderate of the region in general. Many thought that he was among those responsible for the 1992 conflict, but the problem was that he was considered a lumpen politician.

Smirnov's reaction was tough and immediate. Already in early June 2001 three envoys of the Russian Unity Artem Khrukin, Pavel Savelyev and Alexei Sokov were simply deported from Transdnistrea. And now the PMR MSS staff searched Transdnistrea Unity office in Bendery and withdrew office equipment, diskettes and papers and sealed up the office. It was announced that the real Bears headed by Alexander Zyman, director of Moldavkaben Plant in Bendery had supported Smirnov's candidacy under the patronage of Anatoly Belitchenko, Director of Moldova Metallurgical Plant in Rybnitsa, who was close to Smirnov.

T. Zenovich and F. Dobrov went to Moscow via Kishinev airport, and assailed I. Smirnov in a press-conference in Interfax Agency. But first of all, 1,5 hour accusations of the former friend and boss in dictatorship, renewal of the year 1937 and etc. were covered in the Russian TV only 1,5 minutes; and secondly, even in Transdnistrea itself not many people saw it; and thirdly, Smirnov's team accused Zenovich of resorting to the help of foreign states Russia and Moldova in the struggle for power. At nights some unknown people (presumably special services staff and members of pro-Smirnov public organizations) wrote on the walls of buildings insulting words about the opposition candidates, and with the assistance of a special services (admittedly SSM) staff, the PMR Central Elections Committee Deputy Head Gregory Bryazu had shadowed one of those writers with the use of video equipment. On 15 November 2001 this case was examined in Tiraspol City Court.

In such an atmosphere I. Smirnov got 87% of the votes during December 9, 2001 elections. Only two opposition candidates were let to the final voting: Tom Zenovich (7,2%) and nominated by left-radical forces Alexandr Radchenko (4,8%). The consequences were:

1. The group of Zenovich and Dobrov in fact have left the PMR political stages. Since 9 December 2001, Zenovich have not made any speech in public, and Dobrov later resigned from the posts of Bendery Deputies' Speaker and Bendery Labor Committee Leader. In late August 2002 Dobrov wrote a penitential article in a presidential newspaper in Transdnistrea, where he called upon the readers to unite around the nationally elected PMR President Igor Smirnov. In response, the same newspaper published some articles with the idea that Dobrov had yet to gain confidence since in an alliance with

Moldova special services he attempted to crush the Transdnistrea Republic.

2. Directors of Transdnistrea industrial enterprises fall under stronger control of Smirnov's team.
3. In late 2001-early 2002, I. Smirnov has formed his Cabinet where the majority made former ministers.
4. Position of Transdnistrea authorities vis-a-vis Russia became even tougher. From December 2001 and until 4 October 2002, not a single train with the Russian military property was allowed to leave Transdnistrea.

One can make the following conclusion: for some reason, Russia has suspended the influence on the internal political situation in Transdnistrea, and Moldova was unable to find adequate means for that. National TV of Moldova failed to show due dynamism and was unable to provide interesting materials about the PMR election campaign, and there was not enough Moldova press sold in the region. Besides, there was a clear shortage of interesting articles in the Moldova press. There was an impression that the Moldova society did not have much interest in the results of election battles in the rebel region. As far as Smirnov's team is concerned, they have got an opportunity to accuse Moldova of the desire to bring defeatist forces to power in Tiraspol. The dialogue between Tiraspol and Kishinev was stopped and relations between the sides were frozen.

THE GAGAUZ FACTOR AND ITS ROLE IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN KISHINEV AND TIRASPOL

In October 1990, Transdnistrea labor detachments came to the rescue of Gagauzia when Moldova's pro-Rumania radical Premier Mirche Snegur moved tens of thousands young volunteers to rebelled Budzhak after the region had declared its independence on 19 August 1990. The volunteers were defeated, and Gagauzia independence supporters headed by its first president Stepan Topol and local Parliament Speaker Mikhail Kendigelian had dominated in the region until 1995. Since then, the task of Transdnistrea policy in Gagauzia has become the creation of problems to Kishinev through the support of most radical political forces of Gagauzia.

One can say that from 1990 to 2002, Gagauzia have become a range where Kishinev and Tiraspol polished different technologies of mutual struggle. In December 1994, negotiations between Kishinev and Komrat ended up with a compromise: there was proclaimed Gagauz Autonomy as a part of Moldova. According to some information in mass media, during 1995 and 1999 Bashkan (head of the Autonomy) elections Tiraspol both

times unsuccessfully invested huge money into Mikhail Kendigelian's election campaign. As a result, relations between PMR and Gagauzia became colder, although even such a moderate Gagauzia leader as George Tabunshik continued considering Transdnistrians as their allies against the right political forces in Moldova.

