WITH OR WITHOUT YOU?

RUSSIA'S EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP WITH ABKHAZIA AND TRANSNISTRIA

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ABSTRACT

After secessionist wars in the post-Soviet region broke out in the 1990s, both scholars and policymakers expected Abkhazia and Transnistria to continue developing closer ties with, and hence integrating into Russia. Contrary to this prediction, this thesis argues that these breakaway territories began pursuing independent politics that triggered conflicts with Russian interests in both the political and economic spheres and that contributed to the formation of distinct identities in the parastates. To study the evolvement of Russia's relationship vis-à-vis Abkhazia and Transnistria between 1992 and 2020, the thesis employs the concept of hierarchies in international relations; and concludes that Abkhazia and Transnistria neither subordinated to Russian hierarchy nor balanced with Western-leaning states in the region against Muscovite hegemony but took a "third way" and began pursuing independent politics without realignment.

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INTRODUCTION

"My head is in Russia

but my legs are walking to Europe."[1]

In November 2016, the Russian Geographic Society held its annual award ceremony in the presence of Russia's president Vladimir Putin. When the President asked a young competitor "where the Russian border ends," the boy immediately gave the answer, but Putin corrected him: "the borders of Russia do not end." Although Putin later added that it was only a joke, the note was barely audible amid the applause.[2]

The borders of Russia may not be endless, but events have proven that they are not so static, either. New, powerful actors are emerging in world politics, but the Russian Federation has not given up keeping former Soviet territories under its influence, nor even annexing them. Soon after the dissolution of the USSR, ethnic tensions rose and escalated in its "near abroad." The Abkhaz community on the Eastern coast of the Black Sea opposed its incorporation into neighboring Georgia. Similarly, beyond the Dniester River a Russian minority feared its forced assimilation into Moldova by the government of Chisinau.[3] Both disputes remain unresolved after twenty years, while the stated communities enjoy relatively strong independence in their *de facto* states, the Republic of Abkhazia and the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (hereinafter Transnistria).[4]

1 Thomas de Waal, "An Eastern European Frozen Conflict the EU Got Right," POLITICO, February 16, 2016, https://www.politico.eu/article/transnistria-an-eastern-european-frozen-conflict-the-eu-got-right-moldova-russia-ukraine/.

2 "'The borders of Russia do not end' says Putin at awards ceremony" (Moscow, Russia: Euronews, November 25, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ou8mI_ce80s.

3 Similar clashes broke out in South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Tajikistan. This paper, however, only examines examples within the Black Sea region.

4 Other names, such as Trans-Dniester, Transdniestria, Dniestria (meaning "beyond the Dniester river") are also applied. In the thesis, the anglicized Latin-Slavic form "Transnistria" is used.

But the maintenance of even that limited independence would be impossible without the assistance of a powerful ally. Russia took on that role by launching peacekeeping missions in the affected areas and assuming a mediator role between the warring parties from 1992. The Kremlin was widely criticized for these moves by Western and UN-agencies: while Russia aimed to restore and consolidate the statehoods of the new post-Soviet countries in these separatist territories, Moscow was suspected of pursuing its own economic and political interests in the region. Both scholars and policymakers argued that the Kremlin's final goal was to stop those secessionist outbreaks (that might result in spillover effects on communities living within Russia) and in the meantime regain influence over the territories lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union, hence preventing the newly independent states from Euro-Atlantic realignment.[5] Although that realignment has still not occurred (neither Georgia nor Moldova is part of the EU or NATO), the breakaway territories[6] have not integrated with Russia, either, unlike in the notable case of Crimea. Alternative reasons may be the Russian financial crisis, which resulted in the drop of financial aid, the increasing political disputes with the Kremlin, and the creation of a common identity, distinct from Russian. In short, faced with two potential futures—Russian integration or Euro-Atlantic realignment—Abkhazia and Transnistria avoided both. What path did the breakaway states take between 1992 and 2020, and how can it be characterized?

[5] Emil Avdaliani, "Russia's Changing Economic Attitude towards Abkhazia & Tskhinvali Regions," Modern Diplomacy, February 16, 2020, https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/02/16/russias-changing-economic-attitude-towards-abkhazia-tskhinvali-regions/; "Nato Warns over Russia Border Force," *BBC News*, March 24, 2014, sec. Europe, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26704205; Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Dov Lynch, "Peacekeeping and Coercive Diplomacy: Russian Suasion," in *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, ed. Dov Lynch (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000); Robert Orttung Walker Christopher, "Putin's Frozen Conflicts," *Foreign Policy* (blog), February 13, 2015, https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/13/putins-frozen-conflicts/; Trevor Waters, "Russian Peacekeeping in Moldova: Source of Stability or Neo-Imperialist Threat?," in *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping*, ed. John Mackinlay and Peter Cross (Tokyo: United Nations University, 2003).

[6] For a discussion on terminology, see: Pål Kolstø, "The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States." Journal of Peace Research 43, no. 6 (2006): 723-40.

I argue that contrary to predictions that Abkhazia and Transnistria would continue to develop closer ties with, and hence integrate into Russia, they began pursuing independent politics that triggered conflicts with Russian interests in both the political and economic spheres. In toto, Abkhazia and Transnistria neither subordinated to Russian hierarchy nor balanced with Western-leaning states in the region against Muscovite hegemony—they took a "third way" and began pursuing *independent politics without realignment*. Financial support from Moscow decreased, while disagreements on bilateral questions caused disappointment among Abkhaz and Transnistrian nationals. After this breakaway the parastates' governments also generated a distinct identity in the parastates by developing the attributes of statehood and fostering collective identities of Abkhaz and Transnistrian communities. Below, I describe this as a "hierarchy revision" in which a new equilibrium is emerging or has emerged. Since this new equilibrium precludes rapprochement with the Russian Federation, the two territories' future with Russia remains uncertain.

Although there is now a growing interest among scholars in studying possible cooperation between the breakaway and parent states,[7] voices expecting the maintenance of the pro-Russia status quo remain dominant and can be supported by different theoretical tools. For instance, structural realism expects that these (de facto) states should maintain close ties with a great power to maintain their own security. Not strong enough to go it alone, Transnistria and Abkhazia must either bandwagon with Russia, or join others (e.g. Georgia, NATO) to balance against it.[8] The breakaway states show no signs of realignment to the West, perhaps because

[7] See: Kolstø 2020, Marandici 2020

[8] Baldur Thorhallsson and Sverrir Steinsson, "Small State Foreign Policy," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2017. For a review of balance of power logic, see John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Timothy Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, Third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 77–93. According to balance of power logic, the

Russia's hegemony is too strong to make balancing possible, leaving bandwagoning the only option.[9] But as Russia's security presence has grown, Abkhazia and Transnistria have sought greater autonomy from Moscow, rather than rapprochement. A structural realist account thus explains the breakaway states' general strategic constraints but leaves open the question of why and how Transnistria and Abkhazia have sought *independence without pursuing realignment* under Russia's growing hegemonic shadow.

Another body of International Relations research that focuses on hierarchy more adequately captures Abkhazia and Transnistria's structural position. This theory, which explains hierarchies as "social contracts" made between dominant and subordinate states, expects that small states like Transnistria and Abkhazia have strong economic and/or military incentives to exchange sovereign autonomy to a dominant state for security assurances and economic integration/access from that state.[10] Indeed, relations between Russia and the two breakaway states fit this mold: Moscow is considered to be their security guarantor while its share of Sukhumi's and Tiraspol's annual revenue remains extremely high.[11] A hierarchy approach expects that secessionist states should closely coordinate, and possibly achieve a high level of interdependence, with an increasingly assertive Russia given their weakness relative to Moscow and the lack of alternatives.[12]

breakaway states can realign with the West, open new negotiations with Georgia and Moldova, help them in their bids to join NATO and EU, etc., or bandwagon against the West with Russia.

9 For this logic on a global scale, see Stephen G. Brooks and William Curti Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

10 David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy (Itthaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

11 Sabine Fischer, ed., *Not Frozen! The Unresolved Conflicts over Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh in Light of the Crisis over Ukraine*, vol. 9/2016, SWP Research Paper (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik - SWP - Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, 2016).

12 Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, 3.

Although the hierarchies approach explains better the overall relationship of the breakaway states to Moscow, it too has limitations. Integration with Russia has met with several obstacles, including the development of autonomous identities in the breakaway states and disagreements between governments. As Russia has increased its security presence, the breakaway states have sought further independence, rather than rapprochement. Put differently, they have revised their hierarchical relations as subordinates. Although the hierarchies literature does not focus on change or revision (especially from subordinates), it expects that as a dominant state becomes more powerful, the subordinate states should become increasingly hierarchically linked to it. But in the cases examined here, autonomy was sought from hierarchy, not the other way around.

