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碩士論文

Master's Thesis

**THE SUSTAINABILITY AND FUTURE OF DE FACTO STATES OF
POST-SOVIET AREA
(ON THE EXAMPLE OF TRANSNISTRIA AND ABKHAZIA)**

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ABSTRACT

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia resulted in the establishment of a great number of sovereign nations and separatist states concentrated in the greater Black Sea region and Balkans. The latter, so-called de facto states became the result of frozen conflicts that emerged as Russia's grip over its territory weakened during the last years of the USSR and dormant ethno-religious tensions erupted into internecine conflict. Separatists, ultimately with help from Russia, were able to enshrine victories on the battlefield through ceasefires with parent states that have held for over two decades. However, the issues surrounding these de facto states remain unsettled, and attempts at conflict resolution and reconciliation have been complicated by many factors, including Russian interests and involvement in the region, national historical memory and demographics, non-ability of weak parent states to step up and international norms and laws that mostly favor the status quo. This thesis seeks to examine the de facto states of Abkhazia and Transnistria, the challenges in front of them and explore possible scenarios for the future of these entities through investigating and analyzing the common points and differences.

Keywords: de facto state, frozen conflict, parent state, patron state, possible scenario

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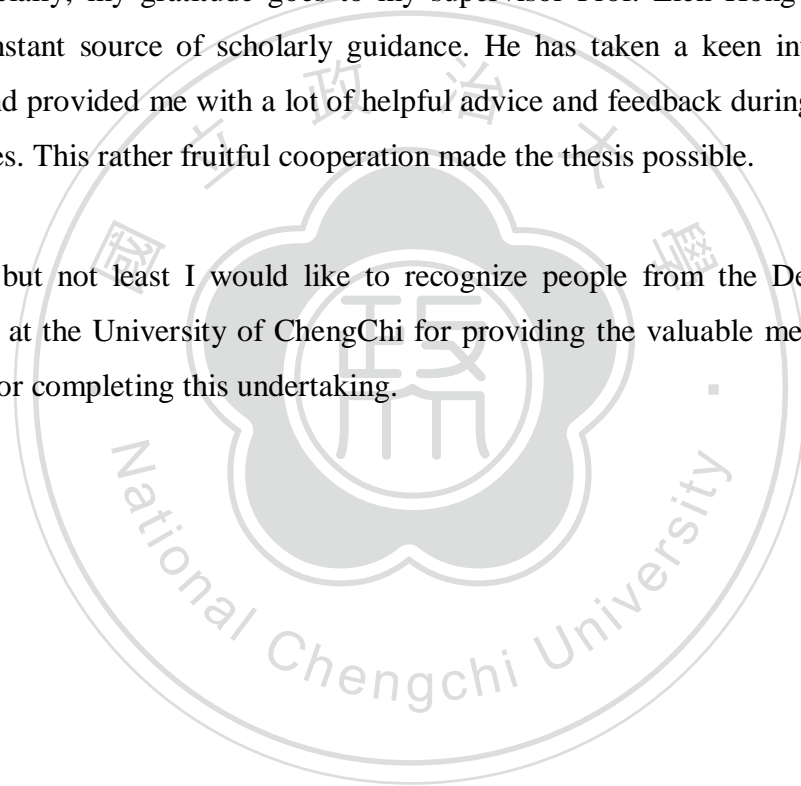


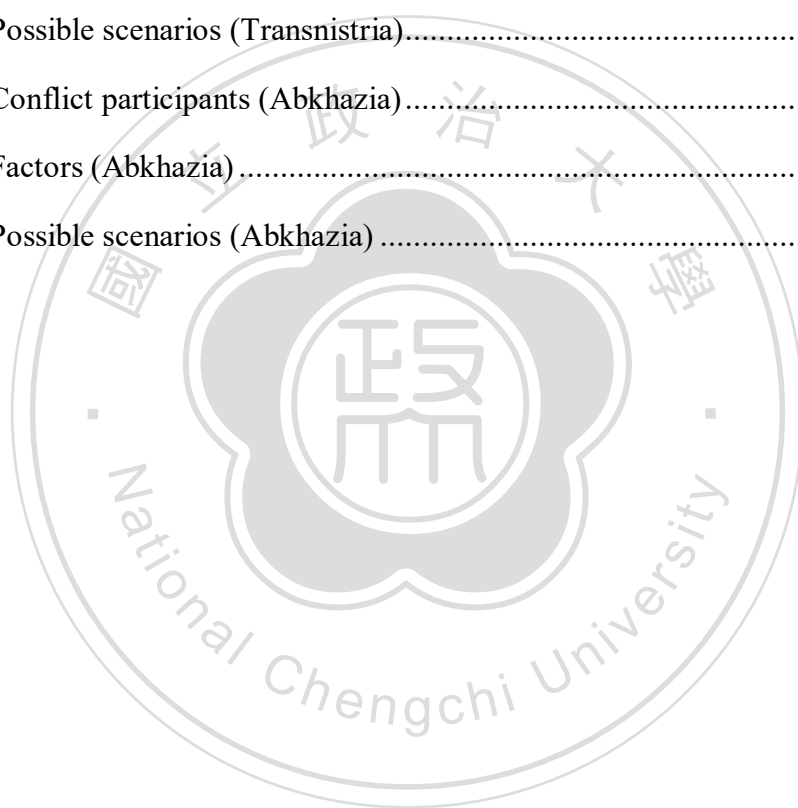
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	Introduction	1
1.1	Rationale of the thesis and research questions	1
1.2	Literature review	2
1.3	Methodological and theoretical scope	12
1.4	Time frame and research limitations	13
1.5	Chapter overview	15
CHAPTER 2	Background on de facto states	16
2.1.1	Definition of de facto states	16
2.1.1	The choice of terminology	16
2.1.2	The relevance of the issue of statehood and secession	18
2.1.3	Theories of secession and their limitations	20
2.1.4	Problem of recognition	22
2.1.5	Role of a patron state and influence of Great Powers	25
2.2	Unrecognized states of post-Soviet area	28
2.2.1	General information on de facto states of post-Soviet area	28
2.2.2	Special features of post-Soviet de facto states	31
2.3	Chapter conclusion	33
CHAPTER 3	Case selection	35
3.1	Transnistria's case	35
3.1.1	Origins	35
3.1.2	Conflict	39
3.1.3	Current situation	40
3.1.4	Russia's and other players' involvement	42
3.1.5	Attempts at reconciliation	46
3.2	Abkhazia's case	47
3.2.1	Origins	47

3.2.2 Conflict.....	49
3.2.3 Current situation.....	50
3.2.4 Russia's and other players' involvement.....	51
3.2.5 Attempts at reconciliation.....	54
3.3 Chapter conclusion.....	55
CHAPTER 4 Prospects for the future	61
4.1 The prospects of a sustainable conflict settlement for Transnistria	61
4.1.1 Conflict participants	61
4.1.2 Significant factors affecting the situation	62
4.1.3 Possible scenarios of conflict resolution	64
4.2 The prospects of a sustainable conflict settlement for Abkhazia	67
4.2.1 Conflict participants	67
4.2.2 Significant factors affecting the situation	68
4.2.3 Possible scenarios of conflict resolution	70
4.3 Chapter conclusion.....	72
CHAPTER 5 Conclusion.....	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	81

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Table 1 Thesis structure	15
Table 2 Types of unrecognized states in the former USSR	30
Map 1 Transnistria's map.....	35
Map 2 Abkhazia's map	47
Table 3 Conflict participants (Transnistria)	61
Table 4 Factors (Transnistria)	62
Table 5 Possible scenarios (Transnistria).....	64
Table 6 Conflict participants (Abkhazia).....	67
Table 7 Factors (Abkhazia).....	68
Table 8 Possible scenarios (Abkhazia).....	70



CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale of thesis and research questions

One of the main current problems of the modern system of international relations is the problem of unrecognized states. “Unrecognized state” is a common name for a group of territorial entities that, despite their signs of statehood, cannot act as a subject of international relations because they do not have full international diplomatic recognition¹. Nowadays there are 120 such entities on the territory of 60 countries that are not recognized by the international community in the world. In those entities various ethnic groups and peoples struggle for their right of self-determination. Indeed, those conflicts that are inspired by the idea of self-determination are a destabilizing force in international relations, as they can cause the civil war or interstate or become a permanent “hot spot” on the political map, endangering territorial integrity of states and international stability.

The problem of unrecognized states is also relevant for the post-Soviet area after the collapse of the USSR several territorial entities like Abkhazia, Transnistria, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh became contested territories that lack widespread international recognition. Among a wide range of unrecognized states, this research will focus on two de facto states of former Soviet Union - Transnistria and Abkhazia. The choice of the region for the future case study was determined by one peculiar feature that makes post-Soviet area entities differ from other unrecognized states: the secessionist entities are quickly “outsourcing” their independence to another state, meaning they seek for external support from a patron (Russia in this case) and would prefer a future integration with it rather than a continuous struggle for independence, which is completely different from, for example, Kosovo or Iraqi Kurdistan cases. At the same time the choice of Transnistria and Abkhazia is determined by several key aspects on their way to secession, that make them differ from each other: Abkhazia has been recognized by its patron state while Transnistria not; Abkhazia shares a border with its patron but Transnistria not; moreover, both of them have rather different domestic economic capabilities and potential, and thus uneven claims to self-sustainability.

In the result of literature analysis on the subject it can be concluded that the large number of modern political scientists are increasingly showing interest to the states with “frozen conflicts”, as after 2008 when Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia,

¹ Philip C Jessup, *A modern law of nations: an introduction*. New York: Archon Books, 1986, p.236.

scholars and policy-makers started to realize that the status of these state entities is not ephemeral, moreover the situation is far from static.

The present study is not aimed at evaluating the legitimacy of a claim to self-determination of Abkhazia and Transnistria rather to explore possible scenarios for future existence and building state capacity in order to gain new insights on post-Soviet de-facto states through a so-far unexplored angle. On the basis of analyzing the historical and modern aspects that influenced the emergence and development of these two state entities, this research will investigate and analyze the common points and differences on the way to their state's recognition as well as approaches of the major global players and international actors towards this.

In order to do that the research questions are:

- What are the possible scenarios for the resolving of “frozen” status of Transnistria and Abkhazia? Is external recognition the only possible solution or inclusion to Russia can be considered as one more way to the resolving the “frozen” state of given entities?
- What are the main factors of external recognition for the two de facto states in question? What are the internal forces that can also influence the recognition process of Transnistria and Abkhazia?
- Is there a third party that influences the recognition process? How does the international community react on the conflict in these two de facto states (USA, UN, EU, Russia)?
- Why Transnistria and Abkhazia are geopolitically important? What are the main geopolitical forces that influence the dynamic in this region?
- Are Transnistria and Abkhazia ready for independence? Is it possible that other variants for their future existence are more preferable?

1.2 Literature review

The end of the Cold War and the following collapse of Soviet Union created a perfect condition for emerging new de facto states on this territory. Some states, like Chechnya, experienced war but were finally defeated; some states despite of armed conflicts during their early years managed to survive until present days. Although there are sufficient materials for academic research on the topic of unrecognized states in general and unrecognized states of post-Soviet area in particular, still, in international relations studies

this subject is on the periphery compared to the literature devoted to sovereign states. Usually they are described as state entities that cannot be defined by state-centric theories and considered as something temporary. Recent developments, however, show that these entities can be more viable in reality and that there is growing interest among the scholars in researching this topic. Although, it is been noticed that the literature on de facto states is presented unevenly when considering how much coverage each entity gets: some are very thoroughly analyzed, some are very little. Moreover, among the unrecognized states themselves the scholars' interest is spread unevenly as well: most attention has been devoted to "former" unrecognized states that have managed to secede, in other cases of still (yet) unrecognized states political scientists are mostly focused on describing the history of the conflict and current political situations. However, during the last decade the debates over South Sudan and Kosovo have caused a growing attention to the problem of new states' creation.

a) Origins of de facto states

What concern de facto states, the literature on this topic argues that civil wars and security concerns explain the emergence of unrecognized entities. Daniel Byman² and Charles King³ mention that de facto states emerge from civil wars, especially in cases where there is a weak central government in a parent state. Michael Rywkin⁴ also argues that most of de facto states have emerged in the result of ethnic or religious conflicts or state disintegration. Deon Geldenhuys⁵, likewise, brings the attention to the process of secession as "the single most common" cause for the emergence of unrecognized states. Charles King notes that Eurasia's de facto states (i.e., Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria) appeared in the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the next followed ethnic and separatist wars. In these cases, civil war broke out between the minority group and the parent state as a consequence of the state's weakness. After the minority group creates a de facto state and once it has confirmed its status, the de facto state is able to build institutions that allow it to function like a de jure state.

To summarize the authors above, de facto states appear from domestic ethnic conflicts or civil wars that break out when there is a threat coming out from the parent state

² Daniel L. Byman, *Keeping the peace: lasting solutions to ethnic conflict*. Baltimore and London: JHU Press, 2002, p.280.

³ Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States", in *World Politics* Vol. 53, No. 4, July 2001, pp.524-552.

⁴ Michael Rywkin, "The Phenomenon of Quasi-states", in *Diogenes* Vol. 53, No. 2, May 2006, pp.23-28.

⁵ Deon Geldenhuys, *Contested States in World Politics*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp.85-89.

towards an ethnic group. It can be noticed that often the conflict does not show a clear winner and the following stalemate leads to the creation of a de facto state. Neighboring and regional states are not willing to intervene into a conflict or recognize the newly emerged state as such an intervention would violate the international norm of territorial integrity. Moreover, sovereign states fear that recognizing such secessionist movements may cause the territorial issues in their own countries. Thus, the norm of nonintervention prevents other states from the obligation to recognize secessionist groups.

b) Secession

After analyzing relevant literature on the topic of unrecognized states, it has been noticed that secessionism has become the main tool for the creation of states, thus, no wonder this process has earned a lot of interest not just in the political science circles, but among scholars of international law as well. Scholars like Macedo and Buchanan⁶ discuss the challenges of law that accompany the process of secession, moreover they raise the question of the possibility of political separation within the domestic constitution. Radan⁷ in his works focuses mostly on the issue of regulation of international responses to attempts of secession and also the justification of it. Johanson⁸ and some other scholars tend to believe that traditional recognition doctrine and practice of non-recognition of secessionist states should be revisited and reissued and new collective patterns of recognition should be introduced to the international legal system. Moreover, legal and political philosophy is one more field of study that examines the issues such as a peoples' right to decide and the legitimacy of secession in general Buchanan⁹. As political philosophers mention, there is a significant gap between the arguments to justify a moral right to secede and arguments to justify regulations of how international law should deal with the political separation.

There is no commonly accepted definition of secession as a form of state creation. Among different definitions, most grant it a narrow meaning by insisting that secession be opposed by the host state and/or involve the use or threat of force. These definitions underemphasize or ignore the fact that secession is a process of state creation upon territory

⁶ Stephen Macedo and Allan Buchanan, Secession and self-determination (New York: New York University Press, 2003), pp.247-255.

⁷ Peter Radan, "Secessionist Referenda in International and Domestic Law" in "Nationalism and Ethnic politics", Vol.18, 2012, pp.8-21.

⁸ Peter Radan, "Secessionist Referenda in International and Domestic Law" in "Nationalism and Ethnic politics", Vol.18, 2012, p.25.

⁹ Allen Buchanan, Justice, legitimacy, and self-determination, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.26-37.

that was not, of itself, previously a state. Radan¹⁰ in his works introduces the definition of secession that later will be used in this thesis as “a creation of a new state upon territory previously forming a part of an existing state”. What is more, the term “secessionist state” in this thesis is also used to define a state that is not (yet) recognized by the international community, although it has manifested its de facto independence.

c) External recognition

There is a big debate among political and legal scientists about whether or not external recognition plays the crucial role in the process of new state creation. Peterson¹¹, for example, argues “as long as the newly created state meets the requirements of statehood that are set in the Montevideo Convention of 1933 (defined territory, permanent population, effective governance, capacity to enter into relationship with other states), it is a state”. Yet, as the reality shows, one-sided secession is impossible in the current international system, even if a secessionist state fulfills all the needed requirements. Thus, as Fabry¹² mentions, it is a “foreign acknowledgment that gives the newly formed entity the standing of a sovereign state in international relations and law.”

Scholars of political and legal science outline the reasons that can lead to international recognition. All those various explanations can be grouped into three main categories by Siroky¹³: 1) the one that focus on the secessionist group; 2) secessionist state; 3) foreign powers and external actors. There is no clear explanation which reasons influence the secession process most, moreover scholars tend to mix them all together in order to give a full explanation of why the secession takes place. In Siroky's¹⁴ work we can find evidence of a complex approach towards the explanations of factors influencing secession. He claims that “highly impoverished or very distinctive ethnic groups; weak, poor, and ineffective mother states; political and economic support from external forces; and support of ethnically similar external forces are all factors that form secessionist movements and have an impact on their outcome.” Although Siroky doesn't create any particular theory about his findings, his ideas

¹⁰ Peter Radan and Aleksandar Pavkovic, On the Way To Statehood: Secession And Globalisation. (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), pp.44-45.

¹¹ M-J Peterson, Recognition of Governments: Legal Doctrine and State Practice, 1815- 1995 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp.23-55.

¹² Aleksandar Pavković and Peter Radan , Secession and Territorial Borders: The Role of Law. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp.20-25.

¹³ Aleksandar Pavković and Peter Radan , Secession and Territorial Borders: The Role of Law. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp.33-46.

¹⁴ Aleksandar Pavković and Peter Radan , Secession and Territorial Borders: The Role of Law. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp.20-25.

will be used in this thesis to explain the reasons that stand behind the external recognition and also find the factors that may have a big impact on the future of de facto states in question.

Many scholars pay their attention to the issue of under what circumstances external powers are more willing to recognize the secessionist entity. One group of authors, like Buchanan¹⁵, Dersso¹⁶, Orentliche¹⁷, Sterio¹⁸ support the idea, that a state can be successfully recognized only when its inhabitants suffered some injustices, such as a threat of physical survival of its members by the actions of the parent state; violations of basic human rights or systematic discrimination (economic, ethnic, regional), unjust occupation of previously sovereign territory by the mother state. Moreover, Sterio¹⁹ claims that violation of human rights and serious injustices is an essential condition for external recognition, the secessionist group has to prove the act of serious oppression or the violation of human rights, otherwise the recognition cannot be possible. Another group of authors supports the idea of the international recognition happening when the secessionist group is ethnically different from the majority of population or the governing elite in a parent state. Heraclides²⁰ for example, claims that the most important factor for secession is group's diversity. Another scholar, Song²¹ agrees with it, saying that in the situation when a secessionist group is a distinctive ethnic group in the parent state, self-determination of such a group should be supported by international community.

Ethnic conflict that lays in the center of most secession movements is a very common topic in scholar circles. Kaufmann²² claims that ethnic identities are determined and extremely difficult to change in the short and medium time frames. Kaufmann does not believe there can be any room for compromise between a secessionist group and a parent state, because the security dilemma makes groups to toughen their positions in order to protect the group and its demands. This situation leaves little room for institutions, agencies, or material factors. Instead, this approach emphasizes power and security, which means that

¹⁵ Allen Buchanan, *Justice, legitimacy, and self-determination*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.26-37.

¹⁶ Solomon Dersso, "International Law and the Self-Determination of South Sudan", Addis Abeba: Institute for Security Studies, 2012.

¹⁷ Stephen Macedo and Allan Buchanan, *Secession and self-determination* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), pp.247-255.

¹⁸ Milena Sterio, *The right to self-determination under international law* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.97-114.

¹⁹ Milena Sterio, *The right to self-determination under international law* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.97-114.

²⁰ Stephen Macedo and Allan Buchanan, *Secession and self-determination* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), pp.247-255.

²¹ Svante E. Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective" in "World Politics" Vol. 54, No. 2, 2002, pp.245-276.

²² Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars" in "International Security" Vol. 20, No. 4, 1996, pp.3-20.

ethnic groups rebel against mother state and seek its own power and independence in order to survive in an international system that separates one group from another. Kaufmann argues that ethnic conflicts will continue as long as opposite groups exist within the same territory. In his view the only solution to ethnic conflict in this case can be separation of groups into two independent territories which will help to minimize the security dilemma associated with ethnic conflicts.

Similar to Kauffmann's idea about the ethnic conflict being in the center of a most secession movements, Donald Horowitz²³ argues that group worries about survival and subordination lead to the "importance accorded to competitive values: a group that cannot compete will be overcome or will die out." The scholar believes, the fear of subordination can lead to fear of extinction. The threat (or even perception of a threat) to a group's survival can lead to extreme measures against the suppression.

d) Domestic powers

There are scholars who believe that for a faster external recognition it is very important for a secessionist state to gain all state capabilities to show to the global community that they have all needed requirements to receive an international support and become an independent state. Still, there is a significant difference of views among scholars about the indicators the secessionist group should provide to prove they are able to be independent. For example, Caspersen²⁴ claims that economically the secessionist state should be strong and it shouldn't be much dependent on the parent state or a patron state. Siroky²⁵ says that secessionist state should be economically stronger than a parent state and should provide its citizens with better life conditions. Sterio²⁶ argues that in a situation when a parent state is economically, politically and military weaker than a secessionist region, it is more likely for the last to gain the support from the international community. Although the mentioned authors underline different factors as essential ones, they have one idea in common, which is the secessionist state has to provide its citizens with a safer and better environment (better than a mother state) to convince other sovereign states in their full ability to become independent.

²³ Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars" in "International Security" Vol. 20, No. 4, 1996, pp.3-20.

²⁴ Nina Caspersen, Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp.64-66.

²⁵ Peter Radan and Aleksandar Pavkovic, On the Way To Statehood: Secession And Globalisation. (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), pp.33-39.

²⁶ Milena Sterio, The right to self-determination under international law (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.97-114.

As the reality shows, domestic situation also matters, even for a de facto state. Kristin Bakke²⁷ argues that in addition to the abovementioned factors, de facto states continue their existence also in the result of internal legitimacy. The scholars define internal legitimacy as “both regime legitimacy and the population’s approval of the state’s social order. The latter refers to the people’s belief that the de facto state is an independent entity from the host state and the former refers to the people’s confidence in the government of the de facto state.” Bakke mentions that “people’s concerns about the provision of public goods such as democracy, economic development, and health services, are, together with insecurity associated with criminal violence, important determinants for internal legitimacy.” To gain legitimacy de facto states will often adopt democracy and provide security for their population. Nina Caspersen²⁸ argues that because international recognition is one of the main priorities, de facto states attempt to establish democracy and order to gain legitimacy not only domestically, but also internationally. In their seek for independence, de facto states will strengthen the democratic institutions they have established and the empirical statehood they have gained.

e) **The role of Great Powers**

Political scientists such as Coggins²⁹ believe there is a very important factor that should be always kept in mind while explaining the factors influencing states’ secession – Great Powers power games. The relationship between parent states and Great Powers as well as secessionist states and Great Powers play a huge role in the process of gaining independence. Saideman³⁰ claims that it is essential for secessionist group to receive a support from the strongest powers to make the secessionist movement successful, because only power rules the foreign policies of Great States and their decisions towards recognition of de facto entities. Therefore it should be noted here, that some authors argue, that most states, especially Great Powers like Russia, China and USA, are usually not so willing to recognize the new members of the international system because of the risk of separatism movements and self-determination moods within their own borders.

²⁷ Kristin M. Bakke, John O’Loughlin and Michael J. Ward, “The Viability of De Facto States: Post-War Developments and Internal Legitimacy in Abkhazia”, for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Seattle, September 2011.

²⁸ Nina Caspersen, Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp.78-83.

²⁹ Bridget L. Coggins, “Secession, Recognition & The International Politics of Statehood” (PhD. Diss., Ohio State University, 2006) pp.28-30.

³⁰ Aleksandar Pavković and Peter Radan, Secession and Territorial Borders: The Role of Law. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp.30-33.

f) Possible scenarios for the future of de facto states

Independence

Most of the existing literature argues that gaining independence is significantly difficult for de facto states, though the empirical evidence shows that obtaining the independence is more than possible, and the example of five de facto states (Eritrea 1993, East Timor 2002, Montenegro 2006, Kosovo 2008, and South Sudan 2011) that in the end have gained the full independence is very indicative. Still, the most commonly seen outcome for de facto states is a stalemate, which is in most cases when de facto states keep the status quo and are neither defeated nor convinced into rejoining the mother state. Eiki Berg and Raul Toomla³¹ argue in favor of maintaining the status quo when it comes to the question of de facto states. They note that “the status quo may offer various forms of normalization even when legal recognition has not been granted. Especially, when the political nature of the ‘recognition game’ leaves no space for evolving opportunity structures and does not enable de facto states to legalize their practices.” Svante Cornell’s³² article eliminates the commonly used idea of an autonomy being able to reduce ethnic tensions between a minority and its parent state. Cornell’s work examines the role of creating the autonomy in reducing the conflict between Eurasia’s de facto states and the parent states. In the result of his research Cornell concludes, “autonomy has been a source of conflict and not a solution to it...secessionism is likely to be significantly higher among autonomous minorities than among no -autonomous minorities.”

Maintaining the status quo

Maintaining de facto statehood, or the status quo, can be long-term goal for some de facto states. Taking to the consideration the international community’s reluctance to recognize given entities and the parent state’s inability to forcibly rejoin them back, it is not likely that these entities may continue to function as de facto states. As in the example of Nagorno Karabakh, a de facto state in Azerbaijan, that has turned its focus away from gaining independence and international recognition in favor of internal development. Its leadership believes that its de facto “status is sustainable and can fulfill its goals of security and independence.” The example of Taiwan is also illustrative. Taiwan has been a de facto state for four decades with a functioning democracy and a strong economy. In a 2009 poll in

³¹ Eiki Berg and Raul Toomla, “Forms of Normalisation in the Quest for De Facto Statehood”, in “The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs”, Vol. 44, No. 4, 2009, pp.27-45.

³² Svante E. Cornell, “Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective” in “World Politics” Vol. 54, No. 2, 2002, pp.245-276.

Taiwan, more than 60 percent of the population over 20 voted for keeping the “status quo.” Taiwan is not the only case in which the status quo is appealing. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has functioned as a de facto state for over three decades, at the same time Iraqi Kurdistan, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh have done so for over two decades. Thus, it can be concluded, under the right conditions, de facto statehood can provide peace and stability for the mother state and the neighboring states.

Autonomy

By Horowitz³³ secession is defined as: “an attempt by an ethnic group claiming a homeland to withdraw with its territory from the authority of a larger state of which it is a part.” Although there are some secessionist groups that demand full independence (e.g., Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia), there are also secessionist groups that demand autonomy. One of the reasons that autonomy is more preferable than secession is that the last is much more difficult to achieve. One obstacle to secession is the high costs that come with it. For instance, Robert Young³⁴ argues that seceding from an advanced industrial economy could impose heavy economic costs on the secessionist entity. In such cases, secession is a matter of costs and benefits and secession becomes unattractive when the government can impose “large costs on citizens” (including those who want to secede) and “all citizens and firms must be fearful of transition costs.”

It is also should be noticed that independence is not the end-goal of all secessionist movements. Michael Keating³⁵ writes in his work that independence is “only one possible outcome of the national claim and that there are many other constitutional formulas that can accommodate it.” In the result, a number of variants of statehood have emerged, including autonomy and independence-lite that preserves the unity of the parent state. One more barrier to secession, according to Keating, is that the domestic and international traditional paradigm in dealing with secessionist movements is governed by a “disapproval of secession.” A possible explanation is that an approved secession can motivate minorities in other sovereign states to seek independence as well. This may have two possible consequences. First, governments fear that they too could face the threat of secession and therefore oppose unilateral secessions. Second, recognizing unilateral secessions would create international instability, particularly in view of the correlation between secession and violence.

³³ Donald L. Horowitz, *Irredentism and International Politics*. (Sydney: Lynne Rienner Publishers 1991), pp.112-119.

³⁴ Robert A. Young, *The Secession of Quebec and the Future of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1998), pp.46-48.

³⁵ Michael Keating, “Rethinking Sovereignty: Independence-lite, Devolutionmax and National Accommodation” in “Revista d’estudis autonòmics i federals”, No 16, 2012, p.290.

Disapproval of secession by international community is especially strong when it is unilateral; that is, without the consent of or any agreement with the mother state. Moreover the disapproval against unilateral secession is written in domestic and international laws, which emphasize the inseparable feature of state sovereignty. Stéphane Dion³⁶ notes that although there is not an international law against unilateral secession, this does not suggest that there is a “positive right to secession” that would force governments to accept or recognize a unilateral secession. Moreover, in addition to the domestic laws and international norms against secession, Dion notes that states are “extremely reluctant” to recognize unilateral secession unless it falls under decolonization. Given the complications that follow the secession, it is common for secessionist groups to request/demand political autonomy.

Such, there are several alternative political arrangements other than independence that can decide the status of de facto states, which is supported by the empirical data. Liam Anderson³⁷ points out three possible solutions for de facto states: independence, forced reintegration, and peaceful reintegration. A fourth possible outcome to de facto states, largely overlooked by the literature, is the status quo, or continuing as a de facto state. Scott Pegg³⁸ identifies the status quo or the continuation of de facto statehood as a resolution for managing de facto states. The status quo is also mentioned in the works of Pal Kolstø³⁹ who suggests a federal agreement with the parent state as a way for managing the conflict. Kolstø argues that a federal arrangement tends to foster the least tension between the various factions. John McGarry⁴⁰, meanwhile, proposes “a negotiated re-entry resulting in a decentralized federal system combined with the statehood power sharing.”

What shapes the choice of the scenario?

Thus, behavior of de facto states is a reflection of the interaction between domestic pressures, economic interests, and political institutions. The case studies will show that de facto states are willing to sacrifice independence if their economic and political demands are met by the mother state. Institutional frameworks such as autonomy, power sharing, and federalism can encourage secessionist groups to rethink the idea of independence. The

³⁶ Stéphane Dion, “Why is Secession Difficult in Well-Established Democracies? Lessons from Quebec” in “British Journal of Political Science”, Vol. 26, No. 02, 1996, pp.269-283.

³⁷ Nina Caspersen and Gareth Stansfield, Unrecognized States in the International System. (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.54-56.

³⁸ Scott Pegg, “De Facto States in the International System” for Institute of International Relations at the University of British Columbia, 1998, pp.1-29.

³⁹ Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, “Living with Non-recognition: State and Nation-building in South Caucasian Quasi-states”, in “Europe-Asia Studies”, Vol 60, Issue: 3, 2008, pp.483-509.

⁴⁰ Tozun Bahcheli, Barry Bartmann, and Henry Srebrnik, De Facto States: The Quest for Sovereignty (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.105-111.

appropriate institutional arrangement and economic incentives from the proper arrangement with the parent state can convince de facto states to stop the secession. To addition, the governments of de facto states have to consider the demands and interests of its domestic population and groups. De facto state political parties and governments cannot ignore the response from its own citizens, elites, and other interest and societal groups.

g) Summary

King, Keohane, and Verba⁴¹ in their work argued that it is crucial for a social research to be useful for both theory and the real world. This thesis will try to meet such a demand. De facto states have been often ignored in political research until recently, but after the declaration of independence of Kosovo in 2008 the attention has rapidly increased from both political science and legal scholars. Analyses of one or several secessionist states have been conducted, focusing more on the theory behind the secession, historical and cultural factors that led to the separatist movements and current political situation, however, not paying too much attention to the future of given de facto states and possible scenarios for resolving the situation around them. Thus, this thesis will try to fill a gap in the literature by trying to seek an answer to the conundrum of what two de facto states in question want and, more importantly, how they are trying to achieve their goals and how their current accomplishments will actually reflect their position in the future.

1.3 Methodological and theoretical scope

This thesis is a case study by its very nature. To address the research questions mentioned earlier, a two case cross qualitative study approach was chosen. One of the main benefits to using cross-case analysis - it is not as much limiting as a single case variable study. The second benefit is that using a cross-case analysis especially in a qualitative research helps to provide with a better insight of topic of the study and create new ideas and perspectives.

This research aims to examine possible scenarios for future existence and building state capacity. The research will acknowledge the main theories of secession but at the same time consider political reality in sense of current situation in Transnistria and Abkhazia as well as a broader picture in international relations. The research will mainly be qualitative in approach, due to the assumed value of the context and setting so as to allow deeper

⁴¹ Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba, "Designing Social Inquiry" in Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.35-37.

understanding of legitimacy within the framework of institution-building in Transnistria and Abkhazia. Ethnographic research methods will be also used in order to take into account the diverse point of view of the inhabitants of two de facto states in question.

In order to conduct this analysis, this thesis will use the variety of sources. The most important are official reports, UN resolutions, regulations as well as other official documents such as Constitutions and Declarations. Methodological triangulation method (which is a method of gathering more than one type of data, such as documents, statistics, observations, official reports, questionnaires) will be used to enhance credibility of the collected data.

In the construction of the theoretical framework, and will depend on the most prominent academics in the field of international law and theories of secession complied with works on the history and economics of Transnistria and Abkhazia. The thesis will also refer to journalistic pieces, such as newspapers articles, reports and documentaries in order to show current ideas of political leaders.

As it was already mentioned, the methods and data collection used for this work's case studies follow a qualitative and analytical-descriptive approach. A rich component of the analysis will look at historical narratives and casual story telling from the officials and scholars who witnessed the events in both Transnistria and Abkhazia. Important socio-economic and demographic data will be collected from the already mentioned sources as well as the statistical offices of several NGOs. It must be stressed that not all the sources have the same significance for the final valuation. Criteria will be made on credibility of the sources.

1.4 Time frame and research limitations

The cases were chosen from the time period of 1992 to the present day because although the history behind the state building of Transnistria and Abkhazia shows that these two entities had secessionist movements long before the Soviet Union collapse, but especially after the end of Cold War Transnistria and Abkhazia started a new stage on their way to international recognition. During the period of Cold War secessionist groups had a lot of different constrains that we can't witness nowadays, and although the dissolution can be seen by some political science and international law scholars as some kind of secessionism, due to the difficulty of interpretation this period was decided to be left out of the research. Moreover, because of the scope of the present study, it was too difficult to extend the time frame and include more than the selected two cases.

Russian recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008 brought an important change in terms of external relations for these entities and other in the same condition. As will be argued in the following chapters, this development had a significant impact on the state capacity and the political economy of these territories, as well as on the livelihood opportunities for their residents. That is the time when residents, de facto authorities, and their patron, have started to think for the long-term, thus marking a change from strictly conflict related dynamics that was largely viewed during the 1990s.

This thesis has certain limitations. The biggest limitation is the nature of the subject, as the subject is topical, thus it will be relatively difficult to cover all the current changes to analyze the possible future scenarios for Transnistria and Abkhazia. According to Bent Flyvbjerg (2004) one more limitation of using the case study method is that it can be guilty of “having a bias towards verification, understood as a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions”, which means the risk of confirming existing ideas and beliefs can be a significant issue in case study research.

One more limitation concerns the data collection. The current study tends to use a series of formal and informal interviews from officials, scholars and journalists who witnessed the events in Transnistria and Abkhazia. Personal narratives can potentially offer more than media sources coming from places where freedom of the press is limited. Still, it should be taken into the consideration that some answers can be censored or changed in favor of the narrative side as well as not represent the will of the majority. Plus, interviewees can sometimes give a response that does not match their belief or opinion or they might give the answer they are expected to give, but it might be scripted to what they believe is the appropriate response.

1.5 Chapter overview and research structure

Chapter one: *Introduction*.

Chapter two: *Background on de facto states*. Define and discuss the choice of terminology used in the thesis. Introduce different types of de facto states that exist nowadays in the post-Soviet area. Examine a state’s legitimacy that can come in two forms: internal and external. Describe the issue of de facto states being states by function, but not being recognized as such and thus being excluded from the international community. Examine where de facto-states originate and how they survive. Underline what role a patron state plays in the issue of de facto states.

Chapter three: *Case selection*. Describe the history of a conflict in Transnistria and Abkhazia, analyze their current political situation, discuss the main players of the conflict and their impact on the situation around de facto states in question.

Chapter four: *Prospects for the future*. Conduct the comparative analysis of Transnistria and Abkhazia. Identify the common points for the conflict in these two entities as well as their differences. Discuss the prospects for the conflict resolution in these two de facto states. Introduce different scenarios for future existence.

Chapter five: *Conclusion*.

Thesis structure (Table 1)

Literature review	Theory	Factors for scenarios
Origins of unrecognized states	Definition of de facto states	Ethnic
Secession	Statehood and secession	Legal
External recognition	Problem of recognition	Foreign policy
Domestic powers		Internal policy
The role of Great Powers	Patron's role	Economic, social, political
Possible scenarios for the future of de facto states:		
Independence		
Reunification with parent state		
Autonomy		
Status quo		

Source: by author

CHAPTER II – BACKGROUND ON DE FACTO STATES

2.1 Definition of de facto states

2.1.1 The choice of terminology

De facto states for the first time can be noticed to appear after the decolonization period during the 1960s and 1970s. These states were not able to achieve their political objectives of independence, but established de facto entities. For instance, South Katanga (Democratic Republic of Congo) emerged as a de facto state in 1960 and Biafra (Nigeria) emerged as a de facto state in 1967. The late 1980s to early 1990s generated the greatest number of de facto states especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Several examples of unrecognized states that appeared on the political map can include: Abkhazia, Anjouan, Biafra, Bougainville, East Timor, Eritrea, Gaguzia, Iraqi Kurdistan, Katanga, Kosovo, Montenegro, Nagorno-Karabakh, Palestine, Republika Srpska, Republica Srpska Krajina, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Somaliland, South Ossetia, Tamil Eelam, Taiwan, Transnistria, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Some have since moved to full statehood, others have been reunited with the parent state, and others still continue to function as de facto entities. De facto states have usually been marginalized and ignored by the international community due to their tenuous status.

Scott Pegg was the first scholar to bring the term and following definition of the ‘de facto state’ into the international relations lexicon. It should be mentioned, however, that political scholars were using the term well before Pegg’s article of 1998. For example, Sean Randolph used the term to refer to Taiwan in a 1981 article and, in a 1993 article, Michael Gunter used the term to refer to the creation of a de facto Kurdish state in northern Iraq. Before using a definition, it is important to briefly discuss the conceptual framework concerning the de facto state. There are several names that typically appear: ‘de facto state,’ ‘quasi-state,’ ‘semi-state,’ ‘unrecognized state,’ and ‘contested state.’ This thesis will use the term ‘de facto state’ for several reasons. First, the term would seem to best express that de facto state possesses all the fundamental characteristics of a state, except the recognition itself (de jure recognition). It is, in fact, a state without legal standing. Second, the other terms mentioned above do not capture the entire matter of cases of de facto states. For instance, Deon Geldenhuys uses the term ‘contested state,’ arguing that “most contested states find their very right of statehood being challenged by their parent states and the broader international community.” Geldenhuys’s statement assumes that all

de facto states desire recognition, but this is not in full supported by the empirical record. Later in this thesis there will be several scenarios for the future for two selected cases of this thesis of Transnistria and Abkhazia, and it will be possible to notice, that there is more than one scenario apart for recognition for the de facto states, for instance the integration with the patron state or reunification with the parent state on the basis of broad autonomy or confederation. ‘Semi-state’ and ‘quasi-state,’ meanwhile, indicate that the entity is a partial state or is similar to one. Such descriptions fail to fully define de facto states, which are not half states, but rather states in practice but without legal recognition.

