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**THE ROLE OF ELITES IN THE HISTORY OF
TRANSNISTRIA**

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Summary

The “frozen” or rather “unresolved” conflicts at the borders of the ex-USSR date mainly from the collapse of the Soviet state (1989-1991) to the present. The relevance of performing studies of this kind of conflicts lies, in particular, on the necessity to understand the causes and seek solutions to security problems in the Central and Eastern European region, in the context of the continuous challenges of new outbreaks.

The role of elites in the history of Transnistria represents an integrated approach of the history, by analyzing political processes and elite phenomena that occurred and took place in the current Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova which is separated and *de facto* governed by its own elites after 1991. This paper is a contribution to the contemporary history, the research referring mainly to the period 1989-2019, but also including an own vision of the historical context that led to the emergence of Transnistria (dating from 1924, when the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created).

The aim of this paper refers to the re-evaluation of ideas and concepts on the issue of “unresolved conflicts” by researching the particular case of Transnistria. The historical dimension of the research will focus mainly on the relationship between kinds of elite (political, economic, military) as well as relation between elites at various levels (local, regional, international). In order to carry out our scientific research, we used analytical, inductive and comparative methods.

The paper is structured in three parts each of which corresponds, in essence, to a Chapter. In the first part, we conducted research on the causes of Transnistrian separatism from the perspective of the history of elites. Thus, I turned my attention to a historical approach with reference to the events in the current territory of the Transnistrian region from the earliest times to the moment of *de facto* separation. The analysis focuses on the investigation of the causes that determined the formation of the population on the left bank of the Dniester, the culture and customs and relations with the inhabitants of the right bank of the Dniester. Thus, we established the origin of the current inhabitants of the left bank of the Dniester - which turns out to be a “tripartite” - Romanians, Russians and Ukrainians. A brief foray into history allowed us to conclude that the current territory of Transnistria has always been inhabited by Moldovans (Romanians).

The study focused on the circumstances in which the RASSM was created in 1924, emphasizing the Kremlin's recognition of the presence of “Moldovan” (Romanian) people (referred here as a cultural collective entity) on both banks of the Dniester river. Moreover, we managed to offer our own perspective of the “Moldovan nationalism” successfully created in

RASSM during 1924-1940, which proved to be unique in the former USSR, since, unlike the other ex-soviet Republics, only in the Republic of Moldova the elites promoted a common history with another state, Romania. Analyzing the policies of the USSR in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, we identified the causal link between the discriminatory policies against both banks of the Dniester promoted by the Russians in Soviet Moldova, and the artificial ethnic distancing of Romanians, Russians and Ukrainians from MSSR between 1989-1992. These policies focused mainly on two dimensions: the massive industrialization of the left bank of the Dniester (Moscow's strategic actions) and the promotion of allogeneic leadership. The economic power of the leaders (ethnic Russians, who came to Transnistria as factory and enterprise managers) was the main factor in the initiation of the separatist wave, which in fact led to the conversion of these elites. Using the results of researching of the archives of the Communist Party of MSSR, we were able to show the origins of the people who led the separatist movements of 1989-1992 - most of whom were born and educated in the Russian Soviet Socialist Federal Republic, came to the Transnistrian region around 1970-1980, some of whom returned to their homeland (Russia) after leaving the leading positions in Transnistria.

The second part includes, on the one hand, the evolution of the political and socio-economic situation in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, and, on the other hand, a comparative perspective of *de facto* regimes and their right to be considered a “nation state”. In this part we offered a new historical image of the contemporary Transnistrian region, especially addressing the issue of the existence of the so-called “Transnistrian people” or “Transnistrian nation” both in terms of political/civic concept of nation.

The challenge we set out in the second part was to add a legal element to the classical views of historians on the definition of nation, involving individual case of Transnistria. We have tried to demonstrate that, while there is no “Transnistrian nation”, the current status of Transnistria cannot be included in the modern idea of nation-state, especially by observing the criterion of nationality. Using the conclusions, we reached from the analysis in Chapter I, we were able to demonstrate, first of all, the lack of attachment and connections based on a “national consciousness” between the leaders of the 1989-1992 separatist movement and the indigenous population. Also, from a comparative perspective, we managed to show that after a period of 30 years of *de facto* existence, Transnistria left with little in common with *de facto* states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In the last chapter, we had the opportunity to research and present a current vision on the behavior of the strongest European actors regarding the Transnistria (Russian Federation and European Union). In the same time, we analyzed the impact of the regional processes on

the development dynamics of the Transnistrian region and economic and political priorities of the Transnistria “power elite”.

As a general conclusion, we can say that Kremlin intensified its rhetoric in defending the interests of Transnistria every time decision-makers in Chisinau rejected Moscow's initiatives and flirted with the West and relaxed it when Moldovan ruling elites showed an attitude of loyalty and friendship to the Russian Federation.

However, once the European Union offered Autonomous Trade Preferences to Moldova which covered also Transnistria, the economic ties with Russia, especially the dependency on Russian market started to decrease. After the establishing of common Moldovan-Ukrainian border control on one of the most agglomerate border segments on the Transnistrian territory and due to the benefits offered by the DCFTA, economic cooperation and exports from the Transnistrian region have been massively reoriented towards the EU market. In this way, the European Union obtained a *soft power* instrument over Tiraspol, and offered the Government of the Republic of Moldova the possibility to keep evidence and collect taxes from companies registered on the left bank of the Dniester.

The scientific contribution of this paper is given by the chosen approach, namely the contrast of the various points of view expressed by scientific researchers on the specifics of the Transnistrian region, from ancient times to the present. In particular, we refer to the published works of authors from the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, as we have not identified a similar historiographical study.

From a geopolitical perspective, we believe that the influence of the ruling elites of the regional actors will continue to play an important role in the dialogue between Chisinau and Tiraspol. Since the development of the Transnistrian region depends largely on the economic facilities offered by Brussels to the Republic of Moldova, and while the relations with Ukraine are not registering a positive dynamic, resolving the Transnistrian conflict by offering the region a special status within Moldova does not seem such a distant prospect. This time, however, the conditions will not be the same as in the Kozak Memorandum.