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**‘FROZEN CONFLICTS’ IN ASSOCIATED EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
COUNTRIES: GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA**

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

MA thesis

Supervisor: Prof. Nico Groenendijk

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the dynamics of ‘frozen conflicts’ in Georgia and Moldova, from the early 1990s when the conflicts erupted, till early 2017. The main aim of the thesis is to give a more up-to-date understanding of the Transnistrian, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian conflicts. It explores the main similarities and differences between them, based on five main characteristics of ‘frozen conflicts’. The thesis subsequently provides an explanation of such differences by a combination of explanatory factors. Embedded case study was used as a research method, through two levels of analysis (country level and conflict level), since three conflicts were studied in two countries (two Georgian conflicts and one Moldovan conflict).

The conflicts of Moldova and Georgia show many communalities as ‘frozen conflicts’, such as ineffective peace resolution, the emergence of the separatist regions as de facto states, and the active role of a protector state (the Russian Federation). The major dissimilarity between the conflicts concerns the escalation and ‘heating up’ possibilities. Although the Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts date back to the same period (right after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the regaining of independence by Moldova and Georgia) and have been more or less ‘frozen’ for more than two decades, their development in the end of the 2000s was different. The conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia ‘heated up’ in 2008, whereas Transnistria has never seen such an active phase of hostilities. To explain the relatively stable ‘frozen’ nature of the Moldovan conflict, the thesis focuses on the role of the protector state/Russia and the countries’ vulnerability towards Russian leverages. In the thesis, the Kremlin’s

leverages are distinguished by soft and hard type of levers. Soft levers include political and economic instruments; hard levers include military involvement. The central claim of the thesis is that as long as -from the perspective of the external state- soft leverage is effective, there is no need to resort to hard leverage, and the conflict remains 'frozen'. Comparison of Georgia and Moldova in terms of energy and economic dependence on Russia, manipulation of pro-Russian autonomous regions, and Moscow's close ties to the central leadership in the countries involved, shows that Russia had and still has considerable soft leverage and therefore influence over Moldova's internal and external policies, which is different from Georgia. This (difference in) leverage is then further discussed within its wider context, by looking at the role of the EU (given that both EaP countries have an Association Agreement with the EU) and NATO, at geo-graphical aspects, and at the role of the recent crises in Ukraine.

Keywords: 'frozen conflicts', Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Georgia, Moldova, Russian Federation, Eastern Partnership, Association Agreement, Soft and Hard Leverage.

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List of abbreviations

AA - Association Agreement;

ABLs - Administrative Boundary Lines;

AEI - Alliance for European Integration (Moldova);

BMO - Border Monitoring Operation;

BTC - Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan;

BTE - Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum;

CEPI - Central European Policy Institute;

CIS - Commonwealth of Independent States;

DCFTA - Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area;

EACU - The Eurasian Customs Union;

EAEU - Eurasian Economic Union;

EaP - Eastern Partnership;

ENP - European Neighborhood Policy;

EU - European Union;

EUBAM - EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine;

EUMM - European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia;

GID - Geneva International Discussions;

HRW - Human Right Watch;

IDPs - Internally Displaced People;

IPAP - Individual Partnership Action Plan;

JCC - Joint Control Commission;

JPKF - Joint Peacekeeping Forces;

NACC - North Atlantic Cooperation Council;

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization;

NDI - National Democratic Institute;

NGC - NATO-Georgia Commission;

OSCE - Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe;

PCRM - Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova;

PfP - Partnership for Peace;

SCP - South Caucasus Pipeline;

UN - United Nations;

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;

UNM - United National Movement (Georgia);

UNOMIG - United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia;

USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

1. Introduction

The thesis deals with the recent dynamics of ‘frozen conflicts’ in Moldova and Georgia. Much research has been conducted on ‘frozen conflicts’ under the heading of ‘post-Soviet frozen conflicts’, focusing on specific conflicts such as those in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Most of the research done under the heading of ‘post-Soviet frozen conflicts’ however dates from the period before the EU entered into Association Agreements (including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements) with three so-called Eastern partnership countries (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). As the title of this thesis indicates, this thesis focuses on ‘frozen conflicts’ taking into account these recent developments and the corresponding changes that occurred in some EaP countries, internally as well as externally (in terms of relations with the EU and with the Russian Federation). The thesis provides a comparative study of three conflicts (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria) in two EaP countries (Georgia and Moldova), by applying the analytical framework provided by the literature on characteristics of ‘frozen conflicts’. This application sets out some similarities and differences between the three cases, which are further explored by looking at factors at the case and country level. The time frame of the research runs from the early 1990s (when the conflicts involved erupted) up till early 2017. The main aim of the thesis is thus to discuss more recent dynamics of the ‘frozen conflicts’ in the post-soviet space, and to get a more up-to-date understanding of the Transnistrian, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian conflicts in associated eastern partnership countries: Georgia and Moldova.

This introduction first briefly elaborates on the background of the thesis. Subsequently, it explains the choice of focus of the thesis as well as the case selection. After putting forward the main research question and sub-questions, the introduction discusses methodological issues, and outlines the thesis structure.

Background

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, at the end of the 20th century, some of the former-Soviet republics faced separatist conflicts, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, the Transnistrian conflict in Moldova and the recent conflict in eastern Ukraine. Those conflicts are extensively discussed by many authors, together and separately, from different perspectives. Some similarities between those conflicts are reviewed by Kapitonenko. According to him, artificially ‘frozen’, or de-escalated, not fully resolved conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan are structurally similar with the following contributing factors: “weakness of states, economic depression and external support” (2010: 37). Also, some similar ground is examined by Tudoroiu. He considers that the Post-Soviet ‘frozen conflicts’ (Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, also Nagorno-Karabakh) represent a very homogenous subcategory: all of them emerged during the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence movements of Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan; all of the conflicts were won by the separatists, with the military support of the Kremlin; and in all peace- resolution negotiations Russia was mediator and then supplier of peacekeeping forces (2012: 136-137).

Based on the analyses of above mentioned conflicts, Tudoroiu (2012) identifies four main elements for defining ‘frozen conflicts’ in the Post-Soviet space:

1. An evident political nature of the conflicts/separations;
2. Unstable, highly authoritarian and militarized de facto states¹ with illegal and criminal issues;
3. Negative influence of conflict on the development of a country, by economic and political means. They create the ground for corruption and organized crime;

¹De facto state, De facto regime, self-proclaimed region – these concepts are used as synonyms and refer to a separatist region, which declared independence from a central government but has not gained international recognition, like Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria.

4. Three-sided nature of the conflicts instead of bilateral, since Russia always has been not the real mediator of the conflicts but acted as an actor that provided the secessionists with all kinds of assistance. Moscow also successfully used its citizenship as an instrument for extraterritorial intervention under the purpose of protecting its own citizens. The Kremlin also applied its military presence as a tool to undermine stability of the countries and reduce their western aspiration (Tudoroiu, 2012: 137).

Most existing literature on 'frozen conflicts' is about former Soviet republics. Arbatova (2010) also discusses the three conflicts in Moldova and Georgia and emphasizes the Russian role, by mentioning that these conflicts "have traditionally been seen in the West as part of Russian policy in the CIS² aimed at maintaining control of these former Soviet territories" (Arbatova, 2010: 51). A similar idea is provided by Trenin who called Russia's intervention and peacekeeping missions in conflict zones an "instrument of imperial restoration", or at least of "the Russian national interest" (Trenin, 1998: 171). Russia has not been a true mediator in these conflicts but one of the leading reasons of starting these conflicts and maintaining them in an unresolved 'frozen' condition.

The characteristics of these conflicts and obstacles for resolution are discussed by Ciobanu. He claims that the conflicts are "frozen by Russia itself for its geopolitical interests in the Black Sea-Caspian Sea-South Caucasus region and for counteracting NATO/EU enlargement further to the East" (2008: 40). Russia plays the role of "impartial mediator" and "peacekeeper" in these conflicts, whereas the reality is that "Russia is rather a part of the problem than a part of the solution" (2008: 42-44). According to Ciobanu, "Russia is not, and never was, just an impartial, neutral observer" (2008: 51). He also discusses Russia's leverages and distinguishes energy factor/energy dependence as one of the main manipulation tools towards former Soviet

² Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a regional organization, which was created after the collapse of the Soviet Union and consisted of former Soviet republics, among them Georgia and Moldova, but after the August war in 2008 Georgia left the organization.

Union countries – “Russian supply of energy resources is an effective weapon to preserve these countries in its spheres of influence” (Ciobanu, 2008: 47).

Choice of focus

The overview presented above, shows that for long the literature on ‘frozen conflicts’ was primarily dominated by a focus on Post-Soviet conflicts and concentrated on conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and Armenia-Azerbaijan. Several studies on Post-Soviet conflicts have documented the role and scope of Russian foreign policy; they attempt to map Russia’s policies towards the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh. Other studies focus on causing factors, main characteristics, or obstacles for peace resolution (e.g. Trenin, 1998; Popescu, 2006; Ciobanu, 2008; Trenin, 2009; Kramer, 2008; Nalbandov, 2009; Kapitonenko, 2010; Naegele, 2012; Tudoroiu, 2012).

Most of the literature aims at pointing out the similarities and structural communalities of the conflicts and their ‘frozen’ state, by looking at the common characteristics that make up a ‘frozen conflict’. The downside of that approach is that the ‘frozen conflicts’ in the post-soviet space tend to be looked upon as being highly similar even though it is obvious that there must also be differences, for instance, regarding the active phases (‘heating-up’), international recognition of the separatist region, or the separatist regions’ view on further integration with Russia. This is also argued by Popescu and Weir, who consider the term ‘frozen’ not be adequate since it may lead to the perception that ‘frozen conflicts’ are highly similar, while almost all ‘frozen conflicts’ show different circumstances (Popescu, 2006: 8; Weir, 2008; cited in Alice et.al, 2009: 14). It is therefore interesting to see to what extent and in which way the conflicts also differ and how such differences can be explained. This is the **first contribution** this thesis tries to make to the existing body-of-knowledge. As will be explained in the relevant chapter (chapter 5) this is done by looking at two types of leverage: soft leverage and hard leverage, that the external actor (Russia) has over the

countries involved. Soft levers include political and economic instruments; hard levers include military involvement. The central claim that underlies the thesis is that as long as –from the perspective of the external state- soft leverage is effective, there is no need to resort to hard leverage, and the conflict remains ‘frozen’.

In addition, most of the literature is relatively old, about 5-20 years old, whereas a lot of changes have happened, especially from the European Union perspective, which has had an effect on the countries’ policies and the dynamics of the conflicts. The European Union has become increasingly interested in certain ex-Soviet republics and offered different partnership framework and initiatives, such as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which defines the EU's relations with 16 of the nearest Eastern and Southern Neighbors, among them Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The ENP has been launched in 2003 and promotes strengthening prosperity, stability and security, and the respect of human rights, the rule of law and democracy.³ Within the larger framework of the ENP, in 2009 another EU project, the Eastern Partnership (EaP), was designed only for the following six countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.⁴ The EaP aims at promoting Western values, trade and economic rules with the EU’s immediate neighbors, particularly for those aspiring closer ties and integration with the EU, but without promising EU membership. EaP was a Swedish-Polish initiative, set up in 2009. Out of the six EaP countries, only Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia concluded an Association Agreement (AA)⁵ with the EU, in the framework of EaP, whereas Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus refused it (Tsereteli, 2014: 133). The eastern partnership region has encountered a strong commitment and strategic interest not only the west (EU, and NATO) but obviously also still from Russia. According to German (2012: 1652) Russia is interested to strengthen its influence over the Post-Soviet republics and oppose

³ European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations, Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/overview_en (last accessed: 4.05.2017)

⁴ European External Action Service, Eastern Partnership, Retrieved from: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/419/eastern-partnership_en (last accessed: 4.05.2017)

⁵ European Commission MEMO, The EU's Association Agreements with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, Retrieved from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-430_en.htm (last accessed: 4.05.2017)

Western expansion, within its “sphere of influence”, “strategic backyard”, such as the former Soviet states Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. Moscow applies political, economic or military levers against them; one of the strongest of these levers is the presence of military bases in the secessionist regions.

Since a lot of changes have taken place in Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, regarding foreign and internal policy directions, it is worthwhile to study the effect of these changes on the conflicts, which is an issue that has only been moderately addressed by scholars, given the fact, mentioned earlier, that most literature is relatively old. Accordingly, a critical gap has emerged in the knowledge on the most recent developments in the Post-Soviet space. The **second contribution** of the thesis is that it includes the most recent developments in the region, and thereby looks at the dynamics of these conflicts. A drawback of the existing literature is that by treating the conflicts as ‘frozen’, possible developments (i.e. the dynamics over time) of the conflicts tend to be ignored. As one of recent research paper by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (2016: 86) argues these so-called ‘frozen’ conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan –especially since 2014– are by no means frozen, but, on the contrary, highly dynamic. This argument has also been used Popescu and Weir, who –in addition to their argument outlined above– consider the term ‘frozen’ not be adequate as the term may lead to the idea that ‘frozen conflicts’ are devoid of any political activity, which is not the case (Popescu, 2006: 8; Weir, 2008; cited in Alice et.al, 2009: 14).

To summarize, the main focus of the thesis is on former soviet countries, which are suffering from ‘frozen conflicts’, and which are now Associated Eastern Partnership countries (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).⁶ The thesis will look at similarities and differences between these conflicts, and will pay special attention to the most recent developments.

⁶ Obviously, by focusing on countries that have an AA with the EU, the thesis will not include the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, since Azerbaijan declined to sign an AA with the EU.

Case selection

This thesis aims to discuss the dynamics of ‘frozen conflicts’ in the Post-Soviet space and to give an up-to-date understanding of the Transnistrian, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian conflicts in Associated Eastern Partnership countries: Georgia and Moldova. Both signed the Association Agreement along with Ukraine. However, the thesis will not look at Ukraine. There are several reasons for this, what is explained below.

First, the number of cases that can be discussed within the framework of a master thesis is limited. Due to the limitation of pages, discussing a larger number of cases thoroughly is difficult. Accordingly, the case selection is based on the Most Similar Case Study method, which means, that the selected cases are similar in many ways. Out of three Eastern Partners with an AA, Moldova and Georgia are the most similar countries, whereas Ukraine is a special case in many ways. First and foremost, it differs considerably in terms of geography, regarding both land mass and population: by the *land area*, as a whole country territory, Ukraine is 578.95km², Georgia - 69,4km², Moldova - 32.85km²; *population size* - according to Worldometers (2017), Ukraine estimates around 44.40 million people, Georgia - 3.97 million people, Moldova - 4.05 million people;⁷ Also, *size, intensity* and the *population of conflict affected* areas are significantly different. For instance, Crimea, with a territory of approximately 25 800km², is nearly seven times larger than South Ossetia with 3 900 km². More people live on the Crimea peninsula than in the other ‘frozen conflict’ regions combined (Karácsonyi et al., 2014; cited in European Parliament Study, 2016: 7). *Table 1* (page 16) below shows the main differences between the three countries in figures.

In addition, the *historical development* of the conflicts is considerably different – in the case of Moldova and Georgia, (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia) active phase of the conflicts are all rooted in the 1990s and have existed for more than two decades, whereas the conflicts in Ukraine has developed more recently (in the 2010s).

⁷ Worldometers, Countries in the world by population (2017), Retrieved from <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/> (last accessed: 4.05.2017)

Furthermore, due to the military confrontations that are still a regular occurrence, the security situation in Crimea is far from calm. It can only limitedly be regarded as a ‘frozen’ conflict. The same is obviously true for the ongoing military conflicts in Eastern Ukraine.

Besides, when it comes to the case of Crimea, the *legal status* is another difference, i.e. the de facto jurisdiction over these territories. Since the annexation of Crimea, it is de facto subjected to the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation, whereas Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are considered as self-proclaimed republics (European Parliament study, 2016: 8).

In addition, another reason to skip Ukraine is connected with the lack of scholarly works on this case, given the relative newness of the conflicts. However, although the conflicts in Ukraine are not included as cases in this research, they obviously are relevant factors to take into account when discussing the three selected cases, as what happens in Ukraine is bound to have an impact on other conflicts in the larger region.

Table: 1 Comparison of data of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

DATA	Land Mass (km ²)	Population Size (million people) by 2017	Size of conflict zones (km ²)
COUNTRY			
GEORGIA	69. 45	3.97	Abkhazia – 8.660 South Ossetia – 3. 900
MOLDOVA	32. 85	4. 05	Transnistria – 4. 163
UKRAINE	578. 95	44. 40	Crimea – 25. 800

Source: Author, created based on the sources discussed in the text.

This means that the focus in this thesis will be on Georgia and Moldova, and the three conflict areas involved: Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria. The research period begins in the early 1990s when hostilities erupted in all three regions and includes the developments to date. Below some more information is given on these conflicts (a more elaborate description is provided in chapter 2).

The conflicts in Moldova and Georgia

According to Tsereteli, the most common issue of Georgia and Moldova is “the leverage that Russia has over the two countries due to their respective unresolved conflicts” (Tsereteli, 2014: 138). Separatist conflicts in both countries erupted in the early 1990s during the disintegration period of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence process of the two countries. Secessionist movements in Georgia and Moldova were actively supported by Moscow. Subsequently both countries faced with de facto, self-proclaimed states on its territory: and Abkhazia and South Ossetia (See *Appendix 1* (page 105) – Georgia Map) and Transnistria (See *Appendix 2* (page 106) – Moldova Map). For over than two decades, the Kremlin has used these conflicts as “tools of pressure and coercion” (ibidem).

Thus, Moldova and Georgia both are affected by conflicts, where Russia has been heavily involved in. According to Popescu, “assessments of Russia’s role in those conflicts vary” (2006: 1), however all agree that Russia’s policy towards this region is extensive and consists of the following elements: peacekeeping forces and military bases; political and diplomatic support internationally and in domestic affairs; social elements like paying pensions, permitting Russian citizenship and passports via “passportisation” mechanisms; economic elements like subsidies; and (one of the most important elements of keeping conflicts unresolved) Russia’s “mediator” role in peace resolution negotiations. These supportive politics toward separatists are combined with other political or economic pressures put on the central authorities of Georgia and Moldova (Popescu, 2006: 8). According to Lynch, the conflict resolution process in

both countries has been “reactive and largely ineffective” (Lynch, 2002: 832). Despite the fact that all of the secessionist conflicts were ended with ceasefire agreements and various international rounds of negotiations, there has been no tangible progress towards final resolution and instead three de facto states have emerged.

