

# Is Russia preparing a Taiwanese model for Transdnistria?

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*This week revealed that the Official Representation of the unrecognized "Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic" appeared in Moscow. Judging by the statements by the regional leadership and guests present at the opening ceremony, the event has been long prepared and enjoys the direct support of the Kremlin. It seems that the news came as a surprise to Chisinau that immediately called the Russian Ambassador on the carpet for an explanation.*

## What opened in Moscow?

The reaction of the Moldovan authorities and experts shows that for them the opening of the Transdnistrian representation has appeared almost a force majeure event. It seems surprising, because Tiraspol has never hidden its intentions to strengthen ties with Moscow. Moreover, information about the establishment of the "PMR" representation in the capital of Russia trickled out throughout 2018, and on December 21, Transdnistrian leader Vadim Krasnoselsky clearly announced its opening. Why the Moldovan diplomacy neglected this issue and did not ask questions to the Russian side at that stage remains a mystery.

Based on the short commentary of the Russian Foreign Ministry and cold explanations of the MFAEI after communicating with the Russian Ambassador, the foreign policy "alibi" for the opening of the Transdnistrian representation was prepared in advance. Chisinau was left high and dry: Moscow refers to the "Pridnestrovie" non-profit foundation registered in the

Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, which, as stated, will assist in “establishing cultural and socio-economic ties”.

Such an explanation most likely corresponds to reality in technical sense. But it may happen that while Russian diplomacy offers Chisinau to “be satisfied” with an extract from the register, the work is in progress behind the scenes to change the format of political relations between Moscow and Tiraspol.

This is also suggested by the presence of Russian officials at the opening of the representation – judging by the photographs from the event, the ceremony was not neglected by the Russian Foreign Ministry, the State Duma, or the Federation Council. It cannot be ruled out that other officials who “by chance” were not caught on the photo also visited the “celebration”.

Taking into account the strict centralization of the Russian authorities, participation of Russian officials seems to be sanctioned at the highest level. Moreover, the event predictably became a platform for numerous statements on strengthening of the bilateral strategic partnership and assistance in international recognition of Transdniestria.

## **Taiwanese model for Transdniestria**

The Transdniestrian representation in Moscow is not a novelty even on a global scale. It is appropriate to recall the Taipei-Moscow Economic and Cultural Coordination Commission (TMECC), whose offices have been operating for many years in Moscow and Taipei, the capital of the partially recognized Taiwan. Legally representative offices work as non-governmental organizations responsible for the development of bilateral relations between Russia and Taiwan. However, in terms of their actual functions, they are at least full-fledged consular institutions, if not embassies. However, Moscow has not officially established diplomatic relations

with Taipei, as it recognizes the territorial integrity of China.

It might be no accident that the current representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry in the negotiation process on the Transdnestrrian settlement Sergey Gubarev was the head of the same non-governmental organization in Taipei. Being a special envoy for Transdnestrria Gubarev, in fact, closed the issue of the Russian representation in Transdnestrria. Bearing a modest name of "Outreach consular service office in Tiraspol", it has long been a full-fledged Consulate judging by the list of services and the number of citizens covered.

Building relations between Russia and Transdnestrria on the Taiwanese model seems more likely the deeper you dive into the context of the situation. It is obvious that this is the best time one can dream of to execute a diplomatic operation "Moscow representation of the PMR": the Moldovan leadership has plunged into the election campaign and was capable only of banal response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. No one seems to care about the Transdnestrrian settlement in Chisinau now.

Moscow actively assures Chisinau that its approaches to Tiraspol have not changed. However, what Russia really means – the traditional cold lines of statements of the Russian Foreign Ministry on the recognition of territorial integrity of Moldova, or, for example, the resolution of the State Duma on recognition of the results of the 2006 referendum on the independence of Transdnestrria – only time will tell.

In the current difficult foreign policy environment, the Kremlin does not need to make any drastic movements towards the recognition of Transdnestrria. This will only exacerbate relations with Europe and the United States, local regimes in Chisinau and Kyiv, and is unlikely to have a positive impact on the situation of the region "sandwiched" between Moldova and Ukraine. Therefore, Moscow and Tiraspol must have decided

to follow the path of the proven effectiveness of gradual recognition from culture to politics, strengthening diplomatic cooperation under the cover of non-governmental "funds" and pacifying statements.