

Results of quality sociological survey

Dialogue between Two Banks of Dniester

Tiraspol, July 2104

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Introduction.

History of the Transnistrian conflict is over two decades long. Next year Transnistria will mark the twenty fifth anniversary of its de facto independence and split first from the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic and then and from Republic of Moldova. Processes and conflicts of this nature were typical for many territories of the former Soviet Union republics at that point of time. However, in case of Transnistria, one could note some differences, such as the fact that there was no titular nation or prevailing language/cultural/or national minority living here.

It is natural that throughout all this period of time the region was cooperating in different forms with the Republic of Moldova, starting with military operations in its territory in 1992 and finishing with the negotiation process in the '5+2' format of today. The negotiation process that, according to different estimations is over 20 years long, passed through different stages with respectively formulated documents and arrangements. "Depending on its stage, the process efficiency was estimated differently, however, today 'political situation in and around Transnistria remains, on the whole, stable. The major players are mainly busy with their own internal problems or more serious foreign policy issues. Besides, the parties directly involved in the conflict are not yet ready for more radical steps due to the continuing consultations with their strategic partners".¹ In other words there are no serious tangible 'breakthroughs' in the negotiation process now and they are hardly likely to happen in the foreseeable future.

However, the situations in the territories bordering with Transnistria are becoming more intense. We can mention here the signing and ratification of the RM-EU Association Agreement with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement being its integral part, dramatic events in the southeast regions of the Ukraine accompanied with internal political crisis taking place in this country, as well as aggravating RM-RF mutual relations. All these factors become a new challenge for the negotiation process between Transnistria and RM, and namely for the citizens of the region having to be more and more actively involved in the political environment along with the need to resolve their daily life problems.

Transnistria proposes Chisinau a 'Civilized Divorce' and formulates its official communication with external partners in the tideway of Eurasian integration and joining the Customs Union based on its own concept of foreign policy developed in 2012. Meanwhile, Moldova proposes Tiraspol the Law on Major Provisions on Special Legal Status for the Communities Located on the Left Bank of Dniester (Transnistria) of 2005 in the context of European integration and develops its strategy of country's reintegration.

What do Transnistrian citizens, experts and political analysts, people of different ages, genders and nationality think of the future of their region in this context? How do they see the future of relations between Transnistria and Moldova? What do 'Confidence-Building Measures' and 'Common Economic Space' mean for them?² ; - The quality sociological survey of **Dialogue between Two Banks of Dniester** held in Transnistria in the summer of 2014 was aimed at obtaining answers to these and other questions.

However, it is necessary to bear in mind that results of the quality survey serve as a precondition for deeper analysis based, among other things, on the quantitative survey methods, which can yield information for the formulation of detailed hypotheses for carrying out of further surveys without giving grounds for mechanical extrapolation on the overall population of the region.

¹ Vladimir Yastrebnchak, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Transnistria

² Goals and objectives of the given survey

Survey Methodology

The given quality survey was carried out with organization of **6 focus groups and 12 in-depth expert interviews**. Theoretical sampling in the course of survey was made with account of the possibility to cover different social groups of Transnistrian population. Sampling details can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

No	Category of Respondents	Method/Quantity	Number of Respondents/Experts	Geography / Description of Respondents
1	Young people at the age of 18 - 29	Focus group – 1	11 respondents: 4 men and 7 women; 3 respondents from rural communities, 8 – from cities	Tiraspol, Bendery, and Grigoriopol and Slobodzeya districts. Young people of different social statuses: students, businessmen, public servants, unemployed; people of different educational levels
2	Middle-age people of 30 - 50	Focus group – 1	9 respondents: 4 men and 5 women	Tiraspol, Bendery. Economically active population of different professional backgrounds and educational levels
3	Older-age people (men – over 60, women – over 55)	Focus group – 1	11 respondents: 3 men and 8 women	Tiraspol, Bendery. Pension-age people of different educational levels and professional backgrounds in the past.
4	Representatives of villages with prevailing Moldovan population in the national structure	Focus group – 1	9 respondents: 2 men and 7 women	Villages: Butory, Giska, Tashlyk, Sukleya. Respondents at the age of 18 - 64 of different educational levels and professions
5	Representatives of villages located on the Dniester river bank	Focus group – 1	10 respondents: 3 men and 7 women	Glinnoye, Nezavertaylovka, Tsybul'yovka, Bychok, Speia. Respondents at the age of 20 - 58 of different educational levels and professional backgrounds
6	Representatives of enterprise community	Focus group – 1	8 respondents: 4 men and 4 women	Tiraspol, Bendery, Rybnitsa. Respondents at the age of 22 - 54, representing businesses in the sphere of service provision, agriculture, and light industry
7	Representatives of expert community	In-depth expert interviews – 12 interviews	12 respondents: 8 men and 4 women	Tiraspol, Bendery, Slobodzeya. Experts political analysts, sociologists, ex-officials of different levels, heads of mass-media outlets, businessmen, representatives of legislative authorities

When working with focus groups in order to select respondents, we used the ‘Snow Ball’ method. The operators responsible for selection had questionnaires for screening, which made it possible to diversify the structure of focus-group participants based on gender, age, geographical area, professional backgrounds, as well as education and nationality.

There was developed a special Guide containing a number of questions for working with focus groups and carrying out of in-depth interviews described in the customer’s ToR, as well as questions

and tests. Average duration of focus-group work made 2 hours with average duration of one in-depth interview making 50 minutes. All the focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews were carried out in June – July, 2014.

Selection of respondents in the process of carrying out of expert interviews was done with the use of the method of references to analytical materials on the issues mentioned in the snow-ball-based survey provided in the Internet.

The following methods were used in the analysis of survey materials and drafting of the report:

- Content-analysis
- Method of data clusterization
- Method of analytical induction

Survey Restrictions.

Like any results of quality surveys, results of the given survey cannot be mechanically extrapolated on the overall population. Results of the given survey serve as a basis for constructing serious descriptive and cause-effect hypotheses demanding verification and specification in the course of mass quantitative survey. Nevertheless, application of the theoretical conceptualization method makes it possible for us to draw some conclusions with regard to expected typical reactions of the Transnistrian population in relation to respective questions connected with the survey topic.

In the course of the survey, we failed to contact with any representatives of large-scale industry in the region, and, thus, their opinions are not reflected in the survey results.

Important Events Having Taken Place in the Course of the Survey.

In the period when the survey was being carried out, the RM Government signed Association Agreement with the EU on June 27, 2014, which was subsequently ratified by the country's Parliament. This event undoubtedly influenced the results of the survey, as it was perceived by a considerable part of respondents in the focus-groups as "Moldova's joining the European Union after some transition period...", which rendered respective impact on the answers and opinions of respondents. More details about this influence are provided in the survey results description.

Besides, during the survey period, social and economic crisis aggravated, which resulted in the reduction of public servants' salaries (they now receive only 85% of the accrued sums), reduction of the working week and working day, as well as in other problems for the given category of citizens due to the difficulties with revenues of Transnistria's budgets of all the levels.

