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Representation and Democracy in
Eurasia's Unrecognized States:
The Case of Transnistria

Oleh Protsyk

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Like the majority of modern states, non-recognized or *de facto* states are governed indirectly through elected representatives who are entrusted with the task of carrying out most of the functions of government. Issues of representation are central to an understanding of modern polities and have therefore generated substantial academic interest with regard to the identity and performance of representatives.[1] Non-recognized states have largely been spared such detailed scrutiny of their domestic politics and patterns of representation, even though requests by these states for recognition draw increasingly on claims to democratically-secured genuine representation.

Claims of democratic representation are, of course, not the only grounds on which non-recognized states build the case for their legitimacy. As argued by a number of recent accounts, non-recognized states in the former Soviet space managed to secure the provision of public goods at levels that were not substantially lower than those of metropolitan states.[2] In addition to providing pensions and operating hospitals, non-recognized states have also achieved some success in constructing new identities for their regions, and these are promoted relentlessly through school curricula and the media.[3] Nevertheless, claims that their political systems are democratic and that patterns of representation are genuine are accorded a special place amongst arguments used by *de facto* states to justify their increasingly assertive quest for recognition.[4]

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[1] Maurizio Cotta and Heinrich Best (eds.), *Democratic Representation in Europe: Diversity, Change,* and Convergence (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007); Gerhard Loewenberg, Peverill Squire, and Roderick Kiewiet (eds.), *Legislatures: Comparative Perspectives on Representative Assemblies* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2002); Pippa Norris (ed.), *Passages to Power: Legislative Recruitment in Advanced Democracies* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997); Regina Smyth, *Candidate Strategies and Electoral Competition in the Russian Federation: Democracy without Foundation* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006); Henry E. Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia?: Democracy, Federalism and the State* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006).

[2] Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States", *World Politics* 53 (2001); Oleh Protsyk, "Moldova's Dilemmas in Democratizing and Reintegrating Transnistria", 53 *Problems of Post Communism* (2006).

[3] Stefan Troebst, "The "Transnistrian Moldovan Republic", 1990-2002: From Conflict-Driven State-Building to State-Driven Nation-Building", in Arie Bloed and Rainer Hofmann (eds.), *European Yearbook of Minority Issues* 2 (Leiden, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff ,2004); Stefan Troebst, ""We Are Transnistrians!' Post-Soviet Identity Management in the Dniester Valley", 1 *Ab Imperio. Theory and History of Nationalism and Empire in the Post Soviet Space* (2003).

[4] The normative aspects of self-determination claims and the ethic of secession are discussed in Margaret Moore, ed., *National Self-Determination and Secession* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998); Bruno Coppieters, and Richard Sakwa (eds.). *Contextualizing secession: normative studies in comparative perspective* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003).

There is a number of reasons why issues of representation remain largely unexplored in the literature on non-recognized states. The closed nature of these regimes and the lack of relevant and reliable data contribute to the paucity of research in this area; as noted by one student of these regimes: "Eurasia's de facto countries are informational black holes".[5] A further reason is a productive but restrictive preoccupation with the dynamics of interactions between metropolitan states and secession-seeking regions. Discussion of these interactions often entails simplifying assumptions on the homogeneous nature of the elites representing secessionist entities. This discussion also increasingly focuses on various aspects of power sharing between metropolitan and secessionist elites. [6]

This paper problematizes the issue of the homogeneity of elite preferences and societal consensus in support of secessionist policies. In doing so it relies on examining patterns of political representation in Transnistria. The paper argues that exploring the ethnic, socio-demographic, and occupational characteristics of elites provides insight into both the sources of their preferences for secessionist policies and into the mechanisms of elite selection in hybrid political regimes. It claims that persistent restrictions on political participation and contestation

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[5] Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States", 53 *World Politics* (2001).

[6] For opposing views on benefits and drawbacks of power sharing see for example Philip G. Roeder and Donald Rothchild (eds.), *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars* (Cornell University Press, New York, 2005); Marc Weller and Barbara Metzger (eds.), *Settling Self-determination Disputes: Complex Power-sharing in Theory and in Practice* (Martinus Nijhoff, Leiden, Boston, 2008). For other recent studies that deal with issues of power sharing, see: Pippa Norris, *Driving Democracy: Do power-sharing regimes work?* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007); Andreas Wimmer *et al.* (eds.), *Facing Ethnic Conflicts* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, MD, 2004); Marc Weller and Stefan Wolff (eds.) *Autonomy, Self-Governance and Conflict Resolution* (Routledge, London, 2005). Andrew Reynolds. *The Architecture of Democracy: Constitutional Design, Conflict Management and Democracy* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002).

shape the patterns of political representation, in particular by minimizing the possibility that political entrepreneurs with a policy agenda different to that of the incumbent can win political office and consolidate societal support for policies other than secession.

By examining the composition of the Transnistrian political elite throughout the period of Soviet disintegration and the history of *de facto* independence, this paper identifies systematic patterns of under-representation of certain ethnic and social groups. It is argued that this under-representation has been translated into a lack of articulated policy alternatives which, given certain underlying characteristics of the Transnistrian conflict, should have been present in the public domain. The fact that secessionist policy objectives remain unchallenged within Transnistrian society is thus interpreted as a consequence of the limits imposed on political contestation. It is regarded as a product of the systematic exclusion from the political elite of representatives of societal groups with the largest stake in resolving the currently 'frozen' conflict through some form of coexistence with Moldova within the framework of a common state.[7]

By focusing on patterns of under-representation, the proposed analysis challenges dominant explanations of the region's commitment to secession. Transnistria is an example of a multiethnic region. The high level of ethnic heterogeneity in the region led a number of scholars to search for an explanation to the secessionist phenomena in the existence of a strong regional identity. "Politicized regionalism" is a term frequently invoked in accounts of Transnistria's secession from Moldova.[8] This paper provides grounds for questioning the existence of broad regional consensus both for the elites' initial decision to escalate confrontation with the central government as well as for later policies seeking to resolve the long-standing conflict through the pursuit of unconditional independence.

The examination of representational outcomes in the case of Transnistria also encourages to focus on issues other than democratization-fuelled processes of nationalistic outbidding and radical activism. The latter issues are central to the existing literature's discussion of mechanisms of conflict escalation in the Eurasian zone. This literature emphasizes the importance of pre-

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[7] Discussion of numerous international initiatives at resolving the Transnistrian conflict through some form of a power sharing agreement can be found in Bruno Coppieters *et al.*, *Europeanization and conflict resolution: case studies from the European periphery* (Gent [Belgium] : Academia Press, 2004) Also available online at: 5 *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* (2004), http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/special_1_2004.html; Steven D. Roper, "Federalization and Constitution-Making as an Instrument of Conflict Resolution," *Demokratizatsiya* 10 (Fall 2004).

