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The subject of neutral license plates – old issues and new perspectives of the Transnistrian dispute

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Ukraine's decision not to allow vehicles registered in the Transnistrian region, other than those displaying neutral license plates and registered in accordance with Moldovan law so as to be able to participate in international road traffic, has brought the issue of Transnistrian regulation to the forefront of public opinion. In the interpretation of the Tiraspol leaders, the strictly technical decision took on a political character. The subject of the neutral license plates has brought to light several old problems of the Transnistrian settlement process. At the same time, the controversies provoked by this subject are an opportunity for the new government in Chișinău to reflect on the perspectives of the evolution of the Transnistrian dispute settlement process.

The substratum of the neutral license plates problem

The Border Guard Service of Ukraine issued on August 31, 2021, a communiqué announcing that, according to the order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, from September 1, 2021, only vehicles from the Transnistrian region of Moldova registered with Neutral registration plates, together with other cars registered in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Moldova, will be able to participate in international traffic¹.

The government in Chișinău has asked Kyiv authorities to extend until January 10, 2022, the permission for vehicles with registration plate numbers from the Transnistrian region to enter the territory of Ukraine, but the neighboring state did not comply with this request from the Republic of Moldova. Previously, the Moldovan authorities submitted this request to Ukraine two times, as Kyiv intended to implement this measure starting with January 1, 2020, and then - April 1, 2021.

It should be noted that on April 24, 2018, in accordance with the provisions of the so-called "Berlin plus" package agreed upon within the official negotiating format "5+2" on June 2-3, 2016, in Berlin, Chișinău and Tiraspol signed the Protocol Decision on the participation of non-commercial Transnistrian means of transport in international road

¹ 31 вересня призупиняється допуск до участі в міжнародному дорожньому русі автомобілів із Придністровського регіону Молдови, які не мають номерних знаків узгодженого чи нейтрального зразка. 31 серпня 2021. / <https://dpsu.gov.ua/ua/news/z-1-veresnya-prizupinyatsya-dopusk-do-uchasti-v-mizhnarodnomu-dorozhnomu-rusi-avtomobiliv-iz-pridnistrovskogo-regionu-moldovi-yaki-ne-mayut-nomernih-znakiv-uzgodzhenogo-chi-neytralnogo-zrazka/>

traffic². The Moldovan authorities argued for the need to sign this document from the perspective of the necessity to legalize the means of transport that are not legally registered in the Republic of Moldova, in order for these vehicles to become subjected to identification in national and international road traffic.

The mechanism created by the protocol decision of April 24, 2018, is a voluntary one for natural persons holding transport registered in the Transnistrian region. In accordance with Law no. 170/2018, those persons had 2 years, starting with September 1, 2018, to register their means of transport at the subdivisions of the Public Services Agency (ASP), based in the cities of Tiraspol (with the processing capacity of 50 applications per day) and Rîbnița (25 applications per day), in order to obtain plates with a neutral registration number³.

The means of commercial transport (cargo and passenger) are not included in the mechanism created by the protocol decision of April 24, 2018, because the economic agents from the Transnistrian region, who want to carry out commercial activities abroad (this also refers to those who deal with cargo and passengers transport), must be present in the legal space of the Republic of Moldova and are obliged to register such means of transport at the APS (Agency for Public Services, and previously at the Licensing Chamber within the Ministry of Economy). Also, in the document of April 24, 2018, no reference is made to driving licenses. Naturally, holders of neutral license plates must have internationally recognized legal documents, and any documents issued by the so-called authorities in the Transnistrian region, including driving licenses, do not fall under this category.

