

Sebastian Relitz (Ed.)

---

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE  
AND COOPERATION IN PROTRACTED CONFLICTS



---

CORRIDORS PROCEEDINGS VOL. I

ANATOLIY DIRUN

**POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE SYSTEM OF SETTLEMENT OF  
ETHNO-POLITICAL CONFLICTS: THE CASE OF TRANSNISTRIA**

DOI: 10.15457/cp\_1\_100-109

---

ANATOLIY DIRUN

## POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE SYSTEM OF SETTLEMENT OF ETHNO-POLITICAL CONFLICTS: THE CASE OF TRANSNISTRIA

*Ethno-political conflicts are vital factors for regional security. Due to their complexity, they often acquire a protracted character in the process of their settlement. The settlement of protracted conflicts through political means is a crucial challenge for scholars in the field of conflict research and political science in general. This paper argues that the stability and effectiveness of the conflicting parties' institutions play an essential role in conflict resolution. Institutions ensure both, the stability of the conflicting sides and the stability of the relations between them. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the relationship between the development of political parties in Transnistria and the implementation of social and economic reforms in the republic. I argue that the lack of programmatic vision to modernise political institutions and the party system limits the possibilities for the leadership in Tiraspol to stabilise the sociopolitical system in Transnistria. This shortcoming destabilises institutions in Transnistria and negatively affect the Moldovan-Transnistrian settlement process.*

**KEY WORDS:** *political parties, political institutions, electoral system, Transnistria, protracted conflicts*

### INTRODUCTION

#### DE FACTO POLITICAL PARTIES: BETWEEN STATISM AND CONSISTENCY

Experience shows that for more than 25 years of the existence of unrecognised states in the post-Soviet space the perception of de facto states on international law has changed. Preserving their statuses of unsettled conflict for all these years, unrecognised states have evolved from their original concept of self-proclaimed states to a new concept – the de facto state. Distinctive features of the de facto state include “the minimum sufficient level of political and legal order, as well as the resources for its provision, including the high level of its legitimating by the population of the relevant territories” (Ilyin/Meleshkina/Melville 2010).

25 years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union confirmed another trend: “The diplomatic and legal refusal to recognise de facto states is an indirect confirmation of the forced recognition of the fact of its existence and, thereby, the ability to recognise

*it when certain conditions change”* (Ilyin/Meleshkina/Melville 2010). In this regard, the question is topical – what helps to ensure a minimum political and legal legitimacy during these years? The answer, in our opinion, lies in understanding the causes, origins and mechanisms of the functioning of the de facto state’s political institutions. The duration of the “frozen conflicts” indicates the need to study the effectiveness of the conflicting parties’ political institutions and their impact on the dynamics of conflict development. We can distinguish three main tasks that have to be addressed by institutions in the context of conflict:

1. Ensure legitimate support from citizens.
2. Preserve the competitiveness of institutions regarding conflictual contact with the second party to the conflict.
3. Develop international cooperation with the goal of step-by-step external legitimisation of the de facto state.

For the de facto state, ensuring the legitimacy of the political regime is the primary factor that demonstrates the level of citizens’ trust in acting institutions, the quality of the institutions’ work and their ability to influence the formation and implementation of policies. In this connection, investigating the activities of political parties under the conditions of an unrecognised state is topical.

The party system is an inalienable attribute of any democratic state. This is primarily because it carries out the task updating the management class, as well as ensuring the stability of the political institutions necessary for the successful implementation of reforms. The tasks of the party include nominating new personnel, developing socio-economic programs and participating in the election of a team of like-minded people. Undoubtedly, each country has its model of party building. However, regardless of the format of the party system, it must be recognised that political parties are the only effective institutions for mediating legitimate power struggles due to their complex mechanisms of checks and balances both within the party and within the political system.