[8] Pal Kolstø and Andrei Malgin, "The Transnistrian Republic: A Case of Politicized Regionalism", 26 *Nationalities Papers* (1998); Pal Kolstø, *National integration and violent conflict in post-Soviet societies : the cases of Estonia and Moldova* (Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2002).

existing autonomy institutions and political liberalization for explaining conflict escalation.[9] The proposed analysis highlights instead the restrictive nature of partial or incomplete democratization and its effects on the nature of the secessionist region's late communist and post-communist transition. The political evolution of the Transnistrian regime is conceptualized here as a case of managed or restricted pluralism. This concept is commonly and fruitfully used to describe practices in many hybrid regimes in the former Soviet region.[10] What a focus on legislative representation adds to this literature is a detailed analysis of how political recruitment is managed in these systems, and what consequences these mechanisms of elite selection can have for the overall functioning of the regime.

Before embarking upon analysis of the data—much of which comes from longitudinal comparison of patterns of parliamentary representation in Transnistria—it is important to stress that legislative institutions are not epiphenomenal in the Transnistrian case. The functioning of its parliament and relevant elections are meaningful political processes, both of which contain some elements of contestation and institutional rivalry. A notable illustration can be found in the May 2005 constitutional reform draft, prepared by a group of parliamentary deputies. The draft envisaged the transfer of considerable power from the Transnistrian president to the parliament, and addressed issues such as the rules of cabinet and constitutional court formation, the introduction of the office of prime minister, and the legislative powers of the president. Although the draft was not passed, it was widely considered to be a serious challenge to the existing presidential system and a direct attack on the local "guarantor of stability", the Transnistrian President Smirnov.[11] In short, the regional parliament is the main forum in which the pluralist dynamics of the Transnistrian political system play themselves out.

This paper begins with a discussion of the ethnic dimension of political representation. Ethnicity, along with certain other demographic characteristics of the Transnistrian parliamentary elites, are analyzed in terms of their effect on the motivation of elites to initiate and sustain policies of secession. The characteristics of elites and of the wider population are compared, and the possibility of decoupling the preferences of politicians from the preferences of societal groups

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[9] Philip G. Roeder, *Where nation-states come from : institutional change in the age of nationalism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007); Valerie Bunce, *Subversive institutions : the design and the destruction of socialism and the state* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999).

[10] Henry E. Hale, "Regime cycles: Democracy, autocracy, and revolution in post-Soviet Eurasia," 58 *World Politics* (2005); Lucan Way, "Authoritarian state building and the sources of regime competitiveness in the fourth wave: The cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine", 57 *World Politics* (2005).

[11]The seriousness of this challenge is, for example, illustrated by reporting in the executive government controlled media Olvia-Press, *"Reforma Semnadtsati"*, (August, 8 2005). Available at http://www.olvia.idknet.com.

is explored. The next section of the paper discusses the complex political nature of the Transnistrian regime, which combines elements of genuine political competition with severe restrictions on the ability of opposition candidates to gain representation in parliament and to articulate policy alternatives to the pursuit of full independence. The final section examines the nature of the parliamentary alliance that serves as the main source of support for the Transnistrian regime. In doing so, the section sheds further light on mechanisms which are used to ensure that different types of political actors remain locked into the regime's secessionist course.

Ethnic representation and ethnic elite preferences

Political elites are important for group identification and mobilization, as numerous accounts have demonstrated.[12] Elites are also self-interested, which raises questions about how they handle their mandate of representation. Elites might also have varying sets of the previously acquired skills and resources that continue to shape their preferences in new situations. An examination of the ethnic composition and social identity of political elites in Transnistria allows us to construct an account of Transnistrian secessionism which differs from that put forward by the "politicized regionalism" argument. The latter suggests the existence of inter-ethnic group solidarity and wide societal support for the Transnistrian elites' pursuit of secessionist policies.[13] Support for these policies on the part of two out of the three major ethnic groups in Transnistria— the Russians and Ukrainians—can be grounded logically (but should not be automatically assumed) in public fears about the nationalizing Moldovan state.[14] However, explaining the willingness of ethnic Moldovans, the largest ethnic group in Transnistria, to support secession from their ethnic kin group in Moldova is more problematic.

Although it is generally accepted that Moldovans are the largest ethnic group in Transnistria, their exact number is a contentious political issue. Interpretations of the 1989 census data on the Transnistrian ethnic composition used by the central Moldovan authorities and authorities of a breakaway region differ quite substantially. The 2004 census conducted by the

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[12]Elites are a part of the story in all major accounts of ethnic mobilization in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet transition. The extent to which the elites mattered, however, is a matter of substantial disagreement in this literature. Roeder (fn. 9); Bunce (fn. 9); Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist mobilization and the collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002); Dmitry P. Gorenburg, *Minority ethnic mobilization in the Russian Federation*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003).

[13] Kølsto and Malgin (fn. 8); Kølsto (fn.8)

[14] Survey data on public support for independence, as well as results of numerous referendums on this issue are considered as unreliable both by the international community and by local politicians. For an academic discussion of this issue see Kølsto (fn.8).In an interview with the author, a city council deputy from one Transnistrian city claimed that results of opinion polls and referendums are doctored by the executive government. She claimed that no one has a good understanding of what people really think about pursuing the goals of independence. Author's interview in Transnistria, July 12, 2006.

Transnistrian authorities produced new figures that were also disputed. Nevertheless, these data sources all indicate that ethnic Moldovans have a plurality in the region. It is safe to assume that the share of ethnic Moldovans in the Transnistrian population at the beginning of the 1990s was somewhere between 33.8% and 39.9%, the estimates of the Transnistrian and Moldovan authorities respectively.[15]

An examination of the presence of ethnic Moldovans in parliamentary ranks suggests that they were consistently under-represented throughout the entire course of the secessionist conflict. Table 1 below compares the ethnic composition of the Transnistrian population with the ethnic composition of consecutive Transnistrian parliaments. The table combines data on ethnic affiliation, as reported by the parliamentary deputies themselves in various published sources, with the author's estimates of ethnicity for deputies on whom no information relating to ethnic affiliation was available.[16] For the figures on ethnic composition of population, the table uses the Transnistrian official data, which gives the most conservative estimates of the share of ethnic Moldovans in the Transnistrian population.

