

**Forum:** Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA4)

**Issue:** The Situation in Transnistria

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**Position:** Co-chair

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## INTRODUCTION

The Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR), otherwise known as Transnistria, is an independent state that is not officially recognized by any member states. It is officially part of the eastern European country Moldova. It stretches along the, officially, Moldova controlled, part of the left part of the lower reaches of the Dniester river<sup>1</sup>. It has a population of approximately 475 thousand, most of which are either ethnic Russian or Moldovan. Its official languages are Russian, Moldovan or Romanian and Ukrainian. Its government follows a presidential system and its economy is mainly based on industry<sup>2</sup>. Transnistria is strongly dependent on Russia, in regards to its economy, politics and military.



**Figure 1: Map of Transnistria**

Recent developments in the form of 3 explosions noted on Transnistrian territory, have led to the belief that the region may potentially become a new front in the Russian invasion of

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<sup>1</sup> 'Transnistria'. *Nationalia*, <https://www.nationalia.info/profile/48/transnistria>

<sup>2</sup> 'CONSTITUTION OF THE PRIDNESTROVIAN MOLDAVIAN REPUBLIC'. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 1 Oct. 2014, <https://mid.gospmr.org/en/constitution>

Ukraine. The two states, Russia and Transnistria, share a 400-kilometer-long border; whose southernmost point is a mere 62 kilometers away from the strategic city of Odessa. Furthermore, in addition to its military, which is comprised of anywhere between 4500 and 7000 soldiers<sup>3</sup>, there is a 1500 to 2000 soldier Russian military force permanently stationed in the region, which has been designated as a peacekeeping force.<sup>4</sup> This strong Russian presence within Transnistria in addition to recent acts of aggression within the region<sup>5</sup>, warrant the belief that it could be used as a launch pad of a new front in the invasion.

While there has been a considerable amount of debate on the issue at hand, it has been relatively ineffective in finding a decisive solution, leaving Transnistria in a volatile, yet frozen state, in which the government of the PMR is not recognized by Transnistria, yet the actions that have been carried out in the past have resulted in little to no change. This means that the region is a source of political entropy in the region and also considered a testament of Russian aggression after the Soviet years. Furthermore, since Russia has used discrimination and actions against Russian people outside of its borders as a pretext of invasion, there is reasonable speculation that Russia would want to act on Transnistria and its immediate surroundings; Moldova and Ukraine. Moreover, Moldova is, to some extent dependent on Transnistria for its power, seeing as it controls a hydroelectric power plant that provides around 80% of Moldova's electricity<sup>6</sup>, and a considerable amount of energy connections to the outside world, such as high power electric lines and gas transmission pipelines.

The situation in Transnistria is a ridiculously convoluted issue, with most sources not being able to agree on most of the facts. However, one thing is for certain; the instability in the region poses a disproportionately large threat to international security in the region, but also endangers the lives of the almost half a million people living within Transnistria, as well as the millions living in Moldova and Ukraine.

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<sup>3</sup> Kulakevich, Tatsiana. '4 Things to Know about Moldova and Transnistria – and Why Russia's War May Spread beyond Ukraine to Reach Them Soon'. *The Conversation*, <http://theconversation.com/4-things-to-know-about-moldova-and-transnistria-and-why-russias-war-may-spread-beyond-ukraine-to-reach-them-soon-182030>.

<sup>4</sup> 'What You Need to Know about Transnistria'. *OpenDemocracy*, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/what-you-need-to-know-about-transnistria/>.

<sup>5</sup> Brewster, David. 'Transnistria: The next Front of the Ukraine War'. *The Interpreter*, 2 May 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/transnistria-next-front-ukraine-war>.

<sup>6</sup> 'What You Need to Know about Transnistria'. *OpenDemocracy*, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/what-you-need-to-know-about-transnistria/>.

## DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

### De iure (de jure)

Legally, based on laws<sup>7</sup>

### De facto

Practically, not formally recognized<sup>8</sup>

### Expatriate

One living in a foreign country. In this context, an expatriate, or expat, is someone who has moved to another country to gain money intended for people back in their home country.<sup>11</sup>

### Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

The total monetary or market value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period, usually a year<sup>9</sup>.

### Sovereignty

Autonomy, the authority of the state to have complete control over itself<sup>10</sup>.

### Puppet state

A state that de iure independent but is de facto controlled by some outside power. In most cases, puppet states are not recognized by international law.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Definition of DE JURE. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/de+jure>.

<sup>8</sup> Definition of DE FACTO. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/de+facto>.

