



Role of Ukraine in the Transnistrian conflict settlement

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Introduction

Lack of progress in the Transnistrian conflict settlement continues to influence the situation in the region and has an impact on the developments in the Republic of Moldova and at last in the adjacent *oblasts* of Ukraine. The Transnistrian conflict is also considered one of the defining elements in the perception of risks and challenges to security and stability both of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The research paper *Role of Ukraine in the Transnistrian conflict settlement* is an attempt to present a brief historical overview of the settlement process with the focus on the role of external factors, primarily of Ukraine in the conflict settlement.

Along the way, the Moldovan-Ukrainian relationships have experienced ups and downs depending on the political realities in Chisinau and Kiev. The bilateral agenda was always overloaded with sensitive issues, such as demarcation, border and customs co-operation, property issues, environmental protection of Nistru River, education, protection of national minorities and others - some of them very much connected with the Transnistrian conflict settlement. From this angle, the Transnistrian issue is always a dominant element on the agenda of the Moldovan-Ukrainian bilateral relations and in many cases sets the tone for the overall atmosphere of bilateral co-operation.

Ukraine has also had an influence on the Transnistrian conflict settlement, but also on the internal processes in the region from political, economic, ethnical, educational and cultural point of view. This is understandable as the Transnistrian region is a narrow strip of land between Ukraine, which is the only “neighbor” of the region and the rest of the territory of the Republic of Moldova with almost 1/3 of Ukrainian ethnic population. Moreover, until 1940 the left side bank of Nistru River was part of Soviet Ukraine. All these factors offer to Ukraine a rather high level of awareness and understanding of the situation in the region.

It is also interesting to note that in some cases Ukraine followed Russia’s stand in the region. For instance, Ukraine offered in a simplified regime the Ukrainian citizenship to a large number of inhabitants living in the region, exactly like Russia did; the Russian's request to open a consulate in Tiraspol was followed by Ukraine that requested permission to establish a consulate in Rybnitsa.

On its turn, the Republic of Moldova has repeatedly tried to use the advantage of the existing Ukrainian potential and levers in order to stimulate the settlement process, but most often

failed due to both objective and subjective reasons related to the position of Moscow and Tiraspol, but also of some interests in Chisinau and Kiev. The situation has changed quite a lot lately.

From another point of view, the Transnistrian region has also major interests in Ukraine, first of all economic ones, especially taking into account the close proximity of Odessa seaport that has become the main gate of import-export needs for the Transnistrian business community. Tiraspol has also tried to play with certain success rivalries between Ukraine and Russia, skillfully manipulating the competition of two countries to have more influence over the region.

Ukraine as part of the main settlement initiatives and formats

The events of the early 90's brought the collapse of the USSR and subsequently independence of Soviet republics, including the Republic of Moldova. The uncertainty of the moment, as well as the conditions of budding a state allowed certain forces from the left bank of Nistru River, supported from abroad, to bring up the conflict situation into active military hostilities starting with March 1992, although the conflict itself began earlier.

One of the first attempts of international engagement in the settlement process could be considered the quadripartite mechanism of political consultations (Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia and Ukraine). It was launched on 23 March 1992 on the margins of the CSCE Ministerial Conference in Helsinki. In a Joint Declaration on the developments in the Eastern districts of Moldova, the four foreign ministries have called for respecting the territorial integrity, a ceasefire, the immediate disarmament of all illegal formations, restoring activity of legal bodies in all localities, respect for human rights, including ethnic minorities and the assisting of refugees.

Actually, this mechanism began the active phase of external actors' involvement in the settlement process - in various formats, with various successes, but practically always with the participation of Ukraine.

During the initial period, the quadripartite mechanism appeared to be promising because Romanian participation offered a balanced approach on the settlement, especially bearing in mind that Ukraine took practically the same stand as Russia, in supporting Tiraspol's demands.

According to then Moldovan President, Mircea Snegur, during the quadripartite meeting in Istanbul, both the Russian President Boris Yeltsin and the Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk had a hostile attitude towards the authorities in Chisinau, being tolerant to those in Tiraspol.¹ The same impression has another participant of those meetings Oazu Nantoi, currently the Program Director of the Institute of Public Policy (Chisinau) who recalls that the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Anatoly Zlenko took the same stand as his Russian colleague, supporting in fact demands about independence of Transnistria.²

Regardless of the mechanism meetings, including at the highest level, the settlement process did not advance, and the situation was worsening by every day.