In addition to the lack of consensus about terminology, there are also a few competing definitions in the scientific literature. Scott Pegg gives, perhaps, the most useful starting point: “a de facto state exists where there is an organized political leadership that receives popular support and has achieved sufficient capacity to provide governmental services to a given population; is capable of entering into relations with other states and seeks full constitutional independence and widespread international recognition.”⁴²

A second definition, from Tozun Bahcheli describes de facto states as “regions which carry out the normal functions of the state on their territory, but are not de jure states”⁴³. Thus, it is noticeable that Bahcheli’s definition as well as Pegg’s one describes de facto states as secessionist entities by default.

The problem with these and other definitions used by scholars is the incorporation of problematic concepts and conditions that do not properly capture de facto states. Nina Caspersen and Gareth Stansfield propose the definition of such a kind, they stress that de facto states must possess the following features: “de facto independence, including territorial control, and have managed to maintain this for at least two years; have not gained international recognition, or even if they have been recognized by some states, they are still not full members of the international system of sovereign states; they have demonstrated an aspiration for full, de jure, independence either through a formal declaration of independence, through the holding of a referendum, or through other actions or declarations that show a clear desire for a separate

⁴² Scott Pegg, “International Society and The De Facto States” in “The international journal of Middle East studies”, Vol.33, Issue 3, 2001, pp.469-470.

⁴³ Tozun Bahcheli, Barry Bartmann, and Henry Srebrnik, De Facto States: The Quest for Sovereignty (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.105-111.

existence”⁴⁴. Moreover, these authors do not explain why they use the two-year cut-off on de facto states, moreover they do not specify either what is meant by full membership in the international system of sovereign states, nor do they explain what is meant by “a clear desire for a separate existence.” Pegg’s definition is also controversial, for example, Pegg uses ‘popular support’ as a criterion of de facto statehood, but it is not clear what is meant by ‘popular support’ and more importantly, he fails to justify why it is a necessity.

In short, the existing definitions give us a starting point, but they are all lack of representing the essence of de facto states. Most definitions offer controversial criteria that do not further the understanding of de facto states, but the situation requires a definition that is specific and describes the whole universe of cases. To this end, the following definition will be used in this thesis: a de facto state is in effective control of a defined territory, provides a range of services to the population, and enters into diplomatic and economic relations with other states, but still does not possess de jure recognition. This definition intentionally avoids the statement that de facto states are always longing for independence and recognition given that the literature has not proved this statement, plus, de facto states will show different degrees of the features specified in the above definition.

Thus the choice of the term for this thesis was decided because it fully describes the objective character of territorial situations regardless of the status of elites governing the territorial unit in question. It is clear that the term “de facto state” expresses the dimensions of the situation which has to be taken into the consideration in this work. Accordingly the question of self-contained existence or effectiveness is of particular relevance here.

2.1.2 The relevance of the issue of statehood and secession to the matter of de facto states

International system has been observing some geopolitical mobilization after the second half of 20th century. These changes have resulted in several conflicts which demanded secession of territorial entities from their parent state. The conflicts are mostly caused by secessionist movements and they have a tendency to end with unilaterally secessions, where these entities establish their own state without consent of a parent state. After decolonization period, these secessionist movements are considered to be illegal by international community because they are

⁴⁴ Nina Caspersen and Gareth Stansfield, Unrecognized States in the International System. (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.24-33.

not a part of decolonization movements any longer, thus these entities remain unrecognized, in other words, de facto states. De facto states in their desire to gain the independence or leave the mother state and rejoin with the patron state violate territorial integrity principle and bring the threat to international peace and stability, which is viewed as the main reasons that these states are regarded as illegal.

It is obvious that striving for statehood is an essential characteristic of de facto territorial units and this circumstance is of great importance with regard to the “starting point” for the examination of the status of those entities. This assertion has been confirmed by Radoman, according to her, for example, respective elites of Abkhazia emphasize that the institutions established in these areas can function as “normal” political organs and as a result, the territorial units in question can survive outside of the authority of a mother state⁴⁵. It is obvious that those elites try to legitimize their claims by trying to prove that they do create states, and in order to achieve this purpose, it is necessary to find an appropriate form to further those claims. But, first of all, it is of great importance to initiate a process, which would emphasize the distinctiveness of the ethnic group in question.

The question of secession is essential to this matter because it indicates the mode of the emergence of a de facto territorial unit and it will be mentioned later in the present thesis that the status of that unit is strongly dependent upon the circumstances in which such an emergence takes place. The most common argument for almost every single separatist entity is the Kosovo precedent. Nowadays there are approximately 70 separatist groups around the world that are trying to use the Kosovo precedent to invoke their own separatism⁴⁶. The Kosovo precedent is almost like “godwin’s law” in the issue of unrecognized units, because every argument in favor of separatism of any kind will lead to the Kosovo precedent. All of the unrecognized Post Soviet states have found a way to apply the Kosovo precedent to their own cause. Each of them established their right to benefitiate separatism. While most scholars of international law say their cases for separatism are not equivalent, it does not stop the use of this precedent being used as a justification.

⁴⁵ Jelena Radoman, “Future Kosovo Status-Precedent or Universal Solution” in “Western Balkans Security Observer”, Issue no. 3, 2006, pp.14-22.

⁴⁶ Jelena Radoman, “Future Kosovo Status-Precedent or Universal Solution” in “Western Balkans Security Observer”, Issue no. 3, 2006, pp.35-39.

2.1.3 Theories of secession and their limitations

Although the development of secessionist theories is considered rather new in the theory of political thought, it is obvious to the political scholars that there must be a moral basis to regulate those processes. A lot of literature on this topic happened to appear starting from the beginning of the early 1990s, which is connected mainly to the sudden emergence of new states after the USSR and Yugoslavia's dissolution. To compare, there were no more than fifty states at the beginning of the 20s century, while nowadays there are almost two hundreds, and among those states there are more than 100 secessionist conflicts to exist. Thus, it is very important for scholars of political thought to pay more attention to those processes for better understanding what the moving force behind it is.

The main debate in moral theories is between primary and remedial right approaches⁴⁷. Theories of primary right understand secession as a fundamental right of certain groups and even individuals, coming out any requirement to justify it. Nationalist theories limit this right to cultural or national groups⁴⁸. These theories usually go for preservation of national and cultural values, and connect self-determination with the right to secede from the metropolitan state. Despite the popularity of the nationalist view among secessionist movements, the idea of making equal nations with states is not supported by many scholars because of many limitations that will be mentioned later in this part. One more theory, associative or so-called plebiscitary, gains the right to secession only from democratic principles without previously constraining the relevant subject bearer of this right⁴⁹. The main goal here is to satisfy basic rights such as democratic demands or individual autonomy. Political authority is inevitably linked to the consent of a population: if the metropolitan state loses the consent of a territorialized minority, that population has the right to secede, independently of its characteristics. It is obvious the scholars defending this position include the need to consider the probability of the would-be state.

The remedial theory takes into the consideration a set of just causes that can justify secession under certain conditions, instead of analyzing the priority of certain principles of the seceding state. The most popular idea in this category points out that, for example, unjust annexation, the violation of individual rights and unfair redistribution are themselves strong

⁴⁷ Margaret Moore, National Self-determination and Secession, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.76-88.

⁴⁸ Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, "National self-determination" in "The Journal of Philosophy", Vol. 87, no. 9, 1990, pp.439-461.

⁴⁹ David Gauthier, "Breaking Up: An Essay on Secession" in "Canadian Journal of Philosophy", Vol. 24, 1994, pp.357-371.

enough reasons to justify secession, thus the legitimacy of the state in this case is teleological: the state is a legitimate authority if it serves to protect, usually individual, rights.

The moral theories of secession usually refer to three different questions which are connected to each other. First is who, explaining the subject involved in secessionist disputes is often the object of controversy, with some considering individuals as the only bearers of the right to secede while others refer to group or national rights. Second is why, meaning the reasons for secession are relevant for just-cause defenders but mostly irrelevant for those supporting primary right theories. Finally, the how question, which considers the supporters of plebiscitarian theories are concerned about procedures, but they are not considered by other theories or at least not as an essential element.

In general it can be concluded that each theory has advantages and disadvantages. Such as adscriptivist theories pay their attention on national culture which is usually the main source for secessionist aspirations. However, it is a well-known fact, that national cultures are dynamic and controversial, that citizens of minority nations normally have shared identities and the borders of these identities are usually not clear. In some circumstances, applying the principle of national self-determination for solving secessionist disputes does not seem to be smart or even possible since the dispute is mainly over the national identity or the existence of a national subject. As their major criterion, plebiscitarian or associative theories focus on the democratic will of the citizens, still, this theory has several limitations, since the political unit that would vote on secession is not clearly defined. A current criticism against the theory refers to the potential fostering of instability, given that the political unit would only be defined after the vote on breaking up with the metropolitan state.

Brief reflection on the three main theories of secession is enough to see that each theory has serious limitations and none covers the complexity of secessionist disputes. There are many questions left non-answered, such as should we consider a majority secessionist claim illegitimate in the absence of severe grievances; are territorial groups entitled to secede though they lack a national culture; is there a limit to recursive secessions even if they are legitimately following democratic procedures? In recent theories of secession there is a certain flexibility and permeability between categories that has led to hybrid approaches and major changes in the positions of the authors. To sum up, in present-day multinational, liberal democratic contexts, few scholars defend a single-dimension approach to secessionist disputes, but the plurality of

legitimizing discourses and interests, the complexity of the notions of justice and the existence of competing visions make it impossible, as stated earlier, beyond certain guidelines provided by moral theories, a case-by-case analysis is necessary.

2.1.4 Problem of recognition

Within the indistinct logic of unrecognized states, there are failed states that are independent legally but do not function as states, while others are not allowed independence, although they possess all the means, like Taiwan; and then others that have achieved recognition from many countries, like Kosovo. The absence of clear standards for recognition seemed to be one of the reasons for their sovereignty used at the bidding of the big powers.

What question comes first when most look at de facto states is how it is possible for the territory in question to even exist in the nowadays global community without any form of recognition? Abkhazia and Transnistria both declared themselves separate from Georgia and Moldova in 1992 within months after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. They have largely been functioning the same way since their creation. In a contradictory way, the absence of recognition actually maintains its existence. Well known Norwegian scholar Pal Kolsto describes the position that “even in the absence of effective state building, most de facto states have succeeded reasonably in their nation building efforts”⁵⁰. The scholar also lists five factors that explain how these de facto states are able to survive in the international community, and each of these factors apply to Transnistria and Abkhazia. These factors are next: authorities in these de facto states are efficient in creating a common enemy from the state they are trying to secede from; unrecognized states remain as militarized societies; the weakness of a parent state maintains these state’s survival; support from a patron state increases survival of a de facto state; the role of an International community helps the survival of the these state. While all of these points are applicable to the situation. The most applicable one for the case studies in the third and fourth chapter is the fourth one, where the patron state often directly or indirectly contributes to the rest of the points.

After the XXI century’s second half, international system has been experiencing some recognition problems, which actually arise from secessionist movements. The existence of de

⁵⁰ Pal Kolstø, “The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States” in “Journal of Peace and Research”, Vol 43, No. 6, 2006, pp.1-7.

facto states became a part of larger research focus approximately since the end of 1900s.⁵¹ Unrecognized states originate from self-determination conflicts and are mostly denied recognition because they are viewed to violate the principle of territorial integrity⁵². Although in the Resolution of 2625, United Nations has given to some communities the right of self-determination, it has noted that the territorial integrities of states in the international system come before, moreover United Nations has given the states the duty of ban on the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. Thus, the United Nations has imposed the right to self-determination to some people. This right is limited only to the people who live under colonial rule. In the resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960 which was adopted by United Nation General Assembly named Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, it is clearly stated: “All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development⁵³.”

As it is understood from the name of the resolution, United Nations has given the right to self-determination to people who live under the governance of colonial countries, thus, de facto states in the international system are mostly not decolonized people but has won their de facto independence after several conflicts with their parent states, by establishing their own state as a result of secessionist movements, moreover they also violate their parent states’ territorial integrity. Clearly this situation creates a problem in international system, as de facto states not only create a recognition problem but also pose a threat to international peace and security.

What is the reaction of international system to these de facto entities which pose a serious threat to their territorial integrity? International society which consists of sovereign states usually chose to respond to the existing de facto states in three ways: actively oppose de facto entities by implementing embargoes and sanctions, generally ignore them and no dealing with them, come to some sort of limited acceptance and acknowledgment of their presence⁵⁴. Isolation of de facto states from international system has some consequences: de facto states are unable to obtain loans from international credit institutions; they are barred from membership of international organizations, international laws and regulations do not apply on their territories – which tend to

⁵¹ Martin Riegl and Bohumil Dobos, Unrecognized States and Secession in the 21th Century (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2017), pp.25-44.

⁵² Nina Caspersen, Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp.64-66.

⁵³ UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV).

⁵⁴ Scott Pegg, “International Society and The De Facto States” in “The international journal of Middle East studies”, Vol.33, Issue 3, 2001, pp.469-470.

discourage foreign investors-, international markets are also closed to them their inhabitants are unable to travel etc⁵⁵.

Basically, the EU has parallel position with existing states in international system regarding de facto states. There are four EU policies towards de facto states: active isolation (embargo and or support for parent re-integration); passive isolation (no engagement); engagement without recognition; recognition⁵⁶. When looking at the policy of the EU, it is possible to see that policies towards de facto states are mostly consist of isolation politics. So states in the international system and EU's stances to de facto states are similar. The mostly preferred option by the EU is engagement without recognition. But in practice, the EU's position exists between engagement without recognition and passive isolation. On the other side, active isolation and recognition are extreme situations which their applying would be dangerous in terms of region's stabilization⁵⁷.

It follows that de facto states do have a problem of significant character as their existence is not confirmed by the international system, but if these territorial entities are not excepted by the global community, where do they function and where is the place of de facto states? An answer has been given in respect of the environment in which these territorial units operate. This situation represents "a state of no peace and no war, where de facto states survive in a functional state of legal limbo."⁵⁸ Clarification of the status of the de facto state requires an introduction of the position within the realm of public international law despite the assertion that "de facto states operate outside international law"⁵⁹. In the result, the problem of a de facto state's unsanctioned existence is expressed through the lack of substantive recognition of the territorial entity in question. It is important at this stage to refer to the essence of this kind of recognition, which mostly consists of five points: "to attain substantive recognition, an entity would need success in at least a majority of the following five areas. First, it would secure recognition from some of the major powers of the day. Second, it would secure recognition from the existing juridical state

⁵⁵ Nina Caspersen, Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp.78-83.

⁵⁶ Sławomir Dębski, Bartosz Wiśniewski, Wojciech Lorenz, "EU Policy Options towards Post-Soviet De Facto States" in "The Polish Institute of International Affairs", No. 6, 2017, pp.12-18.

⁵⁷ Sławomir Dębski, Bartosz Wiśniewski, Wojciech Lorenz, "EU Policy Options towards Post-Soviet De Facto States" in "The Polish Institute of International Affairs", No. 6, 2017, pp.24-27.

⁵⁸ Walter Kemp, "Selfish Determination: The Questionable Ownership of Autonomy Movements" in "Ethnopolitics", Vol. 4, 2005, pp.85-104.

⁵⁹ Walter Kemp, "Selfish Determination: The Questionable Ownership of Autonomy Movements" in "Ethnopolitics", Vol. 4, 2005, pp.108-110.

which it was seeking to leave, or at least no objections from them to others recognizing it. Third, it would secure recognition from neighboring countries and countries with which it shares borders. Fourth, it would secure recognition from a majority of countries in the UN General Assembly. Fifth, it would be able to participate in global and regional international organizations.’⁶⁰

2.1.5 Role of a patron state and influence of Great Powers

De facto states have a recognized problem in the international system because of gaining their de facto statehood through secessionist movements. This situation causes to isolation of de facto states in the international system, and because of this isolationist politics, de facto states can't sustain their statehood without external sources. These external sources are usually called patron states, which support is inevitable for de facto states' survival.

Patron state in general terms means an internationally recognized country that offers political, diplomatic, economic, and/or military support to the de facto states⁶¹. While these external sources had an advantage on de facto states' surviving, they cause some problems as well. These forms of external support come at a price, but they are essential for the survival of the de facto states⁶². De facto states which have already a negative response from international system receive an additional damage because of this dependence. Patron state's help to de facto state is often seen as financial and/or military. Because de facto state can't form democratic state institutions and independent economic structure, they are in need of financial support for their territorial integrity.

Patron states support de facto states for some reasons: as an efficient mechanism for imposing costs on the parent state (e.g. as Russia does to Georgia via South Ossetia and Abkhazia); ethnic solidarity with the secessionists (e.g. Turkey's support of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus); hope of eventual annexation of the disputed territory (e.g. Armenia's

⁶⁰ Walter Kemp, "Selfish Determination: The Questionable Ownership of Autonomy Movements" in "Ethnopolitics", Vol. 4, 2005, p.90.

⁶¹ Sławomir Dębski, Bartosz Wiśniewski, Wojciech Lorenz, "EU Policy Options towards Post-Soviet De Facto States" in "The Polish Institute of International Affairs", No. 6, 2017, pp.23-25.

⁶² Nina Caspersen, Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p.54.

support of Nagorno Karabakh)⁶³. A common and popular answer to why a nation would be interested in supporting another state is that a patron state can use that territory as a way of creating leverage of over the geopolitical orientation of a nation. The Russian federation's motivation for supporting both Transnistria and Abkhazia remains to be consistent in both cases, because Russia fears the expansion of the Western influence and power in its neighborhood. The Russian Federation felt defeated and humiliated in the early 2000s when NATO expanded into Central and Eastern Europe, it cannot lose any more of its near abroad to western institutions, that is why Russia benefits by having Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in a compromised position in being integrated into western institutions because of their problems with ethnic separatism.

Maintaining influence is not only the motivation a patron state can have in supporting separatist causes, there also can be some strategic value in aiding separatism. For example, the Crimea provides the black sea fleet for the Russian Federation, Abkhazia as well gives more access to the black sea fleet, Transnistria is the key in helping transport Russian products to the European market. All of these separatist causes provide some kind of strategic value for the Russian Federation. The extent of this will be covered more thoroughly in the case studies.

When we look at the post-Soviet de facto states, it is possible to say that all entities have a patron state. Patron states have a direct impact on de facto states in return all of these support. One of the most important examples of this situation is Russia's political influence on Abkhazia. During presidential elections in Abkhazia because of Russia's favored candidate's defeat, Russia has implemented an economic embargo on Abkhazia. Accordingly, patron state has cut off Abkhazia's lifeline, until a power-sharing deal was reached between two candidates⁶⁴. On the other side, military support was provided by Russia in the case of South Ossetia and Transnistria; Armenia in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh; Turkey in the case of Northern Cyprus, Serbia in the case of Republika Srpska Krajina and Republica Srpska⁶⁵. William Zartman has also described this dependence as: "states need some emergency pump priming to get the machine started."⁶⁶ This expression means that de facto states which lack international recognition need some patron states' vital support to survive their de facto statehood. A de facto state actually is not a choice

⁶³ Kristina Buzard, Benjamin A.T. Graham and Ben Horne, Unrecognized States: A Theory of Self-Determination and Foreign Influence. (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 2012).

⁶⁴ Nina Caspersen, "Playing the Recognition Game: External Actors and De Facto States", in 'The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs', Vol 44, Issue: 4, 2009, pp.12-37.

⁶⁵ Nina Caspersen, Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp.95-99.

⁶⁶ William Zartman, "Putting Things Back Together" in "Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority", (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), pp.19-31.

for investors, so they don't have any other choice but external dependence. They can't have a part of any economic agreement with other states in international system because of a lack of legal character. It is not possible to demonstrate their statehood and to establish democratic and efficient state institutions in the circumstances of de facto state' establishment, de facto states' dependence on patron state directly rises. Unrecognized states which can't have any support from international society automatically tend to rely on an external power. Although the support of patron state provide some help in maintaining of de facto statehood of unrecognized states, on the other side it causes lacking of international recognition and being alone in the international arena. In the result patron state and de facto state relation contains a vicious circle which means that the more de facto state dependent on patron state, the more they move away from international recognition.