Another reason for the change of respondents' mindsets was intensification of crisis processes in the neighboring state, i.e. the Republic of Ukraine.

Level of Refusals to Participate in the Survey

The average rate of refusals to participate in the survey made about 37% (we here mean focus groups), which, considering the survey topic, is normal for the surveys held in Transnistria. However, it does not bring along any considerable sample bias as it takes place in quantitative surveys.

Summary of Survey Results.

One of the major generalizations in the survey results is the fact that Transnistrian conflict, current situation in the relations between Moldova and Transnistria, as well as future of these relations are in no way the most important ones on the life agenda of ordinary citizens of Transnistria. Estimation of events in the given sphere, as well as projections, statements and comments in this respect are rather objects for activity of political experts and analysts in the area of internal and foreign policy

processes. This conclusion also refers to a considerable part of business community engaged in agriculture and provision of services.

This fact directly influences the level of respondents' competence in the survey topic, which oftentimes appears to be rather low.

The young generation of 18-29 can be considered as specifically incompetent. The youngest participants of this age group under survey appear to be the least competent.

*"... federalization, but federalization means... well, there was such a **memorandum by Kobzar** (the Memorandum on Major Principles of Integrated State System developed in 2003 with assistance of Dmitry Kozak, Special Representative of the Russian Federation President – author's note), which said that the region, as it was called, which... it is considered, I do not know how it is considered, I am not a political analyst either, they can later separate from the federation." (M, 18, Bendery)*

The statement quoted above as an example is not the only one abounding in this kind of phrases and interpretation of facts and events. Respondents from rural areas are also very incompetent in the subject of the survey. This situation made it impossible for the surveyor to analyze results of expert interviews and focus group discussions as an aggregate. Results were analyzed as interconnected; however, experts' points of view remain relevant rather for the expert environment than acceptable and recognized by large social groups of Transnistrian population.

Respondents perceive the current situation in Transnistria differently including problems and achievements of the region, degree of involvement of local authorities in the resolving of problems of society. However, both respondents in the focus-groups and experts coincided in their opinion that throughout the conflict existence and negotiation process (which, according to different assessments, lasts already more than twenty years) no essential progress has been reached except for the peacekeeping operation and absence of any overt acts of war in the region, which, in principle, is estimated as an important achievement. Dependence of major negotiators on the external centers of force is mentioned as one of the reasons for this state of affairs, which fact is recognized by almost all the survey participants. Besides, some respondents expressed serious discontent with the choice of place for the next round of negotiations.

"... I have a question, why should they meet in the course of these negotiations somewhere in Germany, Austria... why don't they come to Kobelyaki (town, administrative center [Кобеляцкого района Полтавской области Украины](#)) why should not they go there? But no one goes there and that is it."
(M., 46, Tiraspol)

This fact was noted by the overwhelming number of respondents in the focus groups. As the reasons for negotiations, people even mentioned international tourism of their participants. Respondents permanently kept saying that negotiations were held for the sake of negotiations, that the negotiation process was deliberately slowed down, that negotiators had no real powers to decide anything, that unilateral decisions were cancelled in the course of negotiation process by the party that had made them.

Conflict settlement prospects seem also to be very unclear.

Philosophizing on the potential future conflict resolution after change of several generations of negotiators based on some unclear expectations of possible changes in the coming three years. The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed on the statement that despite intensification of events around Transnistria one could hardly hope for any visible changes in mutual relationships between

Transnistria and Moldova, though experts recognize that with signing of the RM-EU Association Agreement the status quo has already changed or that it is no longer existent, to be more precise.

Both focus-group respondents and experts were practically unanimous in their answer to the question related to the level of importance of Transnistrian conflict resolution for the present authorities of Moldova. Focus-group respondents, with rare exception, said that the ***issue of Transnistria is not included at all in the list of priorities for the RM authorities today***. One of the reasons for this is the fact that in the process of signing of the EU Association Agreement and after it, the RM authorities have a lot of ‘home’ problems to resolve. The second reason is that they know absolutely nothing in general about the official policy of Chisinau in relation to Transnistria, except for the constantly repeated statement that the conflict should be resolved ‘within the limits of territorial integrity of Moldova’. Experts mentioned in this respect that any changes in the Transnistrian issue resolution now would inevitably lead to the electoral field reformatting, which, in general, does not correspond to the interests of the RM ruling coalition. Nevertheless, experts note that the RM ruling coalition will not formally deny urgency of Transnistrian issue or change the vector in relation to the conflict, as there were negative examples of experiments with this issue by one of the political forces, which, as a result, failed to get to the Parliament in many ways due to this ‘mistake’.

100% of focus-group participants stated that they know nothing about the RM reintegration policy carried out by the Reintegration Bureau under the RM Vice-Prime Minister’ office responsible for reintegration. People found it difficult even to name the body responsible for the given policy area in the RM Government (respondents named it either Ministry or Department, but very few of them heard about this body in principle). Respondents said that they had never dealt with it, do not know anything about it and did not take part in any activities or events carried out under aegis of this body or within the country-reintegration policy framework.

Of course, experts are more familiar with the given issue. However, the policy on country reintegration, in their opinion, is reduced today to financing of different infrastructural projects in the left-bank villages that are under the RM jurisdiction in Dubossary district, village of Varnita and village of Copanca, as well as schools with Romanian language of instruction located in the Transnistrian territory. When speaking about the RM reintegration one of the experts used in relation to this strategy the phrase “Foreign countries will come to help us...”

At the same time, experts noted the fact that Transnistrian authorities responsible for foreign policy also have a strategy “consisting of a set of tactical steps and operations” in relations with the RM, which actually means that there is no strategy in this field at all. None of the experts having taken part in the survey mentioned the ‘small steps tactics’.

Focus-groups respondents were more open than experts saying that the main negotiators from Moldova and Transnistria do not have any powers for negotiating but only voice what they are instructed to say by the external centers of force (the USA, Romania and EU in the first case, and Russia – in the second). Accordingly, changes in the external conjuncture that have lately intensified make it impossible and useless to develop any strategies for the negotiation process.

Three options for Transnistrian conflict resolution were unanimously specified by respondents and experts as comprehensible (you can see them ranked below):

- 2. Recognition of Transnistria’s independence***
- 3. Transnistria’s integration in the RF***
- 4. Building up of the common state with the RM on the federation-confederation basis.***

It is necessary to note that experts practically did not mention the second option as the working one, but it was repeatedly mentioned by focus-groups participants, which shows that the population is not very well familiar with possible scenarios and realistic consequences of this option, in other words, ‘it is more populist than realistic...’

The issues of building up of a potential common state were covered only within the references to the Memorandum on the Framework for Normalization of Relations between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria of 1997 and Memorandum on Major Principles of Integrated State System of 2003 known as Memorandum by Kozak, which shows that experts do not know any concrete details related to the building up of such a state (the model of federal state presented by Igor Dodon in November 2013 was referred to an unsuccessful reproduction of the Memorandum by Kozak). Experts are every cautious in their estimation of constructs of the possible future common state. However, one of the experts specified that after signing of the RM-EU Association Agreement this option for resolving the conflict is very unlikely, as its implementation will lead to the changed model of the state having signed the Association Agreement and will imply revising of the agreement.

