



We certainly will be recognized. Pridnestrovian political expert Roman Konoplev in an interview for DespiteBorders

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Pridnestrovian political expert and chief of PR-agency Consulting Mobile Roman Konoplev in an interview for DespiteBorders.com speaks of Pridnestrovie (further information www.pridnestrovie.net). DespiteBorders has already been interested in Pridnestrovie partially there.

What are attitudes of Pridnestrovian inhabitants (and local authorities) to legal status of Pridnestrovie and to possibilities of solution of this problem (meaning reunification with Moldova – confederation, federation, autonomous region; “reunification with Ukraine” or joining with Union of Russia and Belarus)? Is there any kind of exhaustion due to long-standing status quo?

Since Pridnestrovian Republic has already existed for 20 years, the citizens of Pridnestrovie have learnt many things. Nobody is ready to sacrifice freedom and democratic principles, which were won during the military conflict of 1991 – 1992, and to have an opportunity to somehow solve the situation nevertheless. Current objective difficulties are connected not with the status of PMR but with the actions and threats which come from Moldova’s authorities. First of all, this problem touches economic agents. Moldova couldn’t occupy the territory, but it achieved another aim – Pridnestrovie’s customs documents were recognized illegal. Pridnestrovians suffer because of the economic war, and they do not understand why they have to sponsor corrupt authorities of the neighbor country, the citizens of which made Pridnestrovians suffer acutely and killed cruelly so many people.

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Moldova has large scale of problems (economic, social problems, potential European integration – just to name a few). There have appeared (on the west bank of river Dniester) ideas to leave Pridnestrovie and to become interested in other more important problems. Has it ever met with any kind of response in Pridnestrovie?

Several public figures from Moldova spoke with similar initiatives. Still, there are no grounds to suppose that today's Chisinau elite will be ready to meet such radical changes. In my opinion, the time of civilized Moldovan elite has already come, so as soon as such elite will be formed, a new era of relations between Pridnestrovie and Moldova will begin.

I suppose, today we had better “split up”, following the example of Czech Republic and Slovakia. Peaceful divorce and workable competition in economics and social standards would be a good alternative to the current confrontation.

Unfortunately, Western media broadcast the positions of today's Moldovan authorities – this is almost propaganda and lies. However, today it is not enough for Europeans to hear absurd blames without facts. European citizens often come to Tiraspol. They can see themselves what is true and what lie and only grim fantasy about Pridnestrovie.

What do you think about recognition of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Kosovo? Do you consider dates of recognition of above mentioned entities as turning points for Pridnestrovie? The Russian president claims that Pridnestrovian problem must be resolved as soon as possible. What would Russia like to do? And on the other hand, what should Russia do?

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The moment when Pridnestrovians decided to live separately from Moldova was a critical stage for Pridnestrovia. It was not several plotters' opinion. Tens of thousands of people came to Tiraspol squares and to the centers of other Pridnestrovian towns. It was a real people's revolution. Everybody was tired of living and of being afraid. I remember those times very well – fear of nationalists from the west bank of the river was displaced by confidence that Pridnestrovians could defend their dear and near ones, their families.

The situation was different in Moldova, in comparison with other countries of Eastern Europe – there the forces of reaction fought for power and those forces were more worth than soviet communism for Pridnestrovians. Conservative nationalistic force won in Moldova. The powers which made all the decisions at that time appear today only in small marginal parties in Europe and their actions are watched by the police. People with radical ideology came to power in Moldova and many people were killed in Chisinau because of their ethnic background.

So, it was a note of rebellion. Our wish to be Free became nation-wide. Our leader Igor Smirnov took a bear by the tooth. However, he and the people who decided to go with him, leading Pridnestrovian revolution, were supported by the people. They didn't rise under communist slogans, as they wrote in Europe, they defended Pridnestrovian identity from marginal Nazis who fell greedily upon high positions in Chisinau.

Speaking about your question about Russia's position, Russia today is a coherent liner of the conflict to be solved. Russia supports the opinion of the Pridnestrovian side that we should be heard during any negotiations and that Moldova should take into account the opinion of our people. Russia sees us as equal side in any negotiations that touch upon our destiny. This is an unbiased estimate and we know that this estimate has many followers in European Union.