As reported by Tudoroiu several recent factors have an impact on those conflicts, such as the eastern orientation of NATO and the EU, and the interests Georgia and Moldova have in close relations with the West. However, correspondingly, Moscow’s policy has become harsher in order to restore dominance over the region. At this point, the ‘frozen conflicts’ “are gradually becoming cornerstones for a renewed foreign policy of Russia” (Bugajski, 2010: 3; cited in Tudoroiu, 2012: 137-138). One of the reactions of the Russian Federation on NATO’s eastern enlargement was the August war in 2008 and ‘heating’ of the ‘frozen conflict’ of South Ossetia (Tudoroiu, 2012: 138). In addition, in recent years the European Union has also become increasingly involved in certain ex-Soviet republics with different initiatives (which were discussed above) and therefore became a competitor for Moscow’s “Sphere of Influence”. Moscow by all means tries to “freeze the process of European integration” (Blank, 2008; cited in Tudoroiu, 2012: 138) and replace it with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (as from 2015, succeeding the earlier “Eurasian Customs Union”).

Research questions, research approach & methodology

As explained above the research aims at making two contributions to the existing literature: it includes the most recent developments in the conflicts involved, and looks into similarities and differences between the (development of the) conflicts, and at how such differences can be explained. This is reflected in the main research question of the thesis, which runs as follows:

How can differences and similarities between the dynamics of ‘frozen conflicts’ in Georgia and Moldova (from the early 90s up till now) be explained?

For the further study of the main research question, it is vital to divide it into sub-research questions. The sub-research questions are as follows:

- SRQ1: How have the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova developed over time (from the early 1990s up till early 2017)?
- SRQ2: What are the characteristics of ‘frozen conflicts’?
- SRQ3: What are the differences and similarities between the ‘frozen’ conflicts in the two countries?
- SRQ4: How can these differences and similarities be explained?

The answers to the sub-research questions, taken together cumulatively and in the order outlined, provide the input needed for answering the main research question. SRQ1 first provides a description of the –dynamics of– the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova. SRQ2 provides the analytical framework for comparing the three cases, by using (and amending) the existing literature on ‘frozen conflicts’ and their main characteristics. SRQ3 makes the actual comparison, SRQ4 analyses and discusses factors that may explain differences and similarities between the conflicts.

The main purpose of this thesis is one of “sense-making”, i.e. to gain a better and more up-to-date understanding of the three selected cases. This thesis therefore does not start with a pre-conceived notion of how to understand the cases, on which the thesis then elaborates, but it aims first at providing such understanding. This is reflected in the chosen research approach which is mainly inductive and exploratory. This approach is also known as a “bottom up” and/or “data-driven” approach and involves a largely descriptive nature of study. In the inductive paradigmatic framework “facts are based on observation, conceptualization, and general laws and theories” [...] and finally “ending up with developing some general conclusions [...]” (Trochim, 2006). During the study the “researcher uses observations to build an abstraction or to describe a picture of the phenomenon that is being studied” (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2010; cited in Dudovskiy, 2016). The inductive approach provides “the search for patterns from observation and the development of explanations” (Neuman, 2003: cited in Dudovskiy, 2016). In this thesis the “building of the abstraction” and “search for patterns” is done by answering sub-research questions 1-3. Sub-research question 4 subsequently focuses on the ‘development of explanations’.

The analyses involve two different levels: the level of the conflicts as such, and the level of the country in which the conflict “resides”. For the case of Moldova this multiple-level issue is not relevant (one conflict in one country), but it is relevant for the Georgian case, where we have two conflicts. This is why the thesis follows an embedded case study approach. According to Yin (2013) “case study” means a particular kind of empirical research inquiry that investigates “a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003: 13-14). The case study method, with its use of multiple data collection methods and analysis techniques, provides researchers with opportunities to strengthen the validity of the research findings and conclusions, since it involves broad and in-depth data collection from different sources (Yin, 2003). A distinction can be made between single-case or multiple-case studies and between holistic or embedded case studies. Two or more cases within different contexts make up a multiple case study. Single case and multiple case studies can further be classified as holistic or embedded (Yin, 1994, 2003, and 2013). Holistic case study means to analyze a case as a whole, whereas in embedded case study multiple units of analysis are studied within a case. Each of multiple units of analysis should be relevant to answer the main research question; therefore it is also called “logical subunits” (Yin, 2003). In other words, the term “embedded case study” typically refers to a case that is embedded within a larger case study (Scholz & Tietje, 2003; Yin, 2003; cited in Newton, 2003: 3) and focuses on different sub-units of a specific phenomenon/entity. At the same time, embedded case study design “anticipates the need to collect, analyze, and report on complex detail in the case, as there may be more instances of each of the embedded units of analysis, in contrast to the small number of holistic cases” (Runeson, Host, Rainer, Ragnell, 2012: n.p).

For the purpose of warranting reliability of research results, the thesis is based on multiple cases that gives the author the possibility to multiply observations and not to base research conclusions only on a single case. Besides, the multiple level of analysis of cases are applied as well, for the comprehensive study of three conflicts (two in Georgia and one in Moldova) in two countries. Therefore, this thesis is based on a so-

called multiple embedded case study design, which gives an opportunity of using an additional layer of analysis. Correspondingly, this case study design allows two levels of analysis, the level of the three conflicts and the level of the two countries, therefore three cases (conflicts) are embedded in two cases (countries). As will be explained at the end of chapter 4, the analysis up to chapter 5 will focus on the three conflicts separately, whereas from chapter 5 onwards emphasis is put more on the comparison on the country level (i.e. the Georgian conflicts are taken together)

The thesis achieves its goals by extensive and systematic empirical investigation. The study is conducted with a broad perspective qualitative research analysis of academic journals, scholarly articles, reports, policy papers, findings of authoritative institutes and organizations, public surveys, speeches and interviews. In this way, this research seeks to advocate a more balanced and dynamic explanation of conflict processes through the embedded case study method. More detail on the specific methods applied is given throughout the thesis, in the relevant chapters.

Outline of the thesis

The thesis is composed of six main chapters. Following this introduction (chapter 1), the second chapter answers the first sub research question and consists of a detailed description of the three conflicts separately, two in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and one in Moldova (Transnistria). The subsequent chapter (chapter 3) gives a definition of ‘frozen conflict’ and discusses what the main characteristics of it are. The objective of the next chapter (chapter 4) is to answer the third sub research question about the differences/similarities between the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova. After finding major differences among the cases in terms of ‘frozen conflict’ characteristics, the next step of research (chapter 5) is to explain the differences, which (as shown in chapter 4) are mainly connected with the relatively stable ‘frozen’ nature of the Moldovan conflict. The study ends with a sixth, concluding chapter, in which major findings of the thesis will be summarized and discussed.

2. The development of the Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria conflicts

This chapter aims to answer to the first sub-research question and describe the development of the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova over time, from the early 1990s - till the present situation. At first, the chapter provides the overview of the dynamics of Georgian conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and then moves on the Moldovan conflict in Transnistria.

2.1 Conflicts in Georgia

2.1.1 Abkhazia Conflict

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union two separatist conflicts erupted in Georgian territory, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (see the map, *appendix 1* (page 105)). The Abkhazia conflict is considered as one of the “unresolved” and “bloodiest” (Petersen, 2008: 187). The war resulted in the deaths of more than 2.000 people from both sides (Uppsala Conflict Dataset)⁸ and led to the displacement of about hundred thousands of Georgians (data varies in different sources).

The roots of this conflict come from the Soviet period although it reached its peak in the beginning of the 1990s. In July 1992, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, independently from the Georgian authorities, adopted a resolution. They demanded the restoration of “the 1925 Abkhaz constitution and Abkhazia’s status as a sovereign republic within what was then the Soviet Union” (Chervonnaya, 1994: 112; cited in Petersen, 2008: 195). Already in one month, a full-blown violent conflict started between the Abkhaz and the Georgian National Guards, which lasted 16 months. The main claim from the Abkhaz side was the expansion of autonomy and eventually, full independence from Georgia; whereas the central government of Georgia tried to maintain control over its sovereign territory (Petersen, 2008: 195-197).

⁸ Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Republic of Abkhazia, Retrieved from <http://ucdp.uu.se/#actor/342> (last accessed: 4.05.2017)

According to the Human Right Watch report (1995), the Abkhazian conflict was further escalated by Russia's large-scale involvement, generally in favor of the Abkhaz side. Russia supported and provided Abkhazians with all the necessary military equipment, such as guns, bombers, and even fighters (trained and paid by Russia), in order to bomb civilians and, by that time, Tbilisi-controlled territories in Abkhazia. In addition, Russia was certainly responsible for the human right and humanitarian law violations that occurred in Abkhazia during the conflict.

Despite several attempts, a number of ceasefire agreements failed straight away, and instead of it, both sides strengthened their arm forces and positions around Sukhumi, and continued bombing each other's positions, in December 1992. The following months, Abkhaz forces regained control of "all [...] the territory between the Gumista and the Russian border to the north, including the town of Gagra" (HRW, 1995: n.p.).

However, finally, one year later, in 1993, both sides reached a cease-fire agreement and agreed to deploy the United Nations which promised fifty military observers to the conflict zone. Nevertheless, two months later hostilities renewed on Abkhazia's southern border; troops broke the cease-fire and attacked again all previous fronts. Subsequent to the unexpected raid, many civilians were evicted from their homes. During the evacuation of displaced people by sea or through the Svaneti Mountain, "many died of hunger and exposure"(HRW, 1995: n.p.). Eleven days later the Abkhaz troops had regained control of almost the entire territory of Abkhazia and returned the military situation to the status quo. Very soon, anti-government forces took advantage of the harsh situation and gained control of critical railroad lines and some strategic facilities in the western part of Georgia. During this difficult period, then president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze paved the legal way for Russian troops to help retake the railroads (HRW, 1995), "Russian troops provided this assistance but at the price of a re-orientation of Georgia's foreign policy" (Fact-Finding Mission Report, 2009: 5). Georgia signed the decree for membership in the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in October 1993. In the same year Georgia also joined the

Russian-controlled Collective Security Treaty Organization (Fact-Finding Mission Report, 2009: 5).

Therefore, the first round of peace negotiations in December 1993, ended with an “Agreement of Understanding”, signed by the Georgian and Abkhaz sides. However, regardless of the formal ceasefire agreement, some clashes among civilians continued. In 1994, the UN sponsored a negotiation format for Georgia, Abkhazia, Russia and the OSCE representatives, in order to settle the following issues: “the political status of Abkhazia, the withdrawal of Georgian troops from Abkhaz territory and the repatriation of displaced persons” (HRW, 1995). Subsequently, Russian peacekeeping troops were deployed in the region and opened a safety corridor. When it comes to the repatriation program, it was unsuccessful, in spite of support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In spite of the 1994 ceasefire agreement, years of negotiations, and the long-term presence of a United Nations monitoring force and a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping operation, the conflict has burst out on several occasions, such as in 1998 in the Gali district. The most active phase of hostilities occurred in August 2008, when the sides fought again during the five-day August War in South Ossetia (Tskhinvali Region). The most active front was the naval front, across the coast of Abkhazia (Cohen and Hamilton, 2011: 3, 41). Then tensions moved into the Kodori direction and western Georgian cities in Samegrelo region and in Poti. Military confrontation in 2008 was followed by the formal recognition of Abkhazia by Russia, and then by Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Nauru. However, the United Nations and the majority of the world's governments consider Abkhazia to be an autonomous republic, a part of Georgia's territory. The Georgian government, since the 2008 August war, officially declared Russia's action in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as an occupation and the parliament passed a law on “occupied territories.”⁹

⁹ Legislative Herald of Georgia, Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories, Retrieved from <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/19132> (last accessed: 15.05.2017)

In addition to the recognition, Moscow has strengthened its military and economic power over Abkhazia with the signing of a new treaty, the so-called "Alliance and Strategic Partnership" in 2014. This step was perceived as a reaction to Georgia's western orientation (followed by signature of the AA with the EU). The –then-Georgian foreign minister, Tamar Beruchashvili, said in a statement that “the signature of the so-called treaty constitutes a deliberate move by Russia in reaction to Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations” (cited in Herszenhorn, 2014). According to her, this is a “step towards annexation of Abkhazia by the Russian Federation” (ibidem). The so-called partnership treaty between Russia and the separatist region of Abkhazia was also condemned and rejected by the West (EU, NATO, and Washington).¹⁰ In addition, most recently, followed by the EU's approval to grant visa liberalization to Georgia, on 18 April, 2017, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has opened a new Russian Embassy in Sukhumi, the de facto capital of Abkhazia.¹¹

To sum up, the ethnic tensions between the Abkhaz and Georgians resulted in a Georgian military defeat and de facto independence of Abkhazia, thousands of death and hundred thousands of Internally Displaced People (IDPs), generally ethnic Georgians. In spite of the 1994 ceasefire agreement and years of peace negotiations, the conflict is still unresolved and often referred to as a ‘frozen conflict’. The conflict has burst out several times, although the most active phase of armed confrontation broke out in 2008, almost two decades after the relatively stable situation. In 2008, following the EU-mediated Six-Point Agreement, the EU launched an unarmed civilian monitoring mission (EUMM) to Georgia, in order to patrol the situation in the areas alongside the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABLs) with Abkhazia and South Ossetia with the purpose to avoid further escalation of the situation and return to hostilities.¹² When it comes to the Abkhazia-Russia relation, it has moved to a new stage, i.e. a state-to-state

¹⁰RFE/RL, West Rejects Treaty Between Russia, Abkhazia, November 25, 2014, Retrieved from <http://www.rferl.org/a/russia-abkhazia-nato-european-union-united-states-/26708819.html> (last accessed 5.05.2017)

¹¹ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's address at the opening ceremony for the new Russian Embassy in Abkhazia, Sukhum, April 18, 2017, Retrieved from http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2731903 (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

¹²European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, Mandate, Retrieved from https://eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/mandate (last accessed: 18.05.2017)

relation, as Russian recognized its independence. In the aftermath Moscow signed a treaty with Abkhazia, and also recently opened a Russian embassy in Sukhumi. These steps were taken in parallel with Georgia's successful negotiation with the EU regarding the initialization of an AA in 2013 and granting visa liberalization in 2017. It is worth noting that after the activation of visa-free entry to Georgian citizens, the same right was offered to the residents of the separatist regions by the Georgian authorities, but with a requirement of holding Georgian passport. This offer was denounced by Abkhaz officials as "political manipulation."¹³

2.1.2 South Ossetia Conflict

Before moving on the conflict description, it is important to mention that the historical name of South Ossetia is Samachablo, and the usage of the term of "South Ossetia" dates back to the early 20th century by the government of the Soviet Union. As since then the term "South Ossetia" has been widely used, also internationally, this thesis will also refer to South Ossetia rather than Samachablo.

The tensions in South Ossetia are rooted in -at least- the 1920s, when South Ossetia failed its attempt to declare independence but ended up as an autonomous region within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. The most active phase of tensions over this autonomous region have emerged in 1989, when South Ossetia expressed desire to be independent from Georgia and to re-unite with the region of North Ossetia in the Russian Federation. The confrontation escalated into war in 1991 which lasted until 1992 (Nichol, 2009: 2).

According to the report of Human Right Watch (2009), similar to the Abkhaz conflict, the conflict in South Ossetia was characterized by "sporadic Russian involvement overwhelmingly in support of the separatists" (HRW, 2009: 17). Military confrontation in South Ossetia between South Ossetian separatists and Georgian government in the early 1990s, resulted in hundreds of battle deaths and 5.000 internally

¹³ New Eastern Europe, Brayman and Pack, Georgia's options at the Abkhaz border, 21 February 2017, Retrieved from <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/2272-georgia-s-options-at-abkhazia-s-border> (last accessed: 15.05.2017)

displaced people (IDPs),¹⁴ absolute economic devastation and breaking down of transport routes between Georgia and Russia through the region; and finally the de facto separation of South Ossetia from Georgia (Nalbandov, 2009: 27).

Hostilities in the region ended with a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement, which was signed on 24 June 1992, in Sochi. The agreement stopped the war, but did not solve the status of South Ossetia. With the purpose of resolution of the conflict a Joint Control Commission (JCC) was established. This commission consisted of Russian, Georgian, South Ossetian and North Ossetian representatives and they were discussing all conflict related issues: military, security, economic issues, IDPs etc. In addition, based on the Sochi agreement Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) were established as well. The so called “peacekeeping” force was mainly composed of Russian troops, together with the Georgian and Ossetian ones. According to Nichol, the “peacekeeping” units usually made up around 1,100 troops, including about 530 Russians, a 300-member North Ossetian brigade and about 300 Georgians” (Nichol, 2009: 2). The OSCE was also part of the conflict resolution process by acting as facilitator and patroller of the conflict zone.

Since the conflict, Georgia and Russia have had complicated relations, especially, after the “Rose Revolution” in 2003, which brought into power pro-western president Mikheil Saakashvili, who undertook institutional, democratic and economic reforms. In 2004, several steps were taken towards the South Ossetia region, to restrict border controls, and eliminate smuggling operations. In this respect, “several hundred police, military, and intelligence personnel [was sent] into South Ossetia.” (Nichol, 2009: 3) In addition, in 2006, the “Georgian parliament called for replacing the Russian peacekeepers with international police contingent, contending that Russia’s “peacekeeping” troops formed one of the main obstacles to peaceful resolution of the conflicts” (Socor, 2006; cited in Amashukeli, 2012: 19-20). The relationship between Russia and Georgia considerably deteriorated in 2008 and turned into the five-day war.

¹⁴ Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), Georgia IDP Figures Analysis, Retrieved from <http://www.internal-displacement.org/europe-the-caucasus-and-central-asia/georgia/figures-analysis> (last accessed: 4.05.2017)

Several months of tensions (between Russia and Georgia and military clashes between South Ossetian and Georgian governmental forces) culminated on 8 August, 2008, with a Russian military intervention, which was justified with “the declared purpose of protecting Russian peacekeepers deployed in South Ossetia and those residents who had become Russian citizens” (Amashukeli, 2012: 20). As reported above, Moscow also opened a second front in Abkhazia. Apart from the naval, military and air force attacks, the Russian Federation also applied cyber-attacks against Georgian websites (Cohen and Hamilton, 2011: 3, 44-45).

