

## UNFREEZING 'THE TRANSNISTRIA CONFLICT' FROM THE LENS OF REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY

Amer ABABAKR\*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *Transnistrian is a frozen geopolitical conflict extends back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the formation of an independent Moldovan state. However, there has been little real movement toward a long-term conflict resolution until recently. The purpose of this research is to determine why, despite the efforts of the European Union, the Transnistrian conflict remains inactive and there is no clear prospect for resolving it. To answer this question, the integrated theory of regional security by Buzan and Weaver has been used. The results of this study show that Transnistria is part of a regional security complex under Russian influence, and its intersection with the security complex designed in the Eastern Partnership plan does not allow the EU to resolve the conflict. The difference in the power structures in the two complexes has an effect on the failure of this process. The matrix of regional security complexes in this area is centralized with sub-branches of superior power and superior institutions, and this has added to the complexity of conflict resolution.*

**Keywords:** *The European Union, Transnistria, the Conflict Resolution, the Eastern Partnership Policy, the Security Complexes, and the Frozen Conflict.*

**JEL Code:** F02

### Introduction

One of the knots in Moldova's foreign and domestic policy is the Transnistria conflict. The Transnistrian region is a narrow strip between Ukraine and Moldova, separated from Moldova by the Denister River. In September 1992, Transnistria decided to secede from Moldova. The violent phase of the conflict lasted 4 months and led to Russian intervention. Transnistria's independence was never recognized internationally. Negotiations to resolve the Transnistria conflict were pushed at the formal-informal and international-domestic levels between the leaders of Chişinău and Tiraspol, and de facto, Tiraspol officials were recognized as parties to the conflict.

The region is currently in a state of peace, but this does not mean resolving the conflict. 'Freeze conflict' is what is going on in Transnistria. This adjective refers to the set of conflicts that took place after the fall of the Soviet Union. Examples of frozen conflicts other than Transnistria include the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the Republic of Azerbaijan and South Ossetia-Abkhazia in Georgia. It will be useful to note that the Transnistria conflict, unlike other frozen conflicts in Georgia and the Republic of Azerbaijan, is not an ethnic conflict; rather, it is a historical and even geographical conflict between Moldova, the 'mother state', and Transnistria; in the broader sphere, it is between Moldova and Russia. In fact, it is called a 'frozen conflict,' in which the military phase is over; but the peace treaty has not been

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<sup>1</sup>Amer Ababakr holds Ph.D. degree, Cyprus International University,. His major is in Politics in the Middle East. E-mail: amir.mohammadbabekr@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-5845-8143

concluded. Therefore, this conflict can turn into a full-fledged conflict at any moment with the insecurity of the environment or any destabilizing factor.

After the end of the violent phase of the conflict, since the central government failed to ensure national integration, a de facto government was established in central Tiraspol, which wanted to maintain the status quo. The map below shows the geographical location of Transnistria. Frozen conflict is a major obstacle to the process of democratization and economic development in post-Soviet countries. These conflicts are a major source of security threats such as organized crime, violations of the rule of law, and illegal immigration. With these considerations in mind, the European Union gradually entered the international conflict resolution process as a foreign player. The multi-stage enlargement of the European Union has added to its identity, political and economic problems. The European Security Strategy states that the enlargement process has brought the EU closer to the troubled regions and that it is in Europe's interest for the neighboring countries to be in a stable position.

The main policy of the Union was to change the political, social, and economic structure of Moldova to one of resilience building. The entry of the European Union into this conflict went hand in hand. In the first step, Moldova invited the Union to intervene, and in the second step, the EU itself innovated to enter the game. In 2003, the ENP: European Neighborhood Policy was first introduced, and the groundwork was laid for the EU to enter the region. Three South Caucasus countries, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, and three Eastern European countries, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, were members. In 2005, the P5 + 2 talks between Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, Transnistria, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe + the US + began to resolve the conflict. In a joint article published by Merkel and Sarkozy in *Le Monde* in 2009, they called for an immediate solution with the cooperation of Russia to the Transnistria crisis.

In 2010, Moldova called for a change in the EU's position as an observer in the negotiations, which was approved by the EU representative in Chisinau. It was in this context that the European Union appointed a Special Representative for Moldova and emphasized border management. Given what has been said, the question arises as to why, despite the efforts made by the European Union, the Transnistria conflict remains inactive and there is no clear prospect for resolving it.