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Russia demands that open respectful dialogue should begin. However, Moldovan authorities consider Russia's opinion to be insufficient. As far as my opinion is concerned, Russia should have initiated the discussion of this question within European organizations many years ago. Still, Russia's initiatives need not be enough must be not enough for starting such a discussion: there must be more voices. However, Europeans are too frightened by Moldovan propaganda, and we try to break this information blockade.

Do you think that any country will be willing to recognize Pridnestrovie?

Pridnestrovie needs to be recognized. Pridnestrovian enterprises used to have commercial relations with 75 countries before Moldova started economic blockade against us. We rely on Russia to recognize us in the future, but this fact won't be enough without recognition by the Ukraine and other countries, markets of which have demand for our products. In my personal opinion, Pridnestrovie has the goods in other new countries, thanks to serious economic potential and high level of education.

Romanian president Traian Basescu would like to reunify Romania with Moldova. Moldova is not very enthusiastic about this idea. Why? Would it be significant for PMR?

Today Moldovan elite is represented by people of the old formation, who understand much neither of modern world order nor of the West, nor of the advantages of democratic values. Corruption is a normal environment for them. That is why Moldovan elite prefers talks about eurointegration to real eurointegration. Many friends of mine and I (we are citizens of Pridnestrovie) hope that people with European education and European thinking will come to power in the neighbor country. We hope they will solve the problem of corruption and will



stop taking revenge because of Moldova's military defeat in 1992. Moldova has its way to Europe – this way goes through Romania. Citizens of Moldova become naturalized in Romania and, in fact, integration is on the half of its way. If the elite start to resist, it can stop the process, but it will not last for a long time.

Is the destiny of Pridnestrovie “a big geopolitical game” among EU, Russia and USA?

Pridnestrovie is a small region which does not have any strategic meaning. However, there is geopolitics and there is international legislation, there is European experience of the existence of national enclaves. Prominent players can play their geopolitical chess, but the rights of Pridnestrovian citizens must be realized, taking into account laws and experience of solving similar conflicts. There are all the necessary backgrounds and conditions.

How do EU, Russia, and USA influence Pridnestrovie? Can we feel any other influences there?

I am sure that other countries should provide dialogue between the sides of the conflict, but not speak as a lawyer of this or that side. Such a position will be honest and fair in relation to people of the region. When anybody says that “Pridnestrovie does not exist”, this person does not have real information or they are involved in propaganda. There is no place for propagandistic slogans in the negotiations.

Pridnestrovie has been an independent state since 1991. Does it have any influence on the thinking of people?



In Pridnestrovie, school and university history lessons are not cut by the years of the republic's independence. Young generation knows enough about the history of Russian Federation and about the situation in our region beginning with the period of Russian-Turkish wars. Of course, history has influence on people – they know that the state which was an ancestral home of the today's Romania and Moldova, the state which was united and ruled by Shtefan (who is recognized by Romanian Church as Saint) did not include the territory of Pridnestrovie – the left bank of Dniester. Our land, except for several tens of years after World War II, has never been part of Moldova. Today, Pridnestrovians perceive themselves as citizens of the young country, which has its heroes, holidays, traditions, the country which is connected with Slavic world – Russia and the Ukraine.

Moldova claims that we cannot consider Pridnestrovians as nation – they consider them as society of three ethnic groups. However, Moldovans are “an artificial nation”. Is there any form of solidarity among these groups – meaning a solidarity so strong as to consider them a nation? Can we consider the referendum from September 2006 as a manifestation of above mentioned solidarity of ethnic groups of Pridnestrovie?

To understand the fact whether Pridnestrovian people exists as political nation, one should just come and see Tiraspol on the Day of Independence on September 2nd – see how citizens of the republic celebrate their holiday. It is also enough to pay attention to the fact how Pridnestrovian people confronted the aggression of Moldova – it was the choice of the absolute majority of the population of the region without any dependence on national identity.

We see what motivation Moldovan leaders have when they say this or that thing. These are not secrets. Any citizen of Pridnestrovie can answer the question why Moldova cannot make up its mind to our independence.

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According to the OSCE survey, Moldovans who live in Pridnestrovie prefer to designate themselves as Pridnestrovians. Really? Why? Could you provide us any example?

This sort of self-identification is not connected with the war of 1991 – 1992 only. At the beginning of 1990s, native citizens of Bessarabia preferred to name themselves “Romanians” instead of “Moldovans”. That was the choice of intellectual and political Moldovan elite. The term “Moldovan” began to disappear together with the term “Moldovan language”. “Romanian language” is named in the Declaration of Independence of Moldova.