Officially, the war was ended on 12 August 2008 with a ceasefire agreement, which was brokered by the President of France - Nicolas Sarkozy. The agreement was signed both by the Georgian and Russian presidents on the following days. Finally, violence and military activities terminated within a few days. After the establishment of the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM), on 8 October 2008, Russia at last withdrew its troops from Georgia, except from Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. Russia recognized both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states on 26 August, 2008. Subsequently, Georgia and Russia have not had official diplomatic relations (Cheterian, 2009: 156, 160).

Since the August war, like with Abkhazia, Russia keeps closer links to South Ossetia and in parallel, continues its ‘creeping occupation’ with gradually moving wire fences further into Georgian territory. In 2015, Russian president Vladimir Putin and de facto president of South Ossetia Leonid Tibilov signed a bilateral “treaty” so-called “Alliance and Integration” to legitimate further integration of South Ossetia into the Russian Federation. According to Otarashvili (2017), this treaty clearly expresses Russia’s intention “to annex South Ossetia” and includes the following issues: border controls; economic and financial issues; educational, healthcare, and social welfare systems. The treaty aims to abolish borders between Russia and the South Ossetia separatist region for free movements of goods and people. The main object of the treaty is to “synchronize South Ossetia’s security and border mechanisms with those of

Russia.”¹⁵ This “treaty” was declared as illegitimate and condemned by Georgia itself, and by EU and the US.¹⁶

Furthermore, most recently, on 9 April, 2017, South Ossetia’s de facto government held a “presidential” election and a “referendum” on the issue of changing its name.¹⁷ These actions were condemned by the US (statement of the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi),¹⁸ NATO (statement by the NATO Spokesperson Oana Lungescu),¹⁹ EU²⁰ and Georgia itself. Georgia's Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze called this action illegal and declared that this step has an intention of ultimate annexation of South Ossetia, “an attempt to change the name of the oldest region of Georgia to "Republic of South Ossetia – the state of Alania," which is similar to the name of one of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation "Republic of North Ossetia – Alania." This step can be considered as Russia’s desire to prepare the ground for the illegal annexation of the region.”²¹

¹⁵ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2016 - South Ossetia, Retrieved from <http://www.refworld.org/docid/57c3eb7e9.html> (last accessed: 11.05.2017)

¹⁶ U.S. Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki declared: “The United States position on South Ossetia and Abkhazia remains clear. These regions are integral parts of Georgia. We continue to support Georgia’s independence, its sovereignty, and its territorial integrity. The United States does not recognize the legitimacy of any so-called treaty between the de facto leaders of Georgia’s breakaway regions of South Ossetia and the Russian Federation,”

Eurasian Daily, Russia and South Ossetia sign Treaty on Alliance and Integration, 18 March, 2015 Retrieved from <https://easdaily.com/en/news/2015/03/18/russia-and-south-ossetia-sign-treaty-on-alliance-and-integration> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

¹⁷ Global Security, South Ossetia, Retrieved from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/south-ossetia.htm> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

¹⁸ U.S Embassy in Georgia, Statement: United States Condemns Planned Illegitimate Referendum in South Ossetia 14 February 2017, Retrieved from <https://ge.usembassy.gov/illegitimate-referendum-south-ossetia/> (last accessed: 7.05.2017)

¹⁹ NATO, NATO condemns illegitimate elections and referendum in Georgia’s occupied territories - Statement by the NATO Spokesperson Oana Lungescu, 17 April 2017, Retrieved from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_143120.htm?selectedLocale=en (last accessed: 7.05.2017)

²⁰ European External Action Service, Statement by the Spokesperson on the so-called Presidential elections and the referendum on amending the name of the Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia, 8 April 2017, Retrieved from https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/24443/statement-spokesperson-so-called-presidential-elections-and-referendum-amending-name-georgian_en (last accessed: 7.07.2017)

²¹ UNIAN, Klimkin condemns "cynical election" in occupied South Ossetia, 5 May, 2017, Retrieved from <https://www.unian.info/politics/1869169-klimkin-condemns-cynical-election-in-occupied-south-ossetia.html> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

To summarize, as with Abkhazia, the war in South Ossetia emerged in the early 1990s and ended with military defeat of Georgia's central authority and with the separatists' de facto control over the region. In both regions Russian peacekeeping forces were deployed. The situation has worsened since 2004 and drastically deteriorated in 2008, which escalated into the Russia-Georgia full-fledged five-day war. Two weeks after the end of this war, Moscow officially recognized both regions as independent states and signed an "Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Support," which aimed at the following issues: "to defend each other's sovereignty, grant each other the right to construct and use military bases on their respective territories, and announce the intention to work towards a high level of economic integration" (Gerrits and Bader, 2016: 302). Also, in 2009 Russia signed bilateral agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia about joint measures on the "state" border protection which, in fact, gave Russia a formal control over their frontiers. Additionally, "border-guard directorates were set up by the Russian FSB Border Guard Service in both regions and units deployed there (so called "green berets")" (German, 2012: 1656). Since Russia has close ties to the de facto authorities of South Ossetia and similarly to Abkhazia, their relation has been formally strengthened by the 2015 treaty. Although, different from Abkhazia, South Ossetia openly declares its desire to further integrate into the Russia Federation; a clear step of this was the recent name-change referendum in Tskhinvali (the "capital" of South Ossetia).

2.2 Transnistria conflict

The Transnistria conflict is considered to be one of the more 'frozen conflicts' in the Post-Soviet region. Armed clashes between Transnistria guerrilla groups and Moldovan troops and police sparked in the autumn of 1991. The tensions escalated into full scale warfare in March 1992 and lasted until July 1992 (Osipov and Vasilevich, 2017: 8). However, Moldova's attempt to gain control over the region failed. Hostilities ended after Russian military intervention and the stationing of the –then– Russian 14th army in the Transnistria region.

An official cause of the conflict between Moldova and separatist region of Transnistria is considered to be a 1989 linguistic legislation which made Moldovan the state language. Afterwards, in September 1990 Transnistria announced its separation. Already in November 1990, in central Transnistria, first clashes occurred between Transnistrians and Moldovan police (Vahl and Emerson, 2004: 6-8). Fighting intensified and culminated in a war, which caused almost a thousand deaths and more than 51.000 internally displaced people²² (Sanchez, 2009: 157-158).

After several attempts of international mediation, a final ceasefire was reached in July 1992, and signed by the presidents of Moldova and Russia. According to the agreement, a 10 km demilitarized "security zone" was formed; it was trilaterally controlled by the forces of the Russian federation, Moldova, and Transnistria. The agreement also included the establishment of a Joint Control Commission (JCC), with Moldovan, Transnistrian and Russian delegations, due to ensure cease-fire monitoring and implementation of the agreement. Three years later, the Russian forces were renamed from the 14th Army to the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF) (Vahl and Emerson 2004: 7, 9).

Despite the long-running dialogues on conflict resolution, in which the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine participated, a political solution still has not been reached. The status of Transnistria is unresolved as well; its self-claimed independence is not recognized by the international community. Aside from the political fallout, the loss of control over Transnistria has had a devastating effect on the Moldovan economy, since Transnistria has a great economic potential; almost 87% of Moldova's electricity and its large electric machinery products are produced in and distributed from Transnistria (Roper, 2001: 110).

²² Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), Profile of Internal Displacement: Republic of Moldova, Retrieved from <http://www.internal-displacement.org/europe-the-caucasus-and-central-asia/moldova/2004/profile-of-internal-displacement-republic-of-moldova> (last accessed 4.05.2017)

In 2005, the Moldovan parliament adopted legislation on the special legal status of Transnistria, as an autonomous territorial unit within the Republic of Moldova²³. Soon after this, in 2006, the de facto government of Transnistria held a referendum. According to the official result, the overwhelming majority of Transnistria's residents (97%) supported "the notion of Transnistrian independence and eventual union with Russia" (Hensel, 2006: 10). Besides this referendum, the desire to join the Russian Federation has been repeatedly declared later on.

In parallel with the Association Agreement procedures and progress made by Moldova, several activities took place in Transnistria. In 2012, Russia appointed Dmitry Rogozin (deputy prime minister) as its special representative "on Transnistria" (Popescu and Litra, 2012: 4) and then opened a Russian consulate in Tiraspol. Also, some incidents have happened in the city of Bender in 2013, when Transnistria's de facto authorities tried to gain full control by some ban on Moldovan policy and a decree on the "state border". In 2014, tensions continued about the use of the Latin-script alphabet as well (Ivan, 2014). In addition, pro-Russian sentiments have increased in the separatist region of Transnistria and several steps have been taken by de facto authorities to get closer to Moscow. In 2014, Transnistria adopted Russian legislation, also, in March-April, 2015 Transnistria "lawmakers called on Russian president Vladimir Putin and international bodies to recognize Transnistria's independence as a prelude to Russian annexation;"²⁴ In 2016, Transnistria's "president" Evgeniy Shevchuk officially issued a decree, asking Russia for a full incorporation of the Transnistria region into its Federation.²⁵

To sum up, all of three separatist conflicts in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and Moldova (Transnistria) started in the similar period, the 1990s, and developed in such a way that their statuses are still disputable. The overview of the

²³ Parliament of the Republic of Moldova Law on Fundamental Regulations of the Special Legal Status of Settlements on the Left Bank of the River Nistru (Transnistria), 27 July 2005, Retrieved from <http://www.osce.org/pc/16208?download=true> (last accessed: 15.05.2017)

²⁴ Freedom House, Transnistria 2015, Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/transnistria> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

²⁵ BBC News, Moldova's Trans-Dniester region pleads to join Russia, 18 March 2014, Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26627236> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

conflicts' development clearly shows the extensive role of the main external actor, namely the Russian Federation, during and after the active phases of confrontation. In all three cases, in eastern Moldova and in the two separatist regions of Georgia, Moscow still maintains military bases and strengthens its ties with the de facto authorities.

3. 'Frozen conflicts'

As was discussed in the introduction, the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria are generally referred to as 'frozen conflicts'. In the next chapter an analysis is made of the similarities and dissimilarities between the conflicts. In doing so, the concept of a 'frozen conflict' is used to see to what extent (and with which differences/similarities) the three conflicts portray the characteristics of a 'frozen conflict'. To that end, this chapter discusses the concept of 'frozen conflicts' and aims at answering the second sub-research question: What are the characteristics of 'frozen conflicts'?

Even though the literature on 'frozen conflicts' is largely of an applied nature, rather than a conceptualizing/theorizing one, several definitions of 'frozen conflicts' have been put forward. In general terms, a 'frozen conflict' is a conflict that has not – yet – been resolved by a peace agreement. A 'frozen conflict' means insecurity and instability, and the possibility that the conflict will start again.²⁶ According to MacFarlane (2008), 'frozen conflicts' are about a situation of conflict where there are "no active large-scale hostilities, there is a durable mutually agreed ceasefire, but efforts to achieve a political settlement or peace are unsuccessful" (MacFarlane, 2008: 23). Divergence of interests of the parties involved are obstacles to a compromise and a ceasefire does not necessarily mean that both sides stop violence eventually; therefore it is possible that the conflict escalates again and gets back into an active phase (Shevchuk, 2014: 53).

Another definition of 'frozen conflicts' are those conflicts in which violent ethno-political conflict over separation cause the emergence of a de facto regime that is recognized neither internationally nor by the patron state²⁷ (Nodia, 2005; cited in Alice et.al, 2009: 14). "As the violence surrounding the secession has largely abated, the conflict is considered to be 'frozen' [...]" (Alice et.al, 2009: 14).

²⁶ TISB Model United Nations, Disarmament and International Security Committee, Retrieved from <http://tisb.org/mun/static/background-guides/DISEC.pdf> (last accessed: 12.05.2017)

²⁷ Patron state – this concept will be used in the thesis to refer states, like Georgia and Moldova, from which separatist regions are trying to secede.

Caspersen and Stansfield (2011) combine both elements and define a ‘frozen conflict’ as a conflict which a. retains in between “the stalemate and de-escalation” stages; despite the peace-keeping negotiations it never results in the final resolution; and b. it entails the possibility of emerging de facto state unrecognized by the international community (Caspersen and Stansfield, 2011; cited in Shevchuk, 2014: 53).

Other authors emphasize the importance of endogenous and exogenous factors in explaining why a ‘frozen conflict’ is not resolved. According to Alice et al. (2009), the interplay between endogenous factors (e.g. a state’s inability and/or lack of political will to alter the status quo) and exogenous factors (e.g. external actors who often play a key role in preventing a settlement of ‘frozen conflicts’) preclude a conflict’s transformation and/or resolution (Alice et.al, 2009: 14-15). In a similar vein, Morar thoroughly examines the causes of ‘frozen conflicts’ and the impeding factors for their resolution. He alternatively and interchangeably uses the concepts of “protracted”, “unsolved”, “stagnant”, “enduring”, “gridlocked” or “prolonged” conflicts to describe this phenomenon. For him, such kinds of conflicts are “deceiving”, they might be put on hold as “one could press the pause button of a remote control” but the possibility that they will be abruptly “de-frozen” is high, as has been in the case of south Ossetia in 2008. Thus, according to Morar, so called ‘frozen conflicts’ are just postponed conflicts (Morar, 2010: 11-12).

When it comes to the role of external actors, Morar assumes that “usually, external actors, states and non-state, international and regional organizations rush to stop the violence or limit the escalation of the conflict in the first stage” (2010: 11). However, afterwards enthusiasm for decisive actions toward a long term solution declines. The role of regional and international actors, like the EU, U.N, OSCE or the Council of Europe, is limited to economic assistance or political pressure. This can be due to conflicting aims, inconsistency, hesitations or even strong resentments on the side of the parties involved; as a result, they do not even try to deal with differences. Correspondingly, to achieve reconciliation and to build confidence is getting difficult when there is no trust or will to communicate (Morar, 2010: 11-12).

Because of that, room is left to conflict parties or protector states [i.e. external actors, like the Russian Federation in the selected cases] to find a way out themselves. As a result, instead of resolution, the conflict becomes more “pervasive and insidious” (Morar, 2010: 11). The influence of and relationships with the protector state is a major deterring factor for conflict resolution. Almost all the protracted conflicts are characterized by the inevitable influence of a protector state [as it is the Russian federation in the thesis study], which has huge impact on the region and possesses various tools to force local actors. Reality is that they are not interested in a final settlement that “could circumvent the will and the interest of the protector regional power” (Morar, 2010: 12). In such a situation time plays in favor of the protector, since they have limited interest to solve the conflict. Regarding Moscow’s strategic policy paradigm, prolonged conflicts can be identified as “controlled instability” (Socor, 2004; cited in Morar, 2010: 12). The protector state supports the existence of the separatist entity and protects their interests, even though often the protector state officially denies its involvement to support one side, and acts as if it is neutral. Support very often is not abundant. According to Morar, Russia provides to the separatist regimes only such support which “allows separatists entities to subsist, but not to flourish” (2010: 14).

The emergence of statehood features at the separatists’ side (governments, constitutions, elections, referenda, armies, etc.) also forms a strong obstacle for conflict resolution. Reservations about de facto recognition of the separatist region can be a justification for neutral and non-state actors for not getting involved in a dialogue with separatists and with the protector power. In such a situation parent states and external actors commonly are in favor of an isolation strategy, since they are “faced with the dilemma of balancing the involvement and engagement of separatists with the political considerations of legitimacy and de facto recognitions of separatists” (Morar, 2010: 15). Still, frozen conflicts should not be considered as being neutral socially or politically, since they “constantly create new effects, consolidating a new situation” (Morar, 2010: 16). And therefore, the absence of any attempt to reach a final solution in essence means supporting the status quo. According to Morar, unresolved conflicts are featured with

volcanic pressure and could erupt at any moment; (Morar, 2010: 17) one of the examples of this is the already discussed South Ossetian conflict.

Another important aspect of ‘frozen conflicts’, emphasized by Ciobanu (2008), is the political economy of crime, corruption, trafficking and violence, which is considered as a major threat to the “independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries involved that undermines their economic and democratic prospects, and their peace and stability” (Ciobanu, 2008: 45).

What main characteristics can be derived from the literature reviewed above? For this thesis a ‘frozen conflict’ is defined as a conflict with the following features:

1. No sustainable peace resolution;
2. Continuous presence of the possibility of the conflict flaring up (or: ‘heating up/de-freezing’) again;
3. De jure claims from and de facto control by separatists, but no –wide- international recognition of sovereignty claims;
4. Involvement of an external actor (protector state) with an interest in keeping the conflict unresolved;
5. Undermining effect on the economic and political stability of the parent country involved.

These five features will serve as the basic analytical framework to compare the three conflicts at hand, which will be done in the next chapter.

4. Differences/Similarities between the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova

The following chapter provides an analytical discussion of the selected conflicts to find out similarities and differences using the framework developed in the previous chapter, thereby answering the third sub-research question.

Section 4.1 will discuss the aspect of peace resolution, followed by (section 4.2) the issue of ‘heating’ up of the conflicts. Section 4.3 deals with the de facto statehood of the regions involved. Section 4.4 pays attention to involvement of a protector state, in these cases Russia. The undermining effect of the conflicts on the parent states are dealt with in section 4.5. Section 4.6 summarizes and concludes.

The sources used in this chapter were gathered from different university library databases (Tartu, Leuven, Tallinn and Tbilisi). Based on the key words ‘frozen conflict’ “Transnistria” “South Ossetia” “Abkhazia” “Russia” various academic journals, scholarly articles, reports, policy papers were searched and analyzed. In addition, official web pages of international organizations, like OSCE, EU, and NATO, as well as governmental pages of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation were actively investigated. For the up-to-date and comprehensive analyses, the thesis also explored the recent findings and public surveys of authoritative institutes and research organizations (NDI, Freedom House, 2015-2017).

4.1 Peace resolution

One of the features of a ‘frozen conflict’ is that the involved parties are not able to negotiate an acceptable resolution to the conflict. This section provides information on how such negotiation processes went in the case of the Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria conflicts. What tangible results have been achieved and/or what failures have been experienced?

As was discussed in chapter 2, in the case of the **Abkhazian conflict**, after several rounds of unsuccessful negotiation, in 1994, sides finally agreed on a ceasefire agreement, known as the “Moscow Agreement”. According to the agreement, a

permanent ceasefire line was created and Commonwealth of Independent States' peacekeeping forces were deployed on both sides (Akçakoca et.al, 2009: 42). Before the above mentioned ceasefire agreement, the United Nations tried to settle the situation in the conflict zone by sending an observer mission. The UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was established in 1993 and aimed to "verify compliance with the ceasefire agreement between the Government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities in Georgia" (UNOMIG). But it was not successful as violence continued among civilians and lots of ethnic Georgians were forced to leave their homes. This mission was prolonged since the 1994 ceasefire agreement, and consisted of 136 military observers and expanded objects. However, after 15 years of less effective existence of the mission, it was closed in 2009 following the difficulties among Security Council members to reach consensus regarding the mission's extension²⁸ (Moscow vetoed its extension).