The goal of this research is to figure out why, despite the European Union's efforts, the Transnistrian issue remains dormant with no obvious path to resolution. Buzan and Weaver's integrated theory of regional security was employed to answer this question. The findings reveal that Transnistria is part of a regional security complex dominated by Russia, and that its junction with the security complex envisioned in the Eastern Partnership plan prevents the EU from resolving the conflict. The failure of this process is influenced by the differences in power structures between the two complexes. In this area, the matrix of regional security complexes is centralized, with sub-branches of superior power and superior capability. Thus, Transnistria is part of a regional security complex under Russian influence and that the matrix of regional security complexes and its intersection with the security complex rose in the Eastern Partnership do not allow the EU to resolve the conflict.

## 1. Different View to the Same Conflict

Due to the security implications of regional conflicts, the European Union places great emphasis on maintaining and establishing peace in its neighboring regions. The first category of works generally examines the impact of Eastern Partnership policy on the conflict resolution process in the countries covered by this plan. Grzegorz Gromadzki and Bastian Sendhardt (2015) from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in a detailed report examined the position of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in the European Neighborhood Policy after the Ukraine crisis. The second chapter of this report is about Moldova. The main question of this study is whether the EU's relations with these countries will deepen in the coming years in the framework of the Eastern Partnership policy. The challenges facing Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia are then examined.

The second category of studies emphasizes the Russian role in the process of resolving the Transnistria conflict. Delcour and Tulmets (2016), Fogarty (2010), Delcour and Wolczuk (2017), Staeger (2017), De Waal and Twickel, (2020), Karniewicz, Petrovicka and Wunsch (2010), Kamil (2015), Hill (2012), Schmidtke and Yekelchik (2008) are among them. In his article, Lavrelashvili (2018) examines the dimensions of conflict resolution in Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. The author argues that Europe has the same degree of differences and similarities in all of these countries, but the common threat to resolving the conflict in them is the Russian Federation, which, according to the author, strengthens the convergence of the European Union and these countries (Lavrelashvili, 2018). Reduce the power of Russian-centric communist parties and thus move towards greater stability.

The third category, based on the theory of governance, examines the European Union in the process of resolving the Transnistria conflict. For example, Giselle Bosse (2010), focusing on the political dimension of cooperation, examines EU-Moldova relations in the light of the implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy. Someone like Emerson (2019) also observed that the theoretical framework of his article is foreign governance. The theory of governance for other authors, such as Crombois (2019), Lippert (2019), Christou (2012), and Baltag (2016), also According to Korosteleva (2010), Cenușa (2019), and Montesano, Van der Togt and Zweers (2016), government influence and oligarchic control in Moldova have made the Transnistria conflict more difficult, and the ruling elite has not been able to make corrections.

The fourth group of studies with normative and legal dimensions has studied this important issue. Verdun and Chira (2008) believe that European law in Eastern Partnership countries has led to their greater convergence with European norms and values. The main indicators of this article are laws, legal institutions, and legal procedures. They conclude that this convergence trend is in many ways similar to the Copenhagen indices and increases Moldova's chances of joining the European Union. The spontaneous passage of time has rejected their hypothesis. Delcour and Wolczuk (2017), Vahl (2005), Dura (2011), Niemann and Wekker (2010) argue that the EU has the power to exert normative influence on Moldova. In a joint paper Vahl and Emerson, (2004) emphasized the normative dimension of EU policies and the adoption of an Europeanization approach to the Transnistria conflict resolution process. The fifth category of articles focuses more specifically on the issue of

EU border operations on the Transnistria border with Moldova and Ukraine. Delcour and Tulmets, (2015) emphasized the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM), the establishment of a visa-free travel system, and the DCFTA: Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. This article seeks to answer this question. To what extent have these policies enhanced relations between the EU and Moldova? The author further argues that political instability, the Transnistria conflict, and regional tensions are the most important obstacles to the proper progress of this policy. EUBAM: The European Union's Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine is also emphasized by Popescu (2011) and Attinà and Irrera (2010).

In the current study, I argue that Transnistria is part of a regional security complex dominated by Russia, and its intersection with the security complex envisioned in the Eastern Partnership plan prohibits the EU from settling the conflict. Thus, the study uses the regional security complex theory to examine the unresolved conflict in Transnistria. To this purpose, it investigates the role of external actors in the Transnistria crisis, particularly Russia's involvement.

