

Neopatrimonialism and Regime Endurance in Transnistria

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that neopatrimonialism is vital to understanding the power structure of the secessionist Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (TMR), and that neopatrimonial structures have been manipulated by Soviet-era elites to sustain the unrecognized separatist state's independence. The thesis also argues that neopatrimonialism is not a stable structure and its effectiveness in retaining support for the regime has changed over time. The paper provides an empirical analysis of the TMR in order to answer two questions: *'To what extent does neopatrimonialism explain the regime endurance of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic?'* and *'What does the case of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic reveal about neopatrimonialism and regime endurance over time?'* The analysis examines the TMR regime's use of Soviet-era industrial and bureaucratic structures, media, party networks, and worker committees to assert and maintain control, distribute patronage, maintain support for secession, and co-opt important interest groups. The paper concludes that although neopatrimonialism is only one of several elements that support the TMR regime's endurance, the analysis of neopatrimonial systems in states with significant neopatrimonialism provides a framework for examining disparate but interwoven elements of a state's political economy.

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TIMELINE

- 18th Century** Dniester region comes under the control of Russia; Russian army expels Tatar population and in-migration begins from both east and west¹
- 1924** Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) created on the eastern bank of the Dniester River¹
- 1940** In accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet Union's border expands west to incorporate Bessarabia, which was merged with the Transnistrian territory of the MASSR to establish the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR)²
- 1987**
November Future TMR 'president' Igor Smirnov moves to MSSR to run the Elektromash factory in Tiraspol³
- 1989**
April 23 15,000 to 20,000 minority speakers assemble for a meeting of the International Movement in Support of Perestroika Unitate-Edinstvo; at the meeting Gagauz representatives state their intentions to create an autonomous Gagauz region¹
May 20 Popular Front of Moldova formed²
August Igor Smirnov is elected chairman of the United Council of Workers Collectives (OSTK), which organizes protests against the language laws²
August 27-30 300,000 to 500,000 Moldovans gather at a "National Assembly" to support making Moldovan the state language⁴
August 31 Supreme Soviet passes laws making Moldovan the state language and adopting the Latin alphabet²
September Strikes and protests against language laws continue²
Fall Moldovan nationalists harass Russian-speakers and vandalize Russian monuments¹
Nov. 9-10 Moldovan nationalists attempt to take control of government buildings¹
December Referendum in Ribnitsa supports creation of special economic zone and language regime in Transnistria¹; USSR's Second Soviet Congress of People's Deputies declares Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact illegal⁵
- 1990**
January Referendum in Tiraspol supports creation of special economic zone and language regime in Transnistria¹
April 27 Moldova adopts the Romanian tricolor flag and national anthem³
May Parliament appoints the far-right Moldovan nationalist Mircea Druc as premier⁴
June Transnistrian deputies establish a "Transnistrian Free Economic Zone"⁶
September 2 Transnistrian deputies proclaim the separation of the Transnistrian Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic from Moldova as Soviet Interior Ministry troops protect their assembly⁷; Transnistrian separatists begin to take over police stations and government buildings³

- November 2 First significant armed clashes occur outside Dubosari³, Three dead and 16 wounded¹
- November 25 Soviet Interior Ministry troops protect elections for Transnistria's Supreme Soviet⁷
- December 22 Gorbachev proclaims Transnistria's sovereignty declaration "null and void"⁸

1991

- March USSR-wide referendum on Soviet Union; boycotted by Moldova's leaders but 93% of Transnistrian allegedly support united Soviet Union³
- May 23 Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic is renamed the Republic of Moldova³
- August Moscow Putsch, Chisinau sides with Gorbachev, Tiraspol side with plotters²
- August 27 Moldova declares independence³, Moldovan government officially takes control of Soviet and Communist Party assets on Moldovan territory²
- November 5 Transnistrian Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic is renamed the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic
- December Combined presidential election and referendum on Transnistrian independence results in a victory for Smirnov and an affirmative vote for independence⁵
- December 3 14th Army takes up positions in Transnistrian cities of Grigoriopol, Dubasari, Soboziia, Tiraspol, and Ribnita³
- December 13 Firefights occur when Moldovan police attempt to disarm Transnistrian irregulars near Dubasari²

1992

- Spring TMR harassment of pro-Chisinau police³; increasing clashes as Transnistrian forces seize police stations and government buildings; multiple cease-fires made and broken; increasing involvement by the Russian Fourteenth Army²
- June 20-21 Battle of Bendery, Fourteenth Army intervenes²
- July 21 Moldova and Russia (not Transnistrian leadership) sign ceasefire³

1993

- October TMR leadership supports Yeltsin's opponents⁷

1994

- February Moldova's nationalist Popular Front lose decisively; 90% vote against unification with Romania³

1997

- May 8 Moldovan and TMR presidents sign agreement to normalize relations and establish an undefined "common state"³
- November 24 New Moldovan Constitution ratified with significant autonomy provided for Transnistria and Gagauzia³

1999

- November During Istanbul summit, Yeltsin agrees to withdraw arms and military equipment from TMR³

2001

September Moldova adopts new customs stamps and does not share them with the TMR⁷
November “Base treaty” allegedly signed privately by Russia and Moldova³

2002

July Kiev Document proposes federal state³

2003

November 25 Moldovan President Voronin cancels planned signing of the Kozak Plan, allegedly under Western pressure³

2005

November EU Border Assistance Mission established along Ukrainian-Moldovan border; TMR withdraws from settlement talks in response⁹; senior Russian government officials calls Smirnov the ‘President of Transnistria’ for the first time¹⁰

December 11 TMR parliament elections, ‘Renewal’ movement members wins majority of seats

2006

January Russia cuts off gas supplies to Moldova for 16 days, then doubles price¹⁰

March New Ukraine-Moldova customs agreement implemented after delays¹⁰

September 10 TMR referendum on independence from Moldova and unification with Russia receives 97% affirmative⁹

December Smirnov reelected with 82% of the vote¹¹

Timeline References

1. Skvortsova, 2002
2. King, 2000
3. Borgen, 2006
4. Kaufman, 1996
5. Kolsto et al, 1993
6. Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007
7. International Crisis Group, 2004
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, RELEVANCE AND EXISTING LITERATURE

The August 2008 war in Georgia has refocused attention on Eurasia's unrecognized separatist states, particularly South Ossetia, Abkhazia and the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic, each of which receives substantial support from the Russian Federation. Moldova's separatist Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (TMR) has gained additional attention due to the entry of Romania into the EU and NATO, which moved the boundary of both organizations to the border of the Republic of Moldova. For some time the TMR has also been the alleged source of significant amounts of illicit weapons and munitions on the international black market.

There is a large social science literature on post-Soviet quasi-states (unrecognized separatist states) which often describes them as being 'ethnocratic' regimes that resulted from ethnic wars, or Russian puppet states that survive thanks to support from the Russian Federation, or both puppet states and ethnocracies. The Abkhazian, South Ossetian and Transnistrian separatists movements did in fact have their roots in reactions to ethno-nationalist mobilization in their respective countries. Georgian nationalists promoted the passage of Georgian language laws during the breakup of the Soviet Union, which in turn sparked counter-mobilizations among non-Georgian speakers that escalated into violence and secession. In much the same way, Moldovan nationalists promoted Romanian language laws and initially supported unification with Romania. Russophone elites in Transnistria worked with the largely Russian and Ukrainian industrial sector in organizing a counter-mobilization against the 'Romanianization' of the state.

However, as other scholars have noted, the role of ethnicity is often over-emphasized in explaining the creation, consolidation and resilience of these regimes in general and the TMR in particular. For example, in putting the ethnicity element in context, King (2000: 187) argues that "the real source of the [Transnistrian] violence after 1990 lay in fact at the level of elite politics,"

and the reaction by Transnistrians against Moldovan nationalism was “a revolt by displaced elites against those who threatened to unseat them”. He notes that although history was important, the war “was in no sense about ancient hatreds between eastern Latinity and Slavdom” (ibid: 179).

Furthermore, the ethnic element of the conflicts does not adequately address how or why the separatist regimes have been able to maintain their authority. Chauvinistic nationalism has waned in Moldova and Georgia, minority protections have been codified in new laws, and limited autonomy for the separatist regions has been offered. Nevertheless, the separatist quasi-states continue to resist reintegration and endure despite the decreased minority-rights rationale for their existence. Griffiths (1999: 56) observes that the primordialist ‘ancient hatreds’ focus does “not provide a satisfactory explanation when examining the economic and social patterns resulting from ethnic conflict.” Similarly, King (2001: 535) notes that the putative ethnic roots of the conflicts “are slippery explanations for the absence of a final settlement.”

In Transnistria, where no single ethnic group constituted even half of the population, the ‘ethnocratic’ explanation is particularly weak. Furthermore, by the mid-1990s, “the electoral strength of the cross-ethnic movements that stressed the civic nature of the state” had beaten out the Moldovan nationalist platform in Moldovan politics (Kolossoff and O’Loughlin, 1999: 158). If ethnicity had been a central issue for Slavs in Moldova, it could be expected that many would have moved from rump Moldova to the TMR or Russia following the 1992 Dniester conflict. However, aside from some Soviet intellectuals, there was “no significant movement of Russians or Ukrainians” from rump Moldova to the quasi-state (King, 2000: 173). Moreover, from 1989 to 1993 only 22,351 Russians left Moldova for Russia, at the time making it the second lowest source of Russian migration to Russia of any non-Slavic republic (ibid: 173-174).

Likewise, the ‘puppet state’ explanation for the endurance of Eurasia’s quasi-states is an oversimplification. As illustrated in this paper, the separatist government in Tiraspol frequently behaves independently and sometimes at odds with the wishes of those in power in the Kremlin. Tiraspol has gone as far as using rail blockades to prevent Russia from removing Soviet weapons stockpiles, while the Putin and Medvedev administrations have resorted to backing political opposition to the TMR’s ruling party. Similarly, while the presence of Soviet and Russian troops has been necessary for the TMR, Abkhazia and South Ossetia to maintain control of their respective territories, the presence of Soviet troops is not the single explanation for the endurance of these quasi-states. Instead, the regimes have had to build and sustain their nascent institutions and security forces in order to overcome internal opposition and resist internal and external pressures for reunification. The Russian military did not provide or develop these institutions. Instead, the Russian military is a necessary factor for the endurance of these regimes, but is not sufficient alone to sustain them.

Because neither ethnic mobilization nor Russian influence are themselves the determining factor, the question remains as to how these quasi-states endure while locked in ‘frozen’ conflicts and without international recognition. Going beyond the simple ethno-nationalist explanation for understanding the resilience of quasi-states, Kolsto (2006: 729) proposed that they have endured due at least five factors: 1) success in developing internal support through identity building and propaganda, or “symbolic nation-building”; 2) maintaining a strong military; 3) having seceded from a weak parent state; 4) support from a strong external patron; and 5) the “lack of involvement on the part of the international community”.

Though not writing specifically about quasi-states, Derluguian (2005) provides what appears to be a sixth factor in supporting the endurance of some quasi-states:

‘neopatrimonialism’. His book examines how members of the *nomenklatura*, or Soviet bureaucrat elite, in the north Caucasus were in some cases able to retain their control of the state during the collapse of the Soviet system. Derluguian (ibid: 3-4) describes how Soviet-era “closed networks of bureaucratic patronage” were “in a refashioned form [...] able to provide the basis for the post-communist oligarch restoration of the 1990s”. He continues (ibid: 15) that “bureaucratic elites and ascendant political interlopers” engaged in “a practice of corrupt patronage that relies on the privatization of state offices”, and he labels this “neopatrimonialism”. Similarly, in specifically addressing the TMR, King (2000: 179) writes that combined with the “multifaceted origins” of the conflict, the “political and economic interests spawned by the war itself” have become barriers to resolution.

By borrowing from Derluguian’s arguments regarding neopatrimonialism in the post-Soviet Caucasus, this thesis examines the role that neopatrimonialism has had in sustaining the regime of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic. The role of neopatrimonialism is examined as an addition to Kolsto’s five proposed factors that contribute to the resilience of quasi-states. However, while this paper argues that neopatrimonialism plays a distinct role in obtaining support for the regime from key interest groups, the paper also argues that neopatrimonialism plays a substantial role in sustaining three of Kolsto’s original five factors – maintaining a strong military, retaining support from a strong external patron, and constructing a national identity.

At the same time, neopatrimonialism is not a stable or consistently effective factor in sustaining the TMR regime. The thesis argues that during the initial state-building period, neopatrimonial systems were manipulated with significant success. However, evidence suggests that the influence of the neopatrimonial system may be waning, and the previously effective incentives distributed by the system are no longer adequate to retain collusion from all key

interest groups. Therefore, this thesis seeks to answer the questions 1) *To what extent does neopatrimonialism explain the regime endurance of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic?* and 2) *‘What does the case of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic reveal about neopatrimonialism and regime endurance over time?’*

Neopatrimonialism is a particularly suitable concept for examining the TMR because of its role in sustaining multiple elements that support regime endurance. The elements that support regime endurance are not all linked in obvious ways, but an analysis of the TMR regime’s neopatrimonial structures sheds light on the political economy linking the elements. Analysis of neopatrimonial systems in other highly neopatrimonial states should also provide understanding of their regimes’ behavior, quasi-state or otherwise. Of course, the level of neopatrimonialism varies in different states. In states where neopatrimonialism is not a significant element in the state institutions or policy-making, an analysis of it will produce fewer insights. However, in states with significant neopatrimonialism, analysis of neopatrimonial systems provides an effective conceptual framework for understanding the evolving political economy and political power structures. Therefore, in examining the role of neopatrimonial structures in different states, it is useful to distinguish between states where neopatrimonialism is highly significant, significant, or less significant in state institutions and state decision-making. The term ‘less significant’ is more appropriate than ‘not significant’ because policies, individuals and enterprises may be extensively impacted by elements of neopatrimonialism in any state. This thesis argues that the TMR is a state where neopatrimonialism is highly significant.

A more detailed exploration of the value of neopatrimonialism as an analytical concept is contained in the ‘Conclusions’ chapter of this thesis.

Relevance

Intra-state conflicts and their resolution are increasingly important to international relations. In the 1990s, intra-state conflicts accounted for 94 percent of wars with more than 1,000 deaths (Hoffman and Weiss, 2006: 60). As evidenced in the August 2008 war in Georgia, Eurasia's 'frozen' conflicts can reignite, leaving Russia at odds with the US and its allies. Lynch (2002: 832) observes that "(i)n the absence of a clear grasp of the nature of these separatist states, attempts to resolve the conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan have been reactive and largely ineffective". He continues that despite ceasefires and negotiations, the de facto states themselves "are the main reason for the absence of progress towards settlement" (ibid). Therefore, understanding what drives and maintains the de facto states is necessary to making substantive progress in resolving the conflicts.

Much of the existing literature refers to the situations of quasi-states as 'frozen conflicts'. However, as Lynch (2002: 835) illustrates, this is not an entirely accurate description. Instead, the situations have evolved significantly, so that the conflicts today are much different than when they first began, or when ceasefires ended their periods of violence. Therefore, settlements "will have to be based on the reality of [today], and not that of 1992" (ibid: 836).

Ethnic Mobilization, Corruption and Conflict Resolution

Political entrepreneurs have used nationalist appeals to equate what is good for an ethnic group's elites with what is good for the broader ethnic group. This strategy has been used to divide groups and coalitions that potentially threaten the elites' control of the regime. For example, Kaufman (1996:136) describes how Slobodan Milosevic "resorted to ethnic outbidding

in order to divert attention from demands for democratizing political reforms and market-oriented economic reforms which would have threatened his grip on power.”

When ethnicity and nationalism have been central mobilizing issues for violent conflict, exclusive focus on atrocities and war crimes may inadvertently reinforce ethno-national self-identification by group members (Griffiths, 1999: 71). This may in turn provide corrupt regimes with additional nationalist appeals for sustaining the groups’ mobilization. Griffiths argues that in seeking resolutions to ethnically-framed conflicts, it may be useful to shift more focus toward economic crime while shifting focus away from ethnically-framed atrocities. In other words, it is better to focus on “admittedly *banal* crimes such as bribery, state theft, extortion and tax evasion” instead of focusing on the divisive “ethnically-based ‘heroic’ characteristics of ethnic entrepreneurs” (ibid, emphasis in original). By downplaying ethnicity, a focus on theft and asset stripping by political leaders can serve to reframe the discourse of the conflict and may lead to a more productive dialogue for resolution. A central pillar of the TMR regime’s legitimacy is its putative role as the protector of the rights of Slavic minorities from an ethnocratic Moldova. However, the rationale behind this *raison d’être* has grown progressively weaker since 1992. Given the heroic framing of the TMR leadership and the Dniester conflict, criticisms that focus on the banal crimes of state theft are almost certainly likely to be less divisive.

Although Transnistria’s situation is in many ways unique, the problems associated with institutionalized systems of patronage and clientelism plague decentralizing, transitioning and even developed countries across the globe. In order to better deal with this reality, a clearer picture of the role of neopatrimonialism is necessary. As Karklins (2002: 23) astutely observes, “when this hidden politics [of corruption] begins to dominate a regime, any analysis that ignores it will be misleading”. The lack of a majority ethnic group makes Transnistrian patron-client

networks more clearly distinguishable from ethno-national or clan-based networks, and therefore especially suitable for this analysis.