Negotiation between conflict sides was proceeded within the Geneva Peace Process (about 10 years of existence), led by the United Nations, facilitated by the Russian Federation and observed by the OSCE and the "Group of Friends" (which included: Russia, US, UK, Germany and France) (Merkel and Grimm, 2009: 158). Despite of many attempts by the external actors (mainly by the UN) and the conflict sides (Abkhazia and Georgia) to endorse different solution proposals and political actions, the final status of Abkhazia is still unresolved. The main explanation of this unsuccessful negotiation is connected with clashing interests of conflict sides as well as of external mediators. Georgia offered Abkhazia wide autonomy within the Georgian territory several times but Abkhazia always demanded sovereignty. Both sides "blamed the failures on each other's uncompromising attitudes and the ineffectiveness of mediators (Abkhazia was dissatisfied with the West and Georgia was dissatisfied with Russia)" (Akaba and Khintba, 2011: 44). Another main obstacle to successful outcomes of the negotiations process is connected with the "very active involvement of regional

²⁸ United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unomig/> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)
Georgia - UNOMIG – Mandate, Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unomig/mandate.html> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

power, Russian Federation, which has had an ambiguous involvement in the generation of the conflict and as a mediator” (Cohen, 1999: 12).

When it comes to **South Ossetia**, military confrontation was ended with the OSCE-mediated so-called “Sochi Ceasefire Agreement” in June 1992, “which established a permanent ceasefire and a military exclusion zone” (Akçakoca et.al, 2009: 41). According to the agreement, the OSCE mission was launched in December 1992 with the objective to “promote negotiations between the conflicting parties in Georgia which [were] aimed at reaching a peaceful political settlement” (OSCE). This mission was expanded with different objectives in 1994, and in 1999 with the Mission's Border Monitoring Operation (BMO), which was mandated to observe and report the status on the Russia-Georgia border, which was still uncontrolled. Eventually, without any tangible result, the OSCE mission mandate was also closed since December 2008²⁹ (Moscow vetoed its extension too).

In addition to the OSCE mission, a Russian-led CIS’ Peacekeeping Force (comprising of Russian, Georgian and South Ossetian troops), was created, and a Joint Control Commission (JCC) (comprising of Russia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia (a Russian region) and Georgia) was established with the objective to promote cooperation between parties (Akçakoca et.al, 2009: 41). As Fischer explains the composition of both the JCC and the JPKF was not advantageous for Georgia, as within these forces the presence of North Ossetian and Russian troops was giving priority over troops of the South Ossetian separatists. Therefore, “Tbilisi regarded the JPKF less as a peacekeeping force than a Russian force of occupation” (Fischer, 2016: 45 -46). According to the Crisis Group Europe Report, Joint Control Commission negotiations have been deadlocked, because Georgia saw it as a “three against one” arrangement –South Ossetian, North Ossetian and Russian sides versus Tbilisi. Despite several rounds of meetings nothing tangible was implemented; the Joint Control Commission even failed

²⁹OSCE Mission to Georgia, Retrieved from <http://www.osce.org/georgia-closed> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

OSCE Mission to Georgia, Mandate, Retrieved from <http://www.osce.org/georgia-closed/43386> (last accessed: 5.04.2017)

to create any press statement or protocol (Crisis Group Europe Report, 2007: 9). Moreover, negotiations in the JCC format were not effective as they were frequently halted and have not prevented outbreak of hostilities along the contact line (Fischer, 2016: 45-46).

After the ‘de-freezing’ of the Georgian conflicts in 2008, two rounds of mediation were held by the French president, according to which a Six-Point cease-fire agreement between Georgia and the Russian Federation was signed. However, according to Cheterian the agreement did not bring “an immediate end to the acts of violence” (2009: 156) as in some Georgian villages hostilities still continued against civilians and just as in Abkhazia, lots of ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia were driven from their homes.

Following the 2008 August war, as a part of the Russia-Georgian agreement, a negotiation format, the so-called Geneva International Discussion (GID) was created which is jointly chaired by EU, UN and OSCE. This format include representatives of Georgia, Russian, and separatist regions (Abkhazia and South Ossetia). The main supporter of the dialogue is the US (Smith, 2010: 7). The Geneva talks consist of two different working groups: (1) Security and Stability and (2) IDPs and Refugees. Since its establishment a number of rounds of Geneva negotiations were held, however consensus has not been reached yet - no “measurable progress” has been made (Akçakoca et.al, 2009: 19). As Shevchuk argues the main reason of this is connected with the demand of the Russian Federation to treat Abkhazia and South Ossetia as sovereign states and to let an agreement be signed [by Georgia] regarding the non-use of military force against Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Since Georgia does not recognize the separatist regions as subjects of international law, there is still no concrete result achieved (Shevchuk, 2014: 63).

According to Devdariani (2015) the GID negotiation “process is stagnating: the new rounds take place without expectation of any tangible progress” (Devdariani, 2015: 55), because, sides have “dramatically diverging views” (Devdariani, 2015: 63). But he claims that this format is still valuable for communication between involved

representatives. According to Turunen (2015) the weakness of this format is that it is more focused on maintaining the status quo than trying to evolve to a genuine peace process” (Turunen, 2015: 69). Despite the lack of progress, Fischer assumes that it must be continued (Fischer, 2016: 90), since nowadays, the Geneva International Discussions is the only format on Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts.

Under the scope of the Six-Point Agreement, in September 2008 the EU established an unarmed civilian monitoring mission (EUMM), consisting of 200 monitors. The mission implied patrolling “the areas adjacent to the South Ossetian and Abkhazian Administrative Boundary Lines” (EUMM in Georgia, 2017: 1)³⁰ in order to collect and provide information with regards to the security situation there. As the current Head of the EUMM Georgia states the mission “represents the EU’s commitment to security in Georgia” (Jankauskas, 2015: 71). The EU monitoring mission is still functioning, as it has been prolonged for two years since December 2016 until December 2018.³¹ But taking into account that the mission has only a monitoring mandate without any executive power and that the monitors do not have an access beyond the ABLs and Tbilisi controlled territories, its effect and leverage in the resolution of conflict is very limited. However, as Fischer states the “EUMM fulfills an important function that must be maintained” (Fischer, 2016: 90). Since the closing-down of the UN and OSCE missions in Georgia, currently no international observer is presented inside the conflict regions to patrol Russia’s military activities (Fischer, 2016: 16).

Besides international attempts, since 2012, the Georgian government, through its Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, tries to have direct talks with Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, and supports economic and social activities. However, this policy has

³⁰ EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM), Retrieved from https://eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/?print=yes (last accessed: 18.05.2017)

³¹ EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM), Mandate, Retrieved from https://eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/mandate; http://www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/csdp/missions-and-operations/eumm-georgia/pdf/factsheet_eumm_georgia_en.pdf April 2015; https://eumm.eu/data/image_db_innova/EUMM%20Factsheet%20ENG%202017%20APR.PDF, April 2017, (last accessed at: 5.05.2017)

made little progress to date. Responses in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were characterized by “mistrust, partly because the law on occupied territories” which is active since 2008 (Fischer, 2016:52).

When it comes to the **Transnistria** conflict, a ceasefire agreement was signed in July 1992 between Moldova and Russia. According to this agreement, a trilateral peacekeeping force was established. These forces comprised of the Russian, Moldovan and Transnistrian troops. In addition to the frame of the agreement Moldovan forces left the Transnistria region, where separatists gained full control with the help of the Russian 14th Army (Akçakoca et.al, 2009: 42-43).

Afterwards, in the end of 1990s, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was invited to lead negotiations on a final status of Transnistria. The OSCE established a five-sided format, comprised of the conflict sides (Moldova and Transnistria) and the OSCE, and Russia and Ukraine as mediators (Akçakoca et.al, 2009: 42-43). Later, this format was transformed into the “5+2” format, by adding the US and the EU as observers. Despite several proposals within this negotiation framework, since 1997, the OSCE-brokered talks have brought very limited result and the final status issue still remains unresolved; no framework of any agreement has yet been accepted by any of the conflict sides (Moldova and Transnistria) although the OSCE continues to keep dialogues between sides. The OSCE Mission to Moldova still continues its existence and besides its prior objective to settle Transnistria conflict, the Mission also aims to deal with human rights issues, ensuring freedom of speech, rule of law and a competitive election environment.³² In addition, since 2005, EU’s Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) is still functioning near the Ukraine-Moldova borderline and “promotes border control, customs and trade norms and practices that meet EU standards and serve the needs of its two partner countries.”³³

³² OSCE Mission to Moldova, Retrieved from <http://www.osce.org/mission-to-moldova> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

³³ The European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM), Retrieved from <http://eubam.org/who-we-are/> (last accessed: 19.05.2017)

Attempts to solve the problem came close to success in 2003, when all involved parties believed that Moldova-Transnistria reunification would follow the Russian-brokered Kozak plan, (Akçakoca et.al, 2009: 27-28), but Chisinau rejected the plan at the last minute, because the plan envisaged a veto right to Transnistria over “strategic Moldovan decisions [...] and also a long-term status for Russian military forces” (Büscher, 2016: 28).

After two decades of negotiating processes progress has not achieved yet on the final status of the region. Moldovan authorities suggest autonomy to Transnistria, but Tiraspol “insists on international recognition and is willing only to agree to a loose confederation of equals with Moldova” (Popescu, 2013; cited in Büscher, 2016: 28-29). The situation even worsened after the Ukrainian crisis, since Russian and Ukraine are the mediators of the “5+2” format. For instance, according to Büscher, the 2015 talk round was “burdened by the conflicts between the mediators Ukraine and Russia, and came to a complete standstill again” (Büscher, 2016: 34). Therefore, constructive negotiation on the conflict resolution has become more difficult because of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict itself.

This section shows how awkward peacekeeping negotiation processes and resolution attempts were made in all three conflicts, by different monitoring missions, mandates and peace proposals. Since the cease-fire agreements in the 1990s, various international negotiation formats were established with various external participants to find a solution, however a mutually acceptable resolution has not been reached in any of the cases. They still remain in a deadlocked, unresolved condition. The circumstances are especially difficult in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia cases since 2008, due to different views on their status in the negotiation process. Moscow demands to treat Abkhazia and South Ossetia as sovereign states, which is unacceptable for Georgia. In addition, the OSCE mission is still operating in Transnistria, whereas UN and OSCE missions in Georgia were closed (vetoed by Russia) and nowadays there is no international observer inside the Georgia separatist regions, but with more than 7.000 Russian troops are deployed there. Overall, the both Georgian and Moldovan

negotiation processes have experienced major weaknesses to settle the final status of the conflict regions, because of clashing interests of involved parties as well as mediators.

4.2 Heating-up of conflicts

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the characteristics of ‘frozen conflict’ is the ‘heating-up’ possibility, which is why Morar (2010) called them ‘postponed conflicts’. The second chapter on the conflicts development showed the dynamics of the three conflicts and underlines the major difference between Georgian and Moldovan conflicts, e.g. ‘de-freezing’ of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts in 2008. The Georgian conflicts were characterized by “turbulent” periods before 2008 and their re-eruption was to be expected. In addition, since the 1990s ceasefires, international attempts to find a way out failed. The latter is also true for Transnistria (where peace talks also were unsuccessful), but at least the conflict there has not escalated and has stayed on more or less the same level as it was in the early 1990s when the conflict erupted and then was frozen. Of the three conflicts conflict in Transnistria can be called the most calm and stable; this is also argued by the European Parliament Study, according to which since the 1992 ceasefire agreement no military tensions occurred in Transnistria, no “opposing militaries lined up, or mobilized” and “borders” that “are normally passable” (European Parliament Study, 2016: 10). The South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts were ‘heated up’ and escalated into a large-scale war.

After the Five-day war, the situation even worsened in the separatist regions of Georgia. Russia established military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and still retains a significant number of military contingents, more than 7.000 in both regions combined. Russia has violated the terms of the Six-Point Agreement³⁴ since “it has

³⁴ (1) Not to resort to force; (2) To end hostilities definitively; (3) To provide free access for humanitarian aid; (4) Georgian military forces will have to withdraw to their usual bases; (5) Russian military forces will have to withdraw to the lines held prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Pending an international mechanism, Russian peace-keeping forces will implement additional security measures; (6) Opening of international talks on the security and stability arrangements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Council of the European Union, Extraordinary meeting, General Affairs and External Relations Council, 13 August 2008, Retrieved from:

maintained a larger number of troops in the regions than warranted under the agreement, and has kept forces on a large swath of land that was previously controlled by Georgia” (Smith, 2010: 6). Also Moscow violated the agreement in 2009, when it signed a bilateral agreement on joint border protection with Abkhazia and south Ossetia and started a demarcation process (e.g. ‘borderization’) on occupation boundary line and continues gradually moving wire fences further into Georgian territory (e.g. ‘creeping occupation’). Russia vetoed the extension of the UN and OSCE missions and the only mission which is operation currently in Georgian controlled territories is the EU Monitoring Mission to Georgia (EUMM), although it has no access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russian military control has been established (Smith, 2010: 5). Therefore there is no international mission in the conflict regions to observe Russia’s military action. This situation in the Georgian conflict regions can be understood as ‘creeping occupation’. When it comes to Transnistria, since the 1992 ceasefire, such military activation of ‘frozen conflict’ has never occurred.

4.3 De facto states and recognition issue

As was discussed above, all three selected conflicts are characterized by highly problematic conflict resolution negotiation processes. Despite various attempts, under the different formats of international talk rounds, in none of the cases has an acceptable level of final resolution of the conflicts been reached. All of them are also characterized by the emergence of de facto states within the internationally recognized territories of Georgia and Moldova, although their recognition issue is different.

The conflicts that erupted in Georgia and Moldova in the early 1990s brought to life three self-proclaimed republics, two in Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and one in Moldova (Transnistria). Correspondingly, Moldova and Georgia both were unable to exercise sovereignty over their territory, since they lost control over these regions. Although none of these de facto states are recognized internationally by the

United Nations (UN), a few UN members have independently recognized the statehood of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, since 2008 war.

The majority of the international community supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and condemns Russia's recognition of **South Ossetia** and **Abkhazia**. The Kremlin recognized the independence of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia on 26 August 2008, soon after the five-day August war with Georgia. It was followed by recognition from Venezuela, Nicaragua, and the Pacific Island state of Nauru. Another small Pacific island, Vanuatu, withdrew its recognition of Abkhazia in 2013. Yet another small island, Tuvalu, initially recognized but retracted its recognition in March 2014 after signing an agreement to establish diplomatic relations with Georgia. In total South Ossetia and Abkhazia gained (partial) recognition from four UN member states.³⁵

Different from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, **Transnistria** remains a de facto state, which is unrecognized by any sovereign members of the international community - including even Russia itself. Only the de facto states of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and South Ossetia recognize its independence. After the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia, the Kremlin stated that it did not have such intention in the case of Transnistria, although it simultaneously warned Moldovan authorities "not to adopt Georgia's confrontational stance."³⁶ Regardless of Moscow's lack of official recognition of Transnistria's statehood, a Russian consulate is functioning in Tiraspol.

All the three separatist regimes have been trying to build parallel state structures for two decades, all of them now have "their own government institutions, legal systems and security forces". However, according to Akçakoca, Vanhauwaert, Whitman and Wolff, they could not have organized such "state-like entities" without Moscow's support (2009: 16).

³⁵Freedom House, Abkhazia, 2015, Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/abkhazia> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

³⁶Freedom House, Transnistria, 2009, Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2009/transnistria> (last accessed: 11.05.2017)

In anticipation of the next section on the role of Russia, it is important to point out the link between the recognition issue and Russia's influence. The objective of the three regions differs regarding the option of full integration into the Russian Federation. South Ossetia and Transnistria have declared their readiness to join Russia, Abkhazia has a stance to be independent state. According to Fischer, reluctance of the Russian Federation to incorporate Transnistria is connected with the calculation that in such case Moscow would lose leverage over the separatist region, over the unresolved conflict, and eventually over Moldova (Fischer, 2016: 40). As Kamil Calus, a researcher at the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw stated:

“Moscow's plan for Transnistria is not to support its independence or its incorporation into the Russian Federation. On the contrary, Russia wants Transnistria to be a part of a federalized Moldova. The idea is to use Transnistria as a foot in the door, with a view to dominating all of Moldova and preventing it from turning to the West.” (Malling, 2016; cited in Dedousi and Didili, 2016: 23).

It is worth noting that the official policy of Moscow on Transnistria “is in favor of Moldovan reunification with respect for Transnistrian rights” (Rojansky, 2011; Dedousi and Didili, 2016: 23).

Likewise, Fischer assumes that with final accession of South Ossetia into the Russian Federation, the Kremlin would give up its “lever of influence that could still be useful in its relationship with Tbilisi, depending on how Georgian domestic and foreign policy play out” (Fischer, 2016: 60). According to Druey and Skakov, Russia's reluctance can be explained by Ukrainian event, which “made it impossible for Moscow to agree on South Ossetia's” (Druey and Skakov, 2015: 21-22), although, they claim that the future status of South Ossetia is largely depends on the Russian Federation. The role and importance of external actors, particularly the Russian Federation, during and after the active phase of the conflicts will be discussed thoroughly in the following section.

4.4 External actor

The influence of an external actor is a dominant feature in all selected cases; Russia has been an active player during and after the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria. In all of these conflicts Russia military intervened on the side of separatists, “while official policy declared absolute neutrality” (Mörke, 1998: 123). Akçakoca, Vanhauwaert, Whitman and Wolff also underline the Russian importance for the separatist regions and claim that all three “de facto regime’s survival depends on ongoing political and economic support from Russia” (2009: 16). This is because they all are dependent on Russia by all means: economically, politically, socially and militarily (all the entities have significant Russian military contingents). Moreover, in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria the currency is the Russian Ruble. Also most of the population deliberately holds Russian passports for further justification of Russia’s intended actions –as happened during the August war 2008 in Georgia– Russia justified its intervention with the motive to defend its own citizens.

As Vasily Sturza, the Moldovan presidential envoy declared in 2000: “The resolution of the conflict depends exclusively on the Russian Federation” (cited in Lynch, 2002: 835). Clearly, Russia’s engagement in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria implies several levels, during the active armed conflicts as well as afterwards through support to separatists. Russia played a key role to let the conflicts erupt and then maintain the conflicts unresolved. However, ironically Russia was also a major mediator in every conflict negotiation process. Russian forces were deployed in all three regions under “peacekeeping” mandates. The fact that these break-away regions still are alive is a merit of the Kremlin.

