What is the effect of non-recognition?

The external relations of de facto states in the post-Soviet space

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List of abbreviations

ANCA   Armenian National Committee of America

COBERM   Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism

CONIFA   Confederation of Independent Football Associations

DCFTA   Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

ECHR   European Court for Human Rights

EPNK   European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

EU   European Union

EUBAM   European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine

EUMM   European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia

FSM   Federated States of Micronesia

DNR   Donetsk People's Republic

ENPARD   European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development

GDP   Gross Domestic Product

ICRC   International Committee of the Red Cross

IDP   Internally displaced person

ILO   International Labour Organisation

IMF   International Monetary Fund

LNR   Lugansk People's republic

MFA   Ministry of foreign affairs

MIRAB   "Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy" (Bertram and Watters 1985)

NATO   North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO   Non-governmental organisation

NKAO	Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
NKR	Nagorno Karabakh Republic
ODA	Official development assistance
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PMR	Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (Transnistria)
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (the UN Refugee agency)
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
URL	Uniform Resource Locator (an internet address)
USD	United States dollar
WHO	World Health Organisation

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Abstract

In a context where sovereignty is structurally challenged, sub-state actors increasingly engage in international activities, and the dynamics of global capitalism transcend borders, how much does international recognition still matter in practical terms? This research approaches this question by analysing the external relations of post-Soviet de facto states, and comparing them with those of both sovereign and non-sovereign territories that share with them a set of key features.

Theoretically, this research proposes to conceptualise post-Soviet de facto states as small dependent jurisdictions, thus introducing new analytical tools and resetting expectations about the nature of their relations with a patron, their level of dependence, and their long-term sustainability. Empirically, it offers a wealth of details on how external assistance enables access to public services and a degree of welfare to resident of post-Soviet de facto states. Methodologically, it argues in favour of systematic analysis of textual contents published on the web as an approach still under-utilised in area studies; analyses of purposefully created datasets of textual contents generated by institutions and media of post-Soviet de facto states have been structurally included in various phases of the research.

Conflict and lack of recognition have been fundamental in making post-Soviet de facto states dependent and partly isolated. Since there is no indication that widespread international recognition, reintegration or some other form of agreement on their status is forthcoming, such features should be analytically considered inherent characteristics of these entities. Once they are conceptualised as small dependent jurisdictions, prevalent dynamics of external relations found in these territories are mostly compatible with those found in uncontested territories on both sides of the sovereignty divide.

Preliminary notes

At the time of submission, some parts of this thesis have been published or submitted for publication.

Parts of Chapter 2 and Appendix B have been published in *Studies of Transition States and Societies*: Comai, Giorgio. 2017. 'Quantitative Analysis of Web Content in Support of Qualitative Research. Examples from the Study of Post-Soviet De Facto States'. *Studies of Transition States and Societies* 9 (1). http://publications.tlu.ee/index.php/stss/article/view/346.

An adapted version of Chapter 4 has been published in *Ethnopolitics*: Comai, Giorgio. 2018. 'Conceptualising Post-Soviet de Facto States as Small Dependent Jurisdictions'. *Ethnopolitics. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2017.1393210.*

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Some parts of Chapter 6 have been adapted from the author's contribution to Ó Beacháin, Donnacha, Giorgio Comai, and Ann Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili. 2016. 'The Secret Lives of Unrecognised States: Internal Dynamics, External Relations, and Counter-Recognition Strategies'. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27 (3): 440–66. doi:10.1080/09592318.2016.1151654; and from Comai, Giorgio. 2017. 'The External Relations of de Facto States in the South Caucasus'. *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, no. 94 (May).

Chapter 1.

Introduction

Political atlases routinely present all of the earth's surface tidily divided among sovereign states. The state is largely considered as the natural unit of analysis in international relations scholarship. However, this state-centric approach, as well as the very idea of sovereignty, is being increasingly challenged from multiple directions: from above (e.g. by supra-national institutions), from below (e.g. by sub-state diplomacy) and more in general by the mechanisms of global capitalism and information technologies. Such considerations have drawn authors to suggest that the categories of state and non-state actors are "increasingly uninformative" (Hocking 1999, 17), that the distinction between the diplomatic activities of small states and sub-state entities is "blurring" (Criekemans and Duran 2010, 39) and more in general that contemporary "boundary-transgressing processes and tendencies [...] are undermining the state-centric assumptions of conventional geopolitics" (Ó Tuathail 2000, 166).

In this context, how much does international recognition still matter in practical terms? This research aims at answering this question by analysing the external relations of territories that inhabit the grey zone that exists around the concept of internationally recognised, sovereign independence. They are de facto states, entities that have achieved and maintained for an extended period internal sovereignty over an area, with a degree of internal legitimacy but only limited formal recognition at the international level, or none at all.

Most political maps of the world ignore them. The United Nations and other international organizations officially support the territorial integrity of their parent states, thus negating their legitimacy and, in a sense, their very existence. Yet, evidently, they do exist, regardless of the fact that their borders are not marked with a solid line on political atlases, that international organizations dismiss the political processes taking place there, and that local athletes cannot compete in the Olympics under the flag they consider their own.

In spite of the unaccommodating approach demonstrated by the international community, de facto states managed to survive and to develop a wide array of interactions at the international level. However, their contested status has influenced their external relations in multiple ways. On the one hand, for example, it limits their possibilities to join international organizations, interact through traditional diplomatic channels and receive official development assistance for state building. On the other, exactly because of the refusal of the international community to fully accept their existence paired by a perceived need to regulate their status, de facto states often interact with international institutions more than would be normal for similarly sized territories, either in the context of conflict negotiations or through efforts to further their cause. Finally, their contested nature puts them at the centre of geopolitical conflicts, thus creating the conditions for a patron-client relationship that enables additional forms of support, beyond those stemming from ethnic kins in neighbouring countries or from diaspora organisations.

Considering this peculiar condition, what is the effect of non-recognition on the external relations of de facto states? This research approaches this question by analysing the external relations of post-Soviet de facto states, and comparing them with those of both sovereign and non-sovereign territories that share with them a set of key features. As debated in more detail in section 1.1 below, Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh serve as the main case studies in this research. In order to further delimit the field of inquiry, this research focuses on those external relations that require interaction with actors located outside of the territory of a given de facto state and are aimed at providing public services and a degree of welfare to residents of de facto states. Foreign policy as such, or private cross-border relations of individual actors, are not object of investigation. This narrow focus allows to highlight the practical consequences of non-recognition on state building as well as on the availability of key services to residents of these territories. It is clear that international recognition bears

with it high symbolic value and is likely to have great influence, for example, in terms of identity or perceived security. The fact that being an independent state is held in high esteem in the contemporary world is clear, if for no other reason, because it is the declared goal of considerable parts of society in a variety of territories across the globe, including in democratic western societies (e.g. Quebec, Scotland, and Catalonia). However, given the intrinsic complexity of comparing such 'symbolic value' in different circumstances, in its exploration of the boundaries and meaning of sovereignty in the contemporary international system, this study focuses on more pragmatic aspects.

This research presents original empirical evidence that is relevant to studies that deal with the nature of post-Soviet de facto states, on the dynamics that contribute to their continued existence, on their external relations, and on the mechanisms of domestic legitimacy that ensure a degree of support for the local authorities. At the same time, it explicitly deals with an often overlooked yet important underlying question – how should we study de facto states? - by introducing novel theoretical and methodological approaches. Theoretically, it argues in favour of conceptualising post-Soviet de facto states primarily as small dependent jurisdictions, and only secondarily as contested territories. Methodologically, it introduces structured content analysis of textual contents generated in these territories and available on-line as an additional method to understand, describe and compare de facto states and their institutions.

1.1. <u>Case selection</u>

Among the 21 de facto states identified by Caspersen and Stansfield (2011) since the second World War, only nine are currently existing. They are substantially dissimilar cases, that came into being and developed in very different circumstances. Indeed, non-recognition is one of the few significant features that allows to put in one category territories as strikingly different as Taiwan, Iraqi Kurdistan, and South Ossetia. Among currently existing de facto states, the four de facto states situated in the post-Soviet space – Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh – are the group of territories that share most similarities, besides non-recognition. Similarities include previous belonging to the same political entity, approximate date of declared independence, dependency on an external patron, level of economic development (estimated GDP per capita of less than 5 000 USD), and population size (less than 500 000). Because of their common features, previous studies have separately dealt with what has been called the 'Eurasian quartet' (Lynch 2004; Geldenhuys 2009; Markedonov 2012): they will be the entities at the centre of this research.

In spite of the similarities, selected case studies differ in key aspects that are expected to have an impact on their external relations. Some of them have been recognised by their patron state, others have not. Some of them have a relatively open border with their parent state, others have it sealed and highly militarised. Most of them share a border with their patron, but Transnistria does not. Diaspora assistance is crucial for Nagorno Karabakh, but not for the other cases. Finally, they have rather dissimilar domestic economic capabilities and potential, and thus uneven claims to realistic self-sustainability.

Along the time dimension, this research focuses on the post-2008 period. Russian recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008 marked an important change in terms of external relations for these territories. As will be argued in the following chapters, this development had a significant impact on the state capacity and the political economy of these entities, as well as on the livelihood opportunities for their residents. It is only in 2007 that Transnistria started to formalise its practice of ensuring incomes to its budget by not paying for the gas it imported from Gazprom; in the lapse of a few years, Russian assistance has grown to cover most of Transnistria's budget, and has thus become a key enabler of the local welfare state.[1] Even in Nagorno Karabakh, where relations with Armenia and the diaspora have remained overall stable, the state budget has approximately doubled between 2007 and 2008, thus signalling an important growth in state capacity.

Finally, it is perhaps only after 2008 that many among scholars and policy-makers started to realise more fully that these entities were not ephemeral. As of 2006, one of the main experts on these territories would still argue that a "federal settlement […] must be regarded as the most likely end to most unrecognized quasi-states" (Kolstø 2006, 738), which was the established wisdom in most previous publications on the subject (e.g. Coppieters, Darchiashvili, and Akaba 2000; Potier 2001).[2] In his 2009 book on de facto states, Geldenhuys (2009) would still matter-of-factly write that "although all of today's contested states have been in existence for well over ten years and many could survive several more years, they are all ultimately transient phenomena expected to disappear." Even more recent publications have focused on "alternative destinations"

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1   See Chapter 5 for more details.

2   As of 2000, even Vyacheslav Chirikba, who would later become minister of foreign affairs of Abkhazia, was still openly reasoning on constitutional arrangements that would see Abkhazia and Georgia within a common state (Chirikba 2000).

for de facto states, seemingly assuming that these entities must be short-lived (L. Anderson 2011, 195).[3]

The present research is based on the assumption that, on the contrary, current arrangements will last for the foreseeable future. Since neither widespread internationally recognised independence or reintegration with the parent is in sight, analysis should be focused on the current configuration of these territories. Even if the situation is far from static – they are "Not frozen!" as the title of a recent publication emphatically highlighted (Fischer 2016) – dynamics have somewhat stabilised in comparison to the early post-war years. Fundamentally, residents, de facto authorities, and their patron, have started to think for the long-term, thus marking a change from strictly conflict related dynamics that largely characterised the 1990s.[4]

At least in part for this reason, the self-proclaimed "people's republics" of Donetsk and Lugansk (DNR and LNR) have not been included in this study. At the time of this writing (mid 2017), they may well be already past the two years of continued existence that is part of established definitions of de facto states, but their process of state building has just started to take shape. In brief, they have not been included in the present study not because they should not be considered de facto states, but rather because as long as the dust of war has not settled, it is difficult to study prevalent long-term dynamics that are at the centre of the present study: external relations and their impact on building state capacity.

1.2. <u>Alternative terms of comparison</u>

This research approaches its main research question on the impact of non-recognition by analysing the external relations of post-Soviet de facto states that contribute to their state-building efforts, and by comparing them with those of both sovereign and non-sovereign territories that share with them a set of key features, both in the region and in other parts of the world. As will be seen, this work is clearly rooted in area studies, and benefits of scholarly work on post-Soviet de facto states mostly authored by area studies experts. At the same time, the approach that is outlined in the next paragraphs aims at

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3   Anderson (2011) was also confidently dismissive of the possibility of de facto state incorporation with the patron state, an option that seems certainly less unlikely after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

4   In the case of Nagorno Karabakh, the possibility of full-scale war looms large. However, the process of state building, as well as the external relations that enable it, continue unabated.

overcoming one of the shortcomings frequently found in area studies: the implicit conviction that the phenomena being observed are unique, and root causes for events and prevalent dynamics are to be found almost exclusively in local peculiarities, or specific legacies.

Scholars who have published research on post-Soviet de facto states, while often with a discernible area studies background, have ventured with comparisons including unrecognised states in other world regions in order to gain new insights and favour theory development. Caspersen's (2012) volume is a case in point, and at the time of this writing clearly represents an essential point of reference for students of de facto states. Other works on de facto states have dealt also with cases from different world regions (Bahcheli, Bartmann, and Srebrnik 2004; Kingston and Spears 2004; Geldenhuys 2009), or have included other terms of comparison from Europe such as North Cyprus (Isachenko 2012), Kosovo (Berg 2009), or Bosnia (Berg 2013b). Kolstø, who has an extensive record of publications on post-Soviet de facto states (Kolstø, Edemsky, and Kalashnikova 1993; Kolstø and Malgin 1998; Kolstø 2006; Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2008; Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2011, 2012; Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2013), has ventured outside the region, exploring Somaliland's original road to non-recognised statehood (Pegg and Kolstø 2015), as well as the fate of Republika Srpska Krajina, i.e. an instance where a potential de facto state in the making eventually failed (Kolstø and Paukovic 2014). From their side, scholars who worked on de facto states in other world regions, such as Somaliland (Richards and Smith 2015) and Iraqi Kurdistan (Voller 2012, 2015), often made reference to research on the post-Soviet cases, since the existence of a cluster of cases favoured a fruitful scholarly debate on key concepts.

However, even when the focus of research was not limited to a specific area, terms of comparison have mostly been conflict regions and separatist territories, including in large-scale longitudinal comparisons such as the one proposed by Florea (2014). While approaching the study of post-Soviet de facto states, to the traditional question 'what is it a case of?', most scholars have (implicitly or explicitly) answered that they are primarily contested territories, either in a class of their own with other unrecognised states, or to be compared with (post-)conflict regions.[5]

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5   Berg and Kuusk's (2010) article on degrees of sovereignty is a partial exception, since they include in their index, along de facto states, also dependent territories, autonomous regions, governments in exile and de jure states. Isachenko and Schilichte's (2007) working paper comparing dynamics in Transnistria and Uganda focusing in particular on tax collection is

Post-Soviet de facto states are by all accounts contested territories, by definition lacking widespread international recognition. They are also post-Soviet, largely dependent on a patron, as well as of very small in size: all of them would fall under the most established definition of micro-states, if they were recognised. Their being post-Soviet has been structurally kept in consideration in most analyses, in particular those by area studies specialists. Dependence has also been variously debated, even if mostly as a proxy to establish to what extent these should be considered de facto independent states, rather than puppets (Caspersen 2008; Berg and Kamilova 2012), or to highlight a situation that has been characterised as paradoxical, i.e. the observation that "in their fight for independence, the secessionist entities are quickly 'outsourcing' this independence to another state" (Popescu 2006b, 8).[6] But is this situation so unusual? As will be debated at length in Chapter 4, not at all: it is on the contrary very common for small jurisdictions to be dependent on external support from a patron, and to seek further integration with it rather than struggle to achieve more independence. So what seems paradoxical at first sight, becomes unsurprising as soon as post-Soviet de facto states are conceptualised as small dependent jurisdictions, rather than secessionist entities. In line with this argument, developed further in Chapter 4, within the scope of this research post-Soviet de facto states are conceptualised primarily as small dependent jurisdictions. As a consequence, literature on small dependent jurisdictions is largely taken as a starting point for looking at de facto states through a new set of analytical tools and concepts in order to analyse external assistance coming from a patron and aimed at state building.

To summarise, there will not be a closed set of territories used as a fixed term of comparison; instead, different internationally recognised countries, sub-state entities and other jurisdictions will be referred to when relevant.

1.3. De facto states: a minimalist definition

De facto states have been defined as territories that have achieved de facto independence and maintained it for a substantial period of time, have not gained widespread international recognition (or are "not full members of the international

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by all accounts an exception, even if limited in scope.

6 Caspersen (2009, 49) also made reference to "the paradoxical situation that external dependence is necessary for de facto independence (from the de jure parent state) to be maintained."

system of sovereign states"), and "have demonstrated an aspiration for full, de jure independence" (Caspersen and Stansfield 2011, 3). Other definitions provided since Pegg's (1998) original formal elaboration of the concept follow a similar template, and generally include a requirement that a de facto state must be aiming at full international recognition de jure as an independent state.[7]

Within the scope of this research, de facto states are to be understood, in line with the minimalistic definition proposed by Ó Beacháin, Comai, and Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili (2016, 442), as "entities that have achieved and maintained internal sovereignty over an area for an extended period, with a degree of internal legitimacy but only limited formal recognition at the international level, or none at all." This definition differs from established elaborations of the concepts mainly in two aspects.

First, it does not include a requirement that de facto authorities must "control most of the territory they lay claim to, including 'capital' and key regions", as proposed by Caspersen and Stansfield (2011, 3). At first, this condition seems pertinent, and has probably been introduced to limit the number of cases at the global level. However, events may be proving that this criteria is inadequate to capture all relevant cases in the post-Soviet space. As the de facto border between government-controlled territories in Ukraine and the self-proclaimed "people's republics" of Donetsk (DNR) and Lugansk (LRN) becomes more stable, and the de facto authorities start to deliver services to the resident population, DNR and LNR are effectively becoming de facto states. Yet, they would not satisfy the above-mentioned requirement that they control "most of the territory they lay claim to." Even accepting that the territorial extension to which DNR and LNR aspire does not coincide with the expansive project of Novorossiya (O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov 2016; Suslov 2017), it is still likely to include at least the areas that belong to Donetsk and Lugansk regions, of which DNR and LNR control substantially less than 50 per cent.[8] It is argued here that this fact alone would not make

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7 For an extended debate of alternative definitions of the concept, see Toomla (2014, 33–58).

8 It is anyway clear that DNR and LNR are not satisfied with their current territorial extensions, as evidently appears from initiatives such as the "Humanitarian programme for the unification of the people of Donbas" (Zakharchenko and Plotnitski 2017) launched jointly by the leadership of DNR and LNR, and the reference there as in other contexts – for example, in the criteria for determining which students are entitled to study in DNR universities (dnr-online.ru 2017) – to people "living in the areas of Donbas temporarily occupied by Ukraine", apparently coinciding with the the Donestsk and Lugansk regions.

DNR and LNR any less of a de facto state, and, by extension, that a requirement that de facto authorities must "control most of the territory they lay claim to" should not be included among the criteria for a de facto state to be considered such.

Secondly, the proposed definition does not include a requirement that a de facto states must have "declared formal independence or demonstrated clear aspirations for independence" (Caspersen 2012, 11), which is included in most established definitions. It is true that all post-Soviet cases satisfy this requirement, so at least in this world region the inclusion of this criteria would not impact the universe of cases captured by the definition. However, this criteria is fundamentally misleading since – as debated more extensively in Chapter 4 – many of the cases that scholars routinely consider de facto states, effectively perceive independence as a second best option, and would rather prefer union with their patron, with neighbouring ethnic kins, or even their parent state (it is the case of North Cyprus). In other words, many of these cases are de facto states in spite of themselves: they may have aspired to control a larger territory, or they may be willing to give up their independence if they had the chance, but this does not make them less of a de facto state. Toomla (2014, 56) is thus right in suggesting that "entities that do not want to be sovereign states, but have a functioning government can also be classified as de facto states."

1.4. De facto states: what we have learned

The debate on the definition of de facto state, and more broadly on what their continued existence means for the contemporary understanding of sovereignty, has been an important component part of the scholarship on these entities. However, it is probably the strand of literature that in her review of Western academic discourse on post-Soviet de facto states Yemelianova (2015, 227) includes under the label of 'inter-disciplinary area studies perspectives' that has offered most insights on the dynamics that characterise and determine the continued existence of these entities, as well as on the domestic developments within them.[9]

Early writings on post-Soviet de facto states understandably focused on the conflict dynamics that led to their formation. In the case of Transnistria, such studies highlighted how the conflict that emerged in Moldova in the early 1990s could hardly be classified under the label of 'ethno-territorial conflict' that was applied by default to civil wars

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9   For a bibliography of scholarly publications on de facto states, see this list of references compiled by Berg (2013a) and updated to 2013.

that exploded in South-East Europe and in both the North and the South Caucasus in the same period (Kolstø, Edemsky, and Kalashnikova 1993; O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Tchepalyga 1998; King 2000; Kolossov 2001). As argued by King (1994, 360) "in 1989 the Transnistrians' grievances were almost exclusively associated with the language laws and the threat of union with Romania", and accordingly language laws and policies have been the subject of dedicated studies that dealt either more broadly with Moldova (Bruchis 1982; King 1994; Jeffrey Chinn 1994; Jeff Chinn and Roper 1995; Ciscel 2006) or more specifically with Transnistria (Comai and Venturi 2015).[10] The peculiarities of Transnistrian nation-building, which could not be based on either ethnic identity or previous administrative boundaries, have also been object of inquiry (Roper 2005; Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2011; Dembinska and Danero Iglesias 2013; Şveţ 2013). Finally, researchers working on Transnistria dealt with domestic political developments (Korobov and Byanov 2006; Protsyk 2009, 2012), Transnistria's political economy (Isachenko 2009, 2012), and its flexible foreign policy (Kosienkowski 2012a; Istomin and Bolgova 2016). The role of external actors such as Russia (Devyatkov 2012) and the EU (Dias 2013) has also been analysed. Other studies, in particular by Kosienkowski (2010), and Chamberlain-Creangă and Allin (2010) provide detailed accounts of the internal and external dynamics that allow for the continued existence of Transnistria.

In the last decade, scholarship on Abkhazia has grown considerably, well beyond early publications focusing on the conflict (e.g. Coppieters 2004; Lakoba 2004). More recent research focused on different aspects of the contemporary situation, including inter-ethnic relations (Clogg 2008; Trier, Lohm, and Szakonyi 2010; Matsuzato 2011; Comai 2013), domestic politics (Ó Beacháin 2012; Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2013; Ó Beacháin 2016; Kopeček and Hoch 2016), civil society (Hoch, Kopeček, and Baar 2016), and language laws (Comai and Venturi 2015). Reports by the International Crisis Group (International Crisis Group 2006, 2007a, 2010a, 2013) provide useful context at different points in time, while reports by human rights organisations contribute to understand the difficulties of Georgians living across the de facto border (Human Rights Watch 2011; SaferWorld and Institute for Democracy 2011).[11] Abkhazia's Georgians,

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10 Even a study that deals with an apparently unrelated issue, i.e. "workers' reactions to transnational market reform in a Soviet-era factory", effectively rotates around the issue of language (R. A. Chamberlain-Creangă 2011).

11 For an academic account of cross-border dynamics, see in particular (Lundgren 2017a).

people living across the de facto border, and IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia have also received scholarly attention (Toal and Grono 2011; Kabachnik, Regulska, and Mitchneck 2012; Kabachnik et al. 2013; Prelz Oltramonti 2016; Lundgren 2016b, 2017a). PhD dissertations published as books (Francis 2011; Smolnik 2016), or that led to the publications of a series of independent articles (Prelz Oltramonti 2015, 2016, 2017, Lundgren 2016a, 2016b, 2017a) provide useful context and different angles.

South Ossetia has attracted comparatively less dedicated scholarly attention. Among publications related to the 2008 war over South Ossetia, the Tagliavini report (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia 2009) and Gerard Toal's writings (Ó Tuathail 2008; Toal 2017, chaps. 3–5) remain key points of reference. Also in the case of South Ossetia reports by the International Crisis Group provide useful context (International Crisis Group 2007b, 2010b).

As for the war in Nagorno Karabakh, De Waal's account has deservedly become the most frequently quoted book on the subject (De Waal 2004). At least in part due to the particularly tense nature of the confrontation over Nagorno Karabakh and the impending risk of war, conflict related issues have been at the centre of dedicated analysis (Broers 2015a, 2016; Ayunts, Zolyan, and Zakaryan 2016; Cornell 2017), including works that specifically focus on the role of civil society (Ghaplanyan 2010; Simão 2010; Kopeček, Hoch, and Baar 2016). Other aspects that have received scholarly attention include domestic political dynamics (Smolnik 2012; Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2012; Beacháin 2015), and local cartographic imaginaries (Broers and Toal 2013).

A few articles have provided an overview of key aspects of all four cases; most recently, Ó Beacháin, Comai, and Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili (2016) offered a succinct overview of internal dynamics, external relations as well as counter-recognition strategies enacted by the parent states. At different points in time, other authors offered broad characterisations of prevalent dynamics across cases (Lynch 2004; Kolstø 2006; Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2008; Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2011, 2012) and thus remain fundamental readings for scholars approaching the study of post-Soviet de facto states. Broers' (2013, 2015b; Broers, Iskandaryan, and Minasyan 2015) contributions aimed at presenting the state of the art on the studies on de facto states, and at theory development, should be similarly considered required reading.

Finally, credit is due to John O'Loughlin, Vladimir Kolossov and Gerard Toal for the series of articles they published based on an original set of surveys they conducted in all

post-Soviet de facto states in the period 2010-2011 (O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Toal 2011; Toal and O'Loughlin 2013a, 2013b; O'Loughlin, Toal, and Chamberlain-Creangă 2013; Bakke et al. 2014), and then again in December 2014, with key results later summarised or used for new analyses in separate occasions (O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Toal 2014; Toal and O'Loughlin 2014, 2016, 2017; O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov 2017). Their work provides a wealth of data on local perceptions in these territories, that would otherwise have to based exclusively on expert opinions and impressions gathered by scholars during their fieldwork.

As a scholarly community with an interest on de facto states, what have we learned through our collective research endeavour?[12] First, that in spite of the interminable debate on how to call them, there is a broad agreement on what a de facto state is. Even the terminological debate is eventually coming to an end, with only 'de facto state' and 'unrecognised state' effectively in widespread use. Second, that through nation- and state-building, all of these entities have achieved a significant degree of domestic legitimacy among the resident population.[13] Third, that unlike in many other places of the region, the results of elections are not predetermined; elections are competitive and effectively serve their intrinsic goal of choosing the leadership of a polity. Fourth, that in spite of being highly dependent on a patron, they are not pawns in the hands of their respective patron; electoral victories by candidates others than the one favoured by Moscow has often been presented as an example of their defiance, but their agency is constantly reaffirmed well beyond elections through their constant negotiations and interactions with the patron and other international actors.

These observations are supported by a wealth of details and opinions gathered by a relatively small number of researchers in years of research, surveys, analysis of documents and media, as well as interviews with local policy makers and NGO representatives. The present study feeds into this scholarly tradition by focusing on two aspects that have been previously approached by other scholars: state-building and external relations. In spite of the relative prominence dedicated to both topics, there is still a dearth of information on the practicalities involved in the process of capacity- and

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12 It is worth highlighting that in many ways this is indeed a collective endeavour. A significant number of scholars who have worked on de facto states know each other well, discuss their research experience at conferences, and co-author articles and books.

13 This of course does not take in account the opinion of all those who had to leave as a consequence of ethnic cleansing during the wars in the early 1990s.

institution-building, on how access to public goods and services is made possible by the de facto authorities, and more broadly on how, in practice, de facto authorities interact with their patron and other international actors.

Besides, the dramatic impact on the livelihood of residents determined by Russia's increased involvement in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia after 2008 has perhaps not been fully appreciated. As will be presented through relevant data in Chapter 5, in the lapse of a few years, the salary of public workers and the level of pension payments have increased substantially in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and in some cases they doubled, or grew manifold. Russia is not only a distant protector of these territories (or a puppeteer involved in local political intrigues, as some would have it), but has become the main provider of financial and technical assistance for capacity-building in these territories, enabling and enhancing service delivery in key sectors such as health and education. At the same time, due to explicit protection by Russia, Georgia stopped being a credible threat. Such developments, among others, necessarily impact not only the political economy of these entities, but also dynamics of legitimacy.

In brief, as will be described in Chapter 6, residents and authorities of de facto states interact with other international actors and even with their patron state more than meets the eyes. Hundreds of (ethnic Abkhaz and Ossetian) residents from Abkhazia and South Ossetia go to Tbilisi every year to receive healthcare. Representatives of the European Union and international organisations in both Transnistria and Abkhazia routinely coordinate their activities with official representatives of the unrecognised authorities. These and other details are determinant for shaping a more accurate picture of the processes that are taking place in these territories. In the absence of such detail, even informed readers must make assumptions, and as established daily practices often do not conform with predominant narratives and are not reported in local and international news media, such assumptions may be misleading. Indeed, providing data and details on how external assistance reaches these territories through interactions with the local leadership represents the main empirical contribution of the present study to the scholarship on de facto states.

1.5. Structure of the research

The next part of this introductory chapter presents brief summary of the main research findings, accompanied by a few words of caution and a note on terminology.

Chapter 2 introduces issues of research design and methodology, and presents how they are rooted in the author's own experience.

Chapter 3 points at some of the ways in which micro-states in other parts of the world, as well as sub-state entities in the region, can be considered relevant terms of comparison for post-Soviet de facto states. It then outlines dynamics of external assistance to state building in territories whose status is not contested, including post-conflict countries and neighbouring post-Soviet states. This debate allows to give an overview of how non-recognition impacts externally-led state building in post-Soviet de facto states.

The fourth chapter introduces a conceptualisation of post-Soviet de facto states as small dependent jurisdictions. As will be argued, this approach offers new analytical inputs from an apparently distant scholarly literature and contributes to reset expectations on the external relations that allow for the sustained existence of such diminutive polities. This chapter also highlights how the debate on the criteria included in the definition of de facto states is not purely academic: it shapes the expectations that both analysts and policy-makers have on the long-term path of development of de facto states, and thus it contributes to the (mis)interpretation of prevalent dynamics observed around these territories.

Chapter 5 focuses on direct budget assistance to authorities in post-Soviet de facto states, and presents a wealth of data and details on how these jurisdictions have access to the financial resources they need to conduct state activities. Available data on external assistance and other key features of the local political economy (in particular, the share of residents whose incomes depend directly on the state) are compared across multiple sets of potential terms of comparison, thus testing some of the hypotheses generated in Chapter 4 on similarities with small dependent jurisdictions in other contexts.

Chapter 6 deals with non non-budget support to post-Soviet de facto states, including both technical assistance from the patron and interaction with other actors, including international governmental and non-governmental organisations. As will be seen, external assistance significantly contributes to develop state capacities and interacts with legitimisation dynamics found in these territories.

Finally, Chapter 7 focuses on the ministries of foreign affairs of post-Soviet de facto states. A comparative analysis based on word frequency in the press-releases published on-line by MFAs in these territories and in neighbouring countries is employed to

highlight some of the ways in which MFAs in de facto states differ from their peers in uncontested countries. A thorough analysis of the role of the MFA in coordinating external relations – particularly those that involve international organisations – concludes this chapter, again pointing at the impact of non-recognition on prevalent dynamics.

1.6. A few words of caution

By comparing the external relations of post-Soviet de facto states with a set of other territories that share with them a significant number of features, this research aims to answer qualitatively the main research question on the impact of non-recognition. To do so, it implicitly turns it into the following counter-factual: how would the external relations of these territories be if their status was not contested, and instead they were, for example, autonomous regions in their patron state, in some form of associated statehood with a patron, or internationally recognized as independent states? It then approaches these questions through pattern-matching comparing the external relations of de facto states with territories belonging to the other above-mentioned categories that are as similar to them as possible. This process reflects the logic presented by Yin (2009) in his book on case study research design:

> "For case study analysis, one of the most desirable techniques is to use a pattern matching logic. Such a logic (Trochim 1989) compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one (or with several alternative predictions). If the patterns coincide, the results can help a case study to strengthen its internal validity."

This research does not aim at quantifying the effect of non-recognition. For example, it does not aim at calculating exact figures of the economic costs of non-recognition. Rather, it highlights how the network of external relations that these territories have developed after more than two decades of continued existence contributes to their state capacity, and how non-recognition may have influenced the process.

Many intervening factors make it admittedly difficult to argue beyond doubt that non-recognition is responsible for a given feature of external relations. Indeed, disentangling the consequences of conflict from those of non-recognition *per se* is not always possible, as it is obviously conflict that led to non-recognition and fundamentally shaped ensuing dynamics. Non-recognition led to some forms of international isolation (Berg and Toomla 2009), but it also opened the way for a special relation with the patron that would otherwise be difficult to conceive. Conflict also led to increased

international attention towards territories that may have otherwise remained largely under the radar of international organisations and diplomatic circles.

Given the structure of this work, and the geographic concentration of cases under study, generalisation of research outcomes is problematic. Yet, if a certain type of external activity is found among the de facto states included in this study, this automatically implies that lack of international recognition is not, by itself, an impediment to that kind of activity. On the other hand, if a feature of external relations recorded in de facto states is found also in internationally recognised sovereign states, or sub-state entities, it means that lack of recognition is not necessarily the cause of that feature. To this extent, observations on the impact of non-recognition found in this research are indeed generalisable.

Insights stemming from this work may be particularly valuable in enhancing our understanding of post-Soviet de facto states, as well as in the analysis of the processes taking place in Donetsk and Lugansk starting with 2014. However, the conceptualisations and analytical tools introduced in this research can certainly be applied well beyond the post-Soviet space to other jurisdictions whose status may or may not be contested.

1.7. The admonitions of critical geopolitics

By conceptualising post-Soviet de facto states as small dependent jurisdictions and by comparing their external relations with those of sub-state entities and recognised (micro-)states, this research takes distance from conventional assumptions of international relations that traditionally have as their basic unit of analysis sovereign states. By looking across an often artificial divide between sovereign and non-sovereign territories, this research aims at breaking out of what John Agnew (2003, 53) defined as the "territorial trap", i.e. "thinking and acting as if the world were made up entirely of states exercising power over blocks of space that between them exhaust the politico-geographical form of world politics."

Besides, this research keeps in consideration key warnings brought forward by scholars of critical geopolitics that are particularly relevant to the student of de facto states.[14]

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14 This section points at some of the key warnings that emerge from writings of critical geopolitics that are relevant for the study of post-Soviet de facto states. This is not meant, however, to present critical geopolitics as such, or propose a structured approach for a critical geopolitical analysis of the cases at the centre of this study. For a critical geopolitical

Firstly, critical geopolitics cautions against "the scripting of global space by state-society intellectuals and institutions" (Ó Tuathail 1996, 51), which have "the power to define and delimit that which is taken as 'real'" (Ó Tuathail 2000, 171). Indeed, de facto states have been depicted in the media and even by academics as 'places that do not exist' or as 'black holes.'[15] De facto states do exist and negating their existence (even if only rhetorically) or referring to them with terms that imply some kind of inherent difference (e.g. by obsessively repeating the qualifier 'de facto') is part of a process of "'othering', [...] essentializing, exocitizing and totalizing of places" (Ó Tuathail 2008, 672) that leaves little space for a critical analysis of the processes taking place in these territories.

In other words, there is nothing "magic" about de facto states. They are, to put it simply, places that exist, just as much as any other place. All of them have at least one open border that allows for easy access to the territory. If they ever were, they certainly are not "informational black holes" (King 2001, 550) today. Each of them has multiple online news outlets that report daily from the region, providing a stream of news that is much more substantial compared with that usually available for similarly sized, uncontested territories located in the same region. Both private and public figures in de facto states are active on social media and frequently debate local issues. Local TV stations stream their broadcasts in high definition or put news reels on YouTube. The spreading of the Internet to these territories has vastly facilitated communication and the free flow of information.