After 3 years during which time the mechanism for registration of means of transport with neutral license plates was in place, the APS has registered over 6 thousand such cars from the Transnistrian region⁴. This figure is small if we take into account that the process was targeting about 115 thousand vehicles from the Transnistrian region. It should be noted that between March 17 and June 2, 2020, the activity of the APS subdivisions based in Tiraspol and Rîbnița was stopped for sanitary-epidemiological reasons. Also, between September 1 and October 1, 2020, no registrations of vehicles with neutral license plates were made, because on September 1 the term of action of Law no. 170/2018 has expired, its applicability being extended for another 2 years by adopting, on September 11, 2020, a new law (no. 180/2020)⁵.

Regarding the driving licenses, the inhabitants of the left bank of the Dniester have two possibilities of legal registration. The first is for persons with permanent residence in the Transnistrian region who hold the identity documents of the Republic of Moldova to apply for Moldovan-issued driving licenses. The second, for people who live on the left bank of the Dniester, but have the citizenship of another state, is to change the driving licenses they hold to Moldovan licenses after previously registering in the Republic of Moldova and obtaining a residence permit. The figures show that so far almost 40 thousand inhabitants of the Transnistrian region have obtained, through the exchange procedure, driving licenses of the Republic of Moldova.

² Протокольное решение об участии транспортных средств из Приднестровья, не осуществляющих коммерческую деятельность, в международном дорожном движении. / https://gov.md/sites/default/files/decizie_protocolara_cu_privire_la_participarea_autovehiculelor_din_regiunea_transnistreana_in_traficul_international.pdf

³ Lege nr.170 din 26-07-2018 cu privire la înmatricularea unor mijloace de transport și modificarea unor acte legislative./ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=105526&lang=ro

⁴ Reprezentanții politici în comun cu experții din sfera transportului auto au abordat problematica autovehiculelor din regiunea transnistreană. 2021-09-16. / <https://gov.md/ro/content/reprezentantii-politici-comun-cu-expertii-din-sfera-transportului-auto-au-abordat>

⁵ Lege nr.180 din 11-09-2020 pentru modificarea articolului I din Legea nr. 170/2018 cu privire la înmatricularea unor mijloace de transport și modificarea unor acte legislative. / https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=123238&lang=ro

The position of the parties in the subject of neutral plates

Three parties - Chisinau, Tiraspol and Ukraine - directly, and one indirectly - Russia, are directly involved in the equation on the subject of the participation of vehicles from the Transnistrian region in international road traffic.

Chisinau's position has fluctuated in the dispute over this topic since its very emergence. Initially, *Chişinău* was in favor of extending the old regime of crossing the Moldovan-Ukrainian state border by vehicles from the Transnistrian region until January 10, 2022. The arguments of the Office for Reintegration Policies in support of this request were the following:⁶

- affects the interests of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova on the left bank of the Dniester because only 5% of the total number of vehicles in the Transnistrian region were registered with neutral plates;
- the need to take additional measures to minimize potential vulnerabilities for ordinary people;
- the mechanism of registration of neutral license plates established by the Protocol Decision of 24 April 2018 does not include operators providing freight and passenger transport services and is in place only for vehicles that do not carry out commercial activities and for those legal entities registered with the relevant Moldovan authorities.

Although the government of the Republic of Moldova has asked Ukraine to postpone until January 10, 2022, the application of the mechanism of access to international traffic of vehicles with neutral license plates, in discussions between political representatives in the negotiation process for the Transnistrian settlement involving experts in car transport, Chisinau insists that such discussions be carried within the framework established through the provisions of the protocol decision of April 24, 2018, which refers only to vehicles that do not carry out commercial activities⁷.

Regarding the issue of commercial transport from the Transnistrian region, the Chisinau authorities point out that the subject is a complex one, and that this problem is connected with the process of approximation, in conformity with the principles of fair competition, of taxes and fiscal-customs payments on both banks of the Nistru. That is why this subject must be discussed separately from the subject of the voluntary registration of means of transport with neutral license plates by natural persons.