## 2. The Regional Security Complex Theory and It's Applicability to the Issue

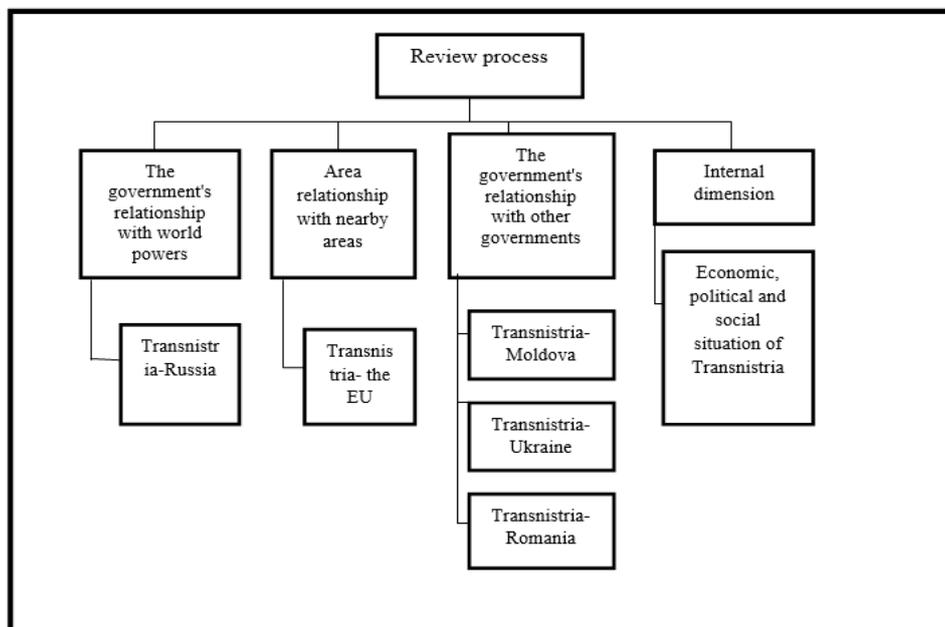
Post-Cold War international relations are explained by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver's theory of integrated regional security. This theory is explained in the book 'Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security (2005). This theory holds that regional security cannot be understood as an independent process and should be viewed in conjunction with other regional and global powers. The emphasis of this theory is on the security created by the actors (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). The present theory emphasizes the level of regional analysis, beyond the mere national or international level. At this level, security must be viewed from a hierarchical perspective. Buzan and Weaver mean a security complex, a set of units that interconnect the main processes of security, decontamination, or both. This theory was proposed to explain the international system after the Cold War. The countries that are currently covered by the Eastern Partnership policy, before entering into a regional mechanism with the European Union are part of the Russian-controlled regional security complex (Sazmand & Joukar, 2016). EU intervention in resolving inactive post-Soviet conflicts, including the Transnistria conflict' is also limited for this reason. The region is close to itself, and the relationship between the government and the superior powers occurs.

There are all these steps in the regional security complex, but depending on the area under analysis, each dimension may become more prominent. Based on this sequence, Buzan and Weaver define the types of security complexes as: standard, centralized, large power, and superior complexes (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). A centralized complex is an order in which a major player dominates security relations in a particular area. According to the pattern in the Transnistria conflict, the type of security complex in it can be called centralized. This focus can be based on a superior power, a great power, a regional power, or an institution (Ibid). Transnistria is part of a security complex based on a superior power, Russia, and an institution, 'the European Union'.

Variables involved in the classification of different types of regional security complexes include borders, anarchic structures, conflict, and social construction. These variables can be operated in the Transnistria security complex as follows:

**Border:** history and geography play an important role in the Transnistria conflict. Moldova was part of the ancient civilization of Bessarabia. A different historical experience led to the split of political views and the creation of two separate groups in Basra and Transnistria (Küchler, 2012). The first group is inclined towards the European security complex, and the second is toward the Russian security complex.

**Anarchic Structure:** In the Transnistria conflict, several actors are involved. This gives an anarchic character to this conflict (De Waal and Twickel, 2020). In addition, resolving the Transnistria conflict will affect other issues in the Moldovan Autonomous Region of Gagauzia<sup>1</sup>.