<sup>9</sup> 'Gross Domestic Product (GDP)'. Investopedia, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gdp.asp>.

<sup>10</sup> Definition of SOVEREIGNTY. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereignty>.

<sup>11</sup> Puppet State - Political Dictionary. 15 July 2022, <https://politicaldictionary.com/words/puppet-state/>.

## Separatist

Someone who is a member of a particular race, religion, or other group within a country and who believes that this group should be independent and have their own government or in some way live apart from other people

## Command-and-Distribution Model

A command economy is a key aspect of a political system in which a central governmental authority dictates the levels of production that are permissible and the prices that may be charged for goods and services. Most industries are publicly owned.<sup>12</sup>

## Free-market economy

An economic system based on changes in supply and demand, with little to no government control.

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## The History of Transnistria

### Soviet Years

After the first world war, on the 24th of January 1918, Bessarabia, which is the area now known as Moldova officially became part of the Kingdom of Romania, except for the territories east of the Dniester. Shortly after, in 1924, those territories, and parts of Ukraine, were occupied by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and aptly named the Moldavian Autonomous Socialistic Soviet Republic, or Moldavian ASSR<sup>13</sup>. Like its neighbors, this was most likely a Soviet puppet state.

After the start of the second World War, in 1940, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed by Nazi Germany and the USSR. It was a non-aggression pact that allowed the two parties to partition Poland and other territories in Europe between them. Among those territories was Bessarabia, the formerly Moldovan part of the Kingdom of Romania,

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<sup>12</sup> The Investopedia Team. 'What Is a Command Economy?' *Investopedia*, 26 June 2022, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/command-economy.asp>.

<sup>13</sup> *About: Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic*. [https://dbpedia.org/page/Moldavian\\_Autonomous\\_Soviet\\_Socialist\\_Republic](https://dbpedia.org/page/Moldavian_Autonomous_Soviet_Socialist_Republic).

which was annexed by the USSR. This newly annexed territory merged with the Moldovan ASSR, creating the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, or Moldovan SSR<sup>14</sup>. This merger was presumably done for the purposes of efficiency and ease of governance. However, it created a lot of underlying tension, as the predominantly Russian demographic of the Transnistrian region was forced into a state which had a sudden majority of ethnic Romanians, who spoke Moldovan.

### Reasons for the separation

Because of the liberal reforms of the then president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, some local governments were allowed more independence from the central government<sup>15</sup> in an effort to accelerate the economy of the Soviet Union and the surrounding territories. While reforms were mainly focused on reshaping the capitalist system of the economy of most of these countries, they were not limited to just that.

The Moldovan SSR was one of the states that opted to make both economic and cultural reforms. The official language of the state was changed back to Romanian or Moldovan, the alphabet used was changed to the Latin alphabet as opposed to the Cyrillic one and various monuments synonymous with the Soviet and, by extension, Russian identity were torn down. All this was done in preparation of Moldova seceding from the USSR and becoming an independent state. When it came to the predominantly ethnic Romanian and Moldovan population, these changes were welcomed. However, the same cannot be said for the population living in Transnistria. The Moldovan population east of the Dniester, as stated above, is predominantly ethnic Russian. Therefore, the active removal of Russian heritage was seen as a targeted attack against them and a subsequent destruction of their own culture. In addition, the changes were also problematic for more practical reasons, as most of the eastern population only spoke Russian. This made communication between the two sides difficult, meaning that the region was almost certain to face economic difficulties in the future, if the local authorities did not change the status quo.

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<sup>14</sup> 'Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic'. *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CM%5CO%5CMoldavianSovietSocialistRepublic.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Editors. 'Perestroika'. History.Com, 14 Nov. 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/perestroika-and-glasnost>.

## Separation and conflict with Moldova

In September of 1990, almost a year before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Transnistria seceded from Moldova under the name of Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR). In response, Moldova mobilized its army in an attempt to regain the lost territory. However, the Moldovan forces were unsuccessful because of the large Soviet military presence still stationed in the region. The fighting lasted for almost 4 months, claiming the lives of hundreds<sup>16</sup>. This conflict is known as the Transnistria war, sometimes referred to as the Moldo-Russian war, referencing the Russian support of Transnistria. After the conflict ended, a political stalemate ensued that is ongoing to this day, with PMR being a de facto independent state that is only recognized or partially recognized by the breakaway states of Abkhazia, Artsakh and South Ossetia.