Secondly, as highlighted by Ó Tuathail (2008, 672), "critical geopolitics is sensitive to the importance of localized context and agency in world affairs". De facto states are often characterised as pawns in the hand of their patron, or simply passive elements in

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analysis of dynamics in and around conflict areas in the post-Soviet space that offers a complex understanding of the context in which many of the mechanisms described in this research take place, see in particular Toal (2017).

15 The most notable example on the media is probably the BBC documentary series "Places that don't exist" broadcast in 2005. Among academics, Isachenko (2012, 1) started her book focused on North Cyprus and Transnistria with the sentence: "This work presents a story of two informal states, two places which officially do not exist". In the introduction to their book on de facto states, Caspersen and Stansfield (2011, 2) argue that they are "in more ways than one, the 'places that don't exist'". For a debate on the "black hole" rhetoric, in particular on Transnistria, see Bobick (2011, 241–43).

geopolitical power struggles, but recent literature on de facto states has increasingly focused on local dynamics in order to understand and explain the processes that take place in and around them. Characterising them as dependent on external assistance from a patron should not be construed as implying that de facto states are pliant servants of their master's biddings, but rather contribute to define the complex network of relationships that they have built around themselves. In other words, this research thoroughly acknowledges and highlights the agency of local actors.

Finally, authors of critical geopolitics recognize the need of contextualising and problematising narratives and competing interpretations of events. This focus is particularly important for a research involving territories that became de facto independent after violent conflicts and whose claims to independence are based on disputed understandings of both recent and ancient history.

1.8. <u>Main findings</u>

External relations of de facto states have their patron state at their centre. In this context, non-internationalised, externally-led state- and institution-building efforts effectively coincide with further integration with the patron state. This process of thorough integration with the patron, perhaps accompanied by maintenance of the symbolic attributes of sovereignty, may effectively represent the trajectory of post-Soviet de facto states. The drive towards further integration with the patron, however, should not be understood as a consequence of non-recognition, or as evidence of the fact that residents of these territories have no desire for self-determination. In this respect, as will be discussed, post-Soviet de facto state behave similarly to small, dependent jurisdictions elsewhere in the world, that out of necessity or pragmatic considerations choose to strengthen ties with their patron.

As will be highlighted in Chapter 5, similarly to what is seen in other small dependent jurisdictions, external assistance accounts for most of budget incomes of authorities in post-Soviet de facto states. Given the unusually high share of residents whose income is directly dependent on the state (in the form of wages and pensions), such external support has a particularly substantial impact on the incomes and livelihood of the local population. Well beyond a mere sponsor, as highlighted in Chapter 6, the patron remains however the main point of reference for state building also in terms of technical and practical assistance.

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, the current situation gives to authorities of de facto states a significant say on the kind of activity that international organisations conduct in their territory. Since promoting democracy, strengthening governance, running advocacy programmes, and the very principle of conditionality are largely off the table, international organisations finance relatively more socially-oriented activities in these territories than in their parent states or other post-conflict territories. Finally, Chapter 7 highlights how the ministry of foreign affairs in post-Soviet de facto states are in many ways unlike similar structures found elsewhere, as appears from both their external communication strategy and their everyday activities.

In terms of methods, this work introduces structured content analysis of textual materials extracted from the web as a new approach to gain insights on post-Soviet de facto states, as well as to compare them with other entities in circumstances when direct comparisons would otherwise seem infeasible. Perhaps the main contribution of this research is however not that of offering a definitive answer to the main research question, but rather to provide a better analytical framework for understanding the external relations of de facto states, and how they contribute to shape societal, economic and political dynamics within these territories.

1.9. On context and terminology

This work assumes that the reader is broadly familiar with post-Soviet de facto states and the context in which they appeared. It does not include lengthy historical introductions, as has sometimes been the case for PhD theses that dealt with the subject (Potier 2001; Cornell 2002a; Francis 2011). There is a rich literature on conflicts in the post-Soviet space, and how they led to the formation of de facto states, and this work could hardly provide original inputs to those debates.

It has by now become a cliché of publications on de facto states to list alternative terms used to describe the concept. In recent years, as acknowledged by various scholars (Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2011, 179, note 4; O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Toal 2014, 494), there has been a growing consensus on the expression 'de facto state', which has also the benefit of shifting the focus to "the agency of the de facto state" (Voller 2012, 12) and to the political project that lies at its basis (Lynch 2007, 486), instead than on its deficiencies (e.g. quasi state, almost state, non-recognized, etc.). Broers (2013, 11 note 1) also "opted for 'de facto state' as the term that is simultaneously the least inaccurate and least offensive," but in a more recent article he preferred the expression 'de facto

jurisdiction' (Broers 2015b), apparently in order to escape the set of misleading expectations that may be related to the concept of 'state.' In this work, which partially aims at adjusting such expectations, the more established expression 'de facto state' is still preferred. As discussed in particular by Lynch (2007, 485–87), there are good reasons to prefer 'de facto state' to other forms. Broadly speaking, however, unless an expression that has attracted some consensus in an academic debate is utterly inappropriate, it is generally wise to stick to the most established version.[16] For this reason, a conscious attempt at resisting the temptation to find "more appropriate" definitions for established concepts characterises the following chapters. For example, the expression 'parent state' is used throughout this work, even if, as highlighted by Ó Beacháin, Comai, and Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili (2016, 442), 'base state' would be "more neutral and accurate."[17] Following a similarly established practice, the qualifier 'de facto' is not repeated each time authorities or institutions in these territories are mentioned.[18]

The four de facto states at the centre of this analysis share many features, but are also substantially different. This makes it more difficult to use generic sentences that have 'post-Soviet de facto states' as a subject, for example, when referring to Russia's role in the region. To avoid heavy phrasing and compulsive repetition of the names of each of these territories, the generic expression 'post-Soviet de facto states' (rather than, e.g., 'post-Soviet de facto states, not including Nagorno Karabakh') is used also in circumstances when it does not apply to all four cases, if the context makes it abundantly clear to which cases it is effectively making reference to.

Clarity and brevity are given priority over nuance also in terms of transliterations and geographic terms, and the most established forms routinely found in journalistic reports are used throughout this work. While acknowledging that such choices are often influenced by pre-Soviet or Soviet practices, the result of more recent conflict dynamics, or some unusual combinations of the above, this pragmatic choice aims at removing needless distractions from the main arguments at the centre of this work, leaving such debates to contexts where they are directly relevant to the object of

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16 I thank Pål Kolstø for making this point clear to me.

17 The expression 'base state' was initially introduced by Byman and King (2012).

18 See also Blakkisrud and Kolstø (2012, n. 4).

analysis.[19] In practice, this mostly translates to using the Russian/Soviet version of names in contested territories (e.g. Sukhumi), and the national version for uncontested cities in post-Soviet independent states (e.g. Chişinău, and Kyiv).[20] This choice is warranted by the understanding that readers of this work will be familiar with many of the terminological subtleties associated with conflict and post-conflict dynamics in the region, and should not be understood as dismissive of the importance of alternative name choices in particular for local actors. Indeed, the fact that two out of the four cases under study had a referendum in 2017 to change their official name clearly demonstrates that such issues are still object of debate, including among residents of these territories.[21]

Even good prose will take its toll on precision: in order to prevent excessive repetition and heavy phrasing, de facto states are sometimes referred to as 'entities' or 'territories'. Both expressions are misleading, as references are mostly do the institutions that have control on a territory and authority over the people that live there, rather than to some abstract entity or to pure physical land. For lack of better solutions, the reader is asked to overlook indulgently at such terminological inaccuracy.

1.10.   Conclusions

This research aims at analysing post-Soviet de facto states primarily as small dependent jurisdictions, looking into the relevant literature in order to gain new analytical insights on post-Soviet de facto states through a so far unexplored angle. Cross-regional studies are not completely unexplored in the scholarship on post-Soviet developments, yet such comparisons are always made under the assumption that they will raise eyebrows in some quarters. It is certainly with this expectation that parallels between post-Soviet de facto states and Pacific island micro-states such as Palau are introduced in the present

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19 Toal and O'Loughlin (2013b), for example, debate at length different understandings among local residents of various identifiers used in reference to Nagorno Karabakh.

20 For a more extended debate of issues related to place names in this context, see in particular Toal (2017, 11–13).

21 After a constitutional referendum held on 20 February 2017 in Nagorno Karabakh, the official name of the entity was changed to 'Artsakh Republic'. A referendum in South Ossetia held on 9 April 2017 on the same date as the presidential elections determined the addition of 'state of Alania' to the official name of the republic.

study, but also in the conviction that this approach brings with it useful analytical tools and interesting angles to the study of post-Soviet de facto states.

In their introduction to a book comparing state crisis in Africa and in post-Soviet countries, Beissinger and Young (2002, 5), candidly admitted that they "anticipate that for some readers the Africa-Eurasia juxtaposition […] will seem odd given the enormous differences in the histories and cultures of the two regions." Aware of the suspicion that such comparisons may raise, they made a plea to scholars approaching their work, which is extended to readers of the present study:

> "the utility of any comparison can be measured only by the degree to which it generates new and meaningful ideas. It is by this criterion as well that we invite our readers to judge the chapters that follow" (Beissinger and Young 2002, 12).

Chapter 2.

Methodology, and the journey that defined it

This chapter discusses openly some contextual aspects that determined the research question that gives the title to this study. It also introduces details on data collection methods: how they have become component parts of the research project, and why some methods may appear more visibly than others in the following chapters. It then outlines some of the practicalities and difficulties related to fieldwork as well as to structured analysis of web contents, which represent the two main data collection methods used for the empirical parts of this research.

The first sections of this chapter will have a reflexive, auto-biographic component. Their purpose it to situate the research within the lived experience of its author, and outline how the researcher's experience has borne an impact on key research design choices that defined this study. The following parts discuss in more details the use of structured analysis of web contents in qualitative research; they outline the benefits, the limitations, as well as some of the technicalities involved.[1] In brief, as will be argued, applying a structured approach to the analysis of selected online resources allows both

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1   An extended version of this section has been published in the journal *Studies of Transition States and Societies (Comai 2017)*.

to "find the needle" and "characterise the haystack", and should accordingly be embraced by scholars in area studies and beyond.[2]

2.1. Shifting attention away from the issue of international recognition

The development of a viable research question is part of an iterative journey, whereby preliminary analyses and a review of literature fundamentally contribute to defining a research project. This ideal pattern is often subject to constraints related to the funding of the research endeavour, and this is the case also of the present study. Indeed, this research has been conducted within the scope of a programme sponsored by the European Union under a Marie Skłodowska-Curie action, which provided generous funding and numerous opportunities for fruitful academic exchange with peers. It also bore with it one limitation: I had to fit my research into a broadly pre-defined research topic which made reference to post-Soviet de facto states, foreign policy, and the issue of international recognition. As a consequence of project regulations, I did not have the luxury to change some of the premises at the basis of the research, or formally shift away from the main research question of this research ("what is the effect of non-recognition?"). Partly as a result, as will be seen, the conclusions effectively challenge the research question, rather than answering it.

The initial focus on the issue of recognition has been inherited from the scholarship on de facto states as it has evolved since Scott Pegg first formalised the concept (Pegg 1998). Indeed, international recognition (or rather, lack thereof) has structurally been the main criteria for case selection in research on de facto states. This criteria has clear benefits for scholars specifically interested in issues related to the status issue and international diplomacy, but as the focus of the research shifts to other aspects, its limits become more apparent. Indeed, as the volume of scholarship on de facto states increased, Pegg (2017, 21–22) argued that "the problem today is not a dearth of comparative work on the post-Soviet cases but rather a dearth of comparative work involving other cases." In this context, he was not only referring to other de facto states but also to "other adjacent phenomena" (Pegg 2017, 22). Pointing out that entities such as Taiwan and Nagorno Karabakh may not really be comparable, Seymour (Closson et

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2   This metaphor has been previously used in the context of content analysis by Hopkins and King (2010, 230).

al. 2013, 679–80) similarly argued that "the study of de facto states needs to move beyond the narrow focus on a heterogeneous set of unrecognised states", since

> such territories share the absence of external recognition, but their dissimilarities in most every other respect make it difficult to parse out the effects that non-recognition has on processes such as democratization, state building, and legitimation. The absence of international legal sovereignty affects these processes, to be sure, but other factors often have far greater effects.

As will be seen, this study answers this call by suggesting that small size and external dependence may indeed be such factors. This analytical framework shifts attention away from the issue of international recognition, and as a consequence the research question that initiated this research inevitably moves to the background.

2.2. Data collection methods: personal experience, differing academic perspectives, and ethics

The object of research, as well as the methodological approach used to study it, are often determined by personal experience. Indeed, this study is the result of long-held interest towards these territories, that at least in part may stem from my own origins in Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol, a pacific and relatively wealthy border region with a contested past that is now part of Italy. Dominant local narratives depict Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol as a clear success story: extensive autonomy agreements are credited with having prevented conflict and limited tensions among various ethno-linguistic groups of residents. A treaty-based autonomy agreement that gives highly formalised rights and guarantees to different ethno-linguistic groups has been the received wisdom and commonsensical solution to potential ethno-territorial conflicts I inherited from my early education. As a young student, the fact that autonomy did not always work and in some instances may have even been a factor leading to conflict (Cornell 2002b) was in itself puzzling. Even the view I had from my childhood's home in the southern Alps mattered: as I started reading about war and ethnic cleansing in post-Soviet mountain territories, accustomed to see a valley scattered with villages from a privileged mountainside position, I could visually picture too well the human suffering related to these conflicts and the pain of being forced to leave one's family's ancestral home.

I started studying Russian by chance in high school in the late 1990s, and since year 2000 I regularly visited for lengthy periods Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. As a graduate student based at RGGU in Moscow in 2005, I wrote (in Russian) for a course on conflict studies my first paper on the Georgian-Abkhazian

conflict: while not technically "pre-internet", that paper was largely based on materials I found in the local library. It was not until 2009 that I first visited Transnistria, and until 2010 when I first visited Abkhazia. As a researcher and editor at *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso,* when visiting the region, I was combining research with journalism. For example, while working on a book chapter eventually published in 2013 under the title "Sovereignty Conflicts and Minority Protection: the Case of Abkhazia" (Comai 2013), I also produced lengthy feature stories (Comai 2012b) and published edited interviews with key respondents (e.g. Comai 2011). At the time, my approach to research was largely based on fieldwork and left little room for theorising: a research project on youth policies in Russia and the northern Caucasus I was conducting at the time resulted in an article published by *Anthropology of East Europe Review (Comai 2012a)* that was based almost exclusively on ethnographic observations and featured pictures from my visits to pro-government youth camps in Russia's northern Caucasus. Another journal rejected a previous version of the same article exactly because it was too much focused on direct observation, and did not include a substantive theoretical section.

Work on the present study, which I started in 2013, has been heavily influenced by previous experience. On the one hand, I wished to continue and expand my research on post-Soviet de facto states. On the other, I desired to take it as a chance for marking a change with the way I previously did research: a four-year research project would have given me the chance to spend more time reading, theorising, and reflecting more on methodological aspects. As I moved to Ireland to start my studies at Dublin City University, I became increasingly aware of different epistemological and methodological debates, as well as the high importance given to issues such as replicability in important parts of the scholarly community that surrounded me.

This experience strengthened my desire to develop this research in a way that would be a clear break from my previous research, and would make it acceptable, or at least defensible, in front of scholars coming from different academic traditions. As a consequence, I aimed at developing a research with a substantive and ambitious theoretical component, and where fieldwork and evidence gathered through unstructured interviews would be complemented by other fully formalised and replicable data collection methods. Last but not least, my becoming a parent in the early stages of this research endeavour pushed me to reduce the time I initially envisioned for lengthy periods of fieldwork, further reinforcing the feeling that I should give more prominence to theory and fully formalised and replicable data collection methods.

The information I gathered during fieldwork for this project, as well as during my previous visits to these territories, has been fundamental in developing my overall thinking on these places, in shaping the research design, as well as in providing insights on specific aspects to an extent that likely does not fully emerge from the following chapters. This is partly because whenever an information I obtained through interviews was equally available in an online source, I consciously chose to refer to the online source rather than my personal interview, in line with the principle of replicability as well as out of ethical considerations (as will be discussed in the next section, even representatives of major international organisations find themselves in a relatively fragile situation in the context of post-Soviet de facto states).

These considerations are aimed at clarifying that the author does not sympathise with the positions of fieldwork sceptics who "argue that fieldwork inevitably produces biased and questionable valid data" (Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2015, 11). In other words, the relatively high visibility given to other data collection methods does not imply that they are considered in any way "superior". Well beyond personal, pragmatic, or ethical choices - as will be argued - using complementary and equally valid data collection methods is a good practice that should be encouraged both because of its inherent merits and because it contributes to reduce the distance between different scholarly traditions.

2.3. <u>Fieldwork</u>

The empirical part of the research has largely been conducted using established methods, combining primary and secondary sources with both formal interviews and informal conversations with government representatives in Tiraspol and Sukhumi, as well as with officers working for international organisations or NGOs active in these territories.

Interviews and meetings have been held in Chişinău and Tiraspol in February 2016; in Sukhumi, Gali and Tbilisi in May 2016. A full list is presented in Appendix A, including full names of government representatives, and only the name of the organisation in all other cases. All interviewees have been preliminarily informed of the structure of the research, the purpose of the meeting, and their rights as participants to the research, and have offered informed consent to their participation either in writing by email or on record at the beginning of each meeting. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to visit either South Ossetia or Nagorno Karabakh, as visiting them without breaching national

legislation of the respective parent states would not have been possible.[3] However, Transnistria and Abkhazia are the two cases which present the highest diversity in external relations, and accordingly are the most relevant case studies for a research that aims at understanding the impact of non-recognition (if a given type of external relation is found in one of these territory, it means that lack of recognition is not an insurmountable obstacle to it).

Chapter 6 has particularly benefited of the insights gained during fieldwork, as given the sensibility of the context even large organisations in some cases prefer not to publicise details on their activities in de facto states. Interestingly, de facto authorities have been open to meet, provide data, and were happy to have interviews on record, while other actors have mostly preferred to have less formal meetings, or asked to be contacted to receive confirmation on specific quotes. This aspect reflects a condition on the ground: de facto authorities feel relatively strong, and can publicly reproduce a narrative that sees their active involvement in interactions with the patron and other international actors. On the contrary, international organisations and NGOs working in these places often feel that their position is fragile, as a misplaced word could effectively lead to their activities being banned or severely limited, either by the de facto authorities, by the government in the parent state, or external donors. Officers working on the ground sometimes struggle to express a coherent public narrative that is acceptable to all parties.

For example, it is acceptable for the government of Georgia that an EU representative meets with the leadership of de facto authorities in Sukhumi or Tskhinvali. It is an indisputable fact that the people who represent the de facto authorities in such occasions have been chosen through local elections, and meeting with those specific individuals inevitably represents an implicit acknowledgement of the electoral process that brought them to that table. However, explicitly recognising the electoral process would be completely unacceptable, and would spark a wave of outrage and condemnation through political elites in the parent state.[4]

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3   In the past, exceptions have been granted in rare circumstances, but the framework of this research made it unlikely that such favour would have been conceded in this case. Ethics guidelines issued by the European Commission on EU funded research highlight the importance of complying with "applicable international, EU and national law" (EC Directorate General for Research & Innovation 2016).

In practice, international organisations operating in de facto states must seek approval for their activities both from the government in the parent state and from de facto authorities (as well as, in some cases, from their respective donors). However, publicly acknowledging the existence of such a vetting procedure is politically inconvenient for all actors involved. Labelling as 'confidence-building' or as 'humanitarian assistance' activities that in other circumstances would be referred to as 'state building' or 'development aid' reflects a pragmatic choice. In particular in the Abkhazian context, international organisations active on the ground have little interest in seeking visibility for their activities in the local media.

Acknowledging the sensitivity of the issues as the centre of this research, when describing dynamics and trends taking place in these territories, details on specific projects, initiatives, or individuals have mostly been left out of this writing, or described only in generic terms and to the extent needed to present a given aspect. In a few instances, some observations and details have not been included in the final version of this research due to ethical considerations; they may have added more nuance and additional evidence, but their exclusion does not bear an impact on the conclusions to this research. While informal conversations and direct observations by the researcher have greatly contributed to the understanding of ongoing dynamics that underpins this research, quotes mostly refer to materials publicly available online.

Interviews have been organised and conducted personally by the author, without the involvement of assistants or interpreters, mostly in Russian and English (but in one case in Romanian, and in one case in Italian) allowing the interviewees to express themselves in the language of their choice.

2.4. Structured analysis of web content

This research is largely based on a combination of fieldwork and analysis of primary and secondary sources, which represent the methods most commonly found in research on de facto states. In addition, this research introduces a new method to the toolbox of

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4   A case in point is the reaction to a statement by Herbert Salber, EU special representative for South Caucasus and Geneva talks co-chair, who in May 2017 congratulated during a meeting in Tskhinvali Anatoly Bibilov for his victory in the presidential elections held in South Ossetia the previous month: meeting Bibilov (who was there because he won the election) was not contentious, but explicitly acknowledging the fact that he won the election was totally unacceptable (Civil.ge 2017a).

researchers working on de facto states: structured analysis of textual contents published on the web.

The process involves the creation of textual datasets generated by extracting contents and relevant metadata (date and title) from websites of institutions and relevant media organisations in de facto states and their parent states.

At its most basic, it allows to order all contents of a specific website by date, filter them by keyword, and sift through them quickly in order to find a specific information. This approach has been used, for example, in order to find background information in preparation of interviews as well as to find some of the statistics included in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, a subset with all items published by news agencies in Transnistria and Abkhazia making reference to training programmes has been manually coded by the author and used as a starting point for the analysis of external assistance to these territories: as will be highlighted, this approach allows to offer a systematic overview of training programmes found in these territories, and minimizes researcher's bias.

Once a dataset has been created, it becomes straightforward to conduct word-frequency analyses, and present the results in time-series graphs or barcharts. Examples of potential use cases have been extensively debated by this author elsewhere (Comai 2017). Within the scope of this study, word frequency analysis has been mostly used in Chapter 7, as a means to compare directly MFAs of de facto states among themselves, as well as with their counterparts in selected internationally recognised countries (countries bordering with de facto states, as well as micro-states and countries in Europe which achieved independence only recently). This approach allows to show in a straightforward way how certain issues or external partners feature more prominently in the public communication efforts issued by de facto MFAs, when compared with recognised country, and thus serves as an indirect indicator of the impact of non-recognition.

The relative ease with which new datasets can be created, including from sources such as those originating in de facto states that are not available in established databases such as Lexis Nexis, is a fundamental component of this approach. The fact that such datasets can be re-created and verified independently by other researchers without licensing constraints is also noteworthy in an academic context that values open access and reproducibility of research.

Finally, once the intrinsic limitations and assumptions of this approach are kept in consideration, word-frequency analysis allows to analyse trends and make comparison meaningfully in cases when this would not otherwise be possible. In particular for scholars working on de facto states who are accustomed to conduct research in a context where trustworthy, independently verifiable data are a rare commodity, this new tool can be particularly useful. In integrating established qualitative methods with a quantitative technique such as word frequency analysis, this research follows the approach that Moran-Ellis et al. (2006, 54) called "following a thread", which consists in "pick[ing] an analytic question or theme in one dataset and follow[ing] it across the others (the thread) to create a constellation of findings which can be used to generate a multi-faceted picture of the phenomenon."

Why this method has been rarely used in area studies, and why it should be welcomed

In recent years, the internet has become a key source of information for academics working in social sciences and humanities. Even if often not explicitly included among data collection methods, it is considered standard practice to look for relevant information online through search engines before doing fieldwork or proceeding with other aspects of research. Such preliminary work, however, is highly dependent on the so-called 'Google skills' of the individual researcher and mostly takes place unsystematically. By its nature, this approach treats the internet as an inordinate mass of contents, that can be superficially explored thanks to search engines and meaningful keywords.

However, in practice, websites are often highly structured. A research question involving a well-defined territory, institution or community may benefit of a structured analysis of the textual contents of a specific website, a section of a website, or a limited number of websites. Once extracted from the Internet, textual contents accompanied by metadata (most importantly, date of publication) can be quickly converted into a carefully tailored dataset (or corpus, as it is frequently called in content analysis)[5]. This opens the way for quantitative content analysis techniques, as well as the possibility to analyse qualitatively a well-defined subset of materials. As highlighted by Baker and

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5   According to Krippendorf (2004, 18), "content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use." For an overview of the development of the concept in recent decades, see in particular Franzosi (2008, xxi–xlx).

McEnery (2005, 198), this allows "researchers to objectively identify widespread patterns of naturally occurring language and rare but telling examples, both of which may be over-looked by a small-scale analysis."

It is argued here that a structured approach to analysing web contents could, and perhaps should, become a common component part of the research process in qualitative research, both in area studies and beyond. Qualitative studies may benefit of a more structured and explicit approach towards analysing on-line contents, an activity that is implicitly included in many studies on current events, recent history or contemporary debates about historical events or figures. Such an approach does not necessarily imply using quantitative methods, and can be used simply to formalize a key component of the research process. Beyond that, basic quantitative analysis of contents based on word frequency can be usefully integrated into qualitative studies, in order to provide additional background information, fine-tune interview guides, or corroborate evidence.[6]

One of the reasons why quantitative content analysis is still relatively uncommon in area studies is that it is considered a technically complex and extremely time-consuming endeavour. As Franzosi (2008, xxxv) put it, decades after the technique was established, and in spite of technological advancements "content analysis is still an expensive research tool. […] And it is so even in computer-assisted content analysis. […] Computer-aided content analysis is *still* time consuming." Indeed, while qualitative content analysis is often based on complex coding procedures and is troubled by issues of inter-coder reliability, quantitative content analysis increasingly involves advanced statistical methods and complex analytical techniques. However, if elaborate content analysis techniques require time, resources and skills that are usually not available to individual researchers, the response must not necessarily be to disregard completely these methods. Instead, a "back to the basics" approach could be applied, limiting quantitative content analysis to its most basic application: word frequency.

Once the limitations of this method are kept in consideration, and a properly structured dataset has been built, content analysis based on word frequency can still do at a basic level what Albig, one of the forefathers of content analysis, considered to be the "most valuable use" of the method: "noting trends and changes in content" (Albig 1938, 349).

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6   The quantitative and qualitative component of the research may interact in different phases of the research, for example, by "following a thread", as suggested by Moran-Ellis et al. (2006, 54).

An additional benefit of this minimalistic approach is that it produces straightforward descriptive statistics and graphs that are meaningful and clear also to informed readers and researchers that have no specific competence in content analysis techniques or statistical analysis. This allows data gathered with this method to be smoothly integrated with qualitative research and to be widely accepted by an audience – that of area studies scholars – largely unaccustomed to advanced content analysis techniques.

A second reason why content analysis is still uncommon in area studies is that relevant dataset are usually not readily available. De facto states serve as a particularly illustrative example, since they have long been considered "informational black holes" (King 2001, 550), local sources are not included in established media databases, and the limited quantitative data available related to them are highly contested.

In order to overcome these difficulties as well as to systematise the process, within the scope of this research, the author created a package for the R programming language: 'castarter - Content analysis starter toolkit for R' (Comai 2016b). 'castarter' facilitates the creation of textual datasets and enables a number of operations on the datasets thus created. Without entering into technicalities,[7] the next sections debate the reasons for creating new datasets, and then outlines some important limitations of this approach.

Creating targeted datasets

Books dedicated to content analysis typically (e.g. Krippendorff 2004; Schreier 2012) do not debate in detail how the dataset is created. They often include sections on sampling (Krippendorff 2004; Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 2005), but they still assume that the researcher has already created, has access or may buy access to a structured dataset.[8] Indeed, a significant part of published research applying this method either explicitly makes reference to on-line databases, or includes a relatively small amount of contents that have presumably been acquired manually (e.g. by copy/pasting individual documents).[9] Commercial databases such as Lexis-Nexis include a number of sources that are relevant for students of area studies, including summaries of local media translated in English by the BBC monitoring service. However, as research questions

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7   Readers interested in some of the technicalities involved are invited to refer to Appendix B, or directly to the software's source code (https://github.com/giocomai/castarter).

8   Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005, 209–10) suggest a number of existing databases accessible for a fee, such as Lexis-Nexis (http://www.lexis.com/).

9   Kutter and Kantner (2012, 6) mention a few such studies.

become more specific, the geographical limits more strictly defined, or the languages involved more exotic, established databases are bound to be a disappointment. Besides, their focus on media, business, or legal contents, disregards, among other things, contents published by local institutions, civil society organizations, or political parties, that may be of interest to the researcher.

Until a few years ago, independent collection and analysis of a vast number of textual materials from previously uncatalogued official or media sources would have been seriously constrained by the human capacity of the researcher as well as by the difficulty of securing physical access to those materials. The spreading of the internet in much of the world has fundamentally altered this condition. Starting with the early 2000s, and more evidently in the 2010s, the Internet has become commonplace also in previously isolated territories; local authorities at all levels throughout the post-Soviet space (including in de facto states) have created own websites where they regularly publish new contents.

An overview of websites related to government authorities in post-Soviet de facto states conducted by this author in the summer of 2014, found over 100 websites directly related to government authorities based in these territories, including official websites of local authorities, state departments, customs offices, courts and inspectorates, along with those of key state institutions such as the president, government, parliament and key ministers.[10] Most of them are regularly updated.

Contents published on these websites are quoted as sources in academic articles related to de facto states, and the websites themselves have been object of scholarly analysis. The 'Laboratory for the analysis of the Transnistrian conflict' at the University of Sibiu (Romania), has created a database detailing the main features of a few dozens websites related to Transnistrian organizations and institutions (Laboratorul Pentru Analiza Conflictului Transnistran 2013). Comai (2015) provided a brief overview of how post-

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10 All of these websites are in line with Fursich and Robins's (2002, 195) definition of 'government website' - "internet sites produced or initiated by a national governmental institution (such as a ministry of information), which are sanctioned by the political leadership of the given country" - as well as the criteria brought forward by Mohammed (2004, 475), "to be included in the final data set, sites had to meet three criteria. They had to be: evidently official by statement or content; national in scope; and hosted, sanctioned and or produced by a native government or government agency."

Soviet de facto states manifest themselves on-line. However, no previously published research has looked at these websites or their contents in a structured way.

Previous studies dealing with other cases have drawn inferences by categorizing websites according to features such as the languages in which they are available and the name of the web domain (Mohammed 2004), content categories (McMillan 2000), or others. However, within the scope of this research, websites have been treated instrumentally simply as repositories of textual information, that at another point in time may have been published on local bulletin boards, transmitted directly to newsrooms, read on the radio, or printed on paper. Frequency, features and perhaps even contents of publications may be influenced by the medium of transmission – in this case, the internet – but this is not the focus of this study. Besides, looking exclusively at textual contents has a number of advantages, facilitating analysis of mass contents and comparison among cases.

Limitations: availability of contents

The approach, which may be useful in a wide set of circumstances, has substantial limitations that should be fully considered. Availability of contents from relevant sources and for relevant periods of time are a fundamental restriction. However, the most important limitation is substantive: researchers should not demand of basic word frequency analysis more than it can really say.

Analysis of word frequency based on time series is at its most useful when lengthy periods of time are included. For example, a dataset should ideally include a substantial amount of data related to the periods both before and after key events. Without a doubt, an ever increasing amount of textual contents is available on-line. However, the relative novelty of the internet leads to the fact that very rarely materials published before 2000 are readily available. Moreover, it has been common for websites to discard older contents when moving the website to a new platform or content management system. As a consequence, the currently available version of a website often includes only contents published starting with 2010 or later. This is a substantial limitation, even for research focused on contemporary events. For example, it is difficult to find relevant local sources with contents published both before and after a relatively recent event such as the August 2008 war in South Ossetia.

With the spreading of modern content-management systems, it is increasingly common for new versions of a website to maintain availability of its whole archive. Generally

speaking, institutional websites tend to have long life-spans. However, sometimes political rather than technical considerations limit the availability of older contents. For example, when a new president has been elected in countries such as Georgia (in 2013) and Ukraine (in 2014), all the contents published under the previous president have been deleted, thus highlighting a moment of discontinuity with the previous leadership of the country.[11] Such political choices pose important limitations, for example, to scholars interested in the presidential rhetoric of Georgia's president Mikheil Saakashvili; they will have to resort to secondary sources or offline archives, significantly increasing the time investment needed to conduct a given study.[12] They also serve as a reminder of the volatility of online resources, as even institutional websites are often not fully stored by initiatives such as the 'Internet Archive' (https://archive.org/) aimed at ensuring long-term availability of online contents.

Besides, even when contents are still available online, it may be difficult to find all relevant items, and to extract relevant metadata, even if most modern content management systems distribute contents using one of a few standard approaches. To test further the feasibility of creating datasets from multiple websites, in October 2015 this author has retrieved with his own 'castarter' package all press-releases of the websites of the presidents of the 15 former Soviet republics, and none of them posed insurmountable challenges. However, things may not go so smoothly with non-institutional websites, and in particular extracting contents from older websites may be more complicated. For example, the website of Transnistria's state news agency offers free access to all of its contents in a format that can easily be extracted by 'castarter' for all news published since 2012. Previous contents all the way back to 1999 are available, but in a less accessible format. They have been successfully extracted by this author, but this required developing a customized parsing solution.

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11 Or rather, it may be argued, shedding light on what seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding about the continuity of democratic institutions.

12 Confirming that removal of contents from the web can be an issue in research practice, Toal (2017, 281, note 41) pointed out that "the press releases and speeches of President Saakashvili are no longer available online." Fortunately, Toal had "compiled a comprehensive collection before they were taken down after [Saakashvili] left office." In perspective, tools such as 'castarter' facilitate pre-emptive, targeted archiving of online contents generated by relevant actors.

Finally, textual contents can be usefully analysed as described only when they are currently freely available on the internet and can be extracted in a reasonable amount of time. Extracting contents for recent years from modern, structured websites (such as most institutional websites or blogs) is usually a relatively straightforward process. However, if relevant data is not currently available online, or it is overtly complex to extract, the approach outlined in this section becomes infeasible.

Limitations: substantive issues and assumptions

Finally, the most important limitations regard substantive issues. The approach outlined in this section relies heavily on word frequency, which is the most basic tool of quantitative content analysis. The rudimentary nature of the process of counting the number of occurrences of a given term requires that the researcher is fully aware of the context in which that term has been used, the existence of alternative expressions to refer to the same concept, and the polysemantic nature of some words.

Accordingly, as has been highlighted, this approach may be useful in the preliminary phase of the research and as a tool to provide additional evidence or information on specific issues. However, the researcher should use such data with caution, without overestimating their explanatory power, and mostly in combination with other methods.

2.5. Conclusions

The author's own experience, the regulations of the programme that funded this research, as well as ethical considerations have all influenced to different extents the choice of data collection methods, the locations of fieldwork, and the relative visibility of each method in the final version of this research.

This chapter has outlined some of the ways in which fieldwork and desk research complement each others in this study. In terms of fieldwork, this research has followed an established pattern found in many studies focused on post-Soviet de facto states, whereby interviews and observations *in loco* substantially contribute to the analysis. While desk research based on content available online has arguably been no less important, it has rarely been explicitly discussed in the literature on de facto states. This chapter presented some of the ways in which this important part of the research can be formalised, and become a full-fledged component of the research.