Tiraspol deemed the authorities in Chisinau responsible for the situation created because it did not implement in time the protocol decision of April 24, 2018⁸. Tiraspol accuses Chisinau of deliberately creating a series of new restrictions for the implementation of the protocol decision of April 24, 2018, and of being, in the past, the initiator of Ukraine's ban on vehicles with Transnistrian numbers on its territory. Tiraspol's main grievances against Chişinău were the following:⁹

⁶ Tema participării în traficul rutier internațional a autovehiculelor din regiunea transnistreană a fost discutată la o reuniune cu ambasadorii și cu reprezentanții misiunilor diplomatice acreditate în Republica Moldova. 2021-08-31. / <https://gov.md/ro/content/tema-participarii-traficul-rutier-international-autovehiculelor-din-regiunea-transnistreana>

⁷ O nouă reuniune comună de lucru a reprezentanților politici și a experților în domeniul transportului auto. 2021-09-20. / <https://gov.md/ro/content/o-noua-reuniune-comuna-de-lucru-reprezentantilor-politici-si-expertilor-domeniul>

⁸ Заявление МИД ПМР. 01/09/21. / <https://mfa-pmr.org/ru/node/8635>

⁹ Четыре вопроса без ответов. Будет ли продвижение в переговорах по автономерам? 24/09/2021. / <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/21-09-24/chetyre-voprosa-bez-otvetov-budet-li-prodvizhenie-v-peregovorah-po>

- the refusal to jointly appeal to Ukraine to suspend the ban on motor vehicles registered in the Transnistrian region until all issues related to the issuance of neutral license plates by vehicle registration points have been resolved;
- the refusal to include in the mechanism of registration with neutral plates, established through the protocol decision of 24 April 2018, the transport of goods and passengers;
- prohibiting the crossing by the border police of the Republic of Moldova of vehicles with neutral numbers, the owners of which hold a driving license issued on the left bank of the Nistru.

Also, Tiraspol is dissatisfied with the fact that the mechanism of April 24, 2018, does not refer to ambulances (68 in number) from the Transnistrian region and does not include Russian and Ukrainian citizens living permanently on the left bank of the Dniester. We have reached the situation, already classic in the negotiation process, when Tiraspol attributes political connotations to technical issues. It should be noted that the accusations of Tiraspol ("humanitarian blockade") are directed unilaterally against Chisinau, practically without reference to Ukraine.

In the circumstances created after September 1, 2021, Chisinau's actions are aimed at improving the functioning of the mechanism established by the protocol decision of April 24, 2018, without exceeding the basic legal framework of this agreement. Tiraspol, on the other hand, is trying to go beyond that agreement by demanding that it be extended by the possibility of registering commercial transport with neutral plates and recognizing driving licenses issued in the Transnistrian region.

Chisinau's solutions to Tiraspol's claims, but also to overcome this problem, are the following¹⁰:

- streamlining the activity of the registration points of the means of transport in Tiraspol and Rîbnița (the disponibility of issuing the neutral model registration certificate in a term of 3-5 days);
- the direct extension of the mechanism created on April 24, 2018, to the car registration subdivisions on the left bank of the Dniester;
- the adoption of exceptional legislative amendments, for humanitarian purposes, in order to be able to document in a facilitated regime the sanitary vehicles provided with special equipment;
- issuance of Moldovan registration plates in facilitated conditions for means of transport that are not covered by the provisions of the protocol decision of April 24, 2018.

Ukraine's official position on allowing vehicles to cross the border has not changed since it was announced on August 31, 2021. As of September 1, 2021, the Ukrainian border service will allow only those vehicles from the Transnistrian region of Moldova that have neutral registration plates, together with those that are registered in accordance with Moldovan legislation, to enter Ukraine. The only derogation accepted by Ukraine from the decision of 31 August 2021 was to allow vehicles with Transnistrian license plates to

¹⁰ Reprezentanții politici au continuat discuțiile pe un șir de subiecte actuale. 2021-10-27. / <https://gov.md/ro/content/reprezentantii-politici-au-continuat-discutiile-pe-un-sir-de-subiecte-actuale>

transit through Ukrainian territory until 1 October in order to allow their owners to return home from Russia and Belarus¹¹.