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[15] The results of the 1989 all-Union census translate to the following shares of major ethnic groups in Transnistria: the Moldovans 39.9% of the population in Transnistria, the Ukrainians 28.3% and the Russians 25.5% /Goskomstat, *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi Perepisi Naseleniia 1989 Goda [Results of All-Union Census of 1989]* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat, 1990). The Transnistrian authorities claim that the 1989 census figures are not accurate because they included populations from a large number of right bank settlements, which were a part of the left bank administrative districts at the time of the 1989 census, but that has remained under the control of the Moldovan central government since 1990. B. G. Bomeshko, "Pridnestrovje: Gody Sozidaniya", in N. V. Babilunga et al. (eds.), *Fenomen Pridnestrovja* (RIO PGU, Tiraspol, 2nd Edition, 2003), 94-122.

[16] The table results for the 1990-95 and 1995-00 terms are based entirely on self-reported data by the deputies. The results for the 2000-05 and the 2005-10 terms include both the self-reported and the author`s estimates. The number of parliamentary seats was reduced to 43 prior to the 2000 parliamentary elections. No deputy was elected in one of territorial districts in the subsequent elections. The table reports only aggregate share of deputies with ethnic background other than Moldovan in the last two parliamentary terms due to difficulties in differentiating among Slavic ethnic backgrounds of deputies with no reported ethnicity. Name-based algorithm was used to identify ethnic Moldovans. Name-based estimations is a common research strategy in various disciplines: O. Razum, H. Zeeb and S. Akgun, "How Useful is a Name-based Algorithm in Health Research among Turkish Migrants in Germany?", 6 *Tropical Medicine and International Health* (2001); S. Harding, H. Dews and S.L. Simpson, "The Potential to Identify South Asians Using a Computerised Algorithm to Classify Names", 97 *Population Trends* (1999).

The data reveals that ethnic Moldovans were under-represented in all parliamentary terms. The two other largest ethnic groups – the Russians and Ukrainians – were, on average, over-represented in the Transnistrian parliament. As the table shows, the percentage of ethnic Moldovans in the parliament varied throughout the post-communist period from 18.75% to 26.19%. The percentage of Moldovans was lowest (18.75%) in the first parliament, which means that the share of ethnic Moldovans in that parliamentary term was about half the share of ethnic Moldovans in the population.

Table 1. The ethnic composition of the Transnistrian parliament, by parliamentary terms

	Population Estimates	**Parliamentary Term**				
		1990-95	**1995-00**	**2000-05**	**2005-10**	**Totals**
Moldovans	*33.8%*	18.75%	24.29%	23.81%*	26.19%*	22.94%*
Russians	*28.7%*	40.63%	27.14%			
Ukrainians	*28.8%*	34.38%	38.57%			
Bulgarians	*2.1%*	1.56%	7.14%	*All other* 76.19%*	All other 73.81%*	Total other 77.06%*
Gagauzians	*0.7%*	1.56%	1.43%			
Other	*5.9%*	3.12%	1.43%			
Totals (N)	100%	100% (64)	100% (70)	100% (42)	100% (42)	100% (218)

Note: * indicates an estimated number based on a sum of self-reported ethnic data by the deputies plus the last name-based estimates of Moldovan ethnicity for deputies with no reported ethnicity. For the 2000-05 and 2005-10 parliaments ethnicity was estimated for 21 and 22 deputies respectively.

Source: Author's calculations from Григорий Маракуца, ред., *Депутаты Верховного Совета Приднестровской Молдавской Республики, I-ый и II-ой созыв*, ГИПП «Типар», Тирасполь, 2000; newspaper 'Приднестровье', no. 246 (1505), 21.12.2000; official website of the Supreme Soviet of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (http://www.vspmr.org).

The very high level of under-representation of the Moldovans during the first term of the Transnistrian parliament is especially important if one takes into account the role of parliament in the dynamics of the secessionist conflict. The first parliament presided over the initial period of implementation of the secessionist agenda and over the progressive escalation of the confrontation between the region and the metropolitan state that led to armed conflict in the spring/summer of 1992.[17] The data in Table 1 indicates that, during those times, there were relatively few ethnic Moldovan parliamentary representatives who could claim to speak on behalf of the group with objectively the most to lose as a result of separation from Moldova.

An exploration of the social profiles of those few parliamentarians who were of ethnic Moldovan origin provides further insight into why there was so little representation in the Transnistrian parliament of voices opposing secession. The ethnic Moldovans in the first Transnistrian parliament came predominantly from one social stratum. Eight out of twelve ethnic Moldovans in the first Transnistrian parliament belonged to the Soviet administrative, party, or economic elite. Only four ethnic Moldovan deputies could be considered as not having a considerable stake in the preservation of old regime.[18]

The case of Grigori Marakutsa, who held the post of speaker in the Transnistrian parliament for three consecutive terms, is illustrative of the dominant social background of most ethnic Moldovan deputies in the Transnistrian parliament. A former communist party secretary in one of territorial districts in Transnistria, he sided with the secessionist leadership and was elected in the late 1990 as a parliamentary speaker, which is officially the second highest government office in the de facto Transnistrian state. Over the course of the many years of his incumbency, Marakutsa frequently spoke on behalf of ethnic Moldovans and became a symbol of ethnic Moldovan participation in the formation of a secessionist regime.

Support of secessionist policies by old communist apparatchiks like Marakutsa was a rational personal strategy for many members of the ethnic Moldovan elite in Transnistria at the time of Soviet disintegration. It provided them with an opportunity to preserve their elite status after anti-communist forces had gained control of the central Moldovan government in the aftermath of the USSR republican elections in the spring of 1990. Siding with the separatists was a way to avoid losing their positions and privileges, as had been the case with the communist

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[17] For a detailed description of conflict dynamics during that period see Airat R.Aklaev, *Democratisation and Ethnic Peace. Patterns of Ethnopolitical Crisis Management in Post-Soviet Settings* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 1999); Stuart J. Kaufman and Stephen R. Bowers, "Transnational Dimensions of the Transnistrian Conflict", 26 *Nationalities Papers* (1998); Jeff Chinn and Steven D. Roper, "Ethnic Mobilization and Reactive Nationalism: The Case of Moldova", *Nationalities Papers* 23 (1995).

