

POLITICAL CRISIS IN TRANSNISTRIA AND ITS EFFECTS UPON THE TRANSDNIESTRIAN CONFLICT SETTLEMENT

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După 18 ani conflictul transnistrian se află în același punct de plecare. Mai mult ca atât, în septembrie 2006 regimul separatist de la Tiraspol a organizat un referendum, în rezultatul căruia 97% din electorat a decis intrarea regiunii în cadrul Federației Ruse. Totodată, ca semn al „democratizării” regiunii, Smirnov a permis apariția mai multor partide politice, care, de altfel, sunt loiale actualului regim. Articolul de față își propune drept scop analiza situației politice din regiunea transnistriană, crizei politice dintre „executiv” și „legislativ” și cum va afecta aceasta aplanarea diferendului transnistrian.

By 2010, the conflict in Transdniestria is in a dead-lock. One of the several “frozen” conflicts in the OSCE region, this conflict is the only one at the immediate border of the European Union. Many would argue that this is the easiest conflict to solve and at the same time 18 years after its start it is still there. The prospects of the settlement are blurred. In this article we will strive to present the most recent developments, covering the period since 2006 till our days.

During the last 19 years there has been established a criminal and well organized regime headed by Igor Smirnov [1]. The interests of the "Smirnov clan" are represented in all political and economic movements of Transdniestria [2]. The self-declared republic's regime is styled as “super-presidentialism” under the leadership of Igor Smirnov, who managed to obtain 103.6% of the votes in a particular district during the 2001 election [3].

Having the intention of “region policy democratization” and at the same time bringing his sons to the political foreground, Smirnov has launched the idea of necessity of political competition of many parties in the Transdniestria Moldavian Republic (TMR). Thus, Smirnov clique surrounded itself by a lot of servile parties during the 2006-2007. Another reason for this strategy is to show the world that the political elite wanted to join Russia too.

For a better understanding of parties' democratic scales and whose interests they serves, let's overview the main of them. One of the main parties affiliated with President Igor Smirnov is Patriotic Party of Pridnestrovie. It was formed on 4 August 2006 by joining three civil society organizations, the Union of Defenders of Pridnestrovie, the Union of Afghan War Veterans and the Women's League of Pridnestrovie. Its leader is Oleg Smirnov, the son of President [4]. Oleg Smirnov chairs the Transdniestria branch of Gazprombank, a fully owned subsidiary of Gazprom. In his acceptance speech, he stated that the party's goal is Transdniestria's integration into “Mother Russia” and that the party's propaganda activities would utilize Gazprom resources.

Another party is People's will of Pridnestrovie, registered in 2006. It is affiliated with the Russian nationalist party of National Revival “Narodnaia volya”, led by state дума vice speaker Sergey Baburin. At the founding congress of the party there were present Grigore Maracuta, one of the best friend of Smirnov and member of the Republic party.

Other party is Fair Republic, founded on 3 July 2007. One of the party's leaders is Galina Antyufeyeva, the wife of security minister Vladimir Antyufeyev. The party is working very closely with the Russian Fair Party, which has assured us that it is ready to cooperate and support its Pridnestrovian colleagues, stated its leader Yuriy Gervasyuk [5].

Yet another party is “Breakthrough” (Proriv), registered in 2006 [6]. According to newspaper reports the organisation is financed by Transdniestrian authorities and the mentor of the organisation is Dmitriy Soin, the chief of constitutional defend department of Transdniestrian secret service (MGB).

Another one is Liberal Democratic Party of Pridnestrovie, registered in 2006 It was formed on 1 august 2006 by followers of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and is affiliated with the Russian party LDPR. Its local leader is Roman Khudyakov.

Thus through the strategy to set up a multi-party system in region, Smirnov by the one hand ensuring herself by the upholding of a larger segment of electors for presidential elections from 2010, by the other way this process is an attempt of Smirnov's administration institutes to prove to international community (which don't pay much attention to enlighten of "democratic institutions" in Transdnistria), that the majority of population support the activity of this unrecognized entity and the present foreign policy course to join to Russia.

