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How can a *de facto* state be distinguished from a puppet state? An analysis of Transnistrian-Russian relations and dependences

Sandra Kamilova and Eiki Berg

Introduction

As the Cold War came to an end several political entities claiming self-determination appeared on the world map. Most of them met international recognition as successor states, which arose as a result of collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. At the same time others were left without this privileged status by the international community. In contrast to “normal” states, *de facto* states are beyond international law – as a rule their existence and continuity is assured by an influential patron state. Though the *de facto* state has unilaterally proclaimed itself to be independent and its aim is to gain international recognition, the relations with and dependence on a patron are those factors, which make it possible to evaluate the credibility of its claims.

The aim of this paper is to examine the very essence of the puppet state and to measure the level of dependence which makes it different from an independently acting *de facto* state. Although there is some evidence from the past, such as the pro-Soviet marionette government of Tannu Tuva (1921-1944), Japan-oriented Manchukuo vassal state (1932-1945) and Nazi Germany supported puppet regimes

in Slovakia (1939-45) and Croatia (1941-45), one may also point to more recent cases, namely Mongolia closely affiliated to Soviet Union (until 1991) and Bantustans under the control of South African apartheid (until 1994). The Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (TMR) is one of those *de facto* states, where dependence on its patron, i.e. Russia, is considered to be too strong to treat it merely as the outcome of a self-determination claim destined to pave the way for independent statehood.

TMR is a secessionist entity on the territory of the internationally recognized Republic of Moldova, which holds the status of a *de facto* state and which has been claiming independence since 1990. The area of the breakaway region is only 4,163 km² and its population is about half-a-million people, but despite of its modest size the region has been in the focus of the international community during the last decades. For several years, the European Union, USA, OSCE, Russia, Ukraine, and both conflicting parties, Moldova and TMR, respectively, have been involved in conflict management, but despite of numerous attempts mediators have not managed to melt this frozen conflict in a way that could satisfy all concerned parties.

International observers argue that TMR is strongly dependent on Russia (e.g. military support, favorable gas tariffs, and social allowances) and are treating this region as a Russian puppet (see e.g. Lynch 2004, Popescu 2006b, Chamberlain-Creanga and Allin 2010). It is also an indisputable fact that the Russian 14th Army directly intervened in the secessionist conflict of Moldova in 1992 (see Isachenko 2010), or that an estimated 1500 Russian soldiers and 20,000 tons of Russian ammunition and armaments still remain on the territory of the region (OSCE Mission 2011). In any case, Russia's role has been decisive in directing the course of conflict and orchestrating the peace-building (see e.g. Russian Draft Memorandum...

2003), or slowing down the pace of Moldova's Europeanization within the European Neighborhood framework (see e.g. Popescu 2005). Still, Russian-Transnistrian interrelations and dependencies are worth a more thorough analysis to determine whether the conventional wisdom of its region's puppet-character can be approved or contradicted.

The theoretical framework of this paper sheds some light on the phenomenon of the *de facto* state and discusses the definition of a puppet state. *De facto* state and puppet state do not necessarily exclude each other; whereas the former lacks international recognition, the latter is over-reliant on its patron state. Thus, it is an empirical question to measure the range of dependencies without making further inquiries about the factual and legal grounds of (non)recognition. This paper attempts first to identify those variables, which signify dependence and make the *de facto* state identical to the puppet state. It then introduces the logic of operationalization while elucidating scales and measurements. The empirical part is an analysis of the economic, social and political factors determining the patron state's influence on TMR.

Theoretical framework

The main feature of the *de facto* state is the absence of international recognition, but despite of that fact it can have all other criteria, which are necessary for being a state: territory, population and efficient governing structures (Lynch 2002). According to Pegg (1998: 26), "the *de facto* state views itself capable of entering into relations with other states and it seeks full constitutional independence and widespread international recognition as a sovereign state". At this point an empirical and legal approach to

define the state can be distinguished (Spears 2004, Lynch 2002). Legally speaking, a *de facto* state does not have international recognition and therefore does not have legal status within the international community. At the same time, the *de facto* state has empirically defined the basis for claiming sovereignty (Lynch 2002: 835). Despite the fact that these entities do not belong to the privileged club of “real” states, they are part of the international affairs. In Kingston’s (2004: 8) view, it is not just a matter of choice between recognition and non-recognition of secessionist entities: the international community is trying to find more flexible ways for coexistence of sovereign states and other entities.

De facto states are most of all concerned about their survival and international recognition. The claimants of independent statehood often “tend to gloss-over their considerable reliance on external support”, which as a rule comes from their patron state (Caspersen 2009: 48). Inevitably weaker and less sustainable *de facto* states become dominated by other states through absorption of external influence and its transfer to usual relations between states. Foreign support is needed to assure the state-formation and nation-building processes and to demonstrate its viability to the rest of the world. More often than not, *de facto* states can fulfill empirical criteria of statehood and participate to some extent in interactions with other actors of the international relations system, yet international recognition is not easy thing to obtain.

Attempting to find the definition of a puppet state, one can start with an interesting comparison made by Silins (1991: 48) who compared puppet state with puppet theatre. According to Silins, one can notice in both cases “control” and “pretending of being someone”. As in puppet theatre, the marionette is under the control of human-beings and depends on how the strings are pulled.