None of the respondents in any group, as well as no expert mentioned a ‘Special Autonomous Status within the RM’. Support of the given option of conflict resolution is extremely small in the Transnistrian society.

When talking as to who directly should resolve the conflict, both respondents and experts said that the leading role in this case belongs to the Russian Federation. The second place, according to the level of influence, is with the USA, the next to follow are the EU and Ukraine. It should be noted here that Ukraine is included by respondents in the list exclusively because it borders with the region. Almost all the survey participants mentioned that resolving of this issue only between Moldova and Transnistria today is impossible and even if it really was possible once in the past, this opportunity has been irreversibly lost.

The 5+2 format is an optimum formula for negotiating, to be more precise, for formal fixing of reached arrangements, should there be any to be achieved. Any kind of its reformatting will not bring along any notable results in the negotiation process. However, experts noted the tendency that comes into being in the RM and consists in the declaration that it is not necessary to respect arrangements reached during the negotiation process, as the other party in negotiations is not vested with the recognized status. The situation in negotiation process today looks like the game of two teams on the same football ground with the teams playing with different balls and in different games.

Some focus-group respondents are familiar with the confidence building program . They mentioned such components as strengthening of civil society capacity, infrastructural projects and projects in the field of business community development, as well as development of journalism capacity. At the same time, the author and the initiator of the program appears to be UNDP Moldova. While positively estimating the program, respondents, however, found it difficult to specify what the basis for long-term effect of confidence building measures is. At the same time, it was also mentioned, as a rule, that the level of confidence between the citizens living on both banks of Dniester is not critically low. Respondents mentioned the European Union as playing the main role in the promotion of the program, while knowing nothing about the role of other states in the development of the given program.

The survey experts believe that existing conflict is not a very big obstacle for the RM joining the European Union. They refer in this respect both to the Cyprus precedent, and to the fact that the conflict did not prevent visa regime liberalization or carrying out of other reforms in the RM aimed at the RM-EU rapprochement. However, it is necessary to note skepticism of experts in

relation to the opportunities for the Republic of Moldova to be integrated into the EU in principle. In this respect, experts mentioned the examples of other countries having signed Association Agreements with the EU earlier (Turkey, Tunisia, Chile).

Setting up of Common Economic Space Agreement is regarded, in principle, as a positive opportunity and as one of the last opportunities to create realistic conditions or preconditions for conflict resolution. Experts suggest that this kind of concept related to creation of Common Economic Space should be submitted for analysis to some competent international structure (Moldova-German Trade and Economy Forum, RF-EU Commission) so that this concept be further on promoted not just by one of the parties to the conflict but by the ‘third force’, which fact would strengthen its viability.

Transnistria Today: Achievements and Problems of the Region.

When speaking about positive aspects of Transnistria today, both experts and focus-group participants noted its human potential and people, in general, as its main ‘attraction’. The multidimensionality of the given concept was expressed in many different ways.

“I think that in Transnistria there live diligent and hardworking people who love work” (F., 54, Bendery)

“I like these people irrespective of what language they speak if they respect each other” (M, 87, Tiraspol)

“There has been built a society that corresponds to many personal standards, such as, first of all, tolerance to interethnic peace, calmness and prosperity” (Political analyst)

Among other positive distinctive features, people also mentioned good climate, beautiful nature, and agricultural goods (Table No 2).

Table 2

	Positive aspects of Transnistria	Major Problems of the Region
Focus –groups respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diligent and hardworking people Hospitality, cleanliness Beautiful nature Places of interest Agriculture Calmness and stability Active youth Natural reserve inherited from the former USSR No discrimination based on national belonging Municipal services Industrial production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak economy Unrecognized states of Transnistria Migration Unemployment (especially among youth) Low salaries Corruption Poor local governance Outflow of qualified workforce Lack of investments Uncertain future Poor ecology of Dniester Availability of health services in rural areas System of medical services provision in general Growing rates of utility services Uniform State Examination as the form of graduation examination of school students Difficulties with obtainment of official documents Attitude of doctors to older people Economic blockade by Moldova and Ukraine Risky farming area of (problems with irrigation system) Hogweed

Survey experts	Traditions of societal self-organization Traditions of direct democracy in Transnistria Small, comfortable and cozy state Human rights protection Lack of VAT (element of investment appeal) Tolerant society	Difficult social and economic situation Demographic and migration problems Unstable situation with workplaces High political risks (especially for investors) Lack of common border with RF Unrecognized status External threats due to the Ukrainian crisis and Moldova's signings of Association Agreement Unregulated conflict Double taxation, tax policy in general
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Results of content-analysis show that the issue of Transnistria's unrecognized status is the matter mentioned rather by experts; however, if, in this case, we speak about international recognition of the state sovereignty, focus-groups respondents also mean non-recognition as a missing international recognition status of the region.

Experts look upon priorities of the Transnistrian regime in region's problems resolution in a wider way and mention a whole range of public life issues.

"It seems to me that greatest attention is paid primarily to social and economic problems, as well as to the external factor, i.e. some kind of negotiation issues and problems including attempts to defend social and economic interests when dealing with external partners"(Teacher)

"In my opinion, the ruling regime pays more attention to social problems"(representative of mass-media)

"I think that for everybody, including society and the state, the most important things are economy and economic development» (Political analyst)

Focus-group participants are more concrete in their statements.

"I think that authorities now do take care of medical institutions, as there are built new medical institutions in the capital of Tiraspol" (M, 18, Bendery)

"Well, we can say that authorities are using some funds from outside of the region for resolving some of the problems related to public health services. For example, there is this Russian Eurointegration (Independent non-profit-making organization of Eurasian Integration – author's note), which is now building a TB hospital in Bendery, something else is built in Tiraspol, as far as I know. They are building kindergartens, some medical centers, a couple of schools, i.e. the authorities try to resolve problems using Russian money."(F, 32, Tiraspol)

"Lately I have been travelling a lot about Transnistria – I am just surprised – they are building roads everywhere and our roads are of a very good quality". (F, 32, Tiraspol)

Some respondents are rather critical in their statements.

"Unfortunately, I did not even notice, in fact, that our ruling regime would be very much concerned about anything seriously."(M, 31, Bendery)

It is also necessary to note that in the course of discussions focus-group respondents would often answer the question, "What are the priority issues being resolved by the Transnistrian

authorities?”, in the way that absolutely differed from the problems that, according to the respondents’ were absolutely urgent for Transnistria today.

It is also important to note that in the context of the survey it was found out that the list of major problems, as voiced by the respondents, practically had nothing to do with the official agendas of consultations held in the 5+2 format or agendas of meetings of the working groups formed on the branch-of-economy principle.

General Perception of the Conflict

“We met to discuss agenda for the next meeting. We have to continue playing the game imitating that some negotiation process is taking place in reality.” (Businessman providing services)

This is the way, in which one of the experts characterized dynamics and progress of the negotiation process between Chisinau and Tiraspol.

