

**THE ROLE OF EU IN TRANSNISTRIAN CONFLICT
RESOLUTION THROUGH THE PRISM OF ITS
NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY**

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Abstract. *Transnistrian conflict is one of a series of disputes at the EU borders. In the Eastern space, together with the conflict from Eastern Ukraine, Transnistrian dispute worries the European community. Brussels is vitally interested in stability and security in Eastern Europe, because it affects the security and prosperity of EU. Brussels is a member of 5+2 format of negotiations on Transnistrian conflict settlement. Therefore, the EU can contribute to the successful conclusion of negotiations by finding a lasting solution.*

At the present, the Transnistrian conflict is frozen. Still, because Russia is the supporter of the separatist regime from Tiraspol, in the event of expansion of the conflict from Eastern Ukraine in its Southern region, the Transnistrian conflict could be thawed, i.e. re-launched. This can affect EU as a neighbor of Moldova. Therefore, we can expect that EU will pay sufficient attention to the evolutions inside Moldova and Ukraine. Brussels can have a crucial role in conflict resolution in Transnistria by: 1) monitoring the situation, 2) supporting responsible decision makers, 3) activating a crisis

center on Transnistrian conflict and on situation in Republic of Moldova – as an associated to EU state, with serious problems, which affects the European security system.

Keywords: Transnistrian conflict, European Union, European Neighborhood Policy, Republic of Moldova, Regional Security System.

1. Introduction

Transnistrian conflict is one in the list of a series of disputes at the borders of the European Union. In the Eastern dimension, together with the conflicts from Lugansk and Donetsk (Donbas) regions of Ukraine, Transnistrian conflict worries the European and the international communities. Brussels is vitally interested in stability and security in Eastern Europe, because the situation of that area affects the security and prosperity of EU. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), lunched in 2003, was design as a tool to contribute to the stabilization of all border area. In 2009, EU lunched the Eastern Partnership program (EaP), inside of ENP, which comprised six post-soviet states: Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. From the beginning of the EaP and until now, three states (Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine) signed Association Agreements with European Union and expressed their at least verbal determination to implement the agenda of European Integration – to adopt the European values, principles and standards.

2. The Role of EU in Transnistrian Conflict Resolution

Brussels is a member of the 5+2 format of negotiations on Transnistrian conflict settlement. Therefore, the EU can and must contribute to the successful conclusion of negotiations by finding a lasting solution.

In comparison with other disputes, especially with the conflict from Lugansk and Donetsk, the Transnistrian conflict is a frozen one, i.e. now it is of a low intensity. Still, because the supporter of the separatist regime from Tiraspol is Russia, in the event of escalating conflict in Eastern Ukraine and its expansion in the South – in the region called Novorossia (Southern Ukraine) – the Transnistrian conflict could be thawed, i.e. re-launched. This can affect EU as a closest neighbor of the Republic of Moldova (by possible refugees' flows and others). Therefore, it can be expected that EU will pay sufficient attention to the evolutions inside Moldova, as well as it is interested in positive evolutions in Southern and Eastern Ukraine area. In fact, the Transnistrian conflict must be approached in the context of the situation from the East-European region – a field of geopolitical confrontation between Russia and West (NATO – USA and EU).

From the point of view of determination of state authorities to resolve territorial (separatist) conflicts, it is very visible that there is a big difference between the attitudes of Kiev and Chisinau political elites. It is obvious which state wants to solve its territorial conflict, inside of its international recognized borders, and which state does not want. Still, EU could stimulate the Moldovan Government to reach a durable settlement of the conflict, in the interests of the national

security of the Republic of Moldovan and in the interests of the community of European states, in order to establish a balance of powers in front line with reconsolidating Russian sphere of influence, taking into account the great financial EU support, and, therefore, the great influence on Moldovan "pro-European" governmental alliance.

The low interest of the EU for the Transnistrian conflict is obvious comparing the attitude of Brussels towards Russia, regarding, from one hand, the conflict in Donetsk (Donbas) and in Lugansk, and from another hand, regarding the Transnistrian conflict. EU never imposed sanctions to Russia for its incontestable involvement in 1992 war in Eastern part of Moldova (the hottest faze of the Transnistrian conflict), with regular military troops (the former 14 Soviet army), as Brussels adopted sanctions to Moscow for its support to separatist regimes from Eastern Ukraine (since 2014).

EU can have a crucial role in crisis management of the frozen Transnistrian conflict, by:

1. Monitoring the situation (including by cooperating with local NGOs, which know better the situation and understand better the causes of internal political events),
2. Supporting decision makers (political forces who really want security, stability and prosperity for Moldova and who want our country to become a supplier, not a consumer of security and resources from the EU) and civil society (NGOs) interested in conflict resolution.
3. Activating a crisis center on Transnistrian conflict and on situation in Republic of Moldova – as an associated to

EU state, with serious problems, which affects the European security system.