In a similar fashion, the puppet state depends on its patron's dictate. The same appears on the stage where the marionette embodies some imaginary role and makes the puppet state believe that it as an independent state, thus concealing the influence of its patron. James (1986: 139) has noted that "the relationship of puppet state with another and more powerful state is regarded as so close that it justifies their treatment as mere appendages of the larger state, entities which move at its will and only at its will". Crawford (2006: 80) characterizes the puppet state by the following features: "the entity concerned was established illegally, by threat or use of external force; it did not have the support of vast majority of the population it claimed to govern; in important matters it was subject to foreign direction or control; it was staffed, especially in more important positions, by nationals of the dominant state". While combining the analyses of James and Crawford together, Pegg (1998: 36) argues that *de facto* state has much more "organic and symbiotic relationship with its population than puppet state does". In his view an entity, whose leadership is externally imposed and which lacks strong indigenous roots and popular support does not qualify as a *de facto* state (Pegg 1998).

In the context of *de facto* state it is common that it may act and develop independently, waiting for other states to notice that and grant it with recognition. "Primary focus of *de facto* state is political. /.../ The positive economic benefits of integration are less important than the political goal of separation", says Pegg (1998: 43). At the same time the puppet state aims to demonstrate its independence thereby trying to be someone that it is not (Marek 1954; Crawford 2006). It can also be said, that a puppet state itself cannot set achievable political or economic goals, as the processes are led by the patron who is driven by his own aims. According to Marek (1954: 114) agreements between puppet

state and occupier are in essence agreements of occupier with himself.

Foreign control is the main feature, which makes a *de facto* state become a puppet state, but at the same time it should be acknowledged that drawing a border between the control level and level of natural interdependence is not always easy. Silins (1991: 95) refers to the fact, that control as such does not have exact definition, which would have been built on a systematic approach. This paper departs from the viewpoint that there ought to be a wide range of dependencies between the *de facto* state and its patron state which conduces or has already conduced to the appearance of control opportunities, and therefore defines the very nature of being a puppet state. It draws upon main features such as: a) strong economic dependence upon patron state; b) patron's strong political dominance over the *de facto* state governance and policies; c) loyal population towards patron state; d) patron's interest in maintaining and enforcing his dominance over the *de facto* state. As the puppet state is created and controlled by patron (Marek 1954, Silins 1991), then presumably the interest from the patron's side is one of the inseparable features of puppet state. These four abovementioned features also form a basis upon which the possible puppet state character of TMR is evaluated.

Methodology

This paper attempts to examine the *de facto* state dependencies from different perspectives. It combines qualitative and quantitative data while considering both statistics and interviews with experts. As an end result it offers some new ideas of how it would be possible to define and measure the features of the puppet state. Moreover it could offer an al-

ternative view about the Transnistrian conflict. Secessionist conflict combined with national and territorial self-determination, which is looking for international recognition (see e.g. O’Loughlin et. al. 1998; Troebst 2003; Roper 2004; Vahl and Emerson 2004; Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2011), is far more different than conflict between states, of which foreign occupation is taking place under the label of state-building.

Our main aim is to identify and measure Transnistrian-Russian relations and dependencies, and to inquire whether this level of mutual interaction is crucial to the role change, transforming thus a *de facto* state into a puppet state. In addition to political factors (Marek 1954; Silins 1991), this paper attempts to analyze a wider spectrum of fields, involving social and economic aspects in the first place, to determine those features that make a puppet state distinct from a *de facto* state. Hereafter we offer four different ways to measure the transition from the *de facto* state to the puppet state formula (Fig. 1).

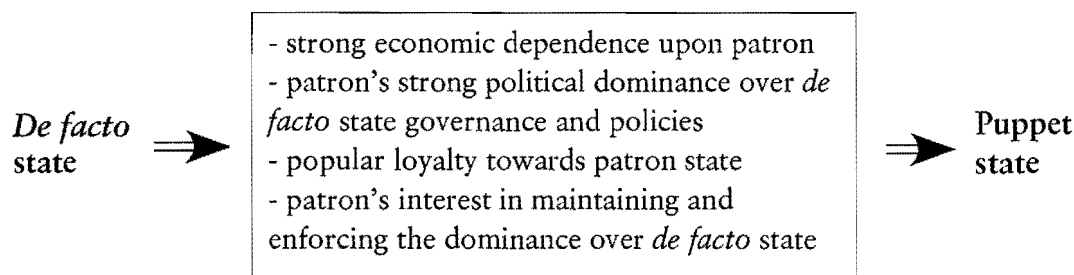


Figure 1: Features distinguishing puppet states

This paper relies extensively on official statistics in TMR, and other surveys¹ and secondary sources which reflect the socio-economic and political situation in this breakaway re-

¹ For instance a survey of mass political attitudes conducted in May 2009 provided this paper with a data about locality ('the place of birth'), allegiance ('identification with the patron'), and political status ('future settlement preferences'). It was carried out under the Estonian Science Foundation project *De Facto States in the International System: Legitimacy vs. Legitimacy* (Grant no. 7951).

