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**THE TRANSNISTRIAN PROBLEM IN POLITICS OF HISTORY OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND TRANSNISTRIAN MOLDOVAN  
REPUBLIC**

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**ABSTRACT**

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## GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

**Relevance of the research topic.** Presently, in Russian and world scholarship, there is a growing interest in the problems of historical memory and politics of history<sup>1</sup>. It is due to the increased importance of the use of history for political purposes; "anthropological" and "cultural" turns in historical science; the rise of ethnic and regional identity politics in the states of the former USSR, which put professional historiography ahead of new challenges; the intensification of geopolitical rivalry in the "near abroad", in which the interpretation of history is used as one of the ways to mobilize the sides.

These problems (historical memory, its formation, changes and the role of the past in the existence of collective identities)<sup>2</sup> belong to the field of historical studies, called *intellectual history*. The methods used by intellectual history, by virtue of its interdisciplinary character, represent the combination of tools from different directions of historical science, such as the history of mentalities, social history, historical anthropology, historical imagology, theories of identity and symbols, etc. Social memory is studied in such sections of intellectual history as the history of historical memory, *politics of memory*, *politics of history*. The latter concept has a German-Polish origin, and its boundaries of application and interaction with the policy of memory are currently disputed.

The subject of historical memory was first developed by the French sociologist of the first half of the 20th century, Maurice Halbwachs, who explained the most common mechanisms of its functioning. Among the most prominent successors of this trend must be noted Jan Assman (division of historical memory into communicative and cultural), Paul Ricœur, and Patrick Hutton (democratization and diversification of memory). The French historian Pierre Nora, who has contributed a lot to the study of historical memory, introduced the notion of "*sites of memory*" as phenomena with which society links its collective memories of the past, created their classification, and studied the mechanisms of their appearance.

The *politics of memory* is a set of various forms of creating and regulating collective memory of the past, perpetuating the memory about important events and figures of the past and present. This subject of study by historians includes not only the content of memory expressed by state and public institutions, but also the "interactive channels" through which the dissemination, discussion, contestation or obscuration of ideas about the past occurs.

The emergence of the concept of "*politics of history*" (*Geschichtspolitik*) refers to the mid-1980s during the "dispute of historians" in West Germany, the main figures of which were Emil Nolte and Jurgen Habermas. In Germany, then, "historical politics" began to mean "the interpretation of history, chosen for political, that is, partisan, motives, and attempts to convince the public of the validity of this interpretation."<sup>3</sup> Later, in the 2000s, this term (*polityka historyczna*) was interpreted in a positive sense by the Polish party "Law and Justice" which had spread across Europe, primarily the Eastern region. Supporters of "modern politics

of history" in Poland declared their aim to combat the distortions of Polish history abroad, primarily within the EU, and the dissemination of knowledge about the heroic moments of Polish history in the twentieth century.

The main actor in politics of history is, at least in Eastern Europe, a state authority. It possesses the combination of the necessary motivations (education of citizens in the spirit of loyalty to a particular ideology) and resources (the right to order and approve school textbooks, to establish national holidays monuments, selectively publish archival documents for political purposes, to adopt "memorial laws", to establish and bestow awards for participation in certain events, to sponsor the filming of historical films, to criticize or rehabilitate participants in certain historical events etc.). Some experts on the politics of history emphasize its fundamental difference from the politics of memory, while others claim the derivative nature of the politics of memory from that of history, emphasizing that with the predominant role of the state in its formulation and implementation<sup>4</sup>.

In Russia, the most famous researchers of this problem are Alexey I. Miller, who primarily deals with politics of history in Russia and Eastern Europe<sup>5</sup>, and Viktor A. Shnirelman, whose sphere of interests embraces Transcaucasia and Central Asia<sup>6</sup>. In the works of Viktor A. Shnirelman the mechanisms of using archaeology, academic and "folk" history in contest for the territories of the Transcaucasian republics by different ethnic groups before and after collapse of the USSR are being revealed.

The bulk of research on historical memory in politics, however, deals with these phenomena in UN member states. Less attention has been focused on states that do not enjoy wide international recognition and membership in the UN - a significant phenomenon of the former Soviet Union. One of such states is Transnistria (Transnistrian Moldovan Republic). Studying the historical arguments and images applied to it and Moldova (as a state claiming the rights on its territory), with the aim of substantiating these rights, reveals the methods and motivations for using historiography in politics. It does also help to describe the peculiarities of the self-perception of these states as a whole.

The practical relevance of studying politics of history in relation to Transnistria is its continued disputed status. The stark competition between Russia and the West in this region makes the Transnistrian issue strategically important. From a scholarly point of view, this topic of research is relevant because of the lack of research on the domestic political aspects of life of unrecognized or partially recognized states that have been established in the former USSR.

The **object of the research** is politics of memory and that of history, pursued in the Republic of Moldova and the unrecognized Transnistrian Moldovan Republic. In this study, they are defined as the use of historical interpretations for political purposes and the exploitation of historical arguments in ongoing political conflicts. The **subject of the study** is the Moldovan and Transnistrian views on the nature of the Transnistrian problem and the history of the region, expressed in the emerging national historical traditions, as well as the reflection of this problem and the history of the region in the education and memorial culture of these states.

