

'Symptoms' of Democracy in Transdnistria

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Abstract: This article examines the relationship between the dynamics of state-building and the function of the international community in the case of Transdnistria, the eastern region of Moldova. It looks in particular at the practices that local authorities use in promoting Moldovan statehood in the international arena. The Transdnistrian state-building project has been characterised by virtual means such as the Internet and by simulation that aim to produce the 'symptoms' of democracy in order to legitimise the claim to statehood. It is argued that these symptoms cannot be understood without reference to the international community, which in the case of Transdnistria serves as a normative framework for the process of state-building and leads to simulations of democracy in the de facto state.

Keywords: Transdnistria, defacto state, democracy, virtual politics
Transnistrien, De-facto-Staat, Demokratie, virtuelle Politik

1. Introduction¹

For those with little knowledge of Transdnistria, or the locally preferred term of Pridnestrovie, one of the websites launched to promote the unrecognised state which is officially part of Moldova summarizes: "Since declaring independence in 1990, it has an export-oriented economy, its own government, and a multi-party democracy with the opposition in control of parliament."² Then, a seemingly legitimate question is posed: "Will this be enough to put Pridnestrovie on the map?"

Its self-depiction contrasts strikingly with what has generally been known of the informal state. Among the images typically employed are a "museum of communism" or "Stalin's last colony", a "diplomatically isolated haven for transnational criminals and possibly terrorists", a "black hole" making "weapons, ranging from cheap submachine guns to high-tech missile parts", a hub of smuggling, and Moscow's puppet regime.³ Aware of the negative image, local authorities decided to use cyberspace in an attempt to promote their version of the story. Taking postmodern theories seriously, Dmitri Soin, informal leader of the most active youth movement, for example, speculates, "if this world is an informational illusion anyway, why can't we construct an illusion the way we want it to be?"⁴ Indeed, at least in cyberspace, Transdnistria appears to function as a real state. The methods by which the illusion of Transdnistrian statehood is constructed are the focus of this article.

In order to make political sense of Transdnistria, it is helpful to refer to Andrew Wilson who suggests viewing post-Soviet politics as virtual: authority is neither earned nor asserted but rather invented. In the process of invention, political technologies are used to "stage the basic mythology of the state" (Wilson 2005: xvi). Furthermore, "politics is 'virtual' or 'theatrical' in the sense that so many aspects of public performance are purely epiphenomenal or instrumental, existing only for effect or to

disguise the real substance of 'inner politics'" (Ibid: 47). Virtual politics can be understood as a form of simulation, to use Jean Baudrillard's term. According to Baudrillard (1983: 5), "to simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't." Yet, simulation involves more than simply pretending: "Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and make believe he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms" (Ibid). As a result, it becomes problematic to distinguish between the real and imaginary. Simulation is thus more than a deception in that it destroys an original reality. To account for this elusiveness, Baudrillard suggests the idea of hyperreality, wherein the distinction between real and imaginary no longer applies: it is the product of a simulation of the real, whereby the imitation is preferred, becoming more real than the real. Importantly, it is the dominance of images and representations that leads to hyperreality.

The article explores how Transdnistria's authorities attempt to make use of the postmodern condition of hyperreality. I argue that the Transdnistrian state-building project has been marked by virtual techniques and simulations, the aim of which is to produce the 'symptoms' of democracy in order to legitimise the claim to statehood. These symptoms of democracy cannot be understood without reference to the international community, which serves as a normative framework for the process of state-building and contributes to the simulation of democracy. It is thus suggested to view the Transdnistrian state-building project in Baudrillardian terms as a product of the international community. The implication here is that the state-building efforts of local authorities find their roots in the international community's values and heavily depend on them to create a hyperreality.

2. From 'Papa's and My Republic' to 'Sheriff Republic'?

Transdnistria as an informal state appeared on the scene in the early 1990s as the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse.⁵ In the late 1980s, the Russian-speaking elite in Transdnistria, who had previously dominated the Moldovan Soviet Republic,

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2 www.pridnestrovie.net (15 February 2008).