gion of Moldova. Indicators based on quantitative data are taken at face value. For example, the import/export levels can be adjusted to 1-point scale, whereas 1 point means that the value of the indicator is 100 percent and 0 point means the value of zero percent. Qualitative indicators spell out their values differently: here the possible options are “0”, “0.25”, “0.5”, “0.75” and “1”, where “0” means absence of the concerned feature and “1” means its strong presence (see Table 1). There are both these indicators, which can be estimated relying on concrete facts and those where there might be a risk of subjective interpretation. To avoid the circumstance that the conclusion is based only upon the judgments of the authors of this paper, the opinions of seven experts as expressed in means are taken into consideration as well.²

Dependent variable	Independent variables	Indicators	Scale
Economic dependence on patron	External trade	proportion from export and import	1 – 100% 0 – 0%
	Direct financial support	proportion from the state budget	1 – 100% 0 – 0%
	Debt to patron	proportion from GDP	1 – 100% 0 – 0%
	Currency dependence	level of dependence	1 – strong dependence 0.75 – fairly strong dependence 0.5 – fairly weak dependence 0.25 – weak dependence 0 – no dependence

² Daria Isachenko, Marius Vahl, Scott Pegg, Stefan Troebst, Vladimir Kolossov, William Crowther and Allin Lyndon were asked to give their estimation to different aspects within this research. None of the seven experts is by his or her origin connected either with Moldova or TMR.

Influenced state structures by patron	Representatives of other origin in state institutions	proportion from total members of the parliament	1 – 100% 0 – 0%
	Influence on decision-making process	level of influence	1 – strong influence 0.75 – fairly strong influence 0.5 – fairly weak influence 0.25 – weak influence 0 – no influence
	Democracy level	level of democracy ³	1 – undemocratic (FH 7) 0.75 – with some democratic features (FH 6) 0.5 – weak democracy (FH 4-5) 0.25 – close to maturity (FH 2-3) 0 – full democracy (FH 1)
	Military presence	proportion from total defense forces	1 – 100% 0 – 0%
Loyal population towards patron	Immigrant population	proportion from the total population	1 – 100% 0 – 0%
	Support for unification with the patron	proportion from the total population	1 – 100% 0 – 0%
	Identification with patron	proportion from the total population	1 – 100% 0 – 0%
	Patron's citizenship among the population	proportion from the total population	1 – 100% 0 – 0%

³ We rely on Freedom House (FH) categorization, according to which each country and territory is assigned a numerical rating on a scale of 1 to 7 for political rights and an analogous rating for civil liberties in the following way: 1-2 Free, 3-5 Partly Free, or 6-7 Not Free societies.

Patron's initiative and interest in context of the <i>de facto</i> state existence	Role in creation the <i>de facto</i> state	level of role	1 – crucial role 0.75 – fairly crucial role 0.5 – fairly weak role 0.25 – weak role 0 – no role
	Role in maintaining the status of the <i>de facto</i> state	level of role	1 – crucial role 0.75 – fairly crucial role 0.5 – fairly weak role 0.25 – weak role 0 – no role
	Prioritizing the <i>de facto</i> state	level of prioritizing	1 – strong priority 0.75 – fairly strong priority 0.5 – fairly weak priority 0.25 – weak priority 0 – no priority
	Role in cultivating socio-cultural cohesiveness	level of role	1 – crucial role 0.75 – fairly crucial role 0.5 – fairly weak role 0.25 – weak role 0 – no role

Table 1: Numerical values assigned to attributes of dependence

Points indicating the level of dependence of the *de facto* state and those indicating the interest from the side of the patron are handled separately: the total amount of points will be recalculated to 1-point scale and placed on the matrix, estimating the characteristics of the *de facto* state, which is reflected on Fig 2.

Level of dependence of the *de facto* state (I^1)

		Strong	Weak
Patron's initiative (I^2)	Strong	Puppet state $I^1 \geq 0.5$ $I^2 \geq 0.5$	<i>De facto</i> state falling under the full control of patron $I^1 < 0.5$ $I^2 \geq 0.5$
	Weak	<i>De facto</i> state under the loose control of patron $I^1 \geq 0.5$ $I^2 < 0.5$	<i>De facto</i> state $I^1 < 0.5$ $I^2 < 0.5$

Figure 2: *De facto* state dependence matrix

There are four different categories brought out in this matrix, which are distinguished by different combination of dependence levels of the *de facto* state and presence of initiative from the side of the patron:

1. **Puppet state.** Patron has manifest interests to stay involved in the political and economic organization of the *de facto* state. These interests are met with great sympathy and understanding among the elite in *de facto* state. Dependence is clearly evident in several fields which empower the patron with tools to influence and control the *de facto* state.

2. **De facto state under the loose control of patron.** Although *de facto* state is quite dependent on its patron in several fields and all presumptions to establish “patron – puppet state” relations are present, yet the patron itself is not interested in taking the *de facto* state under its direct supervision. In case this interest from the patron’s side will appear the *de facto* state is likely to develop into puppet state.

3. **De facto state falling under the full control of patron.** Although the *de facto* state is not yet fully reliant on the patron its viability to pursue independent policies has become questionable. Initiative and interest from patron’s side to get the *de facto* state under its influence is strong.

4. **De facto state.** There exist “patron – *de facto* state” relations while being part of wider network of interactions in the system of international relations. Dependence and dominance are low-key issues for both sides as long as the patron is not seriously involved in the management of daily practices of the *de facto* state and the *de facto* state can survive without the external assistance of its patron.

Placement of the results of TMR in this matrix will show which kind of *de facto* state we are dealing with and whether it gives scientific proof to puppet reputation of TMR or rather disapproves it.