Although Transdnistria is stuck in a climate of fear, which is characterized by open frightening, maintained by the MGB and other paramilitary institutions, playing a decisive role in keeping power by Smirnov's clan [7]. During the last years in the region there are weak, but insistent forces which opposed clan's policy. The largest opposition political party is Renewal, ruled by Evghenii Shevchenko [8] and supported by opposition political forces of the Russia Federation. This party had a big success at the latest election, in December 2005, defeating the ruling party 'Respublica'. Following the win, new generations of reformers were swept into power with the election of Shevchenko as chairman and Parliamentary Speaker. Once with Shevchenko as speaker, the contradiction is held no between parties in opposition, but at another level between legislative and executive power, which led to a political crises in region.

There are many motives on basis of the conflict between the legislative and executive authorities of the Transdnistrian region, but let's analyze them inside. By scenario how actions will evolve in the post-conflict period, depend the possibility of thaw itself Transdnistria conflict, the opening of a dialog at new height, a new quality of Moldo- Transdnistrian dialog and negotiations.

One of the reasons is an insistent desire of the president of the so called Supreme Soviet to gain control over the funds circulation and especially those coming from the financial aid provided by the Russian Federation and other payments connected with natural gas and electric power consumption. The above-mentioned legislative authorities do not possess any levers of control over the financial system of the Transdnistria, which is in most part subject to the Transdnistrian Republican Bank (TRB), "Gazprombank" and "Sberbank" being under total influence of the Smirnov's clan. The financial aid provided this year by Moscow, which amounted to 220 million dollars, has been carried out by "Sberbank" of the Russian Federation and the similar banks in Tiraspol, wherefrom the money has been transferred to the TRB, from this point on the transparency of aid use disappears even for the special commission of the legislative authorities.

The banking and financial sector experts have estimated that only 40 per cent of about 10 million dollars of the aid aggregate amount already transferred in 2009 are used for covering the financial necessities of the region, the rest is laundered by different schemes in the Russian Federation and divided among Smirnov and initiators of this credit from Moscow.

One of the recent schemes of laundering the money from the credit mentioned includes according to the Transdnistria's banking data payment of the second tranche of the financial aid from those three provided for the Transdnistria, for the support of the agrarian sector, which have been actually cancelled by the creditors. The corresponding amount also should be divided among Smirnov and the officials connected with this "transaction" outside the region. The information concerning this operation would have strongly disturbed Shevchuk, who would have belonged the merit of these two tranches transfer.

The legislators engaged into monitoring of the financial and banking system as well as the president of the legislative body from Tiraspol have not managed to grasp the mechanism of budget financial covering within three years of activity being forced by the executive body to review many articles of this law every 2-3 months depending on occurrence of new financial resources, which origin is not clear. According to their statements the real budget accumulations in the last months amounted only to 20-28 per cent, and according to the calculations obtained by them from the ministry of economy they have been estimated at 85-90 per cent. The so called Supreme Soviet has no access to this sphere as well as to the others.

The roots of this accusation are older. The Republican Party which practices a strong pro-presidential policy made a declaration on April 13, 2007, blaming the Obnovlenie party and the Supreme Soviet of the tendency to create in the region political crisis aiming at further assumption of power. The Supreme Soviet was also blamed of providing support for taxation to the monopolist business structures, which stay behind this party. The leader of Obnovlenie, E. Shevchuk, in his turn, responded to these accusations on the 20th of April 2007 and blamed the leadership of the Transdnistrian Republican Party of using irrationally cash assets collected from the population and enterprises for Russian gas consumption. It is referred to about 18

million dollars only for the 1st trimester of 2007 and 27 million dollars for 2006, the money owed to the Russian Federation and which continue to be accumulated at the accounts of “Gazprombank” Bank. He blames Marina Smirnova, the President of “Gazprombank” Bank and Co-President of the Patriotic Party of Transnistria of funds plundering as well as of her membership of the Smirnov’s family and trying to come into power. The speaker E. Shevchuk has come to the conclusion that the declaration of the Patriotic Party is directly connected to its initiative of April 4, 2007, concerning amendments to the state budget. According to this modification the funds from the payments for the gas should have been accumulated at the accounts of the Central Bank of Transnistria. This political war between the political movements supporting the Smirnov’s clan and “Obnovlenie” opposition party continues according to different scenarios up to the present moment [9]. By mass-media statements of Patriotic and Obnovlenie parties, we can conclude of a conflict between them. The other reason of the conflict between Smirnov and Shevchuk is different views on adapting the Transdniestrian Constitution to the Russian one.