Since 2000, observers noted the high level of activity of Transdnistrea MSS in Gagauzia. Most probably, the MSS used as their main man in the south Gagauz radical Ivan Burgudzhi, ex-commander of Gagauz Budzhak battalion, who was Representative of Gagauzia Autonomy in Transdnistrea until September 2002. The following was characteristic of the official Transdnistrea propaganda vis-a-vis Gagauzia:

1. Straightforward and sometimes rude attacks on George Tabunshik, an official Kishinev nominee;
2. Depiction of Ivan Burgudzhi as potential leader of Gagauzia;
3. Mentioning possible bloody conflict in south Moldova;
4. Previous stake on radicals: on 6 October Bashkan elections in Gagauzia Transdnistrea leadership supported Stepan Topol, who gained only the fourth place.

The work of Transdnistrea authorities in Gagauzia is considerably complicated by the lack of mutual border between the two regions. One can forecast that should radicals be defeated and should for example, George Tabunshik or any other politician except for Stepan Topal or Mikhail Kedigelian come to power (and their victory after the results of the failed 6 October elections is practically impossible), Komrat's relations with Igor Smirnov and Vladimir Antufeev's team would get cold. Nevertheless, relations between Gagauzia and Transdnistrea would always remain in this or that form on the following basis:

1. General loyalty towards Russia and Ukraine
2. General non-acceptance of the unionist forces existing in Moldova
3. General political attitude towards the policy of Moldova central authorities of any political orientation.

Besides, in the relations between Transdnistrea and Gagauzia the former will always play a more influential role due to its bigger industrial potential.

INTERNAL REGIONALISM IN TRANSDNISTREA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION

Despite its small size, Transdnistrea region is ethnically, socially and politically diverse. Its relative unity is supported by the following factors:

1. The longstanding confrontation with the official Kishinev
2. Authoritarian presidential power.

As we have already mentioned, according to 1990 information, there were 750-752 thousand residents in Transdnistrea. In his October 1998 message to the Supreme Soviet that was published in mass media, PMR President I. Smirnov mentioned 650 thousands residents of the region. It was never explained where the rest of 100 thousand residents disappeared. In the opinion of the experts, actually there are 400-450 thousand people residing in the region today; others either have left Transdnistrea or went up for earning. Unlike Bessarabia, mainly an agrarian region, in Transdnistrea there are some 68% urban and 32% rural population. But today absent are the most socially active people who are interested in reforms. With their departure the ratio and the role of conservative electorate have increased. The influence of Russia, Ukraine and Moldova is felt in Transdnistrea to various extent. For example, Tiraspol and Bendery are cities with prevalence of Russian population. Consequently, according to surveys, in these cities there are many supporters of close alliance between PMR and Russia. But residents of these cities also have differences in their opinion: if on the left bank Tiraspol there are many supporters of complete separation from Moldova and demarcation along the Dnestr similar to the situation of 1918-1940, then in the left-bank Bendery even many supporters of PMR creation say that Moldova will never let Bendery off, and that even if Ukraine decides to attach PMR, it would not agree to attach the Right bank territories. Considering these moods, even former radical T. Zenovich came out in 2001 with the support of compromise with Kishinev.

North Transdnistrea make Kamenetsky and Rybnitsky districts where there are many ethnic Ukrainians. The main city of this region is Rybnitsa, where metallurgical plant is situated. According to some information, in better times this plant made 58-52% of Transdnistrea budget. Here many people support Transdnistrea attachment to Ukraine. Ex-minister for information and communications Boris Akulov who was appointed I. Smirnov's special envoy in Ukraine in January 2002 originated exactly from Rybnitsa.

Historical data: during the 1919 Civil War in Russia, Rybnitsky and Kamenetsky districts were occupied by Ukrainian Petlura, and the other part of Transdnistrea (without Benders) was under the Russian White Guard influence. At last, Slobodzeisky, Dubossarsky and Grigoriopolsky districts include many Moldav villages, the residents of which maintain

intensive contacts with their relatives on the Right bank. Many Moldav children from the Dnestr left bank attend educational institutions in Kishinev. As for Smirnov's team, we have the opinion that for the preservation of power monopoly they are ready to sacrifice Bendery with the aim of demarcation of border with Moldova on the Dnestr and possible joining to Ukraine. Thus, when analysing the official Transdnistrea propaganda for 1992-2002, it more often refers to the existence in 1924-1940 of Left Bank Moldav Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within Ukraine (without Bendery), and not to 1989-1990 Transdnistrea referendums, on the results of which Transdnistrea Republic has been actually proclaimed on 2 September 1990. Tiraspol officials often use the expression "the left-bank state". Thus we can say that certain political and regional contradictions existing in the region could get even stronger with the weakening of presidential power in Transdnistrea.