3. Crisis Management in the Transnistrian Conflict

Crisis management of any part involved in a conflict or in a negotiation process, regarding a conflict resolution, requires a strategy. Unfortunately, the Moldovan authorities do not have such a document. A strategy results from a policy, a policy results from a vision, a vision results from a mission of the state. Unfortunately, Moldovan state yet does not a mission, a vision and a policy of state building, including of Transnistrian conflict resolution. Because of the lack of a state mission, a policy of reintegration, a strategy, and a tactics, there is no a plan of the conflict resolution.

As an associated state to EU, Moldova could apply for Brussels' aid in developing such instruments (at list to develop a strategy of reintegration). However, due to some hidden aspects (due to some possible financial interests and business personal relations of some politicians from Moldovan authorities together with the Transnistrian leaders), about such a request the Moldovan society does not now nothing yet.

The crisis management is an attempt to control events during a crisis in order to prevent a systematic and significant violence. The decision problem facing an official managing a crisis is to find a balance between toughness and tenderness, between the use of coercion and the granting of concessions, between aggression and adaptation. In this context, can be

remarked that too much coercion can lead to violence, which can spiral out of control and may acquire a dynamic of its own. Too much adjustment can lead to capitulation and to "peace at any price" (which happened at the end of 1992 war on the Dniester riverbanks). For responsible and professional state authorities the essence of the crisis management is to know when to give up and when to be firm. Unfortunately, in the case of Transnistrian conflict, Moldovan politicians in power in 1992 capitulated and until now there are no visible real efforts from the part of Moldovan government to resolve the conflict, despite the rhetoric of the Moldovan politician in power, which says to European strategic partners and to international community that Moldova is fully engaged in Transnistrian conflict resolution.

4. Transnistrian Conflict Resolution: Scenarios

There are a few scenarios of conflict resolution in Transnistrian file. Here are three of them:

1. Federalization within an international treaty recognizing the neutrality of Moldova (for example, by the model of Austria, from 1955), which would be signed by the participants in the 5+2 format of negotiations, especially: EU, USA (NATO would be very appropriate), Russia (in case NATO signs, from another hand can sign the representative of the Organization of Collective Treaty of Security [abbreviation in Russian: ОДКБ]);

2. An exchange of territories between Moldova and Ukraine: some parts of Transnistria, populated by Ukrainians, with parts of Odesa and Chernivtsi regions, populated by

Moldovans, – by the model of exchanging territories by Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1994 (Czechoslovakia was divided in 1993, so there were respected the Final Act from the Conference from Helsinki, in 1975);

3. To keep the conflict frozen “until better times”.

All these solutions could be taken into account and could be discussed in 5+2 format – all the positive and negative aspects of them. It is clear that the Moldovan society and the Moldovan authorities are not in favor of a war as an instrument to solve the Transnistrian conflict. There are a few factors from this regard:

1. A bad economic situation of Moldovan economy (due to a high level of corruption and embezzlement),

2. A high level of technical and human redness of the Russian army – the supporter of the Transnistrian separatist regime,

3. A weak national Moldovan identity (in comparison with Ukrainian identity),

4. A society divided by geopolitical criteria,

5. A low level of confidence/trust of a big part of the Moldovan society towards the political leadership of the country.

Unfortunately, because of the embezzlement of one billion US \$ from the reserves of the National Bank of Moldova, which became a public debt, not many Transnistrian people will accept the reintegration of their region into Moldova. Such an evolution will mean that the citizens from the Transnistrian region will have to pay for what others stole (i.e. ”Pro-European” Alliance, supported by

EU since 2009, which manipulated the Moldovan electorate, as well as the EU authorities from Brussels and from the capitals of the main European countries).

5. Conclusions

Despite its frozen state, the Transnistrian conflict remains a factor of concern regarding the regional security. Due to the conflict in the Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Lugansk), the Eastern Europe became a region that can be treated as a source of destabilization and threat to national security not only of Ukraine and Moldova, but as well of other Central-European states. This situation is a consequence of the geopolitical dispute between Russia – which wants to re-establish its sphere of influence – and West. The initiatives to be close to the Western civilization (European Union and NATO) have led to wars in Southern Ossetia (Georgia – in 2008) and in Donbas and Lugansk regions (Ukraine – from 2014 and until now). Even the war from 1992 on the riverbanks of the Dniester, in Moldova, was an attempt of Russia to maintain the Republic of Moldova in its sphere of influence, after Moscow lost control on the Baltic former soviet republics.

The EU can play a crucial role in Transnistrian conflict resolution, due to its influence on Moldovan authorities and on Transnistrian political and economic elites. As the EU market is the main attraction for the Transnistrian economic agents, also due to a more severe regime at the Moldovan-Ukrainian border, from the part of Ukrainian

authorities, in new conditions there are good premises which shows that the Transnistrian conflict could be solved.

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