Existing Literature

While there is much research exploring the linkages between ethnicized-conflict and state-building (i.e. Griffiths, 1999; King, 2001), linkages between ethnicized-conflict and corruption (i.e. Andreas, 2008; Kemp, 2004; Le Billon, 2003), and the linkages between ethno-nationalist mobilization and regime endurance (i.e. King, 2001; King and Mason, 2006), there is relatively little research examining the linkages between patronage systems and regime endurance in conflict regions. Furthermore, analysis of secessionist states “often entails simplifying assumptions on the homogenous nature of the elites representing secessionist entities” (Protsyk, 2008: 4), and existing literature rarely examines democracy in quasi-states (Popescu, 2006: 4).

In examining the political economy of post-war Bosnia, Griffiths (1999) does touch on the linkages between corruption and stability, but focuses more on organized criminal activity than the mixing of patronage systems with state institutional structures. Huntington (1968: 64) also touches on these issues, arguing that “corruption provides immediate, specific, and concrete benefits to groups which otherwise might be thoroughly alienated from society”. He continues that corruption “may be a substitute for reform”, and “serves to reduce group pressures for policy changes, just as reform serves to reduce class pressures for structural changes” (ibid). However, he is largely dealing with the question “Why does modernization breed corruption?” (ibid: 59), and the broader topics of cultural norms and the political economy of industrialized versus pre-industrialized societies (ibid: 59-71). Others scholars have used to the term ‘predatory state’ for

states that extract such excessive rents and provide so little in return that economic growth is impeded, and contrast this with the ‘development state’ (Evans, 1989). While this approach appears useful in examining the effectiveness of some state apparatuses over others in promoting development, it does not fully address how regimes may employ corrupt practices to maintain their own longevity.

King (2001) examines how ethnic conflict and civil wars may be exploited to benefit members of both sides of the conflict. For example, he notes that often “both the separatists and their erstwhile opponents in central governments benefit from the untaxed trade and production flowing through the former war zones” (ibid: 525), and humanitarian aid can be exploited by central governments (ibid: 546). King’s insights shed light on how corruption can forestall the resolution of conflicts and touches on corruption’s role in motivating elite separatists. These ‘benefits’ of war create disincentives for achieving resolutions for some conflicts and support the status quo of ‘frozen’ conflicts. Similarly, Rose-Ackerman (2008: 328) examines corruption in the immediate aftermath of conflicts, focusing on issues relevant to peacekeepers and international reconstruction teams. She proposes that in post-conflict states with weak institutions, “corruption may be a short term way to hold the system together and prevent violent disintegration”. In these scenarios, powerful private actors and groups are bought off with patronage, thereby avoiding conflict.

Hellman (1998: 1) has argued that rather than supporting thorough market-based reform, in post-communist countries “short term winners have often sought to stall the economy in a *partial reform equilibrium* that generate concentrated rents for themselves” (emphasis in original). Similar blocking by elites of full reform is evident in the state-level corruption of Transnistria and several other transitioning states. Scholars at World Bank and in academia use

the term “state capture” to describe the “illicit provision of private gains to public officials via informal, nontransparent, and highly preferential channels of access” (quoted in Karklins, 2002: 27). However, as described in the ‘Institutional Continuity & State Making’ chapter of this thesis, Transnistria’s Soviet political elite did not ‘capture’ the state during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Instead, they retained control over the local fragments of the Soviet state institutions and channels of political influence. Therefore, rather than private business interests subverting public institutions and politics, the patronage and clientelistic systems originated from the existing political regime itself. This retention and adoption of a collapsing state’s legacy institutions, rather than ‘state capture’, was the case in several other post-Soviet states as well.

Additional literature on neopatrimonialism is reviewed in the “Characteristics and Dynamics of Neopatrimonialism” chapter below.

Quasi-states

The term quasi-state has been used to describe a number of different situations for both internationally recognized and unrecognized states. The term is commonly used in reference to states that either lack internal sovereignty or lack external sovereignty (Kolsto, 2006: 724). A state that lacks internal sovereignty is one that is recognized internationally, but is not recognized as sovereign over all of its territory by a significant proportion of its own population. The Republic of Moldova, which is not recognized as sovereign over Transnistria by much of the Transnistrian population, is an example of this situation. A state that lacks external sovereignty is one that lacks international recognition. The TMR, which is not recognized internationally, is an example of this usage of the term.

By way of comparison, the 1933 Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States defines a sovereign state as having “(1) a permanent population; (2) a defined territory; (3) a government; and (4) capacity to enter into relations with other states” (Lynch, 2002: 835). Representatives of the quasi-states that lack external sovereignty/recognition assert that they have the necessary elements of a state, and that “recognition does not *create* a state, but *reflects* an existing reality” (ibid: 837, emphasis his). Moreover, representatives of separatist quasi-states (typically the same quasi-states that lack external sovereignty and recognition) often argue that the population of their secessionist territory has a right to self-determination in the aftermath of aggression from the parent-state. The TMR leadership uses both of these arguments in portraying the legitimacy of the TMR (Lynch, 2002: 836-837).

In this paper, the term quasi-state will refer to internationally unrecognized states rather than states that lack full internal sovereignty. The reasoning behind this decision is twofold. First, the subject of the paper, the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic, is widely referred to as a quasi-state in scholarly writings. Second, the term quasi-state does not seem to be a descriptive classification for either the Republic of Moldova or Georgia, regardless of the term’s usefulness in describing other entities that lack full control or recognition within their de jure boundaries. Therefore, following Kolsto’s classification (2006: 725-726), the definition of quasi-state in this thesis will be a political entity that has de facto control over the territory it claims, has declared independence, but has not received international recognition as an independent state.

According to this definition of quasi-states, there are several quasi-states located in the sub-Saharan Africa and central Eurasia regions. These quasi-states are often located where competing empires have had repeated territorial disputes (Kolossoff and O’Loughlin, 1999: 155). In the case of Eurasia, several of these quasi-states formed as the Soviet Union collapsed and

provincial ethno-nationalist leaders sought independence from the Soviet Union. Some minority groups (or their putative leaders) within these independence-seeking-provinces reacted against the nationalist independence movements, and sought independence for their own regions or to remain part of Russia. The resulting conflicts have led to unrecognized quasi-states within such newly independent states as Moldova and Georgia. Lynch (2002: 834) points out that secessionists in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh are not trying to capture power in their respective republics, but are instead trying to “exit” the republics. Although this point may seem somewhat self-evident, it is necessary to emphasize that these quasi-states are working to build parallel, independent institutions, and not seeking to gain control of the parent-state’s institutions.

Popescu (2006: 23-24) notes that “(o)ften secessionist entities are less democratic than the states they try to secede” from, and points to the TMR, Abkhazia, Northern Cyprus, and Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka as examples. This, he argues, is due in part to the “under siege” mentality that develops when war is a real possibility and legitimizes the emergency concentration of power (ibid). The leadership of the TMR reinforces this siege mentality with their repeated warnings about the threat of war with Moldova, even though the likelihood of Moldova attacking the TMR is almost zero, as described below.

CHAPTER 2: THE ANTI-ETHNOCRACY: A SHORT HISTORY OF THE TMR

The Transnistria region is a narrow strip of land, 125 miles long and about 20 miles wide, located on the eastern (left) bank of the Dniester (Nistru) River in what is now the Republic of Moldova (Ciobanu, 2007: 4). In addition to the left bank, the TMR quasi-state holds de facto control over the city of Bendery on the right bank of the Dniester. Transnistria’s residents

account for around 17% of the population of de jure Moldova, while its territory is 12% of Moldova's land mass (ibid). In 1989, Transnistria had a population of approximately 600,000, with 40% being ethnic Moldovans, 28% ethnic Ukrainians, and 26% ethnic Russians (King, 2000: 178, 185). By 2008, the population had fallen to approximately 528,600 (USG, 2009: 1).

Names and Terminology

The Moldovan language is variously described as a dialect of the Romanian language, the same as Romanian, or, according to some Soviet and Transnistrian propaganda, a separate language distinguished by its use of the Cyrillic alphabet. Transnistria is a common English form of the Moldovan/Romanian name of the region, although there are multiple variants of the spelling (i.e. Transdnistria and Trans-Dniester). The name is literally translated from the Romanian as 'beyond the Nistru (Dniester) River'. This term was first officially applied by the Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu in 1941, when Romania, in alliance with Germany, occupied the region (PMR, 2009a). In Russian the region is called Pridnestrovie, meaning 'on the Dniester River'. The unrecognized state has three official languages Moldovan, Ukrainian and Russian. According to the separatist government, the official name is Pridnestrovskaia Moldavskaia Respublica, abbreviated PMR (ibid).

For clarity of reading and pronunciation rather than for any political reasons, this paper will refer to the quasi-state as the 'Transnistrian Moldovan Republic' (TMR) and the geographic territory on the east bank of the Dniester River as 'Transnistria'. The term 'rump Moldova' will be used to denote the area of the Republic of Moldova on the western or 'right bank' of the Dniester (Nistru) River which is controlled by the Republic's capital of Chisinau. It should be emphasized here that the terms 'left bank' and 'right bank' are metaphorical because the border

does not exactly correspond to the river, and the TMR city of Bendery is on the Moldovan right bank. Rump Moldova roughly corresponds to the historic region of Bessarabia, which was bounded by the Prut River to the west and the Dniester River to the east. The term ‘Bessarabia’ is used in place of ‘rump Moldova’ where the term is historically appropriate. The territory corresponding to the internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Moldova, consisting of the combined territory of rump Moldova and Transnistria, will be referred to here as ‘de jure Moldova’.

The Anti-Ethnocracy

As noted in the introduction, many scholars have characterized the TMR and Eurasia’s quasi-states as ‘ethnocracies’, ruled by and for the benefit of a dominant ethnic group. However, as the recent history of the region described below demonstrates, the TMR cannot be accurately described as an ethnocracy.

Yiftachel and Ghanem (2004: 649) define an ethnocratic regime as one that facilitates “the expansion, ethnicization and control of contested territory and state by a dominant ethnic nation”. Not only is citizenship distinct from the ethnic nation in ethnocratic regimes, it is also secondary to ethnicity, thus severely undermining the concept of ‘demos’ in the state (ibid: 656). Yiftachel and Ghanem (ibid: 655) also note a “(c)ultural division of labor” in ethnocratic regimes. Government spending on incentives and the built environment (infrastructure, housing and industry) favor the majority ethnic group, while an official language or a de facto government language limits employment for minorities and reinforces the ethnically-based division of labor. Another important aspect of an ethnocratic regime is that the military and police are controlled by the dominant ethnic group, which in turn discourages minorities from

participation and is often used to enforce discriminatory policies. Moreover, the holding of democratic elections does not negate the ethnocratic character of a state. Instead, the regime employs the principal of national self-determination and majority rule in justifying its policies, and the addition of an official language makes the promotion of the dominant ethnicity appear legal (ibid: 669).

Rather than being an ethnocracy, the TMR's putative *raison d'être* is in fact the opposite. From its beginning, the TMR government has portrayed itself as protecting the rights of its multi-ethnic, multi-lingual population from threats posed by the emergence of a radically nationalist Moldovan state. It was, therefore, established in opposition to what was at the time an increasingly nationalist state seemingly headed toward becoming an ethnocracy itself. Unlike Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Kosovo, and Nagorno-Karabakh, no single ethnic group mobilized in support of secession. Instead, Russians and Russophone Moldovans and Ukrainians united against the 'Romanianization' of the state, the possible unification with Romania, and the loss of their own positions and interests (Kaufman, 1996: 119). In fact, "members of the same ethnic groups – Moldovans, Ukrainians and Russians – participated on both sides" (Kolsto, et al, 1993: 975). This counter-intuitive support of Moldovans for secession from a nationalist Moldovan state is likely related to the lack of Moldovan fluency among urbanized ethnic Moldovans. For example, in 1989 only 44% of ethnic Moldovans living in Chisinau were fluent in Moldovan, while 75% were fluent in Russian (Skvortsova, 2002: 171).

As a minority group in Transnistria, the Russophone elite chose "a civic, territorial identity as the only option for construction of the new Transnistrian identity" (Kolossoff and O'Loughlin, 1999: 159). At least in the beginning, this anti-ethnocratic, civic character appears to have been incorporated into the regime. For example, in the 1993 chairman of the TMR

Supreme Soviet, Grigore Maracuta, and the TMR Defense Minister Stefan Kitsak were both ethnic-Moldovans (Kolsto et al., 1993: 975). Although the elite class of the TMR is indeed dominated by Russophones, many of these Russophones are ethnic Moldovans and Ukrainians. Furthermore, if the TMR was functioning as an ethnocracy, the TMR should have been experienced significant immigration of Russians and Ukrainians from rump Moldova. However, rather than a substantial migration of Ukrainians or Russians to the TMR, “the net flow was in the opposite direction” (King, 2000: 173).

Given their history and demographics, the TMR’s anti-ethnocratic stance and the Republic of Moldova’s eventual rejection of radical nationalism should not be surprising. Pre-conflict Moldova’s ethnic groups had high rates of intermarriage, shared the Orthodox Christian religion, and had “no history of widespread communal violence” (King, 2001: 532). The Orthodox Christian religion was even shared by Moldova’s Turkish-speaking Gagauz population (King, 2000: 209). Furthermore, over 50% of Transnistria’s population is of mixed ethnic background (Kolossoff and O’Loughlin, 1999: 166).

History Prior to *Perestroika*

Historically, the Dniester River had served as a border for the Principality of Moldavia, the Kievan Rus, Ottoman vassals, Romania, and Russia. As such, the region had been a “classic borderland where ethnic identities were fluid and situational”, and Russian, Moldovan, Ukrainian, Jewish and German cultures mixed (King, 2000: 181). During the eighteenth century, the Transnistria region came under the control of Russia. The Russian army expelled the Tatar population and in-migration began from both the east and west (Skvortsova, 2002: 175).

In 1924, the Soviet Union established the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) on the eastern bank of the Dniester River (ibid: 162). The region was a part of Soviet Ukraine, and stretched further east than the current boundaries (King, 2000: 181). In accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet Union annexed Bessarabia (the region from the Prut River to the Dniester River) in 1940. This was joined with the MASSR to establish the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (Skvortsova, 2002: 162). Contemporary Transnistrian separatists argue that prior to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Transnistria had never been a part of an ethnically or linguistically Romanian state (Williams, 1999: 79). Instead, it had always been part of a Slavic, Russian or Ukrainian state. Because the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was officially condemned in 1989 by the Soviet Union's Congress of People's Deputies (King, 2000: 127), secessionist argue that there is no historical or legal justification for Moldova's claims on the Transnistrian territory.

Romania, in alliance with Germany, occupied Transnistria during World War II, and the territory was used for concentration camps where tens of thousands of Jews and Gypsies from Transnistria, Bukovina and Bessarabia were killed (Nagy-Talavera, 2001: 462-463). Contemporary separatist discourse continues to recall the threat of Romanian fascism (Munteanu and Munteanu, 2007: 57). The 1940 border was resumed after the end of the war, and from the end of WWII until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Transnistria and Bessarabia together made up the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. Following WWII, many so-called "bourgeois elements" and "kulaks" were sent to Siberia, while industrial managers, workers, and *nomenklatura* were brought into the territory from outside the MSSR (Skvortsova, 2002: 162). The Transnistrian region was soon transformed into a center for heavy industry and Soviet defense manufacturing (King, 2000: 183). Stalin declared that Romanian-speakers in the area

were Moldovans who were distinct from Romanians, and their history books were duly rewritten to support their differences, and the Cyrillic alphabet, which Romania had abandoned for Latin, was re-imposed (Kaufman, 1996: 121).

Because Transnistria and its political elite had already been ‘sovietized’ in the decades following 1924, Moscow viewed them as more loyal than the political elite from Bessarabia, and favored them in appointments to the MSSR government (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 19). Russophones continued to dominate the politics and economy of the region until the 1980s. In fact, prior to 1989, all of the first secretaries of the MSSR Communist Party came from outside of Bessarabia (King, 2000: 183). This privileging is summarized in the Soviet-era saying “To become a minister, you must be from beyond the Dniester!” (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 19).

For the next several decades, Moldovans largely remained in agriculture while Russians and Ukrainians dominated the industrial labor force and *nomenklatura*, and the Russian language was used in most official settings (Kaufman, 1996: 121). Because of this division of labor, Moldovans accounted for only about 25% of Transnistria’s urban residents in 1989, despite being Transnistria region’s single largest ethnic group at 40% of the total population (King, 2000: 183-185).

Perestroika and the Moldovan National Awakening

In the late 1980s, the expanded freedoms of *glasnost* and *perestroika* provided new opportunities for political mobilization. In many of the Soviet Union’s republics, competition for employment and political positions between Russian and the republics’ ethnic-national populations had created tensions with an ethnic dimension (Kolossoff and O’Loughlin, 1999: 158). In 1989, Moldova ranked second to last of all USSR republics in the percentage of

republican ethnic-nationals holding managerial positions (King, 2000: 139). *Perestroika* provided resentful Moldovans and those seeking to replace Russians in higher positions an outlet for their grievances. The disparities between the populations provided a strong incentive for Moldovans to cooperate in supporting reform policies that favored greater local (Moldovan) control. It also provided a strong incentive for elite Russophones to cooperate against reforms.