Blakkisrud and Kolsto have also defined de facto states as "states on the dole". While making this description, they made an example on Abkhazia. Abkhazia is not capable of providing basic services, so they can only rely on Russia's support. While this relationship make Abkhazia's situation difficult on the international arena, Abkhaz side is glad for this external support. Abkhaz Foreign Minister accepted de facto state's dependence on an external support and he made an explanation which confirmed that Abkhazia is under Russian's protectorate⁶⁷.

According to Fairbanks, unrecognized entities are the weakest of the weak states. These entities are often cut off from diplomatic relations, Western aid, human rights monitoring, travel, telephone, banking, and many other parts of global market⁶⁸. Being isolated from international society, and de jure statehood's rights de facto states become dependent on a patron state. But being relied on a patron state may have a potential danger: if de facto entities decide to disconnect with their patron state and turn to international system, they may lose their de facto independence altogether⁶⁹.

De facto states' recognition issue may cause a threat between patron state and the other states. A patron state which has important geopolitical goals on the de facto state's territory, may disturb other powers of international system. These powers' way to react to patron states is

⁶⁷ Pal Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, "Living with Non-recognition: State- and Nationbuilding in South Caucasian Quasi- states" in "Europe-Asia Studies", Vol. 60, No. 3, 2008, pp.387-398.

⁶⁸ Mark R. Beissinger and Crawford Young, Beyond State Crisis? : Postcolonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective, (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002), pp.53-57.

⁶⁹ Nina Caspersen, "Playing the Recognition Game: External Actors and De Facto States", in 'The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs', Vol 44, Issue: 4, 2009, pp.37-39.

usually non recognizing de facto entities. In the result of incomplete and contested state-formation most of de facto states find themselves in the intermediate zones of great power rivalry, thus depending on patron states and their power leverage⁷⁰.

Why are de facto states isolated from international system? At this point, it is better to examine again patron state involvement. Most of de facto states achieved their de facto statehood through secessionist movements. Because de facto states can't win independence struggle against their parent state without an external support, their patron states' involvement would become inevitable. Such third party involvement is usually seen as an obstacle to a negotiated solution⁷¹. This situation leaves an impression, that de facto states are not able to manage statehood process on their own, and that international isolation is implemented by international community to these de facto entities to respond to third party involvement.

Actually de facto states' non recognition by the other states in the international system suits patron states' interests. Because in many cases, it is only the military support of the patron states that prevents immediate reconquest by their parent state, and only the economic support from the patron that prevents economic collapse. Thus, as long as non-recognition continues, the patron's influence on de facto state is maximized. As long as de facto state's unrecognized status remains, its patron state would have better opportunity to pursue their policy in that region. Why is it so important to have economic and military support for a de facto state? For a newly formed entity, economic and military structure is the basis for the statehood. Without military power, de facto state cannot maintain its territorial integrity. And it is also likely that a parent state would take an action to take this territory back. Economic structure has a vital importance for any de facto state. For an entity which lacks recognition and confronts isolation from international system, it is not possible to have foreign investors in that region and the only way to stay strong economically is to depend on a patron state. So patron states' prior choice is to support de facto state in the military and economic areas.

⁷⁰ Eiki Berg and Raul Toomla, "Forms of Normalisation in the Quest for De Facto Statehood", in "The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs", Vol. 44, No. 4, 2009, pp.47-55.

⁷¹ Nina Caspersen, Making Peace with De Facto States, Unrecognized States and Secession in the 21th Century. (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2017), pp.38-55.

2.2 De facto states of post-Soviet area

2.2.1 General information on de facto states of post-Soviet area

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was non-violent in most of the 15 republics. Where difficulties arose were in republics with built-in ethno-territorial polities and hierarchies. The disintegration of the Moscow vertical of power created opportunities for republic-level elites but also for autonomous republic and even autonomous oblast elites to renegotiate new positions between competing power verticals. A “war of laws” between nested Soviet governance structures spiraled into protests and counter-protests, ethnic mobilization and conflict for exclusive territorial control, and subsequent forced population displacement during and after the wars. Thus, although history is rich for examples of de facto states, the dissolution of the USSR and Yugoslavia produced a lot of new cases. This phenomenon is correlated to the collapse of the two unions that had both chosen a system of ethno-federalism, which is a political system that includes many ethnicities and religions while recognizing some members as titular nations. Thus, minorities established autonomous republics. However, some minorities feared they would lose their traditions, cultures, and autonomy within the system, and during the fall of the federations, they put forward their rights. In the result, serious issues evolved, resulting in ethnic cleansings that sought for removing minorities. However, in some cases, parent states have helped minorities to create and retain their status as unrecognized states.

There is a principle in international law as *uti possidetis* (as you possess), which means that a territory or other property remains with the possessor at the end of a conflict unless otherwise provided for by treaty. If the treaty does not state special conditions concerning the possession of property and territory taken during the conflict, then the principle of *uti possidetis* prevails. In other words, the existing borders of polities must be respected. Thus, new delimitation and changing of borders during the dissolution of the USSR and Yugoslavia was not allowed; therefore, separation and independence of their minorities was regularly denied. By reason of this principle of law, the international community has doubts to recognize de facto states, especially in the situation when genocides and deportations have happened and force has been widely used in independence struggles. The acceptance of such de facto states by foreign states would create a bad precedent in that it would imply that they accepted the results of such ethnic cleansings, although even a change in borders or territories by force is not permitted by international law. Thus, the national ambitions of minority groups have led to unrecognized

states, whose situations have created what has been called “frozen conflicts,” as for example in the Russia-Georgian War of 2008.

Two types of de facto states exist in the former USSR and Yugoslavia. The first, a former autonomous province aims at independence and becomes a de facto state. The second, the people who want the new state set the border intentionally to create a “region,” insist on independence, and become a de facto state. (Table 2)

Types of unrecognized states in the former USSR and the former Yugoslavia.	
Type 1. Former autonomous provinces	Type 2. Insistence on territory without basis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abkhazia (in Georgia, former USSR) • South Ossetia (in Georgia, former USSR) • Republic of Serbian Krajina (in Croatia, former Yugoslavia)* • Nagorno Karabakh (in Azerbaijan, former USSR) • Kosovo (in Serbia, former Yugoslavia) • Chechen Republic (in Russia, former USSR)* Republic of Srpska (in Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslavia)* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transnistria (in Moldova, former USSR) • Republic of Serbian Krajina (in Croatia, former Yugoslavia)*
<p>*Chechen Republic, Republic of Srpska, and the Republic of Serbian Krajina can be said to have been unrecognized states at one time, but are not currently.</p>	

Source: Pal Kolstø, “The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States”

Russian influence and intervention, as well as the relations between Russia and the West, certainly conditioned the outcome of the two Georgian secessionist conflicts as well as the one in

Moldova and one in Ukraine. Russian troops are on the ground in all four of these regions today (but not in Nagorno Karabakh), and Russian financial support is vital to their survival. However, the local elites in these regions are not fully compliant instruments of Russian influence. Kremlin-backed candidates for elections in these regions have not always been successful, and instability and backlash have sometimes resulted from too manifest a “Kremlin hand” in local politics. The geopolitical dynamics for all these conflicts can by no means be reduced to the opposition between Russia and the West or to manipulations of Russian authorities pursuing their objectives. These have roots in the deep history of relations between titular peoples, violent conflicts in the past, collective historical memory, and opposed narratives. Particularly important is competition over territory historically shared by two or more ethnic or cultural groups and considered by all of them as the cradle of their identities. In the Soviet period, hostilities between titular peoples were sublimated but kept alive by genuine and imagined injustices on the part of the dominant group (respectively, Georgians and Azerbaijanis) and by the creation of territorial autonomies within Union republics; measures resented as compromising the territory and sovereignty of the dominant group. The conflict in Transnistria is also based not only on spirals of polarization and violence unleashed by the crisis in Soviet authority structures and the emergence of republican-level sovereignty claims, but also on the important historical differences in settlement and economic and political development⁷².

2.2.2 Special features of post-Soviet de facto states

Three of four post-Soviet de facto states in the Caucasus profited from the territorial autonomy in the Soviet era offered to their titular people, respectively, Abkhaz, Ossetians, and Armenians. This contributed to the preservation of the local/ethnic political elite and intelligentsia, the main bearer of identity, and stimulated the diffusion of alternative historical narratives and the struggle for control over territory along ethnic lines⁷³. Much of Transnistria also had historical memory of territorial distinctness as an autonomous republic (the Moldavian ASSR) in Soviet Ukraine. Large numbers of the populations in what became the de facto states rejected the re-discovered nationalistic rhetoric and policies in the republic capitals (Baku, Kishinev, and Tbilisi) and declared their own authority on parts of the respective republics. It is therefore little surprise that a strong majority of most ethnicities (except ethnic Georgians in

⁷² Vladimir Kolosov and John O’Loughlin, “After the Wars in the South Caucasus State of Georgia: Economic Insecurities and Migration in the De Facto States of Abkhazia and South Ossetia” in “Eurasian Geography and Economics”, 52, 2011, pp.631-654.

⁷³ Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser, Russians as the New Minority: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor States (New York: Westview Press, 1996), pp.200-213.

Abkhazia while Karabakhis are evenly divided) consider the dissolution of the Soviet Union a “wrong step” as they lost the economic security and political stability of that regime. The two decades since the local wars have been characterized by political uncertainty, economic isolation, recurrent violence (in Georgia and along the Armenian-Azerbaijani ceasefire line) and widespread poverty.

In general, the differences among the republics and between the nationalities regarding the collapse of the Soviet Union in the de facto states are highly correlated with political and economic prospects. More than 50 % in all three groups (Moldovans, Ukrainians, and Russians) in Transnistria and those in South Ossetia agree that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a mistake; all of these groups have seen a dramatic drop in living standards and huge outmigration. In Abkhazia, 42% of Abkhaz, Armenians, and Russians share the perception that the Soviet Union’s disappearance was a wrong step. Despite the fact that the Abkhaz are effectively in control of the republic’s political structures, and a majority of this group prefer independence as the best option for the future, the dislocation of shifting from the centrally planned economy to the free market and the search for reliable export markets continues to pose a major challenge. Such opinions are common to a large part of the post-Soviet space: though respondents in public opinion polls are well aware of the brutality of the regime, they simultaneously see the benefits of economic security in the Soviet era⁷⁴.

That is why nowadays the inhabitants of de facto states, in general, have higher levels of trust for the Russian leadership than for the respective leaders of their de facto states and only derisory amounts for the leaderships of the parent states from which they separated. As a result of Russia’s recent involvement in the war against Georgia and the recognition of Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s sovereignty, the overwhelming majority of respondents in Abkhazia and South Ossetia trust the leaders of Russia. The inhabitants of Abkhazia and South Ossetia recognize the massive economic assistance from Russia, realizing that their states’ budgets and social policy totally depend from Russian aid. Tourists from Russia to the resorts in the northern part of Abkhazia provide one of its major sources of income⁷⁵. In Abkhazia, Russian assistance highlights the fundamental problem of sovereignty. A part of its political elite hopes that they will continue to get everything from Russia and are satisfied by a role of an economic annex with

⁷⁴ Thomas De Waal, Maria Lipman, Lev Gudkov and Lasha Bakradze, The Stalin Puzzle: Deciphering Post-Soviet Public Opinion (Washington, DC: Carnegie Foundation of International Peace, 2013), pp.44-68.

⁷⁵ Vladimir Kolosov and John O’Loughlin, “After the Wars in the South Caucasus State of Georgia: Economic Insecurities and Migration in the De Facto States of Abkhazia and South Ossetia” in “Eurasian Geography and Economics”, 52, 2011, pp.667-669.

the facade of an independent state. An opposing view perceives independence as a historical responsibility that requires the building of a political nation based on an identity shared by all citizens⁷⁶. The three major ethnic groups in Transnistria (Moldovans, Ukrainians, and Russians) trust the Russian leadership at the same rate of about two-thirds. The hope that Russia will protect the interests of Transnistria in the face of an eventual reunification of Moldova and Romania obviously depends on Russia's highest officials. Transnistrians also realize that their republic has survived only due to constant economic assistance of Russia. The possible unification of Moldova and Romania is considered a major threat in Transnistria, thus justifying the continued Russian military presence.

2.3 Conclusion

Keeping in mind the considerations mentioned earlier and the variety of terms and descriptions employed for the name of the territorial unit in question, it has to be stressed that the definition used in this thesis is the "de facto state". Thus, the territorial unit is an expression of the factual state of affairs, it is a fact, as such. Moreover, it is an accomplished fact and the "de facto" or factual character of the situation involved means that this wording falls within the scope of the notion of effectiveness.

It seems that secessionist movements and ethnic groups' demand for independence will continue to be a problem for the states in the international system. As long as there are several states which have some interest in certain regions, de facto states will have a patron state's support. Because de facto states couldn't complete its statehood process successfully, their basic structures –especially in military and economic areas- become weak and they rely on a patron states' support. Patron states give the support what de facto states need but this dependence put these entities in a position negatively in the eyes of international community. International community's reaction to de facto states is to ignore and not recognize them. This isolation makes de facto states much closer to their patron states. So the more isolation against de facto state, the more dependence on a patron state. De facto states' dependence on a patron states gives the impression to the other states that they can't manage statehood process on their own. So although de facto states aim to prove their statehood and thus seek international recognition as a de jure state, their relations with patron states prevent them to achieve these aims. It is hard to handle for

⁷⁶ Said Gezerdava, "Abkhaz sovereignty and relations with Russia" in "The Politics of Non-recognition in the Context of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict", (London: International Alert, 2011), pp.16-18.

de facto states without a patron state. It is possible to conclude that the more de facto states depend on patron state, the more they go away from international recognition.

The difficulties concerning resolving the problems of present de facto states extend the studies about them, however, new de facto states not only continue to form but also have become a more or less frequent phenomenon in nowadays world, therefore, the need for further studies on de facto states is constantly growing in order to analyze their occurrence and to seek resolution to the problem of existing de facto states.



CHAPTER III – CASE SELECTION

3.1 Transnistria's case

3.1.1 Origins

Map 1



Source: Map of Transnistria, by The Guardian, 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/20/transnistria-russia-rouble-crisis>>

History is an essential factor in understanding the origins of any conflict. This chapter will look into Transnistria's historical relationship with its metropolitan state – Moldova, its patron state – Russian Federation, and its neighbors – Romania and Ukraine to better analyze in the next chapter what the main actors are and what factors influence the choice of the future scenario for this de facto entity.

As it is seen on the map, Moldova appears to be a landlocked country that is situated between Ukraine and Romania and that has been in a conflict with the self-proclaimed separatist region of Transnistria since September 2, 1990, the time of its independence declaration.

Although the armed conflict has mostly ceased since a short war in 1992, it remains to be a potential boiling point between the West and Russian Federation.

Transnistria remains something of an interesting anomaly compared to the other conflict described in this thesis in that the primary motivation for breaking away from its parent state was not caused by ethnic or religious issues, but by elites. However, it has transformed into an ugly, uncontrollable ethnic struggle. Although historically the Dniester River has divided the Slavic world from the rest of Europe, the conflict between the peoples on each side of its bank was not inevitable prior to 1989, which makes this situation different than any other post-Soviet conflict.

The modern Moldovan state starts to exist after the fall of the Soviet Union. It was historically a contested region between Russia and Romania. In 1918, Moldova, then called Bessarabia, declared its independence from Russia and united with Romania. The union lasted until the time when Bessarabia was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940 as a result of the German-Soviet Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which divided much of Eastern Europe. At this time, Transnistria, which used to be a territory of the Russian Empire from 1792 to 1924 and Ukraine from 1924 to 1940, was unwillingly annexed with Bessarabia. When the territory came under the control of the Romanians from 1941 to 1944, the Transnistrians viewed this as an occupation, and it was a remarkable experience that has resonated throughout its recent history.

Moscow took control over the region in 1944 and Bessarabia was annexed in 1947 and was renamed the Moldavian Socialist Soviet Republic. During this time, the Soviets sought to regain the loyalty of the Moldovan people and change the nation into a cohesive one through making it a part of a huge Soviet body. "Soviet propaganda promulgated the idea of a 'Moldovan people' with a 'Moldovan' language and culture, distinct from the Romanian one."⁷⁷

The creation of a distinct Moldovan political identity was not easy. When the Moldavian Socialist Soviet Republic declared its independency and changed the name to the Republic of Moldova, it was completely different than the other newly formed post-Soviet states. Moldova consists of people from different ethnic groups with a history that the Soviets had attempted to change and impose upon them. Many Moldovans are of either Romanian or Russian descent, the latter is the result of Russian migration during the Soviet era, and there were no clear indications

⁷⁷ Natalia Cojocar, "Nationalism and Identity in Transnistria, Innovaton" in "The European Journal of Social science research", Volume 19, 2006, issue 3-4, pp.261-272.

that the state would be able to hold itself together. Thus, Soviet occupation was crucial for what would later become the state of Moldova as it provided a shared experience for the Moldovan people. The lack of centuries of common history and identity were less important than the shared experience of Romanian occupation and Soviet domination.

There is an interesting finding, Soviet attempts to create a cohesive Moldovan state didn't apply to Transnistria, a 400 kilometer patch of land on the "left bank" of the River Dniester between Moldova and Ukraine. According to Natalia Cojocaru⁷⁸, "during the Soviet era the opposition between 'we, the Transnistrian Moldovans' and 'they, the Bessarabian Moldovans' evolved... 'Soviet propaganda had always implied that Bessarabians are capitalists, indolent people who speak another language. This ideology was well indoctrinated in the psychology of Transnistrian people and came to resemble enmity toward the Bessarabian Moldovans.' The difference between Transnistrian and Bessarabian Moldovans was emphasized through unofficial policies of the Communist Party. Transnistria was the area from which the majority of elites from Soviet Moldova were recruited. The 'leftbankers' were considered more loyal to the Soviet regime and more politically reliable than their counterparts from the former 'bourgeois' Bessarabia".

Though formally the Moldavian Socialist Soviet Republic was created out of Bessarabia and Transnistria, there was a big gap between these areas. Transnistria had a longer history of cooperation with the Soviet Union and was not affected by the Romanian influence unlike Bessarabia, other than four disturbing years spent under the Romanians during World War II. As a result, Transnistria adapted to Soviet regime much faster than the rest of the SSR. It was able to easily be Sovietized, leaving its past and working to create a new identity that was not tied to Romania. Its population celebrated non-Romanian Moldovan culture and history and even changed its Latin alphabet to a Cyrillic one.

According to data from a 1989 population census, Transnistria had a population of about 555,000 people. About 40% were ethnic Moldovans, 28% were Ukrainian, 24% were Russian, and 8% identified themselves with other ethnic groups⁷⁹. Although Transnistria has an ethnically diverse population, the official language is Russian and Russia is taken as its protector from

⁷⁸ Natalia Cojocaru, "Nationalism and Identity in Transnistria, Innovaton" in "The European Journal of Social science research", Volume 19, 2006, issue 3-4, pp.288-295.

⁷⁹ Aurora Bencic and Teodor I. Hodor, *Transdnistria: Ethnic Conflict or Geopolitical Interests?* (London: Editura Universitatii din Oradea, 2011), pp.403-417.

Romania. Matthew Rojansky mentions⁸⁰ “evidence indicates that Russian speakers in Transnistria still generally think of Romania as the villain and Russia as the hero in a historical narrative dating back to World War II, when Bucharest was allied with Nazi Germany. Russian speakers therefore associate modern Romanian nationalism with revanchist fascism, a narrative heavily informed by the persistence of a World War II memory shaped by Soviet ideologists throughout the Slavic core of the post-Soviet space, and in overt conflict with a neo-nationalist historical narrative among many of the post-Soviet and post-Communist states in Eastern Europe, including Romania⁸¹.”