Against this background, on 21 July 1992, a ceasefire agreement was signed by the Presidents of Russia and the Republic of Moldova in order “to strive for a faster and complete ceasefire and a settlement of the military conflict in the Transnistrian region by peaceful means”³. At the initial stage, the agreement fulfilled its mission, but gradually has become a cover for the Russian military presence in region. At the same time, although it was mentioned in the Agreement, the quadripartite mechanism silently disappeared without being convened any more. It may be considered as a premeditated action that completely excluded Romania from the settlement process, while Ukraine has returned later in different formats of negotiations.

In the period of 1993 -1997, Russia took indisputably a leading role in the conflict settlement, more complicating than advancing the negotiations. Unfortunately, in that period, Ukraine had a rather marginal role, without influencing too much the process. Nevertheless, in January 1996, in Kyiv, the Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, together with his Russian and Moldovan colleagues, negotiated a Joint Statement by which the parties committed themselves to undertake all measures for promoting the conflict settlement negotiations and signing a document that should define the special status of Transnistria. In addition, Ukraine and Russia claimed their readiness to become guarantors for the future Transnistrian status.

¹ Mircea Snegur, *Labirintul destinului, memorii, volumul 2*, page 637

² Oazu Nantoi, *Pridnistrovskiy konflikt i vzaemyn y Moldovy ta Ukrainy, "Kontekst"*, No 10, September 2001

³ Agreement on Principles of a Peaceful Settlement of the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, <http://www.stefanwolff.com/files/Russian-Moldovan-Ceasefire-Agreement.pdf>

The Moscow Memorandum on the Basis for Normalization of the Relations between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria signed on the 8 May 1997 revealed again Ukraine's role in the process. The document anchored the mediator and guarantor status of Ukraine and Russia, as well as the role of the OSCE as a mediator. Nevertheless, many analysts consider this document controversial in itself, having some elements of federalization already at that stage. For instance, the Memorandum stipulates: “Transnistria shall participate in the conduct of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova - a subject of international law - on questions touching its interests. Decision of such questions shall be taken by agreement of the Parties. Transnistria has the right to unilaterally establish and maintain international contacts in the economic, scientific-technical and cultural spheres, and in other spheres by agreement of the Parties”⁴.

It was the first time the concept of a “common state” was included in an official document of the negotiation process, an ambiguous principle without clear continuity. The weak part the Memorandum could be also considered the intentionally missed out part related to the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, although they were reflected in the Joint Statement of the Presidents of the Russian Federation and Ukraine in Connection with the Signing of the Memorandum on the Bases for Normalization of Relations between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria.

With the signing of the Memorandum one could talk about the period of the five-party format which lasted until 2005 when in Bratislava the “5 + 2” format was officially created. Over that period, a number of settlement ideas were tabled. One of the most debated is considered the plan on federalization of the Republic of Moldova proposed at the Kyiv round of negotiations in July 2002. The mediators proposed, at the initiative of the OSCE, a draft agreement on the constitutional system that would regulate the distribution of competencies between Chişinău and Tiraspol. The document defined the Republic of Moldova as a ‘federal state’; the implementation of the agreement would have been monitored and ultimately guaranteed by the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the OSCE⁵.

⁴ Memorandum on the Basis for Normalization of Relations Between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria <http://www.osce.org/moldova/42309?download=true>

⁵ Natalya Belitser, Transnistrian Conflict: State of Affairs and Prospects of Settlement, <http://www.blackseanews.net/en/read/55025>

After the “orange revolution”, the Ukrainian President had tried to play a more independent role in the settlement process. In this respect, one of the most important actions undertaken by the Ukrainian authorities in terms of the conflict settlement could be considered „the Yuschenko Plan” – a document based on the concept of seven steps towards conflict settlement, entitled „Towards Settlement through Democracy”, outlined at the GUAM summit in Chişinău in April 2005.

On 16-17 May 2005, in the framework of the consultations in Vinnitsa, Ukraine presented the plan itself based on the seven steps as the key elements. Despite the fact that it was not implemented, its proposals can be found in the position of the Republic of Moldova regarding the settlement: the special legal status of Transnistria as an inalienable part of the Republic of Moldova with competences derived from the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova (Parliament Decision No 117-XVI defines the criteria of democratization of TN, without what the legitimacy of the election in the area cannot be recognized), alongside with the trenchant demand to withdraw the military presence of the Russian Federation from the Eastern districts of Moldova and demilitarization throughout of the region⁶.

