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**STAGING THE TRANSNISTRIAN IDENTITY: A DECONSTRUCTION OF
THE OFFICIAL HOLLIDAY'S DISCOURSE**

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Staging the Transnistrian Identity: A Deconstruction of the Official Holliday's Discourse

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Abstract

The politics of identity loom large in post-Soviet societies. It matters as conceptually as a contested fact of contemporary political life. This article focuses upon the consolidation processes of Transnistrian society where Transnistrian leaders play a key role in the construction of national identity via a top-down process. Are analyzed different approaches of self-identification practices; paternalistic atavisms in the creation and keeping of a separate identity; consolidating factors and strategies in analysis of ideology; analyzing of state in-group projection and attitude toward out-group. An important attention is paid to the speeches of Transnistrian leadership in mass media and interviews with the residents of Rybnitsa regarding the official holidays. Key Soviet holidays, May Day and October Revolution, are still celebrated in Transnistria mostly by older generation and members of communist party. Transnistria has instituted a secular public holiday: Independence Day (September, 2). This date is related specifically to the formation of a new Transnistrian region. Military might and pioneers prowess, a Soviet source of pride, are now included in celebrations of the Transnistrian state. October Revolution Day, May Day, Victory Day, Independence Day permits to understand the dynamics of nation-building process and the impact of these commemorations on transnistrian nation-building discourse.

The theoretical framework is therefore consistent with a constructivist view of elite manipulation of public opinion during the nation-building process. The formation of a Transnistrian collective identity is still in the process of formation but this article agrees with William Zimmerman (1998) that a “process of differentiation” is already taking place.

This process of differentiation “constitutes a core element in state and political community formation” (Zimmerman 1998: 45).

Introduction

In a post-Soviet world on the territory of an internationally recognized sovereign state, Republic of Moldova was created a Soviet-style outpost, the so-called Transnistrian Moldavian Republic. The highly Sovietised population of Transnistria on 2 September 1990 declared its secession from Moldova. This left bank of Dniester River after USSR collapse enthusiastically started to search own identity and own vectors of cultural development. Aspirations of ethnic activity for the most part were determined by cultural motives than by political ones. In general spontaneously arisen programs during that time were limited to ideas and slogans about keeping of native language, traditions, culture, etc. It was an impulse for regions where the problem of regional identity was very important.

Ideas of new identity construction were appeared in all post communist Central and Eastern European countries and in all republics of the USSR. Republic of Moldova is not an exception in this concern where the situation has been complicated by artificial boundaries with the Transnistrian region, complex territorial claims and demographic patterns within this area. There are a number of significant contrasts between the socio-cultural identity of the Russians/Russified population in Transnistria and the right bank Moldovans. Divergences with the Transnistrian region were and still remain highly politicized. Nation-building process here is marked by politicians actively seeking recognition, for their particular culture, history, language, and identity.

Regional identity of Transnistrian people represents multivariable and multi component content of mentality. Mentality is developed by leadership into myths appealing to Transnistrian society and trying to differentiate it culturally from Moldovan society. “We will strengthen the independence achieved in such difficulties and defended by blood... Transnistria exists in fact; it is a reality. We will settle all differences but only through negotiations where we will be equal in rights. We do not need anyone to present us with

any status”, - Igor Smirnov¹ stated (Waters 1997: 78). Such differentiation is reinforced by myths, memories and symbols of ethnic heritage, through which, political leaders eager for economic rewards and status forged their strategies. As Iver Neumann points out, “Identity is inconceivable without difference” and in constructing new identities nationalists and new ruling elites are forced “to contrast that identity to something different” (Neumann 1993: 350).

Identity cannot be understood except in relation to ‘Others’ because without ‘Otherness’ a bounded in-group will be difficult to construct. Separatist politics in Transnistrian region formed borders which enclosed ‘We’ and excluded, often violently, ‘Others’ (Bowen 2002: 335). Nation- and state-building projects generate the self and ‘Others’ in the course of the formation of the polity (Alonso 1994: 382). Individuals liken themselves to some people and distinguish themselves from others, bonds are formed between people who see themselves as similar’ (Penrose 1995: 402). It is the task of state and nation-builders to ensure that inclusion and exclusion are codified and maintained (James 1996: 33). Without such markers a new national identity will not be created because it is through confrontation with the ‘Other’ that the community sees what it is not, and what it lacks by recognizing its ‘constitutive outside’ (Hall 1996: 5).

Nationalistic politics aided by the mass media contributed to creation negative stereotypes and fear of another group. This means that political leaders manipulate ethnic tensions for the purpose of ensuring their political existence at the minority groups’ expense.

Looking from this perspective it is not enough to ask *what* is a regional identity and *who* constructs it, by *what* ways as well as *for whom* it is constructed. How can a Transnistrian identity and its different dimensions be characterized? How official holidays have affected the shaping a Transnistrian identity?

In this paper I focus on meaning of construction/deconstruction identity, theoretical issue of national identity problem, resources that characterize national identities in public discourse, and regionalist patterns in staging of a separate Transnistrian identity. Secondly, I explore the process of identity formation which is going on through the prism of official

¹ Igor Smirnov speech in December 1996 when he was reelected for another five years term as a ‘president’ of Transnistrian region refers to Moldova’s proposal to grant Transnistria a special legal status within the framework of a unified Moldova. He was forthright about his intention to consolidate the so called PMR state system.

holidays as one of the ways in which the regional Transnistrian self-image is constructed. I research the ways how a popular past has been reinterpreted by Transnistrian leaders.

Identity politics of Transnistrian auto-proclaimed structures and its ideological messages are more evident in time of such holidays as May Day – on May 1, Victory Day – on May 9, October Revolution – on November 7, Independence Day – on September 2. Analysis of October Revolution, May Day and Victory Day, holidays which were celebrated in time of the Soviet Union evident reveals that a heritage of a Soviet mentality, ideology and identity is still held by a significant part of Transnistrians. Holidays exist in culture not only as external social determinant but as internal necessity of the society as a whole, and each person individually. That's why it is interesting to know personal opinions and visions of ordinary people, how official discourse is represented in their minds. Finally, make analysis of models or “waves” of nation- and state-building projects, the consolidating factors and strategies in ideology. It is interesting to analyze the unusually united political will of Transnistrian regional elite, the normative force of the Transnistria factual existence with its impact on the everyday life of its inhabitants as the main pillars of the Transnistrian strive for state-building.