To better understand this dynamic relationship, this thesis takes David Lake's concept of hierarchies in international relations but examines how the hierarchical relationship has changed over time—how it has been revised. Since both the economic stability and territorial integrity of Abkhazia and Transnistria rely heavily on Russia, they can be understood as hierarchical constructions in which the dominant state (Russia) exercises a varying level of authority over a subordinated state (Transnistria or Abkhazia).[13] However, instead of remaining static, the level of hierarchy between Russia and the breakaways decreased.

I argue that two factors contributed to this outcome: the dominant state shifted its focus to strategically more significant areas, while the breakaway states pursued their own politics, disregarding Russian interests and developing autonomous national identities. This has resulted movement toward a new equilibrium, which shifted from high to a moderate level of hierarchy. Lake distinguishes the two categories by naming them Empire (high) and Informal Empire

[13] Ibid.

(moderate), respectively. As Lake notes, "the stability of such [hierarchical] authority relations depend on whether the ruled and the rulers each uphold their part," but the social contract is "constantly evolving and the equilibrium is a moving target."[14] While an equilibrium was reached after the secessionist outbreaks, a growing number of disagreements show that today, the equilibrium differs for ruled and ruler. In the case of Transnistria, the ruler reduced its authority, although the ruled wanted deeper cooperation; Abkhazia's politics on the other hand have reduced its subordinate position against the will of the ruler. Hence, when applied to the cases, Lake's hierarchical approach shows an evolving social contract in which Russia loses its dominant position vis-à-vis both Abkhazia and Transnistria, though for countervailing reasons: subordinate disassociation or distancing in the former, and dominant disassociation or abandonment in the latter.[15]

Because it looks at domestic (economic and political), structural, and ideational (national identity) factors in explaining the breakaway states' independence without alignment, this thesis sits astride several research traditions in International Relations scholarship. Indeed, some of the hierarchies literature has now pivoted to more explicitly "ideational" explanation of hierarchy,[16] some of which depart from Lake's social contract account.[17] The present study focusses on showing the breakaway states' independence seeking empirically and thus uses Lake's account of hierarchy as a heuristically useful framework to show this change, keeping

[14] Ibid. 13.
[15] For a discussion of alliance abandonment and control in the context of hierarchical alliance relationship, see Victor D. Cha, *Powerplay : The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton University Press, 2016). I use "disassociation" here as describing, roughly, patterns of partial abandonment and autonomy-seeking within the Russia-breakaway relationship.
[16] David C. Kang, "Authority and Legitimacy in International Relations: Evidence from Korean and Japanese Relations in Pre-Modern East Asia," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 1 (2012): 55–71, https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pos002.
[17] Ayşe Zarakol, *Hierarchies in World Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

further theoretical "wagers" to a minimum.[18] However, the present study can be understood as laying the groundwork for further research on the breakaway states' identity formation, the sense of (or lack of) legitimacy in Russia's hierarchies, or issues to do with Russian foreign policy such as status or honor that may implicate the breakaway states.[19] These issues are revisited in the conclusion.

This thesis proceeds in five chapters, excluding this introduction. In the first chapter (which follows immediately below), I give an overview of the breakaway cases and review the existing literature on them. Because Russian dissociation took place across the economic and political realms, I divide the second and third chapters into economic and political changes, respectively. Chapter 2 presents Russia playing a less significant role in the fragile economy of the breakaway territories, while Chapter 3 offers a clear picture of the increasing tensions between Moscow and the breakaway states caused by domestic political developments. As an additional indicator, Chapter 4 presents the way in which governments of the parastates generated unique national identities, independent from both Russia and their parent states, thus seeking independence from Russia without realignment to forces resisting Russia.

[18] Joseph Mackay and Christopher David Laroche, "The Conduct of History in International Relations: Rethinking Philosophy of History in IR Theory," *International Theory* 9, no. 2 (July 2017): 203–36, https://doi.org/10.1017/S175297191700001X.
[19] E.g. Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West From Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

CHAPTER 1 – OVERVIEW OF THE CASES AND EXISTING LITERATURE

Conflicts between Moldova and Transnistria can be dated back to the 19th century when the Russian and Ukrainian inhabitants beyond the Dniester opposed the unification with Romania supported by the Moldovan community. Although tensions decreased after World War II, when the USSR's collapse was followed by Transnistria's declaration of independence, violent ethnic conflicts broke out again.[20] Abkhazia, on the other hand, was an autonomous republic in the USSR, Georgian independence and nationalist politics later triggered clashes with the Abkhaz community though.[21] Russia intervened in both conflicts by sending peacekeeping troops and later giving financial aid and Russian citizenship to those living in the separatist zones. Today, Transnistria is almost evenly shared by Russians, Moldovans and Ukrainians,[22] while Abkhazia constitutes a majority of Abkhaz community with a smaller portion of Georgians and Armenians.[23] While neither of the separatist regions enjoys international recognition, both parastates seek for UN observer status.

Abkhazia and Transnistria became the subject of academic discourse right after their proclamations of independences when debates on the reasons behind the conflicts were closely analyzed. Many of these scholars argued that ethnic background triggered the conflicts,[24] while later authors' attention focused on Moscow's role in the conflict settlement. Among them

[20] Sárka Humlová, "Transnistria: A Short History," Political Holidays, December 18, 2019, https://www.politicalholidays.com/post/transnistria-a-short-history.
[21] Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad : Putin, the West and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (Oxford University Press, 2017).
[22] "Basic Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic" (Ministry of the Economic Development of the Transdniestrian Moldavian Republic, 2017), http://mer.gospmr.org/gosudarstvennaya-sluzhba-statistiki/informacziya/ezhegodnik-gosudarstvennoj-sluzhby-statistiki/statisticheskij-ezhegodnik-2017.html.
[23] "Abkhazia: A Country Profile" (Washington D.C.: UNPO, February 2015), https://unpo.org/downloads/2344.pdf.
[24] For example, see Emil Souleimanov, *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Arsène Saparov, *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus. The Soviet Union and the Making of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2015).

Catherine Dale claimed that Russia's intervention in the form of peacekeeping missions could be understood as a tool to stop secessionist outbreaks, which could result in a spillover effect on communities living within Russia.[25] Although that theory was echoed in Waters' analysis as well,[26] Lynch viewed that narrative only a Russian alibi to intervene in the conflict.[27] That is confirmed by Rukhadze and Duerr who show how the Kremlin used different tools to handle "local" ethnic communities, while separatists in both areas enjoyed the implicit support of Russia.[28]

Another branch of research has focused on the domestic politics of the breakaway states. The ethnic backgrounds of such territories with a special focus on the evolution of a common identity was one of such aspects. Scholars saw the creation of a unique identity by the Abkhaz and Transnistrian leadership, as a device to integrate those minorities who enjoy a majority in the parent state. While Dembinska and Iglesias study the identity politics of the Transnistrian authorities vis-à-vis its Moldovan community,[29] Matsuzato highlights how the Abkhaz leadership attempted to distinct its Georgian-Mingrelian community from the Georgian nation.[30] Much attention is also devoted to the development of democratic institutions in both Abkhazia[31] and Transnistria.[32]

[25] Catherine Dale, "The Case of Abkhazia (Georgia)," in *Peacekeeping And The Role Of Russia In Eurasia*, ed. Lena Jonson and Clive Archer (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996).
[26] Waters, "Russian Peacekeeping in Moldova: Source of Stability or Neo-Imperialist Threat?"
[27] Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*; Lynch, "Peacekeeping and Coercive Diplomacy."
[28] Vasili Rukhadze and Glen Duerr, "Sovereignty Issues in the Caucasus: Contested Ethnic and National Identities in Chechnya, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia," *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 0, no. 48 (August 2, 2016): 30–47.
[29] Magdalena Dembinska and Julien Danero Iglesias, "The Making of an Empty Moldovan Category within a Multiethnic Transnistrian Nation" *East European Politics and Societies*, April 28, 2013.
[30] Kimitaka Matsuzato, "From Belligerent to Multi-Ethnic Democracy: Domestic Politics in Unrecognized States after Ceasefire," *Eurasian Review* 1 (November 2008), http://evrazia.or.kr/review/06_Matsuzato.pdf.
[31] Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, "Living with Non-Recognition: State- and Nation-Building in South Caucasian Quasi-States," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 3 (May 1, 2008): 483–509.
[32] Nicu Popescu, "Democracy in Secessionism: Transnistria and Abkhazia's Domestic Policies" (Brussels, Centre for European Policy Studies, 2006), http://www.policy.hu/npopescu/ipf%20info/IPF%204%20democracy%20in%20secessionism.pdf; A. N. Spartak

Later, academics paid close attention to the relationship of the de facto states vis-à-vis their patron state as well. Scholars, hence, studied the content of bilateral agreements,[33] the attitude of the residents in the de facto states towards Russia[34] or the Kremlin's use of soft power. Tsygankov argues that Moscow's foreign policies – especially those considered as the projection of soft power – can be understood as its attempt only to preserve its existing influence rather than gaining an imperial control.[35] Russia's use of economic and cultural ties as a soft power tool is undeniable, but Tsygankov disregards the fact that such tools do not always work and sometimes these attempts could even trigger instability in the breakaway states in the form of protests and other political events.[36] The annexation of Crimea in 2014 also questions that theory, and shows the patterns of expansionism, framed by the so-called Novorossiya narrative, a project to unite all Russian-inhabited territories in the region.[37] Consequently, Fischer underlines why Russian expansionism is still possible,[38] and Górecki already takes the bilateral treaties signed between Abkhazia and Russia as a step towards the incorporation of the breakaway state into Russia.[39]

and N. N. Yevchenko, "The Socioeconomic Situation in Transdniestria," *Studies on Russian Economic Development* 27, no. 4 (July 1, 2016): 446–52.