This difference within the country was not a problem until the late 1980s when Moscow started to lose power among the republics. During this time, a movement Moldovan Popular Front began to challenge Soviet policies and made an attempt to pull Moldova away from the Soviet Union. Moreover, they pushed for a return to its original language and Latin alphabet. The Transnistrians started to worry that this rise in Moldovan nationalism would move the country towards unification with Romania and that Transnistria might lose its identity. While changing an alphabet may look like a small issue, in reality the protection of a nation’s provides the fundamental form of belonging to a specific culture and history, that is why its protection on the nationalistic level is so fundamentally important. Kishinev passed a controversial language law in 1989 that declared Moldovan the state language of the republic and ordered the transition to the Latin alphabet, plus recognized the unity of the Moldovan and Romanian languages; and laid out a plan for extending its use in all the spheres. It has been supported by many scholars to become the final trigger for the frozen conflict to emerge. Moldova’s new language law led to increased tensions in the country as Kishinev was leaning towards closer cultural and political ties with Romania. Worried about the situation, the Transnistrians became proactive and, from 1989 to the fall of the USSR, voted on several proposals and referendums attempting to create local autonomy against rising nationalism in the rest of Moldova. This included seeking the rights to disengage with Kishinev politically, and join with the Soviet Union. These plans were ruined after the collapse of the Soviet Union. During this time many discussions within Moldova about the nation’s identity and orientation arose and Kishinev had to deal itself with political, economic, cultural and language problems that came as the result of its independence.

⁸⁰ Vladimir Kolosov, “The Transdnestrian Moldovan Republic: An Unrecognized State in the Geopolitical World Order” in “Eurasian Geography and Economics 55(5), 2010, pp.1-34.

⁸¹ John Basescu, “Moldova may reunite with Romania in next 25 years”, RIANovosti, November 30, 2010, <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20101130/161565516.html>>, (August 28, 2019).

While the conflict between Moldova and Transnistria is considered to be one of elite manipulation, it is obvious that elites from both sides made huge errors. The Moldovans quickly replaced many of the Transnistrian political leaders who favored Russia and threatened to cut the economic subsidies to the region. The Moldovan people also aimed clean themselves of their Soviet past. In response to these actions, independent militia in Transnistria prepared to consolidate power in its territory. Every move in Kishinev that took the republic further away from Moscow was met by a countermove in Transnistria that pulled the region itself further from Kishinev. It made the basis for the conflict to start as Transnistrians saw the move away from Soviet norms as ‘Romanianization’, a phenomenon that threatened non-Romanian speakers with persecution, deprivation of their rights and in some cases death. Violence was pointed at Russian speakers in Moldovan cities, which at the same time increased nationalist rhetoric and armed attempts by the Moldovan state to claim its sovereignty over Transnistria highly supported by citizens. As Kishinev did not stop these threats, Transnistrians decided to take matters into their own hands.

3.1.2 Conflict

The armed conflict between Moldova and Transnistria, when it started, was short and decisive, in no small part due to Russian involvement. The fears of marginalization in political, economic, and cultural spheres mobilized much of the Transnistrian population and less than a year before Moldova gained its independence from the USSR, Transnistria declared its separation from its metropolitan state, with the intent to reunite with Moscow.

In December 1991, after election of the Transnistria Moldovan Republic’s first president, Igor Smirnov, paramilitary forces loyal to the new Transnistrian regime engaged in a wave of low-scale violence against police stations and other authorities that remained loyal to Kishinev. This escalated into a larger military conflict in March 1992. Transnistria was aided by contingents of Russian Cossacks and the Russian 14th Army, which had been stationed there since 1956.⁸² This conflict reached its apogee at the town of Bendery in June when Transnistrian forces and “volunteer” Cossacks and Russian Army members defeated Moldovan police that had been sent to restore Moldovan authority over the town.

⁸² Alejandro W. Sanchez, “The Frozen Southeast: How the Moldova-Transnistria Question has Become a European Geo-Security Issue” in “The Journal of Slavic Military Studies”, 22 (2), 2009, pp.152-176.

As a result of these actions, a ceasefire was made on July 21, 1992. Transnistria, with the help from outside, had managed to take control over most of its territory. Around 1,500 people were killed in the conflict and the ceasefire, which was brought by Russia, called for a trilateral peacekeeping operation consisting of Russian, Moldovan, and Transnistrian forces along the Dniester River. As of 2011, there were over 1,500 Russian forces⁸³ of the 14th Army, based in the area.

The military conflict of 1992 was viewed in Transnistrian media as a ‘war against the genocide created by nationalistic Moldovans.’ This armed confrontation is still presented as a solid justification for separatist movements, and in collective memory it was ‘a war for truth, justice and independence. This view is as strong nowadays as it was in the 1990s and such beliefs have made reconciliation appear pointless.

3.1.3 Current situation

Today, Transnistria generally controls the left bank areas of the river Dniestr. Its territory is approximately 4,000 km². Territorial control is not strictly divided by the river, however, as there are areas and villages on the eastern (left) bank that are under Moldovan control and areas on the western bank under Transnistrian rule. The Moldovan villages on the left bank create small corridors in the elongated Transnistrian map.

The population of the entity is just over half a million people and its ethnic composition is rather heterogeneous. Three ethnic groups – Moldovans/Romanians, Russians and Ukrainians – each make up around 30 percent of the population. This ethnic diversity does not generate major tensions within the nation. Transnistria has been involved in concerted state- and nation-building, with the main focus on regional identity. Soviet symbols are frequently used and are also present in the coat-of-arms and the flag of the entity. This has led to the question of whether the Transnistrian conflict is ethnic or political in character, with no clear conclusion on either side. Arguments supporting a political conflict are given by Kolstø⁸⁴ and Roper⁸⁵, while Kaufman and Bowers argue for an ethnic conflict⁸⁶.

⁸³ Ian Johnstone, “Consolidating Peace: Priorities and Deliberative Processes” in *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019), pp.13-29.

⁸⁴ Pal Kolstø and Andrei Malgin, “The Transnistrian Republic: A Case of Politicized Regionalism” in *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 26 (1), 1998, pp.103-127.

The relative success of state-building also shows in the functioning government that the entity possesses. Despite this, Transnistria is not very active in foreign relations. This is effectively seen in the representations or, to be precise, the lack of them in Transnistria. Of UN member states, only Russia has opened a consulate in Tiraspol. The situation is no better concerning Transnistria's representations abroad. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the entity, only embassies in Abkhazia and South-Ossetia have been established. No UN member state has recognized Transnistria and its main foreign activity seems to focus on relations with fellow post-Soviet secessionists Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nowadays Transnistria still is a de facto state. It has a tripartite Soviet-style government; security forces, including an army, police force, and border security; and an economy with its own currency and tax system. This Soviet-style government, the inherited Soviet industrial base, and subsidies from Russia enable the de facto authorities to maintain a high level of economic stability, and a standard of living that while low, is slightly higher than in neighboring Moldova, however, unlike other three de facto separatist states in the Caucasus, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, no nation recognizes Tiraspol, not even Russia.

Although Transnistria has some industrial capacity of its own, which includes a steel sector, the country is mainly dependent on aid from Moscow. This de facto state struggles with high level of crime and since the war emerged it has been generating economic, social, and human rights problems for its own citizens. Moldova itself is one of the poorest countries in Europe and is severely underdeveloped⁸⁷. This situation is even more severe in its breakaway region. There are not so many opportunities for honest employment in Transnistria, as a result, most of the inhabitants are involved in illegal trading activities, which take advantage of Transnistria's geographical location between Romania and Ukraine. "Indeed, due to poorly regulated borders, it is believed that Transnistria is a major node in European and global arms, drugs, and human trafficking networks⁸⁸." Transnistrian officials have been accused by many international

⁸⁵ Tozun Bahcheli, Barry Bartmann, and Henry Srebrnik, *De Facto States: The Quest for Sovereignty* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.105-111.

⁸⁶ Stuart J. Kaufman and Stephen R. Bowers, "Transnational dimensions of the Transnistrian conflict" in "Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity, 26 (1), 1998, pp.129-146.

⁸⁷ Alejandro W. Sanchez, "The Frozen Southeast: How the Moldova-Transnistria Question has Become a European Geo-Security Issue" in "The Journal of Slavic Military Studies", 22 (2), 2009, pp.152-176.

⁸⁸ Vladimir Kolossov, "The Transdniestrian Moldovan Republic: An Unrecognized State in the Geopolitical World Order" in "Eurasian Geography and Economics 55(5), 2010, pp.1-34.

organizations of ignoring the proliferation of money laundering, smuggling, and weapons trafficking within its borders.

In Alejandro Sanchez's article, "The 'Frozen' Southeast: How the Moldova-Transnistria Question has Become a European Geo-Security Issue," he describes some of Transnistria's most severe issues like governance by mafia-like elites, plentiful human rights violations, smuggling, racketeering, attacks on the press, human trafficking, prostitution, and weapons trafficking of everything from missiles, sub-machine guns, and nuclear materials that have been traced to conflicts in the Balkans, Caucasus, and Africa. It has been reported that many of the weapons being trafficked through Transnistria are currently being produced in factories there as well as being repurposed from old Soviet stockpiles⁸⁹.

3.1.4 Russia's and other players' involvement

Russia has played the most significant military, economic, and political role in this conflict. Moscow still keeps serving as the security guarantor of this de facto state. It is not to forget that the initial ambition for Transnistria was not independence, but to keep with the Soviet Union; while Moscow's involvement in the dispute was initially to use this separatist movement to pressure the leadership in Kishinev. From the beginning of the conflict in 1990 to its ceasefire in 1992, Russia most likely played a decisive role in preventing the restoration of Kishinev's central authority over Tiraspol.

Furthermore, in the ceasefire brought by Moscow, Russia installed 6,000 peacekeeping forces within Transnistria. Russia currently maintains around 1,500 troops in the region, with less than half serving as peacekeepers.⁹⁰ The whole idea that Russia is a protector of Transnistria and its ethnic minorities has become a basis to justify the permanent presence of the 14th Army in the de facto state. This troops' presence is a visible symbol of the Republic of Moldova's 'limited' sovereignty, and also prevents Moldova's European aspirations. European efforts to change the peacekeeping mission to an international and civilian have failed so far. Russian presence in the region threatens Moldovan attempts to restore its sovereignty over the region. This helps Russia to maintain a secure position in Europe. Russian interest in Transnistria serves a

⁸⁹ Alejandro W. Sanchez, "The Frozen Southeast: How the Moldova-Transnistria Question has Become a European Geo-Security Issue" in "The Journal of Slavic Military Studies", 22 (2), 2009, pp.148-153.

⁹⁰ Alejandro W. Sanchez, "The Frozen Southeast: How the Moldova-Transnistria Question has Become a European Geo-Security Issue" in "The Journal of Slavic Military Studies", 22 (2), 2009, pp.162-164.

crucial geopolitical goal. The Dniester River historically played an important role as a buffer zone to separate the Slavic world from the rest of Russia, thus Transnistria decided to commit to maintain that legacy. Transdniestrian top rank officials have publicly stated that they have a historical mission to resist Western expansion and they have promised to keep defending Russia's geopolitical interests in the middle of the Balkans.

Some scholars also believe that Moscow's presence on this territory comes from its economic interests. There is no possibility for Transnistria to survive without economic aid and trading with Russia. William Hill argues that on Russia's attitude towards Transnistria is formed and influenced more by the economic and commercial factors involved in the continued existence of an unrecognized, unregulated entity in southeast Europe with an economy based almost completely on foreign trade⁹¹. Thus, Russian military and economic support is crucial for Transnistria.

As with most de facto states, there are issues about political control over the entity. In Transnistria's case, the question is how much independence there is in political decision-making and to what extent there is Russian influence. There are several features that show strong Russian hand in Transnistria. Kamilova and Berg have gone so far as to consider Transnistria a puppet state⁹². Still, it is clear, there is considerable Russian influence but also independent decision-making.

In the military sphere, there is a peacekeeping operation that has been active since 1992, the Russian presence is considered to be illegal, which has been reaffirmed by NATO, which has called on Russia to end this particular operation, with the estimated troop presence around 1,300 soldiers⁹³. Additionally, the continued presence of the Russian 14th Army in Transnistria has contributed to more than just this particular conflict. It is one of the reasons that the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE-II) failed to be implemented. Nevertheless, in Transnistria, the Russian presence can be seen as a guarantee that the entity will not be liquidated by force, initiated by Moldova.

⁹¹ William Hill, "Reflections on Negotiation and Mediation: The Frozen Conflicts and European Security" in "Demokratizatsiya", July 2010, pp.219-227.

⁹² Eiki Berg, "How can a de facto state be distinguished from a puppet state? An analysis of Transnistrian-Russian relations and dependences", in *Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2011*. (Tallinn: Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, 2012), pp.12-18.

⁹³ Victor Cherilla, "APE voices regret on Transnistria article", *EUobserver*, 3 February, 2011, <<http://euobserver.com/24/31684>> (August 21, 2019)

In the economic sphere, Russian influence is less visible than in Abkhazia or South Ossetia. Angela and Igor Munteanu analyze the debt of Transnistria, which is the main channel through which Russia can exert its influence. They claim that ‘gas debts started to be accumulated while Russian giants used the debts to take over important industries in Transnistria’⁹⁴. Popescu states that in 2004 the Transnistrian debt was around €1 billion, roughly the same as Moldova’s⁹⁵. Two-thirds of this debt was from Russian loans. Although Transnistria receives gas from Russia under the market price, it has still accumulated a relatively large energy debt. But unlike Abkhazia, Transnistria is not dependent on Russia to meet its state budget. Furthermore, Transnistria’s trade is more diverse, with both import and export markets in the CIS and the EU. Finally, the Transnistrian Central Bank issues its own currency, the PMR rouble.

In the political sphere, Russia has a direct way of influencing the conflict by being one of the participants in the 5+2 negotiation format. In broader relations with Europe and the US, ‘Moscow-friendly, independent (or even de facto independent) Transnistria provides Moscow with a forward operations base in Southeastern Europe’⁹⁶. Chamberline-Creanga and Allin conclude that Russian influence in the de facto entity and the whole conflict resolution process is growing, especially in the wake of the 2008 war in Georgia⁹⁷.

Therefore, Russia is thought to be interested in the internal politics of the entity. However, this has not always been a successful enterprise. In the 2011 presidential elections, Russian-backed candidate Anatoly Kaminsky finished as runner-up to Yevgeny Shevchuk. As the entity is considered to be ‘not free’ by Freedom House and election results could be manipulated, this development shows that Russian influence does not go that deep. Also, the then incumbent president Igor Smirnov was openly urged ‘not to seek a fifth term, arguing that the territory needed new leadership’ by the Russian presidential chief of staff⁹⁸. That suggestion was ignored.

On the level of the individual, the population has not been given Russian citizenship to the same extent as in Abkhazia, and only a significant minority of the region’s residents hold Russian passports. Overall, Russia has long been the de facto guarantor of Transnistria’s

⁹⁴ Angela Munteanu and Igor Munteanu, “Transnistria: a paradise for vested interests” in “South-East Europe Review”, Issue (4), 2007, pp.51-66.

⁹⁵ Nicu Popescu, “Democracy in Secessionism: Transnistria and Abkhazia’s Domestic Policies”, 2006, pp.1-27.

⁹⁶ Alejandro W. Sanchez, “The Frozen Southeast: How the Moldova-Transnistria Question has Become a European Geo-Security Issue” in “The Journal of Slavic Military Studies”, 22 (2), 2009, pp.148-150.

⁹⁷ Nicu Popescu, “Democracy in Secessionism: Transnistria and Abkhazia’s Domestic Policies”, 2006, pp.16-18.

⁹⁸ Freedom in the World, 12 November 2012, from Freedom House Web site: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2012> (August 12 2019).

autonomy, through the presence of Russian troops, direct humanitarian aid, and economic engagement, however, Russia has consistently expressed a desire to resolve the conflict without a formal declaration of independence by Transnistria, which is a red line for Moldova.

Accept for Russia, there are several more players involved in the conflict one way or another. Thus far, Ukraine's commitment has amounted mostly to rhetoric. However, as the largest state in the region, a major trading partner of Moldova, and sharing a 400 kilometer border with Transnistria, Ukraine is in a position to apply meaningful pressure to both sides to move toward a resolution to the conflict.

Romania's role in the conflict is complex and sometimes inconsistent. Despite the country's ethnic, cultural and historic links to Moldova, it does not participate directly in the 5+2 process, but is instead represented through the EU observer delegation (which, understandably, has never included Romanians in top positions). However, Romanian influence on the conflict is inescapable, and is often cited by stakeholders and analysts as a decisive factor. On the positive side, Bucharest has formally elevated Transnistrian conflict resolution to a top national security priority, and describes itself as a staunch supporter of European diplomacy and of Moldova's European integration prospects. Less helpfully, Romania's historic close ties with Moldova are often treated as fodder for the political campaigns of pan-Romanian nationalists, especially when courting votes from the tens of thousands of Moldovans who carry Romanian passports. Yet suggestions that Romania and Moldova are more than close neighbors, or interpreting Moldova's EU integration as a pathway to reunification with Romania, simply stoke the darkest suspicions of Transnistrians and their Russian allies that Transnistrian conflict resolution is a mere fig leaf for Romanian nationalism⁹⁹.

The new Moldovan government has not abandoned any of Moldova's past insistence on preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity, but it is clearly prepared to make possible some of the conditions that would be necessary for conflict resolution, including a special autonomous status for the Transnistria region, preservation of left-bank residents' property rights and social welfare benefits, and other political and constitutional guarantees. On the other hand, there is a risk that if more than two years of openness to reconciliation by Kishinev does not soon result in the commencement of formal 5+2 negotiations and an agreement on a

⁹⁹ John Basescu, "Moldova may reunite with Romania in next 25 years", RIANovosti, November 30, 2010, <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20101130/161565516.html>>, (August 28, 2019).

reunification process, the goal of conflict resolution will fall by the wayside. In this respect, the EU has a critical role to play, both in pushing forward the conflict resolution process, and ensuring that right-bank Moldova's progress in association talks does not leave the left bank behind.

3.1.5 Attempts at reconciliation

Starting from 1997, the OSCE has organized "5+2 format" talks, that is a conflict resolution process with seven nations, including Moldova, Transnistria, OSCE, Russia, and Ukraine, the United States and EU are invited as observers. The goal of the 5+2 talks is to work out the parameters of a comprehensive settlement based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders with a special status for Transnistria within Moldova. While these talks have worked to suppress some crises, they have not led to any meaningful framework towards conflict resolution. Transnistria keeps rejecting any calls to reunite with Moldova and opposes the expansion of peace talks. It has been over twenty-five years since these territories have existed as a cohesive unit. Many citizens have no memory of Moldova and Transnistria existing as a one state. Moldovans mistrust Transnistrians and view them as Russophiles. They believe that Transnistrians do not share European values and would obstruct the attempts by Kishinev to partner with the West.

Transnistrians, having existed in its own de facto state for decades, even in their poverty feel secure with Russia as their guarantor of sovereignty, and moreover feel deep mistrust towards Moldova. "Being brought up and educated in the environment created by the very specific propagandist machine of Tiraspol, inhabitants of the left bank gradually developed a belief... that they constitute a 'people', a separate 'nation' endowed with a right to the external self-determination..."¹⁰⁰ It is very unlikely that Transnistrians will ever willingly seek to rejoin Moldova. The issue of Transnistria joining a greater state usually revolves less around their rejoining with Moldova as it does their annexation to Russia. Transnistria consistently seek for absorption with the Russian Federation, though Moscow does not appear to be interested with the idea. Transnistria's disadvantages are related to its territorial discontinuity with the Russian Federation. Furthermore it also provides few political benefits for Russia. Recently Tiraspol started to mention annexation again due to the situation in Crimea and it often cites an

¹⁰⁰ Natalya Belister, "Transnistrian Conflict: State of Affairs and Prospects of Settlement," *Black Sea News*, 27 January 2013, < <https://www.blackseanews.net/en/read/55025>>, (August 12, 2019).