The **chronological scope of the work** encompasses the period from 1990 - 1991 to 2006, when the states involved in the Transnistrian conflict have been constituted (2006 is the year of the referendum on independence of TMR and the issue of reunification of the two parts of the former MSSR has been virtually removed from the agenda); they need to support their territorial, political, legal and ideological claims with historical arguments, so the mechanisms and content of politics in the field of historical memory conducted by the RM and TMR are taking shape.

The **territorial range of the work** covers the Republic of Moldova (RM) within its internationally recognized borders (including the left-bank Dnestr region) as a zone of frozen conflict; for some tasks, the area between the Southern Bug and the Dniester is also included.

**The extent of research on the topic.** The number of works on the topic the political nature of historiography on the Transnistrian conflict, and the historical policy pursued by its participants, is relatively small. Among them, is the work of Lidia Prisac "Historiography of Transnistrian separatism"<sup>7</sup>, which examines the main approaches and subjects that are characteristic for studies of the phenomenon of the Transnistrian conflict in Moldova, Romania, the US and the EU, Russia and the TMR; the review by Aleksandr C. Stykalin on the collected articles "Transnistrian Statehood: History and Modernity" (2004) which examines in detail the main historical arguments in support of the Transnistrian national project and compares their content with the contemporary socio-political realities of the Republic of Moldova<sup>8</sup>; the articles of authors of different nationalities, published in the journal *Ab Imperio*. In particular, Stefan Tröbst's article<sup>9</sup> describes in detail the efforts of the Transnistrian authorities to create a separate state identity in the TMR, including the use of historical tools. The author concludes that the efforts of the leadership of the unrecognized republic on this path are relatively successful. Other similar articles deal with conflicts on the basis of history and national identity emerging in Moldova, and the Transnistrian issue is treated there as a reaction to the challenge of Romanianism at the time of collapse of the USSR<sup>10</sup>.

The articles of Vladimir A. Kolosov and Dmitriy V. Zayats<sup>11</sup>; Natalia Cojocaru and Stela Suhan<sup>12</sup>; Michael Bobik<sup>13</sup>; Vitaliy V. Repin<sup>14</sup>; Sergiu Musteață<sup>15</sup> and the others may also be categorized as the works, which analyze certain aspects of historical memory politics in the TMR.

So, it may be concluded that at present studying the politics of memory regarding the Transnistrian conflict has been the subject of collection and processing of research material. On the other hand, a comprehensive concept of politicizing the history of Transnistria has not been elaborated in historiography yet.

**The purpose of the work** is to study the politics of memory and the politics of history pursued by the parties to the Transnistrian conflict (Moldova and Transnistria) in order to confirm their positions concerning the desired status of the territory of Transnistria.

To achieve this purpose, the following **research tasks** are put forward:

- analyzing the background and main stages of the Transnistrian conflict;

- studying the negotiation process with regard to conflict resolution, identifying the main tasks and strategies of negotiations demonstrated by the parties, as well as the relationship of politics of history with them;
- demonstrating the specifics of the interpretation of history of the Transnistrian lands until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by various ideological trends in Moldova and the connection of these interpretations with their political interests;
- identifying the assessments of the events of 1989 - 1992 in Transnistria by the main ideological groups in Moldova in connection with their interests, as well as evolution of these assessments during post-Soviet history of the republic;
- revealing the distinctive features of the image of Transnistrian conflict in Moldovan media, educational and popular literature, as well as by political groupings;
- demonstrating the key images in description of history of Transnistria by the historiography of TMR and their relationship with political interests of the state;
- considering the main features of the image of Transnistrian conflict by the historiography of TMR, highlighting similarities and differences with the Moldovan description;
- analyzing the images of Transnistrian history in educational literature and the historical and cultural landscape.

**The sources of work** are published articles.

One of the most important sources for the topic of politics of history is *official documents* related to the history of Transnistria. This group of sources consists primarily of collections of documents related to the conflict of the late twentieth century and the negotiation process for its settlement<sup>16</sup>. These documents are evidence of the activities of the main “politics of history” actors - the Moldovan and Transnistrian states, which is primary meaning of the notion of "politics of history", and include references to history in justifying political decisions.

*Historical research* is represented by the works of historians of Moldavia, Transnistria, and Romania in the 1920s-1940s. In Transnistria, the peculiarity of historiography is that it had emerged almost simultaneously with the formation of the unrecognized state. In Transnistrian publications on the history of the region and the late 1980s - early 1990s conflict, a large number of primary sources are used, which lack foreign works dealing with ethnopolitical post-Soviet conflicts. In addition, the emerging historiography creates the image of the past for population of this state, which is important for the settlement of frozen conflicts in the future. During the time of existence of TMR, a significant number of books has been published there, which topic is the problems of formation of the republic and the war for its independence in 1992<sup>17</sup>.

Unlike Transnistrian historical publications, there is considerable pluralism in Moldovan literature on the Transnistrian conflict. There are two main ideological stances, according to which history is described. The first of these is

pro-Romanian (unionist) one, based on the contention that Moldovans are part of the Romanian nation, and their historical destiny is connected either with reunification with Romania or with integration into the EU<sup>18</sup>. The second direction is the Moldovanist one. Its proponents call themselves the Moldovan traditionalists or statists. They support the sovereignty of Moldova, the existence of a separate Moldovan nation and its special historical ties with Russia, in many historical matters they adhere to the interpretations inherited from the Soviet period<sup>19</sup>.