33 Thomas Ambrosio and William A. Lange, "The Architecture of Annexation? Russia's Bilateral Agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia," *NATIONALITIES PAPERS-THE JOURNAL OF NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY* 44, no. 5 (2016): 673–93.

34 John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov, "Who Identifies with the 'Russian World'? Geopolitical Attitudes in Southeastern Ukraine, Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 6 (November 1, 2016); John O'Loughlin, Vladimir Kolossov, and Gerard Toal, "Inside the Post-Soviet de Facto States: A Comparison of Attitudes in Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 5 (September 3, 2014): 423–56.

35 Andrei P. Tsygankov, "If Not by Tanks, Then by Banks? The Role of Soft Power in Putin's Foreign Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 7 (November 1, 2006): 1079–99.

36 See Chapter 4.

37 Marlene Laruelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiya, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 55–74.

38 Sabine Fischer, ed., *Not Frozen! The Unresolved Conflicts over Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh in Light of the Crisis over Ukraine*, vol. 9, 2016.

39 Wojciech Górecki, "Abkhazia's 'creeping' incorporation. The end of the experiment of a separatist democracy," *Centre for Eastern Studies*, no. 164 (October 3, 2015): 8.

Closer to my thesis are more recent pieces that examine either Russia or the de facto territories' relationship with it in depth. Rogstad disagrees with those who assumed Transnistria to "become the next Crimea," claiming that "Russia has not cared about Transnistria per se" since it does not hold strategic significance, while its annexation could undermine Russia's attempts to maintain influence over Moldova.[40] Although the Kremlin has shown a growing uninterest towards the breakaway region throughout the years, it was only partly because its shifting focus on Moldova. Decreases in Russian financial aid stem from the Russian economic crisis and political disagreements on bilateral issues. Meanwhile, in connection with Abkhazia, Kolstø shows in his most recent study that Abkhazia is willing and able to defy the wishes of its patron state, hence preventing such incorporation.[41]

The consensus among scholars is that Russia played a crucial role in the secession outbreaks and their aftermaths: it ensured the parastates' security and financial stability. Such a policy created an uneven relationship in which Abkhazia and Transnistria found themselves subordinated to a dominant Russia. Similar hierarchical relationships are analyzed by Lake, who draws on the United States' diplomatic history to show patterns of hierarchy toward U.S. subordinates in the Caribbean, Europe, and East Asia.[42] Other dominant states, and especially their relationships with de facto territories are, however, rarely analyzed, although as McCormack argues, "[hierarchy] is one of the fundamental organizing principles of politics."[43]

[40] Adrian Rogstad, "The Next Crimea? Getting Russia's Transnistria Policy Right," *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 49–64.
[41] Pål Kolstø, "Biting the Hand That Feeds Them? Abkhazia–Russia Client–Patron Relations," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 36, no. 2 (March 3, 2020): 140–58.
[42] Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*.
[43] Daniel McCormack, *Great Powers and International Hierarchy* (Austin, US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). An exception is the work on hierarchies in East Asia, which historically align with China as the dominant state and now with the United States. See David C. Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Evelyn Goh, *The Struggle for Order: Hegemony, Hierarchy, and Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*, First Edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013); David C. Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

A relevant exception is Kanet's book, which identifies Russia as the dominant state with "a restrictive hierarchical order within its sphere of influence."[44] These attempts can be regarded as applications of the concept to the post-Soviet region, but not to Russia's relationship with the parastates *per se*. Even Crandal's article on Moldova, which looks at its relationship with Russia, involves Transnistria only insofar as the latter affects the bilateral negotiations of the former two.[45]

According to Lake, two indicators are involved in measuring hierarchy: economy, which includes all actions that affect the accumulation and allocation of resources; and security, which covers all diplomatic or military actions to lower the risk of coercion by external actors.[46] Since security is closely connected to the political nature of bilateral relationships, the thesis involves a broader, political perspective, while also analyzes how, parallel to such dissension, an independent identity is being formulated.

Although these studies take only snapshots of certain policy areas, such as socio-economic or foreign affairs, together they help us understand how the shifting attitude of the breakaway states vis-à-vis Russia manifested on both political and economic level, which meanwhile gave space to the generation and spread of an independent identity of these regions.

The following two sections detail the breakaways' hierarchy revision first by examining the economic and then the political realm in each breakaway state. In both, the breakaways revised their subordinate positions from full dependency to weak dependency.

[44] Roger E. Kanet, *The Russian Challenge to the European Security Environment* (Springer, 2017).
[45] Matthew Crandall, "Hierarchy in Moldova-Russia Relations: The Transnistrian Effect," *Studies of Transition States and Societies* 4, no. 1 (2012), http://publications.tlu.ee/index.php/stss/article/view/87.
[46] Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, 64–76.

CHAPTER 2 – ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND CHANGE: FROM FULL TO WEAK DEPENDENCY

Since the breakaway of Abkhazia and Transnistria, Russia has played the role of a breathing machine in the economies of the breakaway states. The primary help comes from gas subsidies, which generate significant profits for Sukhumi and Tiraspol. Apart from energy supplies, the de facto republics regularly benefit from Russian humanitarian aids and ad-hoc development funds primarily to cover pensions and food supplies.[47] Dependence on Russian financial assistance remains crucial for a landlocked territory with small industry, hence any crisis hitting Russia will consequently have a robust impact on its subordinated states as well. Between 2014 and 2017, Russia went through a severe financial crisis caused by the devaluation of the Russian ruble.

As a result, the parastates' economies shrunk and trade volumes dropped. Although Transnistria requested additional help, Moscow reduced its financial contributions to both breakaway states. Consequently, the two territories turned towards their parent states and started to exploit their cheaper and more accessible markets. Tiraspol had also dispute with Kyiv over the restriction of their mutual border, while Sukhumi confronted with the leadership of nearby Sochi on questions on tourism. The two areas are also dependent on Russian energy, the subsidized prices, however, create a burden for state-owned Russian companies, which in the case of Abkhazia, met other obstacles during their extraction of minerals on the Black Sea. Below, I demonstrate how the breakaways revised their hierarchical statuses from full economic dependency on Russia (having no autonomy of economic decisions) to weak economic dependency. Lake defines full dependency, as a "near but not necessarily total

[47] Kamil Calus, "An Aided Economy. The Characteristics of the Transnistrian Economic Model" (Centre for Eastern Studies, May 14, 2013), https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_108.pdf.

transfer of authority from subordinate to dominant states," while in weak dependencies only some measures of authority are ceded.[48] In the case of both breakaway states, this took the form of Russia decreasing its financial aid for these territories, which led to the intensification of trade with the parent states. In Abkhazia's case, it also manifested in disagreements on Russian investments and energy security, while after the annexation of Crimea, Transnistria had border disputes with Ukraine.

2.1 Transnistria

The consequences of the Russian economic crisis, experts said, led the Transnistrian economy to find itself in a "free-fall (…) with its finances nowhere near sufficient enough to cover even 50% of costs." Meanwhile, remittances decreased, reaching a record-low volume in the last decade.[49] According to leaked information in 2015, Tiraspol asked Moscow to inject around $100 million a year into its economy, hence contributing 70% of its total budget. The request was, however, rejected by claiming that Russia "had its own economic difficulties."[50] As Russia shrugged its shoulders, Transnistria looked for other opportunities and exploited the Association Agreement signed between the EU and Moldova in 2014. Parallel to the opening of new horizons towards the West, exports to Russia started to decline dramatically: from $909 million between 2007 and 2010 to $232 million between 2015 and 2018. Exports still continues to decline,[51] resulting in Transnistria sending in 2019 more goods to Romania than Russia.[52]

[48] Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, 57.
[49] Dragoș Drăgan, "Transnistria's Economic Woes Present Moldova with Opportunity," trans. Sam Morgan, Euractiv, February 23, 2017, https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/transnistrias-economic-woes-present-moldova-with-opportunity/.
[50] Светлана Гамова, "Россия Сняла Приднестровье с Довольствия [Russia withdrew Transnistria's allowances]," Независимая газета, January 26, 2015, http://www.ng.ru/cis/2015-01-26/1_pridnestrovie.html.
[51] Madalin Necsutu, "BIRN Fact-Check: Is Transnistria Really Economically Dependent on Russia?," *Balkan Insight* (blog), December 23, 2019, https://balkaninsight.com/2019/12/23/birn-fact-check-is-transnistria-really-economically-dependent-on-russia/.
[52] Arina Livadari, "Transnistria Exports More Goods to Romania than to Russia," *Moldova.Org* (blog), April 16, 2019, https://www.moldova.org/en/transnistria-exports-goods-romania-russia/.