3 Cf. Tröbst (2003); Herd (2005); *The Economist* (19 April 2007).

4 Interview, Tiraspol, 13 April 2006.

5 For overviews of the conflict, see Aklaev (1996); Büscher (1996); King (2000).

felt threatened by an emerging nationalist movement whose aims were to convert the Moldovan language from Cyrillic to Latin script, to declare it the official state language, and to reunify with Romania. The Russian-speaking population began to mobilise, with the initiative coming mainly from workers' collectives organised by factory directors. In August 1989, the Moldovan authorities adopted the new language law. A year later, in September 1990, the Transdnistrian leadership declared independence. In spring 1992, the situation escalated into war between Moldova and paramilitary groups in Transdnistria. With the support of the Soviet 14th Army, Transdnistrian forces defeated Moldovan governmental forces and further pursued the process of state-building, although still lacking international recognition.

A feature distinguishing Transdnistria is the dominance of the president's family in political and economic areas. Igor Smirnov, president of the informal state, came to the region in 1987 upon appointment to direct operations at a machine-building factory. In 1989, he was elected to lead the United Workers Collectives, an entity which organised strikes against the language law. When independence was proclaimed in 1990, Smirnov was elected president and subsequently re-elected four times in succession. In the course of informal state-building, Smirnov managed to turn the republic into a state governed solely by presidential rule. All power is concentrated in the executive branch, both de facto and according to the constitution. The public support for Smirnov's leadership is guaranteed by the Ministry of State Security (MGB – *Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti*). Its head, Vadim Antyufeyev, is believed to be the leading figure in securing Smirnov's authoritarian regime (Hanne 2004: 81). The Ministry's activities include suppression of the opposition, but also creation of civil society movements in support for Transdnistria's cause for recognition.

Smirnov's younger son is a deputy in the Supreme Soviet and heads the newly founded Patriotic Party of Pridnestrovie. His political activity is supplemented by his chairmanship of the Transdnistrian branch of *Gazprombank*. Smirnov's elder son has held the lucrative top position in the local customs service since the early 1990s. According to some estimates, the budget of Transdnistrian Customs is much higher than the budget of the republic (ICG 2004: 16). Tellingly, for people living in Transdnistria, the official name of their self-proclaimed state PMR does not stand for *Pridnestrovskaia Moldavskaia Respublika* but rather for *Papina i moia Respublika* (Papa's and My Republic), an expression coined in reference to the state's appropriation by Smirnov's family.

In addition, the Smirnov family allegedly owns Sheriff, the largest company in Transdnistria, which currently owns a chain of supermarkets, petrol stations, and a TV channel. In addition, Sheriff monopolised the telecommunications network and privatised a number of factories. In 2000, it began the construction of a sports complex, including a huge stadium. The company also sponsors a football team, FC Sheriff, and built the largest orthodox cathedral in the centre of the capital Tiraspol.

Although Sheriff's activities are highly visible in the region and, according to the public relations websites, serve as a source of

pride for Transdnistria's aspirations to statehood,⁶ it has been somewhat unclear who is in charge of this company. Concentrating largely on illegal trade activities, it was established by two ex-officers of the special services in the mid-1990s. Initially, its entrepreneurial activities developed by special arrangement with the president's family. In return for unconditional support, Sheriff was offered complete exemption from tax payments and import duties (*Kommersant*, 19 September 2006). However, as its entrepreneurial activities grew, so did its political ambitions. A number of observers believe that although initially Sheriff did have close links with the Smirnov family, interests gradually diverged. Sheriff is believed to have eventually become discontent with the isolation of the PMR, a situation which is detrimental to its growing business activities. As a result, some insinuate the readiness of this group to sacrifice PMR statehood for an arrangement with Moldova to legalise its business.⁷