Construction and de-construction identity-politics in the Transnistrian region: a conceptual framework

Identity politics notion of construction and de-construction is appeared in 1960-70s in European structuralist and deconstructivist intellectual discourse. The process of deconstruction and construction is the way in which individuals in their everyday living come to modify the meaning of their own identity and change at least some of their ethnic behavior patterns without necessarily divesting themselves of all of them. It should be emphasized that what is referred to here is not a change in ethnicity determined by outside forces, such as government policies of assimilation. Rather, it refers to adjustment made by individual members of ethnic groups themselves in their everyday interaction with outsiders and each other, without external “official” compulsion. Deconstruction consists of some objective aspects of ethnic identity losing their meaning and use; others losing their meaning without being completely given up, and still others retaining their meaning even when they are no longer used. Although some aspects of one's identity may be abandoned

and patterns from different cultural sources be acquired and become more meaningful, other aspects may be retained and continue to have significance.

The key idea at the heart of this theoretical agenda is that, as Hall puts it, “Identities are...constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall 1996: 4). There is no pre-existing “essential self” who is then represented or expressed; rather, subjectivity and identity are “constructed within discourse”. There is no “unitary” subject, “identical to itself across time”, but rather identity is always unstable, fragmented and contingent, since it is dependent on the exclusion of that which is other. It should be noted that this perspective, which is informed by post-structuralist theory, and which constitutes the predominant strand of thought about identity in Cultural Studies, is different from, and sees itself as largely opposed to, what is conventionally thought of as ‘identity politics’. As Edward Said writes “identity as such is about as boring a subject as one can imagine. Nothing seems less interesting than the narcissistic self-study that today passes in many places for identity politics, or ethnic studies, or affirmations of roots, cultural pride, and drum-beating nationalism and so on. We have to defend peoples and identities threatened with extinction or subordinated because they are considered inferior, but that is very different from aggrandising a past invented for present reasons” (Said 1998: 7).

According to constructivist tradition ethnic groups not as a naturally determined entity but as a modern social construct. In such constructed societies cultural elites play a key role in the construction of ethnic identity. Pure self-interest, the dream of power and privilege - is an important motive when the elite make demands on behalf of “their” group. While it is true that ethnicity has a powerful emotional and psychological function by providing comfort and security to its members, in itself this factor will not engender conflict unless leaders are prepared to manipulate and exploit these emotions for their own self-serving purposes (Hobsbawm 1983: 6). As a result elites use old traditions, borrowed symbols, moral directives, folklore in the construction of new traditions. Mass production of traditions (starting with state holidays, military parades and placing monuments) serves namely to create and to keep a national state.

Charles King comments that for well-established regions, just as for well-articulated national identities, the temptation is to read back into the past the settled parameters of the region itself, to see the existence of the region as analytically prior to the forms of political

cooperation that emerge within its borders. As with the existence of nations, though, it is easy to forget that the delineations of the boundaries and characteristics of the regional unit emerge from an essentially political process: just as there were no nations before elites - cultural, political and economic - came to imagine them as such, so too are there no regions until one particular vision of the region's shape and features manages to outstrip rival definitions (King 2001: 57). According to this conceptualization, regions emerge as relatively malleable entities contingent on various social practices, including the interaction amongst elites and publics across state borders leading to the generation and accumulation of shared knowledge, meanings and values.

Adam Rotfeld, the personal representative of the chairman of the CSCE Council, reported that "the conflict in the Transnistria region of Moldova raises a question of a fundamental nature. Who in fact is legitimate to enjoy the right of self-determination: nations, ethnic groups or nationalities, or indeed anyone who claims it? (Interim report on the conflict in the Left Bank Dniester Areas of the Republic of Moldova, 1992: 13) The regime has embarked on a state-driven identity building process aimed at fostering a new regionalist pattern of collective identity as the first step toward the creation of a "transnistrian people". Transnistrian leadership does everything for strengthening a separate identity of Transnistrian population. This identity is political which is formed on commonness of historical fate of local population. State authorities purposefully develop the identity by cultivating the representation by political and ideological symbols, and by official holidays also.

The nation staging for elites is a mechanism of self-preservation of multiethnic Transnistrian society. Elites design the community on the basis of a certain ethnic ideal. At the heart of any ideological designing is a principle of ethno authority, based on sovereignty of title ethnos and only this ethnos is a source of the higher authority. About half of the residents of the TMR see themselves as constituting a specific ethno-cultural entity, distinct from neighbors, and they believe that this identity has been forming for centuries under the Russian influence. With Transnistria associate 35,1% Moldovans, 31,7% Russians and 40,4% Ukrainians. (Republican Informational Agency, 19 June 2008). So, the overwhelming majority of citizens, including Moldovans, see Republic of Moldova as a foreign state. It does not mean that Slavs are not loyal to Moldova, at all times

interethnic marriages forms a basis of complex, multilayered identity. The share of the “soviet” people among all three ethnic groups is more, than in Republic of Moldova, especially among Russians (among Moldovans - 17,5%, Russians - 26,1%, and Ukrainians - 18,5%) (Исторический Альманах Приднестровья 2001: 40).

The formation of Transnistrian identity that unites populations is realized through resource of myth making. Myths arouse an awareness of the group’s common fate, stressing individual solidarity against an alien force, that is, by enhancing the salience of boundary perceptions. Nationalists look to the past to regenerate and invent the new “imagined community.” Eric Hobsbawms and Terence Rangers, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) analyzed the way myth and ritual had been used to create a public memory in which citizens were meant to believe. Anthony D. Smith wrote that, without myths, memories and symbols by which to mark off group members from ‘strangers,’ and without the cultural elites to interpret and elaborate them, there can be no real ethnies. Myths gave meaning and purpose to cultural entities, and a sense of attachment and belonging to mobilized populations,” he continues. The ethno-symbolist approach puts emphasis on the subjective components of national identity, while simultaneously underlining the sociological bases of collective cultural identities, like ethnies and nations (Smith 2002: 15). For ethno-symbolists, what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritage. Smith argues that each nationalism usually contains more than one myth of descent, that different images of past and future tell us much about the divisions in the social and cultural life of a community experiencing rapid change, and the difficulties it faces in trying to achieve social integration (Smith 1999: 9, 86).