Nevertheless, experts are not inclined to underestimate importance of the fact of holding of the negotiation process.

“There is just one achievement that is still in effect since nineteen ninety two, since August of ninety two, to be more precise – we have no shooting here.”(Representative of mass-media)

The possibility that one of the parties to the conflict can cancel its own decisions was mentioned, practically, as almost the main result of the negotiation process.

“We can consider as success of negotiation process the very fact that problems created through unilateral steps are still somehow resolved – also unilaterally, on the basis of the negotiation process; in other words this is done through direct decision made by the Moldovan party on cancelling excises on Transnistrian goods, cancelling ecological dues imposed by Chisinau on Transnistrian enterprises. This, certainly can be regarded as undisputable progress, this is good for daily life of enterprises and people.”(Teacher)

Neither do focus-group respondents see any specific progress in the negotiation process, although explaining it differently from their own points of view.

“Should Moldova be ruled not by the representatives of Romania and America, the conflict would have been resolved long ago, and we would be living in a single country.”(F, 70, Tiraspol)

“There is no progress at all. I had to obtain some documents recently, and it has become more difficult to do it as compared to previous times. Transnistrian, Moldovan documents ... it has become even more difficult. If some time ago it was somehow easier to obtain documents, they did not require so many certificates – now they do require them. I consider that... it has become worse.”(F, 20, community of Tashlyk, Grigoriopol district)

“As to the status, whether Moldova will be a unitary state or not – such decisions are made not even in Chisinau... such things are decided up there..., as well as many other things here. We see that Shtanski meets with Carp – well, in my opinion, they can meet as often as they like, but they are not the persons who can resolve something on the global level, they do not have such powers...” (M, 46, Tiraspol)

“You see, when the change of power took place, elections and so on, people expected that something will start changing, something will start developing. As a result, in the beginning there was some kind of excitement. Because they talked a lot, it looked like all the processes started, they started talking about baskets, many things were promised, but, as a result, nothing has become better in the long run.”(M, 20, Tiraspol)

“One person, who is now holding a rather high political position, once said that the issue of conflict settlement will continue unfolding, as many people are engaged in this process, and if this issue is resolved very many people will remain without work.”(F, 21, Tiraspol)

There were some even more serious petulancies.

“They were simply speaking into the cameras and walking before the cameras ... and that was all.” (F, 21, Mayak, Grigoriopol district)

It should be noted that besides critical attitude towards negotiations, respondents did not suggest practically any alternatives, except for recommendations to the Governments of conflicting parties to pay more attention to internal problems of their countries and people and to change venues for holding negotiations for some closer to Moldova and Transnistria place instead of going to Austria or Germany.

Respondents expressed different points of view concerning the possibility of conflict resolution in general. Even if respondents did admit the possibility for such resolution, with rare exception, they found it difficult to answer the question as to when this could become possible in general.

“The negotiation process will end when the present generation of negotiators goes away; in other words, when our generation will come to power and will hold these negotiations because we consider that it is high time to do away with this conflict.”(M, 18, Bendery)

Almost all the survey participants agreed in the opinion that Transnistrian conflict is in no way a threat to safety of the Republic of Moldova or the region as a whole, except for expert opinion that any conflict is potentially fraught with dangerous consequences due to the very fact that is a conflict.

“From the point of view of political science any unsettled conflict, any zone of conflict is a threat to safety for all the participants involved in the process. First of all, these are, certainly, the parties involved in the conflict, and, of course, regional participants bordering with the conflict zone. Therefore, any unsettled conflict is a challenge to stability for all – for the safety of both of Moldova and of Transnistria, both of Romania and of Ukraine.” (Political analyst)

However, in its current condition, the conflict, according to experts, serves, practically, as a certain means for attracting investments by the conflicting parties.

“It is no threat for the Republic of Moldova (it is not dangerous – author’s note), as, if we abstract from the official statements of the Republic of Moldova, it is, in fact, the way to attract attention to the situation, it is also one of the motives for active communications with the European Union, with the United States of America, including the opportunity to receive certain financial preferences in connection with unsettled status of the conflict. Therefore, in my opinion, Chisinau is not so active in any compromise proposals, just because it has no special interest in it. In my opinion, this is a fact.” (Expert in the field of diplomatic relations).

Different opinions and assessments bring along the issue of the need and importance of Transnistria for the Republic of Moldova. Respondents differed in their assessments now saying that, “ We have lived for 20 years separately and will live further on,” then insisting that Chisinau needs Transnistria’s territories and its industrial enterprises.

“The Tartar-Mongols did not need our land, but they came here and even reached Czechoslovakia. Romania would now go as far as Mongolia if they had this right. Moldova would do the same – I mean the Romanized leadership of Moldova. Therefore, they are not interested in us as people. They are interested in the territory and in the assets we have here. These are their only annexation goals, and God forbid it, but if they get a carte blanche, they will come again with a sword across Dniester.” (M, 87, Tiraspol)

One of the experts having participated in the survey expressed an important opinion.

“According to Moldova’s statements, Transnistria, certainly, is of some importance for it as a component of its statehood. But if analyzing this issue from the tactical point of view, this is, probably, not quite so (it is not important – author’s note). However, if judging strategically, this is really the matter of Moldova’s statehood. Because without Transnistria, Moldova, probably, loses the last factor for maintaining its statehood. Having lost Transnistria, having rejected it for whatever reasons, maybe, due to the recognition of Transnistria by some outside force, there disappears, by and large, the very sense of Moldovan statehood in its present state. In addition, as long as the European vector is proclaimed, almost by all the Moldovan parties as irreversible, Chisinau should seriously think as to how to make its way to this European Union. It is not clear what this EU association will bring for the county. Maybe, it is easier to choose a different and fastest way – integration with Romania, and thus integration with the European Union. It is natural that it will be difficult to do it with Transnistria. Without Transnistria it is much easier, but this becomes already an issue of Moldova’s statehood, i.e. how much this statehood, in this case, is important for Moldova’s society. If there is still present this desire to keep the statehood, it is necessary to come to an agreement with Transnistria; if the European vector and European choice are more important, then ...” (Expert in the field of diplomatic relations).

Language issue brings along a lot of discussions, especially in the older-age group of respondents. Although the discussion did not touch upon the existing problems in mutual relations between Transnistria and Moldova, nevertheless, the language issue was formulated by the respondents as follows.

“Now they are building up in Moldova a national state oriented at one nation. They are doing it in all state institutions, in business – this is the only direction.” (M, 59, Bendery)

“And there (in the Republic of Moldova – author’s note) as you know, Russian, at present, is forbidden, as well as the Moldovan language. Last winter they changed constitution and recognized that the state language is not Moldovan even, but Romanian. There is no Russian, no Moldovan now; there is only one language – Romanian. In other words, it turns out that people there are Romanians, aren’t they? Those who will come here to talk to us in Moldovan language without knowing Russian, do you think they will find a common language with local youth, with local people talking only in Russian without knowing any other languages?” (M, 25, Bendery).

At the same time, not all the respondents agreed with this kind of arguments.