In 2000, the *Obnovlenie* (Renewal) movement was founded with Sheriff's financial support. Concerned with economic developments in the region, a number of deputies and entrepreneurs gathered, as the movement's name suggests, to 'renew' the republic by concentrating on market reforms. Major disagreements with the executive branch started in spring 2005, when 17 deputies of *Obnovlenie*, led by then vice-speaker of the Supreme Soviet Evgeny Shevchuk, initiated an amendment to the constitution that would have curtailed presidential powers. Following accusations that they were trying to usurp power, the deputies subsequently abandoned the initiative. In the parliamentary elections of December 2005, *Obnovlenie* managed to win the majority, challenging the pro-Smirnov *Respublika* movement. This success was strengthened by the election of *Obnovlenie's* leader, Shevchuk, as speaker of the Supreme Soviet.

Obnovlenie's rise has been regarded optimistically by Moldova and the West. In Moldova, Shevchuk's election was to a large extent welcomed, with Moldova's leader calling him "a figure with a promising future" (Korobov/Byanov 2006: 523). There is considerable hope in Chisinau that *Obnovlenie* is sufficiently moderate to achieve some type of compromise in solving the Transdnistrian issue. In the West, too, the increasing influence of *Obnovlenie* is seen as sign of possible settlement. A senior EU official, for instance, is convinced that Shevchuk might agree to allow a special OSCE mission to the region with the purpose of assessing democratic reforms, whereas Smirnov has resisted the idea since it was first introduced by Moldova and Ukraine in 2005 (ICG 2006: 11). Furthermore, according to a Western diplomat in Moldova, "The consensus is that a substantial proportion of the Transdnistrian business community is ready to sign up to Chisinau's rule.... These guys know that there is money to be made in legal business" (Ibid).

Unsurprisingly, Smirnov's reaction to the election was not enthusiastic and he was quick to remind that "The main priority of all branches of the government was and remains consolidation of the PMR's statehood" (*Nezavisimaya Moldova*, 17 January 2006). Taking this reminder seriously, the *Obnovlenie*

6 See, e.g., <http://www.pridnestrovie.net/sheriff.html> (15 February 2008).

7 Interviews with local and foreign observers, Tiraspol, April-June 2006.

leadership repeatedly stated that the goal of the movement is to achieve the status of a sovereign state (*Nezavisimaya Moldova*, 21 December 2005). However, the introduction of a new customs regime by Moldova and Ukraine in spring 2006 led to tensions between the Smirnov family and the business community. Even though the customs regime applied only to exports, the leadership also banned imports to the region during the first weeks in order to construct the image of a blockade imposed by Moldova, Ukraine, and the West. The tension was alleviated following a compromise: Smirnov subsequently yielded to Sheriff's insistence and withdrew the restrictions on imports of food commodities (ICG 2006: 10). Enterprises were also allowed to obtain a temporary registration in Chisinau permitting them to resume export of their goods. Politically, however, Smirnov portrayed the situation as the 'fortress under siege of an external enemy' to marginalise supporters of dialogue with Chisinau, that is, Sheriff and *Obnovlenie* (Popov 2006).

Even prior to these events, *Obnovlenie* was wary of openly declaring readiness for steps towards cooperation with Moldova. As stated by Shevchuk, "Any Transdnistrian politician who would say that he is for a unitary Moldova automatically becomes cadaver in Transdnistrian politics" (Ibid). As a result of the new customs regime, or rather of the political manipulation of its public perception as 'blockade', the previously moderate position of *Obnovlenie* radicalised. Moreover, Shevchuk, who was seen as a possible rival to Smirnov in the presidential elections in December 2006, refused to stand for presidential post. His reason was that "Internal political struggle between leaders of two power branches in the course of elections campaign would only increase tensions in the society with a possible consequence of destabilisation of state.... For us the main priority is to resist external threats and to preserve Pridnestrovie as a state" (*Novyi Region*, 29 December 2006).