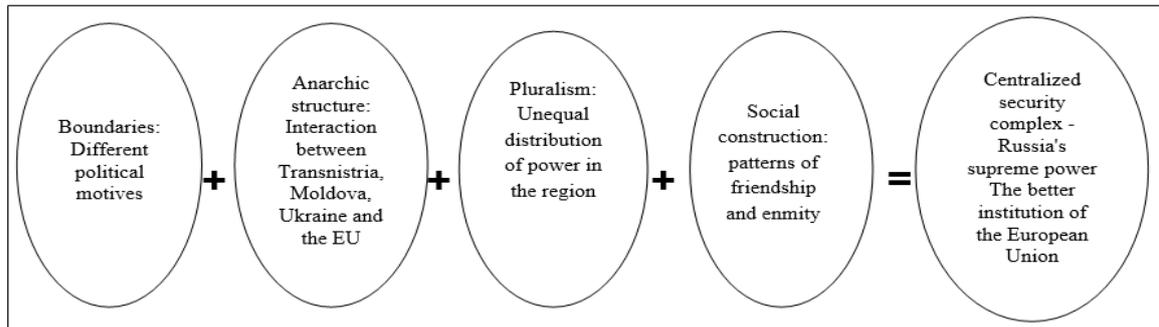
**Figure 1: the matrix of the regional security complex containing Transnistria**

Source: the author

**Conflict:** The distribution of power in this region is uneven, and we see a contradiction between the software power of the European Union and the hardware power of Russia on the one hand and a contradiction between the identities of Russophiles and Europhiles 'with a tendency towards Romanian identity' on the other (Cazat, 2019).

**Social Construction:** Buzan and Weaver mean social construction, the existence of patterns of friendship and enmity in the region. The identity pattern of friendship and enmity can be seen not only between Tiraspol and Chisinau, but also between Europe and Russia (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). The people of Transnistria completely reject the Romanian identity of Moldova. The variables involved in the Transnistria conflict can be summarized as shown in the figure 2.

<sup>1</sup>It refers to the autonomous and Turkic-speaking region of Moldova, which has declared independence since 1994.



**Figure 2. Structural variables of the security complex including Transnistria**

Source: the author

The case study is the methodology used mostly, with the goal of determining the application of Regional Security Complex Theory to Transnistria, discourse, and analysis. The thesis' findings suggest that inter-state relational dynamics based on security issues, power relations, and patterns of amilyty-enmity underplay the identity element in regional formation. As a result, the state is vulnerable to acting on the basis of socially manufactured images, weaknesses, and security concerns.

### 3. Internal Dimension of the Matrix

Buzan and Weaver mean internally in the matrix of a regional security complex, the internal weaknesses of a country that can pose a security threat to one or a group of states, even if that state has no hostile intentions. These weaknesses can be divided into three dimensions: economic, political, and social. Economically, Transnistria suffers from a budget deficit, and its economy needs foreign funding. Most of this assistance is provided by Russia (Seeters, 2010). The sizes of businesses are small and medium, and this has had a detrimental effect on the local economy. Trade plays an important role in the Transnistria economy. Due to the lack of international recognition of this region, its products must enter the world markets with the Moldovan customs seal. With Moldova's membership in the World Trade Organization, the situation has become more complicated (Kamil, 2015). Transnistria companies also have to register in Moldova. This means paying double tax. As a result, illegal trade has become more attractive. The largest economic player in Transnistria is the Sheriff Holding Company (Ababakr & Khaddar, 2021). The founders of this series, Ilya Kazmali and Viktor Gushan, have been the strongest men in Tiraspol since 1993. Sharif owns almost the entire economy of Transnistria. From chain supermarket 'Kvint Winery' to gas stations and TV networks, Sharif is so powerful that in 2016 Tiraspol borrowed from them to pay the arrears of retirees. Transnistria has a corrupt economy that smuggles counterfeit goods such as clothes and cigarettes (Vahl, 2005). Therefore, it is not able to attract foreign capital from any other country except Russia. Of course, there are other problems as well. For example, because this area has not been identified, its currency has no credit outside this area.

Regarding the political characteristics of Transnistria, it can be said that since the time of the de facto first president, Igor Smirnov, the region has taken on an authoritarian image.

The government controls the media, and freedom of association is very limited. Arbitrary arrests are also common (De Waal and Twickel, 2020). Smirnov opposed the improvement of Transnistria's relations with Moldova. He deliberately weakened the economy and ran it in his personal circle; because economic pluralism, in the long run, could lead to political pluralism and threaten its power. It was also in his interest to avoid cooperating with the European Union. In the end, it was not the European Union or Moldova that caused him to be marginalized, but the Russians and Sharif Investment Corporation. In other words, Transnistria's poor financial situation forced Smirnov to carry out a privatization program at a time when all industries and energy resources were in Russian hands (Montesano et al, 2016). Since 2011, when the second president, Yevgeny Shevchuk, came to power, a series of CIA inflammations and financial scandals continued. He realized the benefits of working with Europe; but on the one hand, he had to show that he had the ability to improve welfare in order to legitimize his government, and on the other hand, he was not able to exert political influence at the regional level, especially against Russia, to advance his plans. Overall, Smirnov and Shevchuk had consistent priorities for maintaining political power; however, their strategies to achieve this goal were different. In 2016, Shevchuk handed over power through an election to Vadim Krano Selsky (Dobrescu, 2015). Kranoselsky was, for many years, the most powerful actor in the economic field and was at the head of Sharif's company.

The sum of what was said showed its impact on the social dimension and especially on demographic changes. The rate of migration from this region is high, and at the same time, the birth rate is very low. On average, 2,000 people emigrate from Transnistria annually, and the birth rate there is negative 0.4. The population of the region has increased from 750,000 in 1992 to 469,000 in 2018 (Woehrel, 2014). However, about 30% of the total population is composed of retirees. Another important fact about the transnational social status of Steria is the existence of a Russian identity among citizens (Dobrescu, 2015). All the leaders of this region are black citizens, and about 100,000 Russians live there (Population Data, 2019). The situation of civil society in this region is also not suitable. Political isolation has further limited NGOs. This also negatively affects their access to external resources and makes their activities illegal. A collection of what has been said shows that Transnistria is internally a security threat and a moving bomb.

### 3.1 State to State Relationships

The second step in examining this matrix is the state's relationship with other states. In this section, we should examine the relationship of Transnistria with the states of Moldova, Ukraine, and Romania. The relationship between Moldova and Transnistria is very important because Moldova is on one side of the conflict (Dura, 2011). This relationship has always been associated with tension. In Transnistria, there is always propaganda against Moldova. Relationships have worsened since 2009. This year saw the Twitter revolution, and the country became highly polarized. For the first time since independence, pro-European parties were able to oust the Communist Party and seize power. Many Moldovan elites today measure conflict by cost-benefit analysis (Brown, 2015). Many believe that one of the reasons for the inactivity of the conflict is the desire of Moldovan leaders

to maintain the status quo. This region has been in the nation-state-building process for twenty-eight years beyond the control of the central government. Chisinau, meanwhile, has been and is constantly involved in other political and economic conflicts.

In 2005, the Moldovan parliament passed a law declaring that the Transnistria issue must be resolved peacefully (Montesano et al, 2016). Parliament called Transnistria an autonomous region. But this law was not implemented in practice. Moldova opposes any federalist solution to the conflict. Minorities advocating an alliance with Romania do not want to integrate with Transnistria and have no common interest with them. They fear that this would pave the way for Russian influence in their country. In fact, due to the artificial formation of the nation-state in Moldova and the Soviet communist policies, the process of becoming a collective own in Moldova is very complex and difficult, because this national attachment was never formed.

The second state involved, Romania, indirectly played a significant role in shaping the Transnistria conflict. In the second half of the 1980s, the effects of Gorbachev's reform policies manifested themselves as divisions in Moldovan society (Karniewicz et al, 2010). Moldovan nationalists called for reunification with Romania. Bucharest's official position has always been in support of Chisinau. Romania was the first country to recognize Moldova and take steps to integrate with it. Romania's position has a geopolitical dimension. However, in a referendum held in 1994, 95% of the people wanted to preserve Moldova's independence (Seeters, 2010). They sought an alliance with the Romanian territories of Moldova and the revival of Greater Romania, or the Golden Age of 1939–1939. When the conflict began, Romania was busy joining the European Union and NATO, and this, as a former member of the Warsaw Pact, made a lot of sense. Romania eventually joined NATO in 2004 and the European Union in 2007. From this year onward, the country sought to play a more active role in the Black Sea Basin and, in particular, in the Transnistria conflict (Dobrescu, 2015). In general, Romania has little to do with Transnistria and is not even a P5 + 2. Transnistria has never been Romania's priority in establishing relations. However, Klaus Werner wants the NATO and EU channels to resolve the dispute (Koolae, 2017). It is noteworthy that Romania was one of the EU members states that refused to recognize Kosovo. The decision is attributed to the country's fear of Moldova's secession. If this also happens in eastern Moldova, in the region of Transnistria, the dream of reunifying Moldova with Romania will be forgotten.