In fact, unlike the oscillations of Chisinau, through its uncompromising position, Ukraine has brought the Transnistrian region back into the legal field of the Republic of Moldova in the field of transport, forcing the unconstitutional authorities in Tiraspol to play by the rules of the Moldovan constitution.

Unlike Tiraspol's accusations, Russia condemned Ukraine's actions to "block transport in Transnistria"¹², without referring to the Republic of Moldova. Russia has highlighted that Kyiv's actions will have a negative effect on the negotiation process in resolving the Transnistrian issue in the official "5+2" format because Ukraine has discredited itself as a mediator in the conflict.

Transnistrian issues at the current stage

In February 2012, after a break of almost 6 years, the negotiations in the "5+2" format were resumed. Chisinau, in order to boost its relationship with Tiraspol, proposed the policy of "small steps", which involved solving the existing local problems between the two banks of the Nistru. From Chisinau's perspective, the "small steps" policy was to stimulate collaboration with the local administration, the business community, and the civil society in the Transnistrian region on socio-economic issues. The purpose of the "small steps" policy was to establish a climate of trust between Chisinau and Tiraspol by solving together the socio-economic problems common to the two banks of the Dniester River. In the future, the "small steps" policy was to create the necessary conditions for the initiation of negotiations on the status of the Transnistrian region within the Republic of Moldova.

At present, the dialogue on the settlement of the Transnistrian dispute takes place in the parameters established at the "5+2" meetings of 17-18 April and 13 July 2012 in Vienna, when *the principles and procedures of the negotiation process in the Transnistrian settlement*¹³ were established. In accordance with the agreements reached at those meetings, three thematic baskets were created for the discussion in the "5+2" format.¹⁴ The first basket includes socio-economic issues. The second - legal, humanitarian, and human rights issues. The third basket refers to the general settlement of the conflict, including political, institutional, and security issues.

In June 2016, in order to boost the negotiation process, the *Berlin Protocol*¹⁵ was signed within the framework of the negotiations in the "5+2" format, which contains the following topics of interest to Tiraspol: 1) apostille of diplomas issued in the Transnistrian region; 2) ensuring the participation in the international road traffic of the motor vehicles from that region; 3) telecommunications; 4) the interaction in the field of meteorology and protection of natural resources in the Dniester river basin; 5) criminal cases. Chisinau insisted that four more be added to these subjects: 1) schools with teaching in Latin script; 2) the agricultural lands in Dubasari district; 3) freedom of movement of persons, goods, and

¹¹ МИД ПМР. Официальный телеграм-канал Министерства иностранных дел ПМР. September 6. / <https://t.me/MIDPMR>

¹² Комментарий официального представителя МИД России М.В.Захаровой в связи с запретом на въезд на территорию Украины автотранспорта с приднестровскими регистрационными номерными знаками. 01.09.21. / https://www.mid.ru/web/quest/komentarii_predstavitelya/-/asset_publisher/MCZ7HQuMdqBY/content/id/4850231

¹³ Принципы и процедуры ведения переговоров в рамках «Постоянного совещания по политическим вопросам в рамках переговорного процесса по приднестровскому урегулированию». / <https://gov.md/ro/content/arhiva-actelor-semnate-cadrul-procesului-de-reglementare>

¹⁴ Повестка дня официального переговорного процесса. / <https://gov.md/ro/content/arhiva-actelor-semnate-cadrul-procesului-de-reglementare>

¹⁵ Протокол официального заседания постоянного совещания по политическим вопросам в рамках переговорного процесса по приднестровскому урегулированию. 2-3 июня 2016, Берлин. / https://gov.md/sites/default/files/2016_06_03_protokol_52_berlin_0.pdf

services; 4) the opening of the bridge over the Dniester at Gura Bâcului-Bâcioc. In this way, the Berlin thematic package was balanced, turning it into the so-called "Berlin plus package", which contains eight thematic topics of interest for both banks of the Dniester River (four plus four).