[18] Author's calculations from biographies of deputies published in Grigori Marakutsa, ed*., Deputaty Verkhovnogo Soveta Pridnestrovskoj Moldvaskoj Respubliki I-II sozyva* (Tipar, Tiraspol, 2000).

nomenclatura in Moldova proper in the early 1990s. For many members of the old ethnic Moldovan elites in the Transnistrian region, considerations of elite status and ideological preferences in preserving the Soviet system far outweighed the potential benefits of maintaining ties with the metropolitan state controlled by the members of their ethnic kin group. Once the choice to support secession had been made, this group of Soviet nomenclatura became 'locked into' positions of the ethnic Moldovan group leadership throughout the post-communist period, as illustrated by the length of Marakutsa's tenure as a parliamentary speaker.

The under-representation of ethnic Moldovans indicated in Table 1 is rooted in a number of factors. Electoral system and districting choices constitute one group of factors. The single member district (SMD) majority system has been in place in Transnistria since the founding elections of 1990. Electoral districts were drawn along administrative territorial lines and a typical administrative district comprises both towns and rural areas. Since ethnic Moldovans traditionally resided in rural areas, their lower social status made it more difficult for them to compete in districts where votes in multiethnic towns outnumbered those from the ethnic Moldovan countryside.

The second factor is a set of practices that limited political competition, to be discussed in more detail in the following section. Politicians from the ethnic Moldovan community posed the most credible challenge to the secessionist agenda pursued by regional authorities. As a result, efforts on the part of the authorities to restrict political competition and to inhibit candidates from gaining parliamentary seats were directed in particular against potential challengers from the ethnic Moldovan community, thus further decreasing their chances of obtaining equal representation in parliament.

Other types of constituencies could also claim under-representation in the Transnistrian case. In the context of our discussion of the differences in the composition of the elite and of society in general, data on the birthplaces of parliamentary deputies can provide useful information on other than ethnic forms of elites' belonging to a territory and its population. In the case of the Transnistrian parliament, such data was only available in relatively complete form for the 2005-2010 parliamentary term.

As the following table indicates, less than a third of deputies were born in Transnistria. This is a very small percentage given the importance of community entrenchment for elected representatives, especially in societies that use the SMD electoral formula. The limited local connection of non-native deputies is further underscored by data relating to the location of the institutions where they received their higher education. Out of the twenty-one deputies born

outside Transnistria or Moldova proper, only two received their higher education in Transnistria, and another three did so in the Moldova. The rest studied at universities located in other parts of the former Soviet Union.

Table 2. The birthplace of deputies in the 2005-2010 Transnistrian Parliament

Birthplace	No.	%
Right Bank Moldova	5	11.9
Transnistria	13	30.95
Russia	9	21.43
Ukraine	8	19.05
Other	4	9.52
No data	3	7.14
Totals	**42**	**100**

Source: Author's calculations form the official website of the Supreme Soviet of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (http://www.vspmr.org)

Data on the percentage of the non-native population in Transnistria is not available. Transnistrian urban centres experienced significant immigration during the Soviet period. The Soviet administrative elite in Transnistria was recruited throughout the Soviet Union.[19] However, the bulk of immigration into Transnistrian cities was made up of rural migration to urban centres from the local countryside.[20] Thus, the extremely high proportion of deputies born outside the region suggests that people born in Transnistria were significantly under-represented in the Transnistrian parliament. 'Outsider' interest in preserving a common state with Moldova could legitimately be assumed to be lower than that of groups native to the region.

Both ethnic Moldovans and 'natives' from other ethnic communities have extensive personal ties to Moldova. The long-established Ukrainian and Russian communities in Transnistria have large networks of relatives in northern and central parts of Moldova, where Slavic groups have also traditionally resided.[21] The strength of these kin ties and the long history

[19] Regrettably, one of the classical studies of the Soviet elite, the study of elites in the city of Tiraspol, which is now a capital of the de-facto state, has no information on ethnic characteristics or birthplace origins of members of elite groups whose social and occupational background this study meticulously researched. From today's perspective, this is, of course, a glaring omission in an otherwise extremely thorough study. See Ronald J. Hill, *Soviet Political Elites: The case of Tiraspol* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1977). Issues of ethnic composition of elites in the pre-World War II period are addressed in Charles King, "Ethnicity and Institutional Reform: The Dynamics of 'Indigenization' in the Moldovan ASSR", 26 *Nationalities Papers* (1998).
[20] One study estimates that more than 50 percent and up to three quarters of the new urban residents in Moldova between 1959 and 1989 came from the local countryside. See Nicholas Dima, *Moldova and the Transdnestr Republic* (East European Monographs, Boulder, CO, 2001).
[21] Charles King. *The Moldovan: Romania, Russia, and the politics of culture* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 2000).

of peaceful co-existence between the different ethnic groups in Moldova contributed to the persistence of positive views on the state of inter-ethnic relations between members of all major ethnic groups. This remained the case both in Transnistria and Moldova proper even after the secessionist conflict led to a period of military fighting and a substantial number of casualties across the board in the spring of 1992. As indicated by extensive fieldwork conducted in Moldovan and Transnistria in the second half of the 1990s, personal experience of inter-ethnic conflict was virtually missing from members of all ethnic groups.[22]

Finally, the degree of entrenchment of a separate regional identity in Transnistria at the beginning of the transition should not be overestimated. Comparative literature on secessionist conflicts points to the critical importance of institutional frameworks in fostering such identities and building public support for secession.[23] The Transnistrian region in its current shape became part of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1940 and had no institutionalized autonomy throughout the subsequent Soviet period.[24]

Overall, the ethnic composition of the Transnistrian region, the existence of strong kin ties between all major ethnic groups in Transnistria and Moldova, and the peaceful nature of inter-ethnic coexistence suggests that societal preferences with regard to the issue of secession might have been different from the preferences of incumbent Transnistrian elites. These elites, as suggested by the preceding discussion, gave strong support to the radical secessionist agenda in the early 1990s.

Pluralist political systems do of course provide a mechanism for resolving this type of conflict between different preference schedules and for ensuring alignment in the positions of societal groups and their representatives. In an open democratic environment, one would have expected the emergence of political entrepreneurs who appealed to the interests of segments of the Transnistrian population with a stake in reconciliation and the maintenance of a common state. The efforts of these entrepreneurs should have been assisted by decisions on the part of the

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[22] Kølsto (fn. 8). Inter-ethnic attitudes were reported to be more conflict-prone in the early 1990s. See William Crowther, "Ethnic Politics and the Post-Communist Transition in Moldova," 26 *Nationalities Papers* (1998); William Crowther, "Nationalism and Political Transformation in Moldova", in Donald Dryer, *Studies in Moldovan: the History, Culture, Language and Contemporary Politics of the People of Moldova* (East European Monographs, Boulder, CO, 1996).