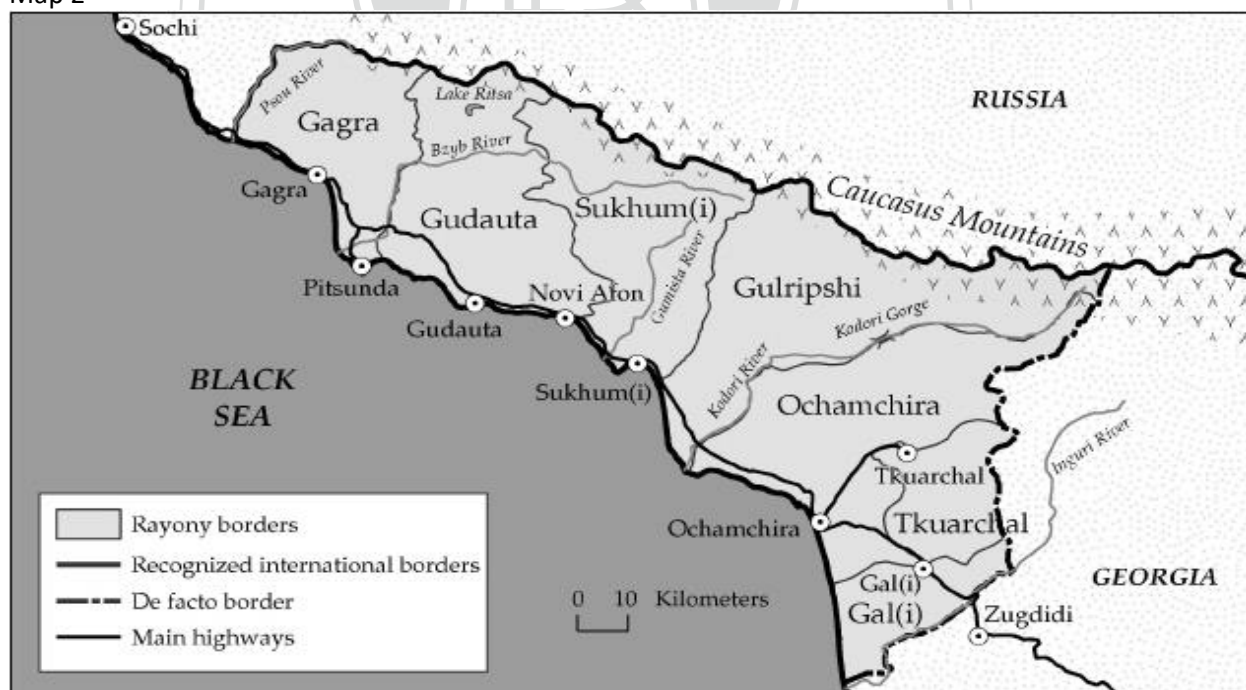
internationally unrecognized referendum held on the issue in 2006 where Transnistrians voted overwhelmingly, about 97%, to rejoin Russia.

While Russia has not completely denied this offer, it is obvious that they would have powerful leverage if they wanted to resolve this frozen conflict, especially when the international community has placed little effort in finding a solution to this problem. Lacking international recognition Transnistria and other de facto states will remain the perfect places for smuggling, corruption and trafficking in everything from drugs to people. Though this conflict is frozen, like others in the region it has the potential to develop quickly, though it would take a major incident resulting from these conflicts to actually galvanize the international community to push Kishinev and Tiraspol towards reconciliation.

3.2 Abkhazia's case

3.2.1 Origin

Map 2



Source: Map of Transnistria, by The Guardian, 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/20/transnistria-russia-rouble-crisis>>

The Republic of Georgia is currently involved into two frozen conflicts with de facto states located within its sovereign territory. The first emerged in Abkhazia where deep-seated ethnic and historical tensions preempted separation between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. These issues have the

origin in Soviet and Russian policymaking and the actions of both Georgian and Abkhaz nationalist movements of the 1980s and 1990s.

The Abkhaz are a distinct ethnic group different from other ethnic Georgians that are the descendants of the Circassians, Turkic peoples from the North Caucasus. During the Soviet era, Abkhazia was a rather prosperous region, located on the Black Sea in Georgia's northwest, it was a popular vacation spot for Moscow's elites. According to the last Soviet census, held in 1989, the population of the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was around 525,000, accounting for almost ten percent of Soviet Georgia's population. Of these, 45.7% were ethnic Georgians, 17.8% were Abkhazians, 14.6% were Armenians, 14.3% were Russians, and 2.8% were Greeks¹⁰¹. During the conflict between Tbilisi and Sukhumi, the Abkhazians, despite not having a majority in the region, were able to hold off the Georgian military and, since 1994, have claimed de facto statehood. Unlike Georgia's other frozen conflict in South Ossetia, Abkhazia's stated end goal is independent political sovereignty.

Abkhazia historically served as a buffer zone between the Russian Empire and Ottoman Empire in the 18th and early 19th centuries. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, Georgia, including Abkhazia, was granted independence and in 1921 Abkhazia was granted a short-lived independence from Georgia. By the end of 1921, the Bolshevik Red Army regained control over the Caucasus and Abkhazia became a Union Republic of the USSR. In 1931, Stalin incorporated the region into the Transcaucasian Federation, which included Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. When the federation dissolved in 1938, Abkhazia was attached to the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) as an autonomous region, a downgrade from its previous status as a Union Republic.

The Soviets maintained control of the region and encouraged migration of non-Abkhaz into the region, to make the Abkhaz a minority within their own homeland. Tbilisi also pressed policies independent of Moscow to make sure that Abkhaz nationalism was kept restrained. These actions contributed to Abkhazian discontent as they felt they had been arbitrarily annexed and forced into political subordination to Georgia. This anger grew throughout the Soviet period, as Georgian nationalism flourished in the late 1980s, the Abkhaz population, and especially a section of the local elites, became increasingly restive, fearing their possible cultural and ethnic

¹⁰¹ Islam Tekushev, *Abkhazia: Between the Past and the Future* (Prague: Medium Orient, 2013), pp.75-79.

disappearance within Georgia. Under the auspices of glasnost, the Abkhaz began to pursue independence.

Seeing an opportunity provided by the weakening of the Moscow's military reach and attempts at political and economic liberalization throughout the Soviet Union in the 1980s, Abkhazia began to act. Initially, leaders only wanted Abkhazia to restore its Union Republic status as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, but, as Soviet power continued to disappear, Abkhazia became suspicious of what actions Tbilisi would take when left uncontrolled by Moscow. Abkhazian leadership changed tactics and warned Gorbachev and Moscow of an imminent ethnic conflict, and to forestall this, they demanded Abkhazia's secession from Georgia. When this brought no change, the Abkhaz formally declared that it was a Union Republic in August 1990, essentially calling for secession from Tbilisi. This act was quickly annulled by Georgia, who had the legal right to do so. However, its actions resulted in mass demonstrations in Abkhazia that eventually had to be put down by Russian troops. Ethnic tensions rose even further with the election and short-lived presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in October 1990.

In July 1991, the Abkhaz Parliament declared that the nation would restore its 1925 constitution, which stated Abkhazia as an independent Soviet Republic united by a special union treaty with Georgia. In response, Georgia attempted to reconcile with Abkhazia over some of its grievances, but negotiations broke down by 1992. The Abkhaz then proposed a treaty relationship that would have established confederal relations with Tbilisi that would have kept Georgia's territorial integrity, however, this proposal was ignored and when the Georgian president was forced into exile in 1992 and replaced by Eduard Shevardnadze, the power struggles within Tbilisi gave Abkhazia the opportunity to pursue with its plans for independence. Abkhazia voted to secede on July 23, 1992 and within three weeks, Georgia responded by beginning a military attack.

3.2.2 Conflict

Georgia entered Abkhazia to forcibly restore its territorial integrity on August 14, 1992. At first, the Georgian troops, a mix of government forces and local militias, did well. However, by the end of 1992 the Abkhaz had regrouped and rearmed with the help of volunteers from the North Caucasus and Russia, and they forced the Georgians back. Georgia had no intention to be

engaged in a protracted conflict, as such, it had the UN broker an initial ceasefire in July 1993, which later was broken by an Abkhaz offensive in September 1993. They captured the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi, moved all Georgian troops away from the region, and drove out much of Abkhazia's ethnic Georgians. In May 1994, Georgia and Abkhazia agreed to a framework for a political settlement and the return of refugees. Russian troops acting under the auspices of CIS were deployed as peacekeepers on the border of Abkhazia and Georgia. In the end, the thirteen-month war killed around ten to fifteen thousand people and resulted in the displacement of over 250,000 people, mostly ethnic Georgians. The conflict has remained relatively dormant, with a few flare-ups. In May 1998, fighting broke out when Georgian partisans attempted to take over part of the Gali district, where thousands of displaced Georgians resided. This effort was rejected and almost 40,000 ethnic Georgians were expelled. In late 2001, the conflict seemed primed to ignite again, when both Abkhazia and Georgia accused each other of engaging in air strikes on each other's territories. Recent salvos have been limited to political and diplomatic maneuvering and while both sides remain entrenched, there is little reason to expect an outbreak in fighting.

3.2.3 Current situation

Abkhazians believe, that their right for independence has grounds because of their status within the USSR. The union between Abkhazia and Georgia from the 1920s was viewed to be equal and as Geldenhuys states, "it can be regarded as the source of their contemporary statehood"¹⁰². This has resulted in demands for Abkhazia to gain equal status with Georgia and to challenge the results of the Soviet dissolution. Abkhazia pushes forward the idea of it being an independent nation like other recognized former Soviet republics. Moreover, the democratic achievements of Abkhazia (strong NGO sector, presence of opposition, more or less independent media) have created the feeling within the entity that international recognition is really deserved.

Currently Abkhazia is a fixed territory at around 8600 km², covering most of the territory of the old autonomous republic. In 2008 Abkhazia gained control over the Kodori gorge, the only area that had previously remained under Georgian rule and gained the recognition from its main patron – Russia and later from four more UN member states of Syria, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, but still Georgia considers the whole territory to be under its jurisdiction, a notion that is as well supported by international opinion and opposed by Abkhazia.

¹⁰² Deon Geldenhuys, *Contested States in World Politics*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.85-89.

The population of the entity varies from around 180,000 to 250,000, with the latest census recording 240,705 people. The ethnic composition of the entity is diverse with the titular nation making up less than half of the population. Other big ethnic groups are Georgians, Armenians and Russians.

As can be seen from the empirical data from earlier, that Abkhazia has the capacity to establish the relations with other states. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia, there are five ambassadors of UN member states to the entity, but only one of them, the Russian, is a resident ambassador; others reside in Moscow. The MFA website also states that Abkhazia has representatives with different titles in 12 states¹⁰³. Abkhazia is recognized only by five UN member states, leaving it short of the 127 required for full UN membership.

The conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia continues to have a huge impact on regional development and security. There are enormous losses for Abkhazia, for example much of Abkhazia's industry is destroyed or looted and its tourism sector suffers a lot. Abkhazia has also been under trade sanctions since 1996 and it has largely reverted to subsistence farming. This de facto state is largely dependent on support from international agencies and nongovernment organizations to provide basic social services for its population. One more result of the 1996 CIS embargo that permitted the direct import only of food products, medical supplies, petroleum products, and household items led to the fact that many Abkhazians have resorted to trade along undetected or illegally sanctioned passageways, including the borders and seaports. The security threats that arise in front of Abkhazia also necessitate giving the military and security apparatuses almost unlimited influence and funding, this comes at the expense of other governmental agencies that could use the nation's limited resources for political, social, and economic development.

Furthermore, Russia continues to have a presence within legal Georgia territory and Moscow's 2008 recognition of Abkhazia's independence has contributed to an increase in Russian military, economic and political influence in Abkhazia. The rise of smuggling and other criminal activity on Georgia's borders continue threatens the security in the region. Lastly, the continuation of this frozen conflict keeps Georgia from becoming more integrated with the West and prevents it from achieving NATO membership, one of its most important security goals, which is only plays good for Abkhazia's patron state - Russia.

¹⁰³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 4, 2019, <<http://mfaapsny.org/ru/foreign-policy/>>, (September 4, 2019).

3.2.4 Russia's and other players' involvement

Russia has played a remarkable role in the Abkhazian conflict by supporting both Tbilisi and Sukhumi at different points during the fighting. Moscow helped Abkhaz fighters push Georgian troops out of the region in 1993. Furthermore, its peacekeeping forces keep playing a destabilizing force, mostly because they do not act as an impartial force. The continuing presence of Russian peacekeepers continues to be a point of contention, taking into the consideration that these troops are from the same unit that Tbilisi claims was involved in the conflict on the Abkhaz side.

At the time of the conflict, Russia had four military bases within Georgia, including one in Abkhazia. While Russia did not encourage the Abkhaz conflict, it certainly helped worsen it. During the war, it was accused of providing Abkhaz fighters with heavy artillery, air cover, and missile launchers. Tbilisi also claims that Russian planes from the Black Sea base were engaged in bombing campaigns to support Sukhumi. While these claims have yet to be proved, although are unlikely to ever be, it is obvious that Russia's actions of training fighters and providing weapons to the Abkhaz was the reason for Georgia's inability to end the conflict. Without the active role of Russian forces stationed in the region, the conflict could not have escalated into the decisive Abkhazian victory.

The continuation of this conflict and the unresolved status of Abkhazia's statehood serve Moscow's interests in a number of ways. Not only does it allow Russia to continue to hold a military, political, and economic presence in internationally recognized Georgian territory, it also prevents Tbilisi from developing stronger regional and international ties, especially with NATO, which does not offer membership to states with territorial disputes.

The main problem with de facto states is the criterion of government. There may be situations where another power, a patron, controls them to the extent that they cannot be considered independent anymore. In Abkhazia's case, that power is Russia. There are several features that point towards the fact that Abkhazia is highly dependent on Russia in economic, military and political spheres. It is the latter that is of the utmost importance because it defines whether an entity is independent in decision-making.

In economic terms, it can be said that Abkhazia is very dependent on Russia. Russia is the dominant trade and investments partner for the entity. Also, Abkhazia is extremely dependent on Russian aid. In an article in *The Wall Street Journal*, Samantha Shields says that in 2009 the Russian contribution to the Abkhaz budget was around \$66.5 million, which constituted 57% of the total¹⁰⁴. A similar proportion, around 60%, is also stated elsewhere¹⁰⁵. Additionally, the Russian ruble is the official currency of Abkhazia.

In the military sector, Russia has had a defense agreement with Abkhazia for 49 years from September 2009 which allows it to station 1700 troops there¹⁰⁶. This is in addition to border guards that Russia has sent to help Abkhazian units. Russia has also deployed anti-aircraft missiles on Abkhazian territory¹⁰⁷. During the war of independence, Russian support was pivotal in the success of the rebel forces against Georgia. Today, Abkhazia is dependent on Russia for the provision of the entity's security with the main fear coming from possible forceful reunification with Georgia.

These two sectors are of a practical nature and this kind of influence is not unique to de facto states. Economic aid, dependency on an economic partner and military assistance are quite usual practices in the world. Moreover, Montenegro, a UN member, uses the Euro as its currency without being in the monetary union or the EU in general. To determine whether a de facto state can be considered independent one must analyze the involvement of the patron in its political affairs and decision-making.

First, on the individual level, Russian influence is visible in people's passports, as it is made easy for people in Abkhazia to gain Russian citizenship, and most now hold Russian passports. One reason for this is that Russian citizenship gives people possibilities to travel that they lack with Abkhazian documents. But it can also be seen as a political tool. Secondly, on the government level, Russia has had aspirations to get its 'own' people into powerful positions. However, this has not always been successful. In 2004–2005 the presidential elections were won by an opposition candidate, Sergei Bagapsh. Even though the elections were marred by

¹⁰⁴ Samantha Shields, "Russian presence grows in Abkhazia", *Wall street journal*. December 14, 2009, <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB126070743647789499>> (August 24, 2019).

¹⁰⁵ William Hill, "Reflections on Negotiation and Mediation: The Frozen Conflicts and European Security" in "Demokratizatsiya", July 2010, pp.219-227.

¹⁰⁶ Freedom in the World, 12 November 2012, from Freedom House Web site: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2012> (August 12 2019).

¹⁰⁷ BBC News. Regions and territories: Abkhazia, 12 March 2012, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3261059.stm>>, (August 7, 2019).

controversy, which led to an eventual coalition between the government and Russian-supported incumbent Prime Minister Raul Khadjimba, the Bagapsh victory shows that Abkhazian politics is not dictated from Moscow.

Furthermore, Freedom House in its country reports states that the Russian influence on political matters has in fact decreased in recent years¹⁰⁸. In 2010 Russia continued to tighten its grip on Abkhazia to the extent that ‘opposition and independent media repeatedly accused the government of ceding too much control to Moscow’. This is possible because of the rather strong NGO sector. The presence of the opposition and independent media already indicates that the entity is not controlled from outside. Also, in 2011 ‘in contrast to previous elections, Russia did not endorse a candidate, though the Kremlin continued to exert economic and military pressure on the territory’. This does not seem to influence the legitimacy of the government, though, as Bakke, O’Loughlin and Ward find¹⁰⁹. They conclude that internal security threats like crime and corruption are more likely to have a negative effect on state and regime legitimacy, whereas political violence and external security threats have no or little effect.

This shows that, notwithstanding economic and military dependency, there is at least some independent political decision-making and the entity is not a de facto Russian province. Russia’s political pressures are countered to an extent that we can talk about an independent, albeit unrecognized, nation.

One more player in the region, apart from Russia is the USA, their main interest lays in the area of supporting Georgia’s security and defense needs with regional peace and stability by supporting Georgia’s engagement with the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia prior to addressing issues of final status. This support is viewed in the strategic partnership with Georgia in spheres of economic aid and development, military assistance and partnership, and democracy promotion. Moreover, the strategic partnership takes as its point of departure Georgia’s unique security context: the absence of an institutionalized pathway toward its promised NATO membership coupled with the clear and present security threat of Russian military occupation and unilateral recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

¹⁰⁸ Freedom in the World, 12 November 2012, from Freedom House Web site: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2012> (August 12 2019).

¹⁰⁹ Kristin M. Bakke, John O’Loughlin and Michael J. Ward, “The Viability of De Facto States: Post-War Developments and Internal Legitimacy in Abkhazia”, for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Seattle, September 2011.

3.2.5 Attempts at reconciliation

Though the UN has been leading negotiations since 1994, there has been almost no progress in resolving the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Displaced persons are not able to return to their homes, small clashes occur periodically between the two forces, and Georgia continues to press its trade restrictions on Abkhazia. According to Shireen “the main impediment to peace now is the conflict between the Abkhaz insistence on self-determination, and the Georgian insistence on territorial integrity. Moreover, Tbilisi is adamant that ethnic Georgian refugees from Abkhazia be allowed to return to their homes. Even if compromise could be reached on the issue of independence, the Abkhaz are unlikely to accept the return of Georgian refugees, because this would once again make them a minority within their own country¹¹⁰.

Georgia continues to treat Abkhazia as an autonomous republic within the Georgian state and blames the Russian Federation for interfering into the conflict and prolonging it. To Tbilisi, the “integration in February 1931 of Abkhazia in the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia offers an incontestable argument of the fact that Abkhazia is an indivisible part of the Georgian territory.¹¹¹” There have been fewer changes in this policy over the last twenty years. Abkhazia keeps developing institutions of statehood in hopes of receiving international recognition.