As far as the PMR state-building project is concerned, *Obnovlenie* has been keen to support the Smirnov discourse. Yet, regarding the internal situation, the political landscape of the PMR has been marked by a series of frictions between Smirnov, supported by the security services, and the parliament controlled by *Obnovlenie*, representing the interests of the business community. In the international community, there is indeed much hope that *Obnovlenie* is the actor to cooperate with to resolve the conflict with Moldova. As an ICG report suggests, "The challenge for Moldova, as well as the EU, US, and Ukraine is to exploit the divisions in the Transdnistrian regime so as to bring into power those with an incentive to work with Chisinau" (ICG 2006: 11). Yet, is there really a split in the Transdnistrian leadership? Can we talk of *Obnovlenie* as an opposition? Or is it simply a virtual ruse designed to create the façade of democracy in response to international calls for democratisation of Transdnistria?

In fact, building an opposition has never been an easy venture in Transdnistria. Among the first to recognise this was General Lebed, who led the Russian intervention ending the armed conflict in 1992. Although Lebed did not challenge Transdnies-

trian statehood, at least not in the sense of restoring the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova,⁸ he strongly criticised the widespread corruption and involvement of local leadership in arms trade (Simonsen 1995: 532). When Lebed was finally called off by Moscow, his criticism towards the PMR authorities was taken up by the local audience. A few left-leaning opposition groups attempted to challenge the Smirnov regime. However, the local communist party failed to organise enough force since it was divided by the MGB's meddling.⁹ Finally, in 2001, as result of the Transdnistrian left's cooperation with the communist party in Moldova, the organisations were banned (Hanne 2004: 82). Any attempt to build an opposition or to question the Transdnistrian state-building project is a complicated matter not only due to direct involvement of the current leadership in suppressing opposition but also as a result of indirect management in the form of 'active measures'.

3. 'Active Measures'

In post-Soviet virtual politics, a variety of techniques is used by its main protagonists – authorities and political technologists – which were originally developed by Bolsheviks and secret service institutions (Wilson 2005: 7-17). In KGB methodology, particular attention was paid to the advantages of 'active measures' (*aktivnye meropriiatiia*), meaning "that style of counter intelligence (intelligence) activity which is proactive and full of initiative. The side which takes the offensive ... will, all things being equal, achieve the best results" (Ibid: 10). Although the 'active measures' strategy was initially developed for activities abroad, it was also applied when dealing with internal enemies, encompassing a number of initiatives like *kompromat* (compromising information) and disinformation, provocation and deepening of hostilities within and between opposition groups, and 'civic condemnations', "that is carefully scripted attacks published in the official press from the ordinary citizens that dissidents sought to represent" (Ibid: 10-16).

The KGB's active measures were further refined by political technologists. The use and, more importantly, control of mass media were crucial, with their role being that of a 'spin doctor'. Yet, their activities went further, contributing "to the construction of politics as a whole", ranging from "the construction of parties, the destruction of others, the framing of general campaign dynamics and manipulation of results" (Ibid: 49). In a virtual democracy, politics is seen "as a series of designer projects, rather than as a real pattern of representation and accountability" (Ibid: 39). Importantly, virtual politics also includes elements of *dramaturgiia*, which can be understood as "not just 'drama' in the sense of excitement, but a whole scenario, like the work of a playwright" (Ibid: 66).

There are four necessary conditions that must be present to maintain virtuality: "a powerful but amoral elite, a passive electorate, a culture of information control, and the lack of an external counterpoint, i.e., foreign intervention" (Ibid: 41).

8 In 1993 Lebed won a seat in the Transdnistrian parliament with 87 percent of the vote, and in his electoral campaign he advocated subsequent unification of Transdnistria with Russia (Simonsen 1995: 531).