## Inner Structure of Transnistria

### Culture and Demographic

It is important to note that while Transnistria and Moldova are in similar locations geographically, they differ wildly when it comes to demographic and culture, and that plays a big part in how their relationship stands and has stood ever since the inception of the Moldovan ASSR. Transnistria has a population of around 475,000 people, with a large percentage of the population claiming to be ethnic Russian (around 29%) with the second largest group being Moldovans (around 28%)<sup>17</sup>. In contrast, around 75% of Moldova's population are Moldovan, while a mere 4.1% are Russian. Other cultural differences include the fact that Transnistria's official languages are Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan while Moldova's official language is Moldovan; this difference originates from the reforms that took place in 1990. Similarly, the change of the Cyrillic alphabet in favor of the Latin one is one of such changes. This stark difference in culture is one of the root causes of the divide between Transnistria and Moldova, and part of the reason why the two nations use separate economic systems, even when they have de facto separated.

### Economy

PMR's economy is a rather peculiar mix of command-and-distribution economic policies which originate from the USSR and the free-market economy of the west. The

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<sup>16</sup> 'What You Need to Know about Transnistria'. *OpenDemocracy*, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/what-you-need-to-know-about-transnistria/>.

<sup>17</sup> 'Transnistria'. *Nationalia*, <https://www.nationalia.info/profile/48/transnistria>.

Transnistrian economy is based on a few large, Soviet-era industrial plants which generate more than half of the region's annual GDP, while the rest comes from Russian subsidies.<sup>18</sup>

A big drawback to the country's economy is that it has seen a permanent deficit. Since 2008, expenses have been higher than expected income, in some instances reaching extremes of expenses being two or three times as high.

As mentioned above, the region's economy is mainly supported by 4 large, Soviet-era industrial plants. These 4 plants produce metallurgical products, textiles, cement and power. Altogether, these 4 plants export almost 95% of their output to the USA, Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Germany and Italy<sup>19</sup>. Some of these plants were owned by the government in the past, but have since been privatized. Around 70% of the region's GDP comes from the export of metallurgical, textile and electric power industries to western Europe. The remaining 30% come from cash remittances from expatriate workers.

All of the above add up to a very inflexible economy that is highly dependent on its outside environment. A great and very recent example of this is the pandemic. Transnistria's economy expanded by 40% in 2021 following the most severe year of the pandemic for the region, but is now expected to contract; to shrink by 20% following the Russian invasion of Ukraine<sup>20</sup>. This due to the fact that both Ukraine, one of the main trade partners of Transnistria, and Russia, the state that provides Transnistria with subsidies and humanitarian aid, have withheld funds that would otherwise end up in Transnistria in an effort to sustain their own respective war efforts. Therefore, the economy is highly susceptible to shocks.

In addition, Transnistria has consistently been highly dependent on Russian aid. Ever since the Transnistria war both direct, in the form of humanitarian aid, and indirect in the form of gas subsidies, the latter of which essentially provides the Transnistrian people with gas free of charge. Transnistria has been growing more independent since 2014, nevertheless its dependence on Russian aid is still very prevalent.

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<sup>18</sup> 'An Aided Economy. The Characteristics of the Transnistrian Economic Model'. *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, 16 May 2013, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2013-05-16/aided-economy-characteristics-transnistrian-economic-model>.

<sup>19</sup> 'Transnistrian Market and Its Impact on Policy and Economy of the Republic of Moldova'. Friedrich Ebert Foundation. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ukraine/02934.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> *Separatist Transnistria Expects 20% Economic Contraction This Year*. 16 May 2022, <https://intellinews.com/separatist-transnistria-expects-20-economic-contraction-this-year-244412/>.

## Politics

Vadim Krasnoselsky is Transnistria's current president. He rose to power in 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2021 after securing a staggering 79.4% of the vote<sup>21</sup>. Krasnoselsky used to work for the biggest private group within Transnistria, the Sheriff Group. Combined with the fact that the only foreign observer state was Russia, many believe that the election was fraudulent. Furthermore, neither the election's validity, nor the president himself is recognized by Moldova, since doing so would mean recognizing the PMR as an independent state.

The region's political climate has seen similar turmoil throughout its existence after the Moldovan civil war in 1992, despite the various solutions put forward by organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), but also independent efforts made by the governments of the countries involved. There are many such examples. In 1997, the Primakov Memorandum was signed by the then presidents of Moldova and the PMR, which ensured legal and state ties between the two countries. However, the misinterpretation on some of the terms led to the memorandum never being ratified, and having a rather unclear effect on the relation of the two nations. In a similar fashion, the 1999 Istanbul OSCE Summit ended with the decision that the Operational Group of Russian Forces, the Russian military force stationed within Tiraspol, would have removed itself from Transnistria by 2002, which never actually happened.