3.3 Conclusion

The conflicts over Abkhazia and Transnistria have reached uneasy points, where “unrecognized by the international community, prey to organized crime, mired in economic misery, scoured by ethnic cleansing, and seared by recent memories of war, these hard-pressed territories have clung to their independence, ever fearful that the states from which they seceded will reabsorb them.”¹¹² While the parent states of Georgia and Moldova are too weak politically, economically, and militarily to retake their separatist regions, they have not given up hopes to do so. The underlying issues of these conflicts have not been resolved and it looks like without participation of the international community, they are likely to become a strategic liability for states both within and outside the region.

¹¹⁰ Kevork Oskanian, *Fear, Weakness and Power in the Post-Soviet South Caucasus*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), pp.67-69

¹¹¹ Anna Popescu, “European Neighborhood Policy and the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict: European Union’s Approach” in *Europeanization and Conflict Resolution: Case Studies from the European Periphery*, chapter 5, July 2004.

¹¹² Dov Lynch, *Engaging Eurasia’s Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and De Facto States* (New York: United States Institute of Peace, 2004), pp.16-22.

Both Abkhazia and Transnistria discussed in detail above have many similarities. Each de facto state shares a history of over two centuries under Russian imperial and communist rule, which resulted in big ethnic and cultural problems. During the Soviet era, these territories, consisted of ethnic minorities different from their parent states, were neither allowed freedom of cultural and ethnic expression, nor were they forced to assimilate with the culture of the state to which they were attached. At the same time, they were allowed regional and ethnic administrative systems that supported the growth and development of nationalist secessionist movements that appeared in the 1980s during the last years of the Soviet Union.

These frozen conflicts have been held by ceasefires since the early 1990s and since then Abkhazia and Transnistria are host to Russian peacekeeping forces. Despite being under monitoring by international organizations, little progress has been made in over two decades of negotiations. Abkhazia and Transnistria have used this time to pursue state-building process, which resulted in the creation of institutions and the development of statehood and sovereignty among their elites and citizens.

Abkhazia and Transnistria have also tried to find different means to appeal to states for international recognition. In the case when the right to self-determination on the basis of ethnic identification is not enough, these territories have also stated the rights to independence based on historical and moral reasons. For example, Transnistria claims historical statehood from when it was an autonomous region in Ukraine before the Second World War. Abkhazia claims that independence should be granted to it, because once it has already been reached in 1921. This appeal to historical precedent is helpful, as it justifies past and present struggles and violence to establish claims for the future. Furthermore, Abkhazia and Transnistria have attempted to claim statehood following the precedent set by Israel after II World War, they feel a sense of entitlement after having suffered a kind of genocide at the hands of their metropolitan states.

Despite meeting most requirements for statehood set in Montevideo Convention, these de facto states have been refused the independence because of the contradictions in the international law, that is why at some point the separatists appealed to the Russian Federation to be admitted into it, but so far, Russia has not agreed to it. Parent states have placed a definite blame at these conflicts' non-resolution on Russia, without which political and economic support, this whole situation would not have been possible. Russia has played a huge role in aiding separatist

movements at all levels and in many ways both in Abkhazia and Transnistria, which has no use in resolving conflicts at all.

Moreover, there has almost nothing to be done towards changing the status quo in any of these conflicts, especially as many internal factors help in preserving these de facto states. The leadership within these territories insists on keeping absolute sovereignty, they claim that their states fulfill all necessary requirements for statehood that set in the Montevideo Convention of 1933. Abkhazia and Transnistria maintain a system of organized political leadership with popular support and that provides basic governmental services to a given population over a specific territory over which effective control is maintained over a significant period of time. While this is empirically true, the level of services provided by the central authority in each de facto state differs. Abkhazia maintains the daily running of three branches of government but is unable to provide social services to its population and depends on the support of the UN and NGOs. In fact, the amount of money brought in from international humanitarian aid organizations far exceeds Abkhazia's total government budget. Furthermore, while the central authority maintains security services to defend its sovereignty, it is unable to ensure law and order across its territory, especially in the Gali district. There are also competing security forces, including Russian troops, Georgian paramilitary groups, and armed ethnic minority groups that roam largely unchecked. Transnistria, conversely, have much stronger central authorities. It has rebuilt some of their infrastructure since their conflicts in the early 1990s and the central security forces maintain effective control within the state and along its borders. That is not to say Transnistria is without problems. It also suffers from a total collapse of industrial production, widespread unemployment, and the deep impoverishment of its populations.

Despite their issues, Transnistria and Abkhazia claim that their situations would improve if they were given the chance to become equal members of the international community. These territories understand well that that their frozen conflicts are not over, as the war can restart at any moment. The de facto states take peace as a temporary thing and they know that while they are working just to survive, the parent states try to surpass them militarily and economically. Security services and the military largely dominate the political processes of both states, hurting economic and social development. Furthermore, the persistence of these conflicts has turned these populations against the international order and rule of law. Power and force are seen as the only way to ensure survival. There is a marked distrust of the international community and of peacekeeping and reconciliation efforts, which prevents the resolution of these conflicts.

One more internal driver to the continuation of these conflicts is that these de facto states suffer from subsistence syndromes, meaning although they are able to maintain institutional features of statehood but cannot provide basic services for their people. The remaining threat of war has combined with economic mismanagement to produce hyperinflation, de-monetized economies, the collapse of social services, and the extensive criminalization of economic activities. Moreover, both Abkhazia and Transnistria are still trying to recover from the collapse of the Soviet system and the destruction of their infrastructure from the wars of the 1990s. There has been little progress made towards economic reforms in these states and many citizens turn to illegal activities to survive.

While these internal drivers are significant, still the most powerful causes for the continuation of these frozen conflicts are external drivers, including the actions of de jure states, Russian intervention, and support by other nations and organizations. First, the actions of the parent states have been detrimental to reconciliation. Moldova and Georgia each tried to forcibly restore their sovereignty and, when that failed, they have tried to repeatedly compel their separatist states through economic, political, and military means. Second, Russia has played an essential role in the outbreak and continuation of these conflicts. Russia maintains peacekeeping forces along the de facto borders of these separatist territories and continues to provide political and military support to these states. “Its peacekeeping forces and support for separatist movements in sovereign states played an important role in Russian strategy and, in many cases, initial peacekeeping forces in these frozen conflicts were drawn from Russian forces already in the conflict zone that provided support to separatist forces during these conflicts¹¹³”. “Russian peacekeeping troops guard the new borders separating the parties. These new borders have allowed the separatist authorities to get on with state building while the presence of Russian troops deters the metropolitan states from large-scale aggression.¹¹⁴” This is exactly what keeps these conflicts from achieving a resolution.

The presence of these forces keeps undermining the faith of both the de facto and parent states in international peacekeepers and diplomacy. The UN and OSCE do not mandate Russian peacekeeping operations and the difference between Russian and international peacekeeping missions, is that Russian operations are not deployed to advance international peace and security,

¹¹³ Aurora Bencic and Teodor I. Hodor, Transdnistria: Ethnic Conflict or Geopolitical Interests? (London: Editura Universitatii din Oradea, 2011), pp.403-417.

¹¹⁴ Dov Lynch, Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and De Facto States (New York: United States Institute of Peace, 2004), pp.34-38.

although this may be one of their declared secondary goals. According to Russia's Military Doctrine, first enunciated in November 1993 and reiterated ever since, Russian operations are deployed to advance Russian state interests – this is their primary objective.

Moreover, the international community and NGOs help preserve these conflicts by providing funds and humanitarian support. In helping de facto states with the day-to-day running of their governments, they are preventing these territories from dealing with the realities of running a sovereign country and may be preventing them from seeking to reconcile with the state from which they separated.

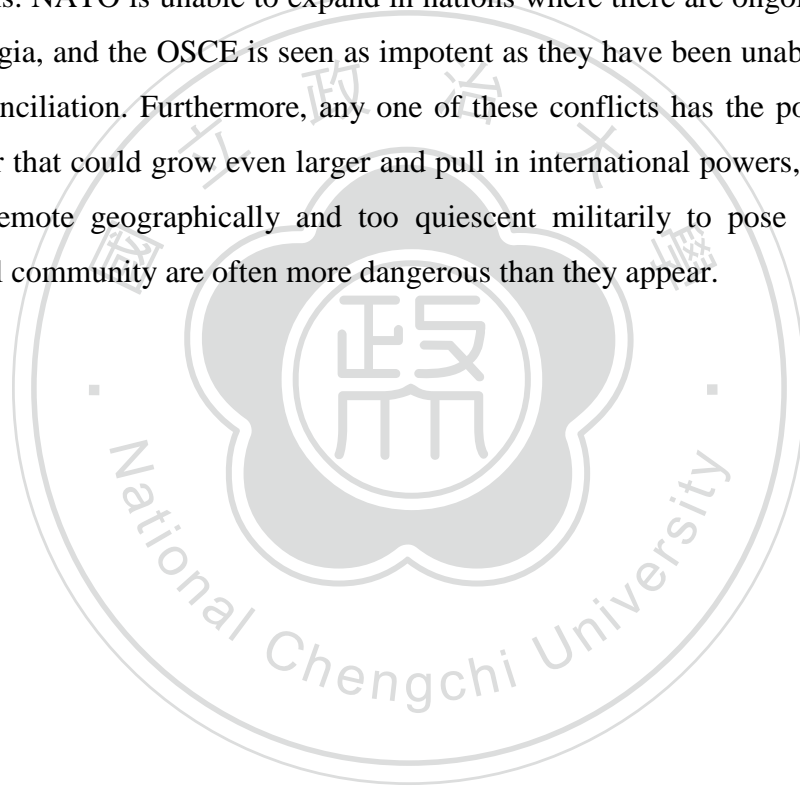
The longer these conflicts stay unresolved, the greater the potential that they will reignite and draw in outside actors. According to Dov Lynch, these conflicts have local, regional, and international implications, “the separatist states have an impact on the security of the states from which they have seceded – the metropolitan states – and on wider regional developments. Close to two million people have been displaced by these wars, putting serious strain on the new states of Moldova and Georgia. The economies of these new states are all deeply affected by the existence of the unrecognized states. The self-declared states have presented external powers with opportunities to intervene in the region. Russia has used its peacekeeping operations in Moldova and Georgia as a means to retain influence over those two states. Conditions within the de facto states have exacerbated problems of organized crime in the post-Soviet space. The legal limbo in which they exist has made them breeding grounds and transit zones for international criminal activities¹¹⁵.

Ultimately, it is impossible to quantify the social, humanitarian, political, and economic costs of the conflicts within Abkhazia and Transnistria. Locally, these conflicts have prevented the development of economic infrastructure, stunted political growth and transparency, and caused states to invest heavily in their security needs at the expense of all other sectors of their states. Furthermore, the legally ambiguous status of these states means that many are economically reliant on other countries and are thus beholden to them. Also, they look to illegal means to support their people, either by turning a blind eye to their citizens' activities or by officially sanctioning them.

¹¹⁵ Dov Lynch, Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States: Unresolved Conflicts and De Facto States (New York: United States Institute of Peace, 2004), pp.54-57.

Regionally, non-resolution of these conflicts prevents from the creation of a comprehensive European order as well as the integration with other willing nations. Russia has been exploiting these issues to serve its geopolitical goals and there is nothing for now to counter Moscow. Moreover, Georgia and Moldova perceive a clear delineation between the West and Russia, and for now are not able to balance between the two effectively. For example, Georgia is looking specifically to the United States for support. While the United States maintains many interests in the region, it is neither willing nor able to provide a security guarantee to this nation and pit itself against Russia, as Georgia disastrously learned in the 2008 war.

Internationally, these conflicts have put a strain on many of the major political and security organizations. NATO is unable to expand in nations where there are ongoing territorial disputes, like in Georgia, and the OSCE is seen as impotent as they have been unable to make any lasting deal or reconciliation. Furthermore, any one of these conflicts has the potential of launching a regional war that could grow even larger and pull in international powers, as conflicts that seem to be too remote geographically and too quiescent militarily to pose a threat to the wider international community are often more dangerous than they appear.



CHAPTER IV – PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

4.1 The prospects of a sustainable conflict settlement for Transnistria

After analyzing historical aspects of the conflict in Transnistria and Abkhazia and exploring various data concerning economic, political, social situation of these two territorial entities it became possible to conduct an analysis to see possible settlements for these conflicts.

4.1.1. Conflict participants (*Transnistria*)

On the basis of information presented in previous chapters, it is possible to distinguish the main players that take part in resolving the situation over Transnistria. Those are mainly the parent state, patron state, neighboring countries and great powers that have their interest in the region. Depending on the level of their involvement into the conflict, players are divided into direct and indirect participants. This part will summarize the main purposes and interests that each player holds towards Transnistria.

(Table 3)

Conflict participants	Purpose	Interests
<i>Direct participants</i>		
Transnistria	Declaration of independence , international recognition as the main goal, or integration with Russia as the second choice;	-Maintaining independence from Moldova; -Cooperation with Russia (political and economic integration); -Economic growth and maintaining of social stability in the region;
Moldova	Territorial integrity;	Integration with Romania; EU integration;
<i>Indirect participants</i>		
Romania	The unification of Romania and Moldova;	Territorial, based on the common historical past and cultural and linguistic community;
Ukraine	Preservation of security of western borders;	Joint EU accession;
EU	-Preservation of stability in the region; -Prevention of Russian influence;	Romania's and Moldova's accession to EU;
Russia	Maintain a secure position in Europe to defend geo-political influence in the middle of Balkans;	Preservation of pro-Russian influence in the region;
Unrecognized states	To create a precedent;	Legal recognition of Transnistria;

Source: by author

4.1.2 Analysis of significant factors affecting the situation

There are several factors that needed to be taken into the consideration before analyzing the future scenarios for Transnistria, as they have the biggest impact on the final resolution. Those are legal issues that revolve around the contradictions in international law system concerning the matter of new states recognition; ethnic factor, which usually creates the basis for many separatist movements; economic factor, which shows the ability of a de facto state to build its independent statehood; social factor, which determines the standard of living of the population of the de facto state; domestic and foreign policy factors, that show the policies of a de facto state towards its own population and towards the international community. These factors all together influence the final decision on the matter of the de facto state itself and how this matter seen by other existing states.

(Table 4)

Factors	The essence
Legal	The contradiction between the right of nations to self-determination and the preservation of the integrity of borders in accordance with the UN Charter. Peoples while exercising their right to self-determination face with the problem of contradiction between the Montevideo Convention and the UN Charter. This contradiction is reflected in modern international relations, examples: recognition of Kosovo by UN member states, Crimea's accession to the Russian Federation.
Ethnic	The absence of inter-ethnic conflicts (three ethnic groups peacefully coexist on this territory (Russians, Moldovans, Ukrainians). Despite belonging to different ethnic groups, people interact with each other to reach common goals. Moreover, the conflict that caused the armed uprising and the formation of Transnistria is not related to the ethnic groups of the territory. The conflict is caused by the infringement of rights of residents (language issue) oriented towards the integration and cooperation with Russia, which is the distinctive feature of this post-soviet de facto state (=regional identity).
Economic	The economy of Transnistria is in decline, as at the moment it is in an economic blockade organized by Ukraine and Moldova, thus, a big part of Transnistrian income is lost, which served as a pillar not only of the authorities and the people, but also of many commercial organizations. This situation pushes Transnistrians towards close economic dependence on Russia.
Social	This factor determines the standard of living of the population. In Transnistria the level of social life despite the economic decline is stable. Russian government supports the social sphere of this territorial entity, pays extra interest to the retirement package and is the basis of other social guarantees.
Internal (domestic politics)	The immediate guarantor of realization of people's rights is government. Thus, the government plays a fundamental role in this conflict. As further development of the state depends on the ideological orientation of the elites, there is no reason to believe there

	will be the reunification of Moldova with Transnistria, and further integration with Romania in the nearest future, as there are pro-russian authorities in power now.
Foreign policy	One of the main and strongest factors in this conflict. The content of this factor can also be referred to the existence of a legal contradiction (since it does not depend on the Transnistria); to the economic blockade by Moldova and Ukraine; and to the existing geopolitical interests of remote countries over a given territory (Russia, EU).

Source: by author



4.1.3 Possible Scenarios of Conflict Resolution

This part of Chapter 4 presents future scenarios for possible resolutions of the conflict over Transnistria. It tries to analyze on the basis of information given in previous chapters what those solutions are, what conditions have to be taken into the consideration to make one or another scenario to come forward and what the probability of each scenario is.

(Table 5)

Possible scenario	Success criteria	Consequences	Possible strategic alliances	Probability of development of this scenario	Personal opinion
Transnistria–legally recognized actor of international system (independency)	Legal contradiction is decided in favor of unrecognized territories; Creation of unified recognition criteria; The change of political power in Moldova and as a result the emergence of the new political thinking regarding Transnistria;	The emergence of many new actors; Economic blockade by Ukraine and Moldova, in the future possible entry of troops in Transnistria;	Transnistria – Russia; Creating new military unions among Transnistria, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Osetia; Creating a new political block of the former unrecognized states;	The probability is very small, since there is no consensus on the decision of this conflict and no possibility of finding a compromise in the legal contradiction. Moreover, the participants of this conflict, except Transnistria itself, are not interested in recognition of Transnistria as an independent actor, including the Russia.	1/5
Transnistria-territory of Moldova	Military occupation, provided that Russia maintains neutrality; Change of political elites in Transnistria (new views regarding Moldova and European integration); Termination of financing from Russia;	Transnistria as a part of Moldova without any special status; Romania and Moldova integration; Further accession of Moldova and EU; Russia loses strategic and military assets; Deteriorations in relations Russia-	Strengthening and expansion of EU;	Unlikely, since Russia will not stop the support of Transnistria as it has its national interests in this region.	2/5

		Moldova, Romania, EU;			
Transnistria as a part of Moldova with a special status	Integration of Transnistria and Moldova on mutually beneficial terms; Termination of financing from Russia; Change of views of political elites in Transnistria and Moldova (regarding to their relationship); Transnistria's officials will focus on eurointegration;	Romania and Moldova integration; Eurointegration of Moldova; Russia loses strategic and military assets;	Strengthening and expansion of EU;	This scenario could be determined as possible if authorities of Moldova and Transnistria were able to negotiate the division of power, but as now Transnistria's authorities hold the absolute power over the territory it's unlikely they will agree to give up a bit.	3/5
Transnistria as a part of Russia	Russia legally recognizes this territory and makes it a part of its federation; Consent of the Moldovan authorities with the withdrawal of Transnistria from the Moldovan Republic; Change of political elites in Moldova; Military occupation of Transnistria by Russia.	Russia gets a strategically important territory and sets a total control over it; Huge financing from Russia; Relationship aggravation among EU, USA and Russia; Growth of discontent and riots in Abkhazia and other post-Soviet de facto states; Moldova will integrate with Romania and enter the EU;	Strengthening and expansion of EU;	It is unlikely, since Russia has already enough power and strength on this territory. Inclusion of Transnistria into the Russian Federation is a waste of resources and new growth of anti-Russian unrest in the world, which Russia cannot afford right now after the annexation of Crimea.	4/5

<p>Transnistria as an unrecognized territorial unity</p>	<p>There will be no radical changes in the present system of international relations; Russia will continue the financing of this region; Moldova will keep neutral towards Transnistria;</p>	<p>Aggravation of the problem of unrecognized states; The deterioration of the economic situation in Transnistria; Strengthening of the economic blockade by Ukraine and Moldova; Increasing dependence of Transnistria from Russia;</p>	<p>The Commonwealth of unrecognized states;</p>	<p>The most likely scenario, since at the moment there is no consensus on solving the problem of the legal contradiction of recognition of the new independent states in international relations, moreover no players want to take any steps towards resolving this frozen conflict to risk the stability in the region.</p>	<p>5/5</p>
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Source: by author



4.2 The Prospects of a sustainable conflict settlement for Abkhazia

On the basis of information presented in previous chapters, it is possible to distinguish the main players that take part in resolving the situation over Abkhazia. Those are mainly the parent state, patron state, neighboring countries and great powers that have their interest in the region. Depending on the level of their involvement into the conflict, players are divided into direct and indirect participants. This part will summarize the main purposes and interests that each player holds towards Abkhazia.