Chisinau and Tiraspol agreed in November 2017, concluding protocol decisions, upon five topics from the "Berlin plus package": 1) the Gura Bâcului-Bâcioc bridge; 2) schools with teaching in Latin script; 3) apostille of the diplomas issued by the "Taras Șevcenco" University of Tiraspol; 4) agricultural lands in Dubăsari district and 5) telecommunications. In April 2018, Chisinau and Tiraspol agreed on the sixth thematic topic in the "Berlin plus package": the registration of vehicles from the Transnistrian region with neutral license plates.

At the moment and since 2018, the Transnistrian regulatory process is in a state of standby. The 2019-2021 political changes in Chisinau and the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus have stopped the process of regulating the Transnistrian issue at the level of partial implementation of the 6 protocol decisions signed in 2017-2018 within the "Berlin plus" package. An evaluation of the implementation of the "Berlin plus" package reveals the following achievements:

- the process of *commissioning of the bridge at Gura Bâcului* is at the stage of finishing the evaluation of the actual technical condition of the bridge, but in order to start the repair and restoration works of the bridge infrastructure it is mandatory to withdraw the control posts near the village of Bâcioc which abusively restrict free movement and have been illegally installed by the so-called Tiraspol authorities;
- the *functioning of the 8 schools subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Research* continues to face difficulties related to the free movement of children and pedagogues and the endowment of these educational institutions;
- there are *issues concerning the cultivation by farmers of agricultural land in the Dubasari district*; such problems are reflected in the control of the movement by owners of such arable land and in the taxes applied to the harvested production at the control points established by the so-called Transnistrian militias;
- on *the apostille file of neutral diplomas*, the mechanism created is a functional one. According to the data presented by the Office for Reintegration Policies in the activity report for 2020¹⁶, between March 28, 2018, and January 4, 2021, 400 such study documents were apostilled (Italy - 89, USA - 53, Bulgaria - 48, Israel - 33, Poland - 32, France - 28, Spain - 16, Great Britain - 15, Austria - 13, Netherlands - 13, Slovenia - 10, Turkey - 10, etc.);
- the subject of *interaction in the field of telecommunications* got stuck at the stage of discussing the technical aspects of telephony and the requirements of the national legislation in force with which those in the Transnistrian region do not agree. Also, the dialogue on the issue of *criminal cases* is problematic.

For the time being, the "Berlin plus" package has been implemented in a fragmentary manner. Its advantages are that it managed to partially solve some existing social-humanitarian problems in the Transnistrian issue. It nevertheless failed to approximate the positions of Chisinau and Tiraspol and to moderate the differences between the banks regarding the perspectives of the evolution of the Transnistrian dispute.

¹⁶ Raportul de activitate al Biroului politici de reintegrare pentru anul 2020 (conform acțiunilor stabilite în Planul de acțiuni al Biroului politici de reintegrare pentru anul 2020). / https://gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_pe_realizarea_pa_bpr_2020.pe_site.pdf

Perspectivile problematicii transnistrene

With almost 10 years of implementation of the "small steps" policy, applied through the "three thematic baskets" and the "Berlin plus" package, the settlement of the Transnistrian issue has reached a point from which no perspective of political settlement of the conflict is possible. The main result of the policy of "small steps" for the Transnistrian settlement is the politicization of technical issues, which led to the erosion of the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova. Tiraspol, practically, became a legal subject equal to Chisinau in the negotiation process of the "5+2" format.