School children and students have been studying “Romanian language” and “the history of Romania” for all these years. Then, having been frightened that they will lose Pridnestrovie for ever, Moldovan authorities decided to return their previous self-identification back. They brought changes to the Moldovan Constitution and the language was again called “Moldovan”. But this fact has not changed anything. Nobody names their language this way anymore in Moldova, since the Latin graphics was introduced.

As for Pridnestrovie, the word “a Romanian” has had negative shade since war, because Pridnestrovians called this way everybody who attacked Pridnestrovie without any difference in nationalities. It is a well-known fact that Romania armed Moldova during the war period, Romania provided Moldova with officers and technical specialists.

Then another time came. It was the time of mass relocation of working population. Many people from Pridnestrovie also left their homes and moved to other countries to earn money. Relations between Moldovans and Pridnestrovians are very different. Even today one can hear people arguing about the history of Moldova and Pridnestrovie, about the future of these

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countries in the train “Moscow-Chisinau”. Of course, people in Russia know the difference between Moldova and Pridnestrovie, because many people from these countries work in Moscow. That is why a guest from Pridnestrovie will never say that he/she is from Moldova. Sometimes another thing happens – many Bessarabians prefer to tell lies and to say that they are from Pridnestrovie. It happens not only in Russia, but in European states as well. As for such a lie in Europe – it is the best way to get documents for Moldovans, because Pridnestrovie is considered to be a not stable region.

Moldovan president in interview for Russian newspaper KOMMERSANT (in March 2008) expressed that Moldova will never join with NATO when Pridnestrovie reunifies with Moldova. Is this scenario real?

Pridnestrovians do not see any criterion in Moldova’s participation in military blocks. Moldova was not a member of NATO when it started war and killed Pridnestrovie’s activists. We worry about lives of our families and we hope that Moldovan authorities will not have the opportunity to control our territory, because nobody can guarantee that a new war will not begin – neither NATO, nor Russia, nor the Ukraine, nor EU. Speaking of Moldovan authorities’ promises – their words cannot be trusted, because today Pridnestrovie lives in the conditions of economic blockade and information war. Moldova initiated criminal cases against our activists. They are wanted by Interpol which is based on deliberately falsified or forged documents given by Moldova. That is why question about Moldova’s membership in NATO and the question about relations between Moldova and Pridnestrovie are different questions.

Pridnestrovie (as well as other states in post-soviet region) depends on Russian subventions (economic, financial, energetical). Can you describe the level of



Pridnestrovian dependence on Russia (in economic, financial and energetical sphere)? Is there any kind of favoritism compared with Moldova?

Pridnestrovie's economics was not seriously dependent on any states. Today, certain problems exist. Economic blockade of Moldova against our republic is the reason of the problems.

When Russia initiated sanctions against Moldova, Pridnestrovie was also under these sanctions. Russia tries to act in this direction uniting and calming the sides of the conflict. However, such a situation gives Moldova advantages, but Pridnestrovian economic agents are imposed by double taxes by Chisinau. Such a situation is negatively reflected on Pridnestrovie's economic growth rate.

What about Russian capital in Pridnestrovian economy?

It came here when the republic authorities, using Russian and Ukrainian experience, decided to privatize main Pridnestrovian enterprises. There is Russian capital in Pridnestrovie, but the main taxpayers are not the plants which were bought by Russian companies but local businessmen. Different opinions on the practicability of the privatization in republic exist. Recognition of Pridnestrovie would greatly enliven region's economics. There is potential and prospects not only for Russian business in the republic. As far as I know, Pridnestrovian authorities are interested in attracting investments.

As far as I know, many paramilitary organizations work in Pridnestrovie. Approximately 40 percent of local population is interested in these organizations. Can you provide us further information?



I am sure these numbers are too high – it is real propaganda. Of course, Pridnestrovians know how to use arms, and people can stand for themselves if there is such a need. However, our republic is not Palestine, it is not Chechnya of the times of Dzhokhar Dudayev – nobody walks along the streets and at the mass meetings with the Kalashnikov gun. Nobody shoots in air at the weddings and other occasions. Arms traffic is prohibited by law and there is criminal responsibility for its keeping or using.

Pridnestrovie is blamed for large scale of smuggling (weapons, human bodies, poultry, cigarettes, and drugs just to name a few). Are there any evidences? What is the attitude of Pridnestrovie to activity of EUBAM?