## The Operational Group of Russian Forces

To expand, Transnistria's independence is largely upheld by the presence of Russian troops within its territory<sup>22</sup>. More specifically, this armed group is the Operational Group of Russian Forces, which was formed in 1995 and has been stationed in Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria since. This division has its origins into Soviet history and, much like the PMR itself, holds significance in regards to the separatism in the region.

In short, the Group stems from the 14<sup>th</sup> Guards Army, originally stationed in Kishinev, Moldova. It was later relocated to Tiraspol in the 80s and then redesignated to Operational Group

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<sup>21</sup> 'Vadim Krasnoselsky Wins Presidential Elections of Unrecognized Transnistria — CEC'. TASS, <https://tass.com/world/1374773>.

<sup>22</sup> Kulakevich, Tatsiana. '4 Things to Know about Moldova and Transnistria – and Why Russia's War May Spread beyond Ukraine to Reach Them Soon'. *The Conversation*, <http://theconversation.com/4-things-to-know-about-moldova-and-transnistria-and-why-russias-war-may-spread-beyond-ukraine-to-reach-them-soon-182030>.



of Russian Forces to match its newfound peacekeeping role. The exact numbers regarding equipment and number of sources are disputed, but it is generally believed that the force has anywhere from 1500 to 2000 combat-ready soldiers and approximately 22000 tons of equipment including vehicles, small arms and ammunition.

This peacekeeping force played a decisive role in securing Transnistria's de facto independence. Despite the redesignation of the Operational Group of Russian forces happening 3 years after the end of the war, the 14<sup>th</sup> Guards Army seemed largely sympathetic to the Transnistrian effort, joining the Transnistrian Republican Guard. Nevertheless, there was no formal confirmation of sympathy towards Transnistria by the Russian government.

To this day, the Operational Group of Russian Forces remains stationed in Transnistria. According to some sources, this is perhaps the only thing that stands in the way of solving the issue at hand, whether that be Transnistria being annexed by Moldova again, or it becoming a fully independent, sovereign state de iure.

### **The 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine**

Briefly, in 2010 the pro-Russia Victor Yanukovych was elected into power by the Ukrainian people. In the following years, the parliament actively took steps to distance the country from NATO and the EU, instead opting to move closer, politically and economically, to Russia. Such steps included calling off an EU association agreement which was scheduled to be signed in November of 2013, but was called off because of pro-Russian sentiment and because of the fact that various transparency laws that came with the agreement would interfere with his and his business associate's alleged nefarious actions. This prompted country-wide mass protests dubbed "The Maidan Revolution" or "Revolution of Dignity". Yanukovych was then defenestrated; removed from power, and fled to Russia in 2014. In the following weeks, after a controversial referendum, Russia annexed Crimea and a region called Donbass in the easternmost part of Ukraine fell into the hands of Russia-backed separatists. Ukrainian forces retaliated and have been fighting since then. In February of 2022, motivated by the "demilitarization and denazification" of Ukraine, Russia, having accumulated forces along its border, launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which is still ongoing as of the time of writing.

### **Transnistrian relations with Russia**

On paper, Russia has historically been relatively neutral when it came to Transnistria and the PMR. However, the two countries have a strong sympathetic relationship on more practical matters, as well as culturally and politically.

Much like Russia, the PMR has been slowly transitioning from a planned economy model - which is an economic system in which the elements of an economy (labor, capital, and natural resources) are subject to government control and regulation designed to achieve the objectives of a comprehensive plan of economic development - to a free market economy. The transition has been made easier on the PMR by the Russians who have, throughout its life, provided it with various amenities, such as humanitarian aid and gas subsidies. Such aid, however, seems to perpetrate separatism in the region. The reasons for this are more than one, as Transnistria is a key region for the surrounding territories regarding energy and how it is moved and distributed<sup>23</sup>. Just to name a few, a crucial hydroelectric dam within Transnistrian borders provides almost 80% of the electricity in Moldova, multiple power lines run through Transnistrian territory into Moldova and there are more than one crucial Russian gas pipelines cutting through the territory. Control over all of the above is crucial, which is part of the reason why the PMR has not dissolved and has maintained stable relations with Russia.