This explains the different appreciation of the "small steps" policy by Chisinau and Tiraspol. The new political power of the Republic of Moldova (especially the head of state Maia Sandu) considers the results of the policy of "small steps" to be modest because it did not represent the way towards the reintegration of the Republic of Moldova¹⁷. The announced goal of Chisinau (during Vladislav Kulminski's term as Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration) for the next period is to develop a strategy for the reintegration process of the Republic of Moldova and to discuss political issues in the official form "5+2", in order to give content to the actions taken by the parties involved in resolving the Transnistrian dispute¹⁸.

Tiraspol, on the other hand, considers that there is no alternative to the "small steps" policy in the interaction between the two banks of the Dniester River and advocates intensifying cooperation on resolving existing issues between Chisinau and Tiraspol in the permanent "5+2" negotiation format¹⁹.

The policy of "small steps" trivialized the process of political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the "5+2" format. Consequently, the policy of "small steps" did not lead to the preparation of the legal conditions necessary for the reunification of the Republic of Moldova, instead, it eroded the state's sovereignty over its territory on the left bank of the Nistru. Although the "Berlin plus" package partially solved some of the existing social and humanitarian problems for the population on both sides, it did not come close to the political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. It is clear that the policy of "small steps" does not offer political perspectives for resolving the Transnistrian dispute.

The process of political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict requires a new approach. Negotiating the status of the Transnistrian region and the presence of the Russian army on the left bank of the Nistru are the key issues for Chisinau in resolving the Transnistrian dispute. Given that, in the "5+2" format, there are no official negotiations on the status of the Transnistrian region and on the illegal presence of the Russian army on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, it is wrong for social-humanitarian issues to become political in the process of regulating the Transnistrian issue.

In the next period of negotiations, in order to ensure the implementation of the agreements within the "Berlin plus" package, Chisinau should change the accents in the dialogue with Tiraspol. Former Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Vladislav Kulminski emphasized

¹⁷ Maia Sandu: „E nevoie de schimbarea legilor și fără parlament acest lucru nu îl putem face”. 23 iunie, 2021./

<https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/maia-sandu-avem-nevoie-de-o-guvernare-responsabil%C4%83/31322301.html>

¹⁸ În negocierile „5+2” este necesară lansarea unei discuții pe subiecte politice – Vlad Kulminski. 24 septembrie, 2021./

<http://www.infotag.md/rebellion-ro/294259/>

¹⁹ О встрече заместителя Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации А.Ю.Руденко с руководителем Приднестровья В.Н.Красносельским. 22-09-2021./ https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/4864580

stated the readiness of the Moldovan authorities to advance towards the political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict²⁰. But the direct approach of the subject concerning the status of the Transnistrian region in the negotiations will be a complicated one because the status issue was practically not discussed at all after the episode of *the Kozak memorandum* in 2003.

Forcing the events in the political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict may be counterproductive for Chisinau, just as in the case of the *Kozak memorandum* in November 2003. Then, the hurry exhibited by Chişinău and the solution it chose to entrust itself entirely to Russia (by avoiding the "3+2" official negotiations format) let Moldova one step away from being regionalized ("transnistriized") through that Russian federalization plan.

At the moment, any solution for identifying the status of the Transnistrian region in the composition of the Republic of Moldova cannot take place without the consent of the Russian Federation. Moscow will agree to the political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict only if it receives the guarantees of legal leverage it needs in order to be able to exert political influence over Chisinau. These levers are clearly provided for in the Kozak Memorandum:

- 1) the stationing for a certain period of the Russian troops on the territory of the Republic of Moldova on the left bank of the Dniester as a guarantee of the observance of the agreements between Chisinau and Tiraspol (after the model of the Moldovan-Russian agreement of July 21, 1992);
- 2) the right of veto over the policy of the central government in Chisinau through the status obtained by the Transnistrian region (possibly also of ATU Gagauzia) within the reintegrated state of the Republic of Moldova.