4.2.1 Conflict participants (*Abkhazia*)

(Table 6)

Conflict participants	Purpose	Interests
<i>Direct participants</i>		
Abkhazia	Declaration of independence , international recognition;	-Maintaining independence from Georgia; -Close cooperation with Russia; -Economic growth and maintaining of social stability in the region;
Georgia	Territorial integrity;	-Preserving Abkhazia as a part of Georgia; -NATO membership;
<i>Indirect participants</i>		
USA	Prevention of Russian influence;	-Supporting Georgia in maintaining territorial integrity;
Russia	Preservation of stability and peace in the region;	-Preservation of pro-Russian influence in the region by keeping military, political, economic presence in the region; -Supporting Abkhazia's independence to prevent Georgia to develop close ties with NATO;
Unrecognized states	To create a precedent;	-Legal recognition of Abkhazia;

Source: by author

4.2.2 Analysis of significant factors affecting the situation

There are several factors that needed to be taken into the consideration before analyzing the future scenarios for Abkhazia, as they have the biggest impact on the final resolution. Those are legal issues that revolve around the contradictions in international law system concerning the matter of new states recognition; ethnic factor, which usually creates the basis for many separatist movements; economic factor, which shows the ability of a de facto state to build its independent statehood; social factor, which determines the standard of living of the population of the de facto state; domestic and foreign policy factors, that show the policies of a de facto state towards its own population and towards the international community. These factors all together influence the final decision on the matter of the de facto state itself and how this matter seen by other existing states.

(Table 7)

Factors	The essence
Legal	The contradiction between the right of nations to self-determination and the preservation of the integrity of borders in accordance with the UN Charter. Peoples when exercising their right to self-determination face with the problem of contradiction between the Montevideo Convention and the UN Charter. This contradiction is reflected in modern international relations, examples: recognition of Kosovo by UN member states, Crimea's accession to the Russian Federation.
Ethnic	The ethnocentric type of state with the dominant Abkhazian ethnic group makes it difficult to achieve diversification of politics and recognition of its country. The Abkhaz both at the legislative and practical levels have much more rights than other ethnic groups. Nepotism is common in this region, which contradicts to all the norms of modern society. Moreover, there is an Armenian-Abkhazian issue in the country, Armenian ethnic group is bigger than an Abkhazian one, there birth rate is three times higher as well.
Economic	The economy of Abkhazia is in decline, as at the moment Abkhazia is economically dependent on Moscow. 95% of the goods turnover comes from trade with Russia. Abkhazia exists due to subsidies and investments from the Russian Federation. Thus, the economy of Abkhazia has no alternative income that is not related to Russia.
Social	This factor determines the standard of living of the population. The number of unemployed in Abkhazia reached 50%. The income gap between the poor and the rich has exceeded 180 times. In Abkhazia the level of social life despite the economic decline is stable. Russian government supports the social sphere of this territorial entity, pays extra interest to the retirement package and is the basis of other social guarantees.
Internal (domestic politics)	The pro-Russian government, all authorities are oriented to Russia.
Foreign policy	One of the main and strongest factors in this conflict. The content of

	this factor can also be referred to the existence of a legal contradiction (since it does not depend on Abkhazia); to the economic dependence on Russia; and to the existing geopolitical interests of remote countries over a given territory (Russia, USA).
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Source: by author



4.2.3 Possible scenarios of conflict resolution

This part of Chapter 4 presents future scenarios for possible resolutions of the conflict over Abkhazia. It tries to analyze on the basis of information given in previous chapters what those solutions are, what conditions have to be taken into the consideration to make one or another scenario to come forward and what the probability of each scenario is.

(Table 8)

Possible scenario	Success criteria	Consequences	Possible strategic alliances	Probability of development of this scenario	Personal opinion
Abkhazia–legally recognized actor of international system.	Legal contradiction is decided in favor of unrecognized territories; Creation of unified recognition criteria; The change of political power in Georgia and as a result the emergence of the new political thinking regarding Abkhazia;	The emergence of many new actors;	Abkhazia – Russia; Join Eurasian Customs Union; Creating new military unions among Transnistria, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh; Creating a new political block of the former unrecognized states;	The probability is very small, since there is no consensus on the decision of this conflict and no possibility of finding a compromise in the legal contradiction;	1/5
Abkhazia - territory of Georgia	Military occupation by Georgia, provided that Russia maintains neutrality; Change of political elites in Abkhazia (new views regarding Georgia’s territorial integrity); Termination of financing from Russia;	Abkhazia as a part of Georgia without any special status; Russia loses strategic and military assets; Deteriorations in relations Russia-Georgia, USA;	Strengthening and expansion of NATO;	Unlikely, since Russia will not stop the support of Abkhazia as it has its national interests in this region;	2/5

<p>Abkhazia as a part of Georgia with a special status</p>	<p>Integration of Abkhazia and Georgia on mutually beneficial terms; Termination of financing from Russia; Change of views of political elites in Abkhazia and Georgia (regarding to their relationship); Abkhazia's officials will focus on integration with Georgia;</p>	<p>Preserving territorial integrity of Georgia; Russia loses its strategic asset in the name of Abkhazia;</p>	<p>Strengthening and expansion of NATO;</p>	<p>This scenario is not likely to happen as nowadays Georgia and Abkhazia are not on the same basis for any constructive negotiation;</p>	<p>3/5</p>
<p>Abkhazia as an unrecognized territorial unity</p>	<p>There will be no radical changes in the present system of international relations; Russia will continue financing this region;</p>	<p>Aggravation of the problem of unrecognized states; The deterioration of the economic situation in Abkhazia; Strengthening of political pressure from Georgia; Increasing dependence of Abkhazia from Russia;</p>	<p>Creation of the Commonwealth of Unrecognized States;</p>	<p>The most likely scenario, since at the moment there is no consensus on solving the problem of the legal contradiction of recognition of the new independent states in international relations.</p>	<p>5/5</p>

Source: by author

4.3 Conclusion

The combination of factors used in this chapter – legal, economic, ethnic, social, external powers, internal powers – have secured Abkhazia and Transnistria an impressive longevity of maintaining their status quo, but still scholars in general agree that these states as phenomena will sooner or later have to disappear and theoretically, this may happen in one of four ways: they may be included into the external patron state; be reabsorbed into the parent state; unite with the parent state in a federal arrangement; or achieve international recognition as an independent state.

The political likelihood in these two de facto states in question, which is defined in factors described earlier, will definitely increase or decrease one of those scenarios to pass through. Thus, for instance, a de facto state may increase its chances of achieving international recognition if it is able to build strong state institutions and eliminate most of criminal activities on its territory; likewise a parent state will manage to reabsorb the secessionist entity by force with the assistance of a strong army, or by peaceful means if it succeeds in building effective state institutions and providing a better economy and a higher standard of living than the de facto state has itself.

The chances for negotiated federal settlements may improve providing the international society plays a more active role in these conflicts and not just putting economic and military sanctions against de facto states. The likelihood of this outcome may increase more if the external patron is somehow persuaded to drop or reduce its patronage of the de facto state. All the participants of the conflict should realize that any settlement of a de facto state conflict will have a huge impact for the remaining cases, for example if a metropolitan state manages to restore the control over a lost territory by military means, this will definitely encourage other state leaders to try the same; and the opposite, the granting of international recognition to one de facto state, even in a way of “exceptional case”, can inspire other de facto state leaders and make them even less responsive to compromise solutions than before. This chapter has presented an analysis on the possible future scenarios for the two de facto states in question on the basis of the data given in previous two chapters, and the scenarios are as follows:

Full independence

Complete independence and international recognition clearly remain the ultimate goal for most secessionist groups, Abkhazia and Transnistria are not the exceptions, however, in the post-World War II period, there exist the unwritten rules of international relations containing

extremely strong restrictions against the creation of new states¹¹⁶. While the principle of the self-determination of peoples is set out in the UN Charter, this right is interpreted as relating to the entire population of a state only, not to any of its territorial or cultural subgroups. It gives the citizens a right to elect their own state leaders, but not to choose separate out of the state, thus the community of recognized states has been closed at both ends. While no old members are thrown out, newcomers are strictly guarded to get in and almost always turned away. Anyway, there is a big possibility, that the sympathies of the international community could change once again, as happened during decolonization and during the dissolution of communist multinational states, when a big explosion of membership happened and from original 51 states the number grew to its present 195, and allow for a third wave of entries into the international state system.

In spite of current contradictions in international system, there is still a chance for de facto states to gain the international recognition as a reward for perseverance in the liberation struggle, or in sympathy with their sufferings at the hands of the challenger state. Moreover the independence card can be played when the tension arises among Great Powers over the region, which is exactly what happened with the recognition of Abkhazia by Russian Federation in the response to the recognition of Kosovo by Western states.

Inclusion into the patron state

Although political leaders of Abkhazia and Transnistria as well as their patron state declare that unification is not what they are aiming for, it seems very clear that, for some leaders, this represents the optimal solution. While the citizens of Abkhazia already enjoy a special visa regime with Russia not granted to citizens of their parent state - Georgia, plus this de facto state uses Russian ruble as a national currency, certain political groups in Transnistria are pushing for integration with Russia, even though this de facto state does not have a common border with it. Authorities use the Kaliningrad oblast as an example to create a precedent for such exclave status. It is obvious for now that this argument will not likely to receive a support, either in Russia or in the Western world, and so far, there are no examples of successful inclusion into the external patron. In spite of ethnic diversity in Transnistria, people of this region feel a strong cultural and historic connection with Russia, that is why they use not an ethnic but regional identity as a reason to push towards the unification with Russia. Russia itself never made any statement to support the idea of unification and only used its influence in the area to deal with other actors in the region but not gaining the political control over the entity itself.

¹¹⁶Öyvind Österud, "The Narrow Gate: Entry to the Club of Sovereign States" in "Review of International Studies", 23(2), 1997, pp.167-184.

Reabsorption in the parent state

Reabsorption into the parent state suggests that two factors, in particular, will influence the likelihood of this scenario: the economic and political strength of the parent state and the withdrawal of a patron state from the region. If a parent state achieves state consolidation and the patron state loses military and economic assets in a de facto state, this attempt may become possible in theory. However in reality it is very unlikely that Moldova and Georgia will be able in the nearest future to collect the needed military power to attack the separatist entities or reach an agreement on the reabsorption of Abkhazia and Transnistria through the negotiation. At the same time it is very unlikely Russia will withdraw economically and military from those territories as Russian national interest is those regions.

Inclusion into the parent state as a separate entity

A parent state may still accept a federated or confederated arrangement for the restored territories. For example, after been reincorporated into Russia, Chechnya today enjoys the same republican status with the same formal rights and prerogatives as other ethnically defined republics in the country. When reunification is the result of negotiated peaceful settlements, a federal solution is an even more probable scenario than the others. In negotiations between a parent state and a breakaway region, this solution can be accepted by both parties, although many observers suspect that one or both parties only pretend to accept a federal arrangement. In the cases of Transnistria and Abkhazia the breakaway regions have been accused of false support for a special status in a common state solution to make the impression that they are engaged in real negotiations, because for separatist leaders the current unrecognized status of their state is just a step towards full independence, thus, they see de facto state status as more preferable than an autonomous unit within another state. To put forward this scenario, the initiative must come from the international community, moreover, pressure must be put not only on the direct participants but also on the patron state. Taking into the consideration the current situation between Georgia and Abkhazia, this scenario is not likely to have outcome as the relationship between two parties are not on the good basis for any constructive negotiation. Moldova and Transnistria could make this scenario happen, because they don't have the same level of tension as Georgia and Abkhazia, but the huge control coming from the Russian Federation in order to preserve this territory as it is of great importance for national interest, prevents this variant to become a reality.

Maintaining status quo

Although there is a slight possibility towards any of the above scenarios to happen, still, the biggest chance that in spite of the fact, that is supported by many scholars stating de facto states should disappear any way soon, most of the evidence show that maintaining the status quo is the most preferable in the current moment. There is no consensus in solving this problem at the current moment, as there is a contradiction on the international legal system towards recognition of new states; there is no dialogue between parent states of Moldova and Georgia and separatist regions of Transnistria and Abkhazia; and there is a big involvement of a third state - Russia in the conflict, which makes it even more complicated. Thus, in order not to shake the fragile stability in the Balkans and the Black Sea regions, all the participants prefer this variant as it suits all the parties, even though it is just temporal.



CHAPTER V - CONCLUSION

Apart from standard states that are entities of international law and have inner sovereignty there is another type of countries at the present time which is beyond such a classification, this second category of states is admittedly capable of performing sovereign legislative, executive and judicial power over its territory, it struggles for independence, but lacks international recognition or is recognized only by a few other states. Among such states with full inner sovereignty but not recognized can be currently included Transnistria and Abkhazia.

This last chapter seeks to use the data and analysis from previous three chapters, to present an answer to the research questions that were illustrated in chapter one. Those questions are as follows. First, what are the possible scenarios for the resolving of “frozen” status of Transnistria and Abkhazia? Is external recognition the only possible solution or inclusion to Russia can be considered as one more way to the resolving the “frozen” state of given entities? Second, what are the main factors of external recognition for the two de facto states in question? What are the internal forces that can also influence the recognition process of Transnistria and Abkhazia? Third, is there a third party that influences the recognition process? How does the international community react on the conflict in these two de facto states (USA, UN, EU, Russia)? Fourth, why Transnistria and Abkhazia are geopolitically important? What are the main geopolitical forces that influence the dynamic in this region? Finally, are Transnistria and Abkhazia ready for independence? Is it possible that other variants for their future existence are more preferable?

What are the possible scenarios for the resolving of “frozen” status of Transnistria and Abkhazia? Is external recognition the only possible solution or inclusion to Russia can be considered as one more way to the resolving the “frozen” state of given entities?

This thesis has provided an answer on the first research question concerning the possible scenarios for the future of two de facto states in question – Abkhazia and Transnistria, which are inclusion into the external patron state; reabsorption into the parent state; unification with the parent state in a federal arrangement; achievement of international recognition as an independent state and remaining of status quo. Although the external recognition is an ultimate goal, the truth is that the probability of gaining independence is very small, as there is no consensus on the decision of this conflict among the main participants of the conflict and no possibility of finding a compromise in the legal contradiction that exists nowadays. Thus, the frozen status is the most

likely scenario, as of the moment there is no consensus on solving the problem among all the participants of the conflict.

What are the main factors of external recognition for the two de facto states in question? What are the internal forces that can also influence the recognition process of Transnistria and Abkhazia?

This thesis has illustrated that there are several forces both internal and external that may influence one or another scenario for Abkhazia and Transnistria. When we talk about internal forces we should keep in mind, that the immediate guarantor of realization of people's rights is government. Thus, the government plays a fundamental role in this conflict, as further development of the state depends on the ideological orientation of the elites. As for now, there is no reason to believe that the government of the two de facto states in question may change their ideology towards the reunification with the parent states of Georgia and Moldova. Moreover, the elites of Transnistria and Abkhazia gain the full support of the population towards their policies concerning the future of the entity. What concerns the external factors for recognition, it is more complicated, because there are extremely strong restrictions against the creation of new states in nowadays international community. After the period of decolonization of former colonies and the dissolution of USSR and Yugoslavia, it has been very difficult for the new states to appear on the international arena due to the contradictions in international law and the simple fear of already existing states in front of the risk that follows the emergence of new states. Apart from the legal issues, Abkhazia and Transnistria can increase their chances to achieve political recognition if they manage to build strong state structures in spite of the pressure from the parent state and eliminate the most blatant criminal activities on its territory. In this case these states may get a chance to be granted international recognition simply as a reward for perseverance in the liberation struggle, or in sympathy with their sufferings at the hands of the challenger state.

Is there a third party that influences the recognition process? How does the international community react on the conflict in these two de facto states (USA, UN, EU, Russia)?

Although the ultimate goal for any de facto entity is to gain independence, the so-called a back- up plan of unification with the patron state always exists, and Abkhazia and Transnistria are not the exceptions to it, though in a different degree. Transnistria pushes more towards the

unification with Russia, even though it has no common border with it, using the Kaliningrad precedent to justify it. That is so because the population of Transnistria is mainly Russians or those who use Russian as a mother language, thus they identify themselves more with Russian Federation than with Moldova or Romania. Abkhazians don't identify themselves close with Russian culture, so they don't push up so hard towards the unification with Russia, even though they have a common border and enjoy visa regime with it, but they see Russia as a guarantor of their statehood and in the situation when they have to choose between reunification with Georgia or becoming a part of Russia they will definitely chose the second as the less evil of two.

What concerns the interest of USA and EU in the future of Transnistria and Abkhazia, it is mostly concentrated about geopolitics of this region. For the Western countries it is important to keep these territories outside of Russian influence, so they would pursue more towards the scenario which includes reunification of Abkhazia and Transnistria with their parent states, as they themselves are leaning towards the west then to Russia, moreover this scenario will eliminate the risk of war conflict in the middle of Europe and in the Black See region, which are strategically important for the USA and EU.

Why Transnistria and Abkhazia are geopolitically important? What are the main geopolitical forces that influence the dynamic in this region?

Due to their location Transnistria and Abkhazia are strategically very important for the big players of the Eurasia region. If we talk about the Black Sea region, this is the border region for NATO and the EU, and the various issues pervading the regional geopolitical, geo-strategic and geo-economic systems are of direct significance to the European/Euro-Atlantic community. This region is in the center of competition between the USA and EU and Russia for the energy recourses, energy transportation, security problems and power projection. It is vital for all the participants to keep this region stable, but the existing frozen conflicts in this region with their high criminal level and shady politics bring a lot of security issues to everyone. Transnistria is situated in the middle of Europe which makes this region strategically attractive to Russian Federation, however, Russia does not simply pressure Transnistria, but there are genuine social, cultural, economic, and political linkages that complement and sustain Russian leverage. Thus, social and cultural orientation towards Russia combines with fear of Romanianisation. Russian economic support and financial investment, as well as persistent strong trade links, contrast with wide-spread fear that closer Moldovan ties with the EU will have a significant detrimental

impact on the Transnistrian economy and residents' living standards, as well as their cultural identity.

Are Transnistria and Abkhazia ready for independence? Is it possible that other variants for their future existence are more preferable?

In this thesis there were presented four scenarios for the solution of frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and Transnistria. After analyzing all the data it becomes clear although the tendency is moving towards the dissolution of de facto states, for the nearest future they will remain the current frozen state. Objectively speaking both Abkhazia and Transnistria look like normal states as they contain all the fundamental features of the state-building written in the Montevideo convention. Although these two entities are very dependent on the Russian economic, social and military support, they have managed to build the governmental institutions needed to maintain the life on these territories. However, the recognition of these states as normal mainly depends on the external forces: parent state, patron state and the whole international community, and that is where there is no consolidation on this matter. Thus, although there is a strong desire coming from the de facto state towards their independence and all the state-building formalities are fulfilled, we should take into the consideration many other factors to talk about the independence scenario for these territorial entities. Thus, there is not the question of whether or not Abkhazia and Transnistria are ready for independence but rather whether or not the international community is ready to let them to be full members. In the result, the only preferable solution before all the differences among the main players of the conflict go away is to maintain the status quo.

Overall, by analyzing the issue of de facto states in question, it seems that despite of Abkhazia and Transnistria having fulfilled all the needed requirements written in Montevideo convention concerning the building of statehood, nevertheless it is still not enough to convince the international community to recognize these two entities, which is the main goal for both of them. It is happening because of the complexity of the question itself, including the existing contradictions in the international law, non-ability of the main actors to come to any consensus about the given matter, the fight of Great Powers over the geopolitical influence through these breakaway territories, domestic issues and many more. Under these circumstances it seems like the maintaining status quo is the most preferable variant for all the actors, because it gives

everyone additional time to find the answer to the question of the future for Abkhazia and Transnistria.



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