It should be noted that academic historiography within the framework of this research often acts as a source to identify, first of all, not the facts, but the political tendencies contained in it and the ideological schemes ensuing from them.

*Memoir literature* includes memoirs of the leaders of the Republic of Moldova in the period of conflict<sup>20</sup>. Its peculiarity as a source consists in the personal political interest of the authors to present their behavior during the conflict in the best possible way, which has as a result, on the one hand, a demonstration of active struggle for the integrity of the country, and, on the other hand, whitewashing their responsibility for the unsuccessful decisions to escalate the conflict in June 1992.

*Journalistic texts* written by active political figures of Moldova and Transnistria who are not historians, were also used<sup>21</sup>. They offer the narratives of history of the Transnistrian problem and the means of its resolution, adopted and implemented at the level of state policy. The distinctive feature of this writing is the promotion of their own political agenda, which the author shares, citing rational arguments and motivations in his favor.

*Periodicals* are mainly represented by the journal “Diplomaticheskiy vestnik Pridnestrovyia”, which presents the official view of the PMR on a wide range of events of the past and the present<sup>22</sup>, the Moldovan literary and journalistic magazine *Limba Română*, that often publishes articles and reviews concerning the problem of Transnistria<sup>23</sup>, and the newspaper (a magazine since 2013) of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Moldova “Oastea Moldovei”<sup>24</sup>.

The other kinds of sources used are *textbooks*, that are adopted in schools in Moldova and Transnistria (they are divided into Moldovan ones, characterized by a variety of publications and pluralism of interpretations while preserving the priority of the geopolitical explanations of the Transnistrian conflict<sup>25</sup>, and the Transnistrian ones, where the TMR’s genealogy is tied to Russian and Ukrainian history is built that is reaching out the distant past, and the Transnistrian conflict is explained on the basis of a combination of national and social motives<sup>26</sup>). Articles and websites where information is given about the “politics of memory” of the Transnistrian authorities associated with museum expositions and urban toponymy in TMR, are also applied<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, the list of sources includes descriptions of commemoration of events of the Dniester war<sup>28</sup> and editions dedicated to the history of banknotes used in territory of current TMR<sup>29</sup>.

The **originality** is determined by the fact that the work for the first time has created a comprehensive description of the images of history of the Transnistrian region in contemporary Moldovan and Transnistrian historiographies. The notion of “mass forms of politics of history” has been introduced and its defining features

have been proposed. The analysis of academic and scholarly-journalistic works published in Moldova and Transnistria in the 1990s and 2000s, as well as Romanian studies of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, connected with the subject of the Transnistrian problem, was carried out. The main features of the images of the history of Transnistria and its population in the official culture of the Republic of Moldova and the PMR are described.

**Theoretical and practical value of the work** consists in proposing and substantiating the use of a term “mass forms of politics of history,” identifying their basic functional qualities and the corresponding characteristics. It is possible to use these schemes in studying politics of memory in relation to other local conflicts in the post-communist world. Research materials can be used to write works on the history of Moldova, politics of history, post-Soviet ethno-political conflicts, as well as textbooks and lecture courses on these topics. Acquaintance with the content and infrastructure of historical memory in Moldova and Transdnistria can be important for the purposes of effective peacemaking based on the communities of the two banks.

**Methodological basis of the research.** For this work, in connection with the fact that its subject belongs to the sphere of intellectual history, the methods applied in that field were prioritized. At the same time, a set of more general methods of studying history was applied. The basis of the methodology of work is a constructivist approach to ethno-political conflicts, based on their understanding as a result of conscious activity of the interested actors.

The work used the concept of "sites of memory" by P. Nora, based on the fact that memorial objects in modern society are supported by various rituals and displays of respect for them, and changes in their meanings, struggles around the interpretation of phenomena is a key topic for research places of memory. The concept of *national narrative* as a special form of historical consciousness has become a methodological framework for studying Moldovan and Transnistrian historiography (as well as teaching literature), its distinctive features and characteristics, the purposes of its application in politics of history.

In order to depict the images of Transnistria in the history and journalism of the PMR, complex images of the enemy in mass media, historiography and education in Moldova and Transnistria, the method of historical imagology was applied. As an analytical tool that became necessary for studying the ways of managing historical memory in Transnistria in its most "visible" material forms, the notion of a *historical and cultural landscape* has been offered.

The author also used the comparative historical method to compare ideas about the same historical facts in the works of authors of different ideological persuasions, the analytical method that allows us to consider various details of the phenomenon, the method of diachronic narration used to describe the development of the Transnistrian conflict and politics of history of the parties, changing throughout the period, as well as an externalist approach to historiography, which presupposes an investigation of the social and political situation, under the influence of which historical ideas are formed.



### **Statements put forward in the research:**

1. The internal political processes associated with the politics of memory and that of history in de facto states, including Transnistria, are demonstrated in the work as a phenomenon that requires studying by the same methods as politics of memory in the UN member states, especially those that have recently obtained independence or been involved in territorial disputes with neighbors. The Transnistrian unrecognized statehood, formed during the collapse of the USSR, has its roots in a combination of ethnopolitical, economic and regional contradictions caused by serious differences in development of the two constituent parts of the Moldavian SSR during the Soviet period.