Analysis of Transnistrian-Russian dependences

When Transnistria broke away from Moldova, it was economically much stronger than the rest of Moldova. Thirty percent of the state's industry was concentrated on the left bank of the river Dniester. The region had more developed infrastructure incorporating mainly transportation networks and was at the same time the most urbanized part of Moldova (Burla et al 2005). The TMR government has justified its claims of independence with economic aspects. It has also been argued that the unification will make TMR responsible for Moldovan debts. The main reason for Moldova's motivation to reintegrate the lost territories was considered as the ambition to gain command of TMR industry and to benefit from it (Popescu 2006a). Yet, it remains to be seen how much TMR social welfare, economic growth, governance structures, military security, and even socialization practices exist independently from the Russian assistance.

External trade

Despite the fact that international community has not granted TMR recognition, the list of its trade partners is impressive. Besides the main partners – Russia, Moldova and Ukraine, it includes such countries as Germany, Italy and Belarus. It is interesting to note that Brazil is also among the top ten countries on the TMR external trade list, leaving behind Poland, USA, China and Kazakhstan (Статистика ВЭД 2011). The statistical data of the State Customs Committee of Transnistria shows clearly that external trade in 2009 and 2010 was most intensive with Russia. When it comes to import, Russia is unquestionably the leader (Статистика ВЭД 2011). Moldova is also brought out as a separate state and most of the export from TMR is directed to this country, though Russia being the second at this point. The level of import and export with Russia constitutes 37.5 percent of the total external trade amount in TMR (2010).

Direct financial support

TMR is currently receiving both direct financial support and loan (in gas) from Russia.⁴ In 2008-2009 TMR received direct financial support amounting to USD 55 mln from its patron. This support coming from Russia is directed at ensuring higher pensions, as well as improving the conditions at schools, kindergartens, hospitals and other institutions. According to the government of TMR, Russia's financial support is consistent with its compatriot policy near abroad (С 1 апреля... 2011). Apparently, the approved budget of TMR was USD 175.2 mln, including thus Russian direct financial support in value of USD 25 mln which amounted to 14 percent of the budget of 2009 (О республиканском бюджете... 2008). In the end of October 2011, Oleg Smirnov while being the Russian Federation citizen and the youngest son of the President of TMR was declared a suspect by Russian authorities in the theft of USD 5.24 mln of humanitarian aid. The case became "criminal" just two weeks after Igor Smirnov, the President of TMR made his decision to compete the fifth time for the presidency in the upcoming December elections in TMR (СОЛОВЬЕВ 2011).

Debt to the patron

One of the means of Russian support to TMR is gas supply; Russia supplies gas to this region at a three times lower rate than to Moldova (Munteanu and Munteanu 2007). Gas supply is also one of the fields where dependence of TMR on Russia can be definitely confirmed. Despite the fact that TMR has problems with payments (70 percent of foreign debt), Russia is still supplying the region with gas.⁵ According to the latest data, the gas debt of Moldova

⁴ TMR has not paid Russia for gas supplies since 2009, but despite that fact Russia has not cut gas supply to the region. Gas received from Russia is added to the debt line in the TMR budget.

⁵ The President of TMR Igor Smirnov has noted that the country officially does not have gas debt, as there is no contract signed with Gazprom – indeed the con-

constitutes USD 319 mln whereas the debt of TMR is USD 2.5 bln (ГАЗОВЫЕ АКТИВЫ... 2011). The GDP of TMR was USD 834.7 mln in 2009; these figures show clearly that the gas debt exceeds the GDP of TMR more than three times (ОСНОВНЫЕ МАКРОЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИЕ... 2011). The indicator of foreign debt demonstrates a clear dependence of the *de facto* state on its patron: such a deep “financial bondage” gives the patron opportunities to influence the *de facto* state and to direct the decision-making process which makes the viability of the *de facto* state doubtful.

Currency dependence

The financial and banking system of TMR is built up on the basis of the Transnistrian ruble⁶ (Приднестровский рубль... 2009). It is not a convertible currency and does not have an international currency code. In 1993-1998, the exchange rate was regularly revised by the Transnistrian Republican Bank and fixed in accordance with market conditions. At the end of 1998 the local currency was fixed against the US dollar, but in 2002 a decision was made to return to the floating exchange rate system (Gudin et al 2003). The Transnistrian ruble is not fixed against the Russian ruble either, but despite that, around 80 percent of invoicing within the TMR is conducted in Russian rubles or other currencies (В Приднестровье собираются... 2009). At the same time the Law of the Central Bank stipulates that the only legal tender in TMR is the Transnistrian ruble (*The Law...* 2007). The

tract for gas supply is signed between Gazprom and Moldovagaz (Munteanu and Munteanu 2007). In 2006 Russia even used this situation to put some pressure on Moldova: Gazprom applied to the international court to claim the gas debt of TMR from Moldovagaz which belongs to Moldova. This claim was approved in July 2007 and the Moldovan company had to face the fact of paying Russia USD 42 mln for the first quarter of 2006 (Долг Приднестровья... 2008).

⁶ The first batch of the new TMR banknotes which were printed in the Russian Federation came into use in 1994. Russian general Suvorov, whose picture was on the new banknotes, symbolized “historical and eternal connection with Russia” (Приднестровскому рублю... 2009).