“I will give you an example, in Moldova there is a village located near Ciumai. The name of the village is Burlaceni. And I am telling everyone that in this village there live Gagauzians, Bulgarians, Moldovans, and Russians – and they all know 4-5 languages. You start speaking to

somebody in Bulgarian and he or she starts speaking with you also in Bulgarian. You start speaking in Moldovan, and he or she answers in Moldovan, or in Gagauzian.” (F, 55, Bendery)

At the same time, respondents noted that in Transnistria, despite the declared three official languages, in fact, the document circulation and office-work are run only in Russian.

“Transnistrian Moldovan Republic, it sounds like that, doesn’t it? But the matter in question here is only Russian language. You can try to write your message to our Mr. Shevchuk in Moldovan language. I do not know in what language you will receive the answer.”(F, 68, Bendery)

On the whole, it should be noted that language issue was not mentioned by survey participants as the main obstacle for normalization of relations between Transnistria and Moldova. No one talked in a dogmatic way about the events of 1992 (except for one of the experts). People rather talked about household issues, such as utilities prices, for example.

“Well utility bills are very expensive. Much more expensive than in Transnistria. They are very expensive.”(F, 28, village of Gisca).

The major problem in the settlement of mutual relations was very well expressed by one of the survey experts.

“... in the long run, we have a common football ground, or a common green lawn, to be more precise, someone comes out there with a stick and a ball and thinks that he is playing field hockey, while another man comes with a football and thinks that this is a football game. Moreover, each of them is playing opposite the grandstands with his team’s fans, while playing the game alone. It is natural that no common game is possible. Each of them deserves a run of applause of the fans, and in this optimistic way everyone considers that game is going on; the game goes on as if simultaneously and on the same field, but they play according to absolutely different rules, they have different gates, the grandstands with fans are also different. This is why we have the results we have. There are no common rules of the game, no clear understanding of the game and the goal to strive for.” (Teacher)

Talking about importance of Transnistrian issue for the RM authorities, almost all respondents and experts agreed in the opinion that from the formal point of view the ***problem can be and really is important and is voiced as important. However, in fact, this item is not included in the actual agenda of current RM authorities.***

“I think that it (the issue of Transnistrian conflict – author’s note) is not included in the top three, or top 5 priorities, actually, as I said, the elites of Moldova and Transnistria still focus their attention on economic issues, foreign policy issues, and communication with external partners. Actually, the issue of Transnistrian conflict settlement is, probably, more relevant, for Transnistria than for Moldova. But, as I far as I can judge, this issue is for Chisinau a priority number ten on the agenda, or something around that, but no more than that.”(political analyst)

“Moldova does not like Transnistria because if we become a part of Moldova, we will ‘dilute’ voices of nationalists at power in Chisinau today. And they do have a lot of power, and they know very well that with Transnistria they will lose this power. So why should I lose my power? I would rather be mosquito’s head there than that of an elephant.” M, 46, Tiraspol).

“Formally – yes. In reality – I doubt it, because the issue is simple, on the one hand, as there is a wide consensus, there is Law of 2005 unanimously adopted by the Moldovan Parliament. It seems to me that attempt to impinge on it means, most likely, at least, to commit a political

suicide; if no one is ready to do it, it looks very simple. There are clear legislative frameworks and one can stay within them, while declaring it as a priority at the same time. It is clear that this kind of formal framework, formal declaration of priorities, multiplication of formalism, making formalism a state policy cannot create preconditions for normal movement forward.”(Expert in the field of diplomatic relations).

Surveyor’s observations make it also possible to draw several important conclusions:

- 1. The conflict problem is not included today in the list of priority problems even of the survey respondents (except for some profile experts, of course), which, certainly, impacts respondents’ level of competence in this sphere.*
- 2. Talking about the conflict and issues around it goes in a calm discussion manner and does not make the impression of its being a ‘sensitive’ issue.*
- 3. The main idea of the statements made by respondents is that they are sure that both parties to the conflict are inevitably forced to follow the decisions made by ‘others’, by ‘big’ players, which, certainly, renders its impact on the intensity and productivity of negotiation process.*

Possible Options for Conflict Resolution.

Almost all the focus-group respondents said that they know nothing about the reintegration policy carried out by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova. Knowledge of respondents in this area was limited with the name of Vasily Shova (former head of the reintegration policy office).

Knowledge of profile experts naturally, appeared wider in this respect.

“The Republic of Moldova, within its reintegration policy frameworks, tries to restore and improve well-being of the people living in the districts located on the left bank of Dniester but being under its jurisdiction. This is, perhaps, the only goal of the reintegration policy for Moldova. I have not seen any other steps they would make towards reintegration” (Political analyst)

“Besides from the open press sources and from consultations with both Moldovan and Transnistrian colleagues, I know that all these funds allocated for reintegration are, naturally, used in the conflict zone, but only in the communities that are located, let us say, under Moldova’s jurisdiction. In other words, these funds are allocated for infrastructure in the villages of Dubossary district, that is under Moldovan jurisdiction; these are the villages of Varnita and Copanca. Additional funds, also within reintegration, will be allocated for compensations to Moldovan peasants, in other words, by and large, these are the funds to be allocated for maintaining fellow-citizens who, according to official Chisinau, live in difficult conditions in the firing line. In other words, such are the purposes of funding.”(Expert in the field of diplomatic relations).

“Reintegration is mainly concentrated on two issues. These are the schools with Romanian language of instruction in the territory of Transnistria and villages under Moldova’s jurisdiction located on the left bank of Dniester. One cannot see any other serious elements of integration, no infinitesimal sign of it. This means that we can say that Moldova is the country, where people got used to stealing throughout all their life without bearing responsibility for it. What kind of reintegration we can speak about in this case?” (Representative of mass media).

It should be noted that respondents found it difficult to give the name of the enforcement authority responsible for reintegration policy, naming it either ministry or department. Mister Karpov's position and functional duties were never mentioned at all.

Respondents never participated in any activities held in the framework of reintegration policy; they never heard anything about such things and know nothing about existence or absence of such a document as Reintegration Strategy of the Republic of Moldova.”

As to the potentially possible and desirable scenario of Transnistrian conflict settlement, respondents and experts mentioned the following preferences:

- 1. Recognition of Transnistria's independence*
- 2. Transnistria's integration in the RF*
- 3. Building up of the common state with the RM on the federation-confederation basis.*

None of the respondents mentioned an option of getting by Transnistria of a special independent status within the RM. This opportunity to resolve the conflict has not found any supporters among survey participants.

It is worth mentioning that survey experts do not consider at all the opportunity for Transnistria to integrate with Russia. They are rather inclined to talk about setting up of a common state with the Republic of Moldova or getting full independence and internationally recognized state sovereignty.