2. Studying the negotiation process among the settlement of the status of Transnistria shows that it has passed a number of stages ranging between revitalization (years 1996 - 2001, 2003 - 2005, 2012 - 2013) and “freezing” (2001 - 2003, 2006 - 2011, 2014 - 2017) negotiations between the parties to the conflict. A consistent line of Transnistrian diplomacy, manifested during both the Igor N. Smirnov and Evgeniy V. Shevchuk presidencies, is to minimize political and status concessions while pursuing cooperation with Moldova on economic and humanitarian issues.

3. Inquiry into the Moldovan-Romanian historiography shows that the interpretation of the history of Transnistrian lands is closely linked with the ethnopolitical self-determination of authors. In order to prove the legitimacy of the claims of Moldova (or Romania) to Transnistria, references are drawn to the demographic, political and cultural presence of Moldovans on this territory for many centuries, as well as the Moldovan political movement in the 20th century. The Moldovan ASSR supports the existence of a separate Moldovan nation as a form of statehood of this nation, and adherents of the idea of Moldavians as part of the Romanian nation - as first of all an artificially created and purely decorative formation hostile to the Romanian people (that does not prevent them from claiming its territory).

4. The attitude toward the political crisis in Transnistria in 1989-1991 and the 1992 war in historiography is also determined by the ethnopolitical orientation of historians. For the Romanians, Transnistria is a puppet state created to prevent the “national revival” of Bessarabian Moldovans, and the 1992 war is a Russian aggression against the independence of the republic. For Moldovanists, these same events are, primarily, civil war inside Moldova, the responsibility for which is primarily on the pro-Romanian forces in Chisinau.

5. As the distinctive features of portrayal of the political crisis and the war in the Moldovan media and popular literature, the next traits can be pointed to: the view of the conflict through the eyes of the military, in contrast to the Transnistrian version based on the description of suffering of civilians, is the representation of the Moldovan military as almost the main victims of the war; attitude towards the enemy as “outsiders”, “nomads” who do not have a historical connection with Transnistrian land, in contrast to Moldovans / Romanians. The population of Transnistria is described as “denationalized” “migrants” dating back to the Soviet period.

6. Major representations of the history of Transnistria in the historiography of Transnistria are the images of the region as an ancient East Slavic land (ignoring the questions about Moldovans and their ancestors in this territory), the organic part of the Russian state, its “outpost”. The idea of Transnistria as a borderland, a crossroads of civilizations makes it advantageous to show its “natural” multiethnicity in contrast to “nationalist” Moldova, and to refer to the particularly important geopolitical position of these lands for Russia, which is incompatible with belonging to Moldovan state.

7. The movement for creation of the Transnistrian autonomy and its separation from the Moldavian SSR is seen by the historiography of Transnistria as a just and essentially defensive struggle of the whole population of the region for the values of "internationalism" against aggressive Romanian nationalism in Chişinău. The causes of conflict are characteristically depicted not in ethnic, but in socio-economic terms (developed industrial Transnistria against the union of the old nomenclature, nationalist intelligentsia and marginal strata from Moldova, who wanted to improve or maintain their status with the help of ethnonationalism).

8. In the history of Transnistria, military images associated with adjoining Russia, the development and protection of the territory of the republic dominate. The main names of the commanders in this connection are A.V. Suvorov, M.I. Kutuzov, P.H. Wittgenstein and A.I. Lebed. The symbolic presence of events not related to the Russian period of history is most noticeable in Bendery.

**The degree of reliability and approbation of the findings.** The reliability of the findings of the research is ensured by representative sources, the level of analysis of historiography, and the scholarly methodology of the study. The main provisions of the thesis were presented at three international and two nationwide academic and academic and practical conferences. On the subject of the research 9 works with a total volume of 3.2 printed pages are published, including 3 articles in journals included in peer-reviewed publications recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation.

**Structure of the work.** The work consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of sources used and literature.

## MAIN CONTENT OF THE WORK

In the **introduction**, the relevance of the dissertation research is substantiated, the object, the subject, the purpose and tasks, the methodology and methods of research, the territorial and chronological framework, the degree of development of the topic, the types of sources used, the originality, the theoretical and practical value of the work are characterized, as well as the degree of its reliability and approbation.

The **first chapter** is dedicated to the problems of genesis of Transnistrian conflict and development of the process of Transnistrian peace settlement.

In the **first section**, the phenomenon of unrecognized and partially recognized states and the TMR as one of their representatives is considered. The massive spread of de facto state entities performing functions of the state but not enjoying international recognition in the post-Soviet space has many presuppositions, both rooted in the Soviet territorial structure, and related to the political processes of the collapse of the USSR and later period. Within the framework of this study, Transnistria is viewed as a state, in which internal political processes, in principle, do not differ from the development of "recognized" states.

As for the Transnistrian conflict, the active phase of which lasted from 1989 to 1992, i.e. the formation of Moldovan and Transnistrian state entities, it is possible to name among its causes interethnic contradictions connected with the rise of nationalism in the Moldavian SSR; competition of different groups of the republican elite that used these contradictions as a tool to preserve or enhance their status; regional and social differences between predominantly agricultural Bessarabia and industrial Transnistria, much more interconnected with the center of the Soviet Union. The source of survival of the young Transnistrian republic in the 1992 war of independence, which followed a series of attempts at a compromise solution to the conflict, alternated with the increase in TMR requests, was the availability of a military resource in the form of the 14th Soviet Army and its own industrial complex on its territory.