Symbolic resources like political values/institutions, culture, history and geography, provide the symbolic raw material which social actors use as they define national identities in public discourse. Thus, “what matters with regard to the construction of national identities is less what resources political actors draw upon than how they put these resources to practical use ...” (Zimmer 2003: 181).

Invented traditions molded images of the past to present needs. Identity is more nuanced in exploring the relationship between traditions as it is invented and tradition as it is received. Collective memory is constructed and a key to memory influence is a political power. So memory of bloodshed in 1992 war in collective consciousness of Transnistrians

is still very strong and considerably promotes their unity. Transnistrian multinational population was gradually involved in self-consolidation practice. The process of nation formation as a fore-runner of the future *pridnestrovskaia* nation was started. "We are unique! We are descendants of Suvorov soldiers, Zaporozhye and Black Sea Cossacs, Moldovan haiducs. During many centuries of common dwelling life formed here a new community – Transnistrian nation – with own mentality, own character and features with strong friendship between people of different nationalities, their willingness to save own dignity and a right to be a man. As Maksim Gorkii wrote: "To be a man sounds proudly!" These words for Transnistrians are not a learned phrase but they reflect the essence of Transnistrian character. "State-building process is characteristic for today and it will be tomorrow" (Smirnov 2001: 39, 105).

One of the parameters of political identity formation is a legitimacy of a political government and trust of citizens to various public institutes. In Transnistria president Igor Smirnov as a charismatic personality of the region and as the "Khozyain President"² has enough support from the local population. So people who believe and trust the President completely – 45,2%, the Government – 38,7%, the Supreme Council – 37,1% (Исторический Альманах Приднестровья 2001: 42).

Self-consciousness of population, their trust/distrust to politics of Transnistrian leadership was proved during my field research in Rybnitsa. I would like to present some opinions of ordinary people, their attitude to present government and state policy.

Our Government, Supreme Council and President do everything for our republic, for its well-being and do their possible to make our life better. I am sure that we will live better as our president affirms. (Olga, 56 years old, teacher)

² Khozyain is a Russian term often used to describe a certain type of political leader; the prototype of the style of Igor Smirnov, Pridnestrovie's own "Khozyain" head of state. It is a rich term which traditionally refers to a leader of a given social domain, a home, a village, an enterprise, or a country. The khozyain of a household is usually the oldest male and is entrusted with the welfare of the group. For someone to merit the title of a real khozyain he must take care of those in his domain. Russian voters judge leaders, including politicians, on whether they are (or give the impression of being) a real khozyain. They are sometimes hard to classify in a classical political sense since their overriding concerns are not a leftist or rightist political agenda, but the welfare of the group where ideology is less important than pragmatism, strength of character and problem solving skills. Igor Smirnov and the other founding fathers of the republic have declared on many occasions, from the earliest day of the independence struggle, that what they wanted to create was a society free of "isms." A khozyain politician can easily be seen as authoritarian in a Western political context, and, true to form, Igor Smirnov has been called both a "strongman" and, by the more radical Smirnov-haters in Moldova, a "dictator". A more accurate description, for those who understand the true meaning of the word khozyain, would be to classify him as a father figure. Since essentially the prime trait of the khozyain is to be pragmatic, and he is not driven by ideology, he is open to change if it benefits the welfare of the group. (<http://www.tiraspoltimes.com/node/183>)

This state defends us and inspires confidence in the future. (Nikolai, 42 years)

Our president kept our unity, unity of our nation. (Mihail, 23 years old)

I support our president in his policy orientation that we must cooperate with Russian Federation and Ukraine. (Anna, 30 years old)

Our government and president don't undertake attempts to change our life, because of their incompetence we live in unstable place. (Natalia, 54 years old)

Our politicians betray us and we have not future here. We have made a "jerk back" in realization of social-economic development. (Oksana, 48 years)

The process of defending the republic against Republic Moldova, coupled with a threat factor that views the TMR as isolated, has accelerated the process of self-identity (O'Loughlin, Kolossov, Tchepalyga 1998: 351). Therefore, the formation of a new identity in the Transnistrian region is proceeding, and this development challenges observers who view national identities as unchanging, uniform, and singular. In Tansnistrian region the visible signs of a new national construction are evident and in less than a decade, a new identity has taken shape.

Reinterpretation of the past and Memory politics on the example of October Revolution holiday and May Day holiday

Interpretation of the past represents an important component of political identity transformation. In order to perceive the Soviet model of the settlement of the relationship of national and all-union socialist identities within the Soviet program as well as the means of its implementation is necessary to at least slightly revert to the Soviet nationalities policy. Two opposite trends were paradoxically combined in the Soviet nationalities policy. On the

one hand there was attention given towards Soviet nations and support for the development of national identities and cultures, on the other hand there was the process of the merging of Soviet nations and shaping of the Soviet people. Some researchers believe that this ambiguous policy was one of the reasons of the collapse of the Soviet Union. One can find different interpretations of the Soviet nationalities policy. The first explanation is based on the “depolicization” and overcoming of the Soviet national identities, and the idea of the formation of united Soviet people – the bearer of a common Soviet high culture which implied the guidance of the Soviet power (Martin 2000: 165). The second interpretation is based on the logic of the Soviet geopolitical strategy for disseminating communism throughout the world (Salmin 1992: 12). In conformity with the first interpretation embodying Stalin’s principle ‘national in form, socialist in content’ Soviet political identity was represented by consistent ideology that was reflected in scientific and political discourse, in educational system, mass-media, political traditions and holiday culture.