More obviously, the Operational Group of Russian forces that is stationed within Transnistria is one of the major aspects of this issue and one that should not be overlooked. Despite attempts made by Moldova and the west, attempts to remove the military group from the region have proven unsuccessful, and with the Ukraine invasion in full motion, many have theorized and feared that the leverage provided by the Operational Group of Russian Forces in the area will be enough to allow Russia to launch a new attack on Ukraine from Transnistrian grounds. Strategically speaking, it would be extremely easy for the Russian military to execute an encircling maneuver on the defending Ukrainian troops currently to the east of Transnistria<sup>24</sup>.

### **Transnistrian relations with Ukraine**

Ukraine, although not having recognized the PMR officially, seeks to maintain a healthy relationship with its leadership. Ukraine itself was integral to the smooth operation of negotiations regarding Transnistria, since the political leaders of the parties (Ukraine, Russia, Transnistria) maintained a strong working relationship. It is important to

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<sup>23</sup> Toflat, Serglu, and Victor Parlicov. Russian Gas and the Financing of Separatism in Moldova | Free Russia Foundation. Russian Gas and the Financing of Separatism in Moldova, <https://www.4freerussia.org/russian-gas-and-the-financing-of-separatism-in-moldova/>

<sup>24</sup> CNN, Rob Picheta. 'How Transnistria, a Russian-Backed Region in Moldova, Is Getting Pulled into the War in Ukraine'. CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/27/europe/transnistria-moldova-ukraine-russia-war-explainer-intl/index.html>.

note that while Ukraine was present in the negotiations (1997 Moscow Memorandum and 2006 5+2 format), it mostly played a sort of mediation role, with the intent to keep Transnistrian leaders satisfied. This was further reinforced by light border presence, looser travel arrangements and regular cross-border trade, all while not having officially recognized the territory<sup>25</sup>. In other words, Ukraine has offered Transnistria a “window to the outside world” not only with trade, but also with moving people.

Transnistria’s friendly relationship with Ukraine is further increased by the Ukrainian and Moldovan governments’ acceptance of the EU Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) which are, in essence, replacements for the previous trade arrangements that allow Transnistria to freely trade with the rest of the EU and the countries that have agreed to both of the agreements. This has inadvertently made Transnistria more dependent on its immediate neighbors and, given the relaxed measures in the border, more dependent on Ukrainian trade than ever.

When it comes to the military relations of things, the issue at hand becomes more complex. So far, Transnistria and the PMR have not shown any signs of aggression toward their neighbors whatsoever. Nevertheless, the fact that Transnistria has a military force that is backed by Russia is concerning to say the least. In 2014, the year of the annexing of Crimea and the Donbass conflict, evidence has turned up that suggests contact between Ukrainian and Transnistrian officials regarding the security of their border. The Transnistria Minister of Interior Affairs was quick to ensure the safety of the border. Nevertheless, Ukraine responded by restricting access to its borders to Russian males aged 13-65, fortifying the border and conducting military exercises near the Transnistrian border and other regions.<sup>26</sup> When it comes to the first measure especially, these measures seemed to affect Transnistria because, as we discussed above, a large percentage of the Transnistrian GDP comes from cash remittances sent by expatriate workers. Therefore, it is in Transnistria’s best interest to maintain a healthy relationship with Ukraine, and it is similarly important for Ukraine to maintain Transnistrian activity coming in and going out of the border, seeing as in the event of a Transnistrian economic

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<sup>25</sup> Frear, Thomas. ‘New Realities: The Ukrainian Approach to Transnistria’. *European Leadership Network*, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/new-realities-the-ukrainian-approach-to-transnistria/>.

<sup>26</sup> Frear, Thomas. ‘New Realities: The Ukrainian Approach to Transnistria’. *European Leadership Network*, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/new-realities-the-ukrainian-approach-to-transnistria/>.

collapse, there is a very real risk of a refugee crisis, with a large part of the PMR's population defecting to Ukraine.

### **Russian invasion of Ukraine and its effects on Transnistria**

To preface this section, it is very important to note that both Russian and Transnistrian officials object to Transnistria being used as a new front, or are at least highly unlikely to do so. However, a problem arises here, because the presence of the Operational Group of Russian Forces remaining in the region is a sign that the above cannot be ensured. Given Russia's history of not being able to adhere to their word, such as with the invasion of Ukraine and the removal of the Operational Group of Russian forces, it would be logical to presume that Russian statements regarding this issue may not be entirely honest.