Increased availability of large amounts of structured textual contents freely available on-line and of software packages that allow for their analysis has drawn increasing

attention towards quantitative content analysis. Often, studies based on quantitative content analysis make use of complex models that are overtly difficult to understand for the uninitiated. This leads to a situation in which scholars with an interest in the substantive issues analysed are not able to judge independently the reliability and the actual meaning of the results presented. At the same time, scholars that are less tech-savvy or not accustomed to use quantitative methods, tend to overlook altogether the vast amount of structured contents that has become available on-line in recent years, or to explore it serendipitously.

This needs not be the case. "Noting trends and changes in content" (Albig 1938, 349) may still be considered a key element of content analysis; not every scholar using quantitative content analysis should necessarily strive to use more advanced techniques or complex machine learning models. Scholars that are not familiar with advanced content analysis techniques may intuitively understand analyses based on word frequency and appreciate their inherent limitations. But well beyond word-frequency analysis, as has been argued, a structured approach to web contents may well contribute to finding troves of information among all the materials produced in previously isolated territories such as post-Soviet de facto states. As emerges from the following chapters, data gathered through desk research fruitfully interacts with insights gained during fieldwork at different stages of the research, substantially strengthening the evidential base.

Chapter 3.

External assistance for security and state building in small jurisdictions and post-conflict environments

As anticipated in the introduction, throughout this study micro-states and small dependent jurisdictions are used as terms of comparison for post-Soviet de facto states along with more established points of reference such as post-conflict regions and post-Soviet countries. Considering the unconventional nature of this juxtaposition, this chapter highlights some of the features that make such a comparison meaningful. Relevant concepts such as 'micro-state' and 'sub-state diplomacy' are presented in the process. In the second part of this chapter, the focus shifts more explicitly towards the issue of external assistance for state building, which is at the core of this research. By providing an overview of the role of external support across different contexts, and by consistently pointing at similarities and discrepancies with the experience of post-Soviet de facto states, this chapter provides useful terms of reference to put in context the

external relations of de facto states that are described more in detail in the following chapters.

3.1. On the similarities between de facto states and micro-states

Studies on micro-states mostly focus on developing countries and island states that at first sight seem to be quite dissimilar from the four de facto states at the centre of this research. Yet, they share some important similarities. With a population close to, or lower than, half a million inhabitants, all of post-Soviet de facto states would qualify as micro-states according to most definitions.[1]

Lacking own capabilities, micro-states often have to rely more or less explicitly on bigger countries for their own security, as well as to ensure a degree of state capacity. This is clearly the case for associated states such as Palau, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands, which have explicitly delegated in a formal agreement with the United States "full authority and responsibility for security and defence matters" (Shuster 2009, 329). A combination of security guarantees and development aid lie at the base of the "'Compact of Free Association' under which, the United States grant large sums of money towards development projects, and in return assumes control over the states' defence and security policies" (Ali Naseer 2002, 8). The similarity with formal or informal agreements that bound patron and post-Soviet de facto states, for example the 'strategic partnership' agreements ratified in 2015 between Russia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is striking.[2]

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1   The definition of small and micro-states has been contentious. Size, economic development and population, sometimes in combination, have been among the most common criteria. Arguably, the choice is also determined by the goal of the researcher. In his work on democracy in very small polities, Veenendal (2013a, 255) opts for a very restrictive definition: "a micro-state is defined as a UN member state with less than a quarter of a million (250,000) inhabitants, which results in a group of 21 countries". Instead, Ali Naseer (Ali Naseer 2002, 1) sets the threshold at 1,5 million inhabitants, including a much wider group of countries. A review of the definitions of state size used in the literature between 1957 and 1999 (Crowards 2002, 177), shows cutting points mostly based on population size ranging from 250 000 to one million. Within the scope of this research, the label of micro-state is applied to countries with a population of less than 500 000 residents.

2   Such similarities are presented in more detail in section 4.4.

Literature on micro-states highlights the reliance of these territories on official development assistance, which consequently becomes a foreign policy priority. According to the World Bank's 'World Development Indicators', micro-states are clearly the largest recipient of official development assistance per capita at the global level. For the period 2011-2015, Tuvalu, Nauru, the Marshall Islands, Palau, Micronesia, and Tonga topped the list.[3] However, South Ossetia would easily lead the ranking if it was included in the statistics.[4]

Most micro-states became independent relatively recently, and had to build their ministry of foreign affairs from scratch, since there was no comparable office in previous colonial governments (East 1973, 497). This was clearly the case also for post-Soviet de facto states. Even if Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh could base the activities of many of their newly established ministries on pre-existing structures of government, they had to start from zero in developing their foreign affairs. Micro-states have a very limited number of diplomatic missions abroad, mostly limited to their patron, regional powers or neighbours, possibly with honorary consuls in other countries. When they do have representations abroad, post-Soviet de facto states take a similar approach, with the significant exception that they do not have the possibility to take advantage of an own representative at the United Nations.

Small size is usually associated with personalistic politics (Veenendaal 2013a). Veenendaal (2013a, 248) stresses how, according to literature, smallness brings with it

> "the tendency of people to know each other through multiple societal roles and functions. These overlapping roles can lead to the confusion of public and private interests, as many (part-time) public officeholders combine their function with a private business or the leadership of a non-governmental organisation or interest group."

Even if the personalistic nature of politics in post-Soviet de facto states has not been an object of specific study, this characterization seems to describe quite well the situation found in these entities. In spite of it, and in line with previous research suggesting that micro-states tend to be more democratic than bigger states (Anckar 2008), post-Soviet de facto states show significant elements of political competition (Popescu 2006a;

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3   Observation based on the World Bank indicator "Net ODA received per capita (current US$)", based on five-year average calculated for the period 2011-2015 for all countries for which data are available.

4   See Chapter 4 for a detailed comparison based on relevant data.

Matsuzato 2008; Protsyk 2009; Ó Beacháin 2012; Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2012; Smolnik 2012; Beacháin 2015; Ó Beacháin 2016).

Lack of specialized skills and of own training facilities (East 1973, 803; Ali Naseer 2002, 10) are also consequences of small size and recent independence: these are features shared by many micro-states and post-Soviet de facto states alike. As a consequence, they refer to the expertise and experience of their patron when needed. Consistent and considerable out-migration is another aspect shared by at least some micro-states and post-Soviet de facto states (Shuster 2009, 332).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that representatives of de facto states explicitly referred to micro-states around the world as models and, at least for a period, considered the formula of associated status as an ideal solution for their long term relation with their patron state. "The following stage in the development of our reciprocal relations [with Russia] has analogues, and an example of such cooperation is demonstrated by the United States and the small independent state in the pacific Ocean – the Marshall islands", declared in 2003 Sergei Shamba, then head of Abkhazia's ministry of foreign affairs (Shamba 2003).[5] "I believe that the relations between Russia and Abkhazia should be about the same as the ones between France and Monaco", stated Stanislav Lakoba, a well known Abkhaz historian and former head of Abkhazia's security council, in an interview with the author (Comai 2010). The publication in Sukhumi of a book dedicated to micro-states (Badra 2006) is a further example of the interest towards these territories.

3.2. <u>Non-sovereign territories and sub-state diplomacy</u>

Sub-state entities, be they autonomous regions, cities, or dependent territories with substantial self-rule, are – by definition – not sovereign. However, many of them have developed extended external relations, including of types usually associated with traditional diplomatic activities among states. Various terms have been used to refer to

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5   References to the Marshall Islands as a positive example can still be found in statements by both Shamba and former Abkhazian prime minister Jergenia in 2006 (Apsnypress 2006a, 2006b). However, at least in Abkhazia, what was presented in as an ideal solution became totally unacceptable less than a decade later, as emerged clearly when official statements issued by Abkhazia's ministry of foreign affairs and parliament vehemently denounced an interview with Taras Shamba, head of the world congress of the Abkhaz-Abaz people, who had suggested that Abkhazia should become an associated state of Russia (Kusov 2014).

such activities. While 'paradiplomacy' has been particularly successful and has been widely employed, 'sub-state diplomacy' seems to be more neutral. Cornago (2010, 13) defines this phenomenon as:

> "sub-state governments' involvement in international relations, through the establishment of formal and informal contacts, either permanent or ad hoc, with foreign public or private entities, with the aim to promote socio-economic, cultural or political issues, as well as any other foreign dimension of their own constitutional competences."

Sub-state diplomacy is a phenomenon that is growing, both in diffusion and scope. Indeed, some authors (Hocking 1999; Criekemans 2008; Criekemans and Duran 2010) have suggested that sub-state diplomacy, in its practice, is more and more difficult to distinguish from small state diplomacy. Hocking argues that the categories of state and non-state actors are "increasingly uninformative" in this field, and that "the most significant aspect of non central governments' actorness, linked closely to their status ambiguity, is represented by the variety of networks in which they can operate" (Hocking 1999, 29). A review of Faroese foreign affairs (Ólavsdóttir, Justinussen, and í Jákupsstovu 2009), for example, shows how a small-sized non-sovereign entity can develop significant foreign activities, even if limited both geographically and in scope, also thanks to a network of own representative offices. The fact that sub-state entities can freely operate in a number of international contexts exactly because of their status ambiguity hints at the considerable possibilities to interact at the international level that in practice are available to representatives of de facto states. Indeed, in a conversation with the author, former minister of foreign affairs of Abkhazia Maxim Gvinjia said that non-recognition is on many levels a "paper curtain", rather than an insurmountable obstacle: one tends to assume that lack of recognition makes international interactions impossible, but often this is not the case.[6]

Unlike micro-states but similarly to de facto states, sub-state entities cannot take advantage of established venues of international encounter like the United Nations or other inter-governmental regional organizations. As Criekmans and Duran (2010, 40) put it, "in contrast to the situation with small states, international institutions are not always the 'best friends' of regions." In a context where alternative forms of diplomacy are obtaining growing importance and where small non-sovereign territories can have

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6   Maxim Gvinjia, former Minister of foreign affairs of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, May 2016.

an active foreign policy, de facto states may employ similar strategies to promote their interests.

Some sub-state governments are starting "to use culture and identity as a lever to place oneself on the international map" (Duran, Criekemans, and Melissen 2009, 9). Criekemans (2010, 40) notices in some sub-state entities "a strong focus on image-building or sometimes even on public diplomacy, and a strategy to utilize culture and tourism as instruments to place one's own nation on the map," and adds that this approach is mostly chosen by "regions with a strong identity or cultural tradition." Among post-Soviet facto states, this is particularly noticeable in the case of Abkhazia.

One of the forms of international cooperation among sub-state entities that has an established tradition, including in the post-Soviet space, is that of city twinnings. In his overview of city twinnings, Zelinsky (1991, 1) highlighted that in some cases they "promote ideological and humanitarian programs that may be at odds with official policy", and in this context argued that "'citizen diplomacy' may be one of a number of developments undermining the integrity of the nation-state system" (Zelinsky 1991, 27). Even in Soviet times, cities in the region stipulated friendship agreements and twinnings with other cities in western Europe and elsewhere. After the fall of the Soviet Union, cities around the Black Sea continued to enter into such relationships, and municipalities in the de facto states of the region have actively been involved in such programmes (Kuşku-Sönmez 2014). Well beyond the establishment of regional networks, inter-city agreements have become a precious opportunity for local authorities in de facto states to develop formal international contacts and implicitly obtain some kind of recognition. Gagra and Tskhinvali, for example, established a twinning with Italian municipalities in Sardinia; Stepanakert is officially a sister city of Montebello in California; Tiraspol became twin city of Novosibirsk in 2016.[7]

In the post-Soviet space, the inclination of sub-state entities to engage in external relations has obtained attention in particular in reference to Russia in the 1990s. In her study of Tatarstan's external relations, Sharafutdinova (2003, 616) highlights the importance of the "identity-constructing component" in the region's foreign activities.

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7   While some instances of such direct interactions and agreements between municipalities have clear political connotations, they mostly do not involve active engagement from residents or the relatively high level of financial assistance that, for example, sometimes accompanied the twinnings of American municipalities with Nicaraguan towns in the 1980s (Zelinsky 1991, 27–28).

She argues that "Tatarstan has been 'acting like a state' in order to be recognised by international actors" (Sharafutdinova 2003, 613) and that many of the agreements it signed "carry a merely declaratory character and are not actually being implemented" (Sharafutdinova 2003, 617). Similarly, some of the agreements signed by de facto states (e.g. between Abkhazia and Tuvalu) are not signed in order to be implemented, but rather in a purely symbolic fashion, in order to act like a state.

Many Russian regions, however, develop direct international contacts even under the centralizing dynamics that took place since the early 2000s. For example, both of the Russian regions sharing a border with de facto states (Krasnodar Krai and North Ossetia – Alania) engage directly with regional administrations and other actors in foreign countries. Because of both economic and geographic reasons, this is particularly noticeable in the case of Krasnodar Krai (GoKuban.ru n.d.), but even landlocked North Ossetia boasts on the official websites of its government agreements and meetings with countries both near and far (Ministry of economic development of North Ossetia 2013a, 2013b). Besides, both of these regions have established formal and direct contacts with the de facto governments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia or with districts within them (e.g. Krasnodar Krai with Gagra district).[8]

Finally, taking the perspective of federated entities, even relations with the federal centre can to some extent be considered "external." For example, as will be seen in more detail in Chapter 5, it is mostly exogenous – rather than endogenous – resources that enable access to public goods, services, as well as the income of a considerable part of the resident population in Russian republics of the Northern Caucasus: Moscow provides for most of the local budget to these regions through direct transfers, and – in comparison to other Russian regions – an unusually large share of residents directly

8   Krasnodar Krai established its own representation office in Gagra in 2009 (Governor of the Krasnodar krai 2009), and gave it a yearly budget of almost 100 000 USD in 2011, with the aim of "representing the interests of the Krasnodar Krai in the Gagra distric (Republic of Abkhazia)", as well as "support in the establishment of direct contacts between economic subjects, institutions of culture, sport and education, of the Krasnodar Krai and the Gagra district (Republic of Abkhazia), establishment of mixed enterprises, holding of exhibitions, 'days of culture', festivals, etc." (Kachalov 2011). The representation office was eventually closed in 2015: "considering the establishment of good neighbourly relations and tight contacts, a large part of the initiatives between the organs of state power, economic actors, and their partners in the Republic of Abkhazia do not need coordination from the side of the government" (Administration of Krasnodar Krai 2015).

depends for their incomes on the state. Similar mechanisms, i.e. exogenous resources covering for most of the budget and a large share of residents (state employees and pensioners) being directly dependent on the state for their incomes, are found also in de facto states.

3.3. <u>Not ideal, yet relevant terms of comparisons</u>

Given the diminutive size of post-Soviet de facto states and the importance of size for foreign policy and the extent of external relations among internationally recognised states,[9] within the scope of this research micro-states are recurrently used as a terms of comparison for post-Soviet de facto states. Ideal terms of comparison would be countries of relatively recent independence, engaged in state and institution building, largely dependent on a patron, with a comparable level of economic development and located in a similar region. Unfortunately, there is not a single state that satisfies all of these criteria at the same time. Micro-states in Europe have mostly been established a very long time ago, have well established institutions and a high level of economic development (Eccardt 2005). Yet, in some circumstances, and in spite of all the differences, reference will be made to European micro-states (e.g. Liechtenstein), European countries of recent independence (e.g. Montenegro and Kosovo) as well as relevant non-sovereign territories (e.g. Greenland).

Among micro-states in other areas of the world, Palau is the only one which obtained internationally recognized independence after 1990. The fact that it has a clear patron (the United States), and their relationship is formalized with a Compact of Free Association, makes of it a useful term of comparison for some aspects. Given that the Marshall Islands and Micronesia have similar arrangements, they are discussed jointly in Chapter 4. Besides them, jurisdictions whose economic structure can be ascribed to the MIRAB model (migration, remittances, aid and bureaucracy) as originally defined by Bertram and Watters (1985) are used as terms of comparison in both Chapter 4 and 5.

However, while aiming to appreciate the impact of non-recognition, distant micro-states or dependent jurisdictions often bound to their former colonial master will not be the only term of comparison. In particular in reference to the economic structure of these territories and the fundamental importance of exogenous financial resources in this context, sub-state entities inside the Russian Federation, in particular the republics

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9   As debated by Neemia (1995, 14), there is a consensus in the literature that "size is the most potent variable on foreign policy behaviour."

located in the northern Caucasus, also serve as a term of comparison (Chapter 5). Parent states and other former Soviet countries are referred to when discussing the type of support from international organisations that reaches these territories (Chapter 6). Neighbouring states as well as micro-states and countries of recent independence in Europe are used as terms of comparison while singling out the aspects in which the ministries of foreign affairs of post-Soviet de facto states differ from those of their recognised peers (Chapter 7).

3.4. State building in the post-Soviet space

In an early and popular article on post-Soviet de facto states, King (2001) suggested that "the territorial separatists of the early 1990s have become the state builders of the early 2000s." This characterisation has been largely confirmed by scholars of de facto states: as Blakkisrud and Kolstø (2011, 180) put it, no matter the reasons behind the secessionist agenda at the beginning of the conflict, time eventually transformed "secessionists into state-builders". However, the dramatic change in the state-building trajectory of these territories determined by Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, and its increased involvement in Transnistria, has perhaps not been appreciated enough; to put it succinctly, domestically-led "deficient state building" (Kolstø 2006, 727) of the early 2000s has turned into externally-sponsored comprehensive state building in the 2010s. After a brief characterisation based on the literature dealing with the earlier phases of state building in post-Soviet de facto states, the following sections point at practices of external assistance for state building found in other contexts, comparing them with those found in post-Soviet de facto states in the post-2008 environment.

To the question "to what extent are the authorities able to provide the populace with the services expected of contemporary states, such as internal and external security, basic infrastructure, and welfare?" (Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2008, 484), scholars have mostly argued that de facto states "are able to provide many of the basic functions of statehood" (Caspersen 2015, 185), and even that their state capabilities are "as well developed as that of the recognised states of which they are still notionally a part" (King 2001, 525). Such considerations, however, tell as much about de facto states as they do about their parent states, since the demise of the Soviet Union coincided with collapse of state institutions across the post-Soviet space (Ganev 2005). The lack of functioning

institutions during the early 1990s has been particularly evident in Georgia,[10] but even as state capacity increased dramatically after Saakashvili's raise to power in 2004 and GDP grew considerably, poverty remained widespread and social spending relatively low (Gugushvili 2017). Widespread poverty and malfunctioning state institutions still characterise Moldova more than twenty years after it achieved independence, with high levels of emigration serving as an implicit judgement on the failures of post-Soviet developments. Caspian oil and gas brought little welfare to Azerbaijanis in the first decade of independence (Rasizade 2002), and even in later years poverty remained widespread, and investments in sectors such as education and health low (Cornell 2011, 256–57).

In other words, stating that de facto states in the 1990s had a state capacity comparable with that of the parent was hardly a generous compliment, and rather meant that these entities were on the brink of being a failed state. Indeed, early writings on post-Soviet de facto states often highlighted low capacities of the de facto authorities. In his book on post-Soviet de facto states Lynch (Lynch 2004, 63) plainly stated that "de facto states are failing states." Still in 2006, Kolstø was arguing that if de facto states were to be recognised internationally, "most of them will end up not as 'normal' or fully fledged states but instead transmute into recognized quasi-states of the Jacksonian variety" (Kolstø 2006, 725), or, in other words, failed states. He also argued that the "modal tendency of quasi-states is deficient state building" (Kolstø 2006, 727), and made clear that state strength is clearly not the main factor enabling the continued existence of these territories.

In fact, the level of state capacity found in post-Soviet de facto states varied considerably among cases. In Transnistria, where infrastructures were not substantially damaged by conflict, ethnic cleansing did not take place, and a significant share of large Soviet enterprises continued functioning, decreased state capacity never led to a total collapse of state institutions. Among the South Caucasus cases, before war and recognition in 2008, Kolstø and Blakkisrud (2008, 506) could matter-of-factly state that across key criteria of state capacity, from defence and control over territory to consolidation of state institutions, there was "a clear hierarchy: Nagorno Karabakh on top, Abkhazia in the middle and South Ossetia at the bottom." At the time of this writing, almost a decade has passed, which led to significant changes in both parent and

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10 "The disintegration of the state went further in Georgia than anywhere else in the former Soviet Union with the sole exception of Tajikistan" (Nodia 2002, 413).

de facto states. In the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the change has been particularly abrupt as a consequence of Russia's recognition of independence and mass inflow of both financial and technical support.

Before focusing on the dynamics of external assistance found in post-Soviet de facto states, the next pages present how external support to state building took place in other relevant contexts. This overview first focuses on what is perhaps the main component of state capacity, i.e. the capability to offer a degree of security to a resident population, which must be a component of even the most minimalistic definitions of statehood, and then deals with state- and institution-building processes found in other contexts. While details on external assistance to state building in post-Soviet de facto states are presented at length in Chapter 4, 5, and 6, the next sections anticipate when discrepancies between post-Soviet de facto states and selected terms of comparisons emerge from the literature.

3.5. <u>External support for security in selected contexts</u>

As highlighted by Wesley (2008, 377), in state building efforts "security is given absolute priority, reflecting a Weberian understanding of the essence of stateness as the monopoly of the means of legitimate violence and a Hobbesian belief that a pervasive state of insecurity makes all other human activity impossible." International efforts in post-conflict settings often include both a direct intervention through a temporary military mission, as well as programmes to establish and train local police and military forces. In the case of Kosovo, for example, in the first instance a military mission (KFOR) was established to provide security on the ground. Later, the UN, EU, OSCE and NATO became involved in police training activities, to the extent that coordination among international organisations became in itself a complicated matter (Dursun-Ozkanca and Crossley-Frolick 2012, 251). In Timor Leste, both the establishment of the army and Timorese Police Service have been "externally designed security building project[s]" (Buldanlioglu Sahin 2007, 202). Such efforts have been prominent after full scale military inventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, involving not only military forces on the ground, but also actors such as the European Union (Gross 2009). Even NGOs are often involved in security sector reforms in post-conflict contexts, mostly as a component of larger humanitarian or development projects (Morrice 2014).

International support to capacity-building in the security sector, however, is not limited to post-conflict international missions, but in different forms can be found in new

independent states that have not gone through extended conflicts. As highlighted by Goldsmith and Dinnen (2007, 1094) specifically referring to police building, "following independence, many developing countries of strategic importance to Western nations have received technical assistance, primarily through training." Countries in South-East Europe have also been at the centre of international police reform programmes, involving a plethora of international organisations as well as bilateral efforts (Schroeder 2007). Such processes can be found also in post-Soviet countries: for example, NATO's 'Partnership for Peace' programme, which includes a security sector reform component, involves all three republic of the South Caucasus (Cornell et al. 2004; Hille 2010, 219). The European Union, the OSCE and USAID all contributed to police reforms in Georgia (Di Puppo 2010, 2),[11] and the United States offered direct assistance and training to Georgian military forces well beyond the structural cooperation that derived from Georgian participation to military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq (Toal 2017, chap. 3).

Finally, support to security sector reforms from either a patron or multi-lateral donors has been common also in small sovereign jurisdictions, not necessarily after a period of conflict, and not only in the early years after independence. A study commissioned by the British Commonwealth on the security of very small states highlighted that security and police forces in such countries are structurally in need of training and support from the outside.[12] Australia, for example, has been providing support to police reforms in the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, Samoa and Nauru (Goldsmith and Dinnen 2007, 1091); New Zealand contributed to police development in – among other places – Bougainville, Cook Islands and Tonga (Law & Development Partnership 2013).

However, in some circumstances external vulnerabilities rather than domestic security are the principal worry of many micro-states, and from this point of view enhanced capacities or even high levels of military spending are no guarantee of security from

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11 It should be highlighted, however, that police reforms in Georgia after 2003 have been driven mostly by domestic political choices, rather than led by external actors (Sholderer 2013, 338–39).

12 "A considerable amount of bilateral military and police training is conducted in the Commonwealth and we urge that this be continued and expanded as required" (McLean 1985, 53).

belligerent neighbours.[13] Ultimately, micro-states have no actual possibility to develop independently a substantial defence force able to resist attacks by bigger, more powerful neighbours.[14] As pointed out by Bartmann (2002, 368) "given that even those few micro-states with a high per capita level of military forces will not have the physical capacity to resist direct external threats, then larger states may have to come to their assistance directly to meet an immediate danger."

In spite of the fact that foreign invasion is not an imminent threat for many (especially island) micro-states, they often have security agreements with bigger states.[15] Many of them have completely disbanded military forces, and kept only a small police force for domestic security.[16] Ultimately, micro-states do not rely on their own strength for keeping their safety and sovereignty, but rather on support from a powerful patron as well as "on international norms and particularly the principle of extantism which invests sanctity for the territorial integrity and independence of even the smallest members of the international system" (Bartmann 2002). This broad principle is often reaffirmed in formal or informal security arrangements with neighbouring states or powerful regional powers.[17]

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13 Given the focus of this research, reference is made hear exclusively to external military threats, in spite of the fact that for Pacific islands states climate change and natural disasters often represent a more immediate security risk.

14 The inability of Kuwait to defend itself against the Iraqi invasion serves as a clear illustration of the case in point: "The expensive and sophisticated weaponry in the Kuwaiti arsenal and even the support of its allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council, itself largely a micro-state alliance, proved to be of no value in stalling, let alone resisting, the superior Iraqi forces." (Bartmann 2002, 364).

15 European micro-states such as Liechtenstein and San Marino do not have a regular army nor have defence agreements of any sort, maintaining formal neutrality and non-alignment.

16 Bartmann (2002, 369) lists 21 micro-states "with police and coast-guard units but no formal military establishment."

17 Small states can reciprocate such assistance by lending their legitimacy as sovereign states by voting with the patron in UN bodies, or through their (at least formal) participation to international military missions such as the United States' 'coalition of the willing' against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq (Wivel and Oest 2010).

3.6. External support for security in post-Soviet de facto states

Quite clearly, the experience of de facto states in this respect is substantially different. For a start, to maintain their independence, de facto states cannot rely on the sympathy and support often conceded to micro-states in the international system. This is not to say that their security from external threats is guaranteed through domestic capacities; quite on the contrary, in spite of a proud and militaristic rhetoric of self-defence, post-Soviet de facto states have been and still are strongly dependent on external support for their defence. As highlighted in the previous section, this is not due to exceptional weaknesses of these territories, but should rather be seen as an inherent feature of small jurisdictions and micro-states: no matter their level of spending on the military, or the extent of militarization of their societies, they remain inevitably vulnerable. In the context of post-Soviet de facto states, where the threat of external military actions is not negligible and there is no realistic possibility that broad coalitions of powerful countries would come to the rescue (as has happened in the case of sovereign Kuwait as well as non-sovereign Kosovo), this leads to increased reliance on a patron.

Even in the 1990s, at a time when a relatively weak Russia did not bankroll the budget of these territories, their external security was to some extent guaranteed by peace-keeping contingents manned by Russia.[18] In all cases, only the patron has been effectively perceived as a provider of security: while international actors have routinely called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, they have almost unanimously highlighted the lack of legitimacy of de facto authorities, and thus have not taken any commitment to protect their security.[19]

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18 There has been a lively scholarly debated on the significance and peculiarities of Russian peace-keeping in this context (Baev 1994; Allison 1994; Lynch 2000; Mackinlay and Cross 2003). No peace-keeping force has been established on the line of conflict in the case of Nagorno Karabakh, but Armenian military forces actively contributed (and contribute) to the territory's defence.

19 In the case of Abkhazia, a United Nations monitoring mission (UNOMIG) has been established in 1993 to provide an additional layer of scrutiny along the conflict line, which may have had some positive impact on the daily lives of local residents, but was not in the position to intervene at any level in case of renewed conflict or violence, as the events of 1998 and 2008 clearly demonstrated.

Also considering the effectively minor security threat coming from Moldova, the Russian peace-keeping contingent offered all the military protection that Transnistria needed. In the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a formal defence treaty has been signed only after Russia's recognition of their independence. However, Russia's immediate intervention on 8 August 2008 in favour of South Ossetia demonstrated with deeds that Russia could be considered a source of protection for the de facto authorities even when the only formal guarantee was given by the mandate of the peace-keeping contingent. Finally, in the case of Nagorno Karabakh, Armenia's military effectively works jointly with Armenian Karabakh forces, and there is a clear understanding that a military attack on Nagorno Karabakh implies full engagement of Armenian military forces.[20]

In de facto states, domestic security has been a particularly thorny issue for residents of marginalised groups, such as Georgian residents in Gali (Human Rights Watch 2011; SaferWorld and Institute for Democracy 2011). However, even beyond such situations, not only political will or conflict dynamics, but also low domestic capacity has had an impact on the capability of local institutions to run an effective police force, or to tackle the allegedly high level of human rights violations taking place in the penitentiary facilities of these territories (Racz 2016; Hammarberg 2013, 14–23). Hammarberg's (2013) report on the human rights situation in Transnistria includes multiple references to the need of trainings across different sectors, including in the judiciary and penitentiary system. In such respects, inernationally-sponsored 'security sector reforms' programmes such as the ones mentioned above have not taken place in de facto states, apparently with minor exceptions related to child rights[21] or border management in Transnistria through Eubam.[22] In the years following 2008, Russia provided training to

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20 The military actions that erupted in April 2016 along certain areas of the line of contact between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan offers a case in point: a significant number of the serviceman killed in battle were under the control of the Armenian (rather than Nagorno Karabakh's) Ministry of Defence. Armenian sources – including the Armenia's own Ministry of Defence (Armenia's Ministry of Defence 2016) – provided figures on casualties without distinguishing among the two forces.

21 For example, in its yearly report Unicef (2016) makes reference to trainings involving "30 militia/police inspectors" in Abkhazia.

22 See Dias (2013) and Chapter 6 for more details on the interactions between Transnistria and the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM).

local policy and security forces, took charge of border patrolling, and established different levels of integration with the local armies. In the case of South Ossetia, some military units have been fully incorporated into the Russian army (Fuller 2017). In Abkhazia, a joint Russian-Abkhazian 'Information-Coordination Centre of Internal Affairs Agencies' has been established in 2017 in order to strengthen coordination among their respective law-enforcement agencies (Civil.ge 2017b).

3.7. External support for state building in selected contexts

Beyond the security component, small jurisdictions, micro-states and post-conflict territories around the world largely receive assistance in order to develop state capacities and sustain their ability to deliver public goods and services to a resident population. In the case of micro-states, local institutions effectively require continued foreign interactions in order to be able to deliver the services expected from a state in a modern society, including consultancies, training and formal education, as well foreign citizens filling middle and high level technical or specialist posts for which local skilled human resources are missing.[23] In very small states, dependence on external support is usually not limited to the constitutive years after newly obtained independence, but it is rather an inherent, structural feature, not only in terms of budget support, but also in terms of technical support.[24] This is true not only for island states in the Pacific and Caribbean, but also for wealthy micro-states in Europe such as Liechtenstein and Monaco: in order to develop and maintain the capacities needed to provide services at the desired level, institutions of these territories need constant interactions with partners in other countries.[25]

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23 For example, Kersell (1987) recounts that in the the Cayman Islands, at the time of his writing, about 32 per cent of the 1300 civil servants working on the islands were expatriates. Also "one to two per cent of employees are sent overseas each year for various lengths of time, from a week to two years, for specialist or professional training. The government also supports 10-12 high school graduates each year to go to university in Britain, Canada or [...] the US." (Kersell 1987, 100). As will be seen in Chapter 6, similar dynamics are to be found also in post-Soviet de facto states.

24 For more details and statistics on external assistance to micro-states and small dependent jurisdictions, see Chapter 5.

25 See for example this characterisation of Liechtenstein's education reforms in the 1970s: "the country's educational system has been further consolidated in the past decade in many ways,

In post-conflict territories, fragile states, "challenging contexts" (Barma, Huybens, and Viñuela 2014), and "areas of limited statehood" (Krasner and Risse 2014), local institutions have often received support for state building and the provision of services to their resident population, well beyond security. Such initiatives can take place under international trusteeships (as was the case for Kosovo and Timor Leste), through governance delegation agreements (Matanock 2014), targeted official support or international relief organizations. In some cases, services have been directly delivered by NGOs or even private companies (Hönke and Thauer 2014).

Such interventions are the result of a widely accepted understanding that state building should be considered an important constituent part of peace building efforts, an approach known also as 'state building for peace' that has taken roots in particular starting with the 1990s (Menocal 2011, 176; Call and Wyeth 2008). Remarkably, peace- and state-building initiatives have mostly been dissociated in the case of post-Soviet de facto states. International efforts addressed at conflict resolution and peace-building by and large did not aim to increase the capacity and legitimacy of local state institutions, which are usually considered key aspects of sustainable post-conflict peace. On the contrary, international actors have almost unanimously chosen to highlight the primacy of territorial integrity (as clearly emerges from the wording of relevant UN resolutions), and thus the lack of legitimacy of the de facto authorities.

Largely as a consequence, no concerted internationalised state-building efforts took place in these territories, such as those that have been established in other post-conflict settings (e.g. Kosovo or Timor Leste). Excluding assistance from the patron, internationalised, concerted, and explicit efforts at capacity-building, i.e. "the development of administrative and institutional competence to run the newly-established institutions and meet the basic demands of society" (Buldanlioglu Sahin 2007, 109) are not to be found in post-Soviet de facto states. Similarly, no structured support has been offered to de facto authorities by international organisations, for example, to build more inclusive institutions, to increase accountability, to develop minority policies, or enhance the electoral process, as has happened in post-conflict territories and newly independent states, including in the post-Soviet space. Any sort of democracy promotion is noticeably absent, and is the logical consequence of the explicit

and links have been created or strengthened with organisations and establishments in neighbouring countries to help to fill the gaps which of necessity occur in the educational facilities provided by this miniature state" (Martin 1984, 469).

lack of recognition of the political processes taking place in these territories:[26] the European Union, for example, through dedicated statements issued by the Council of the European Union or – more recently – the External Action Service, has consistently highlighted its non-recognition of elections in these territories.[27]

3.8. External support for state building in post-Soviet de facto states

The issue of state building in post-Soviet de facto states has been object of inquiry, with research focusing on specific aspects, such as the nexus between state and nation building (Blakkisrud and Kolstø 2011) or between state building and legitimacy (Bakke et al. 2014; Caspersen 2015). As pointed out by Isachenko (Isachenko 2012, 3), however, "research on these political entities has been preoccupied mainly with the question whether they fulfil the necessary criteria of de facto statehood, rather than how this is accomplished."

There has been also some debate on the driving forces behind state-building processes in these territories, and what determines its outcome. In their early years, with the partial exception of Nagorno Karabakh, external assistance has not been the main determinant of state building in post-Soviet de facto states. Among the territories analysed in this research, Transnistria demonstrated highest capacities, but this was largely due to its advantageous starting point, rather than to external assistance or to strong domestic motivation. But while the motivation aspect may have been substantially irrelevant in the case of Transnistria,[28] lack of incentives may have

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26 As highlighted by Broers (2013, 72, note 14), governments in Tbilisi and Baku do not allow 'democratisation assistance' activities to be organised in de facto states, even when it is presented as a component of peace-building work.

27 With time, such statements have become more standardised and succinct. Here is – for example – the full statement issued by the EEAS in occasion of the 2014 presidential elections in Abkhazia: "The European Union supports the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia, as recognised by international law. In view of reports about 'presidential elections' in the Georgian breakaway region of Abkhazia on 24 August, we recall that the European Union does not recognise the constitutional and legal framework within which these elections have taken place" (European External Action Service 2014).