For Transnistria, a discussion about the role and significance of political parties has been ongoing since the establishment of the state. At different stages of building Transnistrian state, this discussion has always been on the agenda. This issue is relevant because, after the election of Vadim Krasnoselsky to the presidency of Transnistria on 11 December 2016, all political power was concentrated in the hands of the party Obnovlenie and the holding company Sheriff that supported it. With such political dominance, there are always additional opportunities for

solving the stated problems as well as potential challenges for their implementation (NewsMaker 12.12.2016).

The experience of the reign of the second president, Evgeniy Shevchuk (2011 – 2016), clearly demonstrated that the inability to build a capable management system and use modern tools for working with parties and movements led to a critical mass of managerial errors. As a result, Shevchuk was defeated in the 2016 election. Speaking of interaction with political parties, it is worth noting the fact that Evgeniy Shevchuk, in fact, himself dissolved in 2016 his own pro-presidential party Revival. Without creating a new political project, he remained without political support from his supporters in the presidential election in 2016. At the same time, we noted that in 2011, Evgeniy Shevchuk received more than 70% of the population's support (Izvestia 26.12.2016). In contrast to the situation six years ago, today, the formation of the government and the mandate of the parliamentary majority in the Supreme Council by the Obnovlenie in themselves may imply effectiveness in their ability to implement public policies.

In the medium term, however, the social and economic situation in Transnistria may become more complicated. The issue here, in our opinion, is not only in external challenges but also traditional challenges. Furthermore, the complicated relationship with the European Union on the part of fulfilling Tiraspol's obligations to implement the DCFTA. Installation of joint Moldovan-Ukrainian customs and border posts, which took control of imports into Transnistria. The issue of the ability of the Government to build effective work of political institutions to solve economic problems.

For the successful implementation of a socio-economic strategy, three conditions must be met: the mobilisation of power, knowledge and the public. If there is an evident concentration of power, but there will be discussions on the question of what needs to be done to address the socio-economic issue? However, the issue of how to mobilise the public during a post-election period to resolve and support the stated goals and objectives remains open. Public mobilisation, in this case, can be described *“as ensuring broad public participation in the process of developing solutions and monitoring their implementation, as well as being aware of a personal interest in the welfare of the state”* (Malgan 2011, 48).

Today, the modern condition of the party landscape in Transnistria allows us to characterise it as a half-party system. It includes one dominant political organisation, as well as several small satellite parties.

Despite the fact that today the government of Transnistria is building new forms of dialogue with representatives of the business community and non-governmental organisations. However, neither active dialogue nor discussion of problems in social networks can replace the activity of political parties capable of consolidating the efforts of various groups of the society to solve the strategic tasks facing the state. Why exactly are political parties able to solve this problem? Established political parties reduce the risk that discussions and public participation on socio-economic challenges are gradually phased out of the life of the state. The activities of a political party form a system of checks and balances, which provides mechanisms for the consolidation of society through the competition of ideas and projects. For example, the consent of political parties played an essential role in transforming Denmark into one of the most competitive economies in the world. This is required for implementing a coherent strategy for more than 20 years, as well as obtaining broad consensus in other areas, from childcare to environmental protection (Malgan, 2011). The central question here is what factors hamper the development and implementation of a competitive party system in Transnistria, which could serve as a room for discussion to generate of new ideas and initiatives to tackle the current deadlock. We can find the answer in analysing the influence of the electoral system on the development of political parties.

#### **THE MAJORITY ELECTORAL SYSTEM: FROM STABILITY TO MONOPOLY**

The electoral system is one of the primary factors shaping the institutional design of the state. It strongly influences the development of political parties, the degree of fragmentation or plurality of the party system. In the Transnistrian experience, the development of the electoral system and party system proceeded in three stages.