The lack of trust between the parties involved is fueled by some key facts that also have historically coincided with upholding the separatist spirit in the region. The Operational Group of Russian Forces is something that many experts consider as both the reason Transnistria has kept its de facto independence but also the reason for a lot of the concern regarding potential aggression against Ukraine from the Transnistrian front. There have been multiple unsuccessful attempts to remove the Russian military from the area. There is, again, the issue that demographically speaking, most of the people within the PMR's borders are Russia-backed separatists, meaning that they would be most likely willing to assist. Combined with the fact that Ukraine and Transnistria share a 400-kilometer-long border that, on its southernmost point, is a mere 62 kilometers away from Odessa, the Transnistrian front in the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not only possible, but it is also expected by many to be involved in conflict.

In addition, three explosions within Transnistria's borders are also cause for concern. While the perpetrators are unknown, some Ukrainian experts have claimed that the explosions were a product of Russian efforts to create a motive for an attack. They worry that Russia will use these explosions and alleged social discrimination against the Russian people by Moldovans as a pretext from which Russian military could be mobilized in the area, both confirming the worries of Ukrainian officials but also disturbing Moldova and Romania. Acts of violence like these are likely to occur again as the war progresses, and there are concerns that critical infrastructure, such as government buildings, power plants, and power lines will be targeted. For this reason, some have proposed providing policing aid to Moldova and Transnistria in an effort to prevent said attacks. This, however, has the drawback of undermining several parts of the Moldovan constitution, which enshrines neutrality. Requesting or accepting the aforementioned aid would be a

breach of the constitution, which would only deteriorate the state of this already very delicate situation.

As was mentioned above, the health of the Transnistrian economy heavily relates to the war in Ukraine, a country that is one of the biggest exporters to Transnistria and has therefore heavily disrupted supply routes, resulting in prices rising sharply after the start of the war. This means that all of the products found in Transnistrian stores that originate from Ukraine, or about half of the products in total, have received an almost 30% upcharge. There is also a shortage of all kinds of Ukrainian goods, which make up a large percentage of imported goods within the territory.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED**

### **Republic of Moldova**

With Transnistria de iure being Moldovan territory, Moldova's role in this issue cannot be understated. Moldova has been steadfastly opposed to Transnistria's independence throughout the years. The Moldovan PM has made a statement that while there is no imminent threat of the Russo-Ukrainian war expanding to the west, towards Moldova, the country's defenses would not "last long" when pressured by Russia-backed separatist forces coming from Transnistria.

### **Russian Federation**

The aggressor in the Ukrainian invasion and the state that Transnistria has historically depended on, both economically and politically. Russia could use Transnistria as a platform for aggression against Ukraine and Moldova alike. If Russia were to use Transnistria as a platform for war successfully, encircling Ukrainian forces would be made especially easy. There is also something to be said about economic relations between the two countries, specifically the fact that Russian efforts have been made consistently throughout the years to maintain the separatist and sympathetic to Russia nature of the region, as there are multiple Russian projects within the region that act as keystones to the Russian economy, such as the gas pipelines. Therefore, some degree of control in the region would be beneficial.

### **Ukraine**

Currently being invaded by Russia. Ukraine shares a 400km long border with Transnistria, which is in a key strategic location in favor of Russia. Transnistria's now main trading partner, instability in its western borders, either from economic collapse leading to an immigration crisis

or through mobilization of Russian forces in the region could be catastrophic for the Ukrainian resistance against Russian forces advancing through the southernmost parts of the country.

### North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Moldova's relations with NATO remain relatively neutral, though the former has, for a long time, sought to modernize and standardize various aspects of its political system in accordance with European and northern Atlantic standards. However, Moldova's constitution forbids sending military aid outside its borders which means that it cannot join NATO. NATO has explicitly stated that they do not intend to intervene in the issue of Transnistria, and seeing as neutrality almost perfectly outlines their relationship with Moldova, that will most likely be the case. When it comes to the war, NATO's stance poses a stark contrast to the issue of Moldova itself, having mobilized their peacekeeping organ for the first time in history. It is important to understand that NATO and its members are at the forefront of this conflict, as one of the confirmed reasons for the invasion was NATO's "aggressive expansion" towards Eastern Europe.

### Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE is the world's largest regional security-oriented intergovernmental organization which also has observer status in the UN. The OSCE has made numerous attempts to ameliorate the situation in Transnistria, including multiple conferences, in 1992 and 1999, that have been largely successful in their original goals and the reintroduction of the 5+2 talks in Vienna, in 2011. Such attempts have been integral in aiding both prosperity within Transnistria but also stopping and preventing outside aggression.