Main peculiarity of October Revolution Day³ as a main holiday of the Soviet calendar is its ideological content. This holiday was understood as a birth of a new world and the destruction of old one, as a new stage in human development. In holiday discourse analysis October Revolution was represented as a symbol of radical changes in history of the country, change to right political structure, to society embodied in values of freedom and progress in socialistic meaning. Such model of historical time was dominant during the Soviet period of time. In future this ideology became to be weak without its communicative function.

Being a successor of the USSR Transnistria has formed the vision of the Soviet past not as the past of foreign country but substantially as own past. Mainly a complex character of this policy determined controversy of new political identity formation in post soviet Moldova. During the first years of Transnistria existence November 7th remained a red-letter day and continued to keep as earlier its ideological essence. Mass media interprets this holiday as it was accepted in the Soviet Union as a revolutionary holiday. “Time shows that it is a unique holiday. It has the global and the humane meaning. November 7 marked

³ The October Revolution is also known as the Soviet Revolution or Bolshevik Revolution, refers to a revolution—as part of the Russian Revolution—that began with an armed insurrection in Petrograd (also regarded as a coup d’état by the worker and soldier masses) traditionally dated to 25 October 1917 Julian calendar (7 November 1917 Gregorian calendar). The October Revolution overthrew the Russian Provisional Government and gave the power to the Soviets dominated by Bolsheviks. It was followed by the Russian Civil War (1917–1922) and the creation of the Soviet Union in 1922.

the beginning of a different life and a different epoch. Revolution gave Russia and the whole world a new country and, more importantly, a new attitude to man. An attitude to every human being as a personality having the right for a worthy life on a par with everyone else”, was told in mass media. So, revolution is represented as “historical foundation” of Soviet identity, of political symbols, traditions and myths. Nowadays, in new conditions this holiday has neither its socially-integrative functions nor its ideological component. It is celebrated by old population and each year Communist Party organizes a meeting. “Under the banner of revolution our people built and fought, lived in multinational, powerful and rich state with the slogan “A man to man is a friend, a comrade and a brother”. Thanks the senior generation! They gave the country everything they could... Present generation of Communists sees its task in restoring the union state on the example of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and return to people all social achievements of the Great October”. (Oleg Horzhan, chairman of Transnistrian Communist Party).

Only veterans being socially active and seeking a social recognition are the direct adherents of the soviet policy. “This day, November 7, has always been and still remains a great holiday for us,” (Alexandr Petrovici, 67 years old). At the same time they are capable to impart “knowledge” about war to new generations. War discourse allowed different generations to speak in one language, to have common ideas on war, common consciousness that promotes strengthening a separate identity. Indeed in Transnistria till now ideas of Great October exist in consciousness of people who lived in time of Soviet Union. “November, 7th a day when it has been finished with the exploitation and workers began to govern the country. A leading role in Revolution played the Russian Social Democratic Working Party of Bolsheviks (RSDRP) which has been renamed into Communist party later. Next victories of our people in actions and in work; industrialization of the country, liquidation of illiteracy, the greatest achievements of our science and culture, space flight, the social welfare that Soviet people used, everything became possible thanks to Great October”, - states the Chairman of Veterans Council N. M. Jaroshev (Правда Приднестровья, 4 May 2007). The Day of October Revolution is a holiday presumably for pensioners and males over 60 years of age having secondary education.

As October Revolution Holiday, May Day also has its self-determination and socially-cultural function. May Day⁴ is linked traditionally with the country's labor movement. The Soviet culture had a stable tradition of celebration this day. Holiday always had not only ideological contents but also cultural aspects. Were organized demonstrations reflected the main essence of social unity and ideological meaning of the Soviet society. Firstly, people marching on demonstration were proud of when they and representatives of labor collectives in strict order passed by a tribune with authority representatives. In the moment of their approach to a tribune the announcer welcomed them and congratulated with new labor successes. Thus people felt unity between them and authority. Secondly, the festive mood of May Day demonstration was also an opportunity of informal dialogue with colleagues. People participated in demonstrations together with their children. After dissolution of old cultural model at the beginning of 90th the tradition of May Day demonstrations has disappeared. But for Transnistrian leadership May 1st continue to keep its social nature and a way of civil consciousness expression. "Today as many years ago we unite with everyone who is able and who likes to work, who is building own life by painstaking and honest job, who is fighting for social rights and freedom". - I. Smirnov (Приднестровье, 7 May 2007). Nowadays society has lost interest in May 1st rallies and parades. Today this holiday is mostly just a good opportunity to go outside, celebrate the onset of spring, and simply to meet friends or even take a short vacation, because the next holiday May 9th (Victory Day) occurs in the next few days, and sometimes it is possible to combine two holidays into one vacation. The best thing about this holiday nowadays, is that it provides for a great excuse to go outside and enjoy a picnic. But those who celebrate this holiday and participate at May 1st demonstration in Transnistria region combine its ideological component with the day-to-day reality of living here people, namely with the economical situation in the region. If in mass media and in speeches of political leaders there are positive markers of economical development, growing of external trade and improvement of living standards of the population, in opinion of ordinary people there are pessimistic mood.

⁴ May Day has been linked with the labor movement since the late 19th century. On that day in 1890, 10,000 workers staged a strike in Warsaw. Underground celebrations were then held in Tsarist Russia each year. After the October revolution of 1917, May Day was declared an official state holiday and celebrated openly for the first time. For some 80 years, it was used as an opportunity to showcase the Soviet Union's strength. Troops and military hardware were paraded through Red Square. In the late 1980s the celebrations began to wane and in 1991 Mikhail Gorbachev was jeered by protesters waving anti-Soviet banners. Nowadays May Day is a chance for different political groups to champion their cause.