According to Lynch, Moscow has been using different military, political and economic dimensions of supporting the secessionist regions: at the *military level* Russia’s role clearly appeared in intervention and then deployment of military bases; at the *political level*, “radical nationalist forces in the Russian Duma have pledged support to the de facto states on numerous occasions, through parliamentary resolutions and public debates” (2002: 846). At the *economic level*, Moscow is a major investor and

provides various economic cooperation possibilities to the separatist regions (2002: 846).

As for the *social dimension* of Russian engagement, its support is extensive, particularly in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As Nicu Popescu clarifies “The Russian government not only granted citizenships to an overwhelming majority of residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but also pays pensions there” (Interview with a Russian expert, Paris, 2005; cited in Popescu, 2006: 6). It is worth mentioning that Russia justifies these actions based on the humanitarian gesture to help Abkhaz and South Ossetia residents.

As reported by Popescu Russia is a critical performer in the *conflict resolution* negotiation process. “Russia often acts not so much as a mediator equally distant from the positions of both sides, but as an actor in negotiations with its own interests” (Popescu, 2006: 5). According to Popescu, Russia meets the following three conditions regarding the active involvement in these conflicts:

1. High level of influence for the secessionist entity to the point of creating a dysfunctional state;
2. Russia as the main power broker;
3. Russian military presence (ibidem)

Despite Russia’s obstacle role in all conflicts resolution, according to Grono (2016), Kremlin sees itself “as a guarantor of stability in the region.” Russia hampers progress toward final settlements of Moldovan and Georgian conflicts. According to Blank, any type of positive steps towards the improvement of the situation and the resolution of these conflicts is not in Russia’s interest (because of its desire to preserve influence in the former Soviet Union countries), therefore it tries to contribute to prolong regional instability, to stalling progress in peace process and keeping them frozen by blocking “the consolidation, integration, and even expansion of Europe that progress in conflict resolution would necessarily foster” (Blank, 2008: 32). Since Russia is a central actor to all these conflicts, “it bears much of the responsibility for failed

conflict resolution to date and for the larger failure to create a viable regional or European security system” (Blank, 2008: 24).

Above all, the most powerful leverage for Russia in these regions are its military bases. Since the beginning of the 1990s that is already before 2007 the Kremlin keeps Soviet-time military bases in the South Caucasus region, and specifically in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. In addition, after the August war in 2008 in Georgia, Moscow deployed two new bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (German, 2012: 1652-3). Currently, in **Abkhazia**, the Russia's 7th Military Base, at the Bombora air field in Gudauta, hosts -about 3.500 soldiers and a small number of aircraft. In **South Ossetia**, the 4th Military Base hosts about 3.800 soldiers in Tskhinvali, Java, and Kanchaveti³⁷ (about 4.000 and 4.000 according to European Parliament Workshop, 2016: 27-29). In **Transnistria**, in Tiraspol and in the Bender Fortress, Russia has less troops (around 1.000-1.500)³⁸ than in Georgian regions. According to Shevchuk, Russian forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia not only prevent Georgia's future efforts to use military force against secessionists, but “they also pose a permanent threat to Tbilisi, as they reduce the period of warning for the Georgian army in case of a Russian attack against this country” (Shevchuk, 2014: 63).

When it comes to recent developments, after the Ukrainian crisis, all the three breakaway regions experienced serious economic deterioration and became even more dependent on Russia (Fischer, 2016: 86). As Büscher explains, the Ukraine crisis had a negative effect on Transnistria's economy (GDP dropped by about 20 percent in 2015). Tiraspol still experiences a severe economic crisis, due to the worsened economic situation with regard to its trading partners and reduced amount of aid from Russia (sanctions have also its impact). As Büscher states “many interpret Transnistria's “President” Shevchuk's insistent assertions of loyalty to Moscow over the past two years as “begging” for further aid” (Büscher, 2016: 40). It is however worth mentioning that different from Georgian secessionist regions, now Transnistria enjoys the DCFTA

³⁷ Eurasianet, At Press Conference, Putin Forgets About Military Bases in Armenia, Moldova, Abkhazia..., 18 December 2014, Retrieved from <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/71416> (17.05.2017)

³⁸ **1.200 troops** by Akçakoca et.al, (2009: 13); **1.500 troops** by Woehrel (2009: 10)

as the EU-Moldova Association Council in 2015 made the decision to expand the DCFTA to the whole territory of Moldova (Büscher, 2016: 40).

As for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, their ties with Russia have been strengthened since 2008, but most importantly since 2014 with the bilateral treaties. According to Fischer, Russia's close engagement to these regions after 2014 can be considered as a response to Georgia's successful AA negotiation with the EU; "taking Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's political, economic and military integration to a point just short of annexation was a symbolic response to Georgia's EU association process" (Fischer, 2016: 60).

To summarize, Russia's role in Post-Soviet conflicts is very extensive. Moscow retains its active engagement towards these regions. Many agree that Russia was not a real mediator in the conflict resolution negotiations, since it certainly has not been neutral (i.e. always supportive of separatists). In addition, Kremlin has never been interested to really resolve the conflict and deal with a final status for secessionist regions; on the contrary: Moscow was the main obstacle to a progressive start of any mandates or proposals. Also, it is obvious that without Russia's backing separatists would not be encouraged enough to oppose central governments and they would not have survived for more than two decades already. Akçakoca, Vanhauwaert, Whitman and Wolff summarize Russia's role under the following two-pronged approaches:

"(1) working both within the multilateral framework as part of the relevant OSCE or UN instruments but (2) also bilaterally, using the direct influence it has over the authorities in Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, because they all depend on Russia for their economic and political survival" (Akçakoca et.al, 2009: 24).

4.5 Instability

One of the characteristics of ‘frozen conflict’ is instability, by all means, inside the conflict zone. Russia supports separatist regions, where corruption and crime are flourishing. For instance, according to Shevchuk, the ‘frozen’ status of the South Ossetia conflict created unique conditions for the illegal distribution of goods and petroleum products, which were imported without customs clearance into Georgia from Russia through the Roki Tunnel. In addition, “highly organized transnational groups were smuggling narcotic substances, weapons, and cigarettes” (Shevchuk, 2014: 58-59). All of this had a negative impact on the economic development in Georgia. Similar observations can be made for the Abkhazia and Transnistria regions, as they are ground for organized crime too and “these systems are controlled by elites loyal to Moscow” (Orttung and Walker, 2015).

As reported by Akçakoca, Vanhauwaert, Whitman and Wolff in all the separatist states the combination of war-time economic devastation, political uncertainty and instability gave ground to “various local and transnational crime networks,” and corruption. All of them suffer from, “arms, drugs and human trafficking, money laundering and organized crime” (2009: 16).

According to the Study of the European Parliament on frozen conflicts (2016), the recent security situation in the Georgian separatist regions is equally difficult. After the August war, “*De facto* internal borders are hard to cross; cross-border trade and people-to-people contacts are seriously hindered, and practically severed in South Ossetia” (European Parliament Study, 2016: 10). Tensions erupted near the “border” of South Ossetia several times, when Russia relocated “the demarcation lines to the regular border direction by strengthening the border infrastructure” (ibidem) (Russia continues so-called ‘creeping occupation’).

Besides corruption and organized crime, political instability and low freedom level are other problems of separatist regions. According to the findings of Freedom House (2017) on the state of political rights and civil liberties, the situation in the

secessionist regions is relatively low compared to the patron countries like Georgia and Moldova. On a seven score scale - score 1 being the best and score 7 the worst-, South Ossetia has a 6.5 score³⁹ and Transnistria a 6 score⁴⁰, and are considered to be among the world's worst performers; whereas Georgia⁴¹ and Moldova⁴² earned a 3 score. However, Abkhazia with a 4.5 score⁴³ is also considered partially free.

In addition, as reported in the recent study of European Parliament (2016), all selected frozen conflicts (plus the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict) are very similar to each other in terms that “they constitute legal “black holes”” and no UN member states exercise jurisdiction over them. Despite the fact that they have “state-like” structures and institutions to protect human rights, they did not manage that properly, because of “the lack of will [...] motivated by regime security interests. Consequently, victims of human rights violations have only very limited access to justice” (European Parliament Study, 2016: 5).

4.6. Summary

This chapter discussed the selected three conflicts in Georgia and Moldova, based on the five features of ‘frozen conflicts’ to find out similarities and differences. The main findings are summarized in *table 2* (page 56). It is worth noting that all the separatist conflicts have a lot in common however many differences were observed as well. Discussion of the conflicts’ negotiation process showed that none of them reached sustainable peace resolution, despite decades of ongoing various talk rounds. All three conflict zones face very serious instability in terms of crime, corruption, and smuggling, also lack of political freedom and liberties. In addition, in all the conflicts the external actor (the Russian Federation) plays a key role to keep the conflicts unresolved, as a

³⁹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2017, South Ossetia profile, Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/south-ossetia> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

⁴⁰ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2017, Transnistria profile, Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/transnistria> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

⁴¹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2017, Georgia profile, Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/georgia> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

⁴² Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2017, Moldova profile, Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/moldova> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

⁴³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2017, Abkhazia profile, Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/abkhazia> (last accessed: 5.05.2017)

mediator in the negotiation processes and as a direct supporter to separatist by all means. Georgia and Moldova are ground for Russian military bases, although the numbers of troops are quite different (Georgia-7.000; Moldova – 1.500). The recognition issue of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria as independent states shows differences as well. The Georgian separatist regions gained four UN member states' recognition as an independent state, among them Russia; Transnistria is not recognized by any UN member state, including Russia. The most important dissimilarity is connected with the escalation of 'frozen conflicts' and their 'heating up' possibilities, particularly the relatively stable 'frozen' nature of the Transnistria conflict compared to the conflicts in Georgia.

Table 2: Features of 'frozen conflicts'

Features of 'frozen conflict'	Peace resolution, mediation & monitoring	Heating-up of conflicts	De facto states and recognition issue	Military involvement external Actor	Instability (Freedom Level by FH, 2017) 1best - 7 worst
Three conflicts					
Abkhazia	Peace resolution highly problematic GID (conflict sides, Russia, US, EU, UN and OSCE) No international observer inside region (UNOMIG vetoed by Russia in 2009)	Yes in 2008	Yes – recognized by 4 UN member states	3.500 Russian troops 'Creeping occupation'	Unstable 4.5
South Ossetia	Peace resolution highly problematic GID (conflict sides, Russia, US, EU, UN and OSCE) No international observer inside region (OSCE mm vetoed by Russia in 2009)	Yes in 2008	Yes – recognized by 4 UN member states	3.800 Russian troops 'Creeping occupation'	Unstable 3
Transnistria	Peace resolution highly problematic "5+2" (conflict sides, Russia, Ukraine, OSCE US and the EU) OSCE mission inside region	No	Yes - But unrecognized by any UN member state	1.200 Russian troops (varies from 1.000 to 1.500)	Unstable 3

Source: Author, created based on the sources discussed in the text.

The goal of the next chapter is mainly to uncover the reason why the Moldovan conflict shows a relatively stable ‘frozen’ nature, compared to the Georgian conflicts. As will be explained in the next chapter, the remaining part of the study follows a country level analysis and discusses several major explanatory factors, especially related to differences in Russia’s leverage over Moldova and Georgia. This means that from now on, the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be discussed together.

5. Explaining differences

This chapter provides the answer to the fourth sub-research question and puts forward explanations for the differences between the Moldovan conflict on the one hand and the Georgian conflicts on the other hand. The chapter is divided into four sections: the first section provides the general introduction to the chapter (5.1). The subsequent section discusses different factors under the heading of soft leverage (5.2). The next section focuses on context factors (5.3), followed by a summary (5.4).

For this chapter sources were gathered from various academic journals, scholarly articles, reports and policy papers. In addition, the chapter also explored the recent findings and public surveys of National Democratic Institute's (NDI) regarding the Moldovan and Georgian respondents' attitude towards a broad range of issues, among them foreign policy orientation. Besides, due to the thesis' goal is to study recent developments of the conflicts in the two associated EaP countries, it was inevitable to use local and international reliable media agencies in order to gather speeches, statements and interviews of high ranking active or former officials and factual or statistical information (relevant for the study).

5.1 Introduction: soft versus hard leverage

This chapter deals with the explanation of differences between the Georgian and Moldovan conflicts, with a specific focus on why they do or do not 'heat up'? As already discussed, the Georgian conflicts 'heated-up' in 2008, and generally involve a larger military involvement of Russia ('creeping occupation'), whereas the Transnistria conflict has never had such an active phase of hostility. This chapter explores a combination of factors to uncover the reasons for the relatively stable 'frozen' nature of Moldovan conflict, compared to the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts. The overview (in chapter 3) of the various literature on 'frozen conflicts' has however shown that in the current literature there is no comprehensive framework available that could be used to explain (differences in) 'frozen conflicts'. Still, as was also clear from

chapter 3, the role of the external actor (protector state) is a main factor for understanding ‘frozen conflicts’. This is also the main perspective chosen in this chapter. The focus will be on the exploration of the Moldovan-Russian versus Georgian-Russian relationship and on Russia’s leverages used in a certain context against these countries. As was mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, the analysis in this chapter is therefore done on the country level rather than on the conflict level.

For a better understanding of the leverages Russia has over Moldova and Georgia, we will build on Tolstrup (2009) who distinguishes levers that dominate Russia’s foreign policy toward the “Near Abroad” and divides them into three parts: military, political and economic.

- The group of *Military levers* includes the following features: “military interventions, military threats, military bases abroad, military support to secessionist republics, peace-keeping forces, military alliances dominated by Russia”;
- *Political levers* consist of “support of anti-Western groups/governments, opposing pro-Western groups/governments, support of secessionist republics, multilateral organizations dominated by Russia, control of the CIS Election, monitoring organization, Russian state TV, and Russian Diaspora”;
- *Economic levers* comprise: “energy monopoly, trade embargos, subsidizations, credits and debt payments” (Tolstrup, 2009: 928-929).

Kramer uses a similar typology when he states that by “by relying on interlocking political, economic, and military ties, Russia will continue to wield vast influence in the other CIS countries” (Kramer, 2008: 18).

In this chapter we will use another distinction, i.e. the distinction between soft and hard leverage. Economic and political levers are understood to belong to the soft leverage category and military levers to the hard leverage category. The **main claim**

that underlies the analysis in this chapter is **as long as –from the perspective of the protector state- soft leverage is effective, there is no need to resort to hard leverage.** Therefore, **as long as Russia has sufficient soft leverage over Moldova or Georgia, there is no necessity of ‘heating’ of the ‘frozen’ conflicts.** This chapter then aims to examine why in the case of the Moldovan conflict, Russia has enough soft leverage over the country, which has worked sufficiently over a long period, whereas in the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia such soft leverage over Georgia apparently was not sufficient, which makes Russia more prone to resort to hard leverage activation: ‘de-freezing’ of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts in 2008 and continuous ‘creeping occupation’.

In the thesis, Russia’s soft leverage will be understood as a combination of the following ‘instruments’: a. energy and economic dependence; b. minority issues and a threat to de-stabilise other regions in the parent country, and c. role of pro-Russian authorities.

Just looking at the use of these levers is however not enough. Activation of the levers takes place within a certain context which also impacts on its effectiveness. This context has changed over the research period and includes, for instance, involvement of Euro-Atlantic institutions (e.g. EU and NATO) in Moldova’s and Georgia’s political life, as well as the level of support of these countries for further integration in EU and NATO. As Hill claims geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the West on the post-Soviet space at the same time “has complicated efforts to resolve lingering conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria” (Hill, 2010: 219). Likewise Secieru discusses that Russia’s strategic object is to maintain influence on Moldova and avoid it turning to the West. “As well as keeping the Transnistria conflict open, Russia’s methods include influencing Moldovan internal politics through propaganda and supplying political, practical and financial support to pro-Russian forces” (Secieru, 2014; cited in Büscher, 2016: 32). Tudoroiu supports the argument that Russian intervention in South Ossetia is the signal that the ‘frozen conflicts’ are dangerous for regional stability and that “the Kremlin decided to upgrade its longstanding instrumentalization of such conflicts in order to prevent what it considers illegitimate

external intrusion in its own sphere of influence” (Tudoroiu, 2012: 135). Likewise, Morar claims that such conflicts are instrumental to Russia’s effort to recreate its own “security community”: “it seems that the secessionist disputes are in the core of the new competitive geopolitics in Eurasia” (Morar, 2010: 13).

In addition to the changing context of regional security due to the rivalry between the West and Russia, other context factors are important to. One such factor is the geo-graphical dimension of Moldova and Georgia. Moldova directly borders on EU and NATO territory, through Romania (Romanian factor will be addressed in the frame of Moldova- Romania historical affiliation), whereas Georgia directly borders on the Russian Federation. In addition, as the Transnistria region is located on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border, it is important to analyze the impact of Ukrainian crises, especially on Moldova but on Georgia as well as.

5.2 Soft leverage

5.2.1. Economic & energy dependence

The first soft lever that Russia can use concerns economic and energy policy. This section therefore deals with the impact of Russian economic and energy policy on neighboring countries and aims at finding out how heavily Moldova or Georgia are dependent on Russian energy import and products export to the Russian market. At the same time it illustrates these countries’ resistance or vulnerability towards Moscow’s economic and energy levers.

In recent years, many experts and analysts discuss several European countries’ dependence on Russian energy, as another weapon of Moscow to exercise an influence over them. Woehrel also considers energy dependence as a tool against EaP countries, “as part of a larger effort to limit the sovereignty and pro-Western orientation of vulnerable neighboring countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia” (2009: 1). Such kind of dependency could be used by Moscow to impact on a country’s internal and external policy orientations. This happened in the case of Georgia and Ukraine, when Gazprom (a Russian government-controlled firm) in response to the “Rose” and

“Orange” Revolutions, respectively, increased energy prices for these countries. As Woehrel states, Russian leaders were afraid that the so-called “Color Revolutions” would spread to other post-Soviet countries, which “could reduce Russia’s influence, and even perhaps threaten Russia’s own authoritarian regime” (Woehrel, 2009: 6).