[23] Roeder (fn. 8); Bunce (fn.8); Svante E. Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," 54 *World Politics* (2002).

[24] Transnistria was a part of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic that existed in the framework of Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic between 1924 –1940. This fact, while a crucial part of a regional identity narrative currently constructed in Transnistia, signifies a rather distant historical experience with important but limited consequences for the secessionist dynamics of the 1990s. On identity construction see Troebst (fn. 3)

secessionist regime in a number of policy areas. For example, the decision of the Transnistrian authorities to continue to use the Soviet-era Cyrillic script for the Romanian language (even though Moldova had switched to the Latin script in 1989) clearly placed the Moldovan youth, which was interested in educational and job opportunities in Moldova and Romania, at a disadvantage.[25] The next section of the paper addresses the question of why these political entrepreneurs did not succeed in articulating alternative policies and how they failed on the basis of constituency support for such policies to get themselves elected into the Transnistrian parliament.

Political contestation and elite turnover

The study of political regimes that fall on the continuum between democratic and authoritarian systems has received a lot of attention in literature on the post-communist transition.[26] Discussion of the exact nature of these regimes is part of a more general debate in comparative politics about the character of intermediate type of regimes found in different regions across the world. The issue of whether these systems should be conceptualized as a new type of authoritarian regime, as hybrid regimes, or as defective democracies still generates a great deal of disagreement. However, this literature has already improved our understanding of various practices of limiting political contestation and participation employed by intermediate type of regimes.[27]

The Transnistrian regime is not original in the way it handles political competition and has employed many of the practices described in the literature on intermediate political regimes. These include selective law enforcement, the arbitrary application of administrative norms and regulations, the use of state ownership as a means of exerting political influence, the politicization of government bureaucracy, and the management of state-run enterprises. As in other cases, these practices are sanctioned by political leaders in control of the executive. They are intended to provide incumbents with an in-built advantage in different political arenas and to limit the ability of the opposition to contest those in power, above all in the electoral field.

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[25] Steven Roper, "The Politicization of Education: Identity Formation in Moldova and Transnistria", 38 *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* (2005).

[26] Hale (fn. 10); Way (fn. 10); Smyth (fn.1); Valerie Bunce, "Rethinking Recent Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience", 55 *World Politics* (2003); Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, *After the collapse of communism : comparative lessons of transitions* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005); Steven M. Fish, *Democracy derailed in Russia : the failure of open politics*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005).

[27] A useful summary of these findings is provided for example in Andreas Schedler (ed.), *Electoral authoritarianism : the dynamics of unfree competition*, (Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2006).

The measures used against the Transnistrian opposition varied in their repressiveness. The most radical critics of secessionism were framed as posing a threat to state security. For example, the so-called Ilaşcu group, which included four ethnic Moldovans that were especially active and vocal in their opposition to secessionist policies, were imprisoned for twelve to fifteen years in 1992.[28] The Transnistrian security apparatus became notorious in the region and was used as an instrument of intimidation against those who opposed the Transnistrian leadership in its quest for independence.

Opposition activists whose position was less radical and who tended to come from the Slavic population of the region, routinely claimed harassment of their organizations and media outlets by law enforcement and regulatory authorities. They also stressed their inability to campaign effectively during elections and accused authorities of outright electoral fraud. The latter was made possible by executive control of electoral commissions at all levels of government.[29]

Attempts by opposition groups to contest policies were also undermined by the ability of the authorities to delay institutionalization of political parties. While discussion of political contestation in intermediate regimes usually focuses on electoral arena struggles between opposition parties and authorities[30], the Transnistrian regime was able to maintain a situation whereby authorities had to deal with individuals or dispersed opposition groups rather than with large, well-managed political organizations. Thus, as late as the end of 2005, only two parties were officially registered in Transnistria, neither of which had substantial influence over political life in the region.[31] Both the Soviet legacy of the absence of competitive party politics and the maintenance by the authorities of a SMD electoral system for all parliamentary elections held in the region contributed to the under-development of political parties.

Throughout the entire post-communist period most of the candidates for parliamentary office in Transnistria ran as independents, which greatly strengthened the leverage of the authorities in discriminating against undesired candidates. The latter lacked the organization to prepare and run campaigns and, equally important, to defend campaign results from falsification.

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[28] The case of their leader, Ilie Ilascu, went to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The ECHR ruled in 2004 that the authorities have infringed the human rights (as defined by the European Convention on Human Rights) of Ilie Ilaşcu and the other three people arrested by the Transnistrian government.

[29] Author's confidential interview with a Transnistiran journalist, Chisinau, 16 November 2005.

[30] Schedler (fn..27)

[31] Both "old" political parties had the word "communist" in their title and differed primarily in terms of their opposition/pro-government stand vis-à-vis the Transnistrian authorities. See Andrei Safonov, "Parlamentskie Vybory 2005 goda," unpublished manuscript, 2005.

The image of a level playing field where different political entrepreneurs are free to articulate their political agenda and seek popular support for this agenda is clearly not applicable to the Transnistrian case.

Yet the Transnistrian regime is far from being a "closed" autocracy. Rather, it illustrates the complexities involved in analyzing and categorizing intermediate regimes. Interventions in the electoral process have been selective and have been largely intended to exclude the possibility of effective participation by those candidates who posed a direct challenge to the secessionist course and the survival of the regime. At the same time, in their efforts to provide mechanisms for elite accountability and to strengthen the legitimacy of the regime in the eyes of domestic and international audiences, the authorities chose to allow a substantial degree of pluralist electoral competition.

Multi-candidate electoral races in each of the territorial districts, free air time for candidates, media-broadcasted debates between candidates running in the same district, and the presence of international observers from a distinct group of countries sympathetic to the regime have all become hallmarks of parliamentary campaigns in Transnistria. The electoral legislation of the region contains a detailed set of rules and procedures as well academic commentaries, all designed to convey the seriousness of the authorities in their approach to organizing elections.[32]

More importantly, the existence of elements of genuine electoral contestation in the Transnistrian political system, something that regime critics often deny, is reflected in the outcomes of electoral races. The incumbency rate—that is, the percentage of sitting parliamentary deputies who secure re-election—is an outcome that is important in a discussion of political competitiveness. All things being equal, a low incumbency rate might indicate a higher degree of uncertainty about the outcomes of the electoral process and a more competitive political environment. The following table presents incumbency data for all parliamentary terms in Transnistria.

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[32] Stepan Beril, I.N. Galinksy, I.M. Blagodatskish (eds.), *Election Legislation of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic in the Context of the World Practice of Democratic Election Conducting* (CSPR "Perspectiva, Tiraspol, 2005).