The **second section** explores the history of the diplomatic process around the Transnistrian conflict, aimed at finalizing the status of Transnistria. It is noted that the researchers of the conflict have developed a number of approaches for its periodization, largely coinciding. Differences between the names of periods are often determined by the political position of the author of a classification. Thus, the periodization of Moldovan political scientist Igor Botsan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of TMR in 2012 - 2016 Nina V. Shtansky, and the Russian historian Natalya I. Kharitonovaya coincide in the distinguishing of the following periods as the main lines of the negotiation process: 1992 as its beginning, 1997-2001 as the zenith of trust between the parties and approach to the conclusion of a treaty on the "common state", 2001 as a turning point in the negotiation process, with the transition to confrontation. The "common state" formula, proposed by Evgeniy M. Primakov, in a memorandum of May 8, 1997, as a compromise for the parties, aroused controversy about his precise fulfillment (autonomy in a unitary state according to the Moldovan version vs. federation or confederation consisting of two equal subjects according to the Transnistrian version). In general, the results of the diplomatic work of the 1990s, in which Russia and Ukraine were actively involved, having their own interests in the region, should be recognized as more beneficial for the Transnistrian side.

Ascending to power of the Communist Party in Moldova in 2000-2001 (it had set the goal of reconciliation between the two banks earlier) has revived the negotiation process for a short time, and a whole package of documents has been signed. However, in the same year, the deterioration of relations began, even more serious than in the 1990s, hand in hand with Moldova's economic pressure on

TMR. At the same time, the first half of the 2000s was marked by the activation of the work of the guarantor countries in developing a compromise solution to the conflict, creating the negotiating formats “3 + 2” and “5 + 2”, working so far, attempts to settle the dispute on the basis of the “Kozak Plan” (Russia) and the “Yushchenko Plan” (Ukraine). Neither documents have been implemented because of the opposition of politicians in Moldova, who viewed them as a violation of the country's sovereignty in foreign policy. The disruption of the plans at the same time was beneficial to the supporters of the actual independence of Transnistria.

From 2006 to 2011, despite the launch of new initiatives by external forces, bilateral negotiations stalled. The renewal of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the TMR is connected with the "tactics of small steps", nominated by the new president of Transnistria, Evgeniy V. Shevchuk. The essence of this tactic was the removal of status issues in favor of practical problems (economics and humanitarian issues), and unofficially - in obtaining advantages of the Moldovan jurisdiction while refusing political concessions. The most successful period of activity in the framework of this ideology is the years 2012-2013, before the international crisis around Ukraine has sharply complicated the position of Transnistria (economic and geopolitical).

The **second chapter** examines the politics of memory and politics of history in the Republic of Moldova regarding the Transnistrian issue.

In the **first section**, the history of the Trans-Dniester land in contemporary Moldovan historical studies is researched. As well as the sources necessary for studying this topic, the works of historians of inter-war Romania on history of Transnistrian lands were involved. It is concluded that there are two ideological lines in the historiography of Moldova, inseparably linked with the political projects for it - the Romanian one vs. the Moldovan one – that are united meanwhile by consensus on Transnistrian lands as the original or at least ancient ethnic territory of the Moldovans. To corroborate this thesis, the historians of Moldova and Romania use archaeological and toponymic data relating to antiquity and the Middle Ages (from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC to the 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> centuries AD); the concept of the ethnic Bolokhovites and the area of their resettlement – “Bolokhov's land” - as the Eastern European people; written sources of the New Time from the data of Moldovan annals to acts of ownership rights on the left bank of the Dniester to the reminiscences of travelers about meetings with the Moldavans / Wallachians behind the Dniester; the facts of the expansion of the power of the Moldovan princes to the lands east of the Dniester (especially in this sense the hetman of Ukraine and the prince of Moldova Gheorghe Duka stands out in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century), the encompassing of lands beyond the Dniester by the "sphere of influence" of the Moldavian / Romanian Orthodoxy.

With respect to the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the greatest attention of both Romanians and Moldovans was attracted by the surge of the Moldovan national movement in Transnistria during the revolution of 1917, the formation and history of the Moldavian Autonomous SSR and its accession to Bessarabia in 1940. The Moldovan Congress of Transnistria in 1917 is important for both camps as a symbol of the fact that, contrary to the Transnistrian historical concept, there was a

Moldavian / Romanian national movement there. The dispute revolves around which goals the movement was putting forward exactly and within which state it saw the left-bank regions of the Dniester.

The Moldavian ASSR is an especially controversial topic because of its dual character of both the Soviet and Moldovan autonomies at the same time. For the Moldovanists it is one of the forms of Moldovan statehood in the conditions of "Romanian occupation of Bessarabia" (albeit truncated), in accordance with the Soviet tradition, and in the presentation of the history of the republic in the 1920s - 1930s the successes of socio-economic and cultural development are of interest first of all. The Romanianists, on the other hand, always emphasize the destructive consequences of Stalin's policy for lives, the well-being and (in the long run) self-consciousness of the "Transnistrian Romanians", who, for the sake of separation from the "Motherland" and turning the region into a "Bolshevik bridgehead" to seize Romania, forcibly introduced "artificial" Moldovan ethnicity.