“If talking about my expert opinion, I base on the current realities and current situation, and I see that independence of Transnistria and its integration with Russia are possible only provided there appear respective external factors. This relates to legitimization of this process and international recognition because Transnistria will be a recognized subject of international law and the matter in question will already be that it should not be a unilateral recognition. It should be also recognized by other key players, and namely by the European Union. Therefore, from my point of view, Moldova and Transnistria should be guided at the given stage by the idea of building up of a common state as the most beneficial for all the parties.”(Political analyst)

“There exist two options. Option one is existence of Transnistria as a subject of a federal or confederative state structure of the Republic of Moldova. It is difficult for me to imagine this in all the details because there can be a federation with confederation elements, and there can be a confederation without federation elements – anything is possible. The fact that it will be a subject within a subject – I have no doubt at all in this respect – its rights and powers will be 10 times stronger than those of Gagauzia today in Moldova, for example. The second option is a situation similar to that of Cyprus. In other words, the status remains as it is, the parties agree about gradual transition to more effective economic cooperation and it all remains frozen until better times.” (economist)

One of the experts mentioned important initial preconditions necessary for conflict settlement.

«Moldova is very strongly connected economically with the Russian Federation, while politically – with the European Union. Transnistria strongly depends on the European Union in the area of economy, while politically it is connected with the Russian Federation. This is an interesting situation, in my opinion, and it should motivate both external partners, Chisinau and Tiraspol to use these opportunities from the point of view of economy and future development of the region, while creating, at the same time, some kind of platform for interaction between Russia and the European Union.» (Political analyst)

None of the experts or focus-group participants wanted to be responsible during the discussion for any statements related to 'Federative State' concept and its components in the context of Moldova-Transnistria conflict settlement. At best, experts would refer to the Memorandum by Kozak ("It contains all the best options.").

It is interesting to note that setting up of the federative state suited best young people from among all the respondents.

"The referendum showed that over 90% of Transnistrians want to join Russia; they just all want to become immediately a part of Russia, but only a small part of them understands that it is very difficult to do it, that it is impossible from the territorial point of view. However much we wanted it, we cannot join Russia via air. A reasonable way out is federalization with Moldova. Of course, there are many people who do not want it; they all say, "No, we want to be part of Russia." Yes! This is a common wish, but, all the same, it is reasonable to agree to federalization. Because, in this case, we will be able to resolve both economic problems and issues related to passports, so that there would be no longer any difficulties with all this." (M, 20, Tiraspol)

Those who were in favor of independence saw the benefit of such conflict resolution in freedom of movement and improvement of general economic situation in the region and, as a result, grown well-being of the population (including their own). Besides, they mentioned legalization of documents issued in Transnistria (including academic diplomas), creation of conditions for attraction of investments and possibility to sign direct contracts on foreign trade activities.

However, there were also those who thought about other possible consequences of getting independence.

"I think that every medal has two sides. First of all, we will develop brands of our own, we will be independent, hurrah! We will be able to travel worldwide. But you always bear in mind other things too. We are not recognized now; we do not pay for gas. And as soon as we become recognized, we should start paying. They will say, "Guys, you have achieved what you wanted, you are working now – please, pay!" This is the first thing. The other thing is that they will start redistributing all the property again. And this will be so, for sure! They will say that the previous redistribution was illegal; there will again appear some new forces. Even from the Moldovan side. They will say, "Do you know that before 1914 my tree was growing here? It will be like this, I am sure. I am afraid that independence will bring us more negative things than positive." (M, 31, Bendery)

Respondents expressed different opinions concerning availability of special plans regarding goals and objectives formulated by each party to the conflict to be achieved via negotiation process. However, even those who insisted that such plans do exist could not specify neither working names of any documents nor concrete activities envisaged by the given plans.

However, one of experts characterized existence of such plans as follows:

"I think that I can characterize such plans using a very succinct phrase from Russian literary classics – Foreign countries will come to help us. This is both strategy and tactics at the same time." (Teacher).

In other words, existence of initiatives in the given field depends on the availability or unavailability of foreign financial and other types of support.

“As expert, I can base only on facts and official statements. Today Transnistria has not put forward such an idea as official settlement plan. All the documents that were proposed during the negotiation process date back to the beginning of the century, or the year 2008 (Agreement on Friendship and Mutual Neighborly Cooperation); today, there is practically no plan officially proposed by the Transnistria party. If speaking in a more abstract way, Transnistria has developed a foreign policy concept with formulated policy directed at Eurasian integration of Transnistria, its integration in the Customs Union and in other integration projects initiated today by the Russian Federation. Well, I think this is all they have. I have not seen any realistic plans or other official initiatives. As to the RM, the situation here is a mirror one because, except for the reintegration concept unilaterally approved by the Republic of Moldova, there are no other concepts or management plans; in other words, there are no other concepts or proposals coming from Moldova. In fact, the parties do not propose any reciprocal actions or proposals within the negotiation process context.”(Political analyst)

It is difficult to speak about mutual compromises and concessions that the conflicting parties should agree on, if it is the matter of recognition of Transnistria's independence, or integration of the region in the RF as priority option for conflict resolution. If the matter in question relates to some other scenarios of developments, focus-groups respondents suggest that Moldovan party be ready to make the following concessions: withdrawal of economic blockade, assurance of opportunity for creation of confederative common state, giving the Russian language the status of the second state language. In its turn, Transnistria should also agree on confederation, simplify the regime for movement of citizens and build a common economic space.

Opinions of experts are more professional in this respect, of course

“As to compromises, in my opinion, until now an optimum compromise is considered to be some kind of postponed political status with a certain two-three-year moratorium imposed and coordinated in relation to discussions of political problems, while, at the same time, with support of international community, attempts should be made to somehow adjust humanitarian, social and economic spheres. Parties should start interacting and resolving transportation and infrastructure problems without touching any basic ones. To my mind, this could be a compromise formula for two main entities, i.e. both Moldova and Transnistria.” (Expert in the field of diplomatic relations).

“Everybody says to Chisinau and Tiraspol that they should step aside from their starting positions of putting forward demands. For Transnistria the starting position of demand is independence, while for Chisinau, for some reason, the starting position of demand – is federation. Thus, it is considered that federation somehow makes Chisinau unhappy and it cannot agree on federation, while, generally speaking, the starting position of demand for Chisinau should be – unitarianism. And unacceptable starting position should be, in principle, unitarianism – in this case it will be possible to speak about some compromises.” (Political analyst).

However, the ground for compromises exists not only for Moldova, but also for Transnistria. As long as external centers of force render decisive impact on the policy in mutual relations between the conflicting parties (according to the survey participants), they will also have to make certain concessions.

“For Russia and the European Union, I think, it is, first of all, safety issues, settling of the

situation in the region to make it predictable in the long-term prospect. If anything, this should be a kind of buffer area – the area that could be a kind of protectorate between the European Union and the RF that will not be threatening for military and defense policies of both entities. In other words, Europe and Russia should consider this region as a safe region, region that is not a member of any blocks, primarily, of any military and political blocks, the region that is not divided in safety sphere.” (Political scientist).

When discussing the issue as to what country or party should be playing a leading role in the conflict settlement, respondents and experts came to the opinion that the ideal situation is when decision is made only by the conflicting parties, though it is already hardly possible today. As an ideal, nobody would challenge the fact that the problem should be resolved by the parties to the conflict. However, today this statement turns into something like hackneyed phrases for propaganda purposes.