28 Especially in the case of Transnistria, it has been suggested that the secession movement was born out of greed rather than grievances, and that the subsequent state building efforts were essentially the result of self-interested actions by a ruling group wishing to maintain

contributed to the limited engagement of authorities in South Ossetia to engage in state-building efforts: according to Kolstø and Blakkisrud the relatively low tensions between South Ossetia and Georgia in the Shevardnadze years contributed Tskhinvali's limited commitment to developing state capacities: "a strong and uncompromising challenger state facilitates independent state building in the breakaway region, while a more accommodating attitude might impede it" (Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2008, 507).[29]

In the long term, however, in all post-Soviet de facto states external support has ultimately become the driving force providing substance to often wishful characterisations of their own capacities. In the case of Transnistria, Russia's support came to the rescue as the state budget was struggling to cope with the costs of its relatively generous welfare state, and increasingly contributed to modernization efforts in sectors such as health and education that had remained largely unreformed, and were still relying on Soviet-time structures and practices twenty years after the demise of the USSR. In the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, international organisations contributed to deliver at least the most basic services to residents through the 1990s and the early 2000s. As domestic fiscal and state capacity was slowly starting to pick up, the war in August 2008 and Russia's subsequent recognition opened the way for Moscow's comprehensive involvement in these territories, thus introducing an abrupt turn in the state-building trajectory of these territories.

Ultimately, it is external assistance that allowed these entities to enhance state capacities, and develop beyond the oxymoronic situation of being at the same time 'failing states' and 'de facto states'. This characterisation is line with Caspersen's argument that external assistance is needed to develop state authorities to any meaningful extent:

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control and privileged access to resources. But no matter if the goal was self-enrichment of an elite or self-determination of a people, underlying dynamics would still lead to state-building processes. Making reference to Olson's (2000) remark that "a bandit leader with sufficient strength to control and hold a territory has an incentive to settle down, to wear a crown, and to become a public good–providing autocrat", Blakkisrud and Kolstø (2011) suggested that the same reasoning could well apply to Transnistria's road to state building.

29 Applying this logic to the post-2014 context in Ukraine, it would appear that Kiev's approach of progressively cutting ties and hindering interactions with the areas under the control of de facto authorities in Donetsk and Lugansk effectively pushes de facto authorities in these regions towards developing domestic capacities.

"creating this level of stateness in a context that frequently includes legacies of war, transition and international isolation is a tall order and attempting to do so without external assistance would be nearly impossible. In order for sustainable entities to be built, external assistance – in one form of another – is therefore needed." (Caspersen 2009, 49)

Indeed, as debated in Chapter 4, external support such as the one provided by Russia makes these territories effectively less *self*-sustainable, but not less sustainable, and has fundamentally contributed to enhancing state capacities in these territories.

Scholars of de facto states are often reminded of a separate case where domestic-led state building and lack of external support from a patron or from international organisations may have actually contributed to building a more resilient and sustainable state-building process: Somaliland (Richards 2014; Richards and Smith 2015; Pegg and Kolstø 2015). Scholars have found "evidence that Somaliland's ineligibility for foreign aid facilitated the development of accountable political institutions and contributed to the willingness of Somalilanders to engage constructively in the state-building process" (Eubank 2010, 1).[30] Apparently, within Somaliland itself, "the lack of external intervention is often seen as a strength" (Pegg and Kolstø 2015, 199), which leads to bottom-up state building, favours a healthy sense of ownership of state institutions, and increases accountability of authorities towards their constituents. In other words, even if lack of recognition has costed Somaliland an amount of potential aid inflows estimated between 100 and 200 mln USD per year (Eubank 2010, 28), it seems that absence of large scale assistance programmes has ultimately been a blessing in disguise: even if by world standards Somaliland remains extremely poor and the quality of services relatively low, it still compares favourably with internationally recognised Somalia and other countries of the region, offering to its residents both political pluralism and – fundamentally – security.

International context and expectations on state capacity make it difficult to draw direct comparisons between Somaliland and unrecognised states in the post-Soviet space. However, considerations on the impact of external assistance on legitimacy and ownership presented in relation to the African context may be relevant also in reference

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30 It is worth highlighting that in spite of non-recognition, basic external assistance in the health sector does reach Somaliland, as it did reach – for example – even Abkhazia in the years of the blockade, or conflict regions in other parts of the world, and such help involves active interaction and cooperation with de facto institutions (Schäferhoff 2014).

to post-Soviet de facto states. Ramachandran's argument that "while donor money can help restore social services in a country, it may engender predation and decrease the government's need to foster relationships with its constituents" (Foreword to Eubank 2010) resounds with debates by Broers (2015b) on the impact of external assistance on the political economy and, as a consequence, on the nature of the political regimes of post-Soviet de facto states: dynamics related to external aid ultimately shape the political system, the political economy, and citizen-power relationship in these contexts.

3.9. <u>Conclusions</u>

The state capacity of post-Soviet de facto states has greatly increased since the early post-war years. With the partial exception of Nagorno Karabakh, state building has initially been domestic-led in the early years, but, in particular after 2008, support from the patron – in the form of direct financial support (see Chapter 5) as well as non-financial technical assistance (see Chapter 6) – has become a key determinant of state capacities.

This brief overview of literature anticipates and contextualises features of external assistance for state building found in post-Soviet de facto states that are presented in more details in the next chapters. It appears that many forms of assistance for security and state building that can be found in post-conflict territories and new independent states have remained unavailable to authorities in post-Soviet de facto states. In particular, internationalised state-building efforts under UN missions or regional coalitions, as well as direct financial assistance through international organisations have not contributed to develop state capacities in these territories, at least in part due to their contested nature.

Lack of widespread international recognition, however, does not imply international isolation. In particular after 2008, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have seen a substantial increase in external assistance aimed at increasing their capacities and in providing better access to services such as health and education to their resident population. Similarly to what happens in small dependent jurisdictions elsewhere in the world, external support to post-Soviet de facto states comes largely from a single external patron and is understood as a long-term commitment. In these contexts, external actors do not make plans for an 'exit strategy' and keep self-sustainability of the recipient largely as a nominal goal. Issues of ownership and legitimacy of external intervention are not explicitly discussed by Russia, but, as frequently found in small

dependent jurisdictions, external assistance takes place in coordination with local authorities, without using the language of explicit conditionality. The inevitably unequal patron-client relationship that emerges from this situation and the sheer amount of external assistance provided to these entities fundamentally contribute to shape the local political economy and have an impact on dynamics of domestic legitimacy.

In line with these preliminary findings, in order to proceed in this exploration of the impact of non-recognition on external assistance aimed at state building, it seems appropriate to delve further in the comparison between de facto states and jurisdictions whose status is not contested, but benefit of direct support for state building from a patron. Accordingly, the next chapter develops further the argument that conceptualising post-Soviet de facto states as small dependent jurisdictions offers a useful analytical framework that allows to capture dynamics of external assistance to post-Soviet de facto states, and can usefully complement established conceptualisations of these entities as primarily contested or post-conflict territories.

Chapter 4.

Conceptualising post-Soviet de facto states as small dependent jurisdictions

> *"First of all, one has to decide, in any given work,*
> *whether one is mainly after similarities or differences.*
> *[…]*
> *A second point is that, within the limits of plausible*
> *argument, the most instructive comparisons (whether of*
> *difference or similarity) are those that surprise."*
>
> *(B. Anderson 2016, 130)*

De facto states, according to the most established elaborations of the concept, by definition strive towards full-fledged, internationally recognised independence. This is in line with conventional wisdom of international relations: "full independence is often seen as a peerless alternative for stateless, nationalistically distinct populations, if only they could achieve such an outcome" (2014, vii). Or, as Krasner (1999, 5) succinctly put it, "recognition provides benefits and does not impose costs."

Indeed, the entities that are unanimously considered de facto states[1] by relevant authors who debated the concept have declared independence and, at least formally, seek international recognition. However, as emerges from previous research, independence may actually be perceived as a second best option by the political leadership and the resident population of these territories. As highlighted by Broers (2015b, 17), "a state creation impulse does not appear to be the driving political telos or even present in all cases." In this chapter, it is argued that there is nothing surprising about this and that widespread expectations that every territory inhabited by a distinct population should strive for full independence, rather than seek closer relations with a strong patron or a former colonial master, is a leftover of "a way of thinking in the days when nation building, independence, sovereignty and nationalism were self-evident categories of a people's statehood" (de Jong and Kruijt 2005, 4).

In seeking support, security guarantees and integration with a strong patron, the authorities of de facto states are effectively following a global trend, where both uncontested territories, UN-member states, and constitutionally distinct sub-state entities are developing such arrangements as the best option for their long-term development (Rezvani 2014). There is a multitude of reasons behind the choice of each of these territories. Pragmatism, however, probably ranks high among them: non-sovereign jurisdictions tend to perform considerably better than neighbouring independent states across a number of parameters, including wealth, health and education (McElroy and Parry 2012; Rezvani 2016).[2] Besides, such relationships also imply strong security guarantees. As highlighted by Baldacchino and Hepburn (2012, 561), "there are clear economic and security advantages in being associated with a larger, richer, metropolitan patron," and this holds true not only for the island jurisdictions at the centre of their research, but also for post-Soviet de facto states.

This chapter explores the affinities between post-Soviet de facto states and small dependent jurisdictions around the globe, with explicit references to Pacific island

1   Different authors have often included a different set of territories (should Taiwan be included? Iraqi Kurdistan? Kosovo?), but there is a clear consensus on a few of them, including the current four post-Soviet cases: Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh.

2   Empirically, this trend is particularly noticeable in areas such as the Caribbean or South Pacific, where islands in some form of association with a patron are located in proximity (and in sharp contrast in terms of wealth and welfare) with independent sovereign states.

states, focusing in particular on their relationship with a patron; the all too apparent differences will not be object of discussion.[3] The "insularity" of de facto states and their external dependence is largely a consequence of the conflict that led to their establishment, and the ensuing lack of international recognition. Since neither territorial reintegration or widespread international recognition seem to be forthcoming, for analytical purposes such attributes are taken as an inherent feature of these territories. It is argued that conceptualizing post-Soviet de facto states as small dependent jurisdictions allows for a better appreciation of their attitude towards independence, their sustainability, the political economy and state-building process underlying their continued existence, as well as their relationship with a patron. Introducing insights from the literature on small dependent jurisdictions to the study of post-Soviet de facto states offers new analytical frameworks, approaches and venues of research that may usefully feed into a growing literature on post-Soviet de facto states that is largely based on case study analysis (Caspersen and Stansfield 2011, 20).

In the first section of this chapter, independence as a long-term goal or as a second-best option is discussed both in theory and in reference to post-Soviet de facto states. The focus then shifts towards partially independent territories, how they represent a prevalent outcome for distinct populations that achieved self-determination in the post-decolonization context, and why such arrangements based on sharing sovereignty have been perceived as a better option than full independence. Treaties of association that bound small states and non-sovereign territories to a patron are briefly described, and compared to existing agreements between post-Soviet de facto states and their patron. The applicability to post-Soviet de facto states of the MIRAB (migration, remittances, aid and bureaucracy) model of economy initially developed in reference to Pacific micro-states (Bertram and Watters 1985) is also briefly discussed. Finally, the main findings are summed up (1. seeking independence should not be a criteria for a de facto state to be considered such; 2. external dependence does not imply unsustainability; 3. in small dependent jurisdictions, including post-Soviet de facto states, domestic capabilities to deliver public goods and services are structurally related to long-term external support), and possible new approaches for analysing post-Soviet de facto states informed by their re-conceptualisation as small dependent jurisdictions are outlined.

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3 While introducing his comparison between post-Soviet central Asia and Francophone Africa, Gammer (2000) made a point that applies also to the present study: "[this article] does not attempt to compare the states and societies of the two groups. The differences between, and indeed within each of the two groups are too numerous and obvious."

4.1. <u>Must de facto states seek independence?</u>

Most definitions of de facto states clearly state, or imply, that full-fledged, internationally recognized independence is the goal of de facto states. This is the case, for example, with Scott Pegg's original definition of the concept, according to which a de facto state "seeks full constitutional independence and widespread international recognition as a sovereign state" (Pegg 1998, 26). In his definition of de facto states, Kolstø (2006, 726) includes among the criteria that a de facto state "must have sought but not achieved international recognition as an independent state." Caspersen and Stansfield (2011, 17) claim that de facto states "have demonstrated an aspiration for full, de jure, independence," while Caspersen (2012, 11) makes clear that to be considered such, a de facto state must have "declared formal independence or demonstrated clear aspirations for independence."

Strictly speaking, the above-mentioned definitions do not state that internationally recognized independence must be the final goal of de facto states. Kolstø (2006, 726) writes that de facto states "must have sought" international recognition, which at one point or another, all of the currently existing post-Soviet cases did. Similarly, Caspersen's definition states that de facto states must have "declared formal independence *or* demonstrated clear aspirations for independence" (Caspersen 2012, 11), and all of the post-Soviet de facto states did at some point declare independence. But such wordings without further elaborations are in line with a broad expectation that seeking internationally recognised independence should be the final expression of self-determination of a territory that fought a war and accepted to live in international isolation to achieve self-rule. As highlighted by Broers (2013, 62), however, post-Soviet de facto states "seem to have transgressed international expectations that de facto states should indeed be resolutely 'self-determinist'; self-determination as a 'choice for a different master' is not accepted."[4]

Various authors have pointed at inadequacies of this criteria in available definitions of de facto states. Isachenko, for example, highlighted that the requirement of seeking "widespread international recognition as a sovereign state" for a de facto state to be considered such, "would be problematic for northern Cyprus, which in 2004 officially

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4   Or rather, many observers assume that self-determination is only instrumentally invoked in order to legitimize Russian imperialism. For an extensive debate on how self-determination norms have been utilized to justify Great Power territorial expansion, see in particular Beissinger (2015).

renounced this goal, yet did not stop being a 'de facto state'" (Isachenko 2012, 18). Kosienkowski (2013, 63) highlighted that in the case of Transnistria the nominal goal of seeking internationally recognised independence is not necessarily a real one; however, this does not make Transnistria any less of a de facto state. Toomla (2014, 56) also pointed out the problematic nature of that part of the definition of de facto states, and suggested that "if an entity functions as a state even against its own will then it can be considered a de facto state."

4.2. Independence as a second best option for post-Soviet de facto states

As debated in detail by Kosienkowski (2012a, 2013), Transnistria's leadership favoured different options at different times. The current leadership of Transnistria formally proclaims internationally recognized independence as a key foreign policy objective (Transnistria's MFA 2012b), while at the same time maintaining that it is following its people's will as expressed in the 2006 independence referendum. The wording of the referendum explicitly referred to independence as an intermediate step towards ensuing "free union with the Russian Federation."[5] Transnistria's president claimed he was acting upon the result of the referendum when he proposed to parliament a constitutional amendment that introduced in the territory's legal system the direct applicability of Russian legislation in December 2013 (Shevchuk 2013b), as well as when he issued a decree aimed at facilitating "free union" with Russia in September 2016 (Shevchuk 2016). References to integration with Russia are common in Transnistria's public rhetoric.

An understanding of Abkhazia as the homeland of the Abkhaz, apparently accepted also by non-ethnic Abkhaz residents (Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2013), accompanied by worries for Abkhaz cultural and linguistic survival, is among the reasons that makes joining the Russian Federation an unacceptable option for large segments of Abkhazia's local population. Internationally recognised independence seems indeed to be the goal of current political elites in Abkhazia, even if this does not preclude developing strong ties with Russia. While it is true that "for Abkhazia the long-term goal is genuine sovereignty, and ongoing integration processes with Russia are an unavoidable tactical concession" (Broers 2015b), it should also be clarified that given the circumstances

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5   It should be mentioned that Crimea, for example, had to formally declare its sovereign independence in order to become a constituent part of the Russian Federation in March 2014 (Walter, Ungern-Sternberg, and Abushov 2014, 297–98).

even staunch supporters of Abkhazia's independence favour very close ties with Russia, including sovereignty sharing agreements on fundamental matters such as defence.

In South Ossetia, the desire to join ethnic kins in North Ossetia by becoming part of the Russian Federation seems to enjoy a widespread social consensus and has been frequently aired by local politicians. Joining the Russian Federation was one of the key elements of the electoral platform of 'United Ossetia', the party which won parliamentary elections in the territory in June 2014.

Scientific surveys conducted in these territories (O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Toal 2011; Toal and O'Loughlin 2013a; O'Loughlin, Toal, and Chamberlain-Creangă 2013; Toal and O'Loughlin 2014), confirm the above characterization: in Transnistria significant support for independence was found, but joining Russia was the preferred option for over 50 per cent of both ethnic Russian and Ukrainian respondents; in Abkhazia, independence was the preferred option, with only ethnic Armenians showing a slight preference for integration with Russia; finally, over 80 per cent of respondents in South Ossetia declared themselves in favour of joining Russia.

In the case of Nagorno Karabakh unification with ethnic-kins in Armenia was the main demand of the Karabakh movement since its beginnings in late Soviet times.[6] After the war, Nagorno Karabakh has engaged in state building and developed own state structures, but as argued by de Waal (2008, 7–8, 2010, 159) and highlighted by Broers (2013, 62), "Karabakh is seen to all intents and purposes as a de facto province of Armenia."

All post-Soviet de facto states are currently strongly dependent on their patron, and prevalent integration dynamics have been often reported as proof that these territories are nothing but "pawns of Russian policy" (Asmus 2010, 4; Smith 2009, 126), or puppet states, a characterization common also in media reporting about the region. An understanding that post-Soviet de facto states survive only thanks to the support they receive from their patron has become a key element of a number of judgements by the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR), which made the patron states legally responsible for actions taken by the de facto authorities. For example, the ECHR argued that "the 'NKR' and its administration survives by virtue of the military, political, financial and other support given to it by Armenia which, consequently, exercises

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6   As Broers (2015b, 12) put it, "[t]he secessionist movement in NK was from the outset driven by an ethos of unification (the Armenian word for which, miatsum, was its main slogan) and not individual sovereignty."

effective control over Nagorno Karabakh and the surrounding territories" (Chiragov and Others V. Armenia 2015, para. 186).[7]

The logic that extensive support leads necessarily to effective control is however problematic, and such characterization has been opposed by scholars whose work has focused on de facto states. In spite of the fundamental role played by the patron or kin state in granting their viability, "experience has time and again shown that most quasi-states are not pliant clients doing their master's bidding" (Kolstø 2006, 733).[8] Post-Soviet de facto states cannot be considered puppet states, yet all of them are highly dependent on their patron, are strengthening integration with it and may not actually be striving to become full-fledged independent states. Does this make them stand apart from other small, dependent jurisdictions around the world, both sovereign and non-sovereign? And does self-determination necessarily imply achieving full independence?

4.3. Is it worth it being sovereign?

The process of decolonisation as initially formalized in UN documents and practice reinforced the idea that self-determination struggles are inextricably connected with independence movements, that "all potential countries would become independent if they could" (Baldacchino and Hepburn 2012, 556). The wording of the 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples' (UN General Assembly 1960) highlights that all power must be transferred to the people of non-self-governing and dependent territories "in order to enable them to enjoy complete independence and freedom."[9] Later UN documents, however, made clear that independence is not the only legitimate option for such territories: "The establishment of a sovereign and independent state, the free association or integration with an independent state or the emergence into any other political status freely determined by a people constitute modes of implementing the right of self-determination by that people" (UN General Assembly 1970).

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7   For a similar reasoning applied to Transnistria by the ECHR, see in particular Catan and others Vs Moldova and Russia (2012, paras. 121–122).

8   For a similar take by other scholars, see also Caspersen (2008, 368) and Broers (2013, 61).

9   For a further debate on self-determination and independence claims in this context, see in particular Fabry (2015).

After the first wave of decolonization, many territories around the world that were given a chance to claim full independence and could in all fairness expect speedy international recognition declined to pursue this option. On the contrary, 'most of these jurisdictions have decided that they would rather retain some aspects of autonomy while maintaining or seeking better terms of integration with their metropolitan/colonial power' (Baldacchino and Hepburn 2012, 557). For example, many referenda have been held in the Caribbean since 1967 (Bermuda, US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Bonaire, Sint Maartin, Saba, Curaçao, St. Eustatius), but none of them supported independence (Clegg 2012). Island jurisdictions from the Pacific Ocean (Levine 2012) to Northern Europe (Ackrén and Lindström 2012; Kuokkanen 2017), for one reason or another, have refused to take the path of full independence.[10] Quite simply, to quote Rezvani (2016), "partial independence beats full independence."[11]

As argued by Baldacchino and Hepburn (2012, 557–58), "the benefits of maintaining a form of association with a larger state (be it 'free association' or 'sovereignty-association') often outweigh the risks associated with complete separation," in particular if the patron state is "keen to maintain the smaller unit within its purview, would be disposed to support its wards with welfare, employment, security, investment and other benefits, perhaps even citizenship." This has led to a pattern of behaviour known as "upside down decolonization" (Baldacchino 2010), i.e. dependent territories conspiring to maintain and extend colonial relationships rather than seeking full independence.

In some cases, island jurisdictions chose to give up some of their self-rule in exchange for becoming formally part of their patron and former colonial master in all respects. For example, in a 2009 referendum held on the island of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean voters overwhelmingly chose to become a French Department, rather than remaining an oversea collectivity.[12] This choice implied direct applicability of French legislation on the territory, further limiting self-rule. This means, for example, that traditional Islamic

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10 Lack of the economic resources seems to be a major factor, even in wealthy northern Europe: "The main stumbling block on the road to Faroese and Greenlandic statehood is that the islands would lose their financial support from Denmark. [...] Neither of the two islands, at least in the near future, will be able to fully assume the financial responsibilities that statehood requires." (Ackrén and Lindström 2012, 506).

11 For a detailed discussion of the advantages of such arrangements, see in particular Rezvani (2014).

law previously applied on the island is due to be phased out in favour of French civil code and that polygamy is to be outlawed, but it also paved the way for more direct transfers and financial support from both the European Union and the French government, including social payments and unemployment benefits for local residents (Chrisafis 2009).

For many Pacific island states that have formally become sovereign independent states, formal independence has only further highlighted their dependence on patrons and donors. Is it possible to talk of sovereignty when "financial assistance […] is required simply for the governments […] to meet their budgetary needs (including paying the salaries of government employees)?" (Levine 2012, 448) Such characterization resounds strikingly familiar to scholars of de facto states. In order to appreciate better further similarities, the next section focuses on different forms of external support received by both formally sovereign and non-sovereign small dependent jurisdictions around the world.

4.4. External support and the issue of economic sustainability

Forms of external support for small dependent territories vary widely. They usually imply some form of security guarantees, capacity building for local institutions, technical and financial support, and may be offered as part of a comprehensive treaty, specific agreements or informal arrangements. Various forms of 'shared sovereignty' (Krasner 2004) and 'governance delegation' (Matanock 2014) have been advocated and introduced in multiple settings, often with the declared aim of strengthening domestic capabilities and state institutions in order to achieve self-sustainability of the jurisdiction that is recipient of support.

This section does not deal specifically with multilateral missions with a clear mandate and an understanding by all sides that international support is limited in time, such as those that took place in the Solomon Islands or in Timor Leste, but rather focus on a set of cases that in one way or another resemble more closely the situation found in post-Soviet de facto states, i.e. cases where a single country (in most cases, a country which

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12 A somewhat similar development took place with the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles, and with its smaller islands – Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba – becoming "special municipalities of the Netherlands, and [...] hence politically and constitutionally integrated into the Dutch metropolis" (Veenendaal 2015).

previously had a key governing role on the territory as a former colonial master or as the administrator of a trust territory) established formal or informal 'shared sovereignty' agreements that do not have a termination date and provide for extended financial support. The following paragraphs focus in particular on the Compact of Free Association that the United States have established with three Pacific micro-states: the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau. However, arrangements established between patrons and both sovereign and non sovereign small dependent jurisdictions from the Pacific to the Caribbean are based on similar key components (security guarantees, freedom of movement, technical assistance and financial support); adding examples from other cases would add more nuances and show the variety of agreements to be found around the world, but would not add substantially to the comparison at the basis of this chapter.[13]

In the case of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau, 'free association' was eventually chosen over a number of alternative options, including that of becoming 'territories' of the United States (such as American Samoa) and that of obtaining commonwealth status (such as Puerto Rico or Northern Mariana).[14] Marshall Islands and Palau were also offered to merge with Micronesia in 1978, but they refused. Unlike the other options outlined, free association provides for full constitutional independence and the establishment of a separate citizenship, even if it still implies a sovereignty sharing agreement. Eventually, Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau have all become UN member states between 1991 and 1994, in spite of the fact that initially the US government believed they would not qualify for UN membership because of their effectively limited independence.[15]

The Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau are required to consult with the United States on matters of security under both the Compact and the mutual security subsidiary agreement (Michal 1993, 320–21). They do not have an own army, as their security is guaranteed from the United States, but local residents are eligible to serve in the

13 For a debate on shared sovereignty in French territories in the Pacific, see in particular Mrgudovic (2012); for Dutch jurisdictions in the Caribbean see Oostindie (2006).

14 For an overview of the process, see in particular McKibben (1990).

15 In reply to a question by the Congress, the US government replied officially that '[i]n the view of the United States, the Freely Associated States, while having sovereignty and full self-government, will not possess the attributes of independence called for in the eligibility criteria of the United Nations Charter' (United States Congress 1984, 109).

American armed forces. They also do not have an own currency; all of them use the US dollar as their official currency. Freedom of movement, i.e. the possibility to live and work in the United States without visa requirements or other impediments, is another key component of the Compacts.

All of these agreements include a financial component. According to the Compact between the United States and the Marshall Islands, for example, financial support "shall be used for assistance in education, health care, the environment, public sector capacity building, and private sector development, or for other areas as mutually agreed, with priorities in the education and health care sectors" (US Department of State 2003, sec. 211a).[16] Between 30 and 50 per cent of annual grant assistance from the US is allocated to build and maintain public infrastructure (US Department of State 2003, sec. 211d). In theory, the Compacts state that the purpose of the grant funds is to assist the governments of these Pacific micro-states 'in their efforts to promote the economic self-sufficiency and budgetary self-reliance of their people' (US Government Accountability Office 2013, 1); financial support is due to decrease and local authorities have to produce a 'Decrement Management Plan' outlining how they are preparing for running their governance activities without external funding. However, substantial financing has been established for the long term (in 2003, the amended Compacts provided for 3.6 billion USD in assistance to Micronesia and the Marshall Islands over 20 years, or about 1,200 USD per year per person),[17] and trust funds have been established in order to provide additional resources after the financial provisions of the Compacts expire. Even so, it seems likely that an additional extension of the funding will be required (as it has been extended after the original termination of the Compacts in 1999). Also, it should be highlighted that the non-financial parts of the Compacts do not have a termination date: military cooperation, technical assistance and overall support are expected to continue indefinitely.

16 Details about grant assistance change slightly among the Compacts, but the focus remain broadly similar.

17 Substantive additional non-compact grants have also been offered: "For example, in fiscal years 2007 through 2011, the FSM spent about 197 million USD and the RMI spent about 46 million USD in noncompact grants from agencies including Interior, Education, HHS, Labor, and the Department of Transportation" (US Government Accountability Office 2013, 10), averaging to about additional 320 USD per year per resident. The relationship is not always smooth, and issues of mismanagement and reporting have caused delays in funding allocations from the United States (Labriola 2016, 198).

The pragmatic security and economic advantages for these jurisdictions of establishing a Compact with the United States are clear. However, the kind of relations established with the United States, rather than fostering structural economic development and self-sustainability, effectively brought these countries closer to the so-called MIRAB model (migration, remittances, aid and bureaucracy), initially introduced by Bertram and Watters (1985) in reference to island jurisdictions in the South Pacific. Territories that fit the model are characterised by strong out-bound migration, their economy is dependent on remittances and aid, and the government sector is the dominant cash employer.

The original proponents of the model highlighted that the MIRAB economic order may be much more sustainable than largely expected. Domestic economic development is not the only possible way of achieving economic sustainability in the medium- to long-term, thanks to what Bertram and Watters define as 'aid entitlement', based partly on donor's recognition of the special problems related to being small and isolated, as well as, more importantly, geopolitical calculations. Maintaining a sustained level of support is unavoidable unless donor countries "are prepared to see living standards slide in their former or actual dependencies; or unless they are prepared to be supplanted by other, competing, aid donors" (Bertram and Watters 1985, 513).[18] In this context, aid can be assimilated to a rent such as oil revenues and is often not conducive to increased self-sustainability, at least in part due to the fact that "returns on investments in some of these economies are low or negative" (Tisdell 2016, 12).

Small size inevitably leads to lack of specialized skills and own training facilities; reference to the patron is thus required for a number of issues, including technical support, law drafting and standards settings. This is true for *all* small dependent territories, not only those relatively poor and isolated that have been the main focus of this section, but also those that are richer than their patron and located in Europe, including UN member states such as Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino. On the one hand, geography requires them to depend on their neighbours for giving their residents access to basic services such as electricity, phone lines and the internet. On the other, in order to function, modern societies demand a vast amount of technical skills that cannot possibly be developed locally, or even effectively acquired by the limited

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18 Bertram & Watters place their reasoning solidly in the de-colonization context; references to colonialism, albeit not totally out of place in the post-Soviet context, are intentionally omitted here in order to make the model they propose more adaptable to the cases at the centre of this article.

numbers of residents of such small societies, in particular considering the fact that such skills (from IT to medicine) need to be constantly updated. Law making and standards settings is structurally burdensome; financial, trade and customs regulations are complex; managing an own currency can be problematic: even wealthy small states depend on a patron or neighbour for most of these things (Eccardt 2005).

Finally, the extensive focus on the patron given so far does not imply that no other external actor (such as neighbouring countries, international governmental or non-governmental organizations, or other countries with a geopolitical interest in the territory) is involved in providing assistance, or in enabling availability of public goods and services to local residents. On the contrary, such interactions may be complementary to the support of the patron, in particular when local state capacity is very low or when geographical circumstances mandate interactions that do not involve the patron.

4.5. Post-Soviet de facto states: shared sovereignty and MIRAB economies

In spite of all the obvious differences, there are a number of features of this brief characterization of relations between a patron and the small, dependent jurisdictions it supports, and of the economic models that this relationship entices, that sound familiar to scholars of post-Soviet de facto states.

For example, Abkhazia has accepted in December 2014 to formalize relations with Russia with a treaty of 'alliance and strategic partnership' that in key aspects resembles the associated status of small island states. It should be highlighted that this is not in contrast with long-standing claims to self-determination by Abkhazia's de facto authorities or a last minute capitulation to Russian pressures. On the contrary, already in 2003 Abkhazia's minister of foreign affairs Sergei Shamba (2003) was happy to consider Abkhazia a Russian protectorate and mentioned the Marshall Islands as a positive example of how Abkhazia-Russia relations may develop. In 2003, Abkhazia's parliament formally proposed to Russia's federal assembly to establish an associated relationship (IA Regnum 2003); the proposed partnership has clear elements of commonality with the treaty eventually signed in December 2014.

The treaty (Kremlin.ru 2014) establishes a coordinated foreign and security policy (art. 4-5), and highlights that a common position is to be agreed in all important matters related to security. A joint military force is to be established (art. 5); in case of

aggression, the Russian Federation is to head this joint force (art. 7). In order to facilitate joint operations, the Abkhazian armed forces are to be modernized and adapt to Russian standards of operation; all related expenses are to be paid by the Russian Federation (art. 8).

According to the treaty, public servants working for the ministry of interior (art. 10), as well as people working in a number of sectors (health, education, science, culture, sport and social services) and pensioners with Russian citizenship are due to have their incomes increased to the level found in Russia's southern federal district (art. 14).[19] Health (art. 17) and education (art. 20) are to be brought in line with the quality standards set in the Russian Federation. Some benefits included in the treaty, such as an increase in the pensions and access to health care in Russia, are meant only for residents of Abkhazia with Russian citizenship; however, this seems to be based on the assumption that double Abkhazian-Russian citizenship is the norm, rather than the exception. Besides, Russia is to facilitate the procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship for citizens of Abkhazia (art. 13). The treaty also includes provisions that address key goals of the local leadership in Abkhazia, including support to efforts for strengthening Abkhaz language use (art. 21) and an obligation to take measures aimed at extending Abkhazia's international contacts, including by facilitating its membership in international organizations and its international recognition as a sovereign state (art. 4).

A largely similar treaty has also been signed between Russia and South Ossetia (Kremlin.ru 2015), even if its different title (treaty of 'alliance and integration', rather than 'alliance and strategic partnership') is a clear sign of its diverging long term goals. Even in the case of Transnistria, which has not been recognised by the Russian Federation as an independent country, a number of both formal and informal agreements have in practice similar effects: security guarantees, financial contributions to increase the incomes of public servants and pensioners, as well as technical support in a number of fields. Formal agreements between ministries of the Russian Federation and relevant authorities in Transnistria provide for technical support across the spectrum of government activities, including health, education, finance, trade, economic development, anti-monopoly legislation, transportation, culture, and others (President of Transnistria 2014). Reconstruction or construction of social infrastructure, including kindergartens, schools and hospitals is being openly financed by the Russian

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19 For more details about Russia's contribution to pensions in post-Soviet de facto states, see Chapter 5, as well as Comai (2016a).

government in the form of humanitarian support through a dedicated non-commercial organization, 'Eurasian integration.'

Frequent references to Russian standards in formal agreements stipulated between Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and the Russian Federation, raise the issue that in many respects these territories function effectively very similarly to Russian regions. "Law shopping", i.e. the practice of borrowing extensively from the legislative scheme of Russia, is found through various post-Soviet countries, but post-Soviet de facto states went one step further, introducing direct implementation of Russian legislation on their territory. In the case of Nagorno Karabakh, "virtually the entire legislative regime - both criminal and civil - is adopted from Armenia" (Waters 2006, 409).

Can post-Soviet de facto states be considered MIRAB economies? While reliable data on migration and remittances are missing or not publicly available for all cases, both anecdotal evidence and previous research[20] suggest that outbound migration is substantial in all post-Soviet de facto states, with the partial exception of Abkhazia. Available information suggests that external aid and public workers' wages (the second component of the MIRAB model) are a fundamental, and even dominant part of the local economy also in other post-Soviet de facto states. According to official sources related to 2016, 92.2 per cent of the budget of South Ossetia (Res news agency 2015), and about 58 per cent of the budget of Abkhazia (President of Abkhazia 2015) is financed by Moscow.[21] These data, however, do not include pensions paid directly by the Russian government to its citizens resident in these territories, which are distributed directly by the Russian side and accordingly do not figure in the local budgets. In the case of Nagorno Karabakh, as of 2014, 'interstate credit' (the formula officially used to refer to transfers from the Armenian government) covers about 55 per cent of total budget expenditures (National statistical service of Nagorno Karabakh 2015, 233). In spite of a global and regional economic crisis, starting with 2008, Russia's support has helped maintaining relatively stable living standards in Transnistria, and increasing them in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, similarly to what happens in MIRAB economies, "living standards have been driven up by rent incomes rather than by expanding productive incomes, […] [and as a consequence] it is inescapably true that the real disposable incomes of the resident populations […] are sustainable only if their

20 See for example the research by Volkova and Ostavnaya (2015) on migration and remittances in Transnistria.

21 Relevant figures are presented in detail in Chapter 5.

current-account rent entitlements are in their turn sustainable" (Bertram and Watters 1985, 510).