In the **second section**, we explore the coverage of events connected directly with the Transnistrian conflict in the historiography of Moldova. An attitude to the role of the Moldovan authorities, the national movement, and the USSR central authorities in the war depends primarily on the political position of the authors - Romanian or Moldovan. For the Romanianists, the war of 1992 is primarily the "war for independence" of Moldova, or the "Russian-Moldovan war", meanwhile for "Moldovan statist" it is a civil conflict engendered by the provocative activities of the Unionists (supporters of unification with Romania) and the parties' intransigence. The reason for the war in the Romanianist version is the plan, deliberately worked out in Moscow, to utilize the population of Transnistria as an instrument for preserving the entire Moldavia, first in the USSR, and then in the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation. Hence, the main attention paid by this branch of historiography to geopolitical problems in Eastern Europe and the role of Russian troops in the events of 1991-1992. It is also pointed out that the population of Transnistria is more Sovietized than in Bessarabia and the response to the rise of the "national movement" in Moldova in the late 1980s, which was perceived as a threat by Russian-speaking residents (according to the authors, because of the long anti-Romanian propaganda). Most often, thus, the conflict is characterized as political, but there is also a tendency to emphasize in it the features of an inter-ethnic clash between Romanian nationalism and "Russian national chauvinism".

The "Moldovanist" and partly pro-Russian branch of historiography in their evaluation of the conflict connects with the Transnistrians, considering the Romanian-oriented forces in Moldova as the culprit of the war. The data on the participation of Romanian military advisers, military equipment and volunteers in battles on the side of the Republic of Moldova, as well as the assessment of the war as part of the Romanian plan aimed at absorption of Moldova, are often given. For Moldovanists, the perception of war as a common tragedy of the entire republic is typical, participation in which is not worth it, and the peacemaking initiatives of the political forces oriented toward building "independent Moldova" and compromises with Transnistria are put at the forefront. It is alleged that most

Moldovans opposed the war. The difference with the Transnistrian version of events is ascribed primarily to condemnation of separatism in the TMR and the “self-isolation” of the Eastern Slavs from the movement "in defense of the Moldovan statehood" against the Unionists.

In the **third section** representation of the Transnistrian problem in schools and other mass forms of politics of memory and that of history in the Republic of Moldova are analyzed. The distinctive depiction of the political crisis and the war in the Moldovan media and popular literature are the view of the conflict through the eyes of military, in contrast to the Transnistrian version based on description of suffering civilians; the representation of the Moldovan armed forces and law enforcement agencies as the main victims of the war (which is natural for the remembrance perspective of the party, leading offensive); attitude towards the enemy as “outsiders”, “nomads” who do not have a historical connection with the Transnistrian land, in contrast to Moldovans / Romanians. The population of Transnistria is described as “migrants”, more Soviet people than Russians or Ukrainians, and Moldovans of Transnistria - as “denationalized”. In textbooks attention is paid not so much to military clashes as to descriptions of political tasks of the Transnistrian side (as the authors reconstruct them) and the role of the central authorities of the USSR, and then to Russian Federation in the conflict, which corresponds to the purposes of presenting it as Russian aggression, not a civil war. It is also characteristic to use the opposition of the faithful Moldovans to the Transnistrian “Communists” and “atheists”. Activities to commemorate the memory of the conflict are not characterized by a particularly high activity and the dominance of activities dedicated to the date of its outbreak (March 2, 1992). The main emphasis in memorial practices is the commemoration of military victims in the conflict from the Moldovan side, while ignoring the plight of the civilian population.

In the **third chapter**, images of Transnistrian history and conflict, created and disseminated in Transnistria, are studied.

In the **first section**, images and concepts related to the history of Transnistria prior to the formation of the republic are explored, proposed in the Pridnestrovian historiography. It concludes that the idea of the Dniester River as a border river dividing different countries and civilizations, and the Transnistrian lands as an eternal (since ancient times) geopolitical borderland is a constant for the historiography of the TMR. This image serves, among other things, as one of the reasons for independence of TMR and its future reunification with Russia, as a part of the “East Slavic civilization” incompatible with Bessarabia, a part of another, “Western” civilization. Another important image of Transnistria is the “outpost” of Russia, which occupies a particularly important position, both geopolitical and cultural, in order to preserve Russian positions in Europe and the Balkans. It is pointed out that this region had been a part of Kievan Rus, and, thus, the Eastern Slavs are not “newcomers”, but the autochthonous population of Transnistria. Or, in another variant of the answer to the Moldovan territorial claims, the repeated change of states and peoples living in that land in different eras is emphasized in the conclusion that no one can claim the role of the

“indigenous nation” here. The third argument in support of their claims is an indication that the left bank of the Dniester has never been part of the Moldovan states, and, therefore, should not belong to them in the future.

The main event in the history of Transnistria is the accession to the Russian Empire in 1792 - 1793 and the immigration of Eastern Slavs from Russia, as well as other peoples, among whom Moldovans are only one of many ethnic groups. A period of the Russian Empire is regarded as one of heyday periods of the region (along with the post-war USSR) and the time of formation of a special “multinational Transnistrian people” based on Russian culture.

The description of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic by Transnistrian historians is contradictory. On the one hand, they regard its creation as artificial and conditioned exclusively by geopolitical ambitions of the Bolsheviks and Comintern, on the other hand they call it historically the first Transnistrian statehood, the successor of which is the current Transnistria. The formation of the Moldavian SSR in 1940 is increasingly regarded as an unjustified incorporation of Transnistria, oriented toward Russia, into the “Romanized” Bessarabia (with reservations that the value of this act was small in the Soviet Union). Such contradictions in the image of the republic are explained by complexity of embedding its history in the idea of creating TMR as a result of the long natural development of the province, and by fluctuations in its self-identification between “Moldovanism” and “Transnistrian patriotism”.