The “5 + 2” format (the Permanent Conference on Political Issues within the Negotiation Process towards a Transnistrian Settlement) established in September 2005 in Bratislava gave a new spirit, a new breath, by including the EU and the US in the negotiation process as observers.

Unfortunately, in 2006 the negotiation process was interrupted for almost six years, and was resumed only in 2011. In the years that followed, the negotiations were tense, with minor results. During that period Ukraine played in general a constructive role coming up with concrete proposals to defuse the situation. In fact, the 2013 Ukrainian OSCE Chairmanship was the most active period of the “5+2” format after resuming its activity. In general, regardless of the poor results, it remains the main negotiation format until now.

Ukrainian OSCE Chairmanship

The OSCE Chairmanship provided a good opportunity for Ukraine to act as a regional leader, especially in the context of existing protracted conflicts. Addressing the OSCE Permanent

⁶ Oazu Nantoi, The Role of Ukraine in the Settlement of the Transnistrian Conflict, http://www.ipp.md/public/files/publication/Ukraine_en.pdf

Council on 17 January 2013, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara, stated: "Unresolved conflicts in the OSCE area continue to represent a serious threat to our regional stability and remain a major concern to all participating States. Assisting the parties in finding a political solution has to be the highest priority for the OSCE. I am convinced that sustainable and long-term settlement of the protracted conflicts in the OSCE area can only be achieved by peaceful means and on the basis of the principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act"⁷

The OSCE Chairmanship offered remarkable opportunities for Ukraine to manifest itself in the context of the Transnistrian conflict – from one hand as a country which was familiar with the entire complexity of the conflict settlement, from another one as the Chairmanship that gave a chance to enhance the Ukrainian role in the negotiation process, including in the „5+2” format. Therefore, the Ukrainian Chairmanship's special attention to Transnistrian conflict didn't surprise anyone and it was received with understanding by participating States.

“Ukraine is strongly determined to contribute to the Transnistrian settlement process. I hope that the positive dynamics of the negotiations will sustain momentum. As a state-guarantor and co-mediator Ukraine believes that the “5+2” format remains the key instrument for achieving a comprehensive settlement. Additional platforms - supported by all parties concerned - may complement these efforts by strengthening mutual confidence”⁸, mentioned Ukrainian minister in the same statement.

In this respect, proving the Ukrainian Chairmanship's determination to contribute to the Transnistrian settlement process, Minister Kozhara paid his first visit as a Chairperson-in-Office to Moldova on 21 January 2013. Agenda of the visit included meetings with the top Moldovan leadership, as well as with the Transnistrian leader. The main purpose of the visit was broadly achieved – the Chairmanship managed to maintain the dynamic of negotiations and give an impetus to the process which subsequently allowed convening five sessions of the “5+2” negotiating format during 2013.

As a follow up of this visit, on 6-7 February 2013, the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for conflicts, Ambassador Andrii Deshchytsia, visited Moldova in order

⁷ Address by H.E. Mr. Leonid Kozhara, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine to the OSCE Permanent Council (Vienna, 17 January 2013) CIO.GAL/7/1317 January 2013, <http://www.osce.org/cio/98766?download=true>

⁸ Ibidem

to start preparations for the 5+2 talks on the Transnistrian conflict settlement, having meetings both in Chisinau and Tiraspol.

The first meeting of the negotiations format under the Ukrainian Chairmanship took place on 18-19 February 2013 in Lviv. The talks brought no visible results, though it allowed to maintain the pace of the negotiation process as well as to address important issues for citizens on both banks of Nistru River, such as freedom of movement.

Negotiations continued in Odessa on 23-24 May 2013. This time, the parties to the conflict with strong support from mediators and observers, including Ukraine, have reached some important practical agreements. "We covered a wide range of issues of importance to the two sides, including freedom of movement and removal of radioactive waste," said Ambassador Andrii Deshchytsia, the OSCE Chairperson's Special Representative for conflicts, who chaired the talks. "I am pleased that the protocol decision was signed today on the dismantling of the industrial cable car crossing the Dniester/Nistru River at the towns of Rybnitsa and Rezina, which has not been used for more than a decade and poses a threat to the people living beneath it."⁹ Ukrainian Chairmanship called the talks „frank but constructive" and urged Chisinau and Tiraspol to maintain contacts in the 1+1 format at all levels.

On 16-17 July 2013, the 5+2 format meeting in Vienna brought some practical results. In addition to the issue of freedom of movement that had already become traditional during the negotiations, the participants also addressed modalities for dismantling the cable car (Rybnitsa-Rezina), environmental and economic issues, co-operation between law enforcement structures and education. Also, it was possible to agree on a protocol decision regarding the draft joint action plan on environmental issues and sustainable use of natural resources that was signed at the round.