President of TMR Igor Smirnov does not even exclude the possibility of joining the Russian currency system while saying that “the more enterprises with Russian capital we have in TMR, the stronger our integration with the economic sector of Russia will be” (Игорь Смирнов... 2006).

People of other origin in state institutions

Presumably, having a close eye on the *de facto* state institutions ensures the patron’s control over its policies. This may easily happen after staffing of all key positions by nationals of the patron state (Crawford 2006). Although James (1986) considers it the most crucial element in defining the features of a puppet state, this remains a challenging exercise due to the lack of hard evidence. For instance, different sources may indeed refer to the fact that the President of TMR and the majority of the political elite are citizens of the Russian Federation (Popescu 2006b, Danelsons 2008, Chamberlain-Creanga and Allin 2010), yet it is not possible to validate this statement more thoroughly. An alternative way to proceed is to study the origin of the members of the TMR parliament (2005–2010) (see Protsyk 2008). It reveals that the share of MPs hailing from countries other than TMR is 58 percent (including Russia 30 percent). This fact again should create more opportunities for the patron to influence and control the decision-making processes in TMR.

Influence on the decision-making process

The estimation of this indicator is to some extent complicated by the fact that information about the patron’s influence on the decisions and law-making of the *de facto* states is concealed and doesn’t have wider representation. The indirect influence could be mentioned here as well – the patron might not give instructions itself, but the *de facto* state for its part might opt for decisions beneficial for the

patron. The satisfaction of the patron is important, as otherwise the *de facto* state would have neither diplomatic nor financial support for its existence. Four experts estimated Russia's influence on TMR decision-making to be strong, whereas three other experts decided for the answer "fairly strong", referring at this point to some tensions in the communication with Moscow. Based on the experts' opinion, this research considers the patron's influence on the decision-making process to be strong because of not only direct instructions but also indirect influence. The fact that the *de facto* state makes decisions constantly keeping the patron in mind and trying to please the latter in most of the cases means that the actions of the *de facto* state are not based only on its own interests, but might be subjected to the control from the patron.

The level of democracy

Democracy is the feature which makes state functioning more transparent and gives the whole population equal rights to be involved in the discussions of state issues. Lack of democracy creates favorable opportunities for the patron to influence the *de facto* state: the patron has a chance to evade fair elections by placing its own representatives in state structures, or to exercise influence with illegal means; for example, putting pressure on the rulers of the *de facto* state by manipulating with gas supplies. An undemocratic society creates many possibilities to ignore laws and norms. Regarding the question "Where would you place your country at the present time?", 47.9 percent of respondents considered TMR as undemocratic (*De Facto States... 2009-2011*). The research of Freedom House (2010) has come to the similar conclusion that in case of TMR we are dealing with an undemocratic state where political rights (6 points) and civil liberties (6 points) are not ensured.

Military presence

After the end of the armed conflict between Moldova and TMR in 1992 the Russian 14th Army was reformed into the Operational Group of Russian Forces in Moldova which came under the command of the Moscow Military District. According to estimates, some 1,500 Russian soldiers (including also 385 Russian peace-keepers in the Joint Control Commission) and around 20,000 tons of ammunition and armaments are still stationed in TMR (OSCE Mission 2011). When it comes to the TMR defense forces, then some sources give the figures of 5,000-7,500 men (Вооруженные силы... 2007, Военная статистика... 2010), others again refer to 10,000 men (Danelsons 2008). We take the average size (6,250 men) figured in local sources as the basis for calculations, add the Russian military presence, and finally compute the share which is 19.4 percent. Constituting around one-fifth of the *de facto* state's defense forces and thereby directly ensuring the military security of TMR as well as indirectly maintaining the current status of TMR, Russia has got opportunities to establish itself as a powerful patron state.

Immigrant population

Population loyal to the patron shows that not only the puppet government but also the whole *de facto* state is under the influence of the patron. Being supportive towards the patron, the population might tolerate or even support possible actions of the government along the guidelines of the patron. Immigrant population (based on their country of birth) in TMR is important as it influences the identity formation of the region and may happen to be one of the sources of loyalty to the patron's actions. At the moment the population of TMR is 518,000 people (Социально-экономическое развитие... 2011). For this indicator, the number of people born beyond the borders of TMR and

Moldova is taken as the basis. The sociological survey of 2009 showed that 64.1 percent of the current population of TMR was born in Transnistria and 10.8 percent in Moldova-proper (*De Facto States... 2009-2011*). Therefore, the proportion of immigrants is 25.1 percent, i.e. one-fourth of the population of TMR, which still gives the patron some basis to represent its interest and to gain support. At the same time it should be acknowledged that “Transnistrians” still form a considerable majority of the population of the *de facto* state.

Identification with the patron

The process of building the Transnistrian identity is not based on ethnic grounds: there is history, culture, territory and traditions closely interwoven with a certain Soviet-type of nostalgia (Kolstø and Malgin 1998). According to the only census carried out on the left bank since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the population is divided in three almost equally sized groups: Moldovans constituted 31.9 percent, Russians 30.4 percent, and Ukrainians 28.8 percent (*Об итогах переписи... 2006*). Although, the ethnic Russians make up little less than one-third of TMR’s multi-ethnic population, the percentage of persons with Russian citizenship is around one-fourth of the total population. At the same time the sociological survey carried out in 2009 shows that 41.1 percent of the population identifies itself with Russia (*De Facto States... 2009-2011*). The fact that almost half of the population sees their identity as Russian (in civic terms) gives the patron a good chance to gain support for its actions with minimum effort. If at some point unification of TMR and Moldova would take place, the majority of the Transnistrians – both ethnic Russians and the Russian-speaking inhabitants – might move to Russia, as they consider it their big motherland (*Приднестровье – маленькая... 2011*).