When it comes to Moldova, Russia still holds considerable influence over Moldova’s energy and economic position. It is entirely dependent on Russia’s energy supplies: gas, oil and petroleum. This dependence has repeatedly been used by Moscow as a manipulation mechanism; for instance, in 2006, when Moldova refused to pay a double price of gas supply, Gazprom cut off natural gas, although soon after Chisinau agreed on a slightly smaller increase; also, the gas price was affected by the Russia-Ukraine gas crisis in 2009, and by global economic crisis. In addition, “Gazprom holds 63.4% of MoldovaGaz’s shares and has control of Moldova’s domestic gas infrastructure” (Woehrel, 2009: 11). In the case of Georgia, as already mentioned, the same way of pressure was exerted by Russia. In 2005, when prices were increased significantly, and in 2006, when Gazprom threatened to cut off gas supplies unless Georgia would agree to pay double prices (*ibidem*).

Moldova’s attempt to diversify its gas supply, in 2013, when the new pipeline plan between Moldova and Romania was actively discussed, has not had any tangible result yet and Russia still maintains a monopoly on Moldova's gas supplies (99, 88% export from Russia, 0,11% from Romania, according to the Energy Community, 2016).⁴⁴ Just as Moldova, Georgia was depended on Russian energy, however, due to Georgia’s geopolitical location, finding a new source of supply was relatively easy and Russia was largely replaced by energy-rich neighbor Azerbaijan (90% of natural gas supplier, by Davtyan, 2016).⁴⁵ In addition, Georgia is also a transit state for several oil

⁴⁴ Energy Community, Gas Markets of the Energy Community Contracting Parties, 23 September 2016, pp.3, Retrieved from https://www.energy-community.org/portal/page/portal/ENC_HOME/DOCS/4326410/3D29F1A1116D141AE053C92FA8C0E091.pdf (last accessed: 7.05.2017)

⁴⁵ “Currently, nearly 90% of Georgia’s natural gas imports come from Azerbaijan, with the remaining 10% coming from Russia as a transit fee for allowing Russian gas to pass through to Armenia.” Davtyan, E., Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP), Trying to Find a Balance: Georgian Dream’s Gas Diplomacy, 12 December 2016, Retrieved from <http://gip.ge/trying-to-find-a-balance-georgian-dreams-gas-diplomacy/> (last accessed 7.05.2017)

and gas pipelines, like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipeline (also known as South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP)) which decreases its dependence on Russia in this regard (Billmeier et.al, 2004: 3-4).

Besides energy dependence, the Russian market is the main export place for Moldovan wine and agricultural products. Like energy supply, Moscow has been using this fact as another pressure mechanism. For example, Moldova's economy was seriously harmed by the ban on wine import from 2005 to 2007, as was Georgia's economy after 2006, by a similar wine boycott by Russia (Woehrel, 2009: 10-11). Another economic measure from Moscow, which was used several times against Moldova and Georgia, are restrictions to migrant workers.

As soon as the Russian-led organization Eurasian Customs Union was launched in 2011, pressure on former soviet countries to join the organization has increased accordingly. Russia worked hard to force particularly three states (Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova) not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU and instead integrate into the Customs Union. Russia subsequently used one of its well-known coercive measures - trade restrictions on Moldova. Moscow has used an *embargo on Moldovan products* (excluding those from Transnistria. This ban mainly hit the Moldovan wine sector⁴⁶ – since 29% of Moldova's wine is exported to the Russian market. The 2013 ban had a damaging effect on Moldova's economy, with losses of around \$6.6m⁴⁷ and in addition, as a result of the 2014 embargo on Moldovan fruit and vegetables the country's economy was hit very hard as 90.6% of its fruit and 43% of all agricultural products were exported to Russian market (Paul, 2014: 3). All these measures taken by Russia were the response to the country's decision to sign an Association Agreement with the EU.

⁴⁶Russia accusations about the impurities of Moldovan wine, Moldova's Economy Minister Valerii Lazar stated: "We will have to clarify where technical problems about the quality of Moldovan wine end and where political aspects begin."
Reuters, Russia, unhappy with Moldova's EU drive, bans its wine and spirits, 10 September 2013, Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-moldova-russia-wine-idUSBRE98916M20130910> (last accessed: 8.05.2017)

⁴⁷ The economist, Why has Russia banned Moldovan wine? 25 November 2013, Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2013/11/economist-explains-18> (last accessed: 7.05.2017)

When the Association Agreement was actively discussed in Moldova, Russia's Deputy Minister, Dimitri Rogozin, directly *threatened Moldova regarding the energy import*. As already mentioned Moldova is dependent on Russian energy for almost 100%. On September 3, 2013, Rogozin said: "Energy is important, the cold season is near, winter on its way. We hope that you will not freeze this winter" (cited in Tsereteli, 2014: 142). Despite this statement Russia did not cut-off the energy supply to Moldova but it tried to demonstrate its power and emphasize Moldova's vulnerability to Russia. The energy sector as a weapon of manipulation was used in September 2012 as well, when Russia's Energy Minister, Aleksandr Novak, promised a lower price for natural gas to the Moldovan government in order to stop Moldova from passing a protocol to enter the EU's Energy Community (Third Energy Package). Consequently, Moldova stopped its accession to the Energy Community Agreement (Tsereteli, 2014: 142).

Another example of the harsh moves of Russia after Moldova initiated the Association Agreement, and chose in favor of the EU, was *Migrant Restriction*. Since approximately 300,000 to 400,000 Moldovan migrants work in Russia, and they send home more than \$1 billion in remittances annually, these restrictions badly affected them. Many of them (around 21,500 Moldovans) were forced to leave the Russian Federation, and in the aftermath money transfer was reduced noticeably. The rest of the Moldovan migrants "are considered at risk and may become subject to similar measures" (Socor, 2014; cited in Tsereteli, 2014: 142). The Russian ambassador to Chisinau Farit Mukhametshinn implicitly threatened Moldova with his statement in 2013:

"About half a million Moldovan immigrants are working in Russia [...] yearly they send about \$2bn back home, which is one third of Moldova's [GDP]. We therefore inform and we tell the Moldovan authorities that when they choose a European path, there will be changes and so they should be aware and prepare for some future adjustments."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ BBC, Why Russian wine ban is putting pressure on Moldova, 21 November, 2013, Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24992076> (last accessed: 8.05.2017)

Cenusa, Emerson, Kovziridse and Movchan call Russia's trade restrictions "Russia's punitive sanctions" since Moscow applies "a policy of punishing, or threatening to punish" (Cenusa et.al, 2014: 1). Every embargo against Moldova or Georgia imposed by Russia was formally justified by 'sanitary' problems, although somehow every ban was in coincidence with Moscow's political position, because "Russian technical agencies [were] following political guidelines dressed up as scientific evidence" (Cenusa et.al, 2014: abstract n.p.). Reality on the ground is that economic and business issues are mixed with political stance and Russian leadership imposes economic restrictions based on political decision and "Russia's desire to show strength" (Cenusa et.al, 2014: 8).

Contrary to Moldova, the Kremlin's 2006 sanction on Georgian products had a useful long term effect for the country's economic development, as Georgia started to diversify its trade market by finding new partners. According to the Centre for European Policy Studies (2014) Georgia is a good example of the post-restriction recovery and improvement without changing political path.

"Before the embargo Georgian wine was exported to 36 countries, by 2011 Georgian producers had entered 15 new markets, including China, Poland, Germany and Singapore. The Georgian case could be a positive example for Moldova and Ukraine, showing the advantages of not changing course in their foreign and trade policy even when confronted with unilateral sanctions imposed by Russia. Georgia never asked Russia to lift the trade embargo [...] (Cenusa et.al, 2014: 7)

To sum up, economic and energy dependence of Moldova to Russia, creates huge (soft) leverage of Moscow to coerce the country, which has been actively used several times. As reported by Bruce "Moscow uses its gas and oil leverage here [Moldova] and throughout the Black Sea to reinforce asymmetrical interdependence in its favor and coerce Moldova into subordination" (Bruce, 46; cited in Blank, 2008: 45). Despite Russia's contradictory attempts, Moldova's government has managed to sign the Association Agreement with the EU but in response Moscow attacked Moldova's economy by using sanction regarding Moldova's import (wine, fruit and vegetables), migrant restriction and threat to cut gas supply. In addition, Russia could not hide its

rage about the AA and Moldova's pro-European choice, and openly declared its position with aggressive statements. For instance, the high ranking Russian politician, foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, warned the EU against its plans to "repeat the Ukrainian scenario" in Moldova and Transnistria, which would have "negative" consequences (Tudoroiu, 2016: 389). Also Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin warned Moldova, that "such a move would jeopardise the future of Transnistria" and would have "serious consequences."⁴⁹

It is true that Moldova accomplished the AA with the EU but it is faced with serious economic damages due to Russia's restrictions. The Kremlin's intention behind this ban shows the purely political nature of the ban, i.e. to keep Moldova at distance from the European Union. The presidential election in 2016 and the election of a new Pro-Russian president, Igor Dodon, have contributed to Russia's goal to maintain control over the country and its decisions. Since his election Dodon has taken many pro-Russian steps. One of these steps is the observer status that Moldova has been granted in the Eurasian Economic Union. This action was however condemned by the Moldovan Prime-minister, who stated that "the paper Dodon signed has "no legal value" [...] and parliament "is the supreme body that approves the direction of domestic and foreign policy."⁵⁰ In addition, Dodon declared that Moldova will cancel the AA with the EU if his party gains majority in the 2018 Parliamentary election and instead will aspire accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (emphasizing the importance of the Russian market for the economic development of the country).⁵¹ He also announced that Moldova is not interested in NATO membership as such membership undermines the country's neutrality.⁵² Also he declared a desire that the Russian language would be

⁴⁹ Euractiv, Russia threatens Moldova over its EU relations, 3 September 2013, Retrieved from <http://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/russia-threatens-moldova-over-its-eu-relations/> (last accessed: 8.05.2017)

⁵⁰ Euractiv, Moldova granted observer status in Eurasian Union, 19 April 2017, Retrieved from <http://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/moldova-granted-observer-status-in-eurasian-union/> (last accessed: 8.05.2017)

⁵¹ Euractiv, Moldovan president hopes to cancel EU Association Agreement, 15 January 2017, Retrieved from <http://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/moldovan-president-hopes-to-cancel-eu-association-agreement/> (last accessed: 8.05.2017)

⁵² Euractiv, Moldova balks at idea of closer NATO ties, 8 February 2017, Retrieved from <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-policy/news/moldova-balks-at-idea-of-closer-nato-ties/> (last accessed: 8.05.2017)

compulsory in secondary schools.⁵³ These and many other statements of Moldova's new president clearly show that he does not agree on the parliament's stated European choice; this creates an unclear and unstable situation in the country, which in turn is favorable for the Kremlin. These developments prove Moldova's vulnerability to Russian levers and therefore its fragile European orientation.

5.2.2 Other minority issues and possibility of destabilising other regions in the parent country

Following Moldova's decision to sign an AA with the EU alongside with Georgia and Ukraine in 2014, as previously stated, Moscow has addressed a strong economic pressure by embargo on Moldovan products, migrant restriction, in addition, threatened to cut off gas. By doing this Moscow tried to hurt to Moldova economically and keep an influence on its politics. Another tool of Moscow to impact on Moldova's political choices are its extensive ties to autonomous regions, Transnistria and Gagauzia. With the help of these regions, Russia endeavors to create a disorder in Moldova. The recent opening of Russia's consulate in Transnistria and the recent referendum in Gagauzia create further difficulties for Moldova. According to the then president of Romania, Traian Băsescu, Moldova should be cautious about the problems that have recently arisen. He pointed out bans on wines and agricultural products, as well as the migrant worker restrictions, and Gagauzia as a dangerous one - "we've also seen they upped the tension in Gagauzia, where the referendum has Russian fingerprints all over. They will try to destabilise with all means."⁵⁴

Gagauzia is Moldova's other autonomous region, mostly populated by ethnically Turkic-speaking Orthodox Christians and Russians. Gagauzia declared independence in 1990 (Roper, 2001: 101, 117). However, it did not establish a well-constructed political structure, because of the following most discussed reasons: (1) economically, Gagauzia

⁵³ Euractiv, Russian should be mandatory in schools, says Moldovan president, 27 March 2017, Retrieved from <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/russian-should-be-mandatory-in-schools-says-moldovan-president/> (last accessed: 8.05.2017)

⁵⁴ Euractiv, Anxiety grows in Europe as Transnistria asks for Russian annexation, 20 March 2014, Retrieved from <http://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/anxiety-grows-in-europe-as-transnistria-asks-for-russian-annexation/> (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

does not have great potential; (2) politically, the population could not be mobilized effectively; and, (3) internationally, Russia did not pay much attention on this region (Chinn and Roper 1998; Roper, 2001; Zabarah, 2012; cited in Tudoroiu, 2016: 379). Instead, in 1994 Moldovan and Gagauzian leadership found the way to establish Gagauz Yeri (Gagauz land): an autonomous territorial status within the Republic of Moldova. The Kremlin increased political and economic support to Gagauzia, but this support is in no way comparable to the financial and political aid for Transnistria (Tudoroiu 2016: 382).

However, followed by Moldova's successful negotiation with EU and completion of the Association Agreement to obtain visa liberalization and DCFTA capabilities, tensions increased in the Gagauzia region. There were worries that all this progress would lead to Moldovan-Romanian reunification, as stated by Gagauzia's former governor Mihail Formuzal "The citizens of Gagauzia are very concerned that Euro-integration processes are being carried out in synch with, say, the entry into Europe through Romania. And this worries and frightens people."⁵⁵

After this, in February 2014, a referendum was held in Gagauzia, where an overwhelming majority of voters (98.4%) supported the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union. On a separate question, 97.2% was against EU rapprochement. In addition, 98.9% of voters favored Gagauzia's right to declare independence if Moldova loses or surrenders its own independence (Tudoroiu, 2016: 384). Also, the former governor of Gagauzia made a number of supporting statements for the Eurasian Customs Union. According to him, for Gagauzia and for Moldova as a whole, integration into the Eurasian Union is more profitable than into the EU, as it provides a stable market for Moldovan goods and, therefore, a strong economy. He urged the central government to take care of country's future perspective and timely stop European integration.⁵⁶

⁵⁵RFE/RL's Moldovan, Concerned about EU integration, Moldova's Gagauz region holds disputed referendum , 2 February 2014, Retrieved from <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-gagauzia-eu-referendum/25249087.html> (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

⁵⁶Ibid.

As reported by Ciobanu (2014) and Minzarari (2014) Gagauzia was encouraged by the Russian side. The Russian Embassy in Chişinău openly declared their support to the referendum. The Russian ambassador in Moldova was very active not only in Gagauzia but also in the Russian-speaking regions of **Taraclia** and **Bălţi**, since he saw “special interest” there (Ciobanu 2014; Minzarari 2014: cited in Tudoroiu, 2016: 384).

The results of referendum were welcomed by Russia and some actions were made in order to show their satisfaction. For instance, due to a decision of the Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Rights Protection and Human Well-Being (Rospotrebnadzor), the Russian market for Gagauzian wine was opened, notwithstanding the general embargo on wine produced in Moldova (Ceapai 2014; Europolibera.org, 2014; cited in Tudoroiu, 2016: 384). Also, on this issue, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin covertly indicated that "the train called Moldova that is chugging toward Europe might lose a couple of its cars." It is obvious, that he had in mind both Transnistria and Gagauzia.⁵⁷

After the referendum, in 2015, a governor election was hold in Gagauzia, which was described as “the most geopolitical Gagauz election ever” (Călugăreanu 2015: cited in Trudoroiu, 387). It is worth noting that all candidates considered themselves as pro-Russian. Unsurprisingly, the election was won by Irina Vlah, the most pro-Russian candidate from the communist party. Moscow supported her and also promised to increase Gagauz exported products to the Russian market (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 2015; cited in Tudoroiu, 2016, 387). Domestically, she presented herself as a continuator of Formuzal’s policies and externally, as a pro-Russian politician. She openly declared “I’m a pro-Russian politician and I represent the interests of the Gagauz people who are mainly pro-Russian. But I will make efforts to have a constructive relationship with the Moldovan authorities” (cited in Tudoroiu, 2016, 387).

To sum up, besides the separatist region of Transnistria, Moldova has another autonomous region with a pro-Russian Governor and a significant Russian minority. This creates further leverage for Moscow to have an influence on the country’s political

⁵⁷ Ibid.

developments. Georgia also has one more autonomous region in its territory – the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, but, since 2004, Georgia’s central government has gained absolute control over the region.⁵⁸ Different from Gagauzia this region is not described as “problematic” – there is no special Russian sentiment or special ties to Moscow, and there is no significant number of Russian minorities (2.4%)⁵⁹ which could be used by Moscow as leverage.

The issue of autonomous regions is closely connected to the issue of minorities. The minority issue presents another lever for Russia, by emphasizing its protector role of Russian minorities living abroad, mainly in neighboring countries. In this respect, Russia has a broad understanding of Russian citizenship, which includes ethnic Russian, Russian-speaking minorities, or Russian-passport owners, whose number is rapidly increasing intentionally. According to Akçakoca, Vanhauwaert, Whitman and Wolff, such kind of tool helps Moscow “to insist on its special role vis-à-vis other ex-Soviet states, especially those engulfed in separatist conflicts” (2009: 25). As reported by Bucataru (2015) “Russia is using its fully linguistic proximity and the compatriots’ policy in order to attract, influence, and destabilize large sections of Moldovan regions”(Bucataru, 2015:151)

It seems that Russia has an ingredient for “Protection of Russian citizens” in Moldova, as Moscow has "responsibility" for Russian citizens living abroad. Such an argument was also used by Russia to interfere in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, although, noteworthy, Georgia did not have a significant ethnic Russian minority within its territory. Russian however artificially created it, with the help of its “passportization” mechanism. Russia offered citizenship to the Georgian population in order to create a basis for a further problem of "protection" of its citizens in the so-called "Near Abroad".

⁵⁸ International Crisis Group, Europe Briefing, Saakashvili’s Ajara Success: Repeatable elsewhere in Georgia? 18 august 2004, Retrieved from <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/untc/unpan018787.pdf> (last accessed: 20.05.2017)

⁵⁹ Adjara.gov.ge, აჭარის ავტონომიური რესპუბლიკის ეთნიკური შემადგენლობა (2002 წლის აღწერის შედეგების მიხედვით)/Ethnic composition of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara (2002 census) Demographic Statistic, pp. 8, რუსი/Russian, Retrieved from <http://adjara.gov.ge/uploads/Docs/518f3b3a2f6d4b06b316c4f7fb36.pdf> (last accessed: 21.05.2017)

The same can be said in the Crimea case: Kremlin portrays the annexation of Crimea as a “national imperative to safeguard the rights of Russian speakers beyond Russia’s borders” (Orttung and Walker, 2015).