On top of that, the de facto country expected to boost its economic ties with Russia through the latter's new territory, Crimea, but either the trade volume nor the number of investments from Russia increased.[53] Only Transnistria's debt to Gazprom increased, although it remains a debate whether not Chisinau has to pay that back.[54]

The case of Transnistria is especially complex because of its four-hundred kilometers long border with Ukraine, through which trade with Russia is processed. After the Crimean conflict, Kyiv reconsidered its relationship with the separatist territory since it regarded the area as an outpost of Russia, which could be just as dangerous to the territorial integrity of Ukraine, as Russia itself. This assumption stemmed from the fact that Transnistrian citizens also hold Russian passports, while the de facto state remains the home of Russian soldiers, which could be easily boosted at any time. From 2014, Ukraine imposed stricter measures on, and fortified its border crossings, while also held military exercises in the neighboring regions.[55] Men of military age who crossed the border with a Russian passport were immediately stopped. While these restrictions had a robust impact on individuals, trade relations were also negatively affected. The market was shut down for a short period and although the Ukrainian market is now open for Transnistrian goods again, it is still not as attractive as in the pre-Crimean War period.[56]

53 Spartak and Yevchenko, "The Socioeconomic Situation in Transdniestria."
54 Nicu Popescu and Leonid Litra, "Transnistria: A Bottom-Up Solution" (London: ECFR, September 2012).
55 Thomas Frear, "New Realities: The Ukrainian Approach to Transnistria," European Leadership Network, March 24, 2015, https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/new-realities-the-ukrainian-approach-to-transnistria/.
56 Robert O'Connor, "Transnistria Isn't the Smuggler's Paradise It Used to Be," *Foreign Policy* (blog), 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/05/transnistria-isnt-the-smugglers-paradise-it-used-to-be-sheriff-moldova-ukraine-tiraspol/.

Such economic difficulty was probably an important incentive for Transnistria to engage in the DCFTA[57] talks originally signed by the EU and Moldova but involving the breakaway state as well. As then-President Yevgeny Shevchuk told to journalists, without agreeing on that deal, access to EU market would be restricted, which could lead to the loss of almost half of Transnistria's foreign market.[58]

2.2 Abkhazia

Abkhazia's period of economic flourishing ended with Russia's financial difficulties. Declining Russian financial aid and the depreciation of the Ruble made imported products from Russia extremely expensive. Consequently, informal trade with Georgia started to intensify, since many goods brought in from Georgia costs three times less than in Russia.[59] However, Moscow did not only provide less aid but the funding became more targeted. The main reason for such restrictions was the endemic corruption that triggered heavy political debates in Russia. For instance in 2011, when public opposition against Kremlin subsidies to de facto territories was organized with the title "Stop Feeding The Caucasus."[60] As a result, the procedures for getting Russian funds have become more complicated, thus halting the construction of several buildings that remain empty today.[61] As a tool to reduce monetary independence on Russia, in one of these buildings Abkhaz officials decided to launch their own

[57] Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
[58] "Евгений Шевчук: 'Когда Есть Необходимость Выбирать Между Тем, Что Сегодня Съесть Или Вложить в Армию, Приоритет Будет Отдан Армии,'[Evgeny Shevchuk: 'When there is a need to choose between what to eat or invest in the army today, priority will be given to the army']" *NewsMaker* (blog), December 24, 2015, https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/evgeniy-shevchuk-kogda-est-neobhodimost-vybirat-mezhdu-tem-chto-segodnya-sjest-ili-21062/.
[59] "Abkhazia: Deepening Dependence," Crisis Group, February 26, 2010, https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/georgia/abkhazia-deepening-dependence.
[60] Tom Balmforth, "Leading Anticorruption Crusader To March Shoulder To Shoulder With Nationalists," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, March 11, 2011, https://www.rferl.org/a/aleksie_navalny_russia_nationalism_opposition/24380766.html.
[61] Dmitri Belyi, Abkhazia Is Tired and Disappointed, ICDS, November 28, 2018, https://icds.ee/abkhazia-is-tired-and-disappointed/.

cryptocurrency but the project proved to be disastrous.[62] Meanwhile, disputes over Russian investments rose.

One incentive for Russia to invest in Abkhazia was so it could exploit oil fields on Abkhaz waters. This aim was fulfilled in 2009 when Moscow and Sukhumi signed an agreement on oil extraction, to be carried out by the state-owned Rosneft, Russia's largest oil company.[63] The cooperation, however, did not last long, since a couple of years after the financial crisis then-President of Abkhazia Raul Khadzhimba, citing ecological concerns, established a commission to examine already-concluded contracts for oil exploration. Russian experts doubted in the commission's environmental fears and rather wondered about Sukhumi's hidden motives to sell the right of extraction to another company.[64]

The Abkhaz government had high hopes for the 2014 Winter Olympics, organized just 30 kilometers far from its border, in Sochi. The Abkhaz leadership was hoping for being one of the main providers of building materials during the construction of the massive amount of facilities needed for the event, this however, did not happen.[65] Moreover, trains to Moscow were canceled, while border controls were severely restricted.[66] Although the Kremlin simultaneously launched a project to renovate the infrastructure of Abkhazia, it was regarded in the media as a kind of sleeping pill for the government.[67] The significant development Sochi

[62] Maximilan Hess, "What Abkhazia's Crypto Dalliance Teaches Us about Monetary Sovereignty," Financial Times, January 20, 2020, http://ftalphaville.ft.com/2020/01/16/1579189265000/What-Abkhazia-s-crypto-dalliance-teaches-us-about-monetary-sovereignty-/.
[63] Andre W. M. Gerrits and Max Bader, "Russian Patronage over Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Implications for Conflict Resolution," *East European Politics* 32, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 297–313.
[64] Nikita Isaev, Острые вопросы требуют прямых ответов [Hot questions require direct answers], Sputnik, November 16, 2015, https://sputnik-abkhazia.ru/analytics/20151116/1016314856.html.
[65] Inal Khashig, The end of the Olympic Games poses a new challenge for Abkhazia, International alert, March 14, 2014, https://www.international-alert.org/blogs/end-olympic-games-poses-new-challenge-abkhazia.
[66] A less common argument claims that this restriction could be a revenge after the Russian vice-consul was assassinated in Abkhazia in 2013.
[67] Monica Ellena, "Abkhazia: Close to Sochi, Far from the Olympics," Financial Times, February 6, 2014, https://www.ft.com/content/d83be5d5-4178-3f29-80d5-08629445cc8d.

went through absorbed those Russian tourists, who previously spent their holidays in the separatist territory. The rivalry became intensified when Sochi's Mayor, Anatoly Pakhomov, publicly diminished Abkhazia's touristic value by criticizing the quality of its beaches and the complexity of border checks.[68] The combination of poor infrastructure and unemployment has led to several accidents and robberies, which also contributed to the loss of Russian tourists.[69]

Abkhazia faces other economic issues, such as scarce energy supply. According to an agreement with Georgia, Abkhazia benefits from the electricity produced by the Inguri Hydropower plant free of charge. Water shortages and high energy consumption, however, have resulted in numerous blackouts.[70] The lost energy is complemented by Russia on a subsidized price, which makes a burden for Moscow as well: since energy is sold to Abkhazia below market price, the energy provider company Inter-Rao generates significant losses that are only partly reimbursed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia.[71] On top of that, after the annexation of Crimea, even Russia itself had electricity deficit in southern regions due to the necessity of supplying the peninsula, thus making the scarce energy market even more problematic.[72]

[68] Valery Dzutsati, "More Disagreements Emerge Between Abkhaz and Russian Interests," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 109 (June 7, 2010), https://jamestown.org/program/more-disagreements-emerge-between-abkhaz-and-russian-interests/.
[69] Liz Fuller, "Analysis: Does Rising Crime In Abkhazia Pose A Threat To Russia?" RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, August 28, 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/abkhazia-unemployment-russia/28701606.html.
[70] D.M. Mushba et al., *Study of Electricity Consumption in Abkhazia* (Tbilisi: International Center on Conflict and Negotiation, 2019), http://iccn.ge/files/energy_study_results_abkhazia_2019_eng_-_e-book.pdf.
[71] Murman Margvelashvili, "Enguri HPP and Energy Supply to Abkhazia -Energy and National Security Challenge" (Tbilisi: World Experience for Georgia, December 2017), http://weg.ge/sites/default/files/enguri-hpp-and-energy-supply-to-abkhazia-1.pdf.
[72] "Transparent Energy Trading in Secessionist Regions Electricity Supply to Abkhazia and Emerging Energy Security Risks for Georgia" (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, July 27, 2018), https://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/Georgia-Case-Study.pdf.