Support for unification

In 2006 there was a referendum on whether TMR should conclusively break away from Moldova and join the Russian Federation. The result was astonishing: 97.2 percent of the respondents were in favor of unification with Russia. The Foreign Ministry of TMR demonstrated their clear position: the results of the referendum were to be taken as basis for negotiations with Chisinau (Piovesana 2006). According to the results of the 2009 sociological survey, 53 percent of the population was in favor of unification with Russia (*De Facto States... 2009-2011*). It is natural that identification with the patron and the wish for unification should be closely interconnected. This research shows that the proportion of the population in favor of unification with Russia exceeds the number of those who identify themselves with the patron state. It can be concluded that among the people with Transnistrian identity there are also those who would like to join Russia.

The patron's citizenship within the population

TMR permits multiple citizenship because of practical reasons – it gives the local population an opportunity to travel abroad. In the context of having the citizenship of the patron state such keywords as “emigration” and “loyalty towards patron's control” can be mentioned which again make the sustainability and independent action of the *de facto* state questionable. Russia is interested in having as many Russian citizens in TMR as possible, as this can be used as grounds for intervention into the life of the *de facto* state: Russia can refer to the wish to stand for its citizens and protect their interests in the region (Popescu 2006a). At the moment around 125,000 inhabitants of TMR (24.1 percent of the total population) have Russian citizenship and 110,000 inhabitants have Ukrainian citizenship (Приднестровье – маленькая... 2011). The Union

of Russians and Compatriots of Transnistria is active in the region, aiming to speak for the Russian citizens on the territory of TMR.

The patron's role in the establishment of the *de facto* state

According to Marek (1954), the emergence of the puppet state is interconnected with military occupation and the initiative of the occupier which plays a decisive role at this point. One of the main criteria for Crawford (2006) has also been the illegal establishment of the entity through military occupation or threat of external force. Hence we should evaluate the level of military intervention, the source of the initiative and the decisiveness of the patron's intervention. The Russian intervention came in a key stage of the establishment of the *de facto* state. The preservation of the Russian military on the territory of TMR after the end of the armed conflict enables drawing parallels with military occupation. The situation changed in favor of TMR only when the Russian army intervened, and without foreign support for TMR, Chisinau would probably have been able to assure the territorial integrity of Moldova (Sanchez 2009). Therefore, the involvement of the Russian 14th Army played a crucial role in this conflict (Kolstø and Malgin 1998, Vahl and Emerson 2004, Kennedy 2007). Hence, it is possible to judge the patron's role in the establishment of the *de facto* state as decisive.

The patron's role in maintaining the status quo

The patron may have different roles to play in the conflict, either in settling or, rather, obstructing the settlement of the issue of the *de facto* state's status. Russia seems to safeguard the *status quo* of TMR. The main reason might be the fact that the unification of TMR with Moldova is not beneficial for Russia, as in this case the patron would lose its influential position in the region. In general Rus-

sia has been so strongly connected with the Transnistrian conflict that it can be treated as one of the parties of the conflict (Socor 2006). Most of experts see Russia as the main reason why the Transnistrian conflict is still not resolved; three of them refer to the fact that apart from the important role of Russia, one should not underestimate the influence of other factors, namely popular support. Generally it was agreed that Russia has obstructed the conflict-resolution process and the actions of other parties on purpose. Though the behavior of Russia might be based on imperialistic claims, one cannot ignore the Transnistrian identity which opposes itself to Moldova and leans towards Russia in issues related to its status. Around one third of the population of TMR sees Russia as a key player in resolving the Transnistrian conflict (OSCE Moldovan News Digest 2011).

Prioritizing the *de facto* state

Presumably, prioritization of the *de facto* state indicates the resources available and the willingness of the patron to contribute to the region. Here the patron's initiative to establish the entity and to provide its security with the aim of realizing its interests plays a very important role in setting the course of conflict management (see also James 1986, Silins 1992, Crawford 2006). The more valuable it looks, the more interest the patron has in controlling and influencing the *de facto* state and making it its own puppet. According to the experts, TMR is a rather weak priority for Russia. Until recently Russia was not much interested in what the TMR government was doing on the local level. Yet, this unresolved conflict can be used as an instrument to avoid further enlargements of the EU and NATO (Vahl and Emerson 2004, Popescu 2006a, Страхоб 2009). While serving the *de facto* state as a tool, it can be transformed into a puppet state to achieve wider goals (Marek 1954). The lower level

of prioritization might mean less attention and influence on its activities from the patron than it could have been in case of higher emphasis.