The Brussels round of “5+2” talks on 3 October 2013 was largely focused on the freedom of movement. Despite all efforts of the Ukrainian Chairmanship, the discussions were difficult and did not allow reaching the expected results.

On 25-26 November 2013, Kyiv hosted the last official 5+2 talks under the Ukrainian Chairmanship. The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Leonid Kozhara used this opportunity to

⁹ Press release of the Ukrainian CiO of 24.05.2013, <http://www.osce.org/cio/101928>

participate personally in the opening session of negotiations. “I welcome the continued active dynamics of the “5+2” negotiation process, the resumption of the direct dialogue between the leadership in Chisinau and Tiraspol, and the practical solutions reached for the benefit of the population on both banks of the Nistru River...As a mediator in the negotiation process and as a guarantor of the settlement, Ukraine will continue its active efforts with the aim of reaching progress in the Transnistrian settlement, as well as strengthening security and stability in the region,”¹⁰ stressed Kozhara.

The meeting in Kyiv resulted in protocol decisions on freedom of movement, pensions and social assistance for people who changed their place of residence, as well as on reconstruction of waste processing facilities.

Against this background, the Ministerial Council in Kyiv adopted on 6 December 2013 the Statement on the work of the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transnistrian settlement in the “5+2” format. By this statement, the OSCE participating States reaffirmed their strong determination to achieve a comprehensive, just and viable resolution of the Transnistrian conflict exclusively through negotiations, on the basis of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova with a special status for Transnistria that fully guarantees the human, political, economic and social rights of its population.¹¹

In the closing statement of the Council, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office referring to the Ministerial Statement on “5+ 2” stressed that the document is a strong signal of participating States' joint determination to achieve progress on the whole agenda of the talks with the aim of reaching a comprehensive settlement of the Transnistrian conflict.

In general, Ukraine invested a lot of efforts during the OSCE Chairmanship and it proved to be one of the most active Chairmanships in the context of the Transnistrian conflict settlement. In a complicated situation and an atmosphere of mistrust, the Chairmanship managed to maintain a regular dialogue, and stimulated the approval of certain important in practical terms decisions for citizens of both banks. Five rounds within the “5+2” talks, two meetings of the Prime

¹⁰ Press release of the Ukrainian CiO of 25.11.2013, <http://www.osce.org/cio/108908>

¹¹ Statement on the work of the Permanent Conference on Political Issues in the Framework of the Negotiation Process for the Transnistrian settlement in the “5+2” format, <http://www.osce.org/mc/kyiv?download=true>

Minister of Moldova and the Transnistrian leader were organized with the direct facilitating efforts of the Chairmanship.

Dialogue with the OSCE major players was also part of Chairmanship's activity related to the conflict settlement. On 29 March 2013, Minister Kozhara paid a working visit to Moscow, having consultations with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. "Both Ukraine and Russia are guarantors in the Transnistrian settlement process. Along with the OSCE as a mediator we understand well the complexities of the situation. I hope that our experience may help us move the process forward,"¹² said Chairman-in-Office during the meeting.

The Ukrainian Chairmanship also facilitated a conference on confidence-building measures organized with the support of the German Foreign Ministry on 30-31 October 2013 in Landshut, Germany. On the margins of the conference, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Minister Kozhara had an opportunity to discuss important issues of the conflict settlement with Moldovan Prime Minister Leancă and Transnistrian leader Shevchuk.

At the same time, the overall conditions were not conducive to a breakthrough in the conflict resolution. One can speak about limited capacity the OSCE Chairmanship since the OSCE decisions are adopted by consensus; also the tensed Moldovan-Russian bilateral relations worsened during that period by given the Russian embargo on Moldovan goods for export, which had a certain negative influence on the spirit of negotiations.

Border and customs policy

Ukrainian policy towards trade and economic cooperation with Transnistrian region was primarily dictated by political interests and comfort of Ukrainian business community. In many cases, the Republic of Moldova position on the conflict settlement was taken into account. From instance, in the period of late 2001 until May 2003, customs cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine negatively marked relations of the two countries as Ukraine continues to allow export of goods produced in the Transnistrian region through the Ukrainian border without Moldovan customs documentation. In May 2003, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine agreed on introducing new customs rules, including for Transnistrian goods export operations, but implementation of the document was difficult being interrupted in summer 2004. Again, Ukraine began to accept Transnistrian goods

¹² Press release of the Ukrainian CiO of 29.03.2013 , <http://www.osce.org/cio/100455>

without Moldovan customs documentation, this time clearing them as “third country goods”.¹³

Nevertheless, the political situation in both countries in 2005 allowed certain adjustments that had important political effects on the conflict settlement.