Table 3. Incumbency rates in the Transnistrian parliament

	Parliamentary Term				*Average for 1995-2010*
	1990-95	**1995-00**	**2000-05**	**2005-10**	
Newcomer	**100%**	**84.29%**	**73.81%**	**40.48%**	**69.48%**
	(64)	(59)	(31)	(17)	(107)
Incumbent	**0%**	**15.71%**	**26.19%**	**59.52%**	**30.52%**
	(0)	(11)	(11)	(25)	(47)
Totals	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100(%)**	**100%**
(N)	(64)	(70)	(42)	(42)	(154)

Author's calculations from Григорий Маракуца, ред., *Депутаты Верховного Совета Приднестровской Молдавской Республики, I-ый и II-ой созыв*, ГИПП «Типар», Тирасполь, 2000; newspaper 'Приднестровье', no. 246 (1505), 21.12.2000; official website of the Supreme Soviet of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (http://www.vspmr.org)

As the table indicates, the average incumbency rate for the entire period was low. This average was calculated as the arithmetic mean of incumbency rates for individual parliamentary terms, excluding the 1990-1995 term that followed the founding legislative elections of November 1990. Throughout the post-communist period, less then a third of sitting deputies were returned to parliament after the elections. In the context of individual parliamentary terms, the incumbency rate was lowest for the second parliament. Only 11 out of 70 deputies in the 1995-2000 parliament had served as members of parliament during the previous term. This translates into a 15.71% incumbency rate. An analysis of this inability of incumbents to win the 1995 parliamentary races in their electoral districts, or the cause of their unwillingness to stand in the elections, is beyond the scope of this analysis. It suffices to say that poor management of Transnistrian separation from Moldova, which led both to military fighting and to the exacerbation of economic hardships in the early 1990s, might have impacted on voter evaluation of incumbent politicians and on calculations by the latter as to their chances of election.

The incumbency rate was higher for the 2000-2005 legislature and reached even higher levels for the 2005-2010 parliamentary term. 25 out of 42 deputies in the fourth parliament, or 59.52% of all deputies, were also members of parliament during the third term. These findings suggest an upward trend in incumbency rates, which might be due to increased professionalization amongst incumbents and to the improved ability of the regime to ensure re-election of its loyal supporters through various legal and illegal mechanisms of influencing the outcomes of individual campaigns.

The last parliamentary elections also saw the introduction of some real elements of party competition. Two so-called civic political movements, which could be seen as prototypes of political parties, were organized prior to the 2005 elections. These movements—"Republic" and "Renewal"—came to dominate the parliamentary campaign. They represented different groups within the ruling elite but were largely united on the core issue of independence.

The continuing reluctance on the part of the authorities to structure the political process along party lines was reflected in their persistent ambiguity with regard to the membership of newly elected deputies in these movements. No official information on the political affiliation of individual deputies was provided by parliament in the aftermath of elections, and analysts who follow Transnistrian politics continue to disagree about the number of deputies who belonged to the two movements. The absence of fixed membership provisions could be seen as one of the institutional devises intended to limit the possibility of further intra-elite differentiation and competition. Nevertheless, the role that civic political movements played in the 2005 elections encouraged others to engage in party building efforts, and by July 2007 there were already ten political parties registered in Transnistria.[33]

The high levels of turnover in the Transnistrian parliament can be contrasted with a high degree of continuity in the executive government. Key positions in the executive, such as those of President of the Republic, Minister for Security and Minister of Foreign Affairs, have been held by the same individuals throughout the entire post-communist period. President Smirnov, the leader of the secessionist movement from the late 1980s, has been re-elected three times by popular election. Each of the elections featured between two and four candidates, but observers agree that they were multi-candidate only in a nominal sense. In neither of the elections was any other candidate able to gain more than about 10% of the vote. On each occasion, the opposition candidates claimed that the elections were unfair and that voting results were rigged. As one opposition politician noted, the stakes in presidential elections were much higher for the authorities than those of any parliamentary race in individual legislative districts, and this led to a much higher rate of manipulation and allegedly to outright fraud in presidential elections.[34]

Parliamentary and presidential elections seem to have been used by the authorities of the de facto state as a means of addressing the different challenges faced by the regime. Stability and continuity of the executive government, preserved through tight management of presidential elections, were intended to offset at least partially the profound uncertainties relating to the

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[33] Editorial, "Party building", *Pridnestrovie* newspaper, 10.07.07, accessed at
http://www.pridnestrovie-daily.net/gazeta/articles/view.aspx?ArticleID=6792
[34] Author's confidential interview with opposition politicians, Tiraspol, 10 December 2005.

international status of the region and to continued elite control of power and property in a legal environment that was not recognized by the international community. The willingness of the authorities to accept a higher degree of openness and contestation in parliamentary races reflects their need to respond to societal pressures for effective political participation and elite accountability.

Elite selection under the system of limited political pluralism

Further insight into the nature of the Transnistrian political system as an example of a hybrid regime can be obtained from examination of the occupational profile of parliamentary elites. This reveals that access to parliamentary positions in Transnistria is limited in large part to representatives of two occupational groups: state bureaucrats and business managers. A coalition of representatives of these two interest groups has been a persistent feature of Transnistrian politics. Due to the competitive character of parliamentary races, there had been some rotation of individuals serving the interests of these groups in parliament. However, as indicated by the data provided below, the nature of this legislative alliance—which controlled the majority of seats in parliament and formed the main base of elite support for the secessionist course—remained constant throughout the post-communist period.

Although the literature on political recruitment has long argued that occupational background is an important factor in explaining both electoral success and the subsequent behaviour of elected representatives once in office, there is no consensus on how differences in occupational background should be conceptualized.[35] The shortcomings of some well-known classifications include the use of non-mutually exclusive coding categories and the lack of clear procedures for making coding decisions in situations where a deputy has had several professional or occupational backgrounds. These deficiencies make it difficult to compare occupational background data and to draw descriptive and causal inferences on the basis of that data.[36]

The following analysis is based on a dataset that was constructed using coding procedures that attempt to address these issues of classification. The coding of occupational background, presented in Table 4 below, is based on a set of categories that are distinct, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive of all possibilities. The job held by a deputy immediately prior to entry

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[35] Walter J. Patzelt, "Recruitment and Retention in Western European Parliaments" in Gerhard Loewenberg, Peverill Squire, and D. Roderick Kiewiet (eds.), *Legislatures : comparative perspectives on representative assemblies* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2002); Heinrich Best and Maurizio Cotta (eds.), *Parliamentary representatives in Europe, 1848-2000*: *legislative recruitment and careers in eleven European countries* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000).