Ukraine, as the third most interesting state, attached more importance to the Transnistria conflict than Romania and was a firm supporter of the P5 + 2. After the Orange Revolution in late 2004, Kiev was concerned about facilitating relations with Moldova (Vahl, 2005). In early 2004, Ukraine and Moldova proposed a joint plan for cross-border cooperation with the European Union. The agreement made it more difficult for Transnistria's traders to enter international markets. Moldovan customs and border guards have been allowed to settle on Ukrainian soil so that Chisinau can control traffic on the eastern border. The 2014 revolution in Ukraine brought about fundamental changes in the region (Sendhardt, 2015). A year later, then-European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker raised the issue of the need to review the Eastern Partnership policy. This did not affect the situation in Transnistria, however. However, the economic relationship with Ukraine is important for Tiraspol. It goes without saying that the

Ukrainian authorities have also taken advantage of Transnistria's illegal activities. In general, all three governments support moving away from Russia and closer to the European Union, but the surviving structures of the Soviet Union and the continued political influence of this country have made them less successful in achieving this goal.

### 3.2 Region to Proximate Region Relationships

The most important region adjacent to Transnistria is the group of states that make up the European Union. The European Union is the second-largest source of world power in the economic and political spheres, after the United States. Since the 1990s, the European Union has advocated for peace in its periphery. The Eastern Partnership is the European Union's most important vehicle for advancing foreign policy in the region. Due to the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007, this program was further encouraged (Cazat, 2019). Eastern European countries, on the other hand, fully supported it.

Obviously, the EU's history of cooperation with some of them, such as Moldova, dates back to 1994, when they signed a tripartite agreement with Ukraine. The level of relations then improved under the Action Plan of 2003. Of course, in the same year, the European Union imposed sanctions on 17 Tiraspol officials (Ivan, 2014). For the first time in this document, the issue of Transnistria was emphasized. With the arrival of the European Union and the United States, the P5 + 5 negotiations to resolve the conflict began in 2005. So far, however, little progress has been made in building trust under this framework. The P5 + 2 negotiations revolved around three axes: the socio-economic axis, the legal axis, and the axis of full settlement of the conflict in institutional, political, and security dimensions (Brown, 2015).

The EU Border Management Program was launched in 2005 following a joint request from Moldova and Ukraine to train and assist the authorities of the two states in establishing joint border control. This operation was defined under ENI: European Neighborhood Instruments. Both the Commission and the Council of Europe were involved in the operation. The main purpose of this operation was to close the entrance of wealth to Transnistria. More than 20 EU member states and 200 European staff participated in the operation (Prohnițchi & Lupușor, 2013). The objectives of the border management operation are to reduce the power of the Transnistria authorities and to pursue a long-term policy to resolve the conflict, which was crystallized in the European Neighborhood Policy. At the end of this year, the Prime Ministers of Moldova and Ukraine signed a joint declaration on the effective implementation of the customs regime to combat illegal trade in Transnistria. In principle, the Joint Declaration is not a new agreement; rather, it is the re-implementation of the 2003 customs agreements that were not implemented by Ukraine (Damen, 2019). In fact, the EU border management operation led to a 50% diversion of Transnistria exports to the EU, but it did not completely build trust in the region. After a period of suspension, the settlement talks resumed in 2006–2011 (Gumene, 2019).

In June 2014, the European Union and Moldova signed a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement in the framework of the Eastern Partnership Policy. This agreement led to increased economic and political cooperation between the parties. The Republic of Moldova was the first country in the Eastern Partnership to sign a visa liberalization agreement with the European Union, and the need to implement reforms based on thirteen priorities was identified. This agreement is a new legal framework that will affect Transnistria as well. Tiraspol realized

the cost of this agreement and first sought a separate agreement with the Europeans, but Brussels and Chisinau rejected it (De Waal, 2020). Under pressure from regional merchants, Transnistria was forced to join the European Union. As a result, informally, a set of EU export facilitation laws was drafted for Tiraspol. There were geopolitical reasons behind this opaque approach. Progress has been made on some laws, such as coding of goods, health standards, laws of origin, and technical issues, but in areas such as intellectual property, the principle of competitiveness, and energy, problems persist.

The year 2016 and the implementation of Package Eight improved the situation. The package is a top-down policy based on de facto convergence (Radenko, 2016). It was approved during Germany's presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and includes issues such as recognition of diplomas issued by Transnistria in Moldova, permission for Transnistria vehicles to travel to Moldova, convergence in the telecommunications market, environmental standards, the Dniester River, monitoring the crimes committed by citizens of each region in another region, teaching Moldovan Latin to schools in Transnistria, ensuring that Moldovan farmers have access to the Dubasari farmland in Transnistria, and finally reopening the Gura-Bicului (Kamil, 2015).

The best solution for the union is to integrate Transnistria into Moldova as an autonomous region. The most important problem for the European Union is Russia's support for the separatists. In addition, Russia is not willing to withdraw its forces or accept the presence of international forces in the region. It could be argued that the current rivalry between the EU and Russia is a peaceful attempt to outdo each other and other rivals, and is an example of a controlled conflict.

### 3.3 The Role of Superpowers the Region

The most important world power in the region is Russia. In 2000, Russia's goal was more to consolidate its presence in the region than to expand its influence (Popescu, 2005a). In 2005, the situation changed, with Putin claiming that Russia should continue its civilian mission in Eurasia. That is why Russia sought military, economic, and political influence in the Transnistria region. The Russians have the upper hand in the process of building trust in Transnistria. Russia's solution is to push Transnistria toward federalism to prevent Moldova from moving west. Moscow claims that the goal is to help both sides reach a logical solution that, while preserving the country's territorial integrity, also protects the rights of the inhabitants of the western half of the Dniester (Montesano et al., 2016). According to Russia, the three autonomous regions of Transnistria, Moldova, and Gagauzia should be united. By doing so, the Russians will retain the two regions of Transnistria and Gagauzia and be able to drive Chisinau away from Europe. In this regard, one of the most important tactics of the Russians was the Kozak memorandum. This treaty not only placed Transnistria in a position of veto power, but Arta also legalized Russia's presence in the region for up to 20 years (Infotag, 2019). With the intervention of EU High Representative Javier Solana, the plan was rejected by Vladimir Voronin in Moldova. Meanwhile, Russia has never recognized Transnistria because, as long as their plan to form a federation is valid, Transnistria will be at least part of Moldova. Russia currently exerts influence in the region in three ways:

*Separatist Financial Feeding:* Transnistrian industries have been sustained for years with the help of Russian subsidies (Popescu, 2005b). Gazprom has also injected large volumes of its

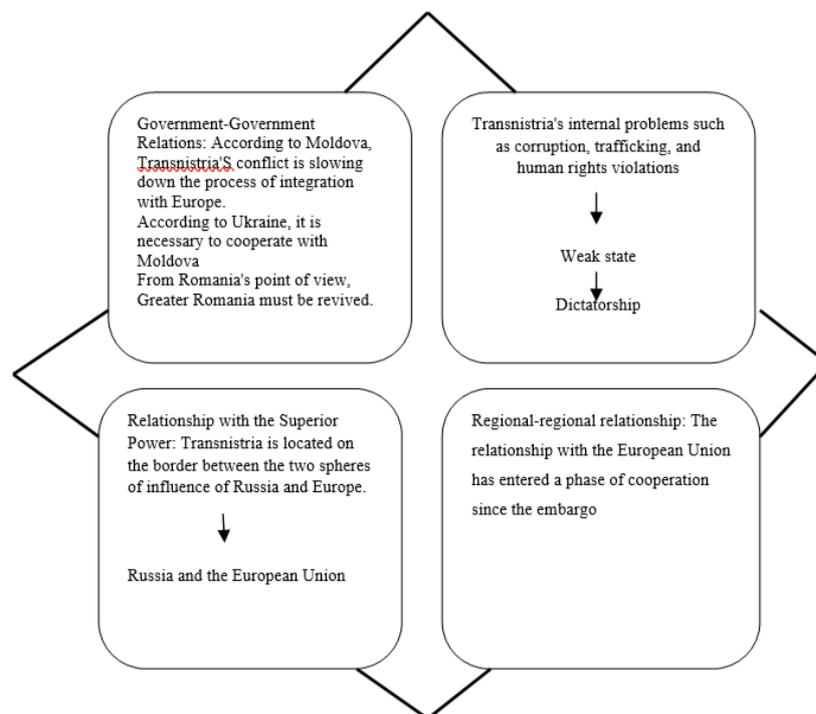
gas exports into the region without receiving any money. In 2019, Transnistria's total debt to Gazprom was over \$ 6 billion (De Waal, 2020). One of the reasons Chisinau prefers this dispute to remain unresolved is the high volume of debt. If the integration of Transnistria into Moldova is finalized, Chisinau will be required to pay this debt.

**Social Assistance:** Russia's most important direct assistance includes assistance to pensioners under the Putinka policy since 2008 and \$ 70 million in development assistance through the Eurasian Convergence Institute (Gromadzki, 2015). The Russians also emphasize the common heritage of the Orthodox Church and the Soviet identity.

**Military Presence:** The Russian army is still present in the region in the form of peacekeeping operations. Three Russian battalions are stationed in Transnistria; which each includes 1500 people. About a third of them are peacekeepers, and the other two-thirds are from the OGRF, or the Operational Group of Russian Forces in Transnistria, a Russian subsidiary of Arta 14 (DeWaal, 2020).

**Moldova's Economic Sanctions:** Russia has tried to get Moldova back on track by imposing sanctions on Transnistria (Infotag, 2019). The sanctions have cost Moldova's weak economy.

In general, from what was mentioned, the matrix represented in figure 3 can be reached (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Transnistria security complex matrix**

Source: the author

As a result, the EU must consider three important points before starting any move: Moscow intervened as it prevented the implementation of the agreement with Ukraine. It could also lead to defeats in Moldova and Transnistria, which would mean a geopolitical defeat for Europe. Therefore, it must be ready to resolve all kinds of normative, economic, and security conflicts within its southeastern borders. The second limiting factor for the EU

is a disagreement between member states. The EU's ability to build trust in this conflict goes beyond its Russian presence to its internal constraints. There is no consensus among EU member states on the implementation of these policies.

Indeed, the EU is unable to adopt an effective conflict resolution strategy due to inter-regional complexity. High levels of corruption, in particular, are impeding EU reforms in Moldova and Transnistria. In the region, Russia also has a strong software and hardware presence. Russia's policies have fared better than the European Union's thus far. The EU's tactics to date have been institutionalization, economic change, and diplomatic discussions, all of which have clearly hampered conflict resolution results. The EU's unified foreign and security policy's absence of a geostrategic perspective has put a pall on EU tactics and conflict resolution tools in the region. Perhaps a broad answer based on the formation of a partnership. Perhaps a broad solution based on the formation of a joint Russian-EU special force and the replacement of the Fourteenth Russian Army with the Fourteenth Russian Army in some kind of peacekeeping mission, given that this army will surely have more legitimacy in the international arena, it might be an effective step in settling the war.

## Conclusion

The continuation of the Transnistria conflict to this day does not look so strange. It seems that most separatist regimes that have emerged in the post-Soviet era are still alive. The main reasons for the continuation of this crisis can be found in the popular support inside Transnistria, strong propaganda, manipulation of the identity-building process, the weakness of the Moldovan economic and military system, Russian support, and the small presence of this region in the international community. As Buzan and Weaver rightly point out, security threats are more common among close states. That is why the European Union intervened in the Transnistria conflict. At the same time, the issue of Transnistria also affects Russia's security. Security patterns are interrelated and intertwined. If Moldova has a closer relationship with the European Union, this affects Russia. Russia is gradually losing control of the region and becoming weaker and Russia is trying to prevent such a scenario.

Indeed, inter-regional complexities do not allow the EU to use an effective solution to the conflict. In particular, high levels of corruption in Moldova and Transnistria are hampering the EU's reforms. Russia also has extensive software and hardware influence in the region. So far, Russia's policies have been more successful than those of the European Union. The tools used by the EU thus far have been based on institutionalization, economic reform, and diplomatic negotiations, which have obviously imposed many limitations on the success of conflict resolution. The lack of a geostrategic view of the EU's common foreign and security policy has cast a shadow over EU tactics and conflict resolution tools in the region. Perhaps a general solution based on the creation of a joint Russian-EU special force and their replacement by the Fourteenth Russian Army, based on some kind of peacekeeping mission, could be an effective step in resolving the conflict, given that this force will undoubtedly have more legitimacy in the international arena.

This conflict has created many soft threats to the EU that Europe does not pay attention to. For example, the risk of arms, human, and drug trafficking from Transnistria has

increased. Transnistria is also a haven for money laundering and other organized crime. The Transnistria conflict is a major obstacle to democratization and economic development in the EU's eastern neighborhood. Consequently, not only for the interests of the countries of the region but also for the protection of the interests of the European Union, its more active presence in this conflict is necessary.

The EU seems to be taking a functionalist approach to conflict resolution, in which it moves from the application of lower policy mechanisms such as the prevention of illegal immigration and smuggling of goods to the first mechanisms such as the root of conflict resolution. This approach is not in line with the geopolitical reality of the region. Another important issue in the failure of the European Union is the existence of multiple trends in the security equations of the region. The quasi-monopoly influence of the 1990s is over, and the many actors mentioned are now involved. The confluence of the two security complexes means that while Transnistria is politically dependent on Russia for imports and capital, at the same time, it depends on Europe to modernize its economic system. It has been added to Russia's appeal since the 2008 crisis, making it seem impossible to reach a final solution.

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