Early Moldovan political organizations such as the ‘Democratic Movement in Support of Perestroika’ and the ‘Music and Literature Club Alexei Mateevici’ initially framed their movements as being in support of the Communist Party’s efforts at implementing *perestroika* (Skvortsova, 2002: 177-178). But by 1988, they had become more overtly nationalists with demands that Moldovan become the official language and be written in Latin instead of Cyrillic. Nationalist meetings and demonstrations grew, blaming Russian and Ukrainian ‘immigrants’ for economic hardships and demanding the appointment of ethnic Moldovans to leadership positions in the republic (ibid: 180).

In response to growing pressures by Moldovan nationalists, the ‘International Movement in Support of Perestroika Unitate-Edinstvo’ (*Edinstvo*) was formed by Russophone intellectuals in Chisinau (Skvortsova, 2002: 181). The group focused on equal rights for all ethnicities and languages, a common Soviet identity and continued membership in the USSR. On April 23, 1989, between 15,000 and 20,000 people attended a meeting held by the organization, and representatives of the Turkish Gagauz minority stated their intentions to create an autonomous Gagauz region (ibid: 181-182). Demonstrations were also organized to protest against the proposed language laws. Labor strikes occurred in Tiraspol, Ribnitsa and Bendery as early as August 16, 1989, where Russophones accounted for 82%, 75% and 70% of the populations respectively (ibid: 182-183).

During Moldova's Supreme Soviet Elections at the end of August 1989, between 300,000 and 500,000 Moldovans gathered at a "National Assembly" to support proposed laws making Moldovan the state language (Kaufman, 1996: 123). The four-day demonstration included speeches criticizing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (which had allowed the USSR to annex Bessarabia), calls for Moldova sovereignty, and the president of the nationalist 'Alexei Mateevici Club' urged the withdrawal of the Soviet "army of occupation" from Moldova (King, 2000: 130). Some Moldovan nationalists also vocally argued for reunification with Romania. Calls for the Soviet army's withdrawal no doubt increased the perceived threat felt by the Russophone population, who largely viewed themselves as Soviet citizens and saw the army as a guarantor of inter-communal peace. *Edinstvo* held counter-demonstrations in Chisinau and Tiraspol to protest the proposed language laws, and were supported by more than 100 striking worker collectives and enterprises, mostly in Transnistria (ibid).

On August 31, Moldova's Supreme Soviet adopted a language law establishing Moldovan as the state language (Skvortsova, 2002: 183). The law required that within five years, government officials, civil service workers and industrial managers would have to know and use Moldovan (Kaufman, 1996: 123-126). It also included language tests for state employees (King, 2000: 131). Exemptions allowed Russian to remain the language of local government where city councils requested it and the Council of Ministers granted it (Kaufman, 1996: 126). Yet most ethnic Russian and Ukrainian did not speak Moldovan, and therefore faced losing their positions in the affected sectors. Even many ethnic Moldovans in urban areas were not fluent in Moldovan. For example, less than half of the ethnic Moldovans living in Chisinau were fluent in Moldovan (Skvortsova, 2002: 171). Moreover, the proposed language laws included switching from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet for written Romanian/Moldovan. Although

accurate statistics are not available, presumably even many fluent Moldovan speakers would have not known the Latin alphabet.

Soon, city councils in Transnistria voted to defy the language requirements, and leaders of the Transnistrian city of Tiraspol began speaking openly about secession (Kaufman, 1996: 126). Industrial laborers in cities with large Russian populations across Moldova went on additional strikes to protest the language laws (King, 2000: 129). Local Communist Party organizations, state institutions and industrial-sector coordinating committees provided mobilizable structures and networks for opposition to Moldovan nationalism (ibid: 187). Strikes were organized and led mainly by Russophone factory bosses and Communist Party members who, in some cases, were reported to have used lockouts to prevent work even when laborers did not wish to strike (Kaufman, 1996: 126-127).

In August, future TMR ‘president’ Igor Smirnov, a ‘red director’ of the Elektromash plant in Tiraspol, was elected chairman of the United Council of Workers Collectives (OSTK), which “coordinated the industrial strikes and demonstrations” against the Moldovan language laws (King, 2000: 188). Furthermore, a group called the Women’s Strike Committee blocked railways to protest the language laws (King, 2000: 187). Transnistrian bureaucrats also used their control of the local bureaucracy and media to build opposition to the language laws and rule from Chisinau.

Meanwhile, Moldovan nationalists and Popular Front members engaged in harassment of Russian-speakers and vandalism of Russian monuments (Skvortsova, 2002: 184). Despite the relatively moderate nationalist discourse in the Moldovan parliament, some of the more radical Moldovan nationalist’s discourse was far more inflammatory. For example, there appeared graffiti in some parts of Transnistria declaring to Slavs “suitcase, railway station, Moscow”

(Williams, 1999: 82). On November 9 and 10, radical Moldovans attempted to take control of two government buildings, leaving over 40 civilians and 140 militiamen injured (Skvortsova, 2002: 184). In December 1989 and January 1990, propositions for creating a special economic zone and language regime in the Transnistria region were overwhelmingly supported by a referendum in the Transnistrian cities of Tiraspol and Ribnitsa (Skvortsova, 2002: 185).

Non-ethnic-Moldovans did poorly in the February 1990 elections for the Supreme Soviet, with ethnic-Moldovans winning 256 of the 369 seats, or 69.4% of the seats (Skvortsova, 2002: 185). Furthermore, ethnic-Moldovans took 21 of the 25 elected seats of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and only one of the 30 non-elected seats went to an ethnic Russian (ibid: 186). However, Smirnov's OSTK also competed in the election, and was "by far the most successful contender" in Transnistria (Kolsto and Malgin, 1998: 108). In April 1990, Russophone members of the parliament were beaten by a crowd after unsuccessfully opposing changing the flag to the Romanian "tricolor" (Kaufman, 1996, 123-124). That May, the parliament appointed the far-right Moldovan nationalist Mircea Druc as premier (ibid). Druc was a leader of the Popular Front movement, a supporter of union with Romania, and a linguistic nationalist.

Transnistrian representatives left Chisinau that spring, and on September 2 proclaimed the 'Transnistrian Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic' as a "constituent part of the USSR" (Kolsto and Malgin, 1998: 108). It is important to note that Moldova at this time was still a part of the USSR, and that Soviet Interior Ministry troops protected the Transnistrian assembly during their meeting (ICG, 2004: 2). Transnistrian separatist groups equipped with arms from the Russian Fourteenth Army soon took control of police stations and other government buildings in the region, ousting Chisinau loyalists and largely securing secessionist control of the territory by

1991 (King, 2000: 189). On December 22, 1990, Gorbachev proclaimed Transnistria's sovereignty declaration "null and void" (Kolsto and Malgin, 1998: 108).

Following the failed August 1991 coup by hard-line communists in the Kremlin, Moldova seceded from the Soviet Union on August 27 (King, 2000: 191). Moldova also used Smirnov's praise for the coup participants as an excuse to arrest him and other separatist leaders. However, Transnistrian women blockaded railway lines and the TMR leadership threatened to end gas and electricity supplies to Moldova, and Chisinau soon released the arrested separatist leaders (ibid).

In December 1991, Smirnov organized a Transnistrian presidential election combined with a referendum on Transnistria seceding from Moldova and remaining part of Soviet Union (Kaufman, 1996: 128). Continued membership in the Soviet Union was unfeasible by this time, but the affirmative (though suspect) results of the vote strengthened the independence movement and confirmed Smirnov as president (ibid).

Tensions rose as Moldovan authorities implemented language laws and Russophones lost their positions in government institutions, state television and radio, and universities. Meanwhile, Transnistrian authorities purged Moldovans that were loyal to Chisinau from their own state institutions (Skvortsova, 2002: 190-191). Sporadic violence continued in the spring of 1992, and Cossack and other volunteers were invited to Transnistria and supplied from the Fourteenth Army's stockpiles (ibid).

War and Secession

In late spring of 1992, violence in Bendery, a largely Slavic city on the western (Moldovan) bank of the Dniester River, escalated into full scale war. On June 19, Transnistrian

forces attacked a police station in Bendery that was still loyal to Chisinau, and Moldovan forces responded by attacking and initially retaking much of the city (Skvortsova, 2002: 192). During the battle, the Russian Fourteenth Army became involved and Russian tanks allegedly crossed the Dniester River from Transnistria into Bendery (Kolsto et al., 1993: 988).

With better equipment and backed by the Russian Fourteenth Army, Transnistrian forces beat back Moldovan forces, and a ceasefire was brokered on July 7, 1992 (Kolsto et. al., 1993: 974). In the end, the war resulted in over 1,000 casualties and around 130,000 refugees and displaced persons fleeing to rump Moldova, Ukraine and Russia (King, 2000: 178). The resulting ceasefire included provisions for a peacekeeping force consisting of Moldovan, Russian and Transnistrian troops (USG, 2009: 1). In the summer of 1995, the Fourteenth Army was downgraded to the “Operational Group of Russian Forces in Moldova” (Williams, 1999: 74).

Diminishing Raison D’être

After achieving de facto independence, the Russian elite, being a minority group in Transnistria, chose “a civic, territorial identity as the only option for construction of the new Transnistrian identity” (Kolossoff and O’Loughlin, 1999: 159). This civic identity largely reflects the civic identity of the Soviet period, where ethnic distinctions were acknowledged but played a secondary role behind the unifying civic identity of Soviet communism. Russian language continued to be promoted as “linking “Transdnistrians of different ethnic background”” (ICG, 2004: 13). Likewise, Moldova’s purge of Soviet intellectuals helped to create recruits for a Transnistrian intellectual class whose writings helped to shape the new Transnistrian identity (King, 2001: 545).

In February 1994 elections, Moldova's nationalist Popular Front lost decisively and 90% of voters were against unification with Romania (Borgen, 2006: 17). Later that year, on November 24, Moldova ratified a new constitution that provided significant autonomy for the Transnistrian and Gagauzian regions (Borgen, 2006: 17) About two-thirds of all of Moldova's Russians and Ukrainians live in rump Moldova, yet even among them, the TMR has received little support since the nationalist mobilizations of the early 1990s (ICG, 2004: 21). Moreover, the growing contrast in freedoms enjoyed in rump-Moldova compared to Transnistria has weakened the portrayal of the TMR as a protector of rights.

More recently, Ukrainian President Yuschenko proposed a plan where Transnistria would enjoy autonomy and the right to withdraw from Moldova in the future if Moldova chooses to unite with Romania (Borgen, 2006: 20). This option addresses perhaps the most credible concern faced by Transnistria's Russophone population. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, many members of the Moldovan nationalist movement had vocally supported unification with Romania after leaving the Soviet Union. This would have changed the situation of Moldova's Slavs from being a large minority in Moldova to being a very small minority in Romania. To exacerbate minority Slav's concerns about unification with Romania, Romania's minority ethnic Hungarians and Roma (Gypsies) have at times experienced substantial tensions with majority Romanians, particularly during the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, given that Romania's minority rights record has been deemed good enough for it to join the European Union, Transnistria's non-Moldovan ethnic groups appear to have little to justify fears of persecution if Moldova and Romania did unite.

Because the protection of minority rights is becoming an increasingly weak argument for TMR independence, the regime has largely refocused its justification for independence on

economics (Popescu, 2006: 10). TMR officials maintain that because the TMR is more industrial and wealthier than Moldova, and Moldova has large debts to repay, the economic well-being of the region depends on independence (Popescu, 2006: 11). For example, in 2005 president Smirnov argued “Why do we need Moldova? [...] We have a gross domestic product per capita that is three times higher than in Moldova [...] That is why Moldova is so interested in our property, that is why they always shout about privatization” (quoted in Popescu, 2006: 11). The regime maintains that widespread privatization of industry would put industrial laborers out of work. In reality, by 1998 the TMR was one of the poorest regions in the former Soviet Union (FSU) (Kolsto and Malgin, 1998: 113). Furthermore, in 2003 the TMR had approximately six-times the per capita debt of rump Moldova (Popescu, 2006: 11). Despite the diminishing logic for refusing a settlement, TMR ‘president’ Smirnov has said that he would retire “only after Transnistria will be recognized” internationally (quoted in Popescu, 2006: 22).

CHAPTER 3: CHARACTERISTICS AND DYNAMICS OF NEOPATRIMONIALISM

“In fact, some of the new states are, properly speaking, not states at all; rather, they are virtually the private instruments of those powerful enough to rule.”

(Robin Theobald, 1982: 549)

Neopatrimonialism has been inconsistently defined and used by various scholars in the social sciences. In their survey critiquing the misuse of the terms patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism, Pitcher, Moran and Johnston (2009: 131-137) identify four different uses of the terms paraphrased here: 1) “a set of social relations [...] mediated by personal loyalty and

governed by bonds of dependence”; 2) “rent-seeking behavior and personalist patterns of authority”; 3) “an economic logic distinguished by the continual blurring of public service and private gain”; 4) “a characteristic regime type associated with most African countries [...]”. Given the range of uses of the term, Theobald (1982: 549) argues that it appears to be in danger of becoming “a catch-all concept, in danger of losing its analytical utility”.

However, as Erdmann and Engel (2007: 114) point out, “despite conceptual ambiguities, many studies that use the concept have come to far-reaching conclusions”, and neopatrimonialism “systematically links politics to the exercise of power which is a core subject of political science”. Moreover, the term ‘neopatrimonialism’ is a common term for a concept that is useful in examining the endurance of the Transnistrian quasi-state. However, an encompassing examination and justification of one usage of the term over other common usages is beyond the scope of the thesis. Therefore, in order to avoid ambiguities in employing this useful concept, this section will deal with defining and clarifying the term as it is to be understood in this paper.

Neopatrimonialism Defined

As its name suggests, neopatrimonialism is related to the concept of patrimonialism. Both neopatrimonialism and patrimonialism, as they are used in this thesis, are based on two of Max Weber’s conceptualization of pure types of political domination and authority: legal-rational and traditional. Legal-rational authority is characterized by the dominance of the rule of law, a distinction between public and private interests, and bureaucratic institutions that have a defined scope of authority and formal rules for promotion. Under legal-rational authority, bureaucratic administration is subject to “clearly defined spheres of competence that are subject to impersonal

rules” (Theobald, 1982: 555). In Weber’s words, “the members of the [bureaucracy], insofar as they obey a person in authority, do not owe this obedience to him as an individual, but to the impersonal order” (quoted in Pitcher et al, 2009: 130). Modern liberal democracy in its ideal is held to be an example of legal-rational authority, although Erdmann and Engel (2007: 111) point out that during the second half of the nineteenth century, Germany was “largely governed by a legal-rational bureaucracy and the rule of law”, but was not democratic.

In contrast, traditional domination is characterized by the leadership holding authority through a traditional or customary system. In Weber’s words, “obedience is owed not to enacted rules but to the person who occupies a position of authority by tradition or who has been chosen for it by the traditional master” (quoted in Erdmann and Engel, 2007: 97). Monarchies are examples of traditional authority, with absolute monarchies closest to the ideal or pure form. Unlike legal-rational authority, under the patrimonial relations of traditional authority, there is no distinction between the leadership’s private and official roles. In describing the concept of the patrimonial system, the analogy of a household economy or manorial estate, where the property and authority belong to the master, is illustrative (Pitcher et al, 2009: 139). The bureaucracy of a traditional system is ultimately responsible to the will of the leadership rather than the rule of law.

Table 1: Weber’s Legal-Rational Authority and Traditional Authority

	Final Authority	Characteristics of Bureaucracy
Legal-Rational Authority	Rule of law	Distinction between public and private interests; defined scope of authority; promotion based on merit or formal rules
Traditional Authority	Individual occupying leadership position	No distinction between the leadership’s private and official interests; bureaucracy is guided by the will of the leadership

As Roth (1968: 196) points out, hereditary succession and similar forms of ‘traditional’ or patrimonial authority are declining in the world. However, hybrid systems remain widespread, where patrimonial personalization of office co-exists with putatively legal-rational systems. This hybrid system is what is meant by the term neopatrimonialism in this thesis.

Erdmann and Engel (2007) illustrate that while much of the existing literature uses the prefix ‘neo’ to mean ‘modern’, the term more properly refers to the personalization of state apparatus (patrimonialism) being embedded in the legal-rational bureaucracy. Clapham provides a clear description of this use of neopatrimonialism: “(o)fficials hold positions in bureaucratic organizations with powers which are formally defined, but exercise those powers ... as a form ... of private property” (quoted in Erdmann and Engel, 2007: 102). Similarly, in Bratton and de Walle’s (1994: 458) understanding of neopatrimonialism, “the chief executive maintains authority through personal patronage, rather than through ideology or law”, and “relationships of loyalty and dependence pervade a formal political and administrative system”. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, neopatrimonialism will refer to patrimonialism co-existing with and embedded in the legal-rational bureaucratic institutions of the state.

There are of course elements of neopatrimonialism in contemporary, putatively legal-rational liberal democracies. Elected representatives often use the powers of their office to further their own interests and political careers. Moreover, they frequently reward important, powerful or especially generous supporters with government contracts or appointments to positions within the government. However, the closer that a liberal democracy is to reflecting the ideal legal-rational typology, the less the private considerations and neopatrimonial activities will influence the state and its bureaucratic institutions.