The patron's role in cultivating socio-cultural cohesiveness

In case the *de facto* state's viability is largely based on the patron's support, is it because the *de facto* state has limited capability to function without the patron's support, or because the patron keeps it fully operational for the sake of its own interests? At this point the patron's role in cultivating socio-cultural cohesiveness deserves perhaps more attention. This paper assumes that through its control over the media outlets and educational system the patron wishes to create favorable circumstances to influence and gain leverage over this region. The experts estimated the patron's role in the socialization process as "fairly strong" or "strong". The educational system uses Russian standards in TMR; diplomas issued in local state universities are acknowledged by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation as equivalent to diplomas of Russian universities (Belitser 2005). School programs still consider TMR's own geographical and philological specifics to some extent, but nevertheless one may rhetorically question whether this kind of socialization raise citizens loyal to TMR or rather to their patron.

Analysis

For the purposes of this research, there were two kinds of indicators involved: on the one hand, that showing the level of the dependence of TMR on Russia, and on the other hand, that indicating the patron's own interest in the existence of the *de facto* state (see Table 2).

Dependent variable	Independent variables	Value
Economic dependence on patron (2.03/4)	External trade	0.36
	Direct financial support	0.17
	Debt to patron	1
	Currency dependence	0.5
Influenced state structures by patron (2.41/4)	Representatives of other origin in state institutions	0.58
	Influence on decision-making process	0.89
	Democracy level	0.75
	Military presence	0.19
Loyal population towards patron (1.43/4)	Immigrant population	0.25
	Support for unification with the patron	0.53
	Identification with patron	0.41
	Patron's citizenship among the population	0.24
Patron's initiative and interest in context of the <i>de facto</i> state existence (3.14/4)	Role in creation the <i>de facto</i> state	1
	Role in maintaining the status of the <i>de facto</i> state	0.79
	Prioritizing the <i>de facto</i> state	0.54
	Role in cultivating socio-cultural cohesiveness	0.81

Table 2: Level of dependences

Regarding economic dependence it can be brought out that TMR has a diversified list of trade partners of which Russia is fairly important. Since 2007, Russia has provided direct financial support which forms a little less than one-fourth of the TMR state budget. At the same time gas debt alone exceeds the size of the TMR's GDP approximately three times. TMR has its own currency in circulation which is not fixed against the currency of its patron. Because of the credibility deficit of the Transnistrian ruble, other currencies including the Russian ruble are unofficially in use. According to our estimates, TMR is in a half-way transition to a puppet state in economic terms (2.03 points from a maximum of 4).

While estimating the extent to which the patron is influencing the governing processes of TMR, we argue that loyalty to the patron and its commands is assumed, given that over half of the members of the TMR parliament were born on the territory of the former Soviet Union and beyond the borders of TMR and Moldova, and that several high ranking TMR officials, including the president, are in fact Russian Federation citizens. It is evident that TMR has no possibility to make decisions based on its own interests, and that the decision-making process is largely conditioned by the authoritarian regime within which it is easier for the patron to influence and control policies. Due to the lack of democratic accountability the patron has a chance to conceal its actions; furthermore, there is no risk of resistance from the population as freedom is restricted. The Russian military presence on the territory of TMR is not exceeding one-fifth of the defense forces of TMR, yet it is still important as a factor of security and control. To sum up, it can be said that the representatives of other states in the state institutions, the openness to the patron's influences, authoritarian regime, and the military presence on the territory of the *de facto* state are features taking TMR even closer to the puppet state (2.41 points from maximum 4).

Under the next category, "loyalty of the population to the patron", we observed the size of the immigrant population, identification with the patron and the level of support for unification and people holding the patron's citizenship in the population. Only in one indicator – support for unification – did the result exceed the 50 percent level. Again, 41 percent of the total population identified itself with Russia, and the fair share of the Russian Federation citizens constituted a quarter of the population. Presumably this number would have been higher if the procedures for getting Russian citizenship had been simplified. The immigrant population (predominantly Russian-speakers born in the

former Soviet Union) forms a quarter of the total population of TMR. Compared with the two other set of variables, the dependence of TMR is lower here (1.43 points from maximum 4). At this point it is possible to assume that the TMR government has managed to assure the Transnistrian identity in some parts of its population.

The last set of variables demonstrates the level of the patron's interest in both the establishment and the existence of the *de facto* state (3.14 points from maximum 4). The research showed that the intervention of Russia in the armed conflict between Moldova and TMR played a crucial role in the establishment of the *de facto* state. At the moment, Russia is either the main reason or one of the main reasons why the Transnistrian conflict has not been resolved. The patron's interest is to keep TMR viable and use it for the sake of its own interests. Russia provides assistance in the form of humanitarian aid, gas supplies, foreign investments, military presence, etc. The research came to the conclusion that at this point the political interest is the most important, as otherwise the patron would not, for example, direct its investments to the unattractive environment and supply gas which is not paid for. At the same time experts admitted that TMR is not a very strong priority for Russia – it is rather a tool to achieve higher goals. In case of higher prioritization, the attention of the patron towards the *de facto* state would be higher, and the influence would be more extensive.