According to the Kozak memorandum, the Republic of Moldova was to become an asymmetric federation. In order to avoid scandalizing the society, the term federalization can be avoided in the basic agreement between Chisinau and Tiraspol, but the Transnistrian region could receive in the composition of the Republic of Moldova a special status with extended competencies (it is in these terms, in June 2019²¹, Dodon and Plahoiţniuc have discussed the political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict). In this case, even if the Republic of Moldova had not been a federation *de jure*, it would have *de facto* functioned on the model of a federal state.

For these reasons, Chisinau's priority on the reintegration agenda should not be the urgent identification of the legal status of the Transnistrian region in the composition of the Republic of Moldova, but other topics. In the official "5+2" negotiating format, it would be appropriate for Chisinau to focus its efforts on discussing human rights issues in the Transnistrian region, including those of a social and humanitarian nature agreed upon in the "Berlin plus" package.

In the relationship with Tiraspol, Chisinau must act through economic tools. The Government of the Republic of Moldova must review the economic agenda of its relationship with the Transnistrian region, the set of basic actions referring to the following:

²⁰ Территория свободы. Гость: Владислав Кульминский. 23 сентября 2021 г. / <https://www.facebook.com/LisaNewsMoldova/videos/3740080169550331/>

²¹ Probe video: Igor Dodon dictează planul pe federalizare a Republicii Moldova. / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ny76PXzgsIM>

- the economic activity of the Transnistrian region must be brought in line with Moldovan legislation. Companies in the Transnistrian region that export abroad and have economic activities on the right bank must pay the same taxes and duties as economic agents from the rest of the territory of the Republic of Moldova;
- it is time for Chisinau to make it a condition that Tiraspol respects the rigors of the provisions that allow the Transnistrian region to benefit from the economic advantages of the DCFTA, which entered into force due to the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union;
- in order to obtain international recognition, the banking connection of the Transnistrian region to the Moldovan banking system must take place in strict accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Moldova. The so-called banks (three in number) in the Transnistrian region can operate legally only when they recognize the legal authority of the National Bank of Moldova, the only internationally recognized banking supervisory authority on both banks of the Dniester River;
- reviewing the energy relationship with the left bank of the Dniester. The energy crisis of September-October 2021 brought to light the vulnerabilities of the right bank's dependence on the supply, almost exclusively, of electricity from the Cuciurgan Thermal Power Plant. The Moldovan authorities need to identify solutions for Tiraspol to pay for natural gas delivered to the Transnistrian region (including the huge accumulated debt);
- the fight against smuggling and the fight against corruption schemes that fuel and maintain the existence of the separatist regime of Tiraspol leaders. Reducing smuggling and eradicating corruption schemes would greatly reduce the strength of the unconstitutional regime in Tiraspol.

Chisinau's economic actions in relation to Tiraspol must be guided by a major goal - the *de jure* and *de facto* return of the Transnistrian region under the constitutional control of the Republic of Moldova, without leaving room for ambiguous interpretations by unrecognized Tiraspol authorities to catalog signed agreements in the sense that the so-called transnistrian moldovan republic "took another step" towards consolidating state sovereignty and international legal recognition. In this way, the Chisinau government will correlate its economic agenda towards the Transnistrian region with the process of political reintegration of the Republic of Moldova.

Conclusions

In order to solve the Transnistrian conflict and start the process of the reintegration of the Republic of Moldova, a different approach is needed from Chisinau. The policy of "small steps", practically, did nothing to bring the Transnistrian region into the legal field of the Republic of Moldova. But even the quick return to the discussion of the legal status of the Transnistrian region is, at the moment, not a good solution for the process of reunification of the Republic of Moldova, because the Moldovan authorities are not ready to reabsorb the Transnistrian region in its current form. As long as political reunification is not possible, or poses dangers to the state sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova, the economic reintegration of the Transnistrian region into the legal space, with improved living conditions for citizens on both banks of the Dniester, is currently the most desirable approach, on the part of Chisinau, to the settlement of the Transnistrian issue.