[36] This problem is evident, for example, in occupational coding used in Best and Cotta (fn. 35).

into parliament in any given legislative term was used for making coding decisions about occupational background. The information on the last job is more important for the purposes of this analysis than data on formal professional background—that is, whether a person was trained as an engineer or a doctor. The latter is often used as an indicator of occupational background in recruitment literature. Although information on formal professional training was also collected for the dataset, it is assumed not to be as central to the task of uncovering the types of resources and connections available to a parliamentary candidate as information relating to the last job held.

Table 4.   Distribution of the occupational background of parliamentary newcomers, by parliamentary terms

	Parliamentary Term				
	1990-95	1995-00	2000-05	2005-10	Totals
Professional	20.31%	13.56%	6.45%	5.88%	14.04%
Culture and Education	4.69%	5.08%	6.45%	11.76%	5.85%
Business	25%	44.07%	48.39%	70.59%	40.35%
Military and Police	6.25%	0%	3.23%	5.88%	3.51%
Political	10.94%	3.39%	0%	0%	5.26%
Civil Service	29.69%	25.42%	25.81%	0%	24.56%
NGO	1.56%	6.78%	0%	5.88%	3.51%
Trade	0%	1.69%	0%	0%	0.58%
Other	0%	0%	3.23%	0%	0.58%
No data	1.56%	0%	6.45%	0%	1.75%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(64)	(59)	(31)	(17)	(171)

Source: Author's calculations from Григорий Маракуца, ред., *Депутаты Верховного Совета Приднестровской Молдавской Республики, I-ый и II-ой созыв*, ГИПП «Типар», Тирасполь, 2000; newspaper 'Приднестровье', no. 246 (1505), 21.12.2000; official website of the Supreme Soviet of the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (http://www.vspmr.org).

The occupational background of deputies with a status of parliamentary newcomer is classified in Table 4 into one of nine categories.[37] As the last column indicates, business managers and civil servants dominate the ranks of parliamentary representatives in Transnistria. 65% of all newcomers belong to these two categories. Professional background, which includes occupations such as engineers, lawyers, economists, medical doctors, is a distant third occupational category. Whilst the distribution of occupational backgrounds in society at large shows a professional background to be the second most frequent category after trade, only 14% of newcomers in the parliament were professionals.

The results obtained suggest a particular pattern of occupational composition in the Transnistiran parliament, which is neither representative of the occupational distribution in society as a whole nor similar to patterns found in established representative democracies. The lack of correspondence between the occupational background of parliamentarians and the distribution of societal occupational characteristics is, of course, a common feature across various national contexts and levels of democratic development. The political selection process favors individuals that come from more advanced occupational categories. Soviet experimentation in this regard proved rather short-lived, as the table's data on trade background reveals. What is much less common in established democracies, however, is the relative weight of occupational categories found to be most frequent in the Transnistrian context.

A dominant theme in the historical analysis of occupational backgrounds of members of Western European parliaments is the growing importance of professionals as one of the main sources for political recruitment.[38] Studies of contemporary recruitment practices also point to the importance of professionals. For example, the recent study of the occupational background of legislators in Germany—a country with one of the strongest traditions in research on parliamentary representation—identified a professional background as the most frequent in the German parliament. The same study also reported that only 3.8% of the parliamentary deputies elected in the 1994 federal elections had a civil service/public administration background, and only 3.7% of the deputies were business managers/employers.[39]

As Table 4 indicates, a reverse trend can be observed in Transnistria. If consolidation of democracy implies greater access of professionals to positions of representation, then the Transnistrian case is not one of successful democratization. The highest value of the share of

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[37] Occupations were classified as follows: professional (lawyers, economists, engineers, medical doctors, etc.), culture and education, business, military and police, political, civil service, non-governmental, trade (blue collar workers), other (retired, students).
[38] Best and Cotta (fn. 35).
[39] Norris (fn. 1).

professionals in parliament was recorded in the first term. This share then declined steadily in all consecutive parliamentary terms. Business managers, on the other hand, proved consistently successful in securing parliamentary representation. Their share grew over time and in the last parliament business managers accounted for an astounding 70% of all newcomers. The share of members of the administrative apparatus of the de facto state (in other words, the civil service) has been consistently high throughout all parliamentary terms, with the exception of the last. Given that incumbency rates have increased over time, many deputies with civil service backgrounds who had entered parliament from the state bureaucracy in previous terms were returned to parliament as incumbents for the latest term.

Overall, the data points to the unquestionable dominance of business managers and bureaucrats in the ranks of parliamentary representatives. Although, as mentioned previously, multi-candidate legislative races are the rule in Transnistria and many candidates from various occupational backgrounds routinely take part in electoral contests in each of the legislative districts, the winners are drawn primarily from these two occupational fields. This suggests that membership of one of these two groups, which are numerically small within society at large, provides a candidate with important advantages in the executive-controlled electoral competition.

The results presented in Table 4 also provide further evidence for the earlier observation relating to the marginal effects of parties on the political process in Transnistria. One of the categories of occupational background – political background – was intended to capture whether any of deputies was engaged in professional political activity prior to entry into parliament. This was defined as full-time occupation of any elected office or full-time employment in a political party. As the table reveals, the highest number of deputies with a professional political background was to be found in the 1990-1995 legislature. These were the former communist party apparatchiks who won seats in the 1990 elections. There were no deputies with a professional political background in the last two legislative terms, which suggests that no deputy (excluding incumbents) was engaged in politics full-time prior to entering parliament. Professional politicians—who in modern democracies reside in parties, and who are one of the main sources of candidates for elected positions even in new democracies—have been virtually absent from the Transnistrian political scene.

The functioning of the Transnistrian political system is shaped by interest group, rather than party-based, politics. Business groups and bureaucracies are the key actors in domestic politics of the de facto state, not political parties. As argued earlier, both the communist legacy and the deliberate choices of the Transnistrian authorities, especially with respect to electoral laws and party registration issues, contributed to this peculiar structuring of the political system.