5.2.3. Role of Pro-Russian authorities

With different leverages, Russia maintains influence on some post-soviet states and often defines their political direction. Different from Georgia, Moscow had/has close relations with Moldovan authorities. Still at the beginning of the 2000s, while the Georgia-Russia relation was strained because of the Rose Revolution, when a pro-Western government came into power, in Moldova a non-reformed Communist Party gained power and managed to keep it for eight years, until 2009. Right after the election success of the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM), the country’s relation with the Russian federation improved remarkably. The importance of the Kremlin for the newly elected party was clearly apparent in the –then- president’s (Vladimir Voronin, president of Moldova from 2001 until 2009) first external visit, which was of course to Moscow (Vahl and Emerson, 2004: 22).

During the Communist Party rule, the Kremlin, for his part, was actively involved in Moldova’s affairs, with close links to Pro-Russian authorities, since Moscow intended to regain control over Post-Soviet sphere and one of its successors – Moldova. Russia’s positive attitude towards Moldova’s Communist Party and its desire to keep them longer in power was evidently expressed during the 2009 election campaign, when the Kremlin openly supported Voronin’s Communist party. Moscow was generously “offering Moldova a loan up to 500 million USD the month before the July 2009 elections” (O’Neil 2009; cited in Crandall, 2012: 8). Despite Russia’s effort to boost the Communist party’s result, the election brought a new pro-Western government (Crandall, 2012: 8). After this, in order to punish the country for its new course, Russia used its well-known leverage discussed above - temporarily restricted import of Moldovan wine and mineral water.

Under the rule of the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM), till 2009, public support for EU integration was very limited - only 6%. In the parliamentary election of 2009 the Communist Party won 49.48% of the votes, whereas other votes were distributed to the following parties: the Liberal Party with 13.14% of the votes, the Liberal Democratic Party with 12.43%, and the Alliance “Moldova Noastră” with 9.77% (European Parliament Report on Parliamentary election in Republic of Moldova, 2009: 6). These parties agreed to create a governing coalition - Alliance for European Integration (AEI) and pushed the Communist party into opposition. Thus, a coalition of three pro-EU parties formed a 101-seat working majority in the parliament and replaced the Communist party, which had dominated since the regained independence in 1991.

Only after the 2009 election in Moldova, the population started to believe that European membership would be good for the development of the country. In parallel, European leaders increased their relation with the Moldovan authorities. The European Union also provided financial support with \$670 million. This assistance was useful for the country’s progress, “the country conducted full and on-time reforms of its judiciary, law enforcement, borders security system, and infrastructure, prompting some impressed EU officials to speak of a Moldovan success story.”⁶⁰ If during the Communist Party rule public support to European integration was 6%, by 2009, it increased to 55%, while 30% of Moldovans still favored closer ties to Russia (Soloviev and Khvostunova, 2014: 5).

Therefore, the domestic situation in Georgia and Moldova was different in the 2000s. Moldova was ruled by the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) since 2001 and had a good relationship with Russia, which in turn, was actively involved in Moldova’s affairs and had an influence on it. In Georgia since the 2003 revolution a pro-western president, Mikheil Saakashvili and his party “United

⁶⁰Foreign Policy, Moscow’s Next Victim Moldova could be the Kremlin's next target. But Europe isn't ready to come to the rescue, 3 September 2014, Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/03/moscows-next-victim/> (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

National Movement” came into power and the Russia-Georgia relation deteriorated seriously.

When considering the current internal situation in Moldova and Georgia with respect to parliamentary composition and the head of state, a noticeable difference is observed as well. The Moldova parliamentary election in 2014 has shown that pro-EU parties have a slight lead over those who are in favor of closer ties with Russia; the three pro-Western parties have 44%, while the opposition has 39%.⁶¹ The Georgian parliamentary election in 2016 has brought two major pro-western parties “Georgian Dream” and “United National Movement” into power with around 49% and 27% votes, respectively, and pro-Russian party “Alliance of Patriots of Georgia” (first time since the Rose Revolution) with 5% and only 6 seats (out of 150) in the parliament.

In addition, as already reported, in 2016, the Moldova presidential election was won by socialist leader Igor Dodon, (who served as minister of economy in the communist government in 2006-2009), after a campaign aimed at pursuing closer ties with Russia rather than with the EU. Followed by the election, the Prime Minister of Moldova, Pavel Filip, stated that the government and new president would need to work together, but added that Moldova's path towards greater EU integration "cannot be reversed"⁶². Still, some confrontation has emerged between parliament and president regarding the country's path and nowadays Moldova is in an ambivalent situation. Whereas, when it comes to Georgia, since 2013 the country is headed by a pro-western president - Giorgi Margvelashvili.

⁶¹BBC, Moldova election: Pro-EU parties edge pro-Russian rivals, 1 December, 2014, Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30265985> (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

⁶² Aljazeera, Igor Dodon wins Moldova Presidential election, 14 November, 2016, Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/11/igor-dodon-wins-moldova-presidential-election-161114195900115.html> (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

5.3 Context factors

5.3.1 The role of the EU and NATO

The usage of soft levers by Russia in relation to Georgia and Moldova is particularly visible and active within the context of strengthening Georgia's and Moldova's ties, partnership and closer integration/cooperation with the Western structures, namely the EU and NATO. Russia activates those levers in order to prevent countries' Western aspirations. For instance, as reported by Shevchuk the main reason for the escalation of the South Ossetia Conflict is connected with "ideological aspects of the future orientation of the Georgian state" (Shevchuk, 2014: 64), therefore, the major factor that caused the 2008 August war is considered to be Georgia's pro-Western orientation and "Russia's interests to undermine the penetration of other powers in the South Caucasus" (ibidem). Blank also discuss the five-day war in a broad scope – as a confrontation between the White House and Brussels on the one hand and the Kremlin on the other hand, since Georgia's major goal was and still remains a further integration into NATO and the EU, and eventually membership, which irritates Russia (Blank, 2008: 26). In this section particular attention is paid to the role and involvement of the EU and NATO in Georgia as well as Moldova, and the degree of support for the EU and NATO in these countries.

The role of and relations with the EU

The relationship between the EU and Moldova and the EU and Georgia, has been particularly intensified since 2008, when the EU developed a new cooperation framework – the Eastern Partnership, which provided the two countries with an opportunity for deeper cooperation and integration in the framework of AA, including the introduction of DCFTA as well as the establishment of the visa-free regime for traveling to the Schengen area. It is worth noting that the Moldovan DCFTA is also directed to the Transnistria region, whereas it is not in case of Georgia's separatist regions, since they have not fulfilled major requirements. In both cases of Moldova and

Georgia, EU supports peaceful resolution of their ‘frozen conflicts’ and –as described in chapter 2 and 4– provides a Monitoring Mission (EUMM), special representatives in Georgia and plays an observer role in “5+2” format in Moldova for settling the Transnistria conflict. Also the EU openly supports both countries’ sovereignty and territorial integrity and its member states follow a non-recognition policy towards the breakaway regions.⁶³

To start with the role of the EU, the relation of Georgia with the EU dates back to the 1990s although it has been intensified since the “Rose Revolution”. In addition to the monitoring and peacekeeping frameworks of relations mentioned above, the EU also carries out regional cooperation with Georgia on the basis of the “Black Sea Synergy” (Mikhelidze, 2009: 39). Nowadays, the EU is a key player in Georgia’s foreign policy strategy and the country aspires to EU integration. It worth noting that the EU is the largest trade partner of Georgia (32.6%)⁶⁴; already one year after enactment of the DCFTA exports of Georgian goods to the EU market increased by 15%) (Factsheet EU-Georgia relations, 2016).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the gaining of independence, Georgia identified itself as a European state and followed a quest for re-Europeanization, as the country “claims European identity” (Kakachia, 2013: 46) and seeks to return back to the place it has always belonged to. Westward orientation and integration in western structures have been “a point of consensus for all political parties of any significance in Georgia” (Nodia, 2013: 99) and openly pro-Russian parties have not been receiving strong popular support. As it is explained by Michael H. Cecire “foreign policy under Georgia [...] shift [...] from a largely neutral, multi-vectored outlook to one that more fully embraced a Euro-Atlantic future for Georgia” (Cecire, 2013: 67) and contrary to the general understanding even Shevardnadze, former Soviet Union foreign minister, “gradually oriented Georgia’s foreign policy in an explicitly

⁶³ European Council, Council of the EU, EU relations with Georgia, 28 March 2017, Retrieved from <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/georgia/> (last accessed: 10.05.2017)
EU relations with the Republic of Moldova, 2 August, 2016, Retrieved from <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/moldova/> (last accessed: 10.05.2017)

⁶⁴ European Commission, Trade, Georgia, 22 February 2017, Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/georgia/> (last accessed: 19.05.2017)

pro-Western direction” (ibidem). As Kornely Kakachia explains it was since the “Rose Revolution” that “European integration acquired new momentum as Georgia loudly reclaimed its European identity and established EU and NATO membership as its goals” (Kakachia, 2013: 47) and since then that policy orientation has remained unchanged. This aspiration is officially stated in the National Security Concepts of Georgia (ibidem). As “balancing Russian power and influence” has become the main foreign policy objective of the country (already since 1994), strengthening its ties with the Western structures, in particular with the NATO, was seen a significant element for “enhancing the country’s national security” (Kakachia, 2013: 42). Russo-Georgian relations have deteriorated from 2004, when due to some “unilateral Georgian steps, not least the effort to establish customs control” (MacFarlane, 2013: 90) in relation to South Ossetia, a fighting broke out between Georgian, Ossetian and Russian forces in summer (ibidem). This was followed by the ban of exported products from Georgia to Russia in 2006 and reached its peak in 2008, which was overgrown into the five day August war. As Sergi Kapanadze describes Georgian government’s response to Russia’s invasion of the country were: ban of the Russian TV channels in 2008; decline in export numbers from Georgia to Russia and “a war of words” between Tbilisi and Kremlin; soon “relations between the two countries dropped to non-existent” (Kapanadze, 2015: 162). In comparison to the UNM government, the new Georgian Dream government took a more pragmatic stance of policy towards Russia and restored the channel of communication with Moscow (by appointing Special Representative of the Prime Minister on relations with Russia⁶⁵) (Kapanadze, 2015: 163).

As for the relations with Moldova, similarly to Georgia, by signing the AA in 2014, Moldova economically and politically strengthened its ties with the EU and now

⁶⁵ Since 2008 August war and cut of the diplomatic relation between Georgia and Russia, “Karasini-Abashidze” format of the dialogue between Georgia and Russia, Georgian Prime Minister's special representative on relations with Russia-Zurab Abashidze and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin can be considered as one of the first of its kind- an official attempt to held meeting and negotiations on trade, economy and humanitarian issues. This format was established in November, 2012, when a new Georgian Dream government came into power.

Civil Georgia, PM Appoints Special Envoy for Relations with Russia, 1 November 2012, Retrieved from <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25407> (last accessed: 15.05.2017)

Georgian, Russian Diplomats Meet in Switzerland, 15 December 2012, Retrieved from <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25550> (last accessed: 15.05.2017)

the EU is the major trade partner for Moldova with about 63% of its exports being directed to the EU.⁶⁶ As in case of Georgia, EU-Moldovan relations have started since the early 1990s, when the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was concluded in 1994. European integration became even more attractive during the presidency of Petru Luschinschi, when in 1996, for the first time, the idea of ultimate membership was officially put on the agenda. Already in two years, Moldova formulated EU accession as a central object of country's foreign policy strategy. Nevertheless, an official statement on "European choice" was not backed up with practical steps. Consequently, a parliamentary election in 2001 ended with the victory of Communist Party, which promoted "Slavic choice" and aimed at further integration with the members of CIS, as well as membership in the Russian-Belarus Union. Whereas European integration was limitedly discussed in their agenda, once as party leader and soon after as –then-president Vladimir Voronin noted that Moldova's aspiration towards EU membership was a "crazy undertaking" and a "delirious idea" (INFOTAG, 2000; cited in Vahl and Emerson, 2004: 22).

For instance, in 2005, parallel to Moldova's indication for seeking closer ties with the West instead of with the CIS organization, the Kremlin strengthened its support for break-away region of Transnistria and the following year Moscow cut natural gas to Moldova, and banned Moldovan wine and agricultural products. Such kind of pressure had their "intended effect". In 2006, the then president of Moldova, Vladimir Voronin, labeled the development of the Russian-led regional organization of Commonwealth of Independent States as "loss of vigor" with an "amorphous condition" but he still declared that Moldova would not leave it, because it would be "a colossal mistake if we abandoned the huge markets of the CIS countries" (cited in Kramer, 2008: 8). In return, Russia gradually lifted its ban on Moldovan exported goods and simultaneously, encouraged Igor Smirnov (then "president" of Transnistria) to raise the issue of Transnistria's independence (ibidem). Thus, behind these steps were hidden purely political reasons to maintain Moldova in the Russian orbit, "sphere of influence".

⁶⁶ European Commission, Trade, Moldova (2017) Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/moldova/> (last accessed: 19.05.2017)

Later, in 2008, after the August War, the then president of the Russian Federation Dmitri Medvedev had a meeting with Voronin in Sochi, where he underlined that “the events in South Ossetia show how dangerous the potential for volatility can be in certain so-called frozen conflicts” (cited in Kramer, 2008: 8). The five-day war should be perceived as “a very serious warning, a warning to everyone” (ibidem). In response, Voronin noted that the Moldovan authority was “paying close attention to the events” in Georgia and would be “taking full account of what has happened in this other place” (ibidem). Voronin promised that he would “not allow such things to occur in [their] own country” and would “exercise restraint and forestall any aggravation of the situation” in Transnistria (cited in Kramer, 2008: 9).

Support for the EU in Georgia and Moldova

To figure out the recent preferences and their stability, regarding the foreign course of Moldova and Georgia, the U.S. National Democratic Institute’s (NDI) commissioned the latest public opinion survey, released in 2015 (Moldova) and 2016 (Georgia), which will be analyzed here. This is an authoritative survey, which shows respondents’ attitudes towards a broad range of issues, among them foreign policy. According to the NDI’s research in Moldova (2015), despite the progress with the EU, regarding the Association Agreement, Moldova’s population is more favorable towards the Eurasian Customs Union than towards the EU. Being asked to choose only one option between support for the EU or for the EACU, Moldovans preferring European integration numbered only 40%, whereas 44% was in favor of Eurasian integration (NDI, 2015).⁶⁷

When it comes to Georgia, a significant difference was established in terms of public support for European integration compared to Moldova. Based on the same institute’s (NDI) survey in 2016, 77% of Georgians approved of Georgian

⁶⁷ NDI (2015), Public Perceptions of Politics and Government, Findings from Recent Survey Research in Moldova, pp.45, Retrieved from <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDIMoldovaSurveyNov2015.pdf> (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

Government's stated goal to join the EU, while 14% of voters disapproved. On the question: which of the following statement do you agree with? 61% voted for "Georgia should join the European Union (EU) established by western European countries" and 20% favored "Georgia should join the Eurasian Union, established by the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Kazakhstan" (NDI, 2016).⁶⁸ However, Moscow still continues to undermine Georgian territorial integrity by erecting barbed wire barricades in South Ossetia ('creeping occupation'). According to Shevchuk, "Russia's aim has been and further remains to suppress the Western influence and make sure that Georgia will not set an example for other countries in the region" (Shevchuk, 2014: 62).

To conclude, Moldovan's willingness to the EU aspiration is relatively low compared to Georgians and very fragile, different from Georgia's quite stable goal for Euro-Atlantic integration, since 2003 Rose Revolution. In addition, in Chisinau political uncertainty has increased since the 2016 presidential election and a new pro-Russian president, who openly declared a desire to cancel the AA and instead further integrate into Eurasian Economic Union.

The role of and relations with NATO

Georgia-NATO relations date back to 1992, when Georgia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and two years later the Partnership for Peace (PfP). Cooperation has been strengthened and deepened since the 2003 Rose Revolution and reached the tangible result in 2008 at the Bucharest Summit where it was declared that Georgia would become a NATO member. Nowadays, Georgia aspires to final integration into the alliance and is considered as one of the largest contributors to the NATO's operations in Afghanistan, Kosovo and in the Mediterranean. The political dimension of relation is discussed on the basis of the NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) framework. Also the Wales and Warsaw summits provide Georgia with a substantial package to increase defence of the country (NATO exercises and a new

⁶⁸ NDI (2016), Public attitudes in Georgia, Results of a March 2016 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia, Retrieved from https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_vf.pdf (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

military training centre in Georgia); NATO in return, supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and its Euro-Atlantic aspiration.⁶⁹

Likewise, Moldova-NATO relations started from 1992, when the country joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and later in 1994 the PfP programme. Moldova works alongside NATO allies and partner countries in a wide range of areas, and also contributes to the NATO-led operation in Kosovo.⁷⁰ But Moldova has never had registered any interest in NATO membership. As Moldova is constitutionally neutral, NATO membership is not on the agenda of any major political group in Moldova, and at this point there is no significant public support of Moldovans for NATO membership either.

Many discuss Georgia's NATO aspiration and Bucharest Summit as one of the causal factors of eruption the five-day war in 2008. As reported by Kramer (2008), after the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008, Russian foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared, "Russia will do everything it can to prevent the admission of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO" (cited in Kramer, 2008: 9). Still in the 1990s, when NATO enlargement began, the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation warned that Russia's "vital interests would be endangered" if the process ever extended to CIS countries. According to Kramer, this sentiment became even stronger under Putin's power and got a new edge in 2006-2008 when for the first time, Georgia and then Ukraine began actively pushing for membership into the Western alliance. As Kramer explains "Russia will continue to oppose their efforts to join NATO and will attempt to deter other countries from even contemplating such a step" (2008: 9).

Russian high ranking officials, like foreign minister Lavrov warned that NATO expansion into the former-Soviet space would not be tolerated (Kramer, 2008: 19). Russia, obviously tries to hamper Georgia's closer ties and integration in Western structures, in particular military structures like NATO Russian. Despite not recognizing

⁶⁹ NATO, Relations with Georgia, 30 March 2017, Retrieved from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm?selectedLocale=en (last accessed: 7.07.2017)

⁷⁰ NATO, Relations with the Republic of Moldova, 30 March 2017, Retrieved from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49727.htm (last accessed 7.05.2017)

its direct role and participation in conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it is clear that Russia hinders any progress on these conflicts resolution, and makes steps towards more distancing them from Georgia. According to Erdmann, this is “obviously part of Russia’s strategy to obstruct progress on these conflicts in order to forestall Georgia’s membership in NATO lest it strengthen Tbilisi’s position in these conflicts” (Erdmann, 2007; cited in Blank, 2008: 29).