9 Interview, Tiraspol, 31 May 2006.

Virtuality is thus a top-down practice, whereby elites are interested in masses remaining indifferent to politics. Yet, "Virtual politics continually evokes the *narod* – the masses, the people. Constitutions are enacted in their name; politicians claim to be in touch with their deepest feelings; but the popular presence is only virtual" (Ibid: 48). In the following, I will focus on two kinds of active measures undertaken by the Transdniestrian leadership with the aim to engineer popular support for the Transdniestrian cause: 'civic condemnations' and creation of 'civil society' organisations.

Social movements are numerous in Transdniestria.¹⁰ Among the groups active on the political scene, three types claiming to represent the civil society can be distinguished: 'patriotic' groups that strongly support the authorities, groups that are directly created by authorities, and 'traditional' NGOs. Patriotic groups are particularly active when it comes to negotiations with Moldova on the future status of its eastern region. In this context, the leadership uses civic condemnations in the local press to demonstrate the people's will with regard to Transdniestrian statehood. During summer 2003, a number of 'requests' from civil society were published in the local press expressing discontent with the reconciliatory position taken by some deputies of the Supreme Soviet. Talks about a federation, namely the initiative of parliamentary deputies to establish a joint commission to draft a constitution for a reunified state, were interpreted as a threat to statehood. As stated in one of the letters, "Transdnistrians are used to the constant external pressure, but the pressure from within, from representatives of the Supreme Soviet, is particularly outrageous" (*Olvia Press*, 4 August 2003). Civil society representatives demanded the Transdniestrian leadership to adhere to the constitution of PMR. In particular, Article 1 states that the PMR is a sovereign, independent, democratic, law-based state and that sovereignty and power belong to the people. The Supreme Soviet was demanded "to stop acting in the ways that exceed its powers that were trusted to it by the people". Accordingly, the president, as the guardian of the constitution, was requested "to strictly adhere" to its principles and to consider the question of dissolution of the Supreme Soviet.¹¹

Although it is difficult to assess whether all 'patriotic' organisations supporting the Tiraspol regime are created by it, at least one such organisation leaves little doubt with regard to its origins: the 2005 founded International Youth Corporation *Proriv* (Breakthrough). Its main ideologue and informal leader is Dmitri Soin, a university lecturer in sociology and high-ranking officer of the MGB, who chairs the department for the protection of the constitution. The corporation was created primarily to counter the 'orange threat', in reference to the Orange revolution in Ukraine. Anticipating the possibility of a coloured revolution in Transdniestria, *Proriv's* leadership has developed a 'counter-fire strategy' (*Proriv*, 11 August 2005).

The details of this strategy are taught at the Che Guevara School of Political Leadership, established in August 2005. According to Soin, also head of the school: "The main motivation to create such a school was a demand in political leaders of a new type.... Such leaders have to be not only charismatic, but they have to master political and informational technologies" (Ibid). During a two-week course, future leaders are instructed in political marketing, political technologies, advertising and election campaigns, design and promotion of websites, realisation of active informational campaigns in cyberspace as well as creation, registration, campaign launching, and promotion of printed mass media.¹² According to Soin, the main advantage of the school is that participants are provided not only with theoretical knowledge but also with practical skills (*Proriv*, 11 August 2005).

Proriv is a typical example of a project designed by political technologists to consolidate PMR statehood. Notably, *Proriv's* counter-fire strategy is characterised by numerous elements of *dramaturgiia*. As pointed out by Soin, "The youth is leaving politics, because it is perceived as boring, people need to be entertained.... To engage young people in politics, elements of show must be present".¹³ For instance, during spring 2006 when Moldova introduced new customs regulations for Transdniestria's trade, *Proriv* organised a number of demonstrations on the border with Ukraine. The OSCE has also been subject of *dramaturgiia* actions. According to *Proriv* activists, the OSCE refuses to enter the dialogue with representatives of the real civil society in Transdniestria and the mission efforts are directed at distributing disinformation to the world community regarding the situation in the region (*Proriv*, 28 September 2005). In September 2005, *Proriv* organised a demonstration in front of the local OSCE office in Tiraspol. When the mission staff did not react to the demonstration, one of the participants removed the OSCE flag from the building and replaced it with *Proriv's* flag. In February 2006, *Proriv* activists, protesting against the injustice and double standards of the OSCE mission, marched through the centre of Tiraspol with colourful posters and encircled the OSCE office area with barbed wire to symbolise the blockade of Transdniestria (*Regnum*, 21 February 2006).