The level or intensity of economic hierarchy between dominant and subordinate depends on whether the subordinate has full authority over allocating its resources, choosing its trade partner and other actions related to its own economy, which can vary from *market exchange* (enjoying full authority over choosing partners) to full *dependency* (in which the subordinate state cedes authority over all of its economic policies, including its currency, to another polity).[73] Directly after the secessionist wars, the breakaway states' heavy reliance on Russia could be understood as the lifeblood for their own economic survival. Although Russia remains an important economic benefactor for the parastates, recent developments (opening to Western markets, disagreements on partnerships, launch of new currencies) proved that Russia's role and power is diminishing. Such events have shown that Abkhazia and Transnistria have revised their positions in hierarchy from the 1990s status quo full dependency to a weak dependency by the 2010s. As a result, their autonomous authority over their economy can more ably resist Moscow's wishes, and go its own way. Importantly, they have not done this by pivoting fully toward the West—hence independence with realignment.

[73] Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, 56.

CHAPTER 3 – POLITICAL DISAGREEMENTS AND CHANGE: FROM PROTECTORATE TO SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

The population of both breakaway states delegated power to heroes of the independence war, like the Abkhaz Vladislav Ardzimba or the Transnistrian Igor Smirnov. These leaders, however, concentrated wealth and power in their hands, and as a result, a new massive mobilization for re-democratization took place.[74] The Kremlin had also an interest in moving political developments and domestic policies towards a different direction. Ties with Russia went beyond sending financial aid to these de facto states. Whether taking an active role in elections or suggesting deeper partnerships, Moscow used numerous tools to shape domestic policies in its own will. Such maneuvers, however, ended with diverging results.

In fact, Russia's involvement in the breakaways' elections proved to be counterproductive, since both Abkhaz and Transnistrian populations perceived it as (hegemonic) interference in their domestic politics. Although leaders of the parastates still regarded Russia as their main partner, their close relationships with the Kremlin began to worsen. Moscow shifted its focus to Moldova, hence rejecting Transnistria's proposals for unification. On the other hand, Abkhazia's intention to prevent further integration manifested itself in the unexpected rejection of the so-called agreement "On Alliance and Integration" and the political statements of several Abkhaz politicians.

In the following sections, different political events and policies are elaborated to show how the hierarchical positions of the parastates shifted from protectorate to sphere of influence. Lake uses the term protectorate for a hierarchical relationship in which "a dominant exercises

[74] Matsuzato, "From Belligerent to Multi-Ethnic Democracy: Domestic Politics in Unrecognized States after Ceasefire."

authority over many of the subordinated state's possible security actions," whereas sphere of influence means the relationship in which "a dominant state possesses the authority only to limit a subordinate's cooperation with third parties."[75] It is important to note that the possession of such authority does not imply the dominant state constantly using that authority. Thus, Transnistrian leaders' numerous attempts to make closer ties with Russia were received in Moscow with growing uninterest, especially after Moldovans voted a pro-Russian president in 2016. Different is the case in Abkhazia, where Russia's aim to keep the hierarchical relationship of protectorate met several obstacles in the form of rejection of further integration. Albeit the two parastates' goals concerning their ties with Russia were different, they both ended up maintaining an equally lower level of hierarchical relationship, which highlights the dominant Russia's role in the evolving relationship.

3.1 Transnistria

Vladimir Putin's "United Russia" party has a long record in supporting the Transnistrian political actors. The first President of Transnistria, Igor Smirnov enjoyed that support until 2011 when Moscow switched sides and signed a cooperation agreement with Transnistria's other major party, "Renewal."[76] One of the reasons behind the shift was to open a substantial dialogue between Tiraspol and Chisinau, a conflict resolution process that Transnistria's "founding father"[77] opposed.[78] As a consequence, in the 2011 elections the Russian party

[75] Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations,* 54.
[76] Marcin Kosienkowski and Andrey Devyatkov, "Testing Pluralism: Transnistria in the Light of 2011 Presidential Elections," *Published in Spotkania Polsko-Mołdawskie. Księga Poświęcona Pamięci Profesora Janusza Solaka, Ed. Marcin Kosienkowski, (Lublin: Episteme, 2013), 303-28.*, accessed April 20, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/1871427/Testing_Pluralism_Transnistria_in_the_Light_of_2011_Presidential_Elections.
[77] Roman Konoplev, *Pridnestrovie's Future: Liberal Economy, Freedom and Security* (Roman Konoplev, 2010).
[78] Stanislav Secrieru, "The Transnistrian Conflict – New Opportunities and Old Obstacles for Trust Building (2009–2010)," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 241–63.

openly supported Renewal and its candidate, Anatoliy Kaminski, who was introduced as a "true force for modernization."[79] At that time, the visitors representing United Russia were denounced in the mass media by the Transnistrian Central Election Commission. They were dubbed "unwanted guests" and accused of interfering in Transnistrian domestic politics.[80] Neither Kaminski nor Smirnov won, but steps towards deeper cooperation with Moldova were still made by President-elect Yevgeniy Shevchuk.[81] Thus at the next Presidential elections in 2016, Russia attempted to stay clear and conducted a "Radio Silence" strategy: no candidates were endorsed and no Russian officials appeared in the campaign.[82]

Since Russia no longer paid that much attention to the Transnistrian political developments, a shift in the political discourse occurred in Tiraspol as well, characterizing the most recent presidential elections as a competition to show who is more loyal to Russia, while accusing each other of dealing with Moldova and Ukraine behind the scenes.[83] The 2016 election was not simply about political competition but was also a struggle to remain on the Kremlin's agenda, which slowly shifted towards Moldova's new President, the pro-Russian Igor Dodon. As political scientist Alexandru Lesanu puts it: "Russia has come to the realization that the Moldovan government is now the best advocate for Russian interests in the region," that is why it "divert[s] its attention away from Transnistria."[84]

79 Despite Putin's support, the independent Yevgeny Shevchuk won the 2011 Presidential elections. Later Shevchuk was accused for, among many other, abuse of power, corruption and smuggling.
80 Andrey Devyatkov, "Russian Policy Toward Transnistria," *Problems of Post-Communism* 59, no. 3 (May 1, 2012): 53–62.
81 Kosienkowski and Devyatkov, "Testing Pluralism." 324-326.
82 Lina Grau and Robert Coalson, "Explainer: An Unpredictable Election Unfolds In Moldova's Breakaway Transdniester," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, December 11, 2016, https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-transdniester-election-russia-explainer/28169591.html.
83 Alexandru Lesanu, "Transnistria's Presidential Election: A Hard-Fought Contest with No Punches Pulled, as Russia Diverts Its Attention from the Unrecognised State," *LSE European Politics and Policy (EUROPP)* (blog), December 23, 2016, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/69999/1/blogs.lse.ac.uk-Transnistrias%20presidential%20election%20A%20hard-fought%20contest%20with%20no%20punches%20pulled%20as%20Russia%20diverts%20it.pdf.
84 Ibid. 2.

Regardless of the political actor, holding Moscow's hands tightly was in everyone's interest--to make a long-cherished dream coming true and unite Transnistria with Russia. In a 2006 referendum, 97% of votes favored unification.[85] The demand was reasserted in 2014 when a couple of days after the annexation of Crimea, local politicians and activists asked the Russian parliament to draft a law (similar to the one drafted for Crimea) to allow their territory to join Russia.[86] Although President Shevchuk published the request to join Russia by the end of 2016,[87] the accession, was not even discussed by the Kremlin[88] Moreover, Griogry Karasin, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia stated that "Transnistria can be [instead] a special area within Moldova."[89]

3.2 Abkhazia

Moscow took an active role in the presidential elections of Abkhazia as well. In 2004, just before the Abkhaz Presidential elections, Vladimir Putin met candidate and former Prime Minister Raul Khadzhimba, with whom he shared relations "of a uniquely fraternal nature."[90] Even before inaugurating him as President, Khadzhimba was received by Putin and praised for being "a supporter of the expansion of our relations."[91] Photos of the meeting were posted all over Abkhazia but voters perceived the display as interference in Abkhazia's domestic