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
24 January, 1918	Bessarabia officially becomes part of the Kingdom of Romania
12 October, 1924	Moldovan ASSR is created
August 23, 1939	Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is signed

September 2, 1990	Transnistria declares independence from Moldavian SSR
25 August, 1991	Transnistria declares independence from Soviet Union
2 March - 1 July 1992	Transnistria War
21 July, 1992	Joint Control Commission is established by the OSCE
November 1999	OSCE Istanbul Summit
July 27, 2005	Establishment of “Law on Basic Provisions of the Special Legal Status of Localities of the Left Bank of Dniester”
Late 2013 - Early 2014	Euromaidan or Maidan Revolution takes place in Ukraine
20 February, 2014	Annexing of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation
22 June, 2018	UN General Assembly Resolution 72/282 is adopted
24 February, 2022	Start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

## **RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS**

### **UN GA RESOLUTION 72/282**

On the 22nd of June, 2018, during the seventy-second session of the UN General Assembly, resolution 72/282 was adopted. The title of this resolution is “Complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova” and as it suggests, it demands the removal of the Operational Group of Russian Forces from the Transnistrian territory, despite its designation as a peacekeeping group by the Russian government.

### **UNDP Joint Action to Strengthen Human Rights in the Transnistrian Region of the Republic of Moldova**

In a project that lasted seven years, the UN Development Programme, along with 6 other UN entities planned and ratified measures that foster social progressiveness and inclusive growth. The project in total had a budget upwards of 4 million USD and aimed to make aspects of society and daily life more accepting to people with disabilities, people on the Autism spectrum, and people with serious chronic illnesses such as HIV/AIDS. Especially in the second and third phase of the project, particular emphasis was placed on Transnistria.

### **OHCHR in Moldova: Providing vital support to Ukrainian refugees**

Ever since the start of the war, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has been providing aid to Ukrainian refugees crossing over to Moldova by documenting and providing aid and protection with the help of the Moldovan government and the Moldovan people at large. Over 400,000 Ukrainians have fled to Moldova, a quarter of which have decided to stay there. More specifically, an additional 8,000 refugees have decided to remain in the Transnistria region.

## **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

### **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s past attempts (OSCE)**

After the end of the Transnistrian civil war, on July 21st 1992, the OSCE established the Joint Control Commission, which was a group of soldiers from three states. The purpose of this commission was to ensure the civil security of the people in Moldova and Transnistria and to



establish a ceasefire in the process. This measure saw success, given that fighting has not restarted since the end of the civil war.

The OSCE Istanbul Summit took place in 1999. The attendants reached a decision that dictated that the Operational Group of Russian Forces and other Russian forces stationed in Georgia, were to be completely withdrawn by the 31st of December in 2002. This was, evidently, an ambitious decision that did not end up succeeding, seeing as Russia did not meet the deadline, and has not withdrawn its armed forces since.

In Vienna, 2011, Transnistria, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE (with the US and EU as foreign observers) reintroduced the 5+2 talks. The goal of these talks was to establish a stable solution that both insured the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, while establishing Transnistria's restricted independence within its borders. This would both facilitate prosperity within Transnistria, while also respecting internationally recognized boundaries.

### **Agreements and treaties between member states**

In 1994, Russia and Moldova came to an agreement that called for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transnistria within three years of the signing. This agreement also demanded that Moldova recognized Transnistria as an independent state, and since Moldova was unwilling to ratify it immediately, something that the agreement hinged on, it automatically became obsolete.

In 1997, in the Moscow Memorandum, the Primakov Memorandum was created. It was an agreement between Moldova and Transnistria that stated that the two would function as a joint state. While the memorandum made it clear that Transnistria would be able to act independently when it came to economics, the two parties had different interpretations of how the political and judicial climate would be formed.

The ambiguity of the Transnistrian legal system would not be cleared up until 2005, with the "Law on Basic Provisions of the Special Legal Status of Localities on the left Bank of Dniester". The law further reinforced the previously established territorial integrity of Transnistria within Moldova, while also establishing the fact that Transnistria will be responsible for its own legal, economic and cultural system.

The following year (2006) a double referendum was held in Transnistria, which asked voters whether they would like Transnistria to reunify with Moldova or instead maintain its de facto independence and possibly unite with Russia in the future. While the separatist notions won by a landslide victory, various pro-Moldovan groups have denounced its results.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

The situation in Transnistria is incredibly convoluted and has proven very difficult to solve. For almost 30 years now, possible solutions posed by the OSCE and by member states have had little to no effect. The solutions proposed below have, more or less, been proposed before. However, due to the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, now more than ever there needs to be some sort of change. It should be noted that while these solutions, as they are described here, require at the very least a basic level of understanding of the above contents of this guide.