The first stage, which lasted from 1989 to the autumn of 1990, was connected with the election to the Transnistrian Supreme Council, which passed by an absolute majority. According to the results of the election campaign, 64 deputies entered the first convocation of the Supreme Council. In the second stage, December 24, 1995, a referendum was held in Transnistria where the constitution of the state was adopted, which consolidated the parliamentary-presidential form of government. Soon after, the law On the Election of People's Deputies of 12 September 1995 for the use of a mixed electoral system provided for the formation of the parliament. The lower chamber – the Legislative Chamber – consisted of 32 deputies and was formed by an absolute, while the upper chamber – the House of Representatives – consisted of 35 deputies elected by regional districts where the first five candidates for deputy mandates became winners. The third stage of the electoral reform refers to the year 2000

and is related to the law On Amendments and Additions to the Constitution of the Pridnestrovskaja Moldavskaia Respublika, dated 21 June 2000. With this, the presidential form of government was established in the republic under which the Cabinet of Ministers is an executive body under the president. Also, the Supreme Council was reformed into a unicameral legislative body consisting of 43 deputies whose elections are held by the majority system.

The theoretical justification of the influence of the electoral system on the development of parties was developed by M. Duverger (1954). The French researcher deduced a regularity known as M. Duverger's Law. Its essence lies in the fact that the majority system in single-seat constituencies leads to the formation of a two-party system. He proposed a law and a hypothesis about the relationship between the number of parties in the country and its electoral system. The law boils down to the following: *"The principle of a simple majority and elections, providing only one ballot, lead to the emergence of a two-party system"* (Duverger 1954). The hypothesis suggests that *"a simple majority system, elections that provide for a second ballot and proportional representation, lead to a multi-party system"* (Duverger 1954). On the contrary a proportional system promotes the development of a multiparty system.

Ever since the majority system was administered in Transnistria (i.e., 2000), four electoral cycles have already passed: 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015. Fifteen years is a sufficient period to analyse the effectiveness of the relative majority system and its influence on the dynamics of the development of political parties. Table 1 presents the results of elections to the Supreme Council of Transnistria for each electoral cycle from 2000 to 2015.

Table 1

Election date	The leading political organisations participating in the elections	The parliamentary majority	Leadership (belonging to the party)
2000	– <i>Edinstvo Pridnestrovia</i> – <i>Obnovlenie</i>		Grigori Maracutsa
2005	– <i>Respublica</i> – <i>Obnovlenie</i>	<i>Obnovlenie</i>	Evgeniy Shevchuk / <i>Obnovlenie</i> (2005–2009) Anatoliy Kaminskii / <i>Obnovlenie</i> (2009–2012)
2010	– <i>Partia Patrioticheska</i> – <i>Obnovlenie</i>	<i>Obnovlenie</i>	Anatoliy Kaminskii / <i>Obnovlenie</i> (2009–2012) Michail Burla / <i>Obnovlenie</i> (2012–2015)
2015	– Supporters of <i>Evgeny Shevchuk</i> – <i>Obnovlenie</i>	<i>Obnovlenie</i>	Vadim Krasnoselskiy (elected with the support of deputies from <i>Obnovlenie</i> ) (2015–2016) Aleksandr Serba / <i>Obnovlenie</i> (2016–today)

An analysis of the presented data allows us to draw the following conclusions:

1. The only political organisation participating in every election since 2000 is the *Obnovlenie* party. The stability of this organisation is connected to the financial support from the firm Sheriff as well as to systemic work in the field of party building. The current regional distances, humanitarian actions, information support of candidates and other resources allowed the party to form a parliamentary majority from 2005 to 2015.
2. The presidential form of government in Transnistria, as well as the lack of the right to form a government with the party through a majority in the parliamentary elections, limited the ability of *Obnovlenie* to develop and implement political decisions.
3. The main competitors of *Obnovlenie*, as a rule, were created by the team that controls the executive branch. Such a political technology attitude to parties as exclusively pre-election projects, apparently, was based on the belief in the

omnipotence of administrative resources and backroom arrangements and on the desire to avoid investing in and developing party projects. Despite this fact, the presence of a second political force is considered today in Transnistria as an integral part of the electoral process.