[85] Compiled by Michael Schwirtz, "Transnistria Votes on Independence," *The New York Times*, September 18, 2006, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/18/world/europe/18RUSSIASUMM.html.
[86] "Trans-Dniester Plea to Join Russia," *BBC News*, March 18, 2014, sec. Europe, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26627236.
[87] Damien Sharkov, "Moldovan Separatists Want to Join Russia Even without Common Borders.," Newsweek, September 9, 2016, https://www.newsweek.com/moldovas-transnistrian-separatists-call-join-russia-496931.
[88] "Government Did Not Discuss Transnistria Possible Accession to Russia," TASS, March 24, 2014, https://tass.com/russia/725049.
[89] Tatiana Urbanskaya, "Trouble in Transnistria," UNIAN, March 11, 2015, https://www.unian.info/politics/1054236-trouble-in-transnistria.html.
[90] "Meeting with President of Abkhazia Raul Khadjimba," President of Russia, January 12, 2016, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61278.
[91] "Встреча с Президентом Абхазии Раулем Хаджимбой [Meeting with President of Abkhazia Raul Khadjimba]," Президент России, August 27, 2014, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46501.

affairs.[92] Consequently, Khadzhimba lost and the "more independentist" Ankvab won,[93] but the results were contested, while Russian bureaucrats, such as then-Krasnodar Governor Alexander Tkachev, threatened to blockade Abkhazia.[94] Such fierce reaction proved to be counterproductive. As Skakov notes, "instead of withdrawing with their tails between their legs, the rhetoric of its leaders had strengthened and incorporated now distinct anti-Russian over-tones."[95] But ten years later, Putin's expectations "to strengthen [the] 'friendly' relations" with Abkhazia finally met[96] when Khadzhimba took the Presidential seat, a position he kept for two terms, while allegedly detaining opposition leaders with Russian help.[97]

However, relations deteriorated in 2014. The Kremlin wished to tighten its ties with Abkhazia through a new economic, socio-political, and military partnership. The first version was drafted by Moscow without involving Abkhazia and titled "On Alliance and Integration." Unexpectedly, the draft was published and triggered wide criticism and rallies across the region, including in both Tbilisi and Sukhumi. As an Abkhaz resident commented, "Under such a treaty, the only thing left from [Abkhaz] independence would be the label 'Republic of Abkhazia.'"[98] Although phrases like "the goal of integration" clearly indicated Moscow's aim for unification,[99] the use of specific language was not the only concern in the breakaway state.

92 Astamur Achba, "Abkhazia – Russia's Tight Embrace," European Council on Foreign Relations, September 1, 2016, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/essay_abkhazia_russias_tight_embrace.
93 Wojciech Górecki, "No Change in the Russian Caucasus. The Winter Olympics amid a Local War," *Centre for Eastern Studies*, no. 47 (January 2014), https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/praceosw-47-rosyjski_kaukaz_ang-net.pdf.
94 Popescu, "Democracy in Secessionism: Transnistria and Abkhazia's Domestic Policies."
95 Alexander Skakov, "Abkhazia at a Crossroads: On the Domestic Political Situation in the Republic of Abkhazia," *Iran & the Caucasus* 9, no. 1 (2005): 159–85.
96 "Khajimba Becomes New Abkhaz Leader," *Civil.Ge* (blog), August 25, 2014, https://civil.ge/archives/123965.
97 Liz Fuller, "Russia Reportedly Detains Abkhaz Oppositionist Following New Demand For Khajimba's Resignation," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, April 12, 2016, https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-detains-abkhazia-opposition-figure-follow-khajimba-resignation-demand/28155105.html.
98 Dieter Boden, "The Russian-Abkhaz Treaty: New Tensions in the South Caucasus" (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stfitung, December 2014), https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/11092-20141217.pdf.
99 Ambrosio and Lange, "The Architecture of Annexation?"

One of the most controversial points was the extension of Abkhaz citizenship to Russian citizens, which could give them the right to acquire property in the de facto territory — which noncitizens are currently denied.[100] The Abkhaz leadership was afraid that by purchasing properties, Russia could become the legal owner of Abkhazia. Sukhumi's fears were not unwarranted: several architectural monuments were already owned by Russians, many of whom were former KGB officers.[101] The fears were reaffirmed when Kremlin chief strategist Vladislav Surkov's emails were leaked.[102] The emails revealed how Moscow put pressure on the separatist administration and tried to neutralize Khadzhimba and local elites.[103] Although the clause on citizenship has been removed from the agreement, recently a pro-Russian Member of Parliament proposed a law similar to the removed section. In response, another politician, Almas Jopua called for a moratorium on sales.[104] Later Jopua's car exploded (allegedly bombed by Russian security services). Jopua survived and called for a rally, after which the draft law was definitively removed.[105]

The other reason for increasing distrust towards Moscow was the false Russian media reports on the poisoning of Aslan Bzhania, the favored opposition candidate in the 2019 Presidential elections. Although Bzhania withdrew before the first round of voting, there was no evidence of such an incident. As a result, Khadzhimba won with only one percent difference, however,

100 Thomas de Waal, "Abkhazia: Stable Isolation - Uncertain Ground: Engaging With Europe's De Facto States and Breakaway Territories," Carnegie Europe, March 12, 2018, https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/12/03/abkhazia-stable-isolation-pub-77842.
101 Anna Nemtsova, "How Russia's FSB Colonized Abkhazia," *Newsweek*, August 18, 2010, https://www.newsweek.com/how-russias-fsb-colonized-abkhazia-71447.
102 Ibid.
103 David Batashvili, "'Surkov Leaks': Glimpse into Russia's Management of Georgia's Occupied Regions," *The Clarion Brief*, October 2016, https://www.academia.edu/37144668/_Surkov_leaks_Glimpse_into_Russias_Management_of_Georgias_Occupied_Regions.
104 Achba, "Abkhazia – Russia's Tight Embrace."
105 Eric Jackson, "Russian Soft and Hard Power Revisited: Georgia's Frozen Conflicts," *ERA Institute* (blog), March 23, 2017, https://erainstitute.org/russian-soft-and-hard-power-revisited-georgias-frozen-conflicts/.

massive protests made him resign several months later.[106] Acting President Bganba summoned the Russian ambassador and gave him a public dressing-down. Bganba used rhetoric that "has never been seen in Abkhaz-Russian relations before,"[107] while claiming the misleading news to be "an overt attempt to destabilize the social-political situation in Abkhazia, which could lead to civil strife."[108]

Political interactions, including diplomatic and security actions, are indicators of hierarchy. Open support for candidates proved to be counterproductive, while negotiations on cooperation ended bitterly, which so far, only proves a change of equilibrium. What such interactions also show is that the role to support/oppose a higher level of hierarchy changed by region. As such, Abkhazia's defiance of Russia's proposal for a deeper integration manifested itself in not only the former's rejection of a partnership agreement but in political rallies and electoral results. Thus, Sukhumi managed to reduce the level of hierarchical relationship from protectorate to sphere of influence. On the other hand, the Russo-Transnistrian hierarchy reached the same level against Tiraspol's will. The Transnistrian leadership made its intentions to unify with Russia explicit, but Moscow not only rejected such proposals but slowly refocused its attentions on the pro-Russian Moldovan government.

106 Vlagyiszlav Makszimov, "Abkhazia's de Facto President Resigns, Triggers New Elections," *Euractiv.Com* (blog), January 13, 2020, https://www.euractiv.com/section/eastern-europe/news/abkhazias-de-facto-president-resigns-triggers-new-elections/.
107 Елена Заводская, "'Такой риторики в абхазо-российских отношениях не было никогда прежде' [There has never been such rhetoric in Abkhaz-Russian relations before]," Эхо Кавказа, March 4, 2020, https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/30468704.html.
108 Joshua Kucera, "Abkhazia's Leader Issues Ultimatum to Its Russian Patrons | Eurasianet," Eurasianet.org, March 6, 2020, https://eurasianet.org/abkhazias-leader-issues-ultimatum-to-its-russian-patrons.

CHAPTER 4 – CREATION OF A DISTINCT IDENTITY: FROM SOVIET REGIONS TO PARASTATES

Abkhazia and Transnistria's populations remain heterogeneous even twenty years after their breakaway conflicts. The expulsion (or escape) of about 250,000 Georgians from Abkhazia granted Abkhaz only a small demographic advantage,[109] while an ethnic cleansing policy carried out by the Transnistrian authorities led to 25,000 Moldovan citizens becoming internally displaced persons.[110] Even before the USSR's dissolution Abkhazia had a distinct Abkhaz identity, though it faced repression and forced assimilation by Soviet authorities. Meanwhile, a strong Transnistrian identity was formed only after secession. Thus, the creation and reinforcement of a unique identity could be only conducted parallel to state-building.