### **Ensuring peaceful negotiation**

Due to the nature of this issue, negotiation is one of the few solutions that can be actually carried out. Negotiation itself can entertain multiple viewpoints, which is ideal for this issue, because of its multifaceted nature. However, negotiation in this context has some main issues.

One such issue is that the negotiating parties have little to no assurance that the actions that have been agreed on will actually be carried out. This is a weakness of agreements placed in good faith, because of the fact that they are built on trust. The problem here is that, when regarding a de facto independent state, the relationship between the leaders of the opposing parties have little to no trust between them to begin with. The only things holding them together, in this case are economic and political incentives, control of energy, and the ever looming threat of Russian aggression, which has been validated in the past (1992 Transnistria War). This issue needs to be addressed in a meaningful way; giving negotiating parties some sort of assurance that what was decided will actually be ratified. The extent to which this is done is up to each country's respective policy, however it should be noted that threats of any kind are ill-advised, due to the volatility of the situation.

For the above reason, an unbiased carrier for negotiations should be employed. The carrier in question could be some sort of commission made up of member states, or an organization, such as the OSCE. This would both provide a level of assurance, as well as omit any bias that may hinder negotiations in any way.

### **Limiting Transnistria's reliance on outside power**

The PMR has relied on Russia, both politically, militarily and economically, to survive. Demographically and historically speaking this has made a lot of sense, because the people living within Transnistria are predominantly Russian and the reasons for the region's separatist nature lie within the population's cultural ties to Russia.

This reliance has been troublesome, because by most accounts it is the thing that upholds the separatist spirit in the region, especially the economic aspect. Even though the PMR has been trying to distance its economy from Russian aid, it still makes up a considerable percentage of its economic activity, to the point where if it did not exist, the region would almost certainly collapse economically, and would be forced into de facto merging with Moldova. While this seems like an optimal and relatively quick solution to the topic, one should keep in mind the resulting humanitarian disaster that would ensue, since almost half a million people would be left without stable income, and the control that Transnistria has over the region's energy sources would be left in an incredibly unstable state.

As such, efforts should be focused on making Transnistria less dependent on foreign aid. Instead, guided by each country's policies, states should aim to create a version of Transnistria that is not dependent on aid programs specifically. This will be especially difficult, seeing as this action will bring about instability to some degree and because the parties involved, mainly the Russian Federation may opt to continue providing aid for the reasons mentioned above. For this reason, investment is a crucial part of this effort, as it would be the main way in which foreign power can work to make Transnistria more independent of Russian aid in a scenario where this solution would be employed.

### **Providing military aid to Moldova**

According to Article 11(1) of the Moldovan Constitution, the country proclaims a permanent state of neutrality. In the very next clause, it is stated that Moldova will not allow any foreign military force to disperse in its territory.

It has been suggested that Moldova should accept military aid from other countries. The reasoning behind this is that, as was mentioned above, in the case of hostility by Russia or the PMR, Moldova would falter relatively quickly, leaving its entire population, around 2.6 million people, vulnerable to war crimes similar to the ones being committed in Ukraine. Of course, the impact on surrounding nations would also be immense, with a large percentage of the population defecting to the west. The modernization of the military would serve to delay advances at least, and as has been mentioned above, prevent any more violent events in Moldova and Transnistria similar to the 3 explosions earlier in the year.

However, the prevention of conflict through this manner could cultivate it further. Aside from the very obvious fact that any foreign military force in Moldova would breach Article 11 of its constitution, causing internal division in the country, it may also be understood as an act of aggression from Moldova and any involved countries. This could lead to unnecessary conflict within the country, between Transnistria and the rest of the country, or even worse, a second

Russian invasion. Russia could view the armament as use of excessive force with the intent to silence the people of Transnistria, and could use that as a pretext.

To avoid the above, the implementation of such a measure must be calculated and well thought-out, so as to avoid as much conflict as possible. It should be made explicitly clear by all parties that the government of Moldova does not intend to use their recently obtained military force for anything other than defense against an attack. This is not to say that such a statement would completely prevent conflict with 100% certainty, but is instead more of a legal condition under which the constitution of Moldova can be amended or breached, without any severe backlash.

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