It should also be noted that, despite the opposition of the two main party projects from 2000 to 2015, during this period, ten political parties were established in Transnistria. To date, some of them have ceased to exist, and the activities of others are fading. The most stable is the Transnistrian Communist Party, which has close relations with its Russian counterparts. Thus, the majority system established since 2000 created the prerequisites for a two-party format. However, the lack of additional mechanisms to strengthen the activities and significance of parties, in fact, has transformed the two-party system into a conditionality that will arise before the next parliamentary elections. Before the parliamentary elections in 2010, this pre-election competition between the two political projects ensured the stability of the institutions. This system has become a compromise between the leadership and the citizens of the republic. First, it retained high chances for re-election, but at the same time, it supported competition between candidates, thereby increasing the legitimacy of the elections. The activation of the parties only during the pre-election period blurred the system of checks and balances created in the middle of the 1990s. That, in turn, provoked the emergence of political crises in the Republic, which could no longer be regulated exclusively by non-public instruments.

#### MODERNISATION OF THE PARTY SYSTEM OF TRANSNISTRIA AS A SYSTEM CALL

After 15 years of domination in the parliamentary elections, the party Obnovlenie (with the support of the Sheriff company) finally gained control of the presidential institute in Transnistria. Such concentration of power created favourable opportunities for realising the declared reforms. However, in the absence of other active political projects in the country, this dominance destabilised the political system of Transnistria.

The absence of a consolidated political opposition in Transnistria creates three potential challenges for the government: First, the absence of public discussions around the government's plans and constructive criticism. The lack of public discourses on the legislative agenda leads to low public support of government initiatives and creates vulnerability. Second, despite the victory of the Obnovlenie, it is important to remember that the party does not represent the interests of all citizens. In this regard, it is essential to create the conditions for representatives of other political as-

sociations and leaders of public opinion to participate in political life. Otherwise, elections to the Supreme Council will become the procedure for appointing deputies. Third, the presence of protest moods in society and criticism of government policy makes it necessary to legalise the concept of opposition in Transnistria. Due to the unresolved conflict the political primacy of consolidation of power, such a concept was practically excluded from the political process in the republic.

In Transnistria, distrust of the authorities can also take different forms, from mass demonstrations to criticism on the internet. Examples such as the cancellation of the results of the presidential elections in South Ossetia in 2011 and the holding of a referendum on early presidential elections in Abkhazia in July 2016 confirms the relationship between institutional weakness and political instability (RIA Novosti 10.07.2016). Against this background, the localisation of the crisis in Transnistria during the presidential election campaign in 2016 was the result of Russia's successful mediation, rather than the willingness of politicians in Tiraspol to compromise and modernise the political system (RIA Novosti 56 11.10.2016).

Today, the emergence of new external challenges requires the leadership of Transnistria to generate new mobilisation public projects. In this regard, the activity of only one party against the backdrop of the absence of other political forces' activities, reduces, in general, the possibilities for consolidating the Transnistrian society and promptly responding to threats.

To what degree it will be possible to implement public policies is an open question. The difficulty lies in the fact that after the departure in 2011 of the first president, Igor Smirnov, the system of checks and balances has changed in the republic, which in turn caused a prolonged political crisis between the parliament and the second president, Evgeniy Shevchuk, for five years (2011 – 2016). To build a new, active configuration of power, first of all, the productive work of political institutions based on the trust of citizens will be required.

In turn, a necessary condition for the effectiveness of institutions is their competitiveness. Politically, competition is a particular set of tools and qualities. First of all, it is a choice, a feedback between the authorities, society and the opposition. One can agree with the position of Alexei Kudrin, the head of the Center for Strategic Research, on the possibility of carrying out reforms in Russia, who stated that *"it is difficult to carry out reforms without trust [...]. Lack of trust is an additional tax on any public transaction [...], we have a high level of trust in the president, but if you look at the level of confidence in the government, the parliament, the police, then it is lower – about 30–20%, sometimes even 15%"* (Vedomosti 13.01.2017).