In other words, this does not mean that Abkhazia for example, is not capable *in principle* to be economically self-sustainable, but rather that the level of welfare, public salaries and development that has been achieved in recent years thanks to Russia's help is unlikely to be attainable without that support in the foreseeable future. It should be highlighted that, in a way, Russia's support is making it more and more difficult for Abkhazia to be self-sustainable. Stability and opening of borders with Russia, combined with increased fiscal capacity by authorities in Sukhumi, may have allowed to progressively improve on public services, pensions and salaries from their level pre-Russian intervention, but the terms of the Abkhazia-Russia treaty set such payments at a level that authorities in Sukhumi will not be able to cover independently in the foreseeable future.[22]

Similarly, Transnistria is unlikely to be able to maintain its current level of public salaries and in particular its current level of pension payments (on average, twice as big as those of Moldova or Ukraine) without external support. Nagorno Karabakh would not be able to maintain its current level of public services without financial support from Armenia and the wider Armenian diaspora. In line with the MIRAB model, in post-Soviet de facto states "subsistence remains attainable, and resources available to the village mode of production are sufficient to guarantee the basic needs of the population" (Bertram and Watters 1985, 511), providing a baseline below which the local economy would not go even in absence of external support. However, a sudden decrease of external support from the patron would likely result in a new wave of (at least seasonal) outward migration, as recorded in some MIRAB economies (Fraenkel 2006, 18).

Such considerations, however, should not distract from the basic idea at the basis of the MIRAB model, i.e. that the sustainability of these jurisdictions is in practice related to the sustainability of their 'aid entitlements' rather than on domestic capacities. As long as Russia believes that supporting these entities is an important element for its overall

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22 For example, as of 2015, the median Abkhazian pension amounted lo less than 10 USD per month, while the average pensions paid by Russia in Abkhazia amounts to more than 100 USD per month. In order to be able to offer a comparable level of disbursement autonomously, Abkhazia would need a very considerable increase in its capacity to finance its own budget as well as its social fund.

strategy in its near abroad, it is unlikely that Russia will give up completely economic support to these territories, leaving them destitute and further depopulated. Similarly, it seems highly unlikely that Armenia or the Armenian diaspora would suddenly stop their support for Nagorno Karabakh. In brief, as established examples of MIRAB economies and post-Soviet de facto states both show, economic sustainability does not necessarily mean self-sustainability.

4.6. <u>Outsourcing (de facto) statehood</u>

Already in 2006, Popescu (2006b) referred to the growing Russian involvement in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a process of "outsourcing" de facto statehood. This tendency has increased over the years even for the most pro-independence of the post-Soviet de facto states, Abkhazia, as highlighted in reports (International Crisis Group 2010a), and as clearly emerged from the December 2014 treaty between Abkhazia and Russia discussed above.

However, as highlighted in previous sections, it is common for small dependent territories to similarly "outsource" governance functions and accept limits to their self-rule in exchange for security guarantees, freedom of movement, financial support, and technical assistance. Current arrangements may have led these territories much closer to economies based on migration, remittances, aid and bureaucracy (in line with the MIRAB model), yet they are almost certainly better off than they would have been if they actually insisted on "going alone." Cutting economic, political and security ties with the current patron would hardly enhance domestic capabilities, but rather leave them 'in a status of being alone, poor and destitute in a harsh and unforgiving world' (Baldacchino and Hepburn 2012, 558), much as Abkhazia has experienced in the 1990s. As pointed out by Brookfield (1972, 141–42) in the context of decolonization,

> "the available local resources in these countries are inevitably insufficient to support either the transformation or maintenance of welfare at present and desired levels, then there is no alternative to dependence but stagnation and retrogression. Independence may give a nation self-respect, [...] but it is a self-respect that must be severely constrained by awareness that the power of economic decision making is greatly limited. To maximise self-respect is not accordant with maximisation of either income or welfare."

Territories that are given the possibility to obtain full independence and can expect to see their desire respected at the international level decline to pursue the path to full sovereignty for pragmatic reasons, and rather prefer to enjoy the economic and practical

benefits of keeping close ties with a wealthier patron. It is thus hardly surprising that post-Soviet de facto states strive to strengthen ties with their patron rather than opting for some idealistic independence with no patron to support and defend them, in particular considering the fact that they lack resources for financial self-sustainability and see their security under constant threat. Similarly to other small-sized territories highly dependent on a single patron, post-Soviet de facto states are pragmatically trying to have the best of both worlds, by keeping

> "all (or most) of the ceremonial, symbolic, regulatory and operational trappings of sovereignty, plus a much stronger ally in the corner for those delicate occasions that warrant a display of force or influence, a source of economic largesse, a pool of potential tourists, a custodian of a lucrative and diverse labour market, an appealing location for pursuing higher education, and purveyor of prized citizenship rights" (Baldacchino and Hepburn 2012, 561).[23]

Such insistence on pragmatism is partially at odds with a long-established characterisation by Lynch (2004, 63), according to which "de facto states are driven first and foremost by political, not economic, imperatives." It may be true that indeed politics comes first, ruling out options such as integration with the parent state or a total dismantling of the structures of self-government that have been established after the conflict. But if security and economic benefits can be coupled by a politically acceptable association with a patron, self-reliant independence effectively stops being an attractive alternative.[24]

Thinking of post-Soviet de facto states as small, dependent jurisdictions building a relationship with their patron that may continue to exist in the current configuration for

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23 In fact, pragmatic considerations of this kind are not unique to small island states. The 'devo max' option that according to opinion polls would have been the preferred option in an independence referendum in Scotland if it was included on the referendum ballot paper (Sharp et al. 2014, 37) shows that also the electorate of a developed democratic country would have been willing to take, in its own way, 'the best of both worlds.'

24 This line of reasoning has some elements of commonality with the argument originally brought forward by King (2001), who highlighted that political and economic incentives benefiting multiple interest groups (all the way from elites to pensioners) are a key factor in determining the endurance of the status quo in post-Soviet de facto states. The shady business schemes that were central to King's characterisation fifteen years ago, however, for the most part gave way to a structure of benefits stemming from a largely formalised patron-client relationship.

decades to come, rather than as transient phenomena due to be re-integrated with their parent state, may contribute to appreciate more effectively the dynamics that take place in these territories, as well as their international interactions. Especially in earlier years of studies on de facto states, scholars have focused on various avenues for surpassing the current status issue by looking at some form or another of integration with the parent state (Chirikba 2000; Potier 2001; Coppieters et al. 2004; Geldenhuys 2009).[25] Yet, at least in part for normative reasons, little attention has been dedicated to how these territories may develop further their integration with their patron, even when this trend became more apparent.

This is not unlike what happened in the study of island jurisdictions. For example, according to Jong and Kruijt (2005, 4), scholars of dependent territories in the Caribbean have long "focused on how to move forward to 'more sovereignty', or how to advance constitutional development, meaning more autonomy, or how to arrive as close as possible to an almost independent nation-state status." The long-term prospect most debated in academic literature is inverse to that about de facto states (i.e. a move towards full independence and sovereignty in the case of Caribbean island states versus integration with the parent state for de facto states), but the approaches outlined here share a common problem: a pre-conceived expectation about the long-term development path of territories whose status does not fit clearly the dualistic logic according to which "there are states and there is little else" (Lynch 2004, xi) hinders focused research on currently prevalent dynamics on the ground.

Finally, the debate on the sustainability of de facto states has been centred around an idea of economic self-sufficiency that is rarely found in small dependent territories. In spite of the fact that both the patron and local authorities may find it convenient to maintain rhetorically self-sustainability as a final goal, in practice, it should not be excluded that, as argued by Bertram (1986, 809), "'dependent development' is both sustainable and preferable to a drive for self-reliance."

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25 Even an edited book on the subject that aimed to allow "such entities to be viewed as, if not 'regular' features of the international system, at least ones of a more perennial rather than anomalous nature" (Caspersen and Stansfield 2011, 20), concludes with a chapter that focuses on options for reintegration with the parent state and explicitly refuses to take in consideration prolonged existence in their current status or further integration with the patron as plausible options (L. Anderson 2011, 195).

Even if being small and dependent on a patron may sound less glorious than being self-sufficient and fully independent, conceptualising de facto states as dependent jurisdictions does not imply any judgement on their legitimacy, or their claims to self-determination and statehood; Rezvani's openly positive characterization of partially independent territories may well refer also to post-Soviet de facto states:

> "far from diminishing them, the act of giving up some of their powers frees them to have greater wealth, security, and have a higher quality of self-rule than having to fend for themselves within the relative condition of anarchy in the inter-national system" (Rezvani 2016, 10).

4.7. Conclusions

This chapter draws upon the comparison between post-Soviet de facto states and small dependent jurisdictions in other parts of the world in order to propose a re-conceptualization of these entities for analytical purposes. The main conclusion is that in order to understand the processes that take place in these territories, their economic structure, and their external relations, it may be useful to conceptualize these entities primarily as small dependent jurisdictions. Lack of recognition is clearly a defining feature of their place in the international system, but this should not obscure other inherent characteristics of these entities. Acknowledging smallness and external dependence as key features of post-Soviet de facto states allows to introduce new instruments to the analytical toolbox of scholars working on the region, providing new venues for research and adjusting expectations about their path of development and long term objectives.

Firstly, there should be no expectation that full-fledged, internationally recognised independence must be the final goal of post-Soviet de facto states. In the post-decolonization period, small dependent territories inhabited by distinct populations around the world have by and large preferred to keep close relations with a patron and establish sovereignty sharing agreements rather than seek internationally recognised independence. Post-Soviet de facto states are no exception. More in general, a requirement of seeking independence should not be part of the criteria for defining a de facto state.

Secondly, it should be highlighted that sustainability, rather than self-sustainability, is key for the survival of these entities. The observation that they are not self-sufficient, or that reliance on domestic capabilities would drive their resident population to an economy of subsistence, is ultimately not relevant for understanding their economic

sustainability. Authorities of small dependent jurisdictions with no realistic hope for self-reliant development have managed to provide stability as well as a degree of welfare and public services to their resident population for decades in spite of almost total lack of domestic resources. More in general, research on the economy and sustainability of post-Soviet de facto states may benefit of observations developed by researchers working on small dependent jurisdictions elsewhere in the world and the concept of 'aid entitlement'.[26]

Thirdly, this conceptualisation highlights the key long-term role of external financial and technical support from a patron for providing public services and a degree of welfare to a resident population. In post-Soviet de facto states, the patron is the main source of financial support and a key state-building actor, setting standards and building local capacities according to its own model. However, availability of services to the resident population is not necessarily achieved only through the patron, but possibly also thanks to external interactions that, beyond the patron state, include also the parent state, international organizations, international NGOs, and diaspora communities.

Finally, it should be highlighted that this conceptualization is not exclusive, but rather complementary to established characterizations of post-Soviet de facto states focused on their contested international status and (post-)conflict dimensions.[27] Conceptualising de facto states as small dependent jurisdictions allows to appreciate the relative normalcy of their external dependence,[28] of their key relations with a patron and the legitimacy of choosing close relations and further integration with a patron as an expression of self-determination,[29] be it determined by pragmatic reasons or simply lack of viable alternatives. Accordingly, it aims at reducing the impact of geopolitical assumptions and

26 Indeed, Chapter 5 takes this route by presenting and analysing data related to two of the components of the MIRAB model (aid and bureaucracy) in the context of post-Soviet de facto states.

27 For example, a focus on post-Soviet de facto states' viability in terms of post-conflict violence (Bakke 2011), is complementary, rather than in contrast to, considerations on their viability based on aid entitlement.

28 This "normalcy" does not imply that external dependence and growing integration are universally welcomed in these territories. On the contrary, ambivalent feelings towards the patron are common, for example, in Abkhazia (O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Toal 2011), as they are in some small dependent territories around the world that are constantly trying to adjust their asymmetric relation with their patron.

normative expectations about their long-term path of development by re-shifting the focus on issue-based research that takes in consideration the inevitable inter-relation between internal and external dimensions.[30]

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29 Claims to self-determination within a given territory, however, are still particularly problematic in those cases where ethnic cleansing led to significant changes in the demographic outlook of the territory object of self-determination claims.

30 In other words, frequent references to the importance of external actors throughout this Chapter should not be understood as favouring a reductionist approach that ignores internal dynamics, which are fundamental in determining the outcome of state-building efforts. See also Caspersen (2012, 76).

Chapter 5.

Where does the money come from? Financing the budget and the pension system in post-Soviet de facto states

"With our own resources, we cover for about 20-25 per cent of the state functions, which speaks for itself"

Evgeny Shevchuk (2013a), president of Transnistria

"In other words, with our own resources, we are able to maintain only half of the state apparatus – I am referring to the salary of employees"

Raul Khajimba (2016), president of Abkhazia

Residents of post-Soviet de facto states have access to public goods and services to a large extent thanks to financial resources coming from outside of their territory. For the de facto authorities, it would not be possible to pay pensions, salaries of state employees, and provide public services (including in the health and education sector) at the current level without financial support from abroad. This specific form of aid is the main focus of this chapter: direct transfers to the budget of authorities in de facto states, direct transfers to individuals (in particular, pensioners) residing in de facto states, or indirect support that can be converted into incomes for the budget.[1] Other aspects of the complex blend of external relations that allows residents of de facto states to have access to public services such as health and education, and a degree of welfare are discussed in the next chapter.

Besides describing how – and how much – financial resources are transferred to de facto states, this section develops further the theoretical arguments brought forward in Chapter 4 by putting in context these data, and in particular by discussing the applicability of the MIRAB model originally developed by Bertram and Watters (1985) in reference to Pacific island jurisdictions to describe an economic system based on four pillars: migration, remittances, aid and bureaucracy (i.e. a high number of state employees). The focus here is on the latter two components of the model (aid and bureaucracy) that capture structural forms of external support aimed at the de facto authorities and local residents, rather than on private relations that are at the centre of the other elements of the model (migration and remittances).

Following this approach, this chapter presents statistical data that broadly confirm the applicability to post-Soviet de facto states of relevant characterisations of MIRAB economies. Are external sources of support, rather than domestic sources of revenue, the main element shaping the budget? And accordingly, do budget expenditures adapt with

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1 This definition is specifically adapted to the context of post-Soviet de facto states, as schemes introduced by Russia to assist these territories (through direct payments of pensions, or by not demanding payment for gas in Transnistria) would be unusual in other contexts. As will be seen, however, a large part of patron's assistance to post-Soviet de facto states would be captured by established understandings of budget support, which has been defined "as financial assistance that supports a medium-term program and is provided directly to a recipient country's budget on a regular basis, using the country's own financial management systems and budget procedures" (Koeberle, Stavreski, and Walliser 2006, 5).

aid incomes? Do state employees represent an unusually high share of the workforce? Is there an unusually high number of pensioners? Answers to these questions contribute to our understanding of the impact of non-recognition on the economic structure of post-Soviet de facto states, as well as on the mechanisms that determine the availability of public goods and services to residents of these territories.

The analysis presented in this chapter relies on data coming from multiple sources, including data published by authorities in de facto states, by the patron state, by international organisations, national statistical offices, as well as figures collated from media reports. As will be discussed, issues related to data availability and data reliability substantially limit the accuracy and the comprehensiveness of the figures provided. However, it is argued, available data still offer a meaningful characterisation of the overall structure of the economy in these territories and account for the fundamental role played by external sources in providing monetary incomes for the budget of these entities as well as for a considerable part of the resident population. By putting in context financial support to de facto states, this perspective offers a better picture of the overall economic structure of these territories, and highlights the importance of external relations for the livelihoods of local residents.

In three out of the four cases under analysis, the patron's financial support to the budget takes place in fully formalised and official form. Russia has recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states in 2008, and, since then, there is a dedicated budget line for Moscow's support to these territories that is recorded in both Russia's budget and in that of the recipients. In the case of Nagorno Karabakh, in spite of lack of recognition from Armenia's side, there is a dedicated budget line known under the name of "inter-state loan". In the case of Transnistria, however, there is not a similarly explicit formalised agreement.

After a brief discussion of previous research dealing with how de facto states find resources for their budget, this chapter presents how Transnistria, in spite of lack of recognition and formal agreements, still effectively receives support from Russia to the tune of a few hundreds million dollars a year. The following sections briefly present data on the money transferred from the patron to the budget of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh, as well as on the amount of direct monetary transfers to residents of post-Soviet de facto states that take place through payment of pensions. These data are then used to analyse the economic structure of post-Soviet de facto states, and highlight the relevance of these sources of income for a large share of the

local population. Finally, these figures are compared with corresponding data available on the parent state, neighbouring countries, sub-state entities in the patron state, as well as MIRAB economies in other parts of the world.

The conclusions highlight how in post-Soviet de facto states the share of budget that depends on aid, as well as the share of residents depending on the state for their incomes, is significantly higher than in internationally recognised countries in the region, but is comparable to that found in Russia's most dependent regions as well as in small dependent jurisdictions in other parts of the world. The exceptionally high degree of dependence of post-Soviet de facto states on external support is thus anomalous only at first sight: it becomes "normal" as soon as they are conceptualized as small dependent jurisdictions. As will be seen, similarly to what happens in other small dependent jurisdictions elsewhere in the world, aid fundamentally enhances the state capacity as well as the availability of welfare and services to a resident population, but makes the territory less likely to become self-sustainable in the near future.

5.1. <u>Resourcing small dependent jurisdictions</u>

The political economy of de facto states has evolved significantly since they first appeared, but few scholars have dealt with economic developments in the last decade. Earlier studies focused on the criminal nature of the local economy and the benefits of ethnic war (King 2001; Kemp et al. 2005), but even more recent research has mostly dealt with the situation in these territories prior to 2008 (Prelz Oltramonti 2012, 2015; Broers 2015b). Things however changed substantially in the last decade, and an economic system more dependent on support from a patron has become the norm in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[2]

In the case of Transnistria, Russian aid became an increasingly important source of revenue for financing the local budget since the mid-2000s, as the scope for illicit trade decreased,[3] late Soviet industries became increasingly unprofitable, and the the

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2 Nagorno Karabakh had been consistently receiving direct support from Armenia even earlier.

3 The establishment of a EU border assistance mission in November 2005, and the new customs agreements between Moldova and Ukraine introduced in March 2006 made large scale re-export or smuggling schemes more complicated. For example, EUBAM estimated that re-export of chicken meat in the period from October 2005 to May 2006 had contributed about 7 million USD to Transnistria's budget (Isachenko and Schlichte 2007,

privatization process slowed substantially. About one third of Transnistria's budget came from privatizations in the period 2002-2005 (Isachenko 2012, 119), and only in 2007 did Transnistria formalise its practice of financing its budget by not paying the gas it imported from Russia.[4] Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008 has been a key turning point in the way these territories manage to finance their budget and, more broadly, for the structure of their economy. Abkhazia turned from a subsistent political economy in the period 1993–2008 (Broers 2015b, 276), to a political economy largely based on rents coming in the form of aid from Russia.[5] In the case of South Ossetia, Russia quickly became the predominant source of incomes for the budget, as all other sources of potential incomes (largely based on more or less illicit trade with Georgia) became unavailable. Russia's aid led to a manifold increase in the size of the budget of both of these territories (for example, Abkhazia's budget increased from a paltry 7 million USD in 2001 to over 300 million USD in 2012), but for a number of reasons all four post-Soviet de facto states saw a significant boost to their yearly budget in the period 2007-2009 (see Illustration 5.1). Since current arrangements are likely to remain at the basis of the political economy of these territories for the foreseeable future, the data presented in this chapter focus on this latter phase, highlighting in particular the key role of the patron. This approach differs substantially from most analyses of the economic situation in these territories published by local experts, who mostly focus on the development of domestic capacities looking at possible options for achieving self-sustainable prosperity.[6]

In a valuable theoretical contribution, Broers (2015b) presented alternative models of the political economy of de facto states in the South Caucasus, highlighting how sources of incomes for the budget (and the ruling elite) have important consequences on the

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4   See next section for more details.

5   According to the terminology proposed by Broers (2015b, 7), after 2008 Abkhazia's de facto authorities effectively operate "as a 'monopoly mediator', controlling the interface between exogenous resource opportunities and local society." For a more detailed analysis of Abkhazia's political economy in the period 1993-2008, see Prelz Oltramonti (2015).

6   Studies taking this perspective in Abkhazia include a detailed "Strategy for the socio-economic development of Abkhazia until 2025" sponsored by the president (Tsentr strategicheskikh issledovanij pri Prezidente Respubliki Abkhazii 2015), as well as other publications (Bgazhba, Tsushba, and Shatipa 2014; Ardzinba 2014).

nature of the political system in these territories. In line with the approach at the basis of this research, he also highlights how "genuine economic self-sufficiency may not be the aspiration of de facto leaderships" (Broers 2015b, 16), and laments that implicit understandings of the self-sufficient state as "normal" by Western academics contributes to misplaced expectations on their development.

Research on the impact of aid, and the nexus between aid and development, have traditionally been key elements at the centre of research on new independent states and small isolated territories. Not in the case of post-Soviet de facto states, where the issue of aid has often been mentioned as an argument in the debate on their de facto independence",[7] sometimes implying a false dichotomy between sovereignty and dependence. A set of assumptions have seemingly influenced both the research focus and the vocabulary used to study these territories. Expressions such as 'aid' ('humanitarian aid'/'development aid') or 'technical assistance for state building' have been rarely used to describe Russia's support to Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, even if similar initiatives would have been routinely labelled as such in other contexts. Effectively, no research has been conducted on the successes and failures of external support for state building, on the impact of external dependence on sustainability, or on related issues such as the potential impact of aid volatility (e.g. Iulai 2014), which have been a staple of research on post-conflict and post-colonial societies.

A number of studies have been conducted analysing separate aspects of the political economy of post-Soviet de facto states,[8] but few have specifically focused on the structure of budget revenues. Exceptions include Isachenko's (2009, 2012) work on Transnistria, and the already mentioned article by Broers (2015b) on the South Caucasus cases. This chapter feeds into this literature, by focusing on the patron's role in financing the budget and pension system of these territories, and by comparing key data from post-Soviet de facto states with different sets of entities. Before presenting

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7 For example, the level of the patron's support to these territories has been included, among other criteria, in research aimed at drawing a line between "puppet" and "de facto" state (Berg and Kamilova 2012).

8 For example, comparative research has looked at different levels of development on the two sides of the Dnestr (Străuţiu and Tabără 2015), or the possibly related different levels of domestic legitimacy of the governments in Chişinău and Tiraspol (O'Loughlin, Toal, and Chamberlain-Creangă 2013). Prelz Oltramonti (2015) has focused on the importance of local stakeholders for Abkhazia's political economy in the period 1993-2008.

detailed statistics and introducing a structured comparison, the main sources of external support to the budget and the pension system are outlined for each of the four cases.

5.2. <u>Transnistria, turning gas into cash</u>

In recent years, the main source of (quasi-)financial Russian support to Transnistria has come in the form of natural gas. Given the prominence of this source of incomes for Transnistria's government, it is worth providing additional details on how, in practice, the Russian government sponsors de facto authorities in Tiraspol, without admitting as much, yet doing it in plain sight, through officially recorded exchanges.

Gas is sold to Transnistria on the base of formal contracts stipulated between Gazprom, a joint-stock company controlled by the Russian government,[9] and the Chişinău-based MoldovaGaz, the main gas company in the Republic fo Moldova, which in its turn is also partly owned – and effectively controlled by – Gazprom.[10] MoldovaGaz has a number of subsidiaries, among them, TiraspolTransGaz-Pridnestrov'e,[11] which deals with gas distribution in Transnistria and sells gas to both private consumers and industrial enterprises. Even if physically the gas enters Transnistria directly from Ukraine, gas consumed in Transnistria is officially recorded as imports in Moldova and included in the accounting books of MoldovaGaz. However, while Gazprom demands the full payment of gas consumed in right-bank Moldova, it does not demand payment for the gas consumed in Transnistria.[12]

How does the gas sold by TiraspolTransGaz transform into incomes for Transnistria's budget? Back in 2007, as described by Isachenko (2009), "[t]o ensure timely payment of pensions and other social benefits, local authorities decided to borrow 14 million

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9   According to Gazprom's official website, the "Russian Government controls over 50 per cent of the Company's shares" (Gazprom 2016).

10 As of 2016 (MoldovaGaz n.d.), 50 per cent of MoldovaGaz shares are owned by Gazprom itself, 35.33 per cent by the Moldovan government, and 13.44 per cent by authorities in Tiraspol (whose shares, however, have also been managed by Gazprom since 2005).

11 For additional information on the company's structure and its origins, see also the company's official website, http://www.ttgpmr.com/.

12 Formally, "Gazprom sues Moldovagaz every year to meet the requirements of the forex currency and customs control authorities of Russia in line with which missing the deadlines of repatriation of financial means requires legal measures to be taken" (Infomarket.md 2016), but does not effectively try to collect payments.

USD from the special fund that had been created in 2006 to accumulate gas payments directed to Gazprom." This was only the beginning of a new approach for finding resources for supporting Transnistria's budget, and in particular social expenditures. According to Moldova's ministry the economy, by 1 July 2015, Transnistria's unpaid debt towards Gazprom amounted to more than 4 billion USD (Moldova's ministry of economy 2015), corresponding to about 90 per cent of the total debt due by MoldovaGaz to Gazprom,[13] or about five times as much as Transnistria's yearly GDP. Given the sheer size of the debt, and the overall condition of Transnistria's economy, it appears that Transnistria will never be able to pay back its share of the debt, and that Gazprom does not really expect that the debt will ever be settled by Tiraspol. Yet, the debts is kept on the books, at least in part to be used as a bargaining chip in conflict negotiations.[14]

In practice, simplifying the process, Gazprom continues to provide gas to Transnistria without expectation of repayment; money paid for the gas by consumers and enterprises in Transnistria largely goes to the state budget and is used to support public expenditures, including the payment of pensions and other social subsidies. This happens in line with Transnistria's legislation, albeit without a formal agreement with either Gazprom or the Russian government. The original version of the law "On the peculiarities of payment for natural gas" approved by Transnistria's parliament on 27 December 2006 (President of Transnistria 2007), stated clearly in its article 10 that all money collected for gas consumption should be paid to the company that provides gas; later amendments changed that article, and introduced the possibility to transfer those resources to Transnistria's state budget. Starting with 2009, all money of the gas fund have been transferred to the budget (Całus 2013, 4). This process is public and widely known locally: for example, during a public ceremony on 28 January 2016, Transnistria's president Shevchuk plainly stated that "'gas money' are a source for dealing with the deficit of the republican budget and the pension fund" ("PBR:

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13 It should be highlighted that because of the above-described ownership structure, Moldova's government is best placed to provide exact figures.

14 Russia's deputy prime minister Dmitri Rogozin argues that "'Transnistria's debts for gas are Moldova's debts and they must be repaid,' as long as Chisinau insists that Transnistria is a part of Moldova" (Socor 2012), while they could be counted separately if Chişinău recognised Tiraspol as an equal party to the negotiations.

Denezhnye Sredstva s Gazovogo Scheta Raskhoduyutsya Tol'ko Po Tselevomu Naznacheniyu" 2016).

Authorities in Tiraspol do not publish exact figures on the amount of incomes they have through this source, but it is possible to extrapolate an approximate estimate of the value of gas received by the figures published by multiple media sources at different points in time on the amount of Transnistria's gas debt. Illustration 5.2 presents the growth of the total amount of Transnistria's gas debt through the decade 2006-2015. Based on the same data, Illustration 5.3 shows by how much the debt has increased on a yearly basis: that amount corresponds to the value of the gas Transnistria effectively receives for free each year. However, this does not automatically correspond to the actual incomes to the Transnistrian budget: gas still needs to be turned into money. From this point of view, the amount of money that MoldovaGaz should have paid for it according to its contracts with Gazprom is substantially irrelevant: what matters is how much is demanded for payment locally, and how much is actually possible to collect from both private and business customers in Transnistria.

In order to turn gas into hard currency that can be used for paying salaries and pensions, it is thus absolutely necessary that power-hungry enterprises in Transnistria are able to export their products. They will thus be able to pay for gas consumption (100 per cent of the money paid for gas will actually enter the budget through the gas fund) and will directly or indirectly contribute to the budget by paying taxes on incomes, customs duties and other levies related to workers' salaries. While Russian aid makes for a substantial part of the Transnistrian economy, economic slowdowns are thus worrisome not only for the "usual" reasons (e.g. more unemployment, less taxes paid to the budget, etc.): if enterprises work less, it also means that they consume less gas, so they pay less into the gas fund, and as a consequence there are less money for the budget. Because of this mechanism, a decrease in gas prices is likely to have (at least in the short term) a detrimental effect on incomes to the Transnistrian budget.

It should also be highlighted that while free gas comes from Russia, the actual money effectively comes from exports, i.e. mostly from Chişinău and importers in EU countries (as of 2015, only 8 per cent of Transnistrian exports went to Russia, see Illustration 5.4). Finally, the process can still be profitable for some of the Russian companies (privately or state-owned) who own most of Transnistria's industrial complex. The case of 'Moldavskaya GRES', one of the biggest powerplants in the region, is a particularly telling example. 'Moldavskaya GRES' - which belongs to

Russia's state-owned electricity company 'Inter RAO EES'[15] – buys gas from TiraspolTransGaz at convenient prices, and then sells the electricity it produces to Chişinău at market prices. By paying for the electricity it buys from 'Moldavskaya GRES', given that the bill for the gas consumed by the powerplant is effectively transferred to the Transnistrian budget, Chişinău provides an important part of the actual money that Tiraspol disburses to state employees and pensioners, while Russia-owned 'Inter RAO EES' still makes a profit.[16]

Paying for pensions in Transnistria

Traditionally, residents of Transnistria (including Russian citizens) received a pension only from the Transnistrian authorities, and not from the Russian pension fund. However, since 2008, all Transnistrian pensioners receive an additional component sponsored directly by the Russian Federation (commonly known as the *rossiskaya nadbavka*) as humanitarian support. As of 2014, this component was of about 15 USD per month, but due to the devaluation of the Russian rouble its value decreased significantly in 2015 once converted to the local currency. This form of humanitarian support from the Russian government has remained stable at around 1 billion RUB per year (about 16 million USD at the average 2015 exchange rate).

Since late 2014, pensioners in Transnistria that are also citizens of the Russian Federation have been able to apply for a Russian pension instead of the Transnistrian one. According to official data released by the Russian pension fund, and in line with data issued by authorities in Tiraspol, as of 2015 about 15 000 did the switch (see

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15 More details are available on the powerplant's own official website, http://moldgres.com/.

16 An additional complication is related to the fact that Chişinău pays for electricity in Moldovan Lei: this has led to circumstances when Transnistria's National Bank had substantial amounts of Moldovan Lei that it was not immediately able to convert to US dollars or other currencies (Petrov 2016).

Illustration 5.5).[17] Assuming a pension on a par with the average Transnistrian pension,[18] as of 2015 this form of support amounts to about 22 million USD per year.

5.3. Money for the budget in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Since Russia officially recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries in 2008, the mechanisms for transferring resources to the budget of these de facto states are more straightforward, and are recorded as direct transfers in both the Russian budget as well as in that of the recipients. In both cases, there are officially two main categories of financial support: one formally aimed at socio-economic development that supports regular activities financed by the state budget, and the other that finances mostly infrastructural projects under an 'Investment programme' that is agreed jointly by the sides. Abkhazia's 2015-2017 'Investment programme', for example, includes resources for massive infrastructural projects (roads, electricity network, the water supply and sanitation system), public buildings (e.g. a new building for the Supreme Court in Abkhazia), in education (kindergartens, schools, the local university), in the health sector, as well as works aimed at improving the tourism infrastructure. Funds are also earmarked for improving state capacity, for example by creating a land registry or maps of the water-sanitation systems of the the main cities.

The investment programmes are developed by 'joint inter-governmental commissions for social-economic cooperation' that include representatives of both Russia and Abkhazia/South Ossetia (the programmes for the two territories are agreed separately); even once resources have been transferred to the budget of Abkhazia/South Ossetia, some of the activities need to be specifically agreed with relevant ministries of the

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17 Official figures have not been released, but according to news published on Transnistria's state news agency on 12 January 2016 ("В 2015 Godu Raskhody EGFSS Prevysili Dokhody Pochti Na Milliard Rublei" 2016), quoting Transnistria's Minister for Social Defence and Work, the number of pensioners decreased of about 15 000 individuals between 2014 and 2015; even if she did not explain the reason for such a sudden drop, this must broadly correspond to the number of people who decided to switch to the Russian pensions.

18 If people chose to switch, it would be fair to assume that they expected to receive more, yet media reports highlighted how the devaluation of the Russian Rouble actually led to an economic loss for at least some pensioners. It is worth noticing that, as of 2015, the average pension in Transnistria is more than 50 per cent higher than in both neighbouring Moldova and Ukraine (see Illustration 5.6).

Russian Federation before actual implementation. Recipients however are formally not required to negotiate with Russia on the details of how the 'socio-economic development' component of assistance is spent, in line with one of the basic tenets of budget support in other contexts, i.e. the assumption that there is an "agreement on general budget priorities and expenditures, so that in principle there is no need to earmark funds for specific items" (Koeberle, Stavreski, and Walliser 2006, 7).[19]

A structured analysis of bilateral agreements between Russia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia by Ambrosio and Lange (2016) shows how both Sukhumi and (to a lesser extent) Tskhinvali have a degree of agency in determining the outcome of negotiations with Moscow, in line with prior scholarly observations suggesting that weaker states have disproportionate power in negotiations with powerful states (Ambrosio and Lange 2016, 676). Leaked documents from the negotiations show that the opinions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are taken in consideration at multiple levels in the process of developing the aid package.[20] For example, one document dated 21 October 2013 (O.M. and #SurkovLeaks 2013) points out that the starting point for developing the investment programme 2014-2016 in South Ossetia has been a list prepared by the South Ossetian side, but it also highlights that the actual programme has been developed by the Russian ministry of regions.[21] Leaked documents (Bashlykov and #SurkovLeaks 2013) also testify of Abkhazia's leadership's stubbornness (diplomatically called "principled position") in negotiating aid allocation with Russia, but also of its structural weakness. For example, in July 2012 the Abkhazian side refused on a matter of principle to provide documents requested by Russia to motivate spending on specific

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19 Or, to be more precise, "there may be an understanding between donors and the government that funds may be directed to certain sectors, but there is typically no formal limitation on where they may actually be spent" (Koeberle, Stavreski, and Walliser 2006, 8).

20 The leak in October 2016 of a batch of emails sent and received by the office of Vladislav Surkov (often quoted in media reports with the hashtag #SurvokLeaks), give some insights as to how such negotiations take place. Vladislav Surkov has been Russia's president aide on matters related to Abkhazia and South Ossetia since September 2013. O'Loughlin (2016) has previously argued in favour of using data resulting from leaks in scholarly research. Other authors have previously used Wikileaks as a source for scholarly publications on post-Soviet de facto states (Pegg and Berg 2016).

21 Apparently, most of the objects proposed by the South Ossetian side have not been included in the programme for lack of documentation.

constructions sites; a few months later, they finally gave the requested documentation. Such dynamics show that while Abkhazia and South Ossetia are part of the decision making process on aid in their favour, it is clear at all stages of the process who holds the purse strings.

Indeed, financial contributions from Russia determine budget expenditures in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. According to official data from the governments in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali (see Illustration 5.7 and Illustration 5.8), Russian aid formally represents about two thirds of the budget in Abkhazia, and close to 90 per cent of South Ossetia's budget, and indirectly accounts for a large part of the remaining part.

Given the fact that these territories are not able to finance a budget deficit, their expenditures effectively adapt to the amount received in aid by Russia. When in 2015 a considerable part of the resources dedicated to 'budget investments' in Abkhazia was withhold, the total size of the budget shrunk accordingly. An internal document that emerged from leaked documents (Mamonov and #SurkovLeaks 2013) bluntly states that "the size, structure, dynamics and the actual implementation of the budget of South Ossetia are defined by the relevant components of Russia's financial support."