THE PRESENT SITUATION IN TRANSDNISTREA: FORECASTS AND PROSPECTS

As of mid-October 2002, the situation in Transdnistrea had tendencies to rather dynamic development. In fact it become clear that the confrontation between Kishinev and Tiraspol would not end in a compromise decision unless Russia, USA, OSCE and Ukraine who have their own interests in the region are attracted to the process in this or that form.

This is why inside Transdnistrea there is permanent propagandist campaign against the present leadership of Moldova, which, among other issues, is accused of initiating the OSCE plan of solution to Transdnistrea problem envisaging making Moldova a federative state. The second is the accusation of the intention to appropriate Transdnistrea enterprises to pay off Moldova's external debts. However, according to the information provided by Transdnistrea Republican Bank in June-August 2002, the PMR external debt was over 950 billion \$, i.e.1400 \$ per citizen, which is more than in Moldova. Presidency remains the most influential political structure in Transdnistrea today.

As it has already been mentioned, after the introduction of a practically new Constitution the PMR Supreme Soviet has lost many control functions. The Speaker Grigori Marakutsa as well as his deputy Anatoly Kaminsky who originates from Rybnitsa are both considered moderate politicians. Vice-Speaker in charge of economic issues Evgeni Shevchuk also originates from Rybnitsa. To all appearances, the PMR State Security Minister Major General Vladimir Antyufeev plays his own game. According to its power and traditionally, the PMR SSM is an influential

structure, but recently there have appeared some rivals. Now V. Antyufeev himself is no longer afraid of the Baltic persecution since in July 2002 there was information that the Latvia Prosecutor's Office had closed the criminal proceedings against former Latvia militia lieutenant due to the statute of limitation.

The influence of Justice Ministry (Minister – Victor Balala) has increased. Balala himself originates from Russia, was Russian Supreme Soviet Deputy in 1990-1993. He supports land privatisation. The Justice Ministry has its own special forces – the Scorpion detachment (and the MSS – Delta SF). A serious power structure which has the authority to proceed operative investigation actions s Transdnistrea State Customs Committee (Chairman – Vladimir Smirnov, I. Smirnov's son). Some analysts think that the SCC is a serious rival for the SSM.

Positions of Bender group have lately become stronger in the law-enforcement structures: Alexander Korolev have become Interior Minister and his deputy was appointed Oleg Belyakov, both worked at this PMR right bank outpost. The Interior Ministry also have its special forces – the Dnestr battalion. Old-timer of Transdnistrea government is Lieutenant-General Stanislav Khazheev, who faces problems with army funding. He does not come out with any political statements.

In the nearest prospect, along with the started privatisation, Transdnistrea authorities plan to carry out a referendum on the introduction of land private property. This way there forms a layer of owners who do not depend on Moldova's legislation.

Proceeding from above-mentioned one can make the following forecasts:

1. Most likely, I. Smirnov's team would further maximally delay the negotiations with Moldova by putting forward new demands
2. I. Smirnov would not make any serious replacements in his team since he simply does not have efficient staff he could really trust to. According to different sources, the present Cabinet of Ministers is the weakest one since 1991.
3. The PMR official mass media will continue criticizing modern Russian policy for being conciliatory with the West. The stake will be actually made on the Ukraine President Leonid Kuchma. For the domestic propagandist effect on pensioners and veterans Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko will be hold up as an example.
4. The removal of OGRF arms and ammunition will evidently be hindered from time to time.

As for Transdnistrea political system, one can suppose following:

1. Its preservation would depend on the PMR presidential control over the effective power structures.
2. Any replacements in I. Smirnov's team (if we are talking about really influential organisation men) would in any case lead to the change of the present-day system.
3. In a crisis situation I. Smirnov would prefer to agree directly with Russia, Ukraine and the West but not with Moldova.
4. Without the assistance from outside, Moldova presently has very little means of influencing the internal situation in Transdnistrea.

Conclusions :

1. Without the steadfast attention and permanent precise influence of mediators and guarantors negotiations between Kishinev and Tiraspol would again be delayed for an indefinite time.
2. Considering the enough strength of Transdnistrea state structures, both sides will have to make concessions while developing the final political Agreement.
3. Tiraspol's present party in power and more precisely, its executive branch is interested in the status-quo preservation for an indefinite period from the point of view of its political survival.



ANDREW SAFONOV
Political Scientist
Tiraspol