The statement in the Declaration of 2008 Bucharest Summit about Ukraine and Georgia that they “will become members of NATO”⁷¹ irritated Russia. After that “the Kremlin increased its cooperation with the two separatist territories and unilaterally bolstered the number of troops deployed in Abkhazia” (German, 2012: 1653). The Georgian government’s effort to restore control over South Ossetia in August 2008 generated a response from Russia in form of launching military operation, justified by Russia’s desire to protect its citizens in the region, overgrown into the five-day War (ibidem).

Also as for Moldova, Moscow has been actively trying to hamper its aspiration and leave the country outside the NATO’s sphere of influence (Akçakoca et.al, 2009: 27). And this is why Russia has raised the issues of Moldova’s relations with NATO, mainly the establishment of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), along with its role and participation in GUAM and in OSCE during the negotiations over the Transnistrian conflict. Moscow more or less achieved its aim, since, unlike Georgia, Moldova is not interested in NATO membership and Moscow does not need much effort to distance Moldova from the Alliance.

Support for the NATO in Georgia and Moldova

According to NDI’s public opinion survey in 2014, by a 2:1 margin (39%-against; 18% - for), Moldovans oppose a NATO aspiration. After a year (2015) the

⁷¹ NATO, Bucharest Summit Declaration, 3 April 2008, Retrieved from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_8443.htm (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

supporting for NATO even decreased by 2% (16% - for; 39%- against) (NDI, 2015).⁷² Whereas for Georgia, in polls conducted in 2016, 68% of Georgians approved of the Georgian government's stated goal to join NATO (NDI, 2016).⁷³

In conclusion, different from Georgia, for Moldova membership of NATO was/is not a preference. This is due to the influence Russia has had over the Moldovan authorities for many years and the threat of Moscow's to use its various levers.

5.3.2 Geo-graphical factors

Unlike Georgia, Moldova has a specific relation with **Romania**, one of the EU member states. This relationship is explained by historical ties and affiliations, as Moldova was part of Romania before the Second World War. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, unification of Romania and Moldova was widely discussed; such rhetoric still remains, especially among Romanian authorities. However, in 2002, the new Communist president of Moldova, Vladimir Voronin, announced that he was ending Romania's "colonial attitude" towards Moldova by seeking a closer relationship with Moscow" (Nygren, 2008: 85).

Romania remains interested in Moldovan affairs and its progress towards European integration. One of the active supporters of Moldova's European aspiration was Romanian president Traian Băsescu, who is known for his very direct statements on Moldova. He has openly noted several times that Romania will do everything to promote Moldova's accession to the European Union. In addition Băsescu has repeatedly declared his particular desire to restore a historical unity of Moldova and Romania ("Bigger Romania"). Following the annexation of Crimea, the –then–

⁷² NDI (2015), Public Perceptions of Politics and Government, Findings from Recent Survey Research in Moldova, pp.44, Retrieved from <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDIMoldovaSurveyNov2015.pdf> (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

⁷³ NDI, Public attitudes in Georgia, Results of a March 2016 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia, Retrieved from https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_vf.pdf (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

Romanian president also warned the international community that Moldova was in danger. The Romanian former president told the press that Kyiv and Chisinau were a “priority for Vladimir Putin who wants to rebuild the Soviet Union[...] if you look at the map, you will see this chain of frozen conflicts” around the Black Sea “that can be set off at any time.”⁷⁴

The existence of Romania in Moldova’s political life makes for a different picture compared to Georgia and this point is worth to mention, since there is some rhetoric among Romanians that if from the Russian side there will be any kind of military pressure on Moldova, Romania will protect it. This is interesting considering that Romania is a member of NATO. Although another side of this story is that Romanians will not be so grateful with reunification with Moldova, since Moldova is the poorest country in Europe (according to World Bank, 2017)⁷⁵ and still has a serious problem of corruption and oligarchic interest. According to the NDI Survey in 2015, corruption is the top issue facing the country (NDI, 2015),⁷⁶ whereas Romania has its own problems too.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that Moldova and Georgia has different **geographical locations**. Moldova is located about 100 km from Romania, and therefore very close to the border of EU (Popescu, 2005: 5). Whereas Georgia’s location is significantly tricky; since, different from Moldova, Georgia has a direct border with Russia, on the north, and with Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan, on the south. However, this geographical factor could be countered by the argument that Russia has already had military bases near the Moldovan border, in the Eastern side of the Black Sea and Crimea. Moreover, as already discussed, Moscow has military bases within Moldovan

⁷⁴ The Australian, Romania’s president says Moldova next in ‘Soviet’ expansion, 18 March 2014, Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/romania-s-president-says-moldova-next-in-soviet-expansion/news-story/b3c6572aedd474a6937e96b4044c3281?nk=ce849e33796eb52f6dea30dd5cc36d17-1494091355> (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

⁷⁵ The World Bank, Moldova overview, 20 April 2017, Retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/moldova/overview> (last accessed: 7.05.2017)

⁷⁶ NDI (2015), Public Perceptions of Politics and Government, Findings from Recent Survey Research in Moldova, pp.9, Retrieved from <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDIMoldovaSurveyNov2015.pdf> (last accessed: 6.05.2017)

territory, in two parts of the Transnistria region: Tiraspol and the Bender Fortress in total around 1.000 -1.500 troops.

5.3.3 The role of the crises in Ukraine

According to Rostoks and Podjomkina (2015) Russia's military intervention in Eastern Ukraine is "a reflection of the limits of the soft power [Moscow] possesses and a failure of its repeated attempts to position itself as an attractive partner and model of economic development for its neighbours" (Rostoks and Podjomkina, 2015: 245). The Ukrainian crises (annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas) had an influence on the political life of Moldova and Georgia as well, firstly, because of the geographical proximity of the county; secondly, because of the similarities of political developments in the three countries (Associated EaP) and thirdly, because the main actor in Ukrainian case was again the Russian Federation, therefore there was a fear of "spill over" effect on the Moldovan and Georgian 'frozen conflicts'.

The reaction on the Ukrainian crisis was different in Moldova and Georgia. As Transnistria directly borders with Ukraine, Moldova faced "considerable destabilisation risks" (SWP, 2016: 5). At first Moldova condemned Russia's action in Crimea, but soon after "sought to return to calm dialogue with Moscow" (Büscher, 2016: 29). In the case of Georgia, the government strengthened steps toward closer aspiration with NATO and the EU in the light of the fears that Russia would accelerate the 'creeping annexation' of Abkhazia and South Ossetia" (SWP, 2016: 5). Georgia has expressed solidarity to Ukraine, since Russia's aggression against Ukraine was seen as a continuation of Moscow's policy in the Georgian separatist conflicts. Georgia, also "joined the EU sanctions against the annexation of Crimea, but none of the further-reaching financial and sectoral economic sanctions" (Fischer, 2016: 49-50).

The Ukrainian crisis has even more polarized Moldova's political orientation "since then Moldova has been divided roughly equally between supporters of integration in the EU and those who would prefer to see their country entering the

Eurasian Economic Union” (Büscher, 2016: 31). Also a public survey (from 2014) proves the ambivalent stance of Moldovan people towards Ukrainian developments: “43% feared that the crisis there would spread to Moldova, while 46% saw no particular risks. 40% approved of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, while 43% rejected it” (ibidem). According to Bucataru (2015), what happened in Ukraine had influence on the result of the Moldovan parliamentary election; “if four years ago the elections were marked by the colour revolutions” (2015: 153), the 2014 election gave a significant mandate to Pro-Russian parties (e.g. Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM)). Bucataru discusses the 2014 election as a confirmation that “the Moldovan population is divided in two and there is no common understanding of the national idea of European integration” (Bucataru, 2015: 154)

In addition, after the war in Ukraine broke out, Kiev and Chişinău concluded two bilateral agreements on border security and transparency issue with the support and mediation of the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) (Büscher, 2016: 37). This is due to the fact that “Transnistria’s de facto Moscow-controlled military potential represents a real threat to Ukraine; in view of its proximity to Odessa” (ibidem). As already mentioned earlier, in of the development in Ukraine, the “5+2” negotiation format faced serious challenges towards a constructive dialogue, as two mediators (Russia and Ukraine) now have a conflict themselves.

In parallel with Russia’s annexation of Crimea Transnistria hoped that the Kremlin would integrate them in its federation (Büscher, 2016: 36), that is why they issued a decree asking for full annexation. Followed by the Ukrainian crises, some development were observed in Russia- Abkhazia and Russia-South Ossetia relationships as well (2014, 2015 treaties). In addition, unlike their patron states, all of three de facto states (Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria) openly supported Russia’s action in Ukraine. In 2014 South Ossetia recognized the Donetsk and Luhansk “People’s Republics” and established “diplomatic relations” (Fischer, 2016: 54).

5.4. Summary

Moscow extends different methods for coercion of Post-Soviet republics, which are interested in western aspiration. Russia holds and actively uses different types of leverage (soft and hard) in order to manipulate western oriented countries to act in accordance with Kremlin's wishes. According to Kapanadze (2015) Russia does not recognize its neighbours' western aspiration, clear examples of this are the August war (after NATO Bucharest summit) and the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas (after the 2014 Euromaidan Revolution). For this reason the three associated EaP states face a "the strategic dilemma"[...] "Should these countries continue their pro-Western paths at all costs, or should they pause and embrace Russia's soft power?" (Kapanadze, 2015: 163). In the case of Moldova, the analysis shows that the country is vulnerable to Russia's soft leverage, such as economic and energy restrictions, the possibility of destabilising other regions populated by minorities, and the use of close ties and influence on the Moldovan political leadership. All of these and other tools in Moscow's hand have worked sufficiently to coerce Moldova to act in Kremlin's line; hence there was not necessity for Russia to apply "hard" militarized leverage activation. There was and is no need for 'heating-up' the Transnistria conflict, since the 'frozen conflict' and the use of soft leverage is powerful enough for Moscow. According to Popescu, Russia's "close links to Transnistria and keeping troops in the region allows Russia to exert leverage over Moldova" (Popescu, 2005: 24), but the most severe form of this lever has not been activated yet, unlike Georgia.

Russia was extremely irritated and feared with the "Color Revolutions"⁷⁷ emerged in the beginning of 21st century, since they were perceived as a threat to Russia's influence over the region. Correspondingly Moscow's pressure on Georgia and Ukraine increased drastically. It was especially harsh in respond to Georgia's declared object to leave CIS and join NATO, in 2006-2007 Russian applied several steps like: banning Georgian exports, manipulating with energy prices, increasing influence on media; supporting secessionist etc. (Kramer, 2008: 6-7). However, Georgia did not

⁷⁷ Indicates "Rose Revolution" in Georgia in 2003 and "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine in 2004.

change its foreign policy preference and consequentially, was faced with Russia's toughest leverage activation – 'de-freezing' of the separatist conflict, which returned into full-fledged war. In the Georgian case, when Russia's soft leverage over the country did not work, since Georgia's western path remained irreversible, Russia applied hard leverage-activation, turning 'frozen conflicts' into active military confrontation.

Different from Georgia, Moldova has not had such an active phase of its separatist conflict, which is explained by a combination of other soft leverages and manipulation tools which Moscow owns and actively uses to put pressure on Moldova's policy. Energy dependence is an important lever, as Moldova is for almost 100% dependent on Russian gas supply (Moscow has repeatedly used this fact for manipulation – cutting and threatening to cut supply to Moldova in winter). The importance of Russian trade market for Moldovan wine and agricultural products is another lever, as well as Russia's job market for Moldovan migrants and therefore significant remittances (these leverages were used several time as well by embargo on Moldovan wine and goods, restriction on Moldovan migrants). Besides the Transnistria region, Moscow also tries to pay close attention to Gagauzia autonomous region, which is considered as pro-Russian region, as confirmed by the 2014 Referendum. In addition Russia has kept close engagement to Moldovan leadership over time (especially 2001-2009 PCRM ruling period) and currently after the 2016 presidential election, which brought into power the Pro-Russian Socialist candidate Igor Dodon. This all shows that soft leverage has worked sufficiently and hence activation of the stronger type of leverage, 'heating' of the 'frozen conflict', was not necessary.

By contrast, Moscow's efforts of using soft leverage on Georgia, was unsuccessful, consequentially Moscow applies punitive hard leverage and the Georgian 'frozen conflicts' escalated in warfare in August 2008, which led to the occupation of Georgia's territory. Russia used the 'frozen conflicts' and their escalation threat as a tool to fulfill its broader intention. Shevchuk argues that with this war Moscow completed the following goals: to have the military bases in the region; to reduce Western influence on the region and avert Georgia's aspiration to the NATO; to be a

lesson learned to neighbors (Shevchuk, 2014: 62). However, Georgia still firmly maintains a pro-Western path.

To finalize this chapter, *table 3* (page 88) lists the most important differences between the Moldovan and Georgian case.

Table: 3 Explanatory factors

FACTORS	Energy (Import of Russian natural gas)	Economy/ Trade (Export to Russian market)	Other Autonomous Regions	Political Ties to Russia (2000s)	Support for EU (NDI Public Poll in %)	Support for Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (NDI)	Support for NATO (NDI)
COUNTRY							
Georgia	10% fee for transporti ng (2016)	6.6% (2015) ⁷⁸	Adjara - Not problematic	Very limited during the rule of United National Movement (UNM) 2003-2012 NO diplomatic relation since 2008	61% (2016)	20% (2016)	68% (2016)
Moldova	99,88% (2016)	11% (2015) ⁷⁹	Gagauzia (pro-Russian sentiment)	Close during the rule of Communist Party (PCRM) 2001-2009 Pro-Russian president since 2016	40% (2015)	44% (2015)	16% (2015)

Source: Author, created based on the sources discussed in the text.

⁷⁸ OEC, Where does Georgia export to? (2015), Retrieved from:
<http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/geo/#Exports> (last accessed: 21.05.2017)

⁷⁹ OEC, Where does Moldova export to? (2015), Retrieved from:
http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/mda/show/all/2015/ (last accessed: 21.05.2017)

6. Conclusion

This thesis analyzed the dynamics of ‘frozen conflicts’ in two Associated Eastern Partnership countries, Georgia and Moldova, from the early 1990s when the conflicts erupted, till early 2017. The purpose of this work was to give a more up-to-date understanding of the Transnistrian, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian conflicts and simultaneously explore the similarities and differences between them, based on an analytical framework of characteristics of ‘frozen conflicts’. The thesis also provided an explanation of such differences by a combination of explanatory factors. Embedded case study was used as a research method, through two levels of analysis (country level and conflict level), since three conflicts were studied in two countries (two Georgian conflicts and one Moldovan conflict).

The conflicts of Moldova and Georgia have many things in common as ‘frozen conflicts’, such as unacceptable peace resolution; emergence of de facto states; an unstable situation in the conflict zone by political, economic or legal status; and active external involvement by a protector state, in this case the Russian Federation. Some differences were observed as well. For instance the recognition of the Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria regions as de facto states is different, as the Georgian separatist regions gained four UN member states’ recognition after 2008, among them Russia, whereas Transnistria is not recognized by any UN member state, including Russia. Also, the number of Russian military contingents and the kind of military involvement in the conflict regions is quite different (Georgia-7.000; Moldova-1.500; ‘creeping annexation’ by Russian military in Georgia). Further differences were observed regarding the missions, parties and mediators in the negotiation processes, as well as regarding the separatist regions’ attitude towards further integration into the Russian Federation. However, the major dissimilarity between the conflicts is connected with the escalation and ‘heating-up’ possibilities. Although the Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts originate from the same period (right after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the regaining of independence by Moldova and Georgia) and have shown a more or less ‘frozen’ condition for more than two decades, their development in the end of the 2000s was different. The conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia were

‘heated-up’ in 2008, whereas Transnistria has never had such an active phase of hostility.

To explain the reasons behind the relatively stable ‘frozen’ nature of the Moldovan conflict, some major factors were discussed, with a focus on the role of the protector state/Russia and the countries’ vulnerability towards Russian leverage. To that end the thesis introduced the terms soft and hard leverage. The central claim that underlies the thesis is that as long as -from the perspective of the external state- soft leverage is effective, there is no need to resort to hard leverage, and the conflict remains ‘frozen’. In the thesis, Russia’s soft leverage is understood as a combination of the following levers: a. energy and economic dependence; b. minority issues and a threat to de-stabilise other regions in the parent country, and c. role of pro-Russian authorities. Hard leverage refers to militarized levers, such as military hostilities, including ‘creeping occupation’, which give rise to escalation of ‘frozen conflicts’.

Comparison of Georgia and Moldova in terms of energy and economic dependence on Russia, manipulation of pro-Russian autonomous regions, and Moscow’s close ties to central leadership in the countries involved, showed that Russia had and still has significant soft leverage and therefore influence over Moldova’s internal and external political path and decisions, different from Georgia. This (difference in) leverage was then further discussed within its wider context, by looking at the role of the EU and NATO, at geo-graphical aspects, and at the role of the recent crises in Ukraine.

Because of the limitations of a thesis like this, as was explained in the introduction, this thesis did not include (as conflict cases) the Ukrainian conflicts (annexation of Crimea, war in the Donbass region). Further research into these cases (in comparison to the Moldovan and Georgian cases) would be interesting to further develop the framework for analysis of ‘(frozen) conflicts’, by looking at their characteristics and at the reasons why conflicts freeze and stay frozen, or show active phases of hostilities, using the idea of soft and hard leverage of the external actor over the country involved.

A second avenue for further research would be to compare cases where there is a strong role for a protector state (as in the conflicts in the post-soviet space) with conflicts that are largely bilateral by nature, such as the Kashmir conflict (between India and Pakistan), or the conflict between North and South Korea, to see what determines the ‘frozen’ nature of conflicts in these cases.

7. Bibliography

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Appendix 1: Georgia Map



Source: Eurasian Geopolitics, South Caucasus Maps: Georgia Political Map;

Retrieved from: <https://eurasiangeopolitics.com/south-caucasus-maps/> (last accessed: 14.05.2017)

Appendix 2: Moldova Map



Source: Eurasian Geopolitics, Moldova Maps: Transnistria and the security zone, Retrieved from: <https://eurasiangeopolitics.com/moldova-maps/> (last accessed: 14.05.2017)

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