“The rights of workers are violated very often today. Salaries are not paid for 2-3 months at many enterprises. In Rybnitsa area only 37 % workers receive salary equal to a consumer's basket but others below this level”. (Victor Zadorozhnyj, chairman of local trade unions council)

“May 1st is a day of the international solidarity of workers; unfortunately we have to speak about what worry us seriously today. Did we fight in 1992 only for the right to speak and write in language of our ancestors? We defended first of all our future, our right to have good life, an opportunity to have work, to receive deserved salary, pension... What do we have today? The prices for goods shoot up catastrophically; tariffs for municipal services grow also. A lot of transnistrians merit a better life but they have to survive for the existence. We entirely support a foreign policy vector of our republic but it is two different things: aspiration of transnistrians to unite with Russia and business-project of our authority that reduce our people to poverty”. (Horjan O.O, Chairman of Transnistrian Communist party)

After the USSR collapse Transnistrian region began to revalue the past not in opposition to the Soviet version of identity, but in a format of the official version which will be perceived by population and accepted as identity policy of a new state. But for ordinary people with the exception of old population values existed in the past (political traditions and symbols) lost their actuality and exist “mechanically”. This day pensioners put a question to raise pensions. For others, the holiday simply holds nostalgic value. The holidays as November 7th, May, 1st remain free days for population, but for government and political parties (in particular for communists) continue to be a source for identity policy.

Victory Day as a tool of ideological and political socialization

Representation of the Great Patriotic War is also one of the key components of a new Transnistrian identity. Constructing an official historical discourse the authorities selectively address to the Soviet past choosing as a case events of the Second World War.

The subject of unity of Transnistrian society is extremely important for political elites. Was appeared the necessity to create such official discourse that would help to unite a society. The topic of unity also is observed in a lot of speeches and appeals.

War has a special importance in structure of identity for the several reasons. Firstly, this event is a recent past; his direct participants are still alive. Secondly, patriotic components in structure of identity were relevant in the period of war. In Transnistria region war becomes a starting point, a patriotic component in the structure of Transnistria identity. In this sense war oversteps the limits of ideological splits of the post Soviet period. Thus, war becomes an event which is already implanted in political traditions and in structure of identity. It symbolically represents historical unity of a society and a state; this serves a significant resource of a state legitimization.

The war is important from the point of returning the state in a policy of identity. New symbols represent a symbiosis of Moldovan and Soviet symbols, and all these elements emphasize national and “patriotic” components, continuity with all historical stages of country development.

This holiday keeps its main contents and ritually-ceremonial forms of Soviet culture. At the state level to such forms concern the wreaths-laying ceremony and, certainly, a military parade. The new form of a holiday is “The ribbon of St. George” action, the black-and-orange ribbon initiated by non government organizations in 2005 in the context of 60th Anniversary of the Victory. In official discourse it is not a political or commercial action, it is reminding about the victory for young who must know about a great victory over fascism. In my opinion this ribbon is very important for actualization and strengthening historical and socially-organized sense of Victory Day. For people who has fixed on the clothes or on the car the ribbon of St. George it means a symbol of Russia as a winner, unity between people and commonness of historical destiny.

I would like to mention the role that mass media plays in this context. TV and radio broadcast program this day not only congratulate veterans they search new forms of actualization of May 9th, its historical sense in consciousness of the post Soviet generation. Victory Day is a holiday when propaganda and state discourse find understanding and support from Transnistrian society. Attempts to integrate old Soviet model of the historical past in a new official discourse were observed in all TV programs and speeches of I.

Smirnov. Smirnov doesn't make separation between Soviet and Transnistrian Motherland. The cult of heroes of Great Patriotic war and commemoration characterized for Soviet Union became a powerful component of transnistrian official discourse. Great Victory is a glorious page in history of Transnistrian Moldavian Republic.

On May 9th I. N. Smirnov addresses mainly to drama events of twenty century. Narrative created on this basis appeal to a theme of sufferings and sacrifice. In his congratulatory speech Smirnov often uses events and holidays containing disputed ideological and symbolical values. As usually with the feelings and deep emotions in a voice, he tearfully thanks very much few survived veterans for their military victory, for wounds, for a feat..., speaks about boundless love and respect to them, for soldiers of Great victory... In his book “Жить на нашей земле/To live in our country” (2001) he wrote: “Our veterans are the golden fond of the Transnistrian nation, they have knowledge, experience and ability to keep an optimistic mood in difficult situation” (Smirnov 2001: 130).

“People of good will remember those who lost their lives, glorify living creators of Victory. This day is not a subject of reassessment or devaluation, it doesn't change meaning during a time, years or centuries, doesn't depend convictions or whims of ruling government. But today is not only an occasion for admiration of a feat of millions alive and deceased. We are successors of a victory. Everyone should answer what he made for Great Motherland in a time of difficulties. Is he honest in face of those who gave their life for his Native country, has he the right to look up to veterans of the Great Patriotic War. We should draw fair conclusions about the reasons of overtaken us a tragedy – collapse of Great power. And we must do everything depending from us to save a heritage of heroic senior generation. Their feat remains in centuries, as a caution for descendants, as a lesson of courage, selfless service to the Fatherland, fidelity to ideals of good and justice.

Dear Transnistrians! Congratulate you with our greatest holiday – Victory Day! Wish you health, happiness, the peace! And for our republic I wish prosperity, developments of democracy for ordinary people who live in this fertile, sacred ground, plentifully watered by blood of our fathers and grandfathers!” (Smirnov broadcast appeal).

On May 9th by president were presented two published books as a present for veterans: “PMR – the chronicle of large-scale events” and “Everything can be repeated

again?!” The first book is about history of Transnistrian Moldavian Republic from 300 year till 2006. The second book “Everything can be repeated again?!” that was written by Smirnov’ council Anna Volcova who consider that 1992 war described in the book is a small Great Patriotic War of transnistrians. She made a comparison between policy of Hitler and policy of Snegur, Voronin (Moldovan presidents). She thinks that war in 1992 is the same fascism that’s why she put question-mark “Everything can be repeated again?!”