A referendum on self-determination of the population or joining the Russian Federation was held on the 17th of September 2006. The referendum “results” have shown that 97 per cent of participated populations have voted for integration with the Russia Federation [10]. As a result, the process of adapting the Transdniestrian Constitution to the Russian one has begun. So, two options concerning the ways of amending the Constitution had existed till May 27, 2009. The first option was proposed by the deputies of the Supreme Soviet from Obnovlenie party and was called the “initiative of those seventeen” [11]. This initiative was harshly retorted by Smirnov’s satellite parties. For example, Igori Ivanenco, the head of the executive committee of the Patriotic Party of Transnistria declared on June 3, 2009, within the 2nd Party Congress that the party would offer resistance to all intentional political disturbances taking place in the region in the last time, which had been manifested starting with the current year. He considered that the so called social-political resistance “initiative of those 17”, who wanted to amend the constitution, by taking into account the region necessities and not plagiarizing the Russia Federation Constitution. A “considerable merit” in this movement oppression belongs to the so called social-patriotic bloc founded in April, 2009, by the patriotic and republican parties. The Union of Non-Combatant Officers and Sergeant-Majors of the town of Bender, the Union of the Veterans of “Nistru” Special Task Force of the town of Ribnita, “Memoria” Union from the town of Ribnita have joined this bloc. The bloc declared on July 2, 2009, that it called all political forces on discussing new versions of the Transnistrian Constitution and it should be exposed to a referendum. The second option was presented by the president and non-governmental organizations and political parties supporting Smirnov. Under the pressure of the latter the deputies have withdrawn the initial variant. By bringing the Transdniestria Constitution to conformity with the Russian one, Smirnov real aims at extending his powers and transformation of the region into a “presidential republic”.

The impertinent and indecent behavior of Smirnov’s team towards the deputies especially towards the speaker has provoked their rebellion and the attempts to limit the competences of the executive authorities and the region leader. It is another reason which has caused the actual political crisis. The Republican Committee coordinating the political movements and parties of the Transnistria received on July 9, 2009 a declaration [12] concerning dismissal of the Supreme Soviet president E. Shevchuk blaming him of arbitrariness, impossibility to withstand the budget crisis and groundless assuming of merits for the financial aid from the part of the Russian Federation. At the same time dismissal of E. Shevchuk from the post of the president of the Transdniestria’s Supreme Soviet has aroused a number of questions, some experts consider that the motive is that Shevchuk tries to start a new political carrier as a fighter against the corrupted Smirnov regime, the others consider that he had a nervous breakdown, the thirds state that the sponsors have refused to support him. Those, the first persons from the “Sheriff” leadership, which stand behind Shevchuk have been actually forced to sacrifice the speaker of the so called Supreme Soviet as a result of Smirnov Decree concerning introduction of a strict control over prices formation and currency circulation. Fulfilment of this act provisions has been committed to the so called Ministry of Internal Affairs. This Smirnov’s plan to get rid of Shevchuk indirectly has had effect.

The evolution of the political situation according to the mentioned scenario has been unpredictable for the majority of the politicians and deputies of both levels. It has been stated that even the presidents of some legislative committees have been present with a fait accompli. In this context it has been demonstrated once again that the presidents of the legislative and executive bodies are manipulated by two separate driving

forces from Moscow, and in the case of Shevchuk those standing behind Smirnov are more supported by the Russian President Medvedev.

Concomitantly on July 2009 at the initiatives of Smirnov there were begun the reform of power. Smirnov signed a decree of a new structure of presidential institution. Another decree proposed by him was toward the setting up of the Council for Security of TMR. In according with modifications to pmr constitution for harmonized it at Russia's one the supreme soviet will divide in two Houses. As a result of referendum on new Constitution the present the Supreme Soviet will be abolished and will be announced new parliamentary election. This is the Smirnov's scheme of removing Shevchiuk from political life. Smirnov declared that the Supreme Soviet in its present version has too much leadership's functions, unlike the presidential institution has. Smirnov's main criterion is institutional comparison with Russia Federation, therefore the transformation of the country into a presidential republic. By such scenario we see that Smirnov clan has free way to strengthen its power.

The Smirnov's plan foresight the announcement of new anticipated parliamentary election on December this year and the organization of a referendum toward new Constitution of Transnistria. In according with his plan Smirnov will go firm ahead for certain in consolidation of political forces around him and concentration of power in his hands.