Corruption, Patron-Client Relationships and Neopatrimonialism

This definition of neopatrimonialism is similar in important ways to the common definition of corruption. Corruption is defined by Transparency International as the “misuse of public power for private gain” (Karklin, 2002: 23). Other common definitions of corruption mirror this language and its parallel with neopatrimonialism. For example, Huntington (1968: 59) defines corruption as “behavior of public officials which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends”. Likewise, patronage systems and clientelism involve practices commonly defined as corruption, and both patronage and clientelism are fundamental activities of a neopatrimonial system. Therefore, concepts developed for analyzing corruption will be incorporated into this research. Determining the legality of corrupt and patron-client reciprocity is outside the scope of this paper, and, as Le Billon notes (2003: 418), elites involved in corruption may also be in charge of legislative activities that would define an activity as legal or illegal anyway. It should also be noted that neopatrimonialism does not necessarily involve corruption if the leadership does not misuse the public power for private gain. For example, an ideologically-driven dictator may blur the distinction between personal authority and the rational-legal bureaucracy without seeking private gain.

Integrative and Monopolistic Corruption

Johnston (1986: 464) offers the useful distinction between ‘integrative’ and ‘disintegrative’ corruption. Integrative corruption serves to link “people and groups into lasting networks of exchange and shared interest”, whereas disintegrative does not, and may instead lead to discord and conflict (ibid). For example, corruption in the redistribution of land may serve to

reinforce kinship ties, political party ties, or other patronage networks (ibid: 468). As this thesis argues, the ‘integrative’ aspects of political corruption are employed by the TMR leadership to maintain collusion from important actors and sustain the regime.

In some circumstance, corruption “may even be seen as legitimate by a significant proportion of the population” (Le Billon, 2003: 415). As an example of corruption seen as legitimate, Le Billon (ibid: 414) points to favoritism based on kinship or other “codes of reciprocity within (neo)patrimonial political systems based on legitimate patronage”. He argues that in fact, reciprocal corruption may serve “key hierarchical functions, thereby contributing to political order”, and “conflicts may arise more from changes in the pattern of corruption, than from the corruption itself” (ibid). Charap and Harm (1999: 1) concur, arguing that leaders can reduce “the probability of a palace revolution by creating a system of patronage and loyalty through corrupt bureaucracy”.

Similarly, monopolistic corruption, or top-down bureaucratic corruption that is controlled by a regime, is often more stable than decentralized corruption. When corrupt activities within the bureaucracy are monopolistically controlled by the regime, bribery rates are more predictable, they are paid at predictable sequences to bureaucrats, amount to less in total, and are therefore generally less harmful to the economy (Charap and Harm, 1999: 17). In contrast, states without centralized control over corrupt rent-seeking are often characterized by unpredictable requirements for bribery paid to sundry authorities. This results in higher total amounts of bribes being paid and lower economic activity within these states (ibid: 17). For example, Shleifer and Vishny (1993: 600) note that in economies like Soviet Russia or Korea in the early 1990s, although corruption is “pervasive, the person paying the bribe is assured that he gets the government good that he is paying for, and does not need to pay further bribes in the future.” In

contrast, in economies with decentralized corruption, “numerous bureaucrats need to be bribed to get a government permit, and bribing one does not guarantee that some other bureaucrat or even the first one does not demand another bribe” (ibid).

The state bureaucracy “can be considered as a monopoly on the granting of licenses that permit private sector activity” (Charap and Harm, 1999: 15). Licenses may be awarded to allies, or bureaucrats may require bribes and reciprocal favors, thereby allowing “the diversion of licensing proceeds away from the budget towards private gain” (ibid). This produces income for civil servants and their regime allies, thereby entrenching them within the corrupt system. Corrupt civil servants become dependent on the system for access to bribery income, and their bureaucratic supervisors have leverage over them by gaining the option of exposing their corrupt activities if they become disloyal or refuse to pass on some bribery income to the superiors (ibid: 15-16). This reinforces the self-selecting nature of corrupt bureaucracies where bribes are required to obtain positions in the first place. Corrupt elites “have a strong motive to keep non-corrupt individuals out of politics or to co-opt anyone slipping through their net” (Karklins, 2002: 28). Job seekers who pay bribes to obtain civil service positions are presumably more likely to accept bribes themselves and collaborate in keeping the larger scheme secret. Thus the self-selection is ‘regulated’ by the corrupt scheme itself.

Charap and Harm (1999: 15-16), among others, have even argued that low bureaucratic wages are intentionally used to promote corruption within the system, creating a rent-extracting system benefitting all levels of bureaucrats and reinforcing obedience. At a more basic level, Karklins (2002: 27) notes that the threat of firing civil servants is used by their superiors to force their collusion in corrupt activities. Because elites in the TMR regime are largely in control of

the region's neopatrimonial system, the system should properly be considered to be monopolistic corruption.

Difficulties in Measuring Corruption and Neopatrimonialism

Like corruption, neopatrimonialism is difficult to measure in part because participants are likely to hide activities deemed inappropriate and are unlikely to report these activities to researchers. In the case of quasi-states, additional difficulties lie in the absence of substantial amounts of statistical data. For example, the Transparency International does not list Transnistria separately from Moldova in its 2007 Corruption Perception Index (Freedom House 2008). However, it is possible to estimate the level of some types of corruption from existing information, as scholars have done with cross-border smuggling (see the 'Bureaucrats, Civil Servants and the Justice System' section below). Furthermore, it is analytically useful to examine neopatrimonialism without attaching a statistical measurement to it.

CHAPTER 4: INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY & STATE MAKING

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet states in Europe, many of the Soviet-era institutions exhibited remarkable resilience throughout the transition. As Bunce (1999: 146) observes, "(i)t is tempting to think of the revolutionary changes [...] as cases of institutional collapse. [...] However, what was striking [...] was the role of institutions in providing some structure and some certainty in unusually fluid and uncertain times." In fact, the Soviet-era institutions were used by many provincial elites to assert their own authority vis-à-vis Moscow, other external powers, and internal challengers. Moreover, patronage networks were

already well established under the late Soviet system, so the new regimes were able to incorporate existing neopatrimonial arrangements into the emerging political systems.

Unlike the other Eurasian quasi-states of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria did not have any form of regional autonomy within the Moldavian SSR or the broader Soviet Union (Pelczynska-Nalecz et al, 2008: 371). Nevertheless, the TMR leadership was able to use their control over the territory's expansive industrial assets in combination with local Soviet-era institutions and political structures to maintain their positions and expand the reach of their authority. Writing specifically about Transnistria, Isachenko (2008: 5) observes that "building formal state institutions was not undertaken from scratch, [...] local party organs and city councils were already in place". The new TMR even kept many of the state symbols from the Soviet period, such as the flag of the Moldovan SSR (ibid). Therefore, rather than envisioning a collapse of Soviet institutions followed by the creation of new institutions, it is more useful to recognize the continuity between the institutions of the Soviet state and the TMR.

Soviet Federalism

This section provides a brief overview of the system of Soviet federalism in order to illustrate why the institutional structures of the republics and territories were readily available to the successor governments, and why the territories were largely divided along ethno-national lines.

Lenin and Stalin saw nationalism as a powerful force that needed to be addressed rather than ignored (Martin, 2001: 70). In an effort to co-opt nationalist sentiment with a sense of a national homeland, the Soviet Union established national-republics and smaller national-

territories throughout its territory, dividing them along ethno-national lines (ibid: 67). Instead of trying to eliminate ethno-national identities, Soviet leaders worked to shape ethno-national identities to be secondary to the broader civic identity of Soviet Communism. The Soviets incorporated a discourse of “aggressive promotion of symbolic markers of national identity” to “depoliticize” nationalism through a “show of respect for” non-Russian national identities (ibid: 74-75).

However, as the Soviet Union dissolved, this system of ethno-national territories with their own administrative institutions ended up providing defined boundaries and mobilizable resources for secessionist republics and territories. The three Soviet federal republics of Europe (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union) each broke up largely along the federal administrative lines that had been established or reinforced under the Soviet system (Bunce, 1999: 111). In fact, Bunce (1999: 136) notes that the only European states that broke up after socialism were those that were national-federal. Moreover, the “institutional design of socialism [...] played a crucial role in shaping *how* regimes and states ended” (ibid: 125, emphasis hers). According to the constitution of the USSR, the constituent republics of the Soviet Union had the right to secede from the Union (Kolsto et al, 1993: 973). Largely because of this arrangement, the break-up of the Union occurred along the existing borders and no new borders were created (ibid: 973).

The federal structures also served to reinforce the power base of the republican governments. Each republic had established borders and their own elites who controlled the territory’s centralized economic, political, cultural and social institutions (Bunce, 1999: 84-85). In addition, because the provincial Communist Parties controlled the institutions in each republic, the republics’ elites already controlled the structures that were necessary to running the

successor state. In the case of the TMR, elites were able to maintain control of these institutions rather than ceding them to the opposition or Chisinau.

Neopatrimonialism in the Late Soviet Union

Late Soviet *nomenklatura* across the Soviet Union had developed a system of patronage and reciprocity that served to keep themselves in power. As Karklins (2002: 23) notes, “communist regimes were characterized by monopolies of all kinds, political, economic, and social”. Furthermore, the Communist Party selected who would join the elite, thus having the power to root out potential rivals and threats to their positions (ibid: 28). This system facilitated a rising use of ‘informal’ practices among the elite, and party members increasingly used their public positions for private ends. Jowitt (1983: 276) argued that by the early 1980s “*informal practices [had] become corrupt practices*, practices that subvert more than contribute to the party’s formal goals and general interests” (emphasis his). Likewise, Karklins (2002: 28) determines that progressively increasing corruption had “transformed communist cadres into patrons who received tribute from subservient units and subordinated the interests of their posts to personal and particular interests”.

Moldova was not an exception to this corrupt transformation. The 1961-1980 period under MSSR First Secretary Bodiul was particularly notable for its corruption (King, 2000: 100-102). This was continued into the 1980s, when First Secretary Semion Grossu appeared uninterested in “dismantling the personal fiefdom that he and his predecessor, Ivan Bodiul, had constructed since the period of stagnation under Brezhnev” (ibid: 122). Moscow eventually took the step of criticizing the corruption in the MSSR and its leadership’s lack of effort to implement the *perestroika* policies of economic restructuring (ibid: 121-122). In response, Grossu blamed

agitation for reform and restructuring on “local nationalism” (ibid), an argument that would later be mirrored by the TMR regime in justifying its own resistance to economic and political reform.

The Soviet Union’s economic decline limited the resources available to Moscow for use as incentives in maintaining the loyalty or collusion of the periphery (Bunce, 1999: 85). In turn, it became increasingly necessary for the republics’ governments to maintain control and economic stability through their own innovation. In addition, the reforms of *perestroika* provided opportunities for the republics’ governments to increase their own power and local authority. The republican governments dealt with reform, political opportunities and economic decline in divergent ways. This divergence among republican governments accelerated the decline of federal authority, which in turn increased the authority of the republican leadership (ibid: 86-87).

Furthermore, *perestroika* provided political opportunities for local competitors to challenge provincial elites, thus creating additional pressures for elites to use their positions to more aggressively address both reforms and opponents. Similarly, as political position in itself “became a less secure guarantee” of the advantages enjoyed by the political elite, “emphasis shifted [from political position] to private property” (Kryshtanovskaya and White, 1996: 716).

Derluguian (2005: 275) argues that “the institutional fusion of politics and economics embodied in the Communist Party apparatus made the provincial first secretaries pivotal actors in both fields”. The importance of their role grew as the provinces gained increased autonomy from Moscow or, as in the cases of Transnistria and Abkhazia, autonomy from their respective successor-state republics. Furthermore, as competition for control of local resources grew, “regional elites within the republics began to replicate the conflict between Moscow and the republican capitals” (King, 2000: 185).

Continuity in the TMR

As in other post-Soviet states, the monopolies on political power, state assets and institutional control were largely retained by the new provincial regime in secessionist Transnistria. Of course, Moldova asserted competing claims to the political power, assets and institutions in Transnistrian territory, just as competing claims existed in other Eurasian quasi-states. But the TMR's military victory in 1992 gave the Transnistrian regime *de facto* control over the assets and institutions in the territory. As Table 2 illustrates, the economic and industrial assets of Transnistria were substantial at the time of secession.

Large Electrical Machines	100.0%
Power Transformers	100.0%
Gas containers	100.0%
Cotton Textiles	96.6%
Electric energy	87.5%
Cement	58.1%
Low-horsepower electric engines	55.8%
Sheet metal	23.5%
Agricultural products	13.1%

(source: King, 2000: 186) [Fair Use]

In 1990, about 95% of Moldova's enterprises were still controlled from Moscow, making them akin to "extra-territorial zones" where Chisinau authority remained weak (Kolsto, et al., 1993: 980). Many of these enterprises were factories in Transnistria, as Table 2 illustrates. Furthermore, Transnistrian enterprises produced 33% of all industrial goods in de jure Moldova, 56% of all consumer goods, and 90% of the electricity used in rump Moldova (Kolsto, et al., 1993: 980). Due to the economic dependence of Transnistria's manufacturing industry on trade

relations with other Soviet regions, particularly the military-industrial manufacturers, the region's factory directors and other *nomenklatura* sought to maintain these connections rather than seceding with Moldova.

State Making

The 1992 ceasefire has allowed the TMR to develop its own state institutions and structures. At the same time, state ownership and privatization has separated the management of strategic infrastructure, such as energy and transportation, from Moldovan control. As illustrated in the next chapter, the state security apparatus spends much of its effort on keeping the TMR independent, and the TMR customs service has grown into a lucrative empire. This has been reinforced by Russia's insistence that before withdrawing its peacekeepers, a resolution must be agreed upon by both Chisinau and Tiraspol. This insistence provides Tiraspol with a virtual veto, and prolongs the status quo indefinitely. Moreover, by supporting negotiation formats that involve only Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, and the TMR, Russia has largely kept the West from playing a larger role in conflict resolution.

Tilly (1985: 182) writes that in a narrow sense, state making is "eliminating or neutralizing the local rivals of the people who controlled the state". In the TMR, this process began before the 1992 war, most notably with the purging of pro-Chisinau police and the ongoing seizures of government buildings by separatist forces. It continued with the "ruthless elimination of those potential landlords who challenged Smirnov immediately after the 1992 war" (Popescu, 2006: 7).

It has been argued that the initial Transnistrian conflict was the result of provocative actions by Tiraspol's secessionist leadership that incited responses from Moldova, thereby

escalating the situation and resulting in a war. For example, Kaufman (1996: 127) argues that Transnistrian elites intentionally provoked “a security dilemma between Moldova and Dniestrian Russophones” by behaving in a way “calculated to exacerbate the greatest fears of the Moldovan nationalists”, and then portraying themselves as defenders of the Russophones. This interpretation follows Tilly’s (1985: 170-171) description of a racketeer, who is someone who “produces both the danger and, at a price, the shield against it”. In this case, the price paid for the protection is support for the regime. However, this view is overly critical of the behavior by separatists Russophones and overly generous regarding Moldova’s nationalists. In the run up to the 1992 war, Moldovan nationalism posed what appeared to be a genuine threat to Russophones and Ukrainians, elite and otherwise. The early nationalist rhetoric and actions of the Moldovan Popular Front certainly reinforced the secessionist leaders’ message that immediate action was necessary to protect the rights of ethnic minorities from an imminent threat.

Regardless of the role that secessionist leaders played in provoking the 1992 conflict, the subsequent behavior by the TMR regime conceptually fits Tilly’s description of a racketeer. Especially in its early years, the regime used the state bureaucracy and media to disseminate a dramatically exaggerated description of the danger posed by Chisinau, against which it provides ‘protection’. Some observers have argued that “while Moldova has sought to decrease ethnic tensions, the TMR has attempted to exacerbate them and subsequently claim that separation is necessary in order to avoid ethnic conflict and possibly genocide” (Borgen, 2006: 8). In another example, the official newspaper “Dniestrovskiy Kurier” published an article in March 2004 outlining measures that would need to be taken if, for some reason, NATO invaded the TMR (Belitser, 2005: 3). However, as mentioned above, the TMR’s *raison d’être* of protecting minority rights is growing increasingly weak. Moreover, the level of cross-border travel by

Transnistrians provides them with a realistic picture of the state of affairs, making it more difficult for the regime to convincingly employ this rhetoric.

In fact, despite the rhetoric of the TMR regime and its media, war with Moldova is almost out of the question (see Popescu, 2006: 4-5 and Lynch, 2002: 840). Moreover, minority rights in rump Moldova reflect “international standards and practices” (Popescu, 2006: 10). A team sent by the Association of the Bar of the City of New York concluded that not only had Moldova made significant improvements in minority rights, but that the TMR “has had a poor human rights record including a lack of due process, persecution of religious minorities, and retaliation against political dissenters” (Borgen, 2006: 7). In effect, a “non-existent threat has become a fundamental pillar justifying the existence of the de facto state” (Lynch, 2002: 840). As Munteanu notes (2002: 222), the legitimacy of the TMR regime is tied to the conflict. Its leadership therefore has few incentives to resolve the conflict and surrender their privileged positions.

CHAPTER 5: NEOPATRIMONIAL DYNAMICS OF THE TMR

“The essence of neopatrimonialism is the award by public officials of personal favors, both within the state (notably public sector jobs) and in society (for instance, licenses, contracts, and projects).”

(Bratton and de Walle, 1994: 458)

This chapter examines neopatrimonial dynamics not only in the relationship between the leadership, the state, the enterprises, and the people of Transnistria, but also with people,

governments and enterprises that are outside of Transnistria. This is necessary because the neopatrimonial system that has been established in Transnistria is interwoven with actors, businesses and institutions outside of the region, particularly in Russia, Ukraine and Moldova. Relationships with outside actors is at the level that, according to the International Crisis Group (2004: 17), the TMR regime has been able to exploit “illegal economic ties as a bargaining tool” in lobbying Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Likewise, given the importance of Russian peacekeepers in preserving the status quo, any patronage and reciprocity that is used to maintain relationships with Russian politicians and military planners is likely to be relevant. Although the framing of the TMR as a ‘mafia state’ or a ‘black hole’ may be overly dramatic and misleading, the number of businesspeople and elites from outside of Transnistria who have benefitted from the TMR’s smuggling, customs-avoidance schemes and largesse make the terms conceptually interesting. It is a network that stretches across the whole Black Sea region and into Romania. In some respects, the quasi-state does indeed operate as something like an extra-legal territory for smuggling-schemes and high-level graft. The former US Ambassador to Moldova Rudolf Perina has even called the TMR the biggest “duty-free zone” in Europe (Ciobanu, 2007: 10). Yet in other respects, however, it strives to be a ‘normal state.’

The TMR regime has developed and maintains strong neopatrimonial relations with several key interest groups, including business leaders, industrial workers, civil society organizations, and the Russian military. In addition to using these neopatrimonial relations to create incentives for supporting the regime and disincentives for opposing it, the neopatrimonial system is manipulated to sustain three of the five factors identified by Kolsto (2006: 729) that “contribute to the viability of unrecognized quasi-states”. As described in the following chapter, neopatrimonialism in the TMR provides substantial benefits to powerbrokers and businessmen in

Russia, who in turn lobby the Russian government to maintain support for TMR, thus retaining the support of a strong patron and the assistance it provides to the TMR's own military forces. In addition, the regime's institutions are used extensively to forge a Transnistrian national identity, both officially through schools and the media, and unofficially by creating and funding regime-dependent 'civil society' organizations. Before examining the regime's relations with the interest groups, some neopatrimonial aspects of the regime's bureaucracy will be addressed first.

THE NEOPATRIMONIAL BUREAUCRACY

Some Transnistrian residents joke that PMR, the initials of the TMR in its Russian form, actually stands for "Papina i moia Respublika", or Papa's and My Republic, in reference to the positions held by Smirnov's sons (Isachenko, 2008: 6-7). Smirnov's older son is the head of the customs service, while his younger son is a deputy in the Parliament. The TMR regime uses its control over the bureaucracy to coerce, punish, and reward both Transnistrians and foreigner business interests that operate in Transnistria. The regime also disperses patronage to Transnistrian civil servants through employment and extensive opportunities for self-enrichment, including lax enforcement of anti-bribery measures and opportunities for low-level patronage and nepotism, most readily observable at the customs services.

Customs Services

Based on interviews with experts from the EU Border Assistance Mission to Ukraine and Moldova, Popescu (2006: 6) concludes that "(c)ontrol of the border has turned into a lucrative business". More concretely, in 1999 customs administrations registered imports to the TMR that should have provided the TMR with about \$80 million in custom revenues. However, the TMR

budget received only \$3.2 million from customs, the other \$76 million had apparently been siphoned off (Carasciuc, 2001: 10). It is impossible to determine what share of this went to employees of the customs service and what share was kept by smugglers and bribe-payers who were avoiding customs duties, but the take by customs employees is likely to have been substantial in comparison to their wages.

Popescu (2006: 6) notes that “(s)muggling activities have been protected and controlled by a few clans, all of them connected and dependent on the secessionist authorities”. It therefore may not be surprising that the TMR president’s older son, Vladimir Smirnov, is the head of the TMR customs service, a position that “has proved quite lucrative to occupy” (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 21). Also not surprisingly, Vladimir is suspected of illegal trafficking and money laundering by Interpol (Buttin, 2007: 13).

Although bribery and corruption at customs posts may appear to be non-political and low-level, many forms of low-level corruption networks require the patron’s position to remain secure (‘a roof’ in the Russian vernacular), and therefore the recipients of patronage will either work to ensure that the system remains in place, or seek to reap as much as possible in the short term (Johnston, 1986: 470). Low-level corruption is often an important income supplement for poorly paid civil servants. Therefore, the ability to award rents to civil servant can provide a powerful source for ensuring obedience to regimes (Le Billon, 2003: 416). It can be reasonably assumed that if the TMR were to more stringently enforce its own rules on the bribing of customs agents, there would be little incentive for Transnistrians to man posts along the TMR-Moldova internal ‘border’, and Smirnov’s elder son would lose a lucrative source of income. Just as importantly, if the TMR rejoins Moldova, Transnistrian customs agents can reasonably expect

that they will lose their jobs. Therefore, even if independence is not a genuine goal of the customs agents, there is a very large financial incentive for supporting the status quo.

In 2007, Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin stated that smuggling, human trafficking and contraband between Tiraspol and Odessa brought about \$2 billion annually to the TMR regime, while the official budget is about \$145 million (Ciobanu, 2007: 10). Given his position and motivation to discredit the separatist regime, Voronin may have reason to exaggerate the level of smuggling and contraband that the TMR accounts for. However, other credible sources support the claims of massive smuggling and re-export schemes occurring in the TMR. For example, as a confidence building measure, in 1996 Moldova agreed to allow goods travelling to the TMR to pass through Moldova duty-free (King, 2001: 546). Under this scheme, in 1998 Moldovan customs registered \$500 million of goods destined, duty-free, to the TMR. In comparison, only \$125 million of goods were imported to rump Moldova and thus paying duty tax (ibid). At the time, TMR was about 17% of Moldova's total population, yet, according to customs registrations, was importing four times more goods and 6,000 times as many cigarettes as rump Moldova (ibid: 547). These goods were apparently re-exported to Moldova and Ukraine, thereby avoiding their customs duties. As noted above, smuggling rings are linked to and dependent on the regime (Popescu, 2006: 6). Regime members profiting from smuggling therefore have strong financial incentives to maintain the status quo, and without international recognition, they have no real legal incentive to change.

Likewise, there is "considerable evidence" that money from smuggling is linked to officials in Chisinau, Moscow and Kiev (Ciobanu, 2007: 10). The International Crisis Group (2004: 1) has determined that businessmen in Moldova, Russia and Ukraine who have earned profits from the TMR's status "constitute a well-financed lobby that wishes to uphold the status

quo”. For instance, when Moldovan National Television ran a series of broadcasts about the Transnistrian customs situation, the channel’s director had them stopped, “reportedly on the order of senior government officials” (King, 2001: 547). Similarly, according to the International Crisis Group (2004: 16), because Odessa and Vinnytsia are important transport routes for legal and illegal goods travelling to and from the TMR, their administrations “have maintained close political, economic, social, and cultural ties with the [TMR] leadership”. In fact, these allies successfully lobbied the Ukrainian central government to provide relief when Moldova adopted a new customs arrangement and thereby threatened to reduce goods flowing to and from the TMR through Odessa and Vinnytsia (ibid). Furthermore, Russian business owners had an additional incentive to support the TMR because, as Carasciuc (2001: 10) of Transparency International asserts, the TMR had been using Moldovan customs stamps to export goods produced in Russia to the US and EU “at dumping prices”.

New Customs Stamps Arrangement

In an effort to curb smuggling and re-export schemes, in September 2001 Moldova issued new customs stamps that were in line with WTO standards, but did not provide the TMR with the stamps (ICG, 2004: 7). In effect, this meant that for Transnistrian businesses to acquire the appropriate documentation, they have to register in Moldova.

However, Ukraine has a number of elites who were profiting from the status quo (ICG, 2006: 2). So it was not until Yushchenko became president in 2005 that Ukraine agreed to require Moldovan customs stamps for goods from the TMR (ibid). After Ukraine’s Orange Revolution, the new Ukrainian Foreign Minister Tarasiuk stated that “The previous government used Transnistria as a springboard for contraband because the money chiefly flowed to Kiev [...]

Ukraine is not interested in the existence of a ‘black hole’ on its frontier” (quoted in Glenny, 2008: 95). Yet even with the Ukrainian president’s backing, EU pressure was required to implement the agreement by March 2006 (ICG, 2006: 2).

In addition to the new customs arrangement, Moldova and Ukraine requested assistance from the EU in monitoring their border, including the Transnistrian-Ukrainian section. This resulted in the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) opening in November 2005 (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 26). Because of this new customs system, more than 200 Transnistrian companies have registered in Chisinau (ICG, 2006: 8). According to one senior Western diplomat, “if the border regime sticks, Transdnistria has to deal with Chisinau” (ibid). With the benefit of observation along the border, EUBAM estimated that smuggling contributed as much as \$7 million to the TMR budget between October 2005 and May 2006 (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 26). If the TMR budget is indeed benefiting, then allegations that TMR state itself is involved in smuggling appear almost irrefutable.

In response to Ukraine enforcing the agreement requiring Moldovan customs stamps for goods exported from the TMR, Smirnov ordered a ban on imports as well “so as to create the impression of an externally-imposed blockade” and to prompt Ukrainian and Russian businesses that profit from TMR trade to oppose the new customs regime (ICG, 2006: 10). However, this strategy backfired. While it did provide the regime and its Russian allies with the illusion of an economic blockade to rally against, it also caused a rift between Transnistrian businesses and the regime. In fact, according to Crisis Group (2006: 10), Smirnov ended up giving in on the self-imposed blockade “on the insistence of Sheriff [corporation]”. The *Sheriff* corporation is the TMR’s largest company and had initially been a close ally of the Smirnov regime. Its economic

and political influence is detailed in the 'Business Leaders' and 'Civil Society and Political Parties' sections of this chapter.

Schools

In March 1991, the new quasi-state established an academic laboratory at its university to research the history of Transnistria (Isachenko, 2008: 5). The central roles of this research facility were to support the historical justifications for Transnistria's independence and to highlight the region's historical links to Russia (ibid). Because children growing up in the region have known only life as 'citizens' of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic, the TMR's school system has had the opportunity to shape and reinforce their identity as Transnistrians. Although the use of school systems to reinforce national identities is neither unique nor necessarily neopatrimonial, the TMR regime has used the school to support a propaganda campaign that stokes fears of Moldovan military aggression while presenting itself as an indispensable defender against Moldova. Furthermore, the regime had previously used its security forces to harass Moldovan language schools that used the Latin alphabet instead of Cyrillic (the use of Cyrillic allegedly distinguishes the Moldovan language from the Romanian language) (Hanne and Neukirch, 2005: 22).

Justice System

The role of the police and court system are, ideally, a central pillar in maintaining and upholding the rule of law. However, the justice system in the TMR is used extensively to promote the private goals of regime members and members of the justice system itself. The TMR government has also provided the justice system with substantial legal authority to harass

political opponents through a law that gives authorities “broad and vague powers to fight extremism, which is defined as [...] public defamation, or acts to change the constitutional order” (USG, 2009: 15).

According to the International Crisis Group (2004: 12), the TMR’s Ministry of State Security has approximately 2,000 employees and its Ministry of Interior employs approximately 10,000 people. Together, these account for a significant number of positions that the regime can use to reward loyalty, and a large number of citizens whose continued employment is likely to be understood as subject to the TMR’s continued independence. In fact, with an estimated total Transnistrian employment of 157,300 in 2004 (CISR, 2005: 47), the combined employment of these two institutions accounts for 7.6% of all jobs.

Secessionist politics was first enforced by the security services during the 1990 and 1991 effort to drive out pro-Chisinau policemen. Now, despite officially being in charge of law enforcement only, the Ministry of Interior assists the Ministry of State Security in activities against Transnistria’s internal opposition, including politicians, journalists and NGOs (ICG, 2004: 12). Freedom House (2008) reports that in the TMR “(p)olitically motivated arrests and long-term detentions are common”, while “(p)olitically motivated killings and police harassment have also been reported, and prisoners are frequently denied access to lawyers”.

Measuring corruption in a court system is particularly difficult, given the courts’ role in determining what is legal and what is not and the broad lack of transparency in the TMR’s governing institutions. However, based on multiple interviews and research, the International Crisis Group (2004: 12) determined that the TMR’s court system lacks independence and has been used as a tool to “harass, prohibit and punish” the regime’s political opposition, and the Constitutional Court “is a political organ dependent on the [TMR] leadership”. Likewise,

Freedom House (2008) concludes that “(t)he judiciary is subservient to the executive and implements the will of the authorities” (Freedom House, 2008). For example, after accepting assistance from Moscow, the three main leftist opposition groups were banned by the courts in 2001 and 2002 (ICG, 2004: 7). Moreover, Victor Balala, the “minister of justice” in 2006, was on the Duma staff until 1996 and is “believed to be one of the planners of the “privatization” of assets in Transnistria” (Borgen, 2006: 88). As described below, the TMR’s asset privatizations have been used to reinforce support for the political status quo with both powerful Transnistrians and allies in Russia.

For its part, the TMR’s Ministry of State Security (*Ministerstvo Gosudrsvvennoi Bezopasnosti* or MGB) is “highly influential and all-pervasive in the business, media, universities, and fake civil society organizations” (Popescu, 2006: 7). The head of the Transnistrian Ministry of State Security, Vladimir Antiufeev (alternately spelled as Vadim Atyufeyev, also known as Vadim Shevtsov) was previously a Major in the Soviet Interior Ministry’s special police, and has significant personal motivations for supporting the independence of the TMR. If a resolution is agreed upon between Moldova and the TMR, he has “reason to fear prosecution” for crimes he committed with the special police in Latvia in 1990 and 1991 (ICG, 2003: 6). As recently as 2004, the International Crisis Group (2004: 6, 12) asserted that Antiufeev continued to have strong links with the members of the Russian Supreme Soviet’s reactionary-conservative *Soyuz* group. The *Soyuz* group is linked to reactionary elements of the Russian military, the former KGB, and the Ministry of Interior, and helped to transfer Antiufeev to Transnistria in 1991 (ibid). Ties between members of this group and Antiufeev have provided the TMR regime with durable links to sympathetic strongmen in Moscow and their business interests through the years. Furthermore, Antiufeev is thought to be

“under the control of” the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) (Borgen, 2006: 88). In fact, Vladimir Socor (2006) of the Jamestown Foundation alleges that Antiufeev is still a Lieutenant-General in Russia’s security services.

Antiufeev and the MGB’s extensive role in politics and controlling fake non-governmental organizations is detailed below in the ‘Civil Society and Political Parties’ section of this chapter. Senior members of the Russian forces in Transnistria have also accused the MGB of, among other things, extorting money from businessmen and requiring ransoms to release arrested detainees (Buttin, 2007: 22).

Media

A Transnistrian institution with an especially notable continuity with its Soviet-era predecessor is the government controlled media. In describing the importance of the media in general, Karklins (2002: 30) asserts that “(n)ext to the judiciary, the media is the most crucial player in promoting or hindering efforts to stamp out corruption”. However, the Transnistrian media environment has remained so restrictive that Freedom House (2008) reported that “(n)early all media are state owned or controlled, and such outlets do not criticize the authorities”. This is no longer entirely true (and was not entirely true in 2008 when it was reported), but does illustrate how closed the media had been until recent years. In fact, as Freedom House notes in the same report, the *Sheriff* corporation “dominates the limited private broadcasting” and cable television. It is also the only internet provider in Transnistria (USG, 2009: 13). But *Sheriff* is no longer a close ally of the regime. As explained in the ‘Business Leaders’ and ‘Civil Society and Political Parties’ sections of this chapter, *Sheriff* was formerly closely linked to the TMR regime, but has recently supported reformist politicians in opposition

to Smirnov. The regime has therefore recently lost control over a substantial portion of private broadcasting in the region.

The regime does still maintain significant influence over the media, and had initially exercised extensive control. The TMR's 1993 Law Regarding the Press and Other Mass Media was "a virtual carbon copy of a similar law adopted in the Soviet Union in 1990", except that in areas it was actually more restrictive (Ionescu, 1995). While some independent newspapers do exist, a "state editorial committee, which includes the ministers of security, justice, foreign affair, and information, oversees the activities of all print and electronic media" (Mikhelidze and Pirozzi, 2008: 40). Furthermore, staff at the independent newspapers have been the target of intimidation and violence (Freedom House, 2008). According to the US State Department (USG, 2009: 12), the regime controls "all printing houses" and has a 100% customs duty on foreign publications. Residents of Transnistria have gone from living under the USSR's state-controlled media to the TMR's mostly-state-controlled media. Furthermore, according to the International Crisis Group (2006: 18), "Moldovan television does not reach Transdnistrians". Instead, residents of the TMR watch Russian programming, thereby depriving Moldova of a potentially effective tool for disseminating its own message.

The regime employs other media strategies from its Soviet past. In addition to the regime's state-owned media, the Ministry of State Security sponsors several media groups (ICG, 2004: 12). The regime also uses the Soviet-era strategy of placing "civic condemnations", or attacks on dissidents from ordinary citizens, in the press in order construct a sense of "the people's will with regard to Transdnistriian statehood" (Isachenko, 2008: 13-14). King (2000: 140) notes that in early August 1989, a Tiraspol factory's Communist Party newspaper "prematurely" printed the draft language laws that were to be addressed at the Supreme Soviet

later that month (King, 2000: 140). This sparked demonstrations and strikes in Tiraspol, Ribnitsa and Bendery by Russophones opposed to the proposed laws. Although it is not clear whether the ‘premature’ publishing of the language was intentional, this incident illustrates the breadth of potential uses of Soviet-era institutions for Russophone mobilization.

In another example, in July 2006 the TMR and Russian media carried articles referencing a report from the “International Council for Democratic Institutions and State Sovereignty” (Economist, 2006: 48). The report, which supported the TMR’s claims for international recognition, was ascribed to a group of international lawyers, a US State Department official, and academics from Stanford, Harvard and Oxford. However, the ‘ICDISS’ appears to be an entirely fabricated organization. Those named as participants in the report deny involvement, and the report makes several grammatical mistakes that are common to Russians writing in English (ibid). Despite the apparent unmasking of this fabricated organization and its phony report by *The Economist* magazine, the target population for this and similar disinformation, the residents of Transnistria, are likely to remain ignorant of its origin.

THE TMR’S INTEREST GROUPS

The TMR regime has developed and maintains strong neopatrimonial relations with several key interest groups, including: 1) business leaders; 2) the Russian military; 3) civil society groups and political parties; 4) and industrial workers. The following section examines the nature of the patron-client ties with each of these groups. Of course, there is occasional overlap among these groups, but for clarity of description, conceptualization and organization, the groups will be examined as being distinct. Similarly, there are variations among the members of these groups, and the shortcomings of this type of generalization should be kept in mind.

Business Leaders

Carasciuc (2001: 6-7) of Transparency International identifies a number of areas where a government controls or owns something of value to the private sector, and therefore an incentive for corruption exists. These areas include government contracts; privatized assets; government benefits; licensing that provides privileged or monopolistic positions; access to favorable credit; permits and changes in regulations; privileged tax and duty-free status; and government positions. As the following section illustrates, the TMR regime has provided favored groups with preferential access to these goods and services, which has had the effect of enriching the regime's own members and buying temporary compliance or support from key domestic and international actors.

The economy of the TMR is dominated by a dozen or so large enterprises, while “small and medium enterprises produce a negligible share of the local GDP” (Popescu, 2006: 6). The MMZ steelworks in Ribnitsa alone accounts for almost half of the region's GDP and over half of the state's income (ibid: 6). This dominance of the TMR's economy by a handful of large businesses makes it easier for the regime to influence the economy and the enterprises themselves. As Popescu (2006: 22) notes, “the security apparatus can easily control or coerce a dozen big businessmen which create almost the whole Transnistrian GDP”. Tax and duty exemptions, monopoly status and targeted regulations can be used to great impact in order to retain loyalty or subservience from these large firms. Furthermore, it is more efficient for the regime to collect bribes and rents from a concentrated handful of large businesses than it is to collect from a large number of dispersed small businesses (Popescu, 2006: 22; Charap and Harm, 1999: 13-14). However, the recent reformist political activities by *Sheriff* and other business

interests (see below) seem to reveal that the regime's tools of reward and coercion are losing their force.

The MMZ steelworks produces over half the TMR's income, but the *Sheriff* corporation is the largest company in the TMR (Borgen, 2006: 66), and its largest employer (ICG, 2004: 16). *Sheriff* is a combination grocer, petrol station owner, smuggling operation, and communications monopolist. Its annual turnover is estimated to be as much as \$2 billion, and is alleged to be involved in smuggling of such legal goods as alcohol, oil, pharmaceuticals and tobacco, and illegal arms and drugs (Munteanu and Munteanu, 2007: 53). Korobov and Byanov (2006: 521) calculate that *Sheriff* controls up to 90% of the oil and petroleum trade. *Sheriff's* grocery stores and petrol stations provide a legitimate cover for the importing and exporting of many these smuggled products. The Deputy Chief of Ukraine's Southern Border Control Department estimates that around "95% of Transnistrian contraband found in Ukraine originates from Sheriff Company's storage facilities" (Borgen, 2006: 67).

Despite some of its more mysterious dealings, Sheriff does not keep a low profile. The *Sheriff*-owned Tiraspol football club's stadium has been estimated to cost between \$120 million (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 22) and \$180 million (Glenny, 2008: 93). This is substantial when compared to the TMR's total GDP in 2006 of \$585.6 million (CISR, 2007: 43).

Although *Sheriff* is the TMR's largest company, it pays no taxes or customs duties thanks to a special arrangement with the regime. *Sheriff* was begun in the 1990s by two former officers of the special services (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 22). The corporation is exempt from duties and taxes supposedly in gratitude for the founders' role in the Dniester conflict (ICG, 2004: 16). However, observers conclude that its special tax status has instead been "in return for unconditional support" for the regime (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 22). This unconditional

support had initially been forthcoming, so much so that several reports refer to *Sheriff* as controlled or formerly controlled by the Smirnov family (i.e. Borgen, 2006: 66-67; ICG, 2003: 5; Kliment, 2005: 72). President Smirnov's son Oleg was at one time an employee of *Sheriff* (PMR, 2009b), although what position he held there is not clear. As recently as 2004, the BBC (Ash, 2004), reported that "(o)rganized crime experts in the UK suspect that Sheriff really belongs to the first family of the rogue republic, and claim the Smirnovs use it to launder money". However, *Sheriff's* recent backing of reformist political movements illustrates that it is no longer satisfied with the patronage that the Smirnov regime is able to offer, as described below.

Privatization and Asset Stripping

Interestingly, the TMR only began significant privatization of industrial assets around 2001 (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 23), years later than Moldova and other post-Soviet states. Prior to this, most services and retail trade had been privatized, but 'public-private' partnerships had only begun in the industrial sector (O'Loughlin et al, 1998: 19). Since 2001, privatization of state assets has become a substantial source of income for the state. Between 2002 and 2006, the TMR privatized over \$51.5 million of state assets (Borgen, 2006: 66). In 2002 alone, it accounted for 32% of the state revenues, compared to zero percent in 1998 and 2000 (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 24). However, Moldovan law requires that privatization of any assets on Moldovan territory must be approved by the Moldovan parliament (Munteanu and Munteanu, 2007: 52). Not surprisingly, the Moldovan government rejects the legality of these privatizations (Borgen, 2006: 66).

Owners of these privatized Transnistrian assets are concerned that if a reconciliation is negotiated with Moldova, their ownership will be placed in jeopardy under applicable Moldovan

law (ICG, 2006: 19). An additional complication is that any guarantees from Chisinau that current property ownership will be respected regardless of the legality of their privatization may be reversed by subsequent administrations (ibid: 20). Therefore, many owners of Transnistrian enterprises have an enormous financial stake in either maintaining the status quo or finding another solution that prevents Moldova from seizing their firms. Even TMR opposition parties are concerned about the status of privatized assets. The reformist Renewal movement's leader Shevchuk has been noted to be particularly concerned about the review of TMR privatizations in the case of a settlement (ibid: 19-20). Therefore, until they can obtain credible guarantees that their ownership will be secure, many business owners will continue to collude with the regime in maintaining the status quo. There have even been allegations that an agreement with Moldova on a final resolution has been delayed by TMR authorities so that they can secure private control over state assets before Chisinau gains authority (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 24).

Likewise Russian, Moldovan and Ukrainian owners of Transnistrian assets are similarly at risk (Borgen, 2006: 87). This includes the influential Russian state-controlled giant Gazprom, which took possession of some gas infrastructure in the region in payment for TMR energy debts (see below). It also includes the Russian gas company Itera, which is the majority owner of the MMZ steelworks in Ribnitsa, the TMR's largest exporter (Lynch, 2002: 843). Because several of the TMR's largest firms are owned or controlled by Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan groups, these groups lobby their own governments for policies that support their stakes in the current political economy. A report from the Association of the Bar of the City of New York asserts that "the fortunes of Russian economic elites have become intertwined with a successful secession of the TMR" (Borgen, 2006: 87).

Gazprom

The relative uniqueness of the TMR's situation is compounded by its relationship with the Russian government-controlled energy company Gazprom. Gazprom has had an especially large role in the health of the Transnistrian economy, and therefore on the endurance of the TMR regime. The TMR receives large subsidies from Russia in the form of reduced prices on natural gas. For example, in 2007 the TMR paid approximately one-third the price Moldova pays per cubic meter of natural gas (Ciobanu, 2007: 10). In addition, Gazprom has continued to deliver natural gas to the TMR without receiving full payment. Despite the subsidized price, the TMR has amassed a debt for natural gas shipments of over \$1.3 billion, about three times its annual GDP and more than nine times its annual budget (CISR, 2007: 12). However, Russia has not taken a harder stance on TMR debts in part because of the "political lobby in Moscow on behalf of the Transnistrian separatists" (Munteanu and Munteanu, 2007: 55).

It is largely due to Russia's subsidized supply of energy that products manufactured in the TMR can be exported at competitive prices (Popescu, 2006: 6). Tellingly, the subsidized natural gas benefits Transnistrian factories that are now largely owned by Russian and Ukrainian companies (Borgen, 2006: 85). Because the Russian Federation is Gazprom's largest shareholder (ICG, 2004: 8), it appears that Gazprom's subsidies are in part targeted at benefitting Russian owners of Transnistrian enterprises.

Gazprom's also has relations with both the Smirnov family and pro-Russian, pro-regime Transnistrian political movements. TMR president Smirnov's son Oleg is the chairman of the Transnistrian branch of the Gazprom subsidiary Gazprombank (Socor, 2006). Oleg has promised to use Gazprom's resources in propaganda for his pro-regime Patriotic Party of Transnistria, whose platform includes integration with Russia (ibid). Likewise, Socor (2006) alleges that

“Russian business interests closely linked to Gazprom “privatized” [the MMZ steelworks] unlawfully several years ago”. The majority shareholder of the MMZ steelworks, Itera, has in the past been the beneficiary of billions of dollars of work for Gazprom that Gazprom was capable of doing itself, and mysterious transfers of “huge” amounts money have been documented between the two (Glenny, 2008: 79, 94). The political movement “For Unity with Russia” held its founding conference at the MMZ steelworks, and the leader of the movement is the head of its rolled-steel section (Socor, 2006).

Gazprom observers have speculated that in addition to furthering Russian foreign policy, another motivation for allowing the TMR to amass so much debt is Gazprom’s desire to acquire Transnistrian assets in lieu of payment. For instance, in 2004 the International Crisis Group (2004: 8-9) noted that the TMR’s energy debts “may ultimately serve Gazprom well, since the conglomerate wants to purchase the two largest energy plants in Transdnistria and fourteen other recently privatized enterprises”. In fact, in 2005 the TMR government “disassociated” natural gas assets in the Transnistrian territory from the Moldovagaz SA company. Some of these assets were subsequently transferred to Gazprom in partial payment for its gas debts (CISR, 2007: 13-14). Interestingly, in late 2007 Gazprom announced that the TMR’s \$1.8 billion debt was the responsibility of the Republic of Moldova, and penalties would be placed on Moldova for repayment (Munteanu and Munteanu, 2007: 54). Although it is unclear how this will turn out, in the short-term this appears to be an enormous windfall for the TMR regime and the owners of enterprises that have benefitted from Gazprom’s largesse.

However, it is also not clear that the TMR regime ever intended to repay its debts. Given the size of the debts in comparison to its GDP, and the rate at which the regime acquired new debt, it seems that the regime planned on letting a subsequent regime deal with it, or even

possibly Moldova after reunification. The rapid accumulation of debt by the TMR regime appears to be another scheme for self-enrichment for those connected to the regime. Whether the debt is repaid through trading away state assets, transferring it to an incoming regime, or taken up by Moldova after unification, many private beneficiaries of the unfettered spending are likely to repay nothing.

The TMR itself has used its control of gas and electricity infrastructure leading into Moldova as a strategic tool on a number of occasions. When Smirnov and other separatist leaders were arrested in the wake of the Moscow Putsch, railway lines connecting Moldova to the rest of the USSR were barricaded, and the flow of gas and electricity were stopped (King, 2000: 191). Following the June 1992 fighting in Bendery, gas and electricity from the TMR were shut off again, only returning after Moldovan President Snegur ended the state of emergency (ibid: 196).

The Russian and TMR Militaries

Russian military support for the Transnistrian separatists during the 1992 war and afterwards has perhaps been the single most important factor in the TMR's ability to resist re-integration with Moldova. Russia's Fourteenth Army, based in Transnistria during the Cold War, intervened during the Dniester conflict as peacekeepers in a putative effort to end the violence. By forcing an end to hostilities while secessionist forces still controlled the Transnistria territory, the intervention produced a status quo that was for practical purposes a military victory for the TMR. Since then, the presence of the Russian forces has given the Republic of Moldova a powerful disincentive for resuming the conflict.

Continued Russian support for separatists in the TMR, as with Russian support for Georgia's separatists, has been in part motivated by an effort to reassert their influence in the

former Soviet space, Russia's 'near abroad'. Writing at the outset of this century, Lynch (2002: 845) contends that Russia has "sought to compel Chisinau and Tbilisi to accede to Russian security demands in the shape of forward basing rights, military cooperation and border cooperation." Support for separatists is, in this view, largely a bargaining chip. But this assumes a forward strategy by Russia whereas in actuality their overriding goal may be merely to arrest the erosion of former Soviet space and check the tilt of yet another former Soviet republic towards NATO and the West. Some see this strategy of agitating internal conflicts as a form of "divide and conquer" which has been used by Moscow to maintain influence in several newly independent states (Pelczynska-Nalecz et al, 2008: 381). The August 2008 war in Georgia appears to illustrate this willingness by Russia to use support for separatists as a tool to assert influence and keep NATO from its borders. Likewise, the Russian army trained TMR forces until "at least" as late as 2001 (Borgen, 2006: 79).

However, reasserting of influence in former Soviet space is not the only motivation for Russian support for the TMR. Additional motivations include extensive links between their respective military-industrial complexes; links between the security forces themselves; economic interests of some Russian powerbrokers; lobbying by the TMR regime; assertive Transnistrian resistance to Russian withdrawal; and popular political support among Communists and nationalist deputies in the Duma for a Russian state mission as a defender of Slavs and the Russian diaspora. Regardless of the actual role of ethnicity in the Transnistrian conflict, the ethnic dimension gives Russia, Ukraine and Romania cause to assert themselves as mediators in its resolution (Williams, 1999: 82). Russia in particular has presented itself as a peacekeeper defending minorities from aggression, and nationalist elements in Russia's Duma have expressed staunch support for the TMR's role as putative protector of Slavic rights.

Ties Between the Russian and TMR Security Forces

Strategically located near the southwestern border of the Soviet Union, the presence of the Fourteenth Army in Transnistria reinforced the connections between the region and the broader USSR. At the same time, the Fourteenth's presence diminished the importance of a separate Moldovan identity while bolstering the sense of Soviet identity. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of the soldiers and officers were from the Transnistrian region itself. The Fourteenth Army commander Lebed estimated that 40% of the Fourteenth's officers and 90% of the non-commissioned officers were recruited locally (Kolsto et al., 1993: 995). Moreover, a large number of Soviet soldiers and officers had retired to Transnistria with their families, making it "one of the most highly sovietized territories within [the Soviet Union]" (King, 2000: 184).

During the nationalist Moldovan Popular Front's August 1989, 'Grand National Assembly' demonstration for passage of proposed Moldovan language laws, speeches called for Moldovan sovereignty and the president of the nationalist 'Alexei Mateevici Club' urged the withdrawal of the Soviet "army of occupation" from Moldova (King, 2000: 130). Because a large portion of the soldiers and officers were from Transnistria, they had nowhere else to return to if the army was withdrawn and the USSR dissolved. At the same time, many of these soldiers were not ethnically Moldovan, and therefore had no desire to separate from the Soviet Union or Russia. For their part, Soviet military planners both in Moldova and Moscow would likely have viewed demands to leave Moldovan territory as a serious threat to Soviet security interests. The perception that Western agents were behind the Moldovan drive for independence and unity with Romania ran deep.

During the subsequent break-up of the Soviet Union and Moscow's lack of control over the Soviet military, many officers and soldiers of the Fourteenth Army defected to join the TMR forces. Top Russian officers who defected were rewarded with senior positions in the new TMR regime. For example, the Fourteenth Army's commander, Lieutenant-General Genadii Iakovlev (Yakovlev), defected to become the head of the TMR forces (King, 2000: 192). Likewise, the former chief of staff of the Fourteenth Army, Colonel Stefan Chitac, became the TMR's Defense Minister (ibid). With these high-level defections and the break-up of the Soviet state, lower-ranking officers and soldiers joined the TMR forces, bringing with them control of significant military equipment (ibid). In some cases, entire Soviet units appear to have defected to the separatist forces (Borgen, 2006: 75-76).

The TMR-Russian military linkages and personal connections that were built by the defections of Soviet troops were reinforced by the Russian army continuing to take Transnistrian conscripts after 1991 (King, 2000: 201). By April 1992, Moscow was reasserting control over the former Soviet military, and declared the Fourteenth Army to be under control of the Russian Federation. Smirnov responded by inviting its officers to join the Transnistrian forces (Neukirch, 2002: 236).

The cross-pollination and shared Soviet identity between the Transnistrian forces and the Soviet-Russian army may have also played a role in the decision by members of the Fourteenth Army to become involved in the Dniester conflict. There have been several suggestions that elements of the Fourteenth were essentially freelancing. Perhaps the most telling clue about the views of Moscow on the Fourteenth's intervention is that Lieutenant-General Iurii Netkachev, the commander of the Fourteenth, was replaced by Major-General Alexander Lebed within days of its support for the TMR forces in Bendery on June 20 (King, 2000: 195). Furthermore, the

Russian defense ministry “never publicly claimed responsibility for ordering the intervention” (ibid). In any case, the linkages and overlap between the Russian and Transnistrian forces would facilitate the continued acquisition of stockpiled Soviet arms by the TMR forces and black-market actors.

Soviet Weapon Stockpiles

During the Soviet era, the Transnistria region was developed as a center for defense manufacturing, and large stockpiles of munitions were kept there for the Soviet Fourteenth Army. These munitions stockpiles remained in the territory after the breakup of the USSR. According to a 2006 report from the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, the Soviet-era weapons stockpiles have been a source of revenue for both the TMR and Russians through “joint Russian-TMR sales of army material on the world market” (Borgen, 2006: 10). Although evidence suggests that allegations of recent illegal arms trafficking from the TMR are exaggerated (ICG, 2006: 5; Ciobanu, 2007: 6), the widespread theft from Soviet stockpiles in the early 1990s does not seem to be in doubt. Instead, evidence points to significant theft and proliferation from Soviet warehouses during the early 1990s, followed by a slowing of weapons theft following the re-consolidation of control from Moscow.

As noted above, Soviet soldiers and units defecting to the new TMR security forces brought significant military equipment with them. Likewise, the TMR forces acquired additional equipment “from poorly guarded Fourteenth Army stores” (King, 2000: 191-192). Shortly after the Dniester conflict, the new commander of the Fourteenth Army commander Lebed strongly criticized the war-profiteering by Smirnov and his allies (ibid: 200). Later, the commander of the Russian garrison in Tiraspol, Colonel Bergman, placed mines around some weapons warehouses

to prevent theft (ibid: 201). Colonel Bergman has made additional allegations about Soviet era weapons being moved from Germany and Czechoslovakia to Transnistria. These allegations were printed in the Russian magazine “*Political Journal*” in 2005 and reprinted in Moldova (Belitser, 2005: 2). According to the International Crisis Group (2004: 8), “Russian security officials have made no effort to regain weapons stolen by, or given to, the [TMR] during the [Dniester] conflict, instead merely writing them off the inventory”.

As with other Soviet era assets, the Smirnov regime has used control over Soviet weapon stockpiles, or control over the territory where they are held, to solidify and maintain its position. In the early 1990s, the TMR regime claimed that all Soviet military assets in the territory belonged to the new state, and demanded compensation if the assets were removed (ICG, 2004: 5). In February of 1995, the regime declared that the military assets could not be removed from the territory. In order to prevent removal of the equipment, TMR security forces set up checkpoints around the facilities (ibid). The Russian leadership accepted this in part because of elements of the Russian government and military wished to maintain a base in Transnistria and project influence over the ‘near abroad’. On March 20, 1998, Russia and the TMR signed an agreement where certain categories of weapons, equipment and ammunition would be sold from the Soviet stockpiles, with the revenues from the sales being divided between the Russian Federation and the TMR (Borgen, 2006: 82). In 2001, the TMR regime allowed the removal of more munitions in exchange for relief of \$100 million of its debt on Russian natural gas imports, some military equipment, and other compensation (ICG, 2004: 7). The OSCE believes that as of August 2004, an estimated 20,887 metric tons of ammunition and around ten trainloads of military equipment remained in the TMR (Borgen, 2006: 20).

Military-Industrial Linkages

Despite disputes with the Russian government over the fate of the Soviet weapon stockpile, the region's military production sector remains important and maintains strong links to Russian companies (ICG, 2004: 15). Smirnov has "frequently trumpeted the region's arms exports" (King, 2000: 206), and factories in the TMR continue to manufacture arms and components for Russian companies and Russia's State Committee for Arms Export (ICG, 2004: 8). The TMR's military industrial production remains important enough that the International Crisis Group (ibid) asserted that the Russian defense ministry's "economic interests" and the broader "Russian military-industrial interest in Transdnistriean arms production have tainted prospects for resolving the [Dniester] conflict".

Civil Society and Political Parties

Freedom House classified the TMR as "not free" in 2008, and noted that freedom of assembly and freedom of association are severely restricted (Freedom House, 2008). The regime had largely been able to prevent the development of opposition political parties until as late as 2006. In 2005 there were only two registered political parties in the TMR, both were communist and neither "had substantial influence over political life in the region" (Protsyk, 2008: 15). Because political candidates were forced to run independently, without the support of a political party, potentially troublesome candidates were easier to defeat and their messages are easier to suppress.

In the summer of 2006, multiple "virtual parties and political movements" were established to give the impression of a multi-party system and to add to the perceived legitimacy of the regime (Popescu, 2006: 7). However, the new parties and movements that were

established lacked independence and were closely linked to the regime. For example, Oleg Smirnov, the president's son and a member of Parliament, is the leader of the Patriotic Party of Transnistria that was established in August 2006 (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 21). Interestingly, Oleg stated during his acceptance of the leadership of the Patriotic Party that, as chairman of the Transnistrian branch of Gazprombank, the Party would have "Gazprom's resources" for use in its propaganda (Socor, 2006).

A notable exception to the regime's control and prohibition of opposition parties is the reformist 'Renewal' movement, which was also allowed to register as political party that summer, largely because members of the movement had dominated the December 2005 parliamentary elections.

Civil Society Organizations

In addition to creating allied political parties, the TMR regime has established a number of civil society organizations and associations, or "*obshetvennyye organizatsii*", which lack independence from authorities (Popescu, 2006: 9). At the same time, the regime has taken an active and aggressive approach to dealing with independent civil society organizations. The head of the Transnistrian Ministry of State Security (MGB), Vladimir Antiufeev (Vadim Atyufeev) has expressed the view of the regime on independent civil society organizations this way: "the subversive activities of foreign intelligence services through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is becoming more and more a dominant security threat" to Transnistria, and "many NGOs are to be used as an instrument of accomplishing a *coup d'état*" (quoted in Popescu, 2006: 8). In 2009, the US State Department (USG, 2009: 15) noted that "(a)ll associations favoring reintegration with the Moldovan national government are strictly prohibited".

Although it is unclear if Antiufeev and other regime members truly believe that foreign governments are behind the liberal and reformist civil society groups, he clearly views the organizations as a credible threat that must be dealt with. Therefore, the Ministry of State Security itself engages in the creation of patriotic and pro-independence civil society organizations (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 21). These regime-controlled organizations serve multiple purposes. In conjunction with regime-controlled media, they disseminate and reinforce the regime's message, reinforce the sense of a Transnistrian identity, and create a façade of an active and patriotic civil society.

For example, the government-supported youth movement *Proriv* (Breakthrough) is linked to the TMR security services, and is said to receive orders directly from the regime (ICG, 2006: 10). The founder of *Proriv* is Dmitri Soin, who is himself an officer in the MGB (state security), a university lecturer in sociology, and head of the Che Guevara School of Political Leadership (Isachenko, 2008: 16). The Che Guevara School offers short courses on practical skills in political organizing, media and marketing geared towards future leaders of patriotic Transnistrian organizations (ibid).

In 2005, Soin described the rationale behind the establishing *Proriv* this way: “velvet revolutions could not be stopped by either counterrevolutions, or conservative projects, or administrative resources. Only a counter wave, no less charged with energy and ideology, can destroy the revolutionary flow directed against the political system” (quoted in Belitser, 2005: 3). As Crisis Group notes (2006: 18), “having been separated from Moldova for fifteen years, Transdnistrians, particularly those under 30, are losing any allegiance they may have held to a Moldovan state”. Because of this, government-sponsored civil society groups that that promote

Transnistrian identity and patriotism have an important role for the regime, particularly movements involving Transnistrian youth.

Proriv's links to the regime and its security forces have been used to organize youth demonstrations against reformist legislation, such as on July 5, 2006, when they protested against land reforms that were to be proposed by the reformist Renewal movement (Crisis Group, 2006: 10). In another instance, the head of the OSCE mission William Hill complained of the "inactivity of local police" during a *Proriv* protest at the OSCE, and said that they had support from the TMR security services (Belitser, 2005: 4). On July 26, 2006 *Proriv* affiliates founded the People's Democratic Party – Breakthrough (Socor, 2006).

Several of these fabricated civil society organizations have also been involved in lobbying foreign governments and populations for policies favorable to the TMR. For example, the International Crisis Group (2004: 11) calls the Transnistrian organization 'Union of Ukrainians of Transnistria' a TMR "front organization designed to lobby Kiev over its "one-sided" approach to the [TMR-Moldova] crisis".

Foreign funding for NGOs that engage in politics was banned in March 2006 (Popescu, 2006: 8). TMR authorities have discretion in deciding what NGO activities are political, and the definition of 'foreign funding' also includes funding from domestic businesses that are more than 20% foreign owned (ibid). In addition to this restriction on foreign funds, Transnistrian 'citizens' only have the legal right of association with other citizens of the TMR (USG, 2009: 15). In 2008, the director of one Transnistrian NGO was arrested "for illegally downloading NGO-related documents" (ibid: 22). A notable exception to these restrictions on foreign funds and association has been the opening of branches of several patriotic Russian NGOs in the TMR, which the

regime views as “an important channel for humanitarian aid and political support” (ICG, 2004: 18).

Reliance on government funding creates strong incentives for loyalty among civil society organizations and their employees. Dissemination of the regime’s message is necessary to continue receiving support, while criticism of the regime or excessive independence will result in loss of support or employment. It should be noted here that similar, often justified criticisms have been leveled at NGOs operating in freer societies and countries. In order to maintain funding, especially state funding, even genuinely independent NGOs may have to avoid some activities or forfeit a level of objective commentary in order to satisfy the preferences of their financial supporters. However, in the TMR there is virtually no alternative to state funding for NGOs that engage in politics, and therefore no marketplace for organizations proposing alternative viewpoints.

With the exception of civil society organizations linked to Russian political parties or Russian patriotic movements, foreign organizations and even the EU have not supported civil society groups in the TMR (Popescu, 2006: 9). Furthermore, there is very little interaction between Moldova’s civil society organization’s and those of Transnistria (Mikhelidze and Pirozzi, 2008: 37). This lack of interaction has been reinforced on both sides. For example, secessionists attacked the chairman of the Moldovan Helsinki Committee when he visited the TMR for a human rights event in July 2005 (ibid: 38). In Moldova, the Voronin administration has furthered the isolation of independent Transnistrian civil society organizations by discouraging contact between Moldovan and Transnistrian organizations due to an (apparently misguided) negotiating strategy (Crisis Group, 2006: 18). Ironically, but not surprisingly, the Smirnov regime has supported this Chisinau policy (ibid).

There are a number of neopatrimonial aspects to this arrangement with ‘fake’ civil society organizations. At the regime level, elites use their control of security services and media to discredit and undermine reformers and regime opponents. In addition, they use the state budget to cultivate private organizations and networks of support. At the organizational level, the groups are used to distribute patronage through job placement and financial support for loyal organizations. Within the organizations themselves, there exists opportunities for diversion of the organization’s resources for personal enrichment and membership benefits. In addition, the regime-controlled media serves to reinforce the appearance of popular support for the organizations and provides the organizations with a tool for disseminating their attacks on regime opponents. The increased media and public visibility that accompanies civil society organizations serves as an additional incentive for up-and-coming, politically-active regime loyalists. This is particularly important for patriotic youth organizations such as *Proriv*, who take strong public stands on topics that are widely supported by the regime and covered by the regime-controlled media, and serve as training for future leaders (Belitser, 2005: 3-5).

In addition to establishing dependent civil society organizations, the Smirnov regime has sought distance itself from the Moldovan Orthodox Church and to develop closer ties with the Russian Orthodox Church. In the early 1990s, the regime “denounced clergymen from the right bank territories [rump Moldova]” through its communications with the Moscow Patriarchate (ICG, 2004: 18). Both the Moldovan Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church in Moldova are under the jurisdiction of Patriarch of Moscow, but in 1995 a distinct curacy (akin to a diocese or parish) was established in Transnistria with an ethnic Russian as its bishop. Although the curacy remains subordinate to the Metropolitan Bishop of Moldova (and both are subordinate to the Patriarch of Moscow), the borders of the curacy were revised in 1998 to

precisely reflect the borders of the TMR (ibid). Moreover, officials of the church have been observed to call Smirnov “president” (ibid). These moves have been important for the regime in reinforcing a separate Transnistrian identity and portraying the quasi-state as being somewhat recognized by the Orthodox Church.

The Renewal Movement

Nevertheless, there are independent organizations in the TRM that focus on political issues despite their isolation and limited resources. Belitser (2005: 6) estimates that out of the approximately 600 registered NGOs in the TMR, at least 20 NGOs and two newspapers “might be regarded as genuine and to some extent, independent”. Some of these organizations have opened bank accounts in rump Moldova so that they can access foreign funds without TMR regime interference (Mikhelidze and Pirozzi, 2008: 38). However, Mikhelidze and Pirozzi (ibid: 40) conclude that it is “impossible” for these organizations to promote their activities through the government controlled press.

The most significant and successful independent political organization has been the ‘Renewal’ movement. The reformist Renewal (*Obnovlenie*) movement was founded in 2000 to seek reforms of presidential authority and end the TMR’s isolation so that Transnistrian businesses could expand (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 22). Many Transnistrian business owners have supported the Renewal movement out of a desire for increased opportunities for legitimate trade and an end of the country’s isolation (Popescu, 2006: 12-13). Notably, the *Sheriff* corporation has strong links with the Renewal movement despite the tax, trade and monopolistic advantages it receives from the TMR regime and its alleged early links to the Smirnov family. The Transnistrian author Martynov has even called Renewal the “political

wing” of *Sheriff* (quoted in Korobov and Byanov, 2006: 520). The US State Department (USG, 2009: 12) asserts that *Sheriff* “effectively controlled the Obnovlenie [Renewal] Party”.

The Renewal movement publicly supports continued TMR independence (Freedom House, 2008). However, their commitment to the independence issue, and where it ranks in comparison to ending isolation for TMR businesses, is debated among TMR observers (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 22). In what appears to be an admission that support for independence is largely for political expedience, Renewal’s leader Shevchuk has been quoted as stating “any Transnistrian politician who would say that he is for a de jure Moldova automatically becomes cadaver in Transnistrian politics” (Popov, 2006). However, there is also a strong reason to believe that many Renewal members are indeed supportive of independence due to concerns among business owners about how Moldovan law will treat their previously state-owned assets.

Led by then Deputy Speaker of the Supreme Soviet Evgheni Shevchuk, the movement first sought to pass a series of reforms in the spring of 2005. These included the creation of a Prime Minister position separate from the presidency, a more independent judiciary, and a stronger legislature (Popescu, 2006: 12). The reformers were accused of “trying to usurp power in the country”, and pressure for the reforms was soon dropped (Isachenko and Schlichte, 2007: 22).

Despite the failure of these reforms, later that year members of the ‘Renewal’ movement won 23 seats in the December 2005 parliamentary elections, compared to Smirnov’s *Respublika* Party’s 13 seats (Freedom House, 2008). Notably, the director of *Sheriff*, I. Kazmal, received the highest number of votes for the Supreme Soviet (Korobov and Byanov, 2006: 520). After the victory, Shevchuk was elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet with 39 votes to one (ibid: 523).

Yet it was not until June 2006, the summer when the numerous ‘fake’ political parties and organizations were created, that the movement officially registered as a political party (ICG, 2006: 10).

The turnout for the December 11, 2005 parliamentary elections was approximately 50% of registered voters (Korobov and Byanov, 2006: 521). Interestingly, turnout was highest in the agricultural areas of Grigoriopol and Kamenka, and lowest in the urban and industrial cities of Tiraspol and Bendery (ibid: 521). Also significant is that ‘Renewal’ won 75% of the Tiraspol votes and 50% of Bendery votes, while Smirnov’s Respublika party won 57% of Ribnitsa and 66% of Dubossary (ibid: 524). It therefore cannot be said that either party had consistently stronger support in urbanized areas, as might have been expected.

The seriousness of the split between ‘Renewal’ and the Smirnov regime is unclear and its depth is debated by observers. Isachenko and Schlichte (2007: 23) write that “(w)hether Smirnov is at the top of this power figuration or is challenged by the business group is, however, not easy to discern”. In contrast, the International Crisis Group (2006: 10) argues that protests by the youth movement *Proriv* against Renewal-backed reforms are significant because *Proriv* “is thought to get its orders directly from the regime”. Moreover, in 2007 Shevchuk, the head of the Renewal movement, asked publicly about \$27 million collected in 2006 to be paid for natural gas imports from Russia, which was not delivered (Isachenko, 2008: 10-11). The Smirnov family-linked Transnistrian branch of Gazprombank was responsible for transferring the funds, so Shevchuk was making a significant public accusation about financial mismanagement by the Smirnov-family and its associates (ibid). Furthermore, Renewal has also been working to establish better connections with Moscow. As a result of their successful lobbying efforts, the parliament of TMR, not the president, “is now in charge of distributing new funds from

Moscow” (ibid: 11). For their part, allies of Smirnov speaking in the Duma accused Shevchuk and *Sheriff* of plotting a coup in the TMR (Solovyev and Zygar, 2006).

Renewal therefore has been a genuine challenge to the status quo and the TMR regime. As one senior Western diplomat told the International Crisis Group, “(t)he consensus is that a substantial proportion of the Transdnestrian business community is ready to sign up to Chisinau’s rules”, and that they “know that there is money to be made in legal business” (ICG, 2006: 11).

Russian Parties and Organizations in the TMR

Nationalist and communist Russian politicians with links to the Smirnov regime have also established branches of their parties in the region to solicit votes from Transnistrian holders of Russian citizenship (ICG, 2004: 18). These parties have included the far-right Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. According to a senior Western diplomat, Russia uses a Liberal Democratic Party of Russia office in Tiraspol “as a de facto consulate” to provide passports to any Transnistrians who ask (ICG, 2006: 17). The TMR regime supports the Russian government in providing Russian citizenship for its population and facilitates voting by its citizens during Russian elections. TMR-backed NGOs have even provided support for some of these parties in their campaigns for the Russian Duma (ibid). Interestingly, Smirnov has a Russian passport and votes in all Russian elections (Lynch, 2002: 847).

For their part, deputies of the Russian Duma have acted as election observers in the TMR, and claimed them to be fair (ICG, 2004: 19). They have also passed multiple resolutions in the Duma supporting economic and military agreements with the TMR, and some supporting

TMR sovereignty. Munteanu (2002: 224) notes that “(p)opulist rhetoric about the plight of the Russian diaspora became an important element in the domestic competition among Russian elites.” Support for Transnistrian separatists provided Russian politicians with a relatively easy means for demonstrating their nationalist credentials. While the nationalist rhetoric may have little concrete influence over Russian foreign policy, the TMR regime portrays this domestically as evidence of support from Moscow (Lynch, 2002: 846).

On the other hand, in what is additional evidence that the TMR is not simply a Russian puppet, the Putin administration has attempted to pressure the TMR regime by supporting its opposition. In an effort to coerce Smirnov into cooperating with Moscow’s plans for a resolution to the Dniester conflict, a local branch of Putin’s Edinstvo (Unity) Party attempted to register in the TMR’s 2000 elections and the Putin administration began to support Smirnov’s left-wing opposition (ICG, 2004: 6-7). In response, the Edinstvo party itself was not allowed to register, although it remained active as a group, and the TMR regime brought the main left-wing opposition groups to court, eventually having them banned (ibid: 7). Before being pressured by the Smirnov regime to stop, a “significant number of influential directors of Transnistrian state enterprises” had supported the new Edinstvo group (ibid: 6-7).

Industrial Workers

Writing in 1998, Kolsto and Malgin (1998: 113) observed that the TMR’s economic policies and resistance to reform had not been driven by communist ideology, but rather “by the need to hold on to the support of the workers’ organizations”. Reforms that would cause “the closure of unprofitable enterprises and mass lay-offs” were not an option (ibid). Workers’ organizations had played a central role in mobilizing support for the TMR regime during

secession and after the conflict. During the Moldovan nationalist mobilization of the late 1980s and early 1990s, industrial workers united with 'Russophone' *nomenklatura* to resist the "Romanianization" of Transnistria. Smirnov's path to the presidency began with being in charge of Transnistria's Elektromash factory when, in August 1989, he was elected chairman of the United Council of Workers Collectives (OSTK) (King, 2000: 188). The OSTK had been formed from multiple Transnistrian workers' collectives and had organized strikes against the Moldovan language laws (ibid). Currently, according to Freedom House (2008), the trade unions in the TMR "are holdovers from the Soviet era" and the United Council of Labor Collectives "works closely with the government".

Prior to secession, potential adoption of Moldovan language laws was perceived to threaten the positions of Russophone industrial workers in much the same way as it threatened the positions of Russophone elites. Adoption of the Moldovan language laws would provide Moldovan workers with greater competitiveness in accessing jobs, and at the same time provide Moldovan managers opportunities to displace Russophones in the upper tiers. Likewise, independence from the Soviet Union also threatened workers in industries dependent on trade links with other regions within the Union. Transnistria's industrial and military sectors relied on strong links between the region and the rest of the Soviet Union (King, 2001: 532). In fact, Kolsto and Malgin (1998: 113) assert that "Transnistrian enterprises [were] completely dependent on raw materials from Russia and access to the Russian market for its products". Because of this reliance, workers in sectors dependent on ties with the Soviet Union had strong incentives to support mobilization for TMR independence from Moldova and continued membership in the USSR.

At the time of secession, Transnistria was the center of Moldova's industry, and liberal market reforms threatened to create broad unemployment. Of course, this was not unique to Transnistria, nor were the efforts of the Transnistrian leadership to maintain trade links that had existed under the Soviet system unique. Writing about the broader impact of the Soviet collapse across the Soviet Union, Derluguian (2005: 274) observes that provincial governors "fell back" on their "inherited networks of bureaucratic patronage, which were now deployed against the looming market destruction of the substance of their provincial societies". He continues that during the collapse of the Soviet Union, provincial governors worked to construct "networks of barter exchange that assured the survival of bankrupt enterprises despite frozen bank accounts" (ibid: 275). Likewise, King (2000: 206) observes that after the TMR's secession, its large industry continued to operate "mainly through barter trade with firms in Russia and Ukraine" (King, 2000: 206).

Exploiting these 'inherited networks of bureaucratic patronage' and working toward the continued operation of bankrupt enterprises resulted in maintaining employment opportunities for workers, at least in the short-term. Regime members and their allies worked to maintain trading linkages with important partners in the former Soviet states, such as Gazprom, in order to keep their businesses functional. Although these activities were largely undertaken for personal motivations, their net impact of maintaining employment opportunities supported livelihoods during a difficult period of transition.

By providing continued support to uncompetitive enterprises through sundry subsidies, favorable tariff regimes, bartering, smuggling opportunities, and by retaining clientelistic alliances with powerbrokers in Moscow, Kiev and Chisinau, the Transnistrian regime maintained

short-term shelter for industrial workers from the impacts of market reforms. Each of these forms of support is described elsewhere in this paper, so need not be addressed here.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

The industrialized nature of the TMR, especially in comparison to rump Moldova, has allowed the regime and its state-controlled media to portray reunification with agricultural Moldova as costly and dangerous to the Transnistrian economy (Popescu, 2006: 11-12). This in turn would threaten the livelihoods of Transnistrian industrial workers and business owners, whose enterprises would also allegedly be threatened by reunification. In addition, because the TMR regime has been willing to accrue a massive debt, it has been able to spend more on select social services. For example, as recently as 2004 the average pension in the TMR was around twice the size of the average pension in rump Moldova (ICG, 2004: 13).

Even though the TMR enjoyed early economic advantages, including its large industrial base and urbanized population, the quasi-state's economy has suffered severely since the early 1990s. While this was largely due to the relatively uncompetitive nature of Soviet-era industrial production, the regime's use of state assets and institutions for private enrichment and political influence have worsened the situation. Thanks to its large industrial sector, in 1991-1992 the Transnistria region had one of the highest standards of living in the CIS area (Kolsto and Malgin, 1998: 113). It had also initially been able to avoid the rapid economic declines experienced by some other transitioning Soviet states. For example, in 1992 it experienced a loss of only 6% in production compared to a 20% loss in rump Moldova (ibid: 112-113). Other estimates maintain that the TMR's GNP actually grew 4% between 1991 and 1994 (O'Loughlin et al, 1998: 14). However, by 1998 the TMR was one of the poorest regions in former Soviet space (Kolsto and

Malgin, 1998: 113). Because the TMR's industry is so reliant on trade, changes in its trade balance are especially telling. In 1995, the TMR was a net exporter with a trade balance of surplus \$74.7 million (CISR, 2007: 4). However, this has reversed rapidly and by 2005 the region had a \$260.1 million trade balance deficit (ibid).

The active albeit unsustainable industrial economy combined with comparatively high social spending used to serve as a fairly successful propaganda campaign. For example, a poll conducted in 2000 found that most Transnistrians believed they lived better than their counterparts in Moldova (ICG, 2004: 13). In reality, Williams (1999: 75) asserts that by 1999 the TMR had fallen to the lowest per capita standards of living in the former Soviet Union. Moreover, the per capita debt in the TMR is approximately six times the per capita debt in Moldova (Popescu, 2006: 11).

By the time of the December 11, 2005 parliamentary elections, efforts to pacify desires for reform had started to show signs of failing, as evidenced by the reformist Renewal movement's landslide victory. Voter turnout for the 2005 parliamentary elections was highest in the agricultural areas of Grigoriopol and Kamenka, and lowest in the industrialized centers of Tiraspol and Bendery (Korobov and Byanov, 2006: 521). Had industrial workers continued to feel that the system was working, they would have turned out to vote and supported Smirnov. Instead, Renewal won 75% of the Tiraspol votes, although Smirnov's Respublika party did win 57% of Ribnitsa, home of the MMZ steelworks (ibid: 524).

This thesis has provided an extensive empirical analysis of the TMR in order to answer two questions: *'To what extent does neopatrimonialism explain the regime endurance of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic?'* and *'What does the case of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic reveal about neopatrimonialism and regime endurance over time?'* In answering the

first question, the thesis argued that neopatrimonialism has played a highly significant role in sustaining the TMR regime. Returning to Kolsto's (2006: 729) five factors that "contribute to the viability of unrecognized quasi-states", neopatrimonial structures have been critical in sustaining three of Kolsto's five factors – maintaining a strong military, retaining a strong external patron (Russia in this case), and constructing a national identity. Beyond Kolsto's factors, neopatrimonial structures have provided substantial financial incentives to bureaucrats, business owners, and foreign elites to support the continued TMR independence. Despite the lack of international recognition and the diminishing *raison d'être* of protecting minority rights, the TMR regime was able to use its control over former Soviet institutions to reward allies and supporters in key interest groups. Likewise, sanctions and penalties for opposition to the regime had until recently been cost-prohibitive.

In answering the second question, the thesis argued that although neopatrimonialism is vital to understanding the power structure of TMR, neopatrimonialism is not a stable structure. Rather it has internal contradictions which generate instability and the emergence of opposition. One can see this in the case of the emergence of the Renewal movement and the current power struggle between Soviet era elites and the post-Soviet oligarchs who are oriented toward Russia and Europe. The IMF's Charap and Harm (1999: 17) argue that "(a)t some point, the predatory dictator receives more legitimacy (job security) from benevolence, rather than through patronage", and that a corrupt bureaucracy may become "a hindrance to the changing objectives of the increasingly benevolent ruler". In some cases this may be true, but it does not reflect recent developments in the TMR. Instead, the corrupt bureaucracy is becoming a hindrance to the changing objectives of an important segment of the regime's previous supporters and beneficiaries. In effect, the TMR regime has already dispersed its most valuable assets and

favors, and is now less useful to the beneficiaries of that largess. *Sheriff's* leadership in the Renewal movement exemplifies this shift by beneficiaries of neopatrimonialism. Initially, *Sheriff* was perhaps the largest beneficiary of patronage from the TMR regime. Today, *Sheriff* is perhaps the most important backer of an alternative locus of power to Smirnov.

Furthermore, political and economic changes in the TMR and in neighboring states make the status quo increasingly difficult to maintain. Because the TMR's neopatrimonial system is dependent on some level of collusion from outside its territory, particularly in Ukraine and Russia, the regime cannot control many of the factors that are necessary to maintain the system. The increasingly western orientation of legal trade also appears to be a factor in the TMR opposition's goal of reducing the quasi-state's isolation. In the early post-Soviet years, trade had largely been with CIS countries. For example, in 1995 exports to CIS countries accounted for about 80% of total exports, but by 2005, exports to CIS countries had declined to less than half of the TMR's total exports (CISR, 2007: 4). Moreover, nearly half of the TMR's trade is with the EU and the US (Popescu, 2006: 4). Therefore, in contrast to the regime's continued close ties with Russia, the "new business elite cannot but be oriented to the West", because the economy is so heavily based on exports and imports (Korobov and Byanov, 2006: 519).

However, the continued liberalization and market reform of the TMR is not certain. Similar developments in Russia suggest that post-Soviet regimes with strong institutions continue to have options to maintain their control. The political activism of some Russian oligarchs had several parallels with that of *Sheriff* and other liberalizing elites in the Renewal movement. However, the Putin administration appears to have outmaneuvered opposition oligarchs and reconsolidated state authority using a variety of institutions at the regime's disposal. Shevtsova (2005: 110) argues that in 2000, Putin succeeded in "taming the governors,

fighting the oligarchs, liquidating the independence of the Federation Council, pocketing the Duma, weakening all the other political institutions, and cowing the press”. The regime was even able to replace the head of Gazprom with a Putin ally and loyalist, Alexei Miller (Shevtsova, 2005: 188). The previous head of Gazprom had appeared to be “all powerful”, yet “was forced to leave without a struggle” (ibid). The differences between the Russian Federation and the TMR are numerous, but the Russian example demonstrates how even powerful business elites with extensive political connections can be overwhelmed by neopatrimonial regimes that tightly control dependent state institutions.

Neopatrimonialism as an Analytical Concept

The case of the TMR demonstrates how the examination of neopatrimonialism in states and bureaucratic institutions can provide fruitful insights for understanding the political and economic evolution of countries in transition. When a high degree of neopatrimonialism is present in state structures, it can influence policy-making by state institutions and be used as a tool for self-interested elites to retain their positions. However, even modern liberal democracies exhibit some elements of neopatrimonialism. These frequently include such behavior as the use of public office to advance the officeholder’s own career and the use of office to reward political backers with favorable policies or government contracts. Obviously, the degree to which patrimonial structures are embedded in state institutions and influence state policy-making varies widely.

With this in mind, the examination of neopatrimonial structures in states with significant neopatrimonialism can be particularly useful for scholars and policy makers in understanding some situations of unresolved conflict as well as evaluating foreign aid programs. As the case of

the TMR demonstrates, neopatrimonial structures may play a substantial role in hindering conflict resolution. Although neopatrimonialism may not be the primary obstacle to conflict resolution, it may reinforce other obstacles to resolution, serve as a disincentive for beneficiaries of neopatrimonialism to seek resolution, and neopatrimonial structures can be exploited by elites to forestall resolution. Policy prescriptions based on this analysis would include supporting international efforts to remove the benefits of the status quo political economy. As the TMR case indicates, isolation of businesses from legal international trade can serve as a powerful incentive for many business owners to support change.

Analysis of neopatrimonial systems and how they change over time is also directly applicable to improving foreign assistance to countries transitioning from centralized control to more liberal political and economic systems. Hellman (1998) observes that many policies are based on flawed assumptions about post-communist transitions. He argues that continued market liberalization is not necessarily blocked by groups that have suffered from the initial reforms, but is instead blocked by groups that have benefitted from the initial reforms and do not want continued market liberalization to threaten their gains. This flawed understanding about what elements are blocking liberalization “has led to a series of political prescriptions [...] to insulate the state from the pressures of the short-term losers until the reforms have created a constituency of winners powerful enough to sustain [the reforms]” (ibid: 203). The case of the TMR supports Hellman’s critique. A group of Soviet era elites and their allies have benefitted immensely from the partial liberalization of the Soviet economy, and they have exploited control over state institutions to retain and enhance both their economic and political positions. An improved understanding of neopatrimonial systems would assist in developing policies that accurately address the obstacles to reform. Whether the obstacles to reform derive from elites in highly

neopatrimonial states or otherwise, an accurate understanding of the situation is necessary to develop effective policies.

Furthermore, an examination of how personal interests of the leadership influence the bureaucracies and policy-making in illiberal states is useful in understanding, and possibly anticipating, the behavior of these states. North Korea and Zimbabwe are two fairly obvious examples where the concept of neopatrimonialism is useful in understanding and anticipating state behavior. Similarly, the case of the TMR demonstrates that increased focus on neopatrimonial systems in illiberal states would be useful in understanding the behavior of internal factions within those states. For example, an interesting parallel appears to exist between the Renewal movement's pressure to end the TMR's isolation and the alleged motivations of some current Iranian political elites for supporting policies and political candidates that would lessen Iran's isolation and increase options for international trade.

As this analysis of neopatrimonialism in Transnistria illustrates, in states where neopatrimonialism is significant, an examination of the neopatrimonial system itself provides a framework for examining disparate but interwoven elements of the state's politics that might otherwise be overlooked.

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APPENDIX A: ANNOTATED LIST OF FIGURES

Table 2 [Fair Use]

King, Charles. (2000) *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia and the Politics of Culture*. Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California. Fair use determination attached.