The **second section** reveals the main features characteristic of the image of the so-called “axial age” for the Transnistrian historical memory - events in the Moldavian SSR and the Republic of Moldova in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The creation of the republic and its precedents are characterized as fair and justified from a legal, political and moral point of view. The legal aspect of the referendum as a means of forming an autonomous republic, the reference to the fact that the activities of the Transnistrian movement were in the legal field of the USSR and the decisions of the Moldovan Supreme Soviet of 1990 that are interpreted as a voluntary refusal of Moldova from territories that were not part of it before 1940. Interethnic relations in Soviet Moldova are depicted as a peaceful community of equal peoples, violated by the rise of Moldovan nationalism, which used for its purposes the nomenclature of the MSSR for separated from the Union and the expulsion from power of representatives of non-titular peoples. The military actions of 1992 are presented as a just, defensive war against the “totalitarian-bureaucratic regime” of Chisinau. The unity of all ethnic groups of Transnistrian population before the invaders from the right-bank Moldova is praised. Transnistrian historiography also considers the majority of the population of the right-bank Moldova not as enemies, but as victims of the war or even passive allies of TMR, dissatisfied in the first place with their power that had unleashed this war. In respect to the armed forces of the Republic of Moldova, they simultaneously speak of their brutal behavior in territory of Transnistria, the numerous crimes committed by them, and the unwillingness to fight and readiness to negotiate. Characteristic is the understatement of Moscow's role in events, the evaluation of the actions of the USSR central authorities as a contribution to

Chişinău or even its open support. The Transnistrian movement thus appears to have started from the bottom, counterelite and revolutionary towards the Moldovan Communist party bureaucracy, and at the same time representing the most culturally developed and progressive part of the republican population (skilled workers and technical intelligentsia, as opposed to rural Moldova).

In the **third section**, the content, methods and tasks of representing the history of Transnistria in mass forms of the politics of history in Transnistria are analyzed. Among the main tools for the formation of historical memory in accordance with political objectives there are school education and memorial policy.

In Transnistria has been created an own line of school textbooks, supplementing Russian ones. The historical narrative in them preserves continuity with the Soviet version of the “History of the Moldavian SSR”, in particular by its representation of Romania as the main enemy of the Transnistrians and the perception of Soviet power and the communist movement in Bessarabia as “their own compatriots”.

The historical landscape of Transnistria is based on commemoration of the memory of wars that took place on its territory. The central place is occupied by the commanders of the Russian Empire of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the nineteenth century, who participated in wars that affected Transnistria and the surrounding lands. Among them, the main one is Aleksandr V. Suvorov. His image is so widely represented in the symbolism of Transnistria that TMR is often called the “Suvorov republic”. One of the most important reasons for such popularity is that it is with his name that the entry of Transnistrian lands into Russia and the establishment of Tiraspol, the capital of TMR, is associated. In addition to him, Mikhail I. Kutuzov, Pyotr H. Wittgenstein, Pyotr A. Rumyantsev are revered officially.

Specific to Transnistria is the creation of monuments not only of Russian, but also of foreign historical figures, who have left their mark on the history of the region. This is especially true in the case of the Bendery fortress, where memorials to various foreign rulers and generals have been created (with the exception of Moldovan ones).

Regarding the commemorative actions related to the war in 1992, it is worth noting the erection of monuments to Russian peacekeepers and Transnistrian participants in the war, in which Soviet and Orthodox traditions are combined. Historical policy in relation to Aleksandr I. Lebed - a person who contributed to freezing the conflict and guarantees for the independence of Transnistria - went from hushing up and criticism in the second half of the 1990s - 2000s before the recognition of his merits and intensive perpetuation of his memory in the 2010s. The reasons for this lie primarily in domestic policy of the republic, but the role of the rapprochement between TMR and Russia also plays a role.

The **conclusion** reflects the main findings of the research. This study examines the problems associated with the phenomenon of politics of history and politicization of history applied to the Transnistrian conflict. Among the parties to the conflict conducting historical policy, the positions of only its direct participants



- the Republic of Moldova and unrecognized Transnistrian Moldovan Republic - were examined. The main types of sources used in the writing of the thesis were the historical works of Moldovan and Transnistrian authors, since they most consistently set out the concepts of the history of the Transnistrian region, corresponding to the political interests of the parties.

The work illustrates the thesis that Transnistrian historiography and politics of history are one-sided and oriented toward illustration the same set of theses. First of all, is the idea of Transnistria as an integral part of the East Slavic world and the historical Russian space. Despite the internationalism declared by the ideology of Transnistria, the history of the region by various means, from textbooks to monuments to museum expositions, is represented primarily as Russian history. The main characters associated with development of the Transnistrian lands are Suvorov and Kutuzov, who have integrated them to Russian Empire. Since the times of Kievan Rus, the main attention of historians has been focused on the East Slavic population of Transnistria, while the share of Moldovans in it has been downplayed, emphasis is placed on the fact that the left bank of the Dniester never had never been subordinate to the Moldovan state. Creation of the Moldavian ASSR is one of the most important for Transnistria, but controversially interpreted in local historiography: on the one hand, MASSR is portrayed as the first Transnistrian statehood, on the other, it is emphasized that it was created for opportunistic reasons, and the unification of MASSR with Bessarabia within the framework MSSR in 1940 became a "delayed-action mine".