“Well, in general, I believe that a certain working expert group is being set up for resolving the issue without participation of representatives of Moldova and without participation of representatives of Transnistria.” (NGO representative).

“In other words, this decision, even from the formal point of view, should, anyway, be made at the level of those who have the right to make decisions, at least, not at the level of those who prepare decisions or those who makes them. I mean that it should be a conference of a very-very high level.” (Expert in the field of diplomatic relations).

Mentioning concrete countries that can play a leading role along with parties to the conflict when settling it, respondents gave a priority role to relations between Russia and the USA, the second place is with the team of Russia – EU. Many respondents attributed the right for priority steps in conflict settlement only to the Russian Federation.

Some of the respondents are familiar with the confidence building measures program. Some survey participants were also direct beneficiaries of the given program – representatives of civil society and regional mass-media sources. Respondents and experts mentioned such components as strengthening of civil society capacity, infrastructural projects and projects in the field of business community development and development of journalism capacity. *At the same time, the author and initiator of the program appears to be UNDP Moldova.* While positively estimating the program as such, respondents, however, found it difficult to specify what the basis for long-term effect of confidence building measures is. At the same time, it was also mentioned that the level of confidence between the citizens living on both banks of Dniester is not critically low, as a rule. Respondents mentioned the European Union as playing the main role in the promotion of the program, while knowing nothing about the role of specific states in the development of the given program. However, some experts assumed that Transnistrian population trusts Russia more than any other country and, therefore, its support of the given program would be very powerful in the region.

Summing up in the given section of the survey, we can note the following:

- 1. Focus-group respondents do not demonstrate high level of knowledge in the issue of possible conflict, which may be considered both as a low level conflict potential in reality, and as people’s concern about the reality of everyday life without formulating any long-term goals and objectives in the given region.*
- 2. Proposing their options for situation settlement, experts, nevertheless, do not go deep into their detailed analysis.*

In this situation, there grows a risk of one-sided measures and decisions that can somehow misbalance situation in the region.

Safety Issues.

Answering the question about the general safety level in the region, almost all the respondents noted that it is rather high, and they feel being in relative safety, especially in the light of stormy processes in the neighboring Ukraine.

Opinion of one of the experts attracts specific attention in this context.

“The level of safety includes, to my mind, the opportunity to enjoy all civil rights and freedoms, for example, the level of impact of the lawless state, non-legal impact of state structures – this is what I mean: The Ministry of Internal Affairs, Office of Public Prosecutor, judicial bodies – there is a lot to do in this respect, there are many problems in this respect. I have to face representatives of law enforcement bodies, and, at times, this makes me unhappy. In other words, there is still a lot to do. Therefore the safety level in this respect is not as high, as it would be desirable to be.” (NGO representative).

As to the peacekeeping operation and its format, this is, probably, the only issue throughout the survey, in which practically 100% demonstrated their solidarity in the arguments and answers. Only one respondent supported the idea of peacekeeping mission replacement, and not even so much the change of format, but the termination of operation as such.

“It should be removed. There is no conflict. Today, it is not the time when something can be resolved with the use of weapon. Do you think that if they take away Russian peacekeepers, Moldova will immediately aim its guns at Transnistria? Do you think there will start some conflict? Or something else like that will happen?” (M, 25, Bendery).

The main thesis for the opponents of peacekeeping operation format change is that if the system works well, it should not be changed.

“In my opinion, peacekeepers are important; this is one of the major elements in the keeping up of regional stability and safety. Moreover, that their mandate, as opposed to the second component of the Russian military presence, is not challenged by anybody; their mandate fully corresponds to the international norms and rules. This can be substantiated by the fact that, despite Moldova’s leadership declaration, nobody is even thinking in reality about denouncing the Agreement of 92, which serves as international basis for their stay in Moldova and Transnistria. This the first thing. The second thing is that it is also a physical component of safety taking into account the fact that it is a tripartite peacekeeping effort. Well, we can say that for the people who constantly work with each other, it will be difficult to shoot each other, as long as they are already connected by some personal contacts and have the experience of working together, all this contributes to the development of interpersonal contacts. Of course, there is this South Ossetian experience, but the positive aspects connected with peacekeeping efforts in our region are more reliable. In my opinion, it is still a more successful example of peacekeeping that in no case should be sacrificed just to please some political conjuncture.” (Expert in the field of diplomatic relations).

It is worth mentioning that in the course of drafting of the survey report, the situation in relation to Transnistria has seriously aggravated, at least, in media space of these neighboring territories. One can more and more often hear statements and assumptions on involvement of the region in the conflict in Ukraine including in the military way. With these mindsets, joint peacekeeping operation

in Transnistria acquires a new sense and ‘second breath’. This state of things, according to experts, makes absolutely inappropriate, in general, all kinds of discussions related to the format of operation or its transformation. This situation can and, undoubtedly, does influence perception of safety by the population in Transnistria.

Another issue in this respect was discussion of the neutral or non-aligned status of the Republic of Moldova as a necessary condition for resolving Transnistria conflict. The general impression arising in the course of analysis of respondents’ answers can be characterized as “I find it difficult to answer”, but it is connected not so much with deep analysis of consequences of joining some politico-military block or alliance as with insufficient understanding of the main aspects of this issue. However, respondents of older age groups are more critical in their statements.

«Moldova has already violated its neutrality, and already provides its base area in Bulboka for training by NATO officers and knowledge of the English language for officers of the national Moldovan army in Moldova is already considered necessary. (F, 73, Tiraspol).

Experts demonstrate better understanding and common sense in this respect. They, frequently, change the cause-and-effect relation in the issue of RM status. In other words, the matter in question is not so much the neutral status of Moldova as a necessary precondition for conflict settlement, as the fact that depending on the option of conflict settlement the issue of Moldova’s status becomes important to a greater or lesser degree.

“In case Transnistria is recognized independent, the neutral status of the Republic of Moldova will be of no principal importance. If the matter in question is some other form of common state, all the aspects of constitutional status will be subject to revision in general, both of Moldova, and of Transnistria equally. Moreover, the issue in this case will be not the neutral status of the Republic of Moldova but the neutral status of this other potential state entity as a whole. Therefore, the neutral status of the Republic of Moldova is important now for the Republic of Moldova as a proof of its readiness to some kind of adequate military policy. However, whatever the settlement form is, everything will be subject to change. Therefore, in my opinion, it is not as important as they try to demonstrate it in Chisinau.” (Political analyst)

Common Economic Space and RM Eurointegration Policy.

Economic ties between Transnistria and Moldova were mentioned by respondents as almost the only thing that still connects the regions. However, focus-group respondents’ answers were sometimes inconsistent and not always competent. Experts and respondents would now express their opinions that the market of Transnistria is important for the RM exporters, and then they would say something opposite. They also spoke both about the need to create common economic space, and about impossibility and utopism of the given idea in case of signing of the RM-EU Association Agreement.