Pridnestrovie has been accused of many things since it appeared. This is propaganda. Because of its unrecognized status, Pridnestrovie cannot correct its reputation abroad using legal methods – it cannot bring legal actions against authors, newspapers and sponsors of such publications. EUBAM has not registered any fact of arms and human bodies smuggling for the years of its activity. Speaking about drugs and different products smuggling, it is a problem that all the states face today. In Pridnestrovie, law-enforcement agencies control this sphere and punish violators. Unfortunately, relations between Moldovan police and Pridnestrovian militia suffered because of the disagreements among politicians. Today, the smallest violation – for example, some meat in the boot of a Pridnestrovian car – Moldovan authorities try to color in the darkest way. Still, although Moldova's citizens are very often caught at the territory of the Ukraine or Russian Federation for smuggling drugs, great sums of money, nobody writes that Moldova is a black hole. Political conflict was good for criminal representatives, and in my opinion, Chisinau is responsible for breaking any good links with Pridnestrovie.

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How do you feel economic blockade? Are there any effects? Do you have any solution?

Economic blockade follows after the decisions of Moldovan authorities, who declared unilaterally that Pridnestrovie's customs documents are not legal. Moldova demanded that Pridnestrovian companies must be registered in Chisinau and then these companies were obliged to pay taxes. Thus, today many Pridnestrovian companies have to finance Moldovan authorities. At first, they explained to Pridnestrovie that our region would have some advantages. However, these measures appeared to be another problem for our commercial structures. So, Pridnestrovie finances Moldovan corruption in prejudice of its own population. Such situation is immoral from the ethical point of view. From the economic point of view, these measures appeared to bring great damage to our country. Smaller and medium business is under great risk. In fact, such a measure is a veiled form of deportation.

What local political parties are popular? And why (what kind of policy they advocate)? Do you have any so-called odious parties? Are there any pro-Moldovan parties, i.e. are there any parties that would like to reunify Pridnestrovie with Moldova? Do they have any support?

There are 9 political parties registered in Pridnestrovie, and there may appear even more. "Renewal" ("Obnovleniye"), "Breakthrough" ("Proryv") and "Patriotic Party of Pridnestrovie" are leaders among other parties. These parties might form the next parliament of the republic. All three parties follow pro-Russian vector, because this is the choice of the most population of the republic.

"Renewal" is the party of Pridnestrovian business. It has many connections in Russia with pro-governmental movement "Yedinaya Rossia". "Proriv" is left-of-center organization.



Social-democratic values are not alien to it. “Proriv” actively involves young people. “Patriotic Party of Pridnestrovie” is headed by Oleg Smirnov, President’s son. This Party actively uses religious themes and professes Orthodox values.

The ideas of possible union with Moldova are not supported in our region, that is why leading political powers do not feel like using such slogans. The theme of eurointegration, in comparison with Moldova, does not exist in Pridnestrovie and one of the reasons of such a situation is that we are separated from Europe by the country which hates Pridnestrovie and has territorial claims and threats to the region.

From time to time, there is alternation of generation in political scene. According to you, who can replace the current president Smirnov? Do you think that alternation of generation will attend any fundamental changes?

I suppose, Igor Smirnov will be the President of Pridnestrovie in the nearest future. He is our national leader. President reflects the way our republic follows. Today, there is not a single person in Pridnestrovie who has the same level of credibility. Of course, the time will pass and new leaders will appear. However, I doubt that someone, who will bring slogans of union with Moldova, will ever have an authority here. It is impossible. What is more real – that Pridnestrovie will strengthen its relations with our Slavic neighbor – the Ukraine. A lot depends on the position of Ukrainian leaders towards Moldova, which uses methods of economic war against Pridnestrovie.

Do you think that Russian soldiers are necessary in Pridnestrovie?



As Russian leaders noted for many times, they are not interested in Russian soldiers' presence here for ever. Still, the question of Russia's presence in Pridnestrovie depends on the solving of Moldovan-Pridnestrovian conflict. Russia has worked a lot on utilization and taking-out of the property of Russian Armed Forces. Today, the contingent of several hundreds of Russian soldiers is located in Pridnestrovie. The role they play is more symbolic than military. However, the very fact of Russia's presence in the region is very important for Pridnestrovie's people, because they were Russian troops who stopped Moldovan Army in 1992. In fact, Russian soldiers deterred mass disaster and deportation of Pridnestrovie's citizens. People remember these facts very well. Of course, if the war begins again, Pridnestrovians will have to rely only on themselves and they will certainly repel aggression. Still, there is hope that symbolic meaning of this not big contingent of Russian soldiers will scare away Moldovan politicians who will try to solve the conflict with the help of arms.