At the same time, in order to resist the Moldovan-Romanian "ethnocracy", an important role in the Transnistrian historical policy is played by the concept of existence of a multinational Transnistrian people, historically formed on the basis of Russian statehood and Russian culture, which opposes "aggressive Romanism" from the late 1980s. On this basis in the 1990s Transnistria tried to play the role of protector of the Moldovan national identity, separate from the Romanian one. However, later, with the strengthening of the Moldovan state, the argument for deep differences in identities of Bessarabian and Transnistrian Moldovans, which prevented them from living within the framework of one state, was brought to the fore in the historical policy of the PMR.

It is revealed that politics of history around the Transnistrian problem in Moldova is divided into two main political directions. The first of them, the Romanianist (Unionist), dominating at the present time, considers Transnistrian conflict as artificially created by the Soviets to prevent Moldova from secession from the USSR, and then to keep it in the sphere of Russian influence. Therefore, it is characterized with focusing on the geopolitical aspects of the conflict. The burden for the inability to restore the territorial integrity of the country, according to this version lies on the authorities that are prone to compromise with TMR. The second direction that is oriented towards the sovereignty of Moldovan nation and largely deriving its origin from the Soviet concepts of Moldovan history assesses the conflict as provoked by the aggressive nationalist politics of the pro-Romanian politicians of Moldova in the late 1980s and early 1990s and stopped largely

thanks to leftist Moldovan parties and organizations of ethnic minorities in Moldova.

An idea has been proposed that both political branches use the Transnistrian problem in many ways as an excuse for criticizing the political forces associated with the ideological enemy. Both parties are united by perception of the Transnistrian lands as a territory of ancient Eastern Romanic settlement, the demographic composition of which had been “artificially” changed as a result of migrations of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, encouraged by the tsarist and later Soviet governments. This is used as an argument for reclaiming Moldova's historical rights to this territory, as opposed to Transnistrian claims on it as a historical Southern Russian or Ukrainian land.

**The main conclusions of the thesis are submitted in the following publications:**

*In the leading peer-reviewed scientific journals recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation:*

1. Medinets, M.Ya. (2017), “Enemy Image in the 1989 – 1992 Trans-Dniester conflict: a view from TMR”, *Izv. Saratov Univ. (N.S.), Ser. History. International Relations*, 2017, Vol. 17, iss. 1, pp. 64 – 66 (in Russian).

2. Medinets, M.Ya. (2016), “Romanians beyond the Dniester River: the Moldavian ASSR in Romanian historiography”, *Uchenye Zapiski Kazanskogo Universiteta. Seriya Gumanitarnye Nauki*, 2016, vol. 158, no. 6, pp. 1533 – 1540 (in Russian).

3. Medinets, M.Ya. (2016), “Image of Adversary in 1989 – 1992 Transnistrian conflict: a View from Moldova”, *Vestnik Samarskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, 2016, no. 4, pp. P. 41 – 46 (in Russian).

*In other publications:*

4. Medinets, M.Ya. (2014), “Ethnic composition of the population of the left bank of the Dniester River in 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries”, *Platonovskiye chteniya: materialy i doklady XX Vserossiyskoy konferentsii molodykh istorikov* [Platonov readings: proceedings and reports of the 20<sup>th</sup> All-Russian Conference of Young Historians], Samara, December 12 – 13, 2014, Samarskiy Universitet, Samara, pp. 50 – 51 (in Russian).

5. Medinets, M.Ya. (2015), “The problem of creating the Moldavian ASSR in the contemporary historical literature of Moldova and Transnistria”, *Materialy Mezhdunarodnogo molodezhnogo nauchnogo foruma “LOMONOSOV-2015”* [Proceedings of the International Youth Scientific Forum “LOMONOSOV-2015”] Ed. A.I. Andreev, A.V. Andriyanov and E.A. Antipov [Electronic resource, 1 DVD-ROM, 12 cm.], Moscow, April 13 – 17, 2015, MAKS Press, Moscow (in Russian).

6. Medinets, M.Ya. (2015), “Politics of history: an example of the Transnistrian problem”, *Romantizm i pozitivizm kak istoriograficheskiye epokhi:*

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7. Medinets M.Ya. (2015), *Levoberezhnye Dnestra do prisoyedineniya k Rossii: diskussii moldavskikh i pridnestrovskikh istorikov* [The left bank of the Dniester before joining Russia: discussions of Moldovan and Transnistrian historians], *Pamyati professora Stanislava Mikhailovicha Stetskevicha. Stati i vospominaniya* [In memory of Professor Stanislav Mikhailovich Stetskevich. Articles and reminiscences], Publishing House “YaZ”, Kazan, Russia, pp. 61 – 68 (in Russian).

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9. Medinets, M.Ya. (2016), “Memorialization of the Russian Empire statesmen in Transnistrian Moldovan Republic: the main aspects”, *Materialy Mezhdunarodnogo molodezhnogo nauchnogo foruma “LOMONOSOV-2016”* [Proceedings of the International Youth Scientific Forum “Lomonosov-2016”], ed. I.A. Aleshkovsky, A.V. Andriyanov and E.A. Antipov, [Electronic resource, 1 DVD-ROM, 12 cm.], Moscow, April 11 – 15, 2016, MAKS Press, Moscow (in Russian).

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