An argument could be made that these territories could easily survive even if the 'budget investment' component were to be withhold, since this would not have noticeable changes on the capability to deliver services to the resident population in the short term.[22] However, these resources have been fundamental in determining current capability levels of the local authorities, and, since the property of all new buildings is transferred to them, contribute to increase them. Besides, the 'socio-economic development' component serves to finance regular government activities, including paying for the salaries of state employees in the state bureaucracy, as well as in the education and health sector. To all effects and purposes, these sources of income are the main element determining the capacity of the de facto state to deliver core functions.

It should also be highlighted that, in particular in the case of South Ossetia, taxation actually provides for a negligible part of governments incomes. A proposal that appeared in local media to simply remove all forms of taxation for residents of South Ossetia (International Crisis Group 2010b, 4), is unacceptable because it may stir

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22 They would impact, however, on the economic situation, since constructions sites contribute to the overall level of economic activity and provide employment that at least in part is taken up by the local population, or by migrant workers that to some extent contribute to the local economy.

controversy in Russia and would run against ongoing efforts to uniform legislation with the patron, rather than for its practical consequences. But even in Abkhazia, once customs duties are removed, it actually emerges that incomes from other forms of taxation are negligible, which is one of the main reasons why the Abkhazian side insisted on maintaining customs duties on goods imported from Russia (Ambrosio and Lange 2016, 681).

Pensions in Abkhazia

In Abkhazia, there is a local pension fund which is mostly sustained by domestic contributions (Abkhazia's office of state statistic 2014), but pays out very low pensions.[23] As of October 2015, the majority of recipients receive a basic pension by age, corresponding to about 8 USD per month (AbkhaziaInform 2015). Even including the substantially higher pensions for selected categories (including war invalids and war heroes), the average pension offered by the Abkhaz pension fund corresponds to less than 20 USD per month (at 2015 exchange rates). Starting with 2016, Abkhaz pensioners who do not receive a pension from any other country (be it Russia or Georgia), are set to receive an additional 1 000 roubles per month, bringing their pensions from 500 to 1 500 roubles, or from about 7 to about 22 USD per month (Zavodskaya 2016). This means that starting with 2016 also the Abkhazian pension is directly dependent on Russian aid.

In addition, Abkhaz residents who are Russian citizens receive also a Russian pension, which is substantially higher and set to increase in line with bilateral agreements. As of 2015, there were 32 154 recipients of a Russian pension in Abkhazia, receiving an average pension of 6 262 roubles (about 100 USD), an amount due to increase to reach the levels of Russia's Southern Federal district by 2018 (10 179 roubles in 2015), or about 165 USD at the average 2015 exchange rate (Redichkina 2015).[24]

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23 Given the high share of public employees, and the fact that their salary is largely covered by Russian aid, this does not mean however that the pension fund, even at current disbursement levels, would be sustainable without external support.

24 Given the fall of the rouble's exchange rate against the dollar in 2015, the increase seems less spectacular than earlier expected once figures are converted to USD. However, in Abkhazia the incomes from an average Russian pension may still be higher than active work in a number of sectors; according to official statistics, as of 2015, the average salary in Abkhazia was 9 056 RUB, or about 150 USD per month. For considerations on the importance of Russian pensions in Abkhazia pre-2008, see also Kolstø and Blakkisrud

Overall, in 2015 Russia delivered about 40 million USD to Abkhazia in the form of direct cash transfers to pensioners, and, given the large number of state employees, indirectly provided a large share of the about 10 million USD of contributions that financed Abkhazia's domestic pensions fund.

Pensions in South Ossetia

As of 2016, there are about 700 people who are officially receiving a Russian pension in South Ossetia, and about 4 000 who receive a South Ossetian pension.[25] Given the almost total dependence on Russian aid of the official economy in South Ossetia, both are ultimately covered almost exclusively by Russian aid, also considering the fact that private companies and employees working in South Ossetia do not pay contributions to the pension fund.[26] The minimum pension in South Ossetia grew from about 9 USD in 2010 to about 70 USD in 2015; as of 2015, the average pension in South Ossetia stood at about 100 USD per month (Res news agency 2015).

5.4. Money for the budget in Nagorno Karabakh

Also in the case of Nagorno Karabakh, direct transfers to the budget from the patron (in this case, Armenia) regularly cover more than 50 per cent of overall government incomes (see Illustration 5.9 and Illustration 5.10). The transfer is formally recorded as an 'inter-state loan', and there is some debate on whether there is any repayment arrangement in place (Broers 2015b, 13). Given the circumstances, however, it is clear that the inter-state loan is to be understood to all effects and purposes as direct budget support. It formally comes with no strings attached, and it is officially used in full to support regular budget expenditures, including for financing the pension system (expenditures on "social pensions and allowances" constitute about 25 per cent of the whole budget of Nagorno Karabakh).

(2008, 494), who highlighted how this source of income could make "all the difference in the world" for the livelihood of local residents.

25 Apparently, a significant number of local residents receive a Russian pension in South Ossetia, but are still registered in North Ossetia's pension fund as was previously required, so they are not included in these statistics.

26 A new law on the pension fund introducing contributions by private companies and their employees was being discussed in 2016 (Kotaeva 2016).

These figures, however, do not capture the fundamental role of the Armenian diaspora as a key donor contributing – among other things - to health and education facilities. Since donations that come from diaspora organisations do not pass through the budget of authorities in Stepanakert, they are not included in these calculations.

5.5. <u>Comparing small dependent jurisdictions</u>

Now that external funding mechanisms at the basis of budget formation in post-Soviet de facto states have been outlined, it is time to put in context some of the figures that have emerged. As debated at length in Chapter 4, the literature on small dependent territories, and in particular island states with strong connections with a patron, provides inputs that are particularly useful for analysing the political economy of post-Soviet de facto states. This chapter proceeds in this direction by singling out two defining features of the political economy of small dependent jurisdictions as characterised by the MIRAB model (Bertram and Watters 1985), namely the high share of aid as part of budget incomes and the high proportion of state employees in the workforce.[27]

These two indicators are compared across different sets of jurisdictions. First, the data are compared with global or regional statistics, which shows that post-Soviet de facto states would indeed look anomalous if compared along these parameters with the average independent state or with its post-Soviet neighbours (including parent and patron state). Then, the same figures are compared with a group of small dependent jurisdictions, namely the five island jurisdictions included by Bertram and Watters (1985) in their first study on MIRAB economies and the three countries that are currently under Compact of Free Association with the United States, an agreement which – as debated in Chapter 4 – has some similarities with the treaties that bound Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Russia.[28]

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27 The first two components of the model, aid and migration, are determinant for the livelihood of individuals and families, but are less relevant in terms of external relations that go through the authorities of a jurisdiction.

28 The five cases included in the original studies of the MIRAB model are the Cook Islands, Niue, Kiribati, Tokelau and Tuvalu; the three countries under a Compact of Free Association with the United States are the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau. These are only a subset of all the MIRAB economies later identified by Bertram (2006) and other scholars, but they represent some of the variety found within MIRAB model (both U.N. member states and associated territories, some of them under United States' patronage while others dependent on New Zealand's support).

These are all small jurisdictions in the Pacific Ocean, and those among them that are internationally recognised as independent have been accepted as members of the United Nations only after 1990. They obviously have very little in common with post-Soviet de facto states, but in spite of the obvious differences, their political economy share important features. The main goal of this comparison is to highlight that some key features of the political economy of post-Soviet de facto states are not unique to them (or to unrecognised states), but rather common among small dependent jurisdictions around the world.[29]

Finally, also considering the propensity expressed by at least Transnistria and South Ossetia for joining their patron state, Russian regions are proposed as an alternative set of comparison. This allows to highlight how post-Soviet de facto states would be very different from the average federated entity of the Russian Federation, but very much in line with those found in the regions that are most isolated or dependent on transfers from Moscow (often, republics in Russia's Northern Caucasus).

5.6. Aid as a key element of the budget and the local economy

Bertram (1999, 106) described island states in the Pacific Ocean as being in "a region where governments generally balance their budgets by letting spending change with revenues, where the balance of payments current account is seldom far from balance and external debt remains modest", and highlighted that "external sources of financing that do not leave a residue of debt – current account transfers – are the key to the economic performance of small islands" (Bertram 1999, 107). As the data presented above demonstrate, these characterisations largely apply to post-Soviet de facto states, once we accept that both Transnistria's 'gas debt' and Nagorno Karabakh's 'inter-state loan' are effectively to be understood as current account transfers. The fact that post-Soviet de facto states receive more than 50 per cent of their budget incomes through financial support from the patron would be clearly unusual for larger countries, but is

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29 Also post-conflict territories may effectively share some of these features (a disproportionate amount of aid in the local budget, and an unusually high share of people with registered cash incomes receiving it from the state). However, in the case of post-conflict interventions, all actors involved are aware that this support will not last indeterminately, while in the case of small dependent jurisdictions there is usually an understanding that external support will continue for the foreseeable future.

not unseen in independent micro-states in other parts of the world. It is also frequent for sub-state entities to depend heavily on transfers from the central to the local budget.

International comparisons are often complicated by different accounting mechanisms and underlying dynamics. The most established global dataset on official development assistance (OECD 2014) includes in its data both general budget support as well as targeted aid that never enters the state budget of recipient countries. The data presented in Illustration 5.11, however, include only aid that goes through the budget of the central authorities (and thus not including – among other things – support paid directly to pensioners). This choice is motivated by both availability of relevant data and the focus on the research. On the one hand, in the case of post-Soviet de facto states reliable data are available concerning the aid flows that go through the budget, but not overall external support. On the other, the data presented aim to clarify to what extent external aid is determinant for supporting state capacity in de facto jurisdictions, and how much of the incomes of state employees are covered by external sources. Illustration 5.11 shows that – in line with the definition of MIRAB – it is common for selected jurisdictions to have more than one third of their budget covered by external funding.[30]

Extending the comparison to federal entities of the Russian federation, it emerges that the level of subsidy received by de facto states is in line with that of some Russian regions, in particular those located in the northern Caucasus such as Ingushetia or Chechnya or those located in peripheral areas, such as Altai, Tuva and Kamchatka (see Illustration 5.12).[31] On the contrary, the share of international aid to internationally recognised post-Soviet countries is significantly lower, and remains below 20 per cent

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30 OECD/World Bank data (World Bank 2016) including also aid that does not go through the state budget actually show that some of these jurisdictions receive much larger external support. For example, in 2014 official development assistance to Micronesia has been about twice as much as budget expenditures, and Kiribati's was about 65 per cent of budget expenditures, with only a small share of it passing through Kiribati's budget.

31 Incidentally, the history of Tuva may be particularly relevant to scholars with an interest in international recognition (and lack thereof) in the region: in 1921 the Soviet Union officially recognised the independence of Tannu-Tuva and even exchanged diplomatic representatives with it (Friters 1937, 328–29). Mongolia was the only other country that followed suit. In 1944, Tannu-Tuva was officially annexed by the Soviet Union, and became an autonomous *oblast'* within Soviet Russia (Mongush 1993).

of budget expenditures for all countries for which data are available, even including in the calculations also non-budgetary assistance (see Illustration 5.13).

In brief, the data confirm the observation that in post-Soviet de facto states aid accounts for a significant share of budget revenues, to an extent that is common in Russia's regions in the Northern Caucasus and in small dependent jurisdictions in other world regions, but is very distant from what is found in internationally recognised countries, including in the post-Soviet space.

5.7. The key role of state employees and pensioners

In MIRAB economies, the share of people whose income directly depends on the state budget is unusually high: "the relationship of most of these Pacific micro-economies to the metropolitan economies of the region is akin to that of a suburb, inhabited mainly by pensioners and bureaucrats, within one of those economies" (Bertram 1986, 810). Is this true also for post-Soviet de facto states?

In comparison with the 91 countries and territories for which corresponding data are available in established datasets (ILOSTAT 2016), post-Soviet de facto states have an extremely high share of state employees in the workforce, to an extent that – excluding socialist states such as Cuba – is only found in MIRAB economies such as the Marshall Islands and Réunion, or in petrol states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Illustration 5.14). The share of state employees found in de facto states would thus be unusual for independent countries in the post-Soviet context (see Illustration 5.15), but would be comparable to that found in some regions of the Russian federation, in particular in the Northern Caucasus (see Illustration 5.16).[32]

Comparing the share of state-employees in MIRAB economies and post-Soviet de facto states may however be partially misleading, as authors who worked on Pacific islands seemingly took for granted that all state employees were working as civil servants or in public sectors such as education and health, while in post-Soviet de facto states productive state-owned enterprises are not uncommon. In order to confirm that the high share of state employees is not related, for example, to the fact that lack of international recognition creates a difficult environment for privatizations, disaggregated data

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32 Relevant data for South Ossetia are not publicly available; however, considering the economic situation in the territory, in all likelihood the share of state employees is due to be even higher than in the other post-Soviet de facto states.

including only people working in the public administration have been extracted. Do post-Soviet de facto states have bloated bureaucracies?

Illustration 5.18 presents disaggregated data singling out "bureaucrats" (i.e. civil servants working in the public administration, and excluding people working in the health and education sector) in post-Soviet de facto states and Russian regions. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia present a share of civil servants in the workforce unseen among Russian regions, and even more industrialised Transnistria has a share of bureaucrats that is significantly higher than the average of the Russian Federation, and even of the average in the North Caucasus federal district.

Disaggregated data for MIRAB economies are not always readily available. However, data for Tuvalu and Palau highlight that in such territories public servants may be as much as 30 or even 40 per cent of the registered workforce, allowing once more to put in perspective the seemingly unusual data coming from post-Soviet de facto states (see Illustration 5.19).

Registered monetary incomes in post-Soviet de facto states

In order to account for all the people that directly depend on their incomes from the capacity of the authorities to support their budget and obtain external assistance, also pensioners should be included in the calculation. Adding pensioners to the picture, makes it even more clear that in post-Soviet de facto states a very substantial share of people with a registered monetary income, receive it from the state: 88 per cent (for a total of 74 774 individuals) in the case of Abkhazia, 76 per cent (59 803) in the case of Nagorno Karabakh and 72 per cent (205 400 individuals) in the case of Transnistria (see Illustration 5.20 and Illustration 5.21) according to official statistics. This is a level that is significantly higher than the average in the Russian Federation (57 per cent): among Russian regions, only the republics of Ingushetia, Chechnya and Tuva have more than 70 per cent of people receiving their incomes from the state (see Illustration 5.22). It should also be highlighted that pensioners in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia mostly receive pension payments that are on average significantly higher than those received by residents of the parent states, Moldova and Georgia (see Illustration 5.6), and that they benefit of an earlier retirement age: 55 in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (but 63 in Moldova, and 60 for women and 65 for men in Georgia).

5.8. Issues of data availability and reliability

These data, of course, tell only part of the picture and may be partially misleading: while the total number of pensioners and state employees is most probably accurate, not all private economic actors are registered, in particular outside of the main towns or in cross-border areas. Also, such figures do not account in any way of remittances, which represent a significant part of monetary incomes for many households in the region under analysis. However, considering the absolute number of people employed in sectors for which reliable data exist (state employees and pensioners), the relatively early pension age, as well as estimates of the total population of de facto states, it seems difficult to imagine that the number of private employees would be so much higher as to substantially change the overall picture. The informal economy is certainly significant, but assuming levels of people engaged in subsistence or informal economy comparable to those found in Russian republics in the Northern Caucasus – for example – the characterisation provided would remain substantially unchanged.[33] Labour data on Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh seem to be more complete, with a level of informal employment probably similar to that estimated in Moldova or Armenia.[34]

There are a few segments of the data that are evidently flawed. In Georgian-inhabited Gali, according to official statistics, less than 6 per cent of residents are formally in employment, but clearly many more are working.[35] In South Ossetia, the official figure on pensioners is impossibly low, and their number grows at an unrealistically quick rate.[36] But the data about these territories are so much unlike those of most recognised states that even artificially skewing the figures (e.g. by doubling the number of

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33 According to estimates produced by the statistical office of the Russian government (Russian statistical office 2015), employment in the informal sector is about 45 per cent of the registered workforce in the North Caucasus federal district (but as high as 63 per cent in Chechnya, 57 per cent in Daghestan and 51 per cent in Inguhsetia).

34 For example, estimates on the "Share of informal employment in total non-agricultural employment" for the period 2000-2007 put the figure at 21.5 per cent in Moldova (Jütting and Laiglesia 2009, 35). Other estimates referring to 2009 put it at 15.9 per cent in Moldova and at 19.8 per cent in Armenia (ILO Department of Statistics 2012, 4–5).

35 According to Oltramonti (Oltramonti 2016, 247), "around half of [Gali's] residents' income derived from cash transfers, whether IDP allowances or Georgian pensions; the other half derived from activities such as small-scale cross-CFL trade or subsistence farming, with cash crops such as hazelnuts cultivated on the side and sold over the ceasefire line."

pensioners in South Ossetia, or by doubling the number of private-sector workers in Abkhazia) the overall picture would remain unchanged.

On the other hand, figures related to pensions are due to be mostly accurate, since these are money that are actually dispensed to people and must be recorded in the budget of highly bureaucratised structures such as the Russian pension fund, pension funds of de facto states or local governments. Besides, starting with 2015, Russia has introduced a procedure that demands that Russian citizens residing abroad re-register once a year to demonstrate that they are still among the living in order to receive their pension. This process, aimed at preventing frauds to the Russian pension fund, not only contributes to the fact that statistics are up to date, but also serves as additional evidence to demonstrate that pension recipients actually do live in the de facto states, or at least have some meaningful connection to it. To the extent that they represent only a part of the picture (for example, they do not include military cooperation), also data on budget transfers between patron and de facto states are due to be mostly accurate, representing transfers of resources that actually take place. Finally, the data provided are in line with characterisations of the local economy found in previous research. For example, O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Toal (2014, 440) point out that "in the ruined subsistence economy of Abkhazia heavily reliant on external aid from Russia, incomes are strongly dependent on salaries in the state sector (public services including pensions, education, health care, and law enforcement)."

All things considered, even allowing for a degree of inaccuracy, it is safe to claim that in line with the MIRAB model, state employees and pensioners represent a larger share of people with a monetary income than usually found in the post-Soviet context (or in independent states elsewhere), but to an extent that is not uncommon in some dependent sub-state entities inside the Russian Federation or dependent territories elsewhere in the world. As a consequence, the capability to find resources for the state budget and the pension system is particularly important, and has direct consequences on the livelihood of a large share of the residents of post-Soviet de facto states.

5.9. Conclusions

The data presented in this chapter show clearly that most of the resources needed to support the budget of post-Soviet de facto states come in the form of current account

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36 This is most probably due to a legacy of previous arrangements, when local residents used to register in North Ossetia's office of the Russian pension fund.

transfers from the patron. In the case of Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia additionally funds a significant part of the pension system. It also appears that state-employees and pensioners make up for about two thirds or more of the total number of residents with registered monetary incomes. Based on the above observations and on the data presented through the chapter, it is possible to draw some conclusions.

First, financial resources coming from the patron are the main determinant of budget expenditures, and thus of the actual capability of de facto authorities to maintain the current level of state capacity, or possibly enhance it, in the medium to long term. External support is thus fundamental in determining availability of, and access to, public goods and services.

Second, in post-Soviet de facto states the share of people whose income depends on the state (state employees and pensioners) is significantly higher than in recognised states in the region and in most other countries elsewhere in the world. Authorities may not be widely recognised internationally, but at least in this respect they are directly responsible for the livelihood of a larger share of local residents than is the case for the government in the respective parent or patron state. With the exception of Nagorno Karabakh, the pension systems of post-Soviet de facto states are also more generous than those of their respective parent states, with an earlier retirement age and higher average pension payments. Even not accounting for remittances, direct monetary transfers from outside of the territory are substantially more determinant to the functioning of the state authorities and to the livelihood of its residents than in most internationally recognised states, both in the post-Soviet context and – on average – elsewhere. These data are only at first sight anomalous: once post-Soviet de facto states are conceptualised as small dependent jurisdictions, it appears that they share such features with territories on both sides of the sovereignty divide, i.e. both internationally recognised states in other world regions and sub-state entities closer to them (more specifically, in the Russian Federation) that depend on transfers from the federal centre. In other words, strong dependence on external assistance for financing the budget and a high share of resident whose income depends on the state authorities are common features of small dependent jurisdictions across the globe, and in particular to those island economies that fit the MIRAB model. Accordingly, these are not an exclusive feature of unrecognised states.[37]

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37 While this research has focused on the comparison with micro-states in the Pacific, also dependent jurisdictions in other world regions share such features. For example, until

Third, such consistent financial support from an external patron, while increasing the capacity of local authorities and having a positive impact on the welfare of the population, also makes these territories less and less self-sustainable. As expectations on service delivery and direct incomes for state employees and pensioners grow significantly faster than the capacity of local authorities to finance independently such outputs, their dependence on the patron's support becomes stronger. Similarly to what happens in MIRAB economies, the development of profitable private enterprises that are not dependent on aid is difficult to achieve in post-Soviet de facto states, not only because of their insularity or post-conflict dynamics, but also because aid (and possibly remittances) "crowd out" options for export-led growth, including by artificially increasing wages.[38] Even if the MIRAB model is considered to be more durable and persistent than widely expected, and export-led growth unlikely in this context, there are however ways out of it that do not imply a fall back to subsistence economy and massive migration, tourism being perhaps the most important (Treadgold 1999). But

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recently Greenland received more than half of its budget from Denmark (still about 36 per cent, as of 2015), and about 40 per cent of its workforce is employed in "public administration and service" (StatBank Greenland 2015).

38 One of the dynamics found in MIRAB economies by Bertram (1999, 111) is that "the size and persistence of financial flows into island economies from overseas, and labor migration out, have the effect of making capitalist private-sector activity unprofitable because of the resulting combination of strong exchange rates and high wages." Indeed, a strong exchange rate and relatively high wages are among the problems that, for example, Transnistria's enterprises have to face, and are important obstacles to the export-led growth that is often presented as ideal for the territory. Bertram (1986, 809) also argued that "capitalism as a system of production has no major role in these economies except where it is introduced as a deliberate act of social engineering by policymakers, with subsidies provided to ensure profitability". Again, it is clear that some of Transnistria's enterprises remain in activity thanks to subsidised gas prices, but also in South Ossetia there are example of companies set up through Russian grants which do not seem to make market sense outside of a subsidised environment (Gukemukhov 2017). For a critique of the hypothesis that aid and remittances "crowd out" export growth in MIRAB economies, see Fraenkel (2006). An IMF working paper based on a large-scale quantitative analysis highlights that aid leads to over-valuation of the local currency, and largely as a consequence "aid inflows do have systematic adverse effects on growth, wages, and employment in labor intensive and export sectors" (Rajan and Subramanian 2005, 22); indeed, this dynamic could well apply in particular to the Transnistrian case.

ultimately, as Pacific islands can testify, being a MIRAB economy has many advantages, and for large segments of the resident population and its ruling class reaping its benefits may be preferable to struggling to escape it.

In Chapter 4, it was argued that employing analytical tools developed by scholars of island jurisdictions contributes to a better understanding of key features of the economy of territories which, largely due to conflict and lack of recognition, have become "insular" and strongly dependent on a patron. In this chapter, some observations on the nature of MIRAB economies have been tested on post-Soviet de facto states, in particular in reference to the key role of external aid and to the large share of people whose income directly depends on the state in these territories. At least in these respects, a number of characterizations drawn from the literature on MIRAB economies clearly applies also to post-Soviet de facto states.

Conflict and lack of international recognition have been determinant in making these territories dependent, and in increasing their isolation. Since there is no indication that widespread international recognition, reintegration or some other form of agreement on their status is forthcoming, such features should be analytically considered inherent characteristics of these territories. Further studies would be needed to test other features of the MIRAB model, and consider their analytical potential in reference to debates on the sustainability and development patterns available to post-Soviet de facto states. Additional research on the first half of the MIRAB model (migration and remittances) focused on de facto states would also offer valuable contributions to understanding how cross-border dynamics fundamentally determine the economic structure of a territory and the livelihood of its residents.

The next chapter, however, focuses on non-financial sources of external support that allow residents of post-Soviet de facto states to have access to public goods and services. As will be seen, while only the patron effectively contributes directly to the budget of de facto states, a variety of actors – including international organizations, the parent state, and diaspora organizations – provide support in different forms either directly to citizens or to structures under the control of the de facto authorities, such as institutions in the health and education sector.

5.10.　　Illustrations and tables

Yearly budget expenditures in post-Soviet de facto states
in million USD

Transnistria

| | | | | | 166 | 223 | 210 | 227 | 370 | 352 | 323 | 361 | 324 | 367 | 310 |

Abkhazia

| 7 | 8 | 12 | 16 | 25 | 41 | 55 | 73 | 131 | 148 | 262 | 316 | 250 | 220 | 82 |

South Ossetia

| | | | | | | | | | | | 271 | 160 | 190 | 110 |

Nagorno Karabakh

| | 20 | 21 | 27 | 44 | 62 | 90 | 164 | 152 | 166 | 181 | 168 | 170 | 188 | 174 |
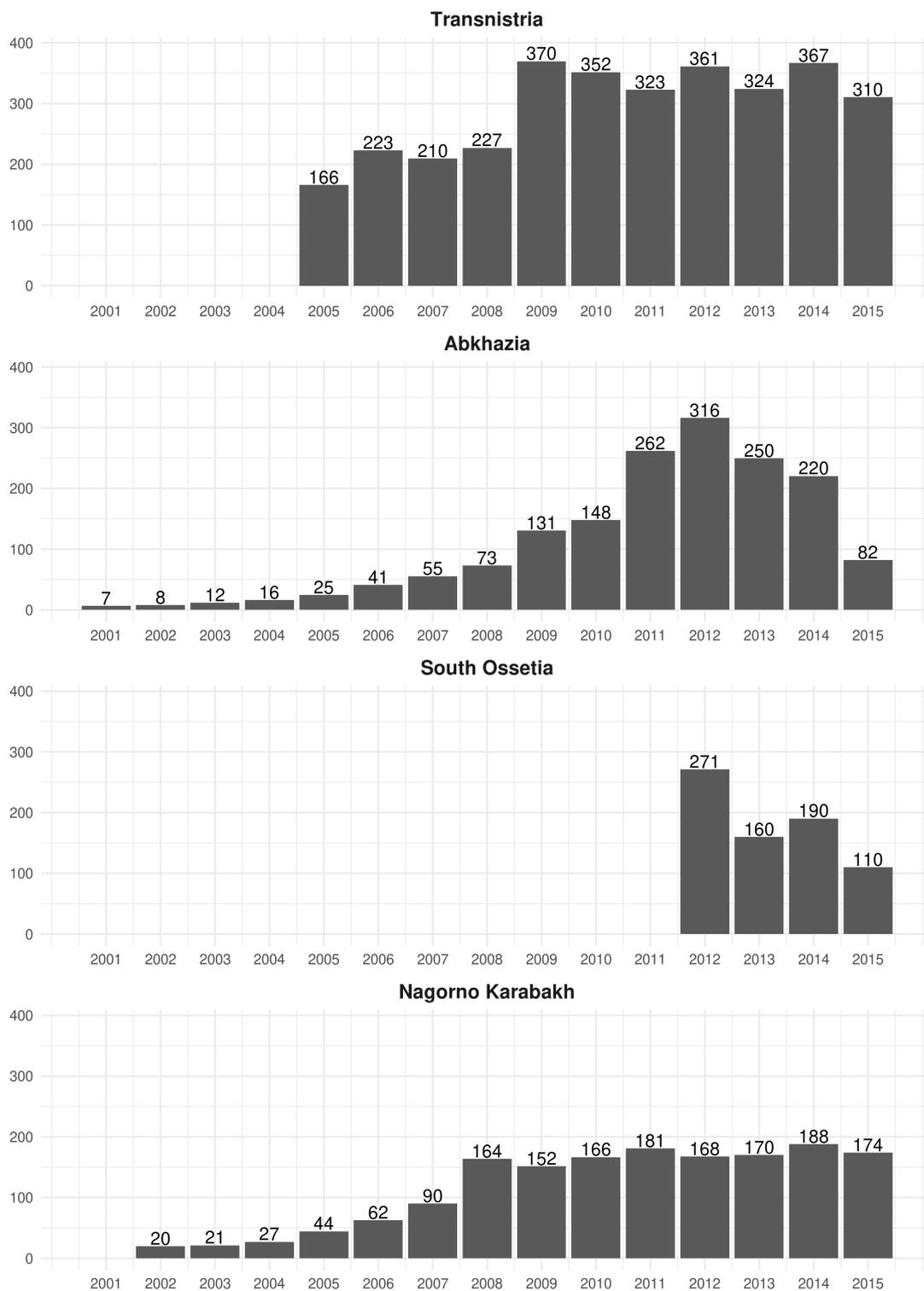
Source: Statistical yearbook for Transnistria, Abkhazia and Nagorno Karabakh; Media reports for South Ossetia
Russian, Armenian and Transnistrian central bank for exchange rates

Illustration 5.1: Yearly budget expenditures in post-Soviet de facto states (2001-2015, in million USD)

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Details on Illustration 5.1

Data on budget incomes and expenditures are traditionally included in the statistical yearbooks published by authorities in de facto governments. In the case of Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh, a backlog of publications is available directly on the website of the relevant statistical office.[39] In the case of Abkhazia, only recent statistical yearbooks are available on the official website,[40] while some issues of previous years are available in a scanned version on other reputable websites.[41] In the case of South Ossetia, the official website of the statistical department does not make public its yearbook (that is anyway regularly issued and presented in Tskhinvali), and official government websites do not publish information on the budget. Relevant data for recent years are however pedantically mentioned in official reports following, for example, parliamentary discussions on the budget: figures taken from multiple media reports have been collated to create this graph.[42] During their fieldwork in South Ossetia before 2008, Kolstø and

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39 In the case of Transnistria, as of January 2016, all issues of the statistical yearbook released between 2013 and 2015 used to be available at the following link http://mepmr.org/pechatnye-izdaniya/statisticheskij-ezhegodnik-pmr; as of June 2017, only the yearbooks for 2015 and 2016 are available at the following link: http://mer.gospmr.org/pechatnye-izdaniya.html. For Nagorno Karabakh, see http://stat-nkr.am/en/2010-11-24-11-18-12. Where not otherwise stated, all links have been retrieved in June 2017.

40 As of June 2017, only the statistical yearbooks for 2013 and 2014 are available on the official website of the Department for state statistics of the republic of Abkhazia, http://ugsra.org/ofitsialnaya-statistika.php

41 Abkhazia's statistical yearbook for 2014 is available on the website of Abkhazia's state university (http://lib.agu.site/books/144/278/); the 2005 issue is available on Apsnyteka (http://apsnyteka.org/2382-abkhaziya_v_tsifrakh_2005.html), an established repository of books and publications on Abkhazia.

42 http://ugo-osetia.ru/index.php/2011-06-30-23-44-4/official/item/3176-ob-ispolnenii-gosudarstvennogo-byudzheta-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-za-2013-god; http://ugo-osetia.ru/index.php/2011-06-30-23-44-4/documents/item/4002-o-gosudarstvennom-byudzhete-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-na-2015-god; http://south-ossetia.info/postanovlenie-parlamenta-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-o-zakone-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-o-gosudarstvennom-byudzhete-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-na-2016-god/; http://ugo-osetia.ru/index.php/2011-06-30-23-44-4/documents/item/4990-ob-ispolnenii-gosudarstvennogo-byudzheta-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-za-2014-god;

Blakkisrud (2008, 497) were told that "detailed information about the budget is […] for official use only."

Data, however, are originally published in the local currency (Transnistrian Rouble, Russian Rouble, and Armenian Dram). In the case of Transnistria, TRUB/USD daily exchange rates starting with 2005 have been exported from the website of the Transnistrian national bank, and the correspondent yearly average has thus been calculated.[43] Average exchange rates for previous years have been calculated from items included in relevant yearbooks that presented data both in TRUB and USD. In the case of the Russian Rouble and the Armenian Dram, daily exchange rates are available on the website of the respective national bank, and yearly averages have been calculated accordingly.[44]

The data presented in this graph point at trends, and outline the order of magnitude of central budgets of post-Soviet de facto states. Different accounting practices as well as the whether different sources of external assistance enter the central budget complicate direct comparison among cases.

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43 Daily exchange rates are published by Transnistria's Republican Bank http://www.cbpmr.net/kurs_val.php?lang=ru .

44 For the Russian Rouble, see http://www.cbr.ru/eng/currency_base/dynamics.aspx?VAL_NM_RQ=R01235&date_req1=01.01.1995&date_req2=31.12.2016&rt=1&mode=1; for the Armenian Dram, see: http://api.cba.am/ExchangeRatesToCSV.ashx?DateFrom=2000-01-01&DateTo=2016-12-31&ISOCodes=USD,GBP,RUB,EUR.
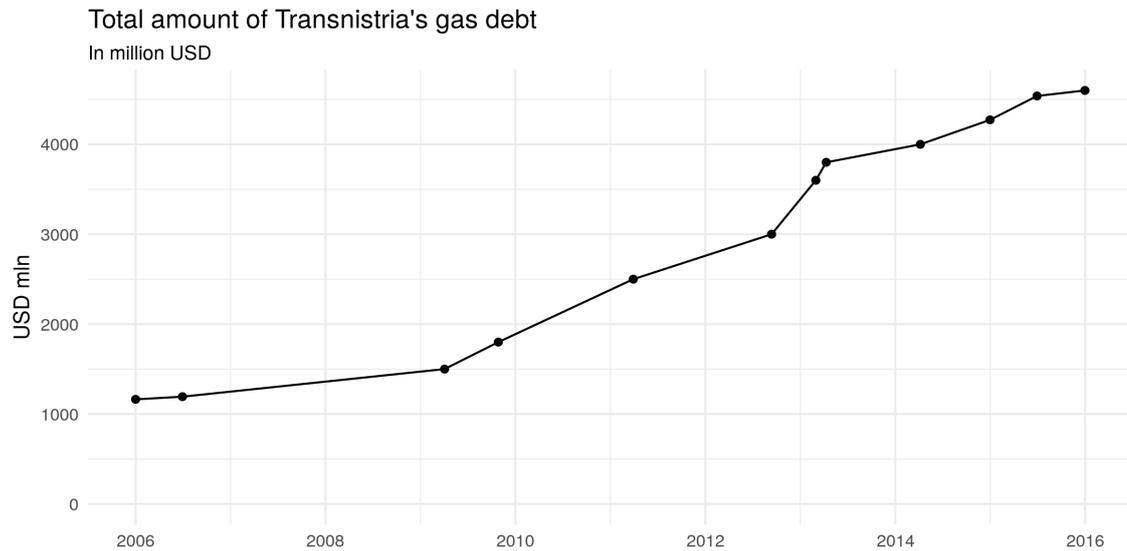
Illustration 5.2: Total amount of Transnistria's gas debt (2006-2015)
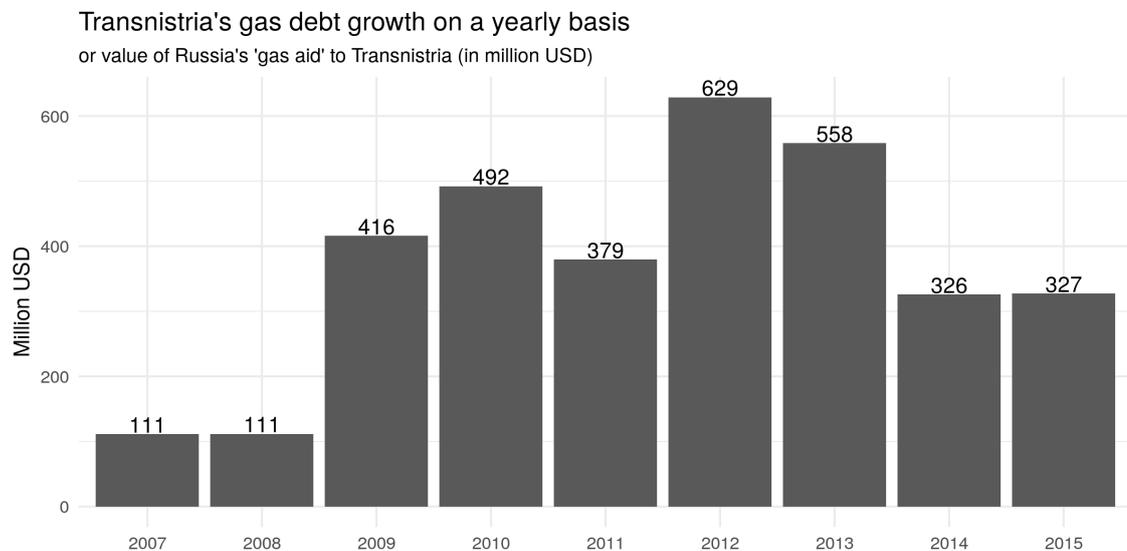
Illustration 5.3: Transnistria's debt growth year on year (2007-2015)

Details on Illustration 5.2 and Illustration 5.3

Official sources in Tiraspol or Chişinău do not publish regularly exact data on the total amount of Transnistria's gas debt. Relevant data, however, have been mentioned in media reports since the mid 2000s. Also, at least in one occasion, the Moldovan government did publish exact figures on the total amount of debt due to Gazprom by authorities in Transnistria.[45] Starting with 2015, economy website Infomarket.Md

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45 http://www.mec.gov.md/ro/content/ministerul-economiei-raspuns-la-adresarea-4000-de-
    cetateni-legatura-cu-datoriile.

reports details on the total debt due by Moldova (including both Transnistria and right-bank Moldova) to Gazprom, based on the data published by Gazprom itself in line with Russian legislation.[46] Even if these data do not separate Transnistria's debt from that of right-bank Moldova, they still allow to provide meaningful estimates of the debt due by Transnistria, since officials in Chişinău occasionally provide information related to the division of the debt, with Transnistria's debt usually in the 85-90% range of the total. In a July 2016 interview, Moldova's ambassador to Moscow mentioned the figure of 88%;[47] Moldova's prime minister, after a meeting with Gazprom representatives in Moscow in March 2017, said that 88.6% of the total debt pertains to Transnistria; accepting this may not be perfectly accurate at all times, 88% is the coefficient applied in calculations whenever only data for the total debt are available.