Proriv's activities are characterised by two related elements: presence or visibility, and the aspiration to occupy the space of what is believed to be a civil society. The organisation has thus become a state instrument in dealing with traditional civil society representatives or NGOs which, as they assert, "are ready to sell their motherland for grants". The struggle between virtual and real civil societies includes disruption of meetings with representatives of foreign NGOs, as, for example, at a meeting between Polish guests and local NGOs in October 2005. Although *Proriv* was not invited, its leadership nonetheless decided to attend the meeting in order to objectively inform the European audience about the situation in Transdniestria. When *Proriv* representatives were refused permission to address the audience, they began to vocally disrupt the meeting with the slogans "Russia-PMR-Proriv" and "Down with double standards of OSCE" (*Proriv*, 27 October 2005).

¹² See further <http://che.tiras.ru/news.php> (21 August 2007).

¹³ Interview, Tiraspol, 13 April 2006.

¹⁰ Approximately 600 social movements are registered in Transdnistria. However, a survey revealed that around 65 per cent of registered NGOs could not be contacted due to cessation of activities, reorganisation, or other reasons. For details see: "Civil society and social unions in Transdnistria" www.world-window.md (21 August 2007).

¹¹ See the letters published by *Olvia Press* ('Souz Zashitnikov Pridnestrov'ia 30 July 2003, *Evraziiskii Souz Pridnestrovtsev*, 30 July 2003; KPP-KPSS, 1 August 2003; 'Souz Pamiat' 4 August 2003), www.olvia.idknet.com (21 August 2007).

To the active measures to promote the Transdnistrian cause, one may also add a project designed to show support of the international community. In June 2006, news coverage in the Transdnistrian press was dominated by a report supposedly written by international experts, including a US State Department official and a number of academics from Stanford, Oxford and Harvard. The report was published by an organization entitled "International Council for Democratic Institutions and State Sovereignty" (ICDISS). However, as was eventually revealed, this organisation seems to exist in cyberspace only (*The Economist*, 3 August 2006).

Importantly, the ICDISS also sponsors a number of websites devoted to improving the image of Transdnistria abroad. A case in point is www.pridnestrovie.net. According to the website, the problem is that, "media resources are not fully used by Pridnestrovie for promotion of its statehood in the West, this is why in Western mass media black myths often appear about Pridnestrovie disseminated by Moldova's propaganda".¹⁴ Mass media are seen as playing an "important role in the process of international legitimization of the PMR". East Timor is provided as an example, which, according to Transdnistria's experts, succeeded in gaining international recognition in 2002 as a result of the creation of numerous websites designed to prove its right of self-determination to the international community (Ibid). Consequently, one of Tiraspol's priorities is engaging with Western media markets. As a result, a great variety of websites emerged devoted to Transdnistria.¹⁵

On occasion, opportunities emerge to make use of visits by representatives of the 'real' international community in the political marketing of Transdnistria. In July 2007, for example, Michael Kirby, US ambassador to Moldova, visited Tiraspol. As the local English newspaper Tiraspol Times reported, "It wasn't quite the ecstatic reception that George W. Bush received when he went to Albania and promised instant independence for Kosovo. But it was close" (*Tiraspol Times*, 19 July 2007). Perhaps of more significance than the visit itself was the organisation which welcomed the US ambassador: He met with *Proriv* activists at the Che Guevara School of Political Leadership. The ambassador was greeted with flowers and presented a yellow scarf, the organisation's symbol. Afterwards, he posed for a photo in front of Transdnistria's flag and another in front of the group's headquarters "under the gazing eye of 'El Che'", while surrounded by members of *Proriv* (Ibid). Although Kirby was keen to highlight US opposition to Transdnistria's independence and support of Moldova's territorial integrity, the meeting was considered "a success for American public diplomacy", and it was suggested that, "Youth activists now hope to engage the United States and other nations in a meaningful debate over how to improve human rights and democracy in the new and emerging country" (Ibid).