“In my opinion, it is not simple, probably, but possible (Common Economic Space – author’s note), though only in case there is a desire and intention to build up something, to repair, to keep it – in my opinion, it would even be necessary. Whether it should be named Common Economic Space or Free Trade Area is already an issue for discussions, but as it has already been mentioned, economic relations are that little something that connects the two regions. If they disappear, there will appear big social and economic difficulties. Chisinau will also come across these difficulties. For the Ukrainian export Transnistria market really is not of great interest, while after the duties were cancelled, as well as other things were done throughout these two years, Transnistria market became interesting for Moldovan export. You can find much more

Moldovan goods on our shop shelves, while they can all be easily replaced by the Ukrainian export, but does Chisinau need it? Does Chisinau need a large-scale trade war? The only effect of such war may become a certain increase of not always legal trans boundary economic activities because the border will still remain transparent. Otherwise, Chisinau will have to construct not just an ordinary customs system, but physical border with Transnistria under a full scheme, though it is up to Chisinau to decide. In my opinion, we should think about how to keep this kind of free economic space.” (Expert in the field of diplomatic relations)

“Now, it is impossible. Moldova has signed with the EU Agreements on Trade Area and Association. Transnistria was not included. Moldova has its access to Russia’s market blocked. Transnistria intends to work on it. No, all this is not realistic now.” (Political analyst)

“Well, it would, probably, be interesting for Transnistria because this is an additional sales market, as a minimum, moreover that some markets in the Ukraine are now lost. However, the problem in this respect is how far realistic it is. It is not yet absolutely clear, because these are two different, though very close, but still different poles.” (Businessman, agricultural production)

Both respondents and experts, in their majority, tend to think that setting of Common Economic Space will, undoubtedly, influence political situation as well.

“As a minimum, this is the first step towards the possibility for us to find peace with each other once. This is already the first step, there may appear economic agents, they can come and we can meet. We could negotiate deals.” (M, 31, Bendery)

“All this could possibly render some kind of direct and indirect influence. Why? Because, first of all, one way or another, political issues would have to be raised and this could, probably, become a guarantee that decisions would have to be observed. This, and some other political issues, could somehow contribute to the keeping up of relationships. Any disruption of relationships postpones political decisions. Keeping up of relationships, at least, does not postpone them.” (Expert in the field of diplomatic relations)

At the same time, none of the respondents or experts formulated any concrete forms or constructs of possible creation of the Common Economic Space. Neither did they give any definitions, possible principles of the potential structure or any other specifics.

It is interesting to note the answers to the question on potential opportunity of joining the EU by the Republic of Moldova with the Transnistria conflict unresolved. While some experts are rather skeptical with regard to any kind of opportunities for the RM joining the EU, there still were answers given by the focus-group respondents containing even concrete dates of such integration (joining).

“They have signed, but have not yet approved it; I think that some time about 2016 they will integrate with the EU.” (M, 64, village of Tibulevca, Dubossary district)

“I am not sure that even having resolved Transnistrian conflict, the Republic of Moldova can integrate with the European Union in the foreseeable future. In my opinion, upon signing of the Association Agreement we see that it is not a very big obstacle. The Republic of Moldova carried

out reforms, held negotiations with the European Union regardless of the existence of the Transnistrian factor, they have visa liberalization regime, some other measures carried out. On the other hand, further course of events has shown that the conflict factor should be, at least, somehow taken into consideration. But we cannot consider it as some kind of insurmountable obstacle. It is not so due to the fact that, to my mind, there is no prospect for the RM's membership.” (Political analyst)

“I think it can, one can discuss it very long saying that the precedent of Cyprus cannot be applied to this region, but precedent is precedent and there is no reason why precedent cannot be implemented in practice at a certain moment. I think it is possible.” (Political scientist)

“Moldova has the right to join the EU, while Transnistria has the right to go its own way, i.e. to the Customs Union and Eurasian Union. But in Moldova it is also not self-evident that people support its integration with the EU as long as no referendum was held in Moldova, unlike the case of Transnistria, with regard to the foreign policy orientation.” (Political scientist)

Conclusion

As a conclusion, we can say that ideas, both of respondents and experts, regarding possible future settlement of Transnistrian conflict are rather vague. This fact can be proven by numerous opinions both of those who think that in the coming three years the situation will remain more or less on the same level as it is today, and of those who expect global changes (though not connected directly with mutual relations between Tiraspol and Chisinau. These respondents do not expect any serious changes in these relations).

“The most important thing is that the situation not become worse. I would say that in future many things will depend on external factors, i.e. on the level of confidence of the conflicting parties that their strategic partners will be supporting them, and to what extent. In this respect, unfortunately, the importance of negotiations between Moldova and Transnistria will not be very significant in comparison with external factors and the level of concentration of the parties on working with foreign partners, instead of working with each other. By the way, in my opinion, this is one of the greatest challenges for the situation as a whole. For example, the parties will not violate it (status quo – author's note) in relations with each other hoping that it will be violated through the fault of another party. But it is no longer existent, by and large. It does not exist. Somebody will have to batter in the last nail, not even to batter the nail but simply to strike on it.” (Expert in the field of diplomatic relations)

“Headline in the newspaper, “Things haven't budged an inch!” (Relations between Transnistria and Moldova – author's note) (M, 30, Bendery)

“Even Globa will not be able to say what can happen in three-year time. I, personally, think that in the coming several months we will all become witnesses and participants of very interesting and dangerous historical events.” (M, 59, Bendery)

“I think that in the next three years the situation, and first of all, in Transnistria, will change, at least, in connection with parliamentary and subsequent presidential elections. However, I consider that the most important thing is that in these coming three years contours of mutual relations between the key players will be defined more clearly, i.e. between Russia and the EU. These three years will outline these contours because we see that the situation with their relations is in crisis. This crisis is primarily connected with the fact that Russia and Europe have

not yet determined the boundaries of their spheres of influence, and this is the key point. They do not find points of contact yet being in the state of confrontation.” (Political scientist)

There were also some very interesting points of view

“I think that in three years Transnistria will be part of some Odessa Oblast.” (M, 18, Bendery)

Speaking about their personal plans, respondents tried to be carefully optimistic. Young people whose life plans are especially important and of high priority declare their desire to remain to live in Transnistria and develop the region, but if there are no changes for the better in the nearest future, many of them are ready to go away.

“I am trying to make my living here meanwhile. I will try to buy an apartment, to marry, to have children, but if it does not happen, I will go away from here. If there is no opportunity to make a good career, to live a decent life, I will go away from here...” (F, 23, village of Sukleya, Slobodzeya district.)

Area for Further Surveys

As has already been mentioned above, conclusions of quality survey cannot be technically extrapolated on the overall population of the region. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out a detailed quantitative survey. Conclusions of the given survey can serve as a reference point for working out of the program and a toolkit for quantitative survey.

Practically each block under consideration in the given survey demands deeper operationalization of concepts, construction of concrete working hypotheses. Each block should also become a subject of deep quantitative analysis.

Besides, in the situation of high degree of intensification of sociopolitical processes taking place around Transnistria, such surveys should be carried out 2 times a year on a regular basis, as a minimum.

Special attention should be paid to the options of possible conflict resolution as long as the degree of their detailed perception by the population of the region is rather low.