The total dominance and influence of one political party and the absence of real competition lets limited involvement of the public in the political process. This passiveness manifest in a low voter turnout in elections. Traditionally, the most active electorate in Transnistria are pensioners and people close to retirement age. Less active are middle-aged people, the youth and active labourers. They are indifferent to the political process, and this is highly undesirable. For Transnistria, the real threat of the active population's non-participation in the political process is the growing migration.

Undoubtedly, this issue is complicated, but migration is also an indicator of citizens' lack of vision in how they can participate in the life of the state, as well as their future there. It is necessary for the president, the government and the Supreme Council to solve economic problems effectively, to think through a set of measures and to enhance the effectiveness of political institutions. To date, we can consider three scenarios of how this situation may develop. First, leave everything as is, i.e., maintain the existing majority system (relative majority). This option is comfortable, but how much it can provide citizens' support for reforms is questionable. Second, modernise the electoral legislation to stimulate the development of new political projects in the country. In this context, norms can be adopted stipulating that only members of political parties, can be members of the parliament. Also, the state should promote the development of other political parties and establish fixed procedures for primaries of candidates and deputies. Third, change the electoral legislation in association with the transition to a mixed system.

Transnistria's transition to a mixed system is, in our view, capable of carrying out the following two tasks: First, the proportional part will stimulate the development of political parties as the leading actors of the political system. In this case, the activity of the parties in proportional elections will undoubtedly be more long-term since the agenda of the party will have to overcome barriers in the whole republic, not only today but also in five years. That will allow for better reflection upon long-term interests and strategies in political programs. The development of mid- and long-term visions for the development of the policy is not only crucial for the socio-economic development of the region but also for any future settlement of protracted conflict between Moldova and Transnistria. Second, the majority part of the electoral system will, in our opinion, ensure stability for the political system as a whole. This stability will be possible because the majority part includes the election of a candidate; a direct representative of voters.

We do not idealise one kind of electoral system. The main thing, in our opinion, is to create conditions for the efficient operation of state institutions and ensure their legitimacy. This issue will require constant analysis and response since these results,

in fact, will determine the results of the announced reforms. Imitation of these activities will not only aggravate problems but provoke distrust on the part of citizens. Experience shows that the desire to rely on old management schemes and decisions may hold the situation to some extent, but it will not lead to its qualitative improvement. Alternatively, as Abraham Lincoln wrote, "*the dogmas of the quiet past are losing power in the turbulent present*".

## REFERENCES

- ILYIN, Mikhail/MELESHKINA, Elena/MELVILLE, Andrei 2010, Formation of New States: External and Internal Factors of Consolidation, in: *Polis* 3, 26-39, at: <[http://www.politstudies.ru/en/index.php?page\\_id=453&id=4277&at=a&pid=>](http://www.politstudies.ru/en/index.php?page_id=453&id=4277&at=a&pid=>), 16/10/2017.
- KUDRIN, Aleksei. Outlined the Program of Economic Growth, in: *Vedomosti*, 13.01.2017, at: <<http://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/articles/2017/01/13/672888-kudrin-pokazal>>, 16/10/2017.
- MALGAN, Jeff 2011, *The Art of State Strategy: Mobilization of Power and Knowledge for the Common Good*, Moscow.
- Residents of Abkhazia Ignored the Referendum on Early Presidential Elections, in: *RIA Novosti*, 10.07.2016, at: <<https://ria.ru/world/20160710/1463282588.html>>, 16/10/2017.
- Rogozin Started to Put Things in Order in Transnistria, in: *RIA Novosti*, 11.10.2016, at: <<http://ria56.ru/posts/45745824595493593543.htm>>, 16/10/2017.
- Shevchuk, Evgeny Became President of Transnistria, in: *Izvestia*, 26.12.2011, at: <<http://www.naturalnews.com/news/510714>>.
- The Transnistrian Monopoly. What to Expect from the Victory of Vadim Krasnoselsky, in: *NewsMaker*, 12.12.2016, at: <<http://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/pridnestrovskaya-monopoliya-chego-zhdet-ot-pobedy-vadima-krasnoselskogo-28818>>, 16/10/2017.