In general, the Transdnistrian authorities have been making concerted efforts to communicate their message to the international audience. Due to a number of websites devoted to this little-known place, it is no longer problematic to locate

information about Transdnistria. What remains problematic, however, is how to classify this series of 'facts' and/or 'myths'. Yet, as Baudrillard reminds us, "We are in a logic of simulation which has nothing to do with a logic of facts and an order of reasons" (Baudrillard 1983: 31).

4. Implications

What we can observe in Transdnistria is the competition between the current leadership, supported by the security apparatus, and an emerging business community that no longer seems to be at ease with the unrecognised status of Transdnistria. To prevent any challenge to the claim to statehood, the security group has been apt to resort to various kinds of active measures such as civic condemnations and creation of civil society to engineer popular support for the Transdnistrian cause. Yet, to make sense of these facts is challenging.

Bearing in mind the virtual, or rather hyperreal, peculiarities of the informal state's formation, one is tempted to assume that it is a kind of virtuality, whereby the local leadership, pressured by the international community to implement democratic reforms as a precondition for settlement, has been working diligently to create at least the façade of democracy by simulating such symptoms as opposition groups and civil society. In this case the competition between 'patriots' and 'reformers' might be a virtual construct. Yet, it is also possible to suggest that it indeed represents an emerging opposition and that the reformers, apparently trapped in the authentic illusion of PMR statehood, have little choice but to support the current discourse of local authorities.

What is there to learn from the Transdnistrian case with regard to the international community? Notably, the case of Transdnistria illustrates a link between internal state-building and the function of international community. First, the support or rather an appearance of the support of the international community serves the purpose of internal legitimacy. The ICDISS report, for instance, has been used by local authorities to demonstrate to the domestic audience that the search for international recognition has not been in vain. Second, even if *de jure* isolated, Transdnistria as an informal state is still embedded in the network of international politics. By means of virtual techniques, local authorities construct an illusion not so much the way they want to it to be, but rather in response to norms and values of the international community. In this way, the Transdnistrian state-building project could be seen as a product of the international community just as much as an expression of local desires.

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¹⁴ <http://pridnestrovie.net/russian.html> (12 July 2008).

¹⁵ E.g. www.visitpmr.com, www.transdnistria.com and www.transdnestier.com.

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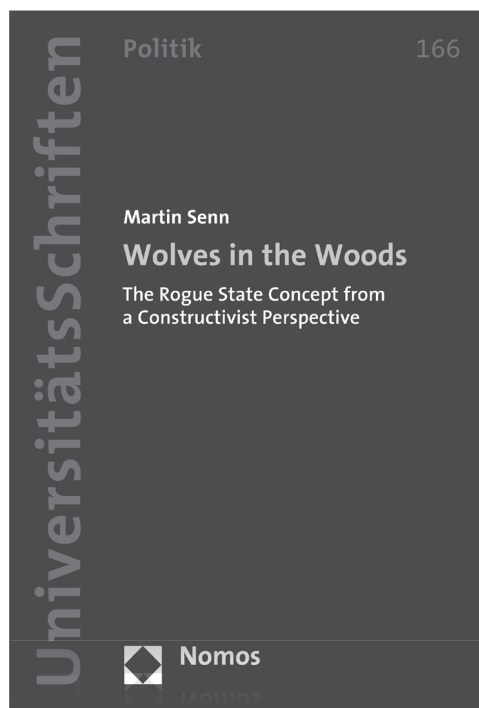
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