When examining the Transnistrian experience from a broader comparative perspective, it is useful to note that a political process based on interest groups is not the only way that politics can be organized in secessionist entities. For example, political contestation in Northern Cyprus rests on robust party competition based on programmatic differences and separate control of the individual institutions of a non-recognized state.[40]

Besides a disproportionably high share of business managers and state bureaucrats in the ranks of parliamentary representatives, a collective profile of the parliamentary corps is characterized in other respects by a lack of diversity. While not presented in the form of a table, the gender distribution and education characteristics of parliamentarians deserve a brief mention here. Economics/business was the educational background for 45% of the entire parliamentary corps. Another 16% of deputies were trained in science. Less than 10% of deputies had degrees in each of the following educational categories: law, social sciences, humanities, or military/police.[41] The average percentage of female representatives across four parliamentary terms in Transnistria was 7.8%. In comparison, the share of female representatives in the current term of a parliament of metropolitan state, the Moldovan parliament, was 21%. While under-representation of women in political structures is a common feature across a range of different national contexts, the Transnistrian figure is very low by comparative standards.[42]

The occupational background of deputies can be assumed to have a greater impact on their legislative behavior than other socio-demographic background characteristics.[43] The

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[40]Hannes Lacher and Erol Kaymak, "Transforming Identities: Beyond the Politics of Non-Settlement in North Cyprus", 10.*Mediterranean Politics* (2005);. H. Faustmann and Erol Kaymak, "Cyprus", *European Journal of Political Research* 46 (2007).

[41] A very small proportion of deputies who studied law is a particularly striking feature of this distributions. Less than 5% of deputies had a law degree at the time of their entry in parliament. This can be attributed to a legacy of the Soviet educational system, which gave priority to the education of industrial managers, engineers, and other types of specialists with hard sciences or managerial background. The data also pointed that a relatively low percentage of deputies, about 7%, with police and military training, which is contrary to some expectations advanced in the literature regarding social and educational make-up of the Transnistrian elite.

[42] Marian Sawer, Manon Tremblay, and Linda J. Trimble (eds.) *Representing women in parliament : a comparative study* (Routledge, London, 2006).

[43] Occupational background is an important variable in several recent studies of legislative candidates and incumbent deputies in the post-Soviet space. See Smyth (fn 1); Hale (fn1); Oleh Protsyk and Andrew Wilson, "Centre Politics in Russia and Ukraine: Patronage, Power and Virtuality," 9 *Party Politics* (2003); Scott Gehlbach, Konstantin Sonin, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya, "Businessman Candidates," University of Wisconsin, unpublished manuscript.

findings of this paper, both in relation to the dominance of business managers and civil servants in the ranks of parliamentary representatives as well as qualitative data from interviews with Transnistrian politicians and civil society activists, have informed the following perspective on collective legislative behavior in parliament. The collective preferences of the legislature with regard to basic distributive questions of domestic politics and the goal of securing international status recognition are shaped by a special type of relationship between the institutions of the *de facto* state and dominant interest groups in parliament. This relationship is based on clientelistic exchanges between executive institutions and the alliance of large businesses and government bureaucracies. State resources and administrative capabilities are used by the executive authorities to help their clients to secure access to parliamentary seats. While in parliament, members of these two occupational groups focus on catering to the interests of their groups rather than on delivering public goods and on backing executive attempts to finalize secession rather than on seriously engagement with repeated efforts by the international community to find a common state solution for Moldova and Transnistria.

The preferences of these two interest groups, and their reasons for compliance with the drive by the *de facto* state for internationally recognized independence, might be different. Achieving full statehood is an obvious preference of government bureaucracies and their representatives in parliament. The business community is much more ambivalent about whether continued insistence on achieving independence and refusal to consider proposals on reintegration with Moldova is the optimal strategy for ensuring growing market capitalization of their businesses and overall economic development of the region.[44] Views that challenge the official pro-independence line are not voiced in the business community for reasons similar to those discussed in the earlier analysis on how intermediate types of political regimes limit political competition. As is well documented in the literature on post-communist states, businesses are especially vulnerable to administrative and legal pressures exerted by executive governments operating in an environment where the rule of law is weak.[45] Threats of sanctions are usually credible and the cost to business leaders of advocating and seeking public support for policies alternative to those promoted by a non-democratic state are prohibitive. It has been

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[44] The Transnistrian business community interests are discussed in "Transnistrian Market and its impact on Policy and Economy of the Republic of Moldova," Report by the Center for Strategic Studies and Reforms (CISR) (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Berlin, 2005).
[45] See for example Keith Darden, "The Integrity of Corrupt States: Graft as an Informal State Institution", 36 *Politics & Society* (2008).

argued that the Transnistrian republic currently represents a sophisticated version of just such a non-democratic state.

Conclusion

This paper has emphasized that pursuit of a secessionist agenda can mean that the leadership of a secessionist movement is faced with difficult choices in relation to the adoption of democratic norms and principles. Initiating, and in particular sustaining, a course towards secession is not a policy that necessarily trumps all the alternatives in a democratic setting, especially if the secessionist region has multiple and diverse links to the metropolitan state. The Transnistrian leadership chose to severely restrict political competition in order to consolidate its hold on power and to maintain the appearance of public consensus on the issue of independence. Restrictions on political contestation had numerous consequences, including the artificial narrowing of the range of policy options and political candidates that would otherwise have been available to the Transnistrian population.

The analysis of the Transnistrian case encourages us to shift the focus of our attention in evaluating secessionist claims from discussing the levels of societal support for the policy of secession to examining the nature of the political process that leads to the building of such support. While public opinion polls in non-democratic states have many sources of potential bias—including respondent fears of expressing their true feelings and even outright manipulation of survey responses—this paper highlights what in terms of normative democratic theory could be considered a cardinal sin for this type of secessionist regime: citizens are denied the right to form their opinion on the basis of free competition of views and ideas.

In attempts to uncover the nature of the political regime in Transnistria, this paper has focused on examining patterns of parliamentary representation. In doing so, it has gone beyond the examination of electoral practices associated with hybrid regimes and concentrated on a detailed analysis of the representational outcomes produced by the political process. Investigation into patterns of legislative representation could be seen as one element in a broader research agenda on the study of legislatures in transitional societies. Calls for the pursuit of such an agenda by students of democratization have been advanced in recent literature which provides an assessment of comparative democratization research and points to the fact that legislative issues remain relatively unexamined.[46]

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[46] Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2003); M. Steven Fish, "Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies*",* 17 *Journal of Democracy* (2006).

The detailed examination of demographic, social, and occupational background data on elected representatives provides a number of valuable insights into the political process in transitional societies. It allows us to identify systematic patterns of under-representation and to discuss their potential implications for policy. It provides the basis for generating estimates on elite preferences and for exploring the character of legislative coalitions, especially in societies with weak party systems. It helps us to understand problems of elite responsiveness and the nature of elite compliance with attempts by the executive government to construct hybrid or non-democratic types of political regimes.