Festive moments in Rybnitsa were started with the congratulation speeches of local administration and representatives of main factories. They thanked veterans for this victory, “for common victory of everyone, for our victory. Our veterans are an example of courage. We always will remain this victory and it will help us to get over the difficulties. May 9th is a symbol of self-sacrificing service for Motherland; it is a symbol of courage and love”. Then there was a parade were Transnistrian frontier troops with military orchestra marched in the central street with the music of the Soviet time and Russian songs “Katiusha”, “It is our last and decisive battle”, “Victory Day”. Young patriots of Transnistria also marched with confidently stride near tribune. After this veterans sitting in the bus on the way of their going to the Memorial of Military Glory were accompanied by pupils and transnistrian pioneers. “*Thanks to our grandfathers and grandmothers I live now in the peace world. We would be in captivity of fascist Germany but we are free people*”, told me a pupil of the seventh form. “*Owing to them, to veterans we live in a free state*”, told a pupil of the ninth form. At the Memorial of Military Glory local administration, representatives of leadership also thanked veterans who gave a peace to Transnistrian state. Children read poems and sang songs about Motherland, about Russia. Then Russian peace-makers invited veterans to eat “a soldier kasha”. Festive day was finished with grandiose salute.

Republic of Moldova as a fascist Germany is represented as an enemy in holiday discourse. In mass media on the Victory Day were mention non signed by Republic of Moldova Primakov Memorandum on May 8, 1997 and Kozak Memorandum proposed in 2003 according that Transnistria could have a right to conduct foreign trade freely and independently of Moldova⁵. “Moldova rejected Kozak Memorandum, Primakov

⁵ On November 25, 2003, under pressure from the United States and the OSCE, Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin refused to sign a Russian proposal, the Kozak Memorandum, hours before President Putin was due to arrive in Chisinau, Moldova, for the document’s official signing. The memorandum provided for an “asymmetrical federation” in Moldova’s constitutional structure, which would have given a permanent veto right in the Moldovan Senate to Transnistria and the autonomous region of Gagauzia, and a veto in Moldova’s

Memorandum, and basically violated all our negotiated arrangements. Chisinau has chosen its own path, and we have been forced to choose another. Now, our scope is improvement the quality of life of our own citizens,”- Smirnov said at the TV PMR.

So the main idea of the Victory Day is to remember the past, the history and norms of behavior in time of the Soviet Union, to make them relevant for young people nowadays (to render assistance to veterans, pensioners). Statements of the political leaders are represented as a quintessence of the state interpretation of the recent past and transformations of political identity. They do not deny the Soviet historical past and strengths the symbolical unity with Soviet political and a cultural heritage. In their speeches they gradually incorporate former Soviet historical myths and commemorations in new model of Transnistrian history presentation. They appeal to different historic facts and events for interpretation and legitimating the internal and foreign policy of TMR.

Victory Day is celebrated as a day of national memory and national pride. Memory on war and a victory become a basis for state in mobilization of its citizens.

Propaganda and state-building in discourse of Independence Day

A new holiday - Independence Day - where symbols and ideology also combines a pathos-military discourse has a powerful mobilization resource in a state-building process and in a creation of a separate identity.

At the beginning a distinction can be made between state-building and nation-building. State-building, pertains to the institutional, economic, and military groundwork of functional states, the ‘hard’ aspects of state-construction, as it were. Nation-building, on the other hand, concerns the ‘soft’ aspects of state consolidation, such as the development of a common national identity among the inhabitants through symbols, propaganda, history writing, and the cultivation and ‘invention’ of traditions and national customs. Nationhood and national identity are not inherent qualities of a state’s population, but are developed and sustained through nation-building (Kolsto 2006: 729).

Federal Constitutional Court until 2015 only to Transnistria. The memorandum also stipulated certain Russian “guarantees,” including the continuous deployment of Russian forces on Moldovan territory until 2020.

The state insures the defense and sometimes the pre-eminence of the nation, while the nation legitimizes the state. At this point perfectly matching is the observation of Herb and Kaplan that state and nation are symbiotically linked. The political functions of the state and the cultural functions of a nation make up an integral dualism. The state needs the nation for legitimacy, and the nation needs the state to fulfill its aspirations (Guntram, Kaplan 1999: 34).

In the process of nation-building people actively seek recognition of their culture, history, language, and identity. “We are an island surrounded by states. What defines a state? First, institutions; second, a territory; third, a population; fourth, an economy and a financial system. We have all of these!” confirmed Vladimir Bodnar, the ex-chair of the security committee of the Transnistrian parliament (Lynch 2004: 48). The de facto states draw on two legal sources of legitimacy to justify their claims to statehood and historical-moral sources. Appealing to history, the de facto states claim that their current incarnation represents but the latest phase in a long tradition of statehood. For these authorities, history is a useful resource in the struggle to justify the present and establish claims for the future (Lynch 2004: 54). The Transnistrian authorities hark back to their experience of “statehood” as an autonomous region in Ukraine before Second World War. “Transnistrian statehood was inherited a large part of a territory and some cultural-mental peculiarities from the first Transnistrian statehood as a part of Ukraine. Having violated the USSR Constitution, the Constitution of the Ukrainian SSR and the Constitution of MASSR, without asking the public opinion people were taken from one geopolitical space (Besarabia) that was mentally strange for it. Artificial pseudo state MSSR was established in this way. So the first Pridnestrovsciaia statehood was liquidated” (Smirnov 2005: 3). Statehood doesn’t need to be recognized by the international community. It is sufficient if it is declared by the people themselves (Lynch 2004: 47). But nowadays Transnistrians see a problem of non recognition as a main factor of regional instability of their state. So 33% of population think that recognition question have to be the first task of the government, unemployment – 31,1%, economical crisis – 29,1%, economical blockade – 25,3% (The International law and modern world realities: the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic as a full fledged state, 2006: 243).

The government affirms that recognition does not create a state but rather reflects an existing reality. The attribution of statehood arises from empirical existence of sovereignty but not from its juridical recognition by other states. As a result, formal recognition of their independence by the international community is seen as secondary problem for the government. Maintaining the status quo of non recognition may better preserve the sovereignty of the TMR. Living in limbo is profitable for the TMR elites (Lynch 2004: 50).

In official discourse a mentioned problem influences on the development of economy and is a main negative factor of difficult social and economic situation in the region. “Certainly if Transnistria was recognized we would improve qualitatively in time of 3-5 years common well-being, use political freedoms according to our constitution but which cannot be realized in equally because of economic disorder”, - has noted Shevchyuk. Transnistria could produce annually on 15 % more during these three years (Человек и его права, 10 September 2008).

Smirnov hopes on Russia support in the question of Transnistria recognition. “Our republic has difficulties today. It is permanently under the political, economical and ideological pressure, somebody wants to put us in dependent and humble situation but our people made a right choice to be together with Russia and we will not turn off the road. Referendum⁶ showed that Transnistrians don't want Moldova” (Приднестровье, 21 March 2007).

Constructing national narrative Smirnov addresses to 1992 war where the central structuring symbol is the Great Patriotic war. War and the necessity of war making are formative features of the state-making process in Transnistria. Since the 1992 cease-fire, the Transnistrian authorities have sought to elevate the war into a mythical struggle and to depict it as a source of legitimacy for the separatist state. The Transnistrian population,

⁶ On 17 September 2006 Transnistria held a referendum. Despite claims, it was not a referendum on independence. Its main question was asking whether Transnistrians want to become independent and subsequently join the Russian Federation. The referendum asked voters:

Do you support the course towards the independence of Transnistria and the subsequent free association with the Russian Federation?
Yes: 97.2% - No: 1.9% - Invalid/undecided: 0.9%

Do you consider it possible to renounce Transnistria's independent status and subsequently become part of the Republic of Moldova?
Yes: 3.3% - **No: 94.9%** - Invalid/undecided: 1.8%.

No state or international organization recognized the referendum. The EU and candidate countries, the US, the OSCE and Ukraine have all condemned the conduct of the referendum. Russia was ambiguous. The Russian foreign ministry did not recognise the referendum but still claimed that it was an example of use of direct democracy and that it was “transparent and without significant irregularities.” The referendum in Transnistria comes in a context when Russia and the secessionist entities of the former Soviet Union – Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh are set to make maximum use of the expected independence of Kosovo and the recent separation of Montenegro from Serbia, as “exportable” precedents.

however, does not seem to accept this interpretation. The ethnically mixed population of the left bank bears no sense of hostility toward Moldovans.

Transnistrian people represent a symbiosis of different nationalities that were formed historically here with common traditions and mentality. (Oleg, 52 years old, a teacher of history)

Transnistrians - people who lives in Transnistria independently of their nationality, live here friendly, love this land, want to work for it prosperity. (Olga, a pensioner)

Transnistrian people are Russians, Ukrainians, Moldovans. We respect all nationalities because we live side by side. (Ivan, 29 years old)

As a rule on September 2nd President I. N. Smirnov, chairman of the Supreme Council E. V. Shevchyuk and other representatives of power wreaths-laying and by sounds of the National anthem the national flag of the republic hoists. Then Minister of Defense, the general-colonel S. Hajeev and army commander general-lieutenant V. I. Atamanjuk drive the armies being rolled by powerful waves of legendary Russian “Ura!” Then it is a moment for a solemn march - parade. Near a tribune measuring out one’s pace pass defenders of Transnistria independence. “They have passed showered by flowers as 18 years ago, have passed how will pass both their children and grandsons in future holidays of republic independence that we have created and have defended” (Приднестровье, 5 September 2008).

Smirnov is in charge of a country with a population the same size of Montenegro. But unlike Montenegro, which has access to international institutions and receives support from the international community, being the President of the Pridnestrovskaja Moldavskaia Respublica (PMR) is hard work: shunned by the outside world, and with his country not even appearing on the map, Igor Smirnov has faced an uphill battle for the past years. He talks about the challenges of running a country which has all the attributes of statehood but which for political reasons is still not integrated into the rest of Europe. In official discourse of political leadership Independence Day is a basic symbol of the nation, is a “realization of

Transnistrians' dream". "We keep traditions of our fathers and grandfathers; we want to develop and strengthen statehood for the sake of freedom, prosperity and safety of each Transnistrian and our state. Long live Transnistria - the independent sovereign state! Glory to hardworking people of Transnistria! We must make stronger Union of Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia! Inviolable friendship with Russia for centuries!" (Приднестровье, 4 September 2008).

In 2008 on Independence Day recognition theme became especially actually also because two Caucasian republics Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the conflict with Georgia got recognition from the Russian Federation. "Dear Transnistrians! 18 years we firmly declare that we ourselves build our future. But this anniversary we still celebrate as a not recognized state. In spite of the fact that we protect economic and political independence and we have all functioned norms of a sovereign state. The peaceful people can organize their life and build own state that hasn't support by civilized world. To our regret, the international norms are regulated by the right of force. Only Russia has courageously withstood to genocide of Osset people. Russia has protected and has recognized independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We bow to Russia and our people support its policy. 18 years later we have chosen a correct way - our statehood. Last years we have confirmed in it. If Moldova wants to remain an independent and sovereign country it has to recognize Transnistrian Moldovan Republic and to maintain good-neighborhood relations with us. Independence can't be kept by blood of peaceful people, - Igor Smirnov confirms. It is determined by will of people, by economic self-sufficiency, ability to guarantee rights and freedoms. We have all these, as South Ossetia and Abkhazia. And we will achieve together our common goals" (Правда Приднестровья, 6 September 2008).

Opposition party, the Communist Party of TMR already gives no credence to present government in the politics of Transnistria recognition. "There are a lot of triumphant people in the streets of Abkhazia and South Ossetia "We waited this happy moment 15 years! – Abkhazia residents say. Ossets waited even more - about 18 years... We are waiting for 18 years too when we will be recognized by world community! We live, TMR exists and we should incline our heads to those who self-denyingly built and protected our state. Today a lot of Transnistrians are happy and sad. We are happy for our brothers - the Ossets and Abkhazians, but when we will be recognized? Recognition of

TMR in general is impossible and never will be happened?! We will have recognition. But now when there is no oppositional deputy in the government we will not get it. Transnistria need a new, strong and conscientious government (Приднестровская Правда, 28 August 2008).

It is known, that TMR was declared cooperation relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia within the community “For democracy and people rights”. In the context of friendship visits representatives of these two recognized republics have arrived in Tiraspol at Independence Day holiday. Plenipotentiary of the president in South Ossetia, the deputy minister of defense in Abkhazia Harry Kupalba have declared from their part that these two already recognized states will continue cooperation with Transnistria and will help TMR to get recognition.

People are convinced that the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia can increase chances of Transnistria to get higher status than a wide autonomy. Answering a question how the recognition of two republics will affect the international authority of the Russian Federation majority of transnistrians (69,7 %) have expressed confidence that authority of Moscow will augment not only in opinion of living abroad compatriots but also of the world community. 20,2 % respondents consider that this step will negatively affect authority of Russia. Others were at a loss for the answer. Interrogation was realized on August 27th - September 1st in Tiraspol, Bendery, Rybnitsa and Slobodzea areas. (<http://www.tiraspoltimes.com/>)

The world has changed but Transnistrians have remained true to ideas which were proclaimed 18 years ago. Independence is the most actual and admissible form of further existence of Transnistrian region. Vectors of external and internal policy of the republic and opinions of people reflect this fact completely. “18 years ago we were afraid how declaration of independence will be reflected on our destiny. However today we are proud of our republic and we are sure in tomorrow day”, (Feodor Dobrov, deputy of the City Council in Bendery).

On the question what does Independence Day mean Rybnitsa residents gave positive answers.

This anniversary of republic is a confirmation of an indisputable truth - created by will of people the republic exists. (Boris, 34 years)

We are of the same age as our republic. It is a young, beautiful, turned to the light and happy future. We want to see different countries, to travel a lot but to study, live and work we would like in Rybnitsa because it is the best town in the world! (Yana and Olesya, pupils of the 9 form)

I love this holiday. It is a kind and light holiday, and we celebrate it especially brightly and colorfully. Rybnitsa is a town of hard working and talented people, and on September 2nd we have a chance to see and estimate successes of our work and cultural life. Of course we have a lot of problems but I think we will decide them in a short time. (Serghei, 27 years old)

I am glad that our Transnistrian state exists. It is not recognized but it has respect in the world, we have friends as Russia and Ukraine. People of different nationalities live here in peace, and there are all equal Russians, Moldovans, Ukrainians or Jews. I trust that our republic will be free and prosperous. It's a pity that my son will not see all these changes. He was killed in time of 1992 war for our republic. (Ana, mother of lost defender Victor)

Independence Day is a double holiday for me. Firstly, it is a family holiday. My children, grandsons and I will go to downtown to see parade and festivity. Secondly, it is a civil holiday or we can say patriotic one. I am happy to work for development of our country, to grow and to educate a new generation of future creators, doctors, grain-growers, steel-makers... It is pleasant that I can see the results of the work in reality. (Liubovi, the teacher of Russian language and Russian literature)

The population shares a high degree of common identity as a nation. There are mainly three reasons for this. Nation-builders draw upon the memory of the civil war

through which the state was established. It can claim to have won the civil war increases the possibilities of exploiting war memories for nation-building purposes. War memorials are constructed and days of victory instituted. Authorities cultivate the image of the 'common external enemy'. Even if the civil war is a thing of the past, the challenger state – the parent state – continues to exist and to claim jurisdiction over the breakaway region. Transnistrian state is driven by strong regional, ideological, and other divisions, but the image of the common external enemy serves as a powerful motor for national unification. In this way, the state contributes to the consolidation of the Transnistrian nation.

Conclusion

Formation of identity is a controversial and slow process. Analysis of official holidays offers the possibility to trace some elements in the identity of the local population. State ideology a highly explicit and consciously is articulated in official holidays. State draws upon national discourses to legitimate authority and achieve social control (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Smith 1991).

Identity staging as a mechanism of unity, self-determination and presentation in public sphere is a very important problem in multiethnic society of Transnistrian region. On the territory of the sovereign state is created a non-recognized community – Transnistrian region where definition of "identity" in the problem of self-determination is a difficult and a complex question. It is not a nation in the sense of ethnicity because Transnistrians represents different nations – Moldovans, Ukrainians and Russians who are united in independence and self-determination issues. Such society sealed with spiritual unity where political leaders through holidays discourse as a main 'stimulus' of social solidarity try to construct a new political identity – 'Transnistrian people'. Transnistrian ideology representing a retrospective, consolidating and direction vectors unites them and direct to the future, to lifelong dreams. Ideological discourse consolidates a national community, strengths a feeling of people unity, keeps statehood and the nation culture. State leaders invariably claim to represent their 'nation', they strenuously try to foster a sense of common identity.

Stuart Hall stated that identities are not only inherited but also constructed and they are constructed in and through representation (Hall 1990: 224). Military-patriotic

representation of the past is undisguised in Transnistrian official discourse, play a function of reproduction the official discourse where the Soviet narrative correlates with the national. Citizens of Transnistria are not confronted with the rejection of the past identity; they are challenged with the construction of a new identity that gives them and their society meaning.

Through nation-building, leaders seek to muster backing from within, from the local population, to create or prop up its internal sovereignty. Successful nation-building to a large degree depends upon successful state-building. Through nation-building, the state authorities are asking the population to attach their allegiance to this particular state by identifying with it (Kolsto 2006: 736).

Analysis of holidays demonstrates that the maintenance of a Soviet mentality is influenced by the impact of socialization, political ideology, perceptions of economic conditions, and acceptance of authoritarian values. Holidays play a special role in identity construction which form and keep identity on the positive emotional background. Transnistrian leadership forms in the speeches and in minds of ordinary people the inclusive political nation which is based (how they consider) on the principles of multiculturalism and mutual tolerance.

Discourse of 1992 war is mediated practically in all official holidays being optics of estimation the present and the future, is a catalyst for strengthening a feeling of solidarity. A historic fact of a victory over fascist aggressors and unification of people in this struggle correlates with the identity issue where a slogan “our people is a winner!” clearly expressed as in discourse of Great Patriotic War as in 1992 war. Remembrance of the war victims as a symbol of heroism, of common victory and common tragedy is a starting point of contemporary Transnistrian history. The image of the first statehood in the context of Ukrainian history is not such important as the Russian – Soviet heritage. Lack of Transnistrian heroism is compensated by Russian history and Russian heritage. Transnistrian state still retains the most important traditional mechanisms for socializing its citizens, to make them more inclusive. Construction of national inclusion is combined with symbols, myths, rituals and holidays with emotions and collective meaning.

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