Small inconsistencies in the data can easily be explained by the constant need to convert figures based on exchange rates (Gazprom publishes data in Russian Roubles, Moldovan sources often use Moldovan Lei, or USD).

The graphs and the summary table reported below includes only data that allow for a coherent pattern of debt growth that is in line with the most trustworthy sources; excluded data points were either approximate figures (e.g. "a debt of 3 billion USD"), or showed small differences with other data due to exchange rates. In no occasion did reliable sources such as those included present incompatible data.

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46 The official website of MoldovaGaz routinely quotes data as published by Informarket.md. Relevant data for recent years could also be found directly in relevant documentation published by Gazprom; see for example http://www.gazprom.ru/f/posts/ 36/607118/gazprom-ifrs-2q2016-ru.pdf, page 39.

47 https://sputniknews.com/europe/20160705/1042449911/moldova-russia-gazprom-dept.html.

Date	USDmln	Source	Link
2006-01-01	1 163.4	NovostiPMR	http://old.vspmr.org/News/?ID=469
2006-06-30	1 193	NovostiPMR	http://old.vspmr.org/News/?ID=469
2009-04-03	1 500	NovostiPMR	http://old.vspmr.org/News/?ID=2853
2009-10-27	1 800	VSPMR	http://old.vspmr.org/News/?ID=3485
2011-03-30	2 500	OSW	http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2011-03-30/dividing-moldovagaz-and-moldovas-gas-debts
2012-09-12	3 000	NovostiPMR	http://novostipmr.com/ru/news/12-09-12/moskva-podtalkivaet-pridnestrove-v-edinuyu-moldaviyu
2013-03-01	3 600	Regnum	http://regnum.ru/news/polit/1644426.html
2013-04-10	3 800	Regnum	http://regnum.ru/news/polit/1647200.html
2014-04-07	4 000	Regnum	http://regnum.ru/news/polit/1647200.html
2014-12-31	4 272.4	InfomarketMd	http://www.moldovagaz.md/userfiles/images/presa-2015/presa_01-09-2015_InfoMarket_ro.png
2015-06-30	4 538.16	InfomarketMd	http://www.moldovagaz.md/userfiles/images/presa-2015/presa_01-09-2015_InfoMarket_ro.png
2015-12-31	4 599.58	InfomarketMd	http://www.moldovagaz.md/press/ro/2016/september/article771

Table 5.1: Amount of Transnistria's debt to Gazprom

Year	USDmln
2007	111.17
2008	111.47
2009	415.99
2010	492.29
2011	379.44
2012	628.84
2013	558.17
2014	325.99
2015	327.18

Table 5.2: Growth of Transnistria's gas debt during a given year in million USD.

Destinations of Transnistria's exports, as share of total exports

According to Transnistria's statistical yearbooks (2002-2015)
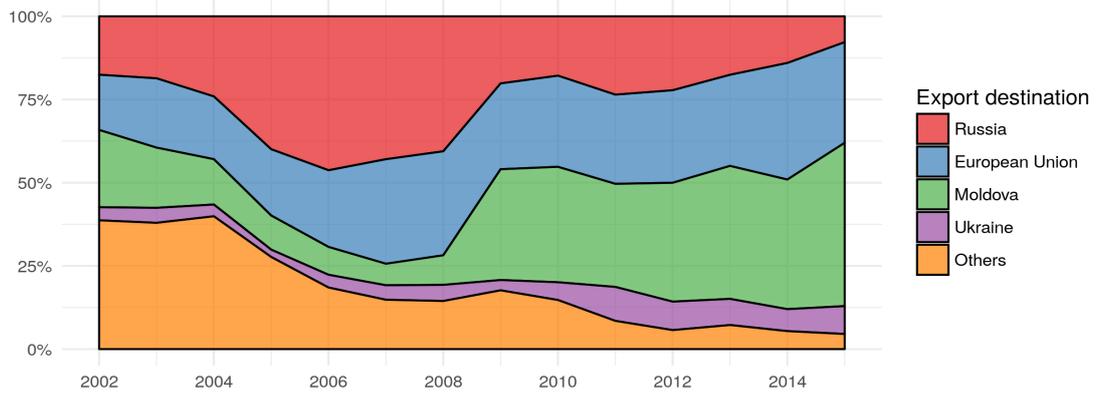
*Due to limitations in available statistics, 'European Union' includes only data related to:
France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania and Slovakia

Illustration 5.4: Destination of Transnistria's exports, as share of total exports (2002-2015)

Number of recipients of Russian pensions outside of Russia (in 2015)

Includes ten countries with highest number of pensioners plus South Ossetia
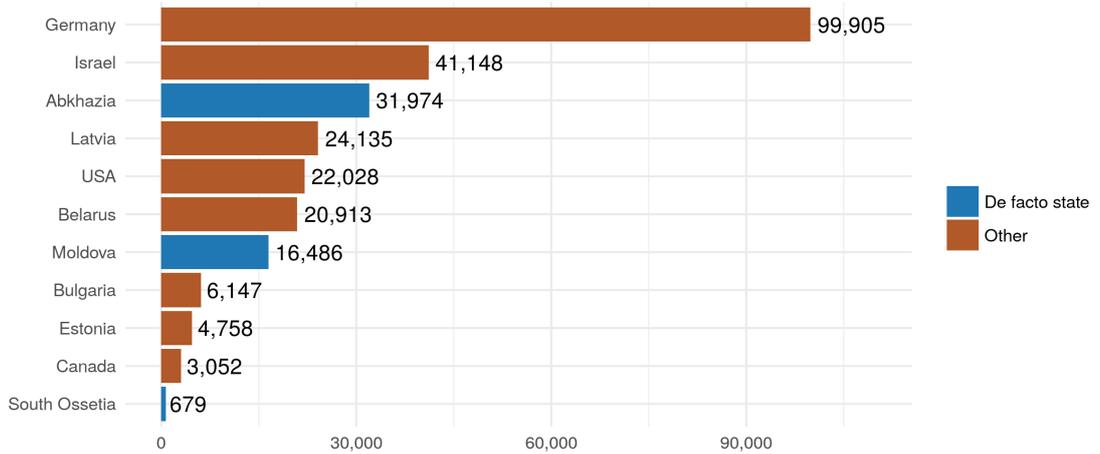
Illustration 5.5: Number of recipients of Russian pensions residing outside of Russia. Data on Moldova effectively refer to Transnistria residents. Source: Russian pension fund (Pension Fund of the Russian Federation 2016)

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Average pension in post-Soviet de facto states and selected countries
Based on 2016 data, or latest available
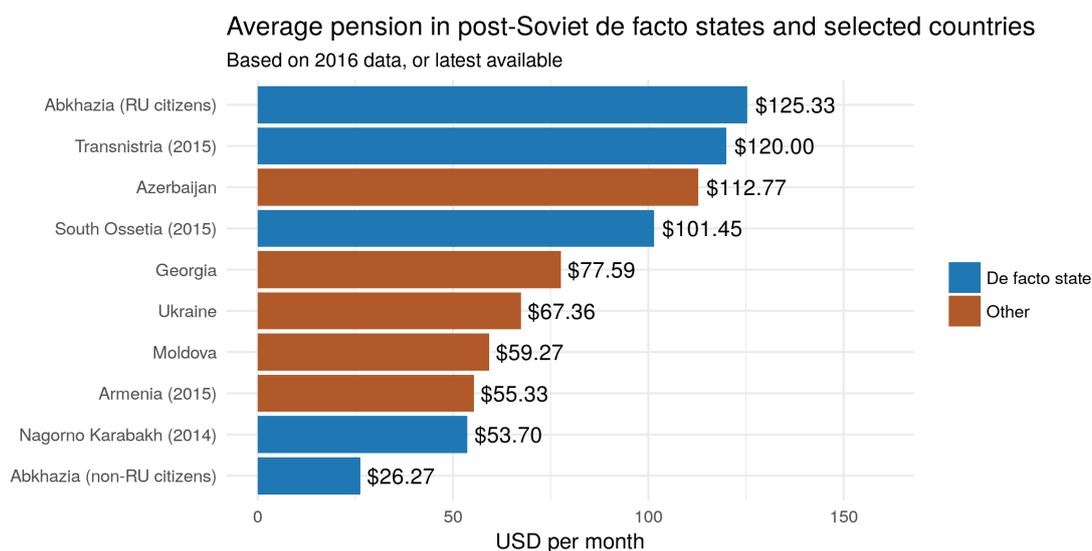
Illustration 5.6: Average pension in post-Soviet de facto states, their patron and parent state, and Ukraine.

Details on Illustration 5.6

Given the difficulty in finding data related to the same point in time for all cases, the significant fluctuation of exchange rates of local currencies with the US dollar, the sometimes abrupt changes in the level of pension payments, as well as the different cost of life across cases, the comparison is unlikely to reflect perfectly the situation on the ground. However, these data still provide a meaningful term of reference.

Data for Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have been retrieved from official sources. They have been converted to USD at the nominal rate for the relevant date, according to the exchange rate given by the respective national bank. Table 5.3 presents exact data, as well as a link to the source of the information.

Country	Date	Currency	Amount	Source
Azerbaijan	2016-01-01	AZN	176.03	http://abc.az/eng/news/93335.html
Azerbaijan	2016-01-01	USD	112.77	http://abc.az/eng/news/93335.html
Georgia	2016-07-01	GEL	180	http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29272
Georgia	2016-07-01	USD	77.59	https://www.nbg.gov.ge/index.php?m=582&lng=eng
Moldova	2016-01-01	MDL	1 165.2	http://www.statistica.md/public/files/serii_de_timp/protectia_sociala/9.2.xls
Moldova	2016-01-01	USD	59.27	http://www.bnm.org/en/content/official-exchange-rates
Ukraine	2016-10-01	UAH	1 745.54	http://www.pfu.gov.ua/pfu/doccatalog/document?id=267606
Ukraine	2016-10-01	USD	67.36	https://bank.gov.ua/NBUStatService/v1/statdirectory/exchange?

				valcode=USD&date=20161001
Armenia	2015	AMD	40 441	http://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=126&id=19151
Armenia	2015	USD	55.33	http://api.cba.am/ExchangeRatesToCSV.ashx?DateFrom=2000-01-01&DateTo=2016-12-31&ISOCodes=USD,GBP,RUB,EUR

Table 5.3: Average pensions in selected jurisdictions

Data for de facto states have been compiled from a number of sources, and the retrieval of data has been somewhat less straightforward, as figures found in different sources do not always correspond, and citizens receive their pension from more than one source.

In the case of Transnistria, the statistical yearbook includes figures on the average pension. The data refer specifically to Transnistrian pensions, even if a considerable amount of residents switched to Russian pensions starting with 2015. No statistics are available for the average amount of the Russian pension to Transnistrian residents, but anecdotal evidence emerging from media reports suggests they are at comparable levels, so they are not reported separately on the graph.

In the case of Abkhazia, there are some residents who receive both a local and a Russian pension. Precise figures on the average level of Abkhazian pension are included in a report by local scholars issued in 2016,[48] according to which the average pension for the 48 600 recipients is 1 014 RUB (or about 26 USD, as of 2014 exchange rates).[49] Minimum pensions have been increased substantially in 2016 for those residents who do not receive other pensions, but a large part of the increase has been effectively nullified (in dollar terms) by the plunge of the Russian Rouble in 2015. Until more recent official data are made public, it is safe to keep the data for 2014 as a reference, estimating that even with the planned increase the average pension is due to be still less than 30 USD per month in 2016.[50]

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48 http://ru.abkhaziastrategic.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/%D0%9C%D0%B8%D1%80%D1%85%D1%83%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0-%D0%98.%D0%92.-%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D1%8F.docx

49 Alternative calculations by the author based on declared yearly expenditures by the Abkhazian pension fund for the same year give slightly higher figures, but this may due to other expenses being effectively included under the relevant section of the budget.

50 Minimal pensions increased from 500 RUB (in 2014, and previous years) to 1 500 RUB in 2016 (but retroactively, with payouts for all of 2015 scheduled in 2016), see

Data on the level of pensions paid to Russian citizens in Abkhazia are more readily available, partly due to the fact that pensions payment are among the issues formally discussed within the scope of Russia's assistance to the territory. According to official Russian sources, as of 1 January 2015, there are 32 163 residents receiving a Russia pension averaging 6 262 RUB (corresponding to about 102 USD at average 2015 exchange rates), with increases scheduled in 2016 and 2017 for those receiving lower pensions.[51] For example, in 2016 27 850 pensioners have received an average increase of 1 300 RUB (or about 19 USD), leading to an estimated average pension of 118.7 USD per month.[52] However, the vast majority of people with a Russian passport living in Abkhazia have also Abkhazian citizenship; in absence of relevant agreements, they are thus entitled to both Russian and Abkhazian pensions. Given that the 2016 increase for Abkhazian pensions did not relate to residents who already received another pension, the data shown in the graph corresponds to the average pension estimated for 2016 (7 388 RUB), plus the average Abkhazian pension pre-increase (1 014 RUB), resulting in about 123.8 USD.

In the case of South Ossetia, relevant statistics are regularly made available through state-owned media. The graph shows the average figure given by the Head of South Ossetia's pension fund for 2015, i.e. 6 221 RUB, or about 100 USD per month (Res news agency 2015). No data is available regarding the amount given to pensioners receiving the Russian pensions (some of them officially registered in South Ossetia, some of them apparently still registered in North Ossetia). Unlike in Abkhazia, pensioners receive either the local or the Russian pension. Both in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a relatively small number of local residents may also be receiving pension or social payments from Georgia.

In the case of Nagorno Karabakh, relevant statistics are regularly included in statistical yearbooks, and there is no indication that local residents receive foreign pensions.

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http://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/27675316.html. Even assuming that the *average* pension increased by 1 000 (and it is known that it must be less than that, since the increase did not involve all recipients), the average pension would still be under 30 USD per month.

51 https://www.pnp.ru/social/2015/12/25/pensii-zhivushhikh-vabkhazii-rossiyan-stanut-vyshe.html.

52 http://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/27675316.html.

Share of the budget from domestic incomes and aid
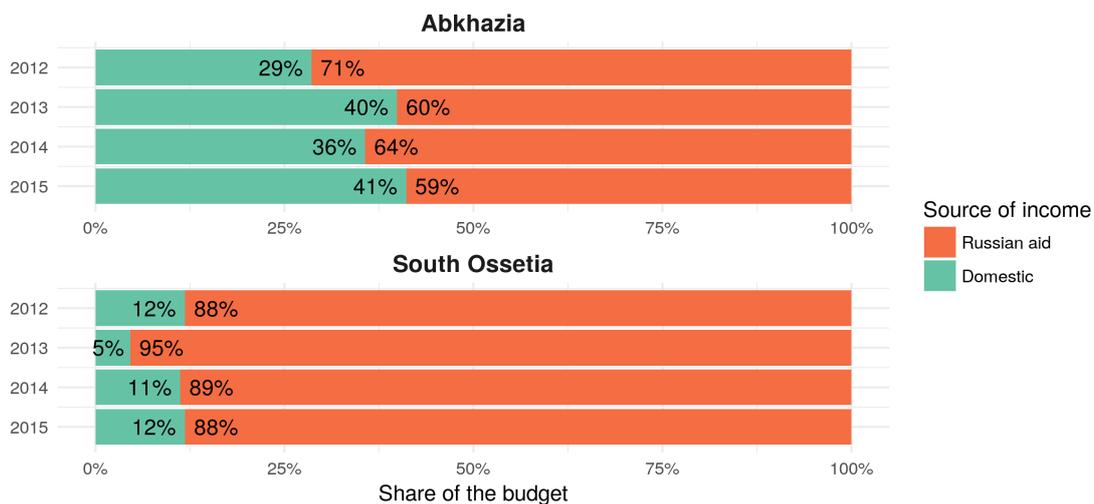
Illustration 5.7: Share of the budget from Russian aid versus domestic incomes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (2012-2015).

N.B.: These data include exclusively incomes to the budget; accordingly, other forms of support such as pension payments are not included.
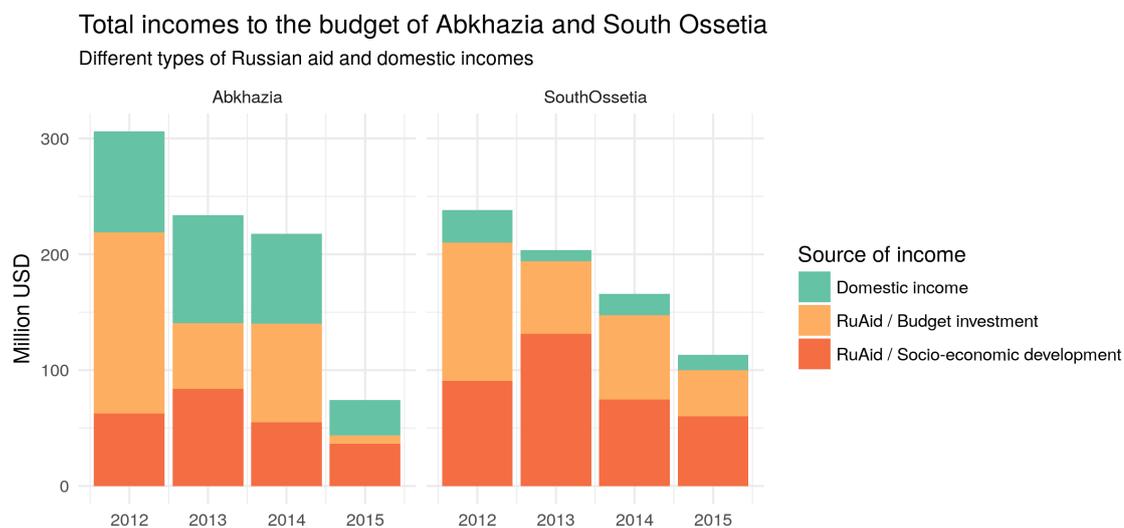
Illustration 5.8: Total incomes to the budget of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, by source of income (in million USD, 2012-2015)

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Details on Illustration 5.7 and Illustration 5.8

Neither Abkhazia or South Ossetia publish on governmental websites or statistical yearbooks structured data on the amount of aid they receive from Russia. However, such figures have been mentioned in media reports or in press releases issued by state authorities,[53] and correspond with those included in Russia's own budget.[54] Exchange rates have been calculated from the the data published by the Russian central bank.

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53 For Abkhazia, see in particular: http://abkhazinform.com/item/2640-gosbyudzhet-abkhazii-1995-2015-gg; http://sputnik-abkhazia.ru/Abkhazia/20160325/1017680770.html. For South Ossetia, see in particular: http://ugo-osetia.ru/index.php/2011-06-30-23-44-4/official/item/3176-ob-ispolnenii-gosudarstvennogo-byudzheta-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-za-2013-god; http://ugo-osetia.ru/index.php/2011-06-30-23-44-4/documents/item/4002-o-gosudarstvennom-byudzhete-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-na-2015-god; http://south-ossetia.info/postanovlenie-parlamenta-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-o-zakone-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-o-gosudarstvennom-byudzhete-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-na-2016-god/; http://ugo-osetia.ru/index.php/2011-06-30-23-44-4/documents/item/4990-ob-ispolnenii-gosudarstvennogo-byudzheta-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-za-2014-god; http://south-ossetia.info/zakon-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-ob-ispolnenii-gosudarstvennogo-byudzheta-respubliki-yuzhnaya-osetiya-za-2015-god/.

54 Russian budget: http://www.roskazna.ru/ispolnenie-byudzhetov/federalnyj-byudzhet/.
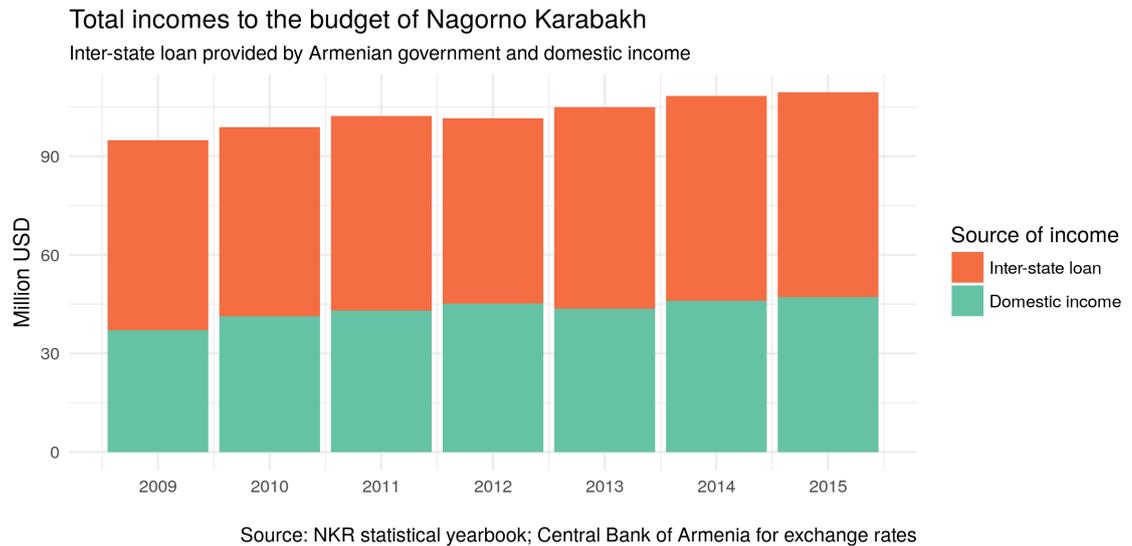
Illustration 5.9: Total incomes to the budget of Nagorno Karabakh by source of income (2009-2015)
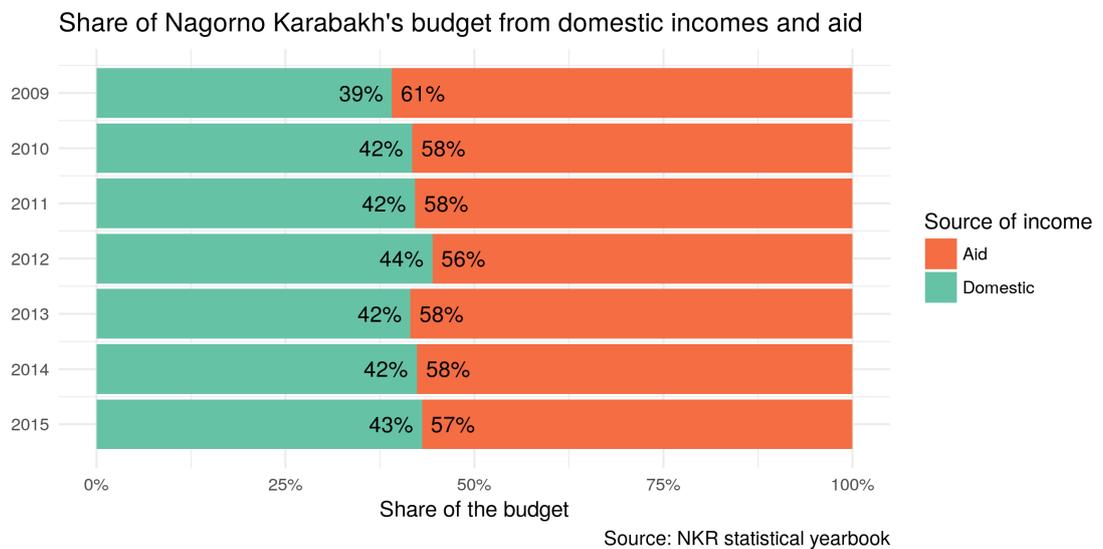
Illustration 5.10: Share of Nagorno Karabakh's budget from domestic incomes and aid (2009-2015)

Details on Illustration 5.9 and Illustration 5.10

Nagorno Karabakh regularly includes details on the amount of the 'inter-state loan' in its statistical yearbooks.

Share of subsidies to the budget

MIRAB countries, US compact, and post-Soviet de facto states

South Ossetia (2016)	92.2%
Tokelau (2010)	85.0%
Abkhazia (2016)	67.4%
Marshall Islands (2012)	62.4%
Micronesia (2013)	60.4%
NKR (2014)	57.6%
Palau (2015)	37.0%
Niue (2013)	36.1%
Cook Islands (2015)	33.5%
Tuvalu (2014)	29.4%
Kiribati (2014)	5.5%

Type: De facto state, MIRAB, US compact

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

* Includes latest available data for each of the territories included

Illustration 5.11: Aid as share of budget expenditures in micro-states and post-Soviet de facto states

Details on Illustration 5.11

Data on external financial support to the budget of selected micro-states are not available in a unified database. Sources for all the data are presented in Table 5.4 below; they include government budgets, reports issued by the patron and IMF reports. External support that does not go through the budget of local authorities has not been included in the calculations.

Country	Year	Aid	Source
Cook Islands	2015	33.54%	http://www.mfem.gov.ck/images/MFEM_Documents/Treasury_Docs/Budget_Documents/2016-17_Cook-Islands_Budget-Book-1_Appropriation-Bill-and-Commentary.pdf - page 73
Kiribati	2014	5.54%	http://www.mfed.gov.ki/sites/default/files/2016%20Kiribati%20National%20Budget_1.pdf - table 4, page 4
Marshall Islands	2012	62.45%	https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2014/cr1426.pdf) - Table 2, p. 20
Micronesia	2013	60.37%	https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2015/cr15128.pdf) - p. 5
Niue	2013	36.15%	https://pefa.org/sites/default/files/assements/comments/NU-Aug11-PFMPR-Public.pdf
Palau	2015	37.04%	http://palaugov.pw/rop-statistical-yearbooks/
Tokelau	2010	85.00%	https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/papers-presented/current-papers/document/49DBHOH_PAP22297_1/administrator-of-tokelau-report-of-the-administrator-of
Tuvalu	2014	29.43%	http://www.tuvaluaudit.tv/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2016-Tuvalu-National-Budget.pdf

Table 5.4: Share of incomes determined by external financial support in selected micro-states (MIRAB economies)

Share of subsidies to the budget (2015)

Subjects of the RF with highest share of subsidies
and post-Soviet de facto states

Region	Value
South Ossetia	88.2%
Republic of Ingushetia	85.6%
Chechen Republic	81.6%
Altai Republic	77.1%
Tuva Republic	75.3%
Republic of Dagestan	70.1%
Karachay-Cherkess Republic	64.3%
Kamchatka Krai	63.0%
Abkhazia	58.9%
Nagorno Karabakh	56.9%
Republic of North Ossetia-Alania	56.2%
Kabardino-Balkar Republic	54.2%
Republic of Kalmykia	53.7%
Average Russian region	30.6%

Type
- De facto state
- Russian region
- Average

Illustration 5.12: Share of subsidies to the budget in subjects of the Russian Federation and post-Soviet de facto states

Details on Illustration 5.12

The Russian ministry of finance published data that include the share of the budget that comes from the federal government.[55] To be more precise, in line with Russian legislation (Art. 41 – 4, Budget code of the Russian Federation)[56], this figure includes subsidies from the federal budget (or directly from budgets of other regions), as well as incomes from international organization or foreign countries. The approach used by the Russian government to calculate these figures confirms that from the point of view of federated entities all of these sources are considered "external".

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55 "Svodnaya tablitsa ispolneniya byudzhetov sub'ektov RF na 01.01.2015", http://info.minfin.ru/subj_analitics.php.

56 http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_19702/c5a5b77bd2e9718ef6faf32c062 d3faeff632d8f/.
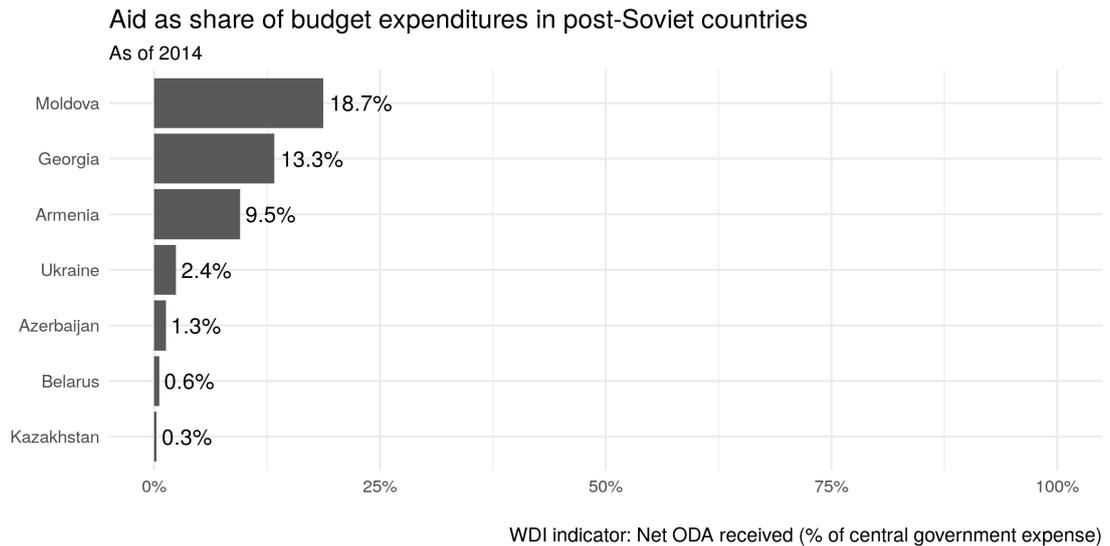
Illustration 5.13: Aid as share of budget expenditures in post-Soviet countries

Details on Illustration 5.13

For the sake of simplicity, World Bank's indicator "Net ODA received (% of central government expense)" has been used here, even if it includes financial support that does not go through the budget of the central government.
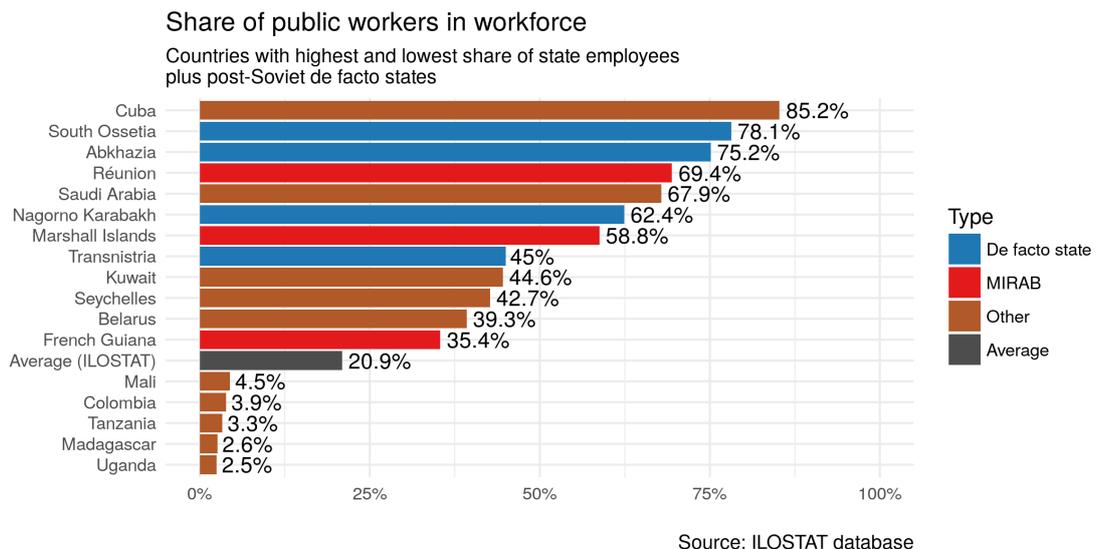
Illustration 5.14: Share of public workers in workforce. The graph includes the ten countries with highest share of public workers among those included in the ILOSTAT dataset (ILOSTAT 2016), the five countries with lowest share of public workers, as well as the average among all 91 countries included in the ILOSTAT dataset.

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Details on Illustration 5.14

Data on the share of public workers from all of the world have been extracted from the ILOSTAT database (ILOSTAT 2016) maintained by the International Labour Organization. The relevant table is "Share of employment in the public sector by sex (%)".

Public sector workers are defined by ILO as follows: "Public sector employment covers employment in the government sector plus employment in publicly-owned resident enterprises and companies, operating at central, state (or regional) and local levels of government. It covers all persons employed directly by those institutions, regardless of the particular type of employment contract."

Exact definition used by statistical offices in de facto states are not currently available, but for the purpose of this comparison it is assumed that the definition coincides with the one used by ILO. The ILO dataset includes data from 91 countries and territories, with most recent data mostly from 2012, 2013 or 2014. For the purpose of comparison, latest data available are used for each country. No other large-scale datasets with similar data have been found (also World Bank, for example, refers to the ILO dataset for public sector employment).

Share of state employee in workforce
Post-Soviet countries and de facto states

Country	Value	Type
South Ossetia	78.1%	De facto state
Abkhazia	75.2%	De facto state
Nagorno Karabakh	62.4%	De facto state
Transnistria	45%	De facto state
Belarus	39.3%	Other
Russian Federation	30.6%	Other
Latvia	28.5%	Other
Lithuania	28.4%	Other
Moldova	26.5%	Other
Average (Post-Soviet)	25.6%	Average
Estonia	25.4%	Other
Azerbaijan	25.2%	Other
Kazakhstan	23.3%	Other
Armenia	21.8%	Other
Ukraine	21.7%	Other
Georgia	15.4%	Other

Illustration 5.15: Share of public workers in workforce (post-Soviet subset). The graph includes all post-Soviet countries for which relevant data are available in the ILOSTAT dataset (ILOSTAT 2016), plus Russia (OECD 2013).