In November 2005, the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) was established as the EU's response to a joint request made by the Presidents of Moldova and Ukraine to support an international mission for enhanced border management capacities, including the development of an international standard of customs control on the Transnistrian segment of the Moldovan-Ukrainian state border¹⁴.

Moreover, as part of the implementation of the Ukrainian-Moldovan agreement on legal trade regime, Ukraine had taken a decision to introduce new customs regulations. Starting with 3 March 2006, Ukraine imposed these regulations on its border with Moldova on the Transnistrian segment, allowing import of goods only with documents processed by the Moldovan customs.

This step was welcomed by the Republic of Moldova, the European Union and the United States, being considered as an action that would curb smuggling and return the customs procedures within the legal framework. At the same time, Transnistrian authorities with the support of the Russian Federation launched an aggressive discreditation campaign both against the EUBAM and the new customs regulations, presenting them as an attempt of “economic blockade” of the region.

Recent geopolitical changes have given new impetus to cooperation in this field, in which the role of Ukraine is crucial. On November 04, 2015, two new cross border cooperation agreements were signed between Moldova and Ukraine that would make it faster and easier to move across the joint border. The first, establishing joint control at the Pervomaisc-Kuchurhan Border Crossing Point, would allow for import, export and transit through Transnistrian region to move through this crossing point.¹⁵

¹³ http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/projects/MDA/00048695_EUBAM-8-2of6-Description%20of%20Actions.pdf

¹⁴ EUBAM 2005 Annual Report, <http://eubam.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/EUBAM-Annual-Report-200506-ENG.pdf>

¹⁵ EUBAM Press Release of 04.11.2015, eubam.org/newsroom/moldova-ukraine-eu-make-it-easier-to-move-across-the-moldova-ukraine-border/

The second agreement, on the automated exchange of border crossing data across the Moldovan-Ukrainian border, would enhance security through increasing transparency about the movement of vehicles and goods over the border. It could also remove the obligation for foreign citizens entering Transnistria to register their stay with the Moldovan migration authorities, avoiding the need to travel over to the administrative boundary line on the west side of Transnistrian region¹⁶.

In the context, Volodymyr Bachynsky, Deputy Head of the EU Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine mentioned that Ukraine was seeking deeper cooperation with EUBAM in accordance with new challenges and priorities such as the DCFTA, which came into force on 1 January 2016. Ukraine also wanted EUBAM to provide assistance for combating smuggling and improving enforcement measures.

As a reaction, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin accused Kyiv of deviation from "impartial mediation in the dialogue between Chisinau and Tiraspol," "intimidation of the international community by the alleged military threat posed by Transnistria, explicit economic and transport "strangulation" of the Transnistrian region. This pressure is seriously aggravating the already difficult socio-economic situation in Transnistria"¹⁷.

Post-Maidan period

Following the dramatic Maidan events that took place in the beginning of 2014, Ukraine has changed significantly its approach towards the Transnistrian issue. The new Ukrainian leadership, being under increasing pressure of Russia's aggressive actions manifested by annexation of Crimea, destabilization of Donbas by military means and economic embargos, realized the importance of respecting the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity not only by statements.

The Ukraine's involvement in the Transnistrian issue has increased and the interest of both countries to give an impetus to the conflict settlement was noted by relevant actors, especially throughout 2014. On 17 March 2014, the Moldovan Prime Minister Iurie Leancă paid a visit to Kyiv, meeting with the Ukrainian Prime Minister Iatsenyuk and the Chairman of the

¹⁶ Ibidem

¹⁷ G.Karasin interview to Interfax, <http://uawire.org/news/moscow-kiev-is-aggravating-the-situation-in-transnistria>

Verkhovna Rada and interim president of Ukraine Alexandr Turchinov. On 1 October 2014, the Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Eugen Carpov visited Kyiv and met with Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Groisman and Ukrainian Deputy Secretary of the Council of National Security and Defense Aleksandr Litvinenko. Among other issues, the Transnistrian conflict resolution was on the agenda of bilateral discussions.