In 2001, Community for Democracy and Peoples Rights was established that should improve cooperation among Pridnestrovie, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Is this organization effective? Has the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia and Nicaragua had any influences on work of this community? Do you cooperate with other unrecognized states as Somaliland, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Turkish republic of Northern Cyprus just to name a few or large scale autonomous regions of other states for example Autonomous republic of Crimea? On governmental or non-governmental level and in what spheres?

Pridnestrovie develops cooperation in different directions. Long-time relations unite us with South Osetia and Abkhazia, of course. There are attempts to have contacts with other unrecognized states. We study the experience of national enclaves in the countries of EU. We try to develop relations with all the countries that are interested in the situation in our

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republic. People from all over the world come to Pridnestrovie, and these are not politicians only. These people want to see the difference between the picture in the newspapers, which is full of propaganda about us, and real life. Contrary to many regions and cities of Europe, it is much safer in the streets of Pridnestrovian cities and towns. There are no conflicts on race or religious grounds. In fact, Pridnestrovians created an oasis of harmonic coexistence of different ethno-confessional groups and cultures unique for European territory. Pridnestrovie and people who live in this country have many interesting traditions and unique features. We value everything that came from our ancestors. We have things to save and defend. The main thing is that we know that the number of friends of our republic grows. It means that sooner or later we will be certainly recognized.

The Ukraine seems to be a not very stable country. Do you think that political crisis that appeared there short time ago can influence the situation in Pridnestrovie?

All the troubles in the neighboring Ukraine are painfully accepted in Pridnestrovie. Dysfunctional situation in the Ukrainian economics will be reflected on us, because many of our citizens work in the territory of Ukrainian regions which are close to Pridnestrovie. Any citizen of Pridnestrovie can get Ukrainian passport and start their own business in the territory of the Ukraine. For example, many Pridnestrovians prefer to make business at the Black Sea shore during the tourist season. That is a reason why Pridnestrovians are worried about the political crisis there. People from Pridnestrovie remember how the Ukraine supported us during the war period and housed refugees.

Many Pridnestrovians and I, of course, hope that Ukrainian democracy will overcome difficulties and that fair balance of opinions and decisions will bring the Ukraine to political and economic stability.

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Recently Moldovan president Vladimir Voronin had been introduced to consecration of church in a village in Pridnestrovie. Pridnestrovian border guards have not let him to Pridnestrovie. Why?

Today, Moldova is not a friend state to Pridnestrovians. Not a single constructive answer to our proposals on regulation and normal neighbor relations was given. Economic pressure and information war continue. Moldovan politicians did not really show their readiness to dialogue. All the things that were really proposed – that Pridnestrovie should be brought to political and business elite of the neighbor country on a saucer like a tasty cake.

Hundreds of criminal cases against our activists are the means of pressure. President of Pridnestrovie is wanted at the territory of Moldova – he, like many other citizens, can be arrested and thrown to prison as soon as he crosses the border. So, I do not understand how the President of unfriendly Moldova can wait for hearty welcome in our country. The leader of Moldovan communist party and President Voronin, without any pre-alignment tried to enter the territory of Pridnestrovie hiding under clergyman's cassock. He might have hoped that he “will not be noticed”. The case is really curious. I would like you to pay your attention to the fact that he was not beaten or arrested, he was not brought to prison. As for Pridnestrovian President, some years ago Igor Smirnov was kidnapped by Moldovan special services and brought to prison in Chisinau.

Pridnestrovian border guards were polite with the President of Moldova and just showed him his way back to Moldova. Pridnestrovian authorities, however, wait for President Voronin in Tiraspol for negotiations. They wait for official answer to Pridnestrovie's authorities' proposals. Everybody waits for the problems to be solved between our countries. As soon as



Moldova gives audible answers to Pridnestrovians' questions, I am sure President of Moldova will not only be allowed to our territory, but he will have an opportunity to visit Pridnestrovia without any obstacles like other citizens of Moldova. Pridnestrovians are ready to start constructive dialogue and cooperation. We wait for friendly steps from Moldova instead of cold war which has continued for 2 decades. There is still hope.

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