The consolidation of statehood in these breakaway states went hand in hand with nation-building. Abkhaz and Transnistrian leaders both put efforts into identifying their nations, peoples and histories to create common identities. Language laws have been approved with the aim of promoting new state identities, supporting nation-building projects, and furthering claims to statehood.[111] The creation of such state identities were also based on distinctions from the dominant nationality of each breakaway region and its parent state, usually demonized in the breakaway region, hence creating a dichotomy of the 'good' and the 'bad.' As in almost every nation-building project, the uses and abuses of history are central.[112] Hence, historical myths highlighting the uniqueness and justifying the existence of *the* Abkhaz or Transnistrian identity gained more space in public discourse.

109 Ahmed Abdel-Hafez Fawaz, *Opportunity, Identity, and Resources in Ethnic Mobilization: The Iraqi Kurds and the Abkhaz of Georgia* (Lexington Books, 2017).
110 James J. Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts* (Springer, 2017).
111 Giorgio Comai and Bernardo Venturi, "Language and Education Laws in Multi-Ethnic de Facto States: The Cases of Abkhazia and Transnistria," *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 6 (November 2015): 886–905.
112 Ala Șveț, "Staging the Transnistrian Identity Within the Heritage of Soviet Holidays," *History and Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 98–116.

The following segments show how national identities were constructed and promoted in the breakaway states through language policies and the use of historical myths. Lake's hierarchical approach does not theorize nation-building but the following sections prove that the formation of a distinct identity could be either a driving factor, or a consequence of the changing hierarchical relationship.

4.1 Transnistria

From the time of its secession, "the [Transnistrian] regime has embarked upon a state-driven identity-building process, which [was] intended to foster a new regionalist model of collective identity as the first step towards the creation of a 'Transnistrian people.'"[113] First, the government employed history-writing as a means of inculcating a new identity and loyalty among the local population. Together with researchers who mostly followed Soviet historiographical traditions,[114] politicians started to reinterpret history and write history books accordingly,[115] hence (re)forming a tangible common identity that is said to have existed even before the separation from Moldova.[116] Dembínska found several historical myths that could serve to expand and invest the new category of 'Transnistrians' with identity attributes:[117] formed from the "Dnestr community" but distinct from the residents of right-bank Moldova, and liberated in 1992, the identity was created to propagate a supra-ethnic Transnistrian

113 Ibid. 105.
114 Vladimir Solonari, "Narrative, Identity, State: History Teaching in Moldova," *East European Politics and Societies* 16, no. 2 (May 1, 2002): 414–45.
115 Vladimir Solonari, "Creating a 'People': A Case Study in Post-Soviet History-Writing," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, no. 2 (May 30, 2003): 411–38.
116 Pål Kolstø and Andrei Malgin, "The Transnistrian Republic: A Case of Politicized Regionalism," *Nationalities Papers* 26, no. 1 (March 1, 1998): 103–27.
117 Magdalena Dembińska, "Carving out the Nation with the Enemy's Kin: Double Strategy of Boundary-Making in Transnistria and Abkhazia," *Nations and Nationalism* 25, no. 1 (2019): 298–317.

people.[118] State symbols and insignia were created, claimed to be national symbols devoid of ethnic markers.[119] Although they all resemble Soviet designs, new stamps and banknotes marked early forays into state- and nation-building.[120]

Another core element in the Transnistrian identity construction was education system: the government made a division between "Transnistrian Moldovans" and "Bessarabian Moldovans" as cognitive support for a Transnistrian identity[121] and to promote a narrative about protecting "true" Moldovans.[122] Although Transnistria permits Moldovan minorities' schools to operate in the region,[123] their freedom of teaching is restricted. Instead of Moldovan publications (that are not allowed in schools), outdated Soviet books are used, which refer to Romanians and Moldovans as invaders or the enemy, while 9 May is considered as the "day of liberation from the fascist threat."[124] Although Transnistrian laws promote the freedom of using the Moldovan or Ukrainian language, in practice, this principle of equality is clearly ignored: laws and other official documents are only accessible in Russian and the websites of state institutions are usually monolingual.[125]

It is important to note, however, that the Transnistrian leadership pursues an ambiguous politics on one of the key aspects on shaping identity, passportization. On one hand, Tiraspol

118 Ibid. 304.
119 Kolstø and Blakkisrud, "Living with Non-Recognition."
120 John O'Loughlin and Vladimir Kolosov, "Building Identities in Post-Soviet 'de Facto States': Cultural and Political Icons in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Transdniestria, and Abkhazia," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 58, no. 6 (2017): 691–715.
121 Stela Suhan and Natalia Cojocaru, "Stratagems in the Construction of the Transnistrian Identity," *Psihologia Socială*, no. 15 (2005): 119–34.
122 Magdalena Dembinska and Julien Danero Iglesias, "The Making of an Empty Moldovan Category within a Multiethnic Transnistrian Nation" *East European Politics and Societies* 27, no. 3 (August 2013): 413-28.
123 That was not always the case: twice, the Transnistrian government attempted to shut down these schools on the pretext they violated Transnistrian legislation. Later some of them were allowed to reopen as private institutions, financed by Chisinau (for more, see: Hanne and Neukirch, 2005 or Roper, 2005).
124 Natalia Cojocaru, "Nationalism and Identity in Transnistria," *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences* 19, no. 3/4 (September 2006): 261–72.
125 Comai and Venturi, "Language and Education Laws in Multi-Ethnic de Facto States." 891.

successfully manages the creation of a common, Transnistrian identity which is unique from both its parent and patron states. On the other hand, the de facto territory actively supports any action that fosters the unification with Russia. Nevertheless, Moscow no longer conducts an active role in citizenship issues. Consequently, Tiraspol had to call for a simplified procedure for obtaining Russian passports in 2018,[126] a request that the breakaway state reaffirmed a year later again.[127] With the lack of any will to simplify such process, Transnistrians today keep requesting Moldovan citizenship, which is considered to be less complex and less time-consuming. In other words, people in Transnistria are more willing to obtain a citizenship of the "enemy" than of the patron.[128]

The government's successful creation of a Transnistrian identity and nation is confirmed by polls and research. Already in 1998, an opinion poll on "National processes, language relations, and identity" found that "processes of the formation of a territorial socio-cultural identity of the Transnistrians could be proven."[129] Two years later, interviews conducted on both sides of the Dniestr river by Russian scientist Vladimir Kossolov showed that "the degree of political and territorial identification with the region and state was almost the same."[130]

126 "Transnistria Requests Simplified Procedures to Obtain Russian Citizenship," TASS, June 1, 2018, https://tass.com/world/1007604.
127 "Transnistrian Authorities Will Request Russia to Ease Citizenship Rules," TASS, May 30, 2019, https://tass.com/world/1060935.
128 Kolstø and Blakkisrud, "Living with Non-Recognition." 198.
129 Stefan Troebst, "'We Are Transnistrians!': Post-Soviet Identity Management in the Dniester Valley," *Ab Imperio* 2003, no. 1 (2003): 437–66.
130 Vladimir Kolossov, *A Small State vs a Self-Proclaimed Republic: Nation-Building, Territorial Identities and Prospects of Conflict Resolution (the Case of Moldova-Transdniestria)*, ed. Stefano Bianchini (Augsburg: Longo, 2001).

4.2 Abkhazia

Although Abkhaz is considered the state language of the breakaway territory, today only a few people speak it, making Russian the *lingua franca* in Abkhazia. In 2007, however, even that linguistic status quo was broken when a new language law was adopted by the Abkhaz Parliament.[131] That law aimed to spread the Abkhaz language that was supported by "Abkhazian historians [who were] starting to resent Russia because of the activities of the Russian empire in the mid-19th century" when the Tsarist Empire deported or executed half and even up to three-quarters of the ethnic Abkhaz population.[132]

Sukhumi also took measures to support the Abkhaz language by mandating obligatory Abkhaz textbooks and language use in schools, though the underdeveloped infrastructure and lack of teachers has prevented it.[133] The Armenian community supported the promotion of the language[134] but it was more problematic with Georgians, many of whom were students and had to move to Georgian-controlled areas, since Georgian schools in the region closed down.[135]

To emphasize the historical presence and importance of the Abkhaz community, these history textbooks state that "as it is widely acknowledged [sic!], the Abkhaz language is one of the oldest languages in the world and is truly autochthonous to the territory of Abkhazia," later

131 Rachel Clogg, "The Politics of Identity in Post-Soviet Abkhazia: Managing Diversity and Unresolved Conflict1," *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 2 (May 2008): 305–29.
132 Belyi, Abkhazia Is Tired and Disappointed.
133 Giorgio Comai, "In Abkhazia, worried about the language law," Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, November 6, 2012, https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Abkhazia/In-Abkhazia-worried-about-the-language-law-124824.
134 Suren Kerselian, Abkhazia's Armenians, multilingualism is the future, interview by Giorgio Comai, Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, November 30, 2011, https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Abkhazia/Abkhazia-s-Armenians-multilingualism-is-the-future-106982.
135 "Living in Limbo. Rights of Ethnic Georgians Returnees to the Gali District of Abkhazia," Human Rights Watch, July 15, 2011, https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/07/15/living-limbo/rights-ethnic-georgians-returnees-gali-district-abkhazia.