Details on Illustration 5.15

This graph is based on a subset of the Ilostat dataset (ILOSTAT 2016) used for Illustration 5.14, including only former-Soviet countries. Data for Russia are taken from OECD dataset (OECD 2013).

Share of state employees in workforce
Russian regions with highest and lowest share of state employees and post-Soviet de facto states

Region	Value	Type
South Ossetia	78.1%	De facto state
Abkhazia	75.2%	De facto state
Chukotka Autonomous Okrug	62.7%	Russian region
Nagorno Karabakh	62.4%	De facto state
Tuva Republic	56.1%	Russian region
Republic of Ingushetia	55.1%	Russian region
Transnistria	45%	De facto state
Zabaykalsky Krai	44%	Russian region
Chechen Republic	43.9%	Russian region
Russian Federation	28.7%	Average
Moscow	24.5%	Russian region
Tula Oblast	24.4%	Russian region
Republic of Tatarstan	24.1%	Russian region
Leningrad Oblast	24%	Russian region
Stavropol Krai	23.8%	Russian region

Illustration 5.16: Share of state employee in workforce (2014). Five regions with highest and lowest share of state employees in federal entities of the Russian Federation, Russian average, and post-Soviet de facto states.

Details on Illustration 5.16

Source: Russia's statistical office, "Raspredelenie srednegodovoi chislennosti zanyatykh v e'konomike po formam sobstvennosti – Okonchanie 2014" http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b15_14p/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d01/03-08-2.doc

Share of civil servants in workforce in post-Soviet de facto states

As of 2014-2015

South Ossetia	32.0%
Nagorno Karabakh	22.2%
Abkhazia	15.3%
Transnistria	5.0%
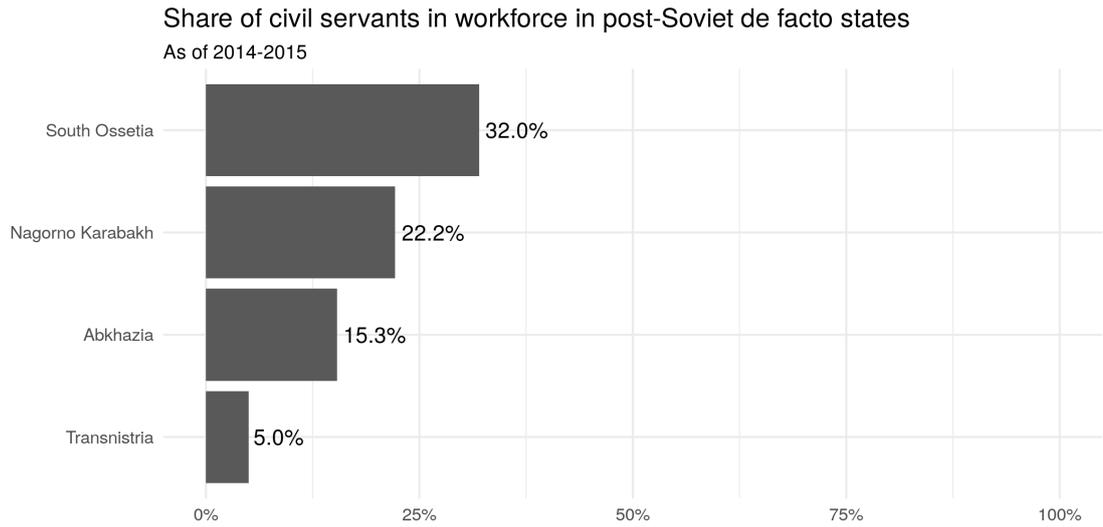
Illustration 5.17: Share of civil servants in workforce in post-Soviet de facto states

Share of civil servants in workforce

in post-Soviet de facto states and Russian regions
(includes five regions with highest and lowest share)

South Ossetia	32.0%
Nagorno Karabakh	22.2%
Abkhazia	15.3%
Republic of Ingushetia	11.3%
Chukotka Autonomous Okrug	10.1%
Magadan Oblast	8.4%
Tuva Republic	8.0%
Altai Republic	7.7%
Transnistria	5.0%
North Caucasian Federal District	4.1%
Russian Federation	3.3%
Vladimir Oblast	2.7%
Republic of Tatarstan	2.4%
Saint Petersburg	2.4%
Leningrad Oblast	2.3%
Moscow	1.9%

Type
- De facto state
- Russian region
- Average

As of 2014-2015

Illustration 5.18: Share of civil servants in workforce in post-Soviet de facto states and Russian regions with highest and lowest share of bureaucrats in workforce.

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Details on Illustration 5.17 and Illustration 5.18

Data for Russian regions, referring specifically to personnel working in state or local authorities, have been published by the Russian statistical office.[57]

Disaggregated data outlining only those working in administration are available for both Transnistria[58] and Abkhazia[59] through their statistical yearbooks. Data from South Ossetia including disaggregated data for the number of people employed in the state apparatus have been published by a Russian news agency, quoting South Ossetia's office for statistics.[60] The expression used in the report presenting the statistics from South Ossetia ("gossluzhshashchie") usually does not comprehend people working in the army or police. Given that relevant data for people employed in security and defence are not reported separately, this exceptionally high figure may also include them. But even if they were included, civil servants would still represent an unusually high share of the employed by both regional and world standards.

In the case of Nagorno Karabakh, unfortunately, 'administration and defence' are merged in a single category. In the absence of more detailed information, it is assumed here that half of the total number given for "administration and defence" is actually employed in administration.

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57 Regiony Rossii. Sotsial'no-e'konomicheskie pokazateli – 2015 g. - http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b15_14p/Main.htm - "Kadry gosudarstvennykh organov i organov mestnogo samoupravelniya; 3.27 Chislennost' rabotnikov gosudarstvennykh organov i organov mestnogo samoupravleniya (chelovek)"

58 Transnistria's statistical yearbook 2016, table 3.3, "3.3. Chislennost' zanyatykh v e'konomike po otraslyam (na konets goda)". Figures do not include army and customs ("Bez silovykh struktur ii tamozhennykh organov,")

59 Department for state statistics of the republic of Abkhazia, "Chislennost' zanyatogo naseleniya v otraslyakh e'konomiki - 2015", http://ugsra.org/ofitsialnaya-statistika.php?ELEMENT_ID=163.

60 "Kto kem rabotaet v Yuzhnoi Osetii?", *Sputnik South Ossetia*, 26 April 2016, http://sputnik-ossetia.ru/infographics/20160425/1782970.html.

Share of civil servants in workforce
in post-Soviet de facto states and MIRAB economies
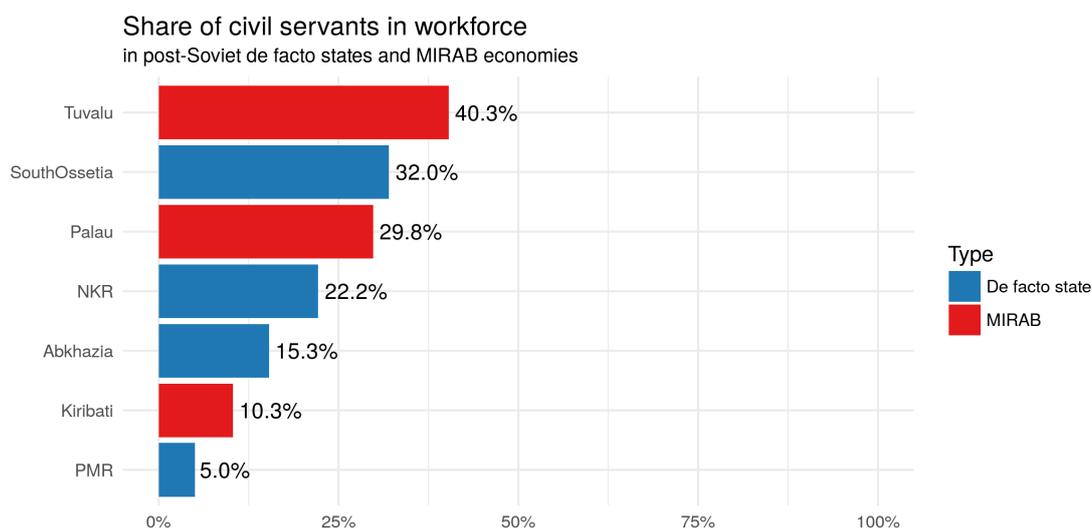
Illustration 5.19: Share of civil servants in workforce in post-Soviet de facto states and selected MIRAB economies

Details on Illustration 5.19

For data on de facto states, see details on Illustration 5.18. For micro-states, data have been taken from official sources related to the respective territories. Updated information was not available in all cases, and the relevant category had different names (in the case of Kiribati, "Public administration"[61]; for Tuvalu "Government administration"[62]; for Palau the figures for "Government agencies", "National government" and "State governments" have been merged[63]), but overall they present broadly comparable data.

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61 Kiribati National statistics office, "Cash Employment by Age Group, Sex and Industry 2010", http://www.mfed.gov.ki/statistics/economic-statistics/labour-force/employment-by-industry.

62 Tuvalu Central statistics division, "Businesses, employees, normal and voluntary contributions for the National Provident Fund: 2006-2007", http://tuvalu.prism.spc.int/index.php/economic/labour/labour-employee-records-from-provident-fund-.

63 Bureau of Budget and Planning (Republic of Palau), "2015 statistical yearbook", http://palaugov.pw/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2015-Statistical-Yearbook-1.pdf.

Number of people with registered cash incomes by type of income

As of 2015
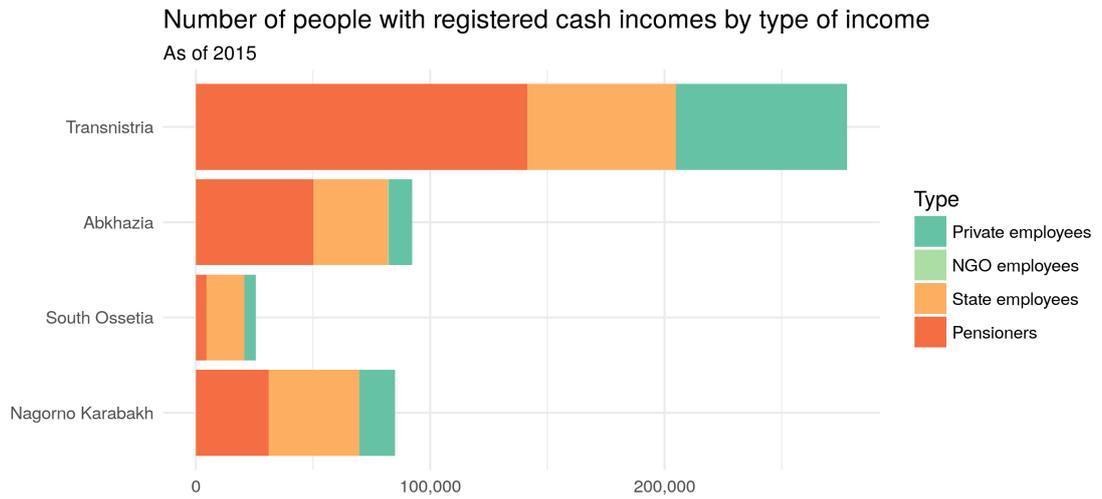
Source: Statistical office of Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh

Illustration 5.20: Number of people with registered cash incomes.

N.B.: *Nagorno Karabakh's statistical office included a large number of "self-employed", while other de facto states do not have this category; to make the data comparable, self-employed have been excluded also in the case of Nagorno Karabakh.*

Share of people with registered cash incomes, by type of income

As of 2015
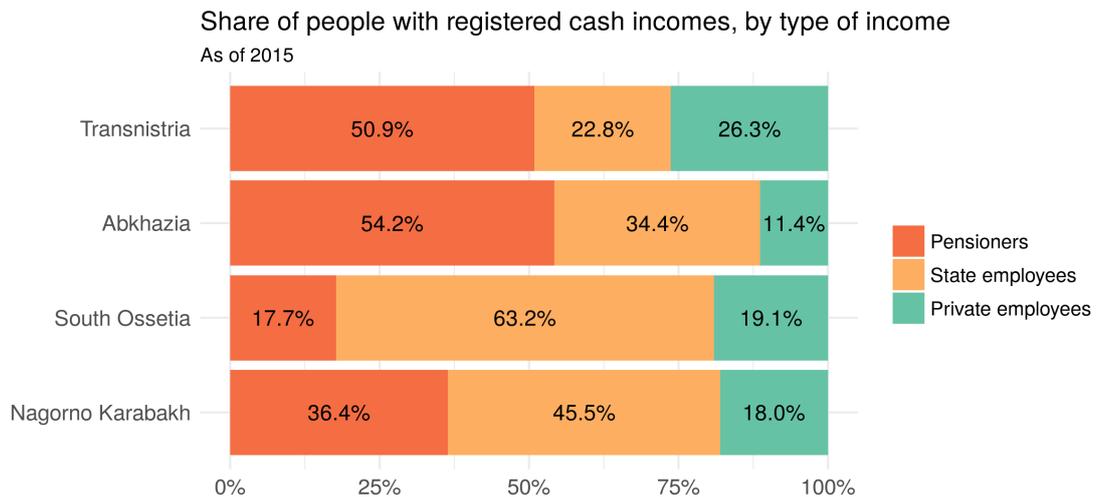
Source: Aggregated data from relevant offices in de facto states and Russia

Illustration 5.21: Share of people with registered cash incomes

Share of people with registered cash incomes, by type of income

Post-Soviet de facto states, average Russian, and Russian subjects
with highest share of state employees+pensioners

Region	Pensioners + State employees	Private employees
Abkhazia	88.6%	11.4%
South Ossetia	80.9%	19.1%
Republic of Ingushetia	79.3%	20.7%
Nagorno Karabakh	77.6%	22.4%
Tuva Republic	76.3%	23.7%
Chechen Republic	73.7%	26.3%
Transnistria	73.7%	26.3%
Zabaykalsky Krai	67.2%	32.8%
Arkhangelsk Oblast	66.9%	33.1%
Altai Republic	65.7%	34.3%
Magadan Oblast	65.6%	34.4%
Republic of Karelia	65.2%	34.8%
Average - Russian Federation	57.2%	42.8%

Legend: Pensioners, State employees, Private employees

Source: Aggregated data from relevant offices in de facto states and Russia;
data as of 2014 (for Nagorno Karabakh and Russia), as of 2015 for other de facto states

Illustration 5.22: Share of people with registered cash income, by type of income. Russian regions and post-Soviet de facto states.

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Chapter 6.

Non-budget support to state and capacity building in post-Soviet de facto states

"Не учи меня жить, лучше помоги материально"[1]

Having presented direct budget transfers to post-Soviet de facto states in Chapter 5, the next sections focus on non-financial assistance that enables better access to public goods and services to residents of these territories. As will be seen, the patron remains the dominant external player also from this point of view, even as international organisations, third countries, as well as the diaspora, play a significant role.

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1   "Don't teach me how to live, and instead support me with funds" - a quote originally from the film "Moscow does not believe in tears" (1980) - mentioned in reference to international support by Abkhazia's deputy minister for labour, employment and welfare Olga Kogonia in an interview with the author, Sukhumi, May 2016.

This chapter is based on interviews with representatives of de facto authorities in Transnistria and Abkhazia, as well as representatives of international and local organisations working in these territories.[2] This chapter presents in some details how non-financial external support to post-Soviet de facto states takes place and which actors are involved. First, it provides an account of how external assistance has evolved since the 1990s focusing on Abkhazia, which is the case where changes in interactions with external actors have been more evident. It then presents in more details how non-budget assistance reaches these territories, contributing to local capacities or directly providing services that would generally be considered to be competence of the state. A structured analysis of materials published by press agencies in post-Soviet de facto states serves as a starting point for the descriptive sections on Abkhazia, Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh.

Given the focus of this research on state building and service provision, this chapter does not deal with initiatives aimed at conflict resolution, unless they explicitly included a dimension focused on improving the livelihood or access to services of people residing in these territories.[3] The case of South Ossetia is not discussed separately; in the post-2008 context external interactions favouring capacity building and service delivery are almost exclusively limited to assistance coming from the Russian Federation, so this case would add little to dynamics found in Abkhazia and Transnistria.[4]

The conclusions highlight some of the ways in which non-recognition impacts external support to post-Soviet de facto states. Firstly, largely due to circumstances created by non-recognition, most donors focus their assistance on social infrastructure and the health sector. Secondly, conditionality that often accompanies external assistance in the

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2   A full list of formal interviews with government representatives from both de facto and de jure government, as well as of interviews and informal conversations with officers of international organisations and local NGOs is included in Appendix A.

3   For extensive analysis and review of conflict resolution efforts in the context of the South Caucasus, see in particular International Alert (2012). In reference to Abkhazia, see in particular Francis (2011).

4   A partial exception relates to the work of the International Red Cross, which facilitates access for residents of South Ossetia to free healthcare services in Georgia sponsored by Tbilisi. This programme, available also to residents of Abkhazia (even if without involvement of the ICRC), is discussed in some detail in the section dealing with Abkhazia.

region cannot be applied in the case of post-Soviet de facto states. Finally, it is highlighted how framing international assistance as 'confidence building' may impact negatively on its effectiveness.

6.1. Taking local media as a starting point: the 'training' subset

In line with the methodological approach outlined in Chapter 2 and more extensively in Appendix B, in order to reduce researcher bias and define the sectors to be analysed in more detail in the following sections, a dataset has been created with all news published on Abkhazia's and Transnistria's state news agencies and currently available on-line, including 25 618 items published on Abkhazia's ApsnyPress between January 2006 and December 2016 and 39 244 items published on Transnistria's Novosti Pridnestrov'ya (previously, Ol'via Press) between August 1999 and December 2016.[5] Unlike in other post-Soviet de facto states, in Nagorno Karabakh there is not a news agency owned by de facto authorities; the most suiting alternative on-line source of news publishing also in Russian or English is the privately-owned *Artsakhpress*, which has been in activity only since January 2014, but has published 15 209 news items in the three following years.

In order to obtain a meaningful number of materials that could be read and coded by a single researcher, yet capture an important part of non-financial assistance to de facto states, a subset composed exclusively of news items including reference to 'training' or the Russian 'povyshenie kvalifikatsii' (qualification course/refresher training/further training) has been created. Each of the items in the subsets (261 news items in the case of Abkhazia, 467 in the case of Transnistria, 21 in the case of Nagorno Karabakh), have then been read and coded by the author, categorising each mention of 'training' by actor involved (if it involved an external actor) and by sector of activity. Many of the items in the subset made reference to an external actor, and by far the sectors of engagement that appeared more frequently have been education and health (see Table 6.1 and Table 6.2). As a consequence, these two sectors are analysed in more details, and other types of external assistance are discussed more succinctly.

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5 In the case of Novosti Pridnestrov'ya, since in recent years the news agency has started covering world events unrelated to Transnistria, only articles including reference to either Transnistria (PMR/Pridnestrov'e) or Tiraspol have been included. This reduced the total number of news items from 67 550 to 39 244.

While acknowledging that a single term such as 'training' does not capture all forms of non-financial external assistance, it is due to present a meaningful sample of activities aimed at capacity building, and contributes to prevent possible forms of researcher' bias. While this exercise serves a starting point for the descriptive sections, other media sources, publicly available data on international cooperation in de facto states, as well as interviews and meetings held by the author in 2016 in Abkhazia, Transnistria and their respective parents states effectively represent the core of materials included in this chapter.

6.2. <u>Surviving the 1990s in Abkhazia</u>

The 1990s have been tough years for most of the population throughout the post-Soviet space, but not uniformly so. Indeed, among post-Soviet de facto states, there has been a great variation in living conditions and level of international involvement. In Transnistria, the fighting in 1992 caused limited destruction, and economic activities were not completely disrupted. There was not a total breakdown of state capacity that demanded immediate action from relief organisations, and availability of public services remained on a par with that found in recognised countries of the region. In South Ossetia, lack of an actual border and ongoing large scale trade gave some life to the local economy and allowed a degree of mobility to local residents. In Nagorno Karabakh, support from Yerevan and the Armenian diaspora enabled post-war reconstruction and large infrastructural programmes already in the 1990s.

The situation in Abkhazia was quite different. According to a 1998 UNDP/World Bank report (1998, 3), "Abkhazia suffered from the sharpest economic decline in the [Former Soviet Union]", since "the regional economy [in Abkhazia] totally collapsed." Ethnic cleansing left Abkhazia with less than half of its pre-war population, and fighting caused extensive damages to the local infrastructure. As a consequence, the self-proclaimed government in Sukhumi lacked both human and economic resources needed to run public services to any meaningful extent. The circumstances, vividly described by Górecki (2013) in his memoirs of his visits to Abkhazia in the early 1990s, have been thus summarised by Lynch (2004, 44):

> The United Nations and international non-governmental organizations, such as Acciòn Contra la Hambre, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Médicines sans Frontieres, have become the pillars of social security in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz ministry of health is little more than a façade for the support of the vulnerable and ill provided by these international humanitarian organizations. The

money brought into Abkhazia by international humanitarian organizations is far larger than the declared budget of the separatist state.

The situation was particularly difficult in the the period 1994-1999, when the Russian Federation imposed an economic blockade on Abkhazia, further contributing to the impoverishment of the region.[6] In those years, the Russian government did not support the de facto authorities, and the local population relied on help from international relief organisations for basic services and for its very survival. A report by one of the organisations involved stressed "the disastrous consequences of the embargo for the indigenous population" and highlighted that "the survival of one in ten people living in Abkhazia depends on the help of relief organisations" (Binet 2002). Besides big international governmental and non-governmental organizations, support came also from other initiatives, including the Hare Krishnas (Górecki 2013, 17; Brown 1997).[7]

Some agreements with Russian regions, regional departments, or Russian universities were in place at the time and to some extent contributed to capacity building in Abkhazia, or offered services to Abkhazian residents, even in the immediate aftermath of the war. Agreements and treaties between Abkhazia and the Republic of Bashkortostan serve as a case in point. Already in the summer of 1993, Bashkortostan's government issued a decision to offer free access to local higher education institutions to 75 students from Abkhazia (Government of Bashkortostan 1993);[8] official decisions taken in 1996 and 2000 testify of substantial provisions of gas cylinders as humanitarian

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6   With the renewal of the war in Chechnya, a total blockade at the border on the Psou between Abkhazia and Krasnodar Krai was introduced by decree starting with 21 December 1994. On 7 July 1995, a new decision by the Russian government opened the border to men of pensionable age (60 years), women independently of their age, and children until the age of 16. These provisions were kept in place until 9 September 1999, when the new government headed by Vladimir Putin issued a decision, nullifying them (Volkhonskiy, Zakharov, and Silaev 2008).

7   For interesting details on the network of external support that Abkhazian representatives tried to build before, during, and after the conflict of the early 1990s, including early forms of engagement with Russian regions, see in particular Studenikin (2002).

8   Daur Kove, who became Abkhazia's Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2016, was apparently one of the beneficiaries, since according to his official bio (Apsnypress 2016c) he is a graduate of the Bashkir State University, served as a point of contact for Abkhazia in Bashkortostan for the period 1995-2000, and then as plenipotentiary representative for the period 2000-2009.

assistance. In the summer of 1994, Bashkortostan signed with Abkhazia a treaty "of friendship and cooperation" ("Dogovor o Druzhbe i Sotrudnichestve Mezhdu Respublikoi Bahskortostan i Respublikoi Abkhazii" 1994);[9] in the following years Bashkortostan hosted medical students from Abkhazia and in a few occasions dispatched humanitarian support and medical staff to Sukhumi.

Starting with the early 2000s, the welfare of Abkhazia's residents slowly started to improve, largely in relation to increased interactions with the Russian Federation: the border on the Psou was opened, small-scale trade was informally accepted, Russian tourists started arriving, the process of acquiring Russian citizenship became easier, and Russian pensions began to be distributed to the increasing number of people who held a passport of the Russian Federation. However, it is only after Russia's recognition of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states in the wake of the war of August 2008, that Russia exponentially increased its role in the region. Pre-existent links with Russian regions and city administrations were strengthened in some instances,[10] but recognition opened the way for comprehensive support across all fields of government activities well beyond the sporadic assistance previously offered by some regions or city administrations (see next section for more details). As a consequence of increased Russian engagement, the role of international organisations decreased significantly. The closure of the United Nations monitoring mission head-quartered in Sukhumi between 1993 and 2009 (Unomig) has been a symbol of this change of direction. With a yearly budget of about 35 million USD and a total staff reaching 459 units (including more than 200 local staff), Unomig has been a highly visible symbol of the international commitment to the region, as well as an important source of income for the local economy (Unomig 2011). Even if local authorities were arguing in favour of a continued presence of the UN mission in Abkhazia after Russia's recognition in 2008 (Apsnypress 2008), the UN security council did not extend the mandate of the mission, ostensibly due to the fact that Russia took an inflexible approach on the naming of the mission (UN Monitoring Mission *in Georgia* was considered unacceptable).

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9   Interestingly, in this treaty the two sides recognise "each other's state sovereignty", highlighting how in the context of the early post-Soviet years being 'sovereign' was not understood as synonymous of being 'independent'.

10 For example, Bashkortostan stipulated new agreements for offering training and courses of qualification to medical specialists from Abkhazia in 2016 (Sputnik Abkhazia 2016).

The marginalisation of international organisations in post-recognition Abkhazia became more explicit a few years later under Ankvab's presidency. As was initially announced in an official meeting in late 2012 attended by representatives of all international organisations conducting activities in Abkhazia at the time (UNDP, Unicef, Unhcr, Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils, World Vision, International Red Cross, Doctors without borders, Action Against Hunger, Première Urgence, and Halo Trust), non-Russian support was to be focused exclusively on the Gali district (Apsnypress 2012).[11] Some understood this new policy as a first step before forbidding completely the work of international organisations in Abkhazia, similarly to what happened in South Ossetia after 2008. The "new realities" - as Russian officials called them – of Abkhazia being recognised by Moscow as independent, and openly sponsored by it, led organisations focused on emergency situations such as Doctors Without Borders to leave the territory in order to focus on other priority areas. Overwhelmed by the humanitarian crisis following the conflict in the middle east, Unhcr reduced its commitment to Abkhazia, and eventually re-addressed its activities from local residents in vulnerable situations to a group of refugees from Syria that arrived in Abkhazia in 2012-2013 (see below for more details).

Increased resources available from Russia also led to a change of attitude by the de facto authorities: in 2003, then Abkhazia's minister of foreign affairs Sergei Shamba (2003) found it appropriate to thank sincerely international relief organizations, but a decade later, president Ankvab (2012) had no words of gratitude for international NGOs. Instead, he made clear that "assistance project cannot be tied to the issue of conflict resolution," and that activities "must be aimed at supporting and developing the Abkhazian society itself." Without a doubt, support from international donors is substantially smaller than that received from Russia, but it is not quite "a drop in the bucket" as some Abkhazian officials would suggest (International Crisis Group 2010a, 12). Indeed, according to data provided to the author by deputy minister of foreign affairs Kan Taniya, the total budget for all activities conducted by international organisations in Abkhazia amounted to about 19 mln USD in 2014 and 2015, and was

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11 Even previously, however, the work of international organizations and NGOs has mostly focused on eastern Abkhazia; "this was a consequence of the double bottleneck on aid programmes imposed from Tbilisi and Sukhumi, which in turn created a contrast between Gali and the rest of Abkhazia, where INGOs and international institutions were largely absent, or had to keep a low profile." (Oltramonti 2016, 260)

estimated to grow to 21.5 mln USD in 2016, and to 22 mln USD in 2017.[12] For reference, as pointed out in Chapter 5, Russian budget assistance to Abkhazia in 2016 amounted to approximately 80 mln USD. On top of that, in the same year the Russian pension fund is estimated to have distributed about 40 mln USD in total to Abkhazian residents.[13]

The following sections provide an overview of external assistance coming from the patron as well as other international actors operating in Abkhazia in the post-2008 context, integrating inputs from structured content analysis of local media with insights gained during fieldwork.[14]

6.3. State and capacity building in Abkhazia

Among all news items published on Abkhazia's state news agency ApsnyPress between January 2006 and December 2016 (25 618 items), 261 made reference to some form of training, and 169 of them made explicit contextual reference to an external actor, in most cases (107) either a direct emanation of the Russian government or other actors based in Russia (see Table 6.1). There are however 51 references to training organised through the support or involvement of international organisations or NGOs, most noticeably the European Union (as a donor), the International Red Cross (almost exclusively in relations to its efforts aimed at identifying the bodies of people disappeared during the 1992-1993 conflict), UNICEF, Save the Children (only before 2008), UNDP, and World Vision.[15]

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12 Interview with Kan Taniya, deputy minister of foreign affairs, Sukhumi, May 2016.

13 This estimate is based on the number of people receiving a Russian pension in Abkhazia in 2016 – 32 553, according to official data (Pension Fund of the Russian Federation 2017) – multiplied by the average level of Russian pension in Abkhazia for the corresponding period – 7 072 Russian Roubles (Redichkina 2015), or about 105 USD according to the average USD/RUB exchange rate – multiplied by 12 months. These figures are indicative, and do not include other forms of assistance coming from Russia, such as defence or scholarships for local students.

14 For a concise overview of international assistance to Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the aftermath of the conflict in August 2008, see also this diplomatic cable by US Ambassador Tefft released by Wikileaks (2009).

15 This list includes all international organisations mentioned in more than two items included in the subset.

Among all sectors, education (50) and health (36) are by far the sectors that appear most frequently in the news in relation to trainings involving external actors, and accordingly they are discussed in more detail in the next few pages. Other sectors receiving external assistance are briefly discussed separately, highlighting in particular how support from international donors can be complementary to that received from the patron, and – even in the context of a strict non-recognition policy – still contribute to the goals of the de facto authorities.

Education

Various international organisations have contributed or interacted in some form with Abkhazia's education system, by providing training programmes or sponsoring renovations of facilities; among them, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (already before 2008, and focused on the Gali district), UNDP (renovating village schools), Unicef and World Vision (creating youth clubs along schools, and providing trainings for teachers on interactive education). As pointed out by Abkhazia's deputy minister of education Dmitri Gvaramia in an interview with the author, these are project-based activities that mostly take place on a small-scale or for short periods of time; he argued that such activities do bring positive results in particular in villages or difficult situations, but ultimately do not contribute to definitively resolve the problems Abkhazia has in the education system.[16]

Even if indeed most projects take place on a small scale, international organisations working in the region definitely have interesting success stories to share. For example, 'Conciliation Resources' together with two local NGOs (Sukhumi Youth House and 'Avangard') organises a series of trainings for teachers of English in schools of all of Abkhazia's districts; six of them every year (since 2015) go to Wimbledon in the UK for two weeks for additional methodological and practical trainings (Gogorian 2017). Such programmes contribute to the qualification of teachers in the public school system of Abkhazia, and have other positive consequences (for example, one of the attendants of the 2016 course opened a private language school for learning English in Ochamchire). Yet, from the point of view of state building, and unlike Russian support, they do not provide comprehensive solutions for Abkhazia's education system.

Russian financial assistance is contributing to renovating or building anew schools and kindergartens across the republic. As of the school-year 2011-2012 there were 26

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16 Interview with Dmitri Gvaramia, Abkhazia's deputy minister of education, May 2016.

kindergartens in Abkhazia, out of 300 that were active in the Soviet period.[17] As of 2016, that number grew to 40, with 15-20 more needed to completely satisfy current demand.[18] The process of building and renovating schools across all of Abkhazia's districts has also proceeded swiftly: deputy minister Gvaramia estimates that at the current level of support from Russia, within 10 years Abkhazia will have basically solved its problems with educational infrastructures, and will have modern and fully-refurbished kindergartens and schools in all of its districts.

Abkhazia has a long-standing problem with qualified teaching staff. This problem is being slowly addressed, including through qualification programmes but perhaps even more fundamentally by substantially increasing the salary of teachers, as agreed in the Russia-Abkhazia treaty on alliance and strategic partnership (Kremlin.ru 2014).[19] The government of the city of Moscow directly sponsors a number of small-scale assistance programmes to Abkhazian education institutions through its offices in Sukhumi (Illustration 6.1).[20]

Dealing with university-level and post-graduate education remains a long-term challenge, and one that in a small society must be approached through mobility, and again Russia is the main point of reference. Federal agency 'Rossotrudnichestvo'[21] in 2016 offered 200 scholarships allowing students at all levels to study in a Russian university.[22] The programme is aimed at residents of Abkhazia, both with and without

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17 Interview with Indira Vardania (at the time, Abkhazia's Minister of Education), October 2011.

18 Interview with Dmitri Gvaramia, Abkhazia's deputy minister of education, May 2016.

19 It is worth highlighting that many qualification programmes for teachers specifically focus on Russian language education, or to the teaching of Russian.

20 Interview with representative of the 'Moscow House' in Sukhumi, May 2016.

21 Rossotrudnichestvo's full name is "Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation." As of 2016, Rossotrudnichestvo distributes up to 15 000 such scholarships across a number of countries (it used to be 10 000 in previous years).

22 In 2015, there were 220 places reserved for Abkhazia (114 at BA level, 23 at MA level, 8 at PhD level, and 59 for specialisations, residencies and advanced trainings), and 236 applications in total (Apsnypress 2015). The number of scholarships has however decreased to a total of 150 units for the year 2017-2018 (Rossotrudnichestvo 2017).

Russian citizenship, and offers a defined number of scholarships for various sectors; quota are defined after consultations with representatives of Abkhazia's government, and take in consideration local needs (in particular, the fact that many specialisations or MA programmes are not available in Abkhazia).[23] Through direct agreements with universities across Russia, there are about 100 additional students each year starting their studies in the Russian Federation. Such scholarships cover accommodation, include a stipend, and last for the whole course of study. Through diaspora networks, some students obtain their university education in Turkey.[24] Georgia is also fully subsidising BA studies in Georgian universities for residents of Abkhazia; as of the 2015-2016 academic year, 86 such students (mostly from Gali) have been accepted in Georgian universities (Agenda.ge 2015). There is some competition, in particular for some of the most coveted specialisations, but overall about 400 places for new students each year for a population such as the one of contemporary Abkhazia certainly gives to most ambitious students willing to study abroad the possibility to continue with their study through a scholarship one way or the other.

Compared with this relative abundance of fully sponsored opportunities, short-term trainings or exchange programmes proposed by international organisations seem negligible or marginal to the Abkhazian side, which would expect the European Union or other international organisations to introduce schemes comparable to the ones offered by Russia, perhaps with a different set of selection criteria, yet with some centralised selection process. The fact that no such offer is provided, in spite of explicit requests from the Abkhazian side, is understood to be politically motivated, and ultimately just another component of the overall isolationist policy of Western governments towards Abkhazia.[25] There are indeed many obstacles for Abkhazian students willing to proceed their education in a university in an EU country: diplomas of local schools are unlikely to be recognised, and some embassies simply refuse to give valid visas to Abkhazian residents even if they apply with a Russian passport. However, the sheer amount of support that Abkhazia receives from Russia, combined with extensive familiarity with (post-)Soviet practices for financing higher education may also lead to misplaced expectations, namely on how extraordinarily rare it is for most EU-based universities to

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23 Interview with representative of Rossotrudnichestvo in Abkhazia, Sukhumi, May 2016; interview with Dmitri Gvaramia, Abkhazia's deputy minister of education, May 2016.

24 Interview with Dmitri Gvaramia, Abkhazia's deputy minister of education, May 2016.

25