President Poroshenko's visit to Chisinau on 20 November 2014 had a pre-electoral connotation and the Transnistrian issue was practically not discussed. Throughout 2015 the agendas of both countries were overloaded by domestic problems, which did not offer too many possibilities to strengthen the high-level dialogue on this subject.

The Maidan events have partly changed the Ukrainian political elite; therefore, the current approach seems to be more a reflection on realities, but not a cardinal change in the perception of the Transnistrian issue, especially at the regional level. For instance, on 23 October 2014 in Odessa, President Poroshenko, addressing representatives of law enforcement agencies on combating cross border smuggling, corrected their statements: “the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic” doesn’t exist as a country. This area is called the Transnistrian segment of the Ukrainian-Moldovan border. Using this definition (“TMR” - AN) is a political mistake”¹⁸.

The attitude towards the Transnistrian problem can be observed in dynamics, depending on the extent of the worsening of the Russian-Ukrainian relations and the continuation of hostilities in the eastern regions of Ukraine. Thus, the Ukrainian authorities had perceived the uncontrolled region as a threat to the security of Ukraine in military terms. As a result, on June 8, 2015, the Ukrainian President approved the Verkhovna Rada decision to denounce a series of military agreements with Russia, including the Agreement between the governments of Ukraine and the Russian Federation on the transit of Russian military forces temporarily deployed on the territory of the Republic of Moldova through the territory of Ukraine, and the Agreement between the governments of Ukraine and the Russian Federation on inter-state military shipments, considering them as a direct threat to national security and the territorial integrity of the country.

¹⁸ <http://www.unian.net/politics/1000039-ne-suschestvuet-gosudarstva-pmr-suschestvuet-lish-pridnestrovskiy-uchastok-granitsyi-poroshenko.html>

This decision was immediately strongly criticized by Moscow and Tiraspol authorities: "The purpose of these actions is clear. They are aimed at creating conditions for the expulsion of peacekeepers from Transnistria based on statements periodically emanating from Moldovan officials about the need to change the format of the peacekeeping operation,"¹⁹ noted the Transnistrian leader Shevchuk. The Transnistrian chief negotiator Nina Shtanski added: „Kyiv's decision to scrap its military cooperation agreements with Russia, including transit rights for Russian peacekeepers and equipment to Transnistria, have created the potential to destabilize regional security.”²⁰

The period is also marked by consolidation of Ukrainian-Romanian efforts in the context of the Transnistrian conflict settlement. On 17 March 2015, in Kyiv, following the meeting with President of Romania Klaus Iohannis, President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko stated: „Special attention has been paid to the events in the Republic of Moldova, particularly in Transnistria. We have agreed to coordinate our actions on Transnistria in order to facilitate the unfreezing of the given conflict and help sovereign and independent Moldova regaining its territorial integrity and reintegrate the Transnistria region”.²¹

On 30 May 2015, Mikhail Saakashvili was appointed as Governor of Odessa, which could be also considered as a signal that the leadership in Kiev closely follows the situation in the region and tries to involve new political forces to demonstrate determination for changes, including in the Transnistrian context.

Conclusions

Ukraine's role in the settlement process has not been fully used and capitalized. This happened partly because of geopolitical interests and attention with which Ukraine and Moldova have managed their relations with the Russian Federation, and partly because of certain historical heritage in the Moldovan-Ukrainian relationship. Also, considerable capacities have been often wasted because of the political situation in both countries. For instance, because of political instability in Moldova, the year 2015 was practically lost for the conflict settlement.

¹⁹ <http://sputniknews.com/military/20150523/1022490789.html#ixzz42bYngWro>

²⁰ Ibidem

²¹ Press release of the Ukrainian presidency of 17.03.2015, <http://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayina-ta-rumuniya-aktivizuyut-spivpracyu-zustrich-prezide-34953>

The atmosphere within the “5+2” format of negotiations was also not conducive for fruitful negotiations, which reflected on the lack of frequency of meetings - for instance, there were no official rounds of negotiations in 2015. Nevertheless, the ability to influence processes in the region has increased considerably lately and closer cooperation of both countries could accelerate the process.

At the same time, the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU by the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine creates new opportunities to involve the Transnistrian business community in the process. These developments give a chance for the economic and trade cooperation of both countries with the EU to become an important element in stimulating the political settlement of the conflict. Moreover, the most important factor is the current geopolitical context that offers to both countries a unique opportunity to speed up the process of settlement and bring closer the two banks of Nistru River.

In addition, the 2016 OSCE German Chairmanship plays an important role in stimulating all parties involved, including Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, to come with innovative ideas in the conflict settlement.