Summarizing the results of the indicators, it is possible to place TMR on the matrix of the *de facto* state. Realigned to a 1-point scale, the coefficient of dependence of the *de facto* state (I^1) and coefficient of patron's interest (I^2) are as follows:

$$I^1 = 0.49$$

$$I^2 = 0.79$$

Based on these coefficients it is possible to place TMR within the matrix which was introduced in the operationalization part of this work, as follows:

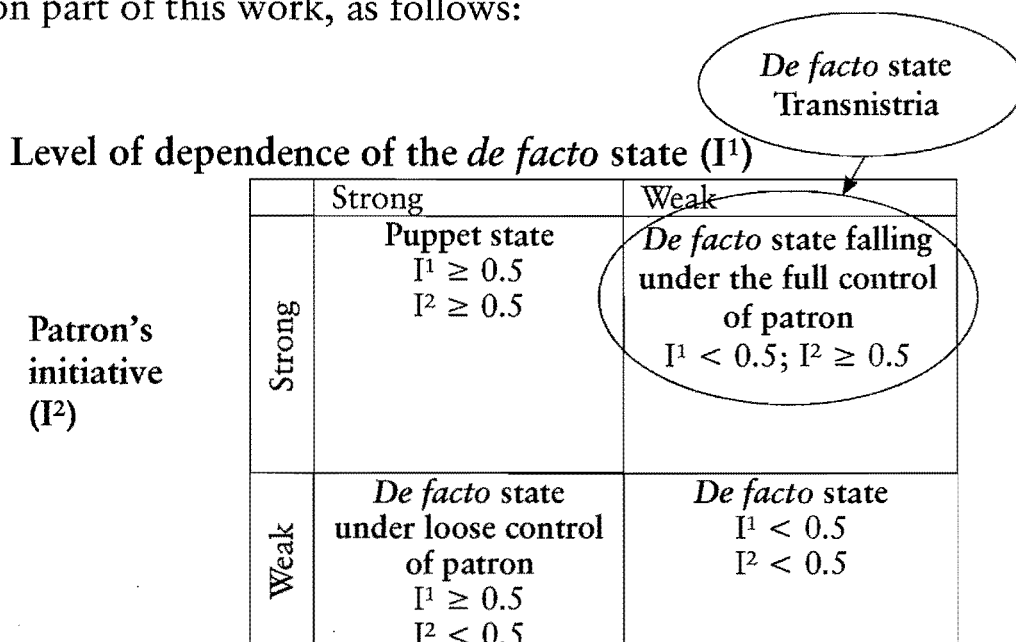


Figure 3: TMR positioning in the dependence matrix

Our research results show us that it is possible to estimate TMR as a *de facto* state falling under the full control of the patron (Fig. 3). TMR is dependent on its patron Russia in several fields and at the same time Russia itself has interest in maintaining these dependences. The coefficient showing the level of dependence of the *de facto* state (I^1) amounts to 0.49 points and is somewhat lower than the coefficient indicating the interest of the patron ($I^2=0.79$). Based on that, it can be said that the dependence of TMR on its patron is not yet that deep.

Conclusions

It has become almost conventional wisdom that *de facto* states do not exercise a sufficient level of independence and therefore can be regarded primarily as puppets of their pa-

tron states (Lynch 2004). True, most of them are importing security and welfare from their patrons, because otherwise they would risk being absorbed by the parent state in the generally hostile international community, which does not recognize their existence (Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2011). Yet this black-and-white picture where the *de facto* state is represented as merely the patron's toy with push and pull strings (Popescu 2006b), or a self-aware political entity capable enough to preserve its statehood and resist external interventions to its domestic affairs (Matsuzato 2008), invites us to make more comprehensive elaborations.

This paper departed from the viewpoint that there ought to be a wide range of dependences between the *de facto* state and its patron state which enables definition of the nature of a puppet state. Moreover, this paper examined this range of dependences in the case of Transnistrian-Russian relations. As predicted, Russia is keen on being involved in TMR's domestic affairs. This involvement becomes visible in terms of humanitarian assistance, gas supplies, foreign investments⁷, naturalization, cultivation of socio-cultural cohesiveness, as well as political and military support. Although Russia has not recognized the independence of TMR, it has been sufficient to realize its aims more successfully and to avoid the enlargement of the EU and NATO into Russia's sphere of interest. Furthermore, TMR has recently served as a location from where to coordinate cyber-attacks against governments which demonstrate opposition to the Kremlin's designs.⁸

⁷ During 2001-2004 the State Privatization Program brought in TMR USD 57 mln from selling 37 objects of state property to mostly Russian companies (Burla et.al. 2005). One could argue that these investments were mostly driven by political concerns rather than relying on economic calculus.

⁸ Chamberlain-Creanga and Allin (2010) claim that Russia's 2007 cyber-attacks on Estonian government networks had been coordinated from TMR (quoted from «Акция хакерского неповиновения», *Kommersant*, 12 March 2009, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-rss.aspx?DocsID=1136738>, and «Нам, русским за границей, иностранцы ни к чему», *Ekho Moskvy*, 5 March 2009, available at http://www.echo.msk.ru/blog/n_asadova/576689-echo/).

Our empirical analysis reveals that TMR is a *de facto* state falling under the full control of its patron. Although Russia has not yet fully patronized TMR, its role in establishing, securing and maintaining this *de facto* state has been crucial. The same argumentation is equally valid when one examines the records of unsuccessful conflict settlement schemes from the past (see e.g. Russian Draft Memorandum... 2003); they have been orchestrated by Russia in the hope to share power among the conflicting parties – Moldova and TMR – without acknowledging the fact that this secessionist conflict has a strong element of interstate rivalry over the territory and peoples' minds. If so, then traditional peace-building efforts combined with power-sharing elements, and applied in the case of Transnistrian conflict have little value.

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