adding that the Abkhaz language – contrary to Georgian explanations – is not related to the Kartvelian [alias Georgian] language.[136] That gave the idea for Abkhaz leaders to change the approach towards ethnic Georgians who reside in the Gal/i district of Western Abkhazia and differentiate them from Georgians in the parent state. By calling them Mingrelians who – unlike other Georgian settlers in the twentieth century – were native to the region that remained neutral during the Georgian-Abkhaz War, the Abkhaz leadership managed to gain the loyalty of the Gal/i residents.[137] Consequently, today the number of Mingrelian students at Abkhaz universities is growing, thus helping young people from minorities to integrate the Abkhaz society.[138]

In addition to the indicators Lake used in his study, this thesis also involved the formation of a distinct identity as a component of the breakaway states' diverging policy. Although one could argue that the existence of a unique identity does not necessarily exclude a high level of hierarchical relationship, the process of creating a collective identity different from Russian or Georgian/Moldovan fosters patriotism and reduces public support for unification with either Russia or the parent state. Hence, new education laws and historical myths did not only contribute to the differentiation of Transnistrians and Abkhazians from any other nation but also aimed at integrating the parastates' minorities, hence taking a "third direction" and conducting independent politics.

136 Vladimir Rouvinski, "Ethnic Enclosure in Soviet and Post-Soviet School Textbooks," IPSHU Research Report Series (Hiroshima: Hiroshima University, 2007), https://home.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/~heiwa/Pub/E20/vladimir.pdf.
137 Matsuzato, "From Belligerent to Multi-Ethnic Democracy: Domestic Politics in Unrecognized States after Ceasefire."
138 "The Realm of the Possible Finding Ways Forward in the Georgian-Abkhaz Context: People in the Gal/i Region" (London: Conciliation Resources, July 2015), https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/CR_The-Realm-of-the-possible_Gal-i_43_webEn.pdf.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, two contrasting cases were elaborated to show that Abkhazia and Transnistria began pursuing independent politics after their secessions, triggering conflicts with Russian interests in both political and economic spheres, which led these breakaway states towards a "third way": neither with Russia, nor with West, but *independence without realignment*. On top of that, a relatively new approach, the concept of hierarchies in international relations, has been used heuristically to develop an accurate picture of the changing relationship between the parastates and Russia. By using Lake's economic and security indicators to measure the level of hierarchy, supplemented with the analysis of identities, there is an evidence that in the last decade the level of the hierarchical relationship between these breakaway states and the patron states moved, whether by Russia or the subordinated state, towards a less asymmetric, "Informal Empire" relation. Both de facto areas are seeking international recognition; they possess nominally independent governments with Moscow being less active in their domestic politics. The three indicators elaborated in this thesis all show that the hierarchical relationships Abkhazia and Transnistria have with Russia are indeed shifting towards a new equilibrium.

Russia was actively involved in the political campaigns of both breakaway states but neither were successful. The candidate endorsed by Putin's party lost elections in Transnistria, while the Moscow-backed President in Abkhazia had to resign amid violent protests. Discussions of Russian interference were increasing in both territories, which made the Kremlin abstaining from following political campaigns and accept whoever the winner was. Consequently, as early as March 2020, Bzhania took the Abkhaz Presidential office who only received a short notice from the Kremlin, accepting Bzhania's "convincing victory."[139] The lack of trust is mirrored

[139] "Congratulations to Aslan Bzhania on His Election President of Abkhazia," President of Russia, March 23, 2020, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63051.

in the President elect recent interviews as well, in which he spoke about Russian cooperation carefully without naming any Russian counterpart he had meet with.[140]

The shrinking Russian economy and the costly developments in Crimea had a robust effect on the de facto areas as well. Trade volumes declined, financial aid has been cut and became targeted to restrict the corruption that characterizes the region. As a result, businesses in the breakaway areas started to open relations with their respective parent states, thus exploiting the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, and exporting to EU member states.

Russia also wanted the Abkhaz leadership to facilitate the process for Russian nationals to obtain Abkhaz citizenship but Sukhumi suspected Russian oligarchs behind, as such they could easily purchase numerous properties in Abkhazia. Interestingly, when the Transnistrian government asked for easier access to obtain Russian citizenship, the initiative was not granted by Moscow. That reaffirms the fact that the "passportizitation" policies used by Russia were only a tool distinct the people living in the separatist areas from the dominant community of the parent state and the process could be only facilitated in places where Moscow had other interests as well. [141]

Consequently, de facto countries in the region launched their own projects to consolidate their statehood and promote common identities. The languages of the parent states, and even Russian were subordinated, while historical myths gained more space in the discourse. The basis of these myths was the distinction between 'us' and 'them'. These elements also helped the

[140] Аслан Бжания, Аслан Бжания: политических преследований в Абхазии не будет [Aslan Bzhania: there will be no political persecution in Abkhazia], РИА Новости, March 23, 2020, https://ria.ru/20200323/1569001423.html.
[141] Ramesh Ganohariti, "Dual Citizenship in De Facto States: Comparative Case Study of Abkhazia and Transnistria," *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 1 (January 2020): 175–92.

breakaway leaderships to justify why Transnistrian Moldovans or Abkhazian Georgians form an integral part of their respective nations.

Transnistria, with a significant Russian community and a widely present nostalgia for the Soviet Union[142] expressed several times its intention to join the Russian Federation, although Moscow did not advocate such initiatives. On the other hand, the Kremlin tried to gain increasing control over Abkhazia, but the rejection of the Abkhaz people (manifested in both political rallies and the results of elections) became an obstacle to further integration.

Since this thesis shows that hierarchies can change not by the instigation of the dominant state but the subordinated as well, further research can distinguish causal relations of domestic politics of the breakaway states and Russian foreign policy, in order to find a solution for the so-called "chicken and egg" problem. This thesis has presented these different realms independently to highlight their different processes. But a future study could try to highlight its similarities and seek to understand what the role of relationship between Russia's dominance and the breakaway states' autonomy is. The role of nation-building and the generation of a distinct identity in choosing a "third way" can be also subject of future studies to decide whether nation-building contributed to the shift in the hierarchical relationship or this hierarchical shift allowed space for forming unique identities. Using other theoretical approaches, such as ontological security would probably suggest that the generation of unique identity can be understood rather as a tool against an existential threat, a "struggle of being against non-being."[143] Concepts of nationalism studies or Russia's foreign policy that could give a higher level of agency to subordinated states could also easily fit in the study of such

[142] Suhan and Cojocaru, "Stratagems in the Construction of the Transnistrian Identity."
[143] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford University Press, 1991).

developments, due to the lack of time, however, the use of these theories remains for further researches. Other studies could also analyze whether an external challenge could become incentive of further cooperation. With the outbreak of COVID-19, for instance, communication and movements between the breakaway and parent states intensified. The leaders of Moldova and Transnistria "have established [a] good cooperation" by conducting tests in Chisinau.[144] Similarly, Abkhazia also views its claims to independence as a separate matter from cooperation with NGOs or even with Georgia itself.[145]

Even if Russia is likely to remain a dominant actor in the region, the power the country used to have twenty years ago has been now weakened. The political 'left alone' feeling, the intensifying trade with the parent state, and the formation of a unique identity shows that Abkhazia and Transnistria now play different roles in the international arena, and in which Georgia and Moldova can become important players again. One such sign was the Moldovan President's video message, in which he expressed his willingness to give the unrecognized Transnistria broad powers of autonomy.[146] Meanwhile, the Abkhaz President-elect announced that he placed the improvement of Abkhaz-Georgian relationship as a top priority of his term.[147]

However, until negotiations between the de facto territories and the host countries operate in the same frameworks as it used to be in the last twenty years, a comprehensive settlement is unlikely to be reached and the future of these breakaway states will remain uncertain. Recent

144 "Moldova Will Be Helping Transnistria Combat Coronavirus Pandemic," Infotag.md, April 3, 2020, http://www.infotag.md/rebelion-en/283832/.
145 "The COVID-19 Challenge in Post-Soviet Breakaway Statelets," International Crisis Group, May 6, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/b89-covid-19-challenge-post-soviet-breakaway-statelets.
146 "Moldovan President Dodon to Grant Broad Autonomy to Transnistria," Hromadske International, February 7, 2020, https://en.hromadske.ua/posts/moldovan-president-dodon-to-grant-broad-autonomy-to-transnistria.
147 "Opposition 'Presidential Candidate' in Occupied Abkhazia Supports 'Direct Dialogue between Tbilisi and Sokhumi,'" Agenda.ge, January 16, 2020, https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/134.

events proved that cooperation is possible with some economic incentives and there is also a sign of openness on all sides, but it is far from being enough for deeper cooperation.

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