The Transdnestrian "democratization" is a part of Smirnov's scenario to join to Russia Federation. Due to its significant political and economic leverage over both sides to the conflict, Russia Federation will remain the principal international factor that influences developments in the region. On the other way, the Moldovan authorities should continue to support the civil society on both parts, without which the country's reintegration policy has odds. The Chisinau have to promote in Transnistria as many social projects that its citizens perceive that their fate matters.

References:

1. Igor Smirnov came in Tiraspol from Far East when he was elected head of "Electromash. The Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic has held three further presidential elections since the first in 1991. Igor Smirnov traditionally has won all by a wide margin. On December 23, 1996, he took 72% of the vote, on December 9, 2001, he took 81.9% of the vote, On December 10, 2006, Smirnov was re-elected for a third time with 82.4% of the vote. In 2001, in one region it was reported that Igor Smirnov collected 103.6% of the votes. The legitimacy of the 2001 election was undermined by reports of irregularities. None of these elections were recognized by the international community, which does not recognize the legality of the Transdnestrian authorities. Writing in the December 2003 issue of *The Eurasian Politician*, Marco Pribilla refers to Smirnov as a "Stalinist." *Once Upon a Time in the West A Tale of Soviet Strategic Deception and the Demise of Western Civilization* // <http://once-upon-a-time-in-the-west.blogspot.com/2006/12/feature-red-world-transnistria.html>
2. Astfel unul din fiii săi este Oleg Smirnov, liderul partidului Republica care susține politica prezidențială a tatălui, celălalt fiu este Vladimir Smirnov, presedinte al comitetului de stat al vâmlor.
3. <http://strangemaps.wordpress.com/2008/09/23/311-transnistria-a-soviet-fly-in-geopolitical-amber/>
4. See it's official site <http://www.patriot-pmr.org/>
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fair_Republic_%28Transnistria%29
6. <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,389143,00.html>, <http://old.azi.md/comment?ID=38496>
7. For example, Oleg Horjan, Liderul Partidului Comunist din Transnistria, a fost condamnat ieri de judecătoria Tiraspol la un an și șase luni de pușcărie pentru organizarea unui miting nesancționat de autoritățile separatiste. Reamintim că la 11 martie 2007, reprezentanții Partidului Comunist din Transnistria au organizat o acțiune de protest în fața sediului Sovietului Suprem de la Tiraspol, acțiune considerată ilegală de autoritățile separatiste. Liderul comunist Oleg Horjan a fost arestat atunci, pentru opunere de rezistență în fața angajaților organelor de miliție de la Tiraspol. Cotidian Național, nr.132 din 27 septembrie 2007 <http://www.flux.md/editii/132/articole/213/> opposes the administration of President Khorzhan and Bondarenko were arrested on March 11, 2007, when handing out leaflets ahead of an anti-Smirnov rally and sentenced to three-day's detention as an administrative punishment. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pridnestrovie_Communist_Party
8. It was founded as a political NGO in 2000 and campaigned under its current name in the 27 March 2005 local council elections, where, for the first time in its five year history, it won a majority of the seats It was officially registered as a full political party in June 2006 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renewal_\(Transnistria\)#cite_note-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renewal_(Transnistria)#cite_note-0)
9. В Приднестровье разгорелся конфликт между лидерами партий 24.04.07 <http://www.olvia.idknet.com/ol108-04-07.htm>

10. Обращение президента „Приднестровской Молдавской Республики” И.Н. Смирнова к народу Приднестровья по итогам общенародного референдума <http://www.olvia.idknet.com/ol161-09-06.htm> Such a result evokes big suspicions when in according with 2005's census 31,9 per cent of population declared themselves Moldavians, 30,4 per cent – Russians, and 28,8 per cent – Ukrainians. It is evident that the referendum has not been free and transparent. For more information see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transnistria#Geography>
11. Информация о законотворческой деятельности верховного совета ПМР. Республиканский Координационный Совет общественных объединений и политических партий ПМР подготовил Информацию о законотворческой деятельности Верховного Совета ПМР, которая поступила в ИА «Ольвия-пресс» и публикуется без изменений: Принято 28.05.09г. <http://www.olvia.idknet.com/ol263-05-09.htm>
12. Заявление Республиканского Координационного Совета общественных объединений и политических партий ПМР. Принято 09.07.2009г.// <http://www.olvia.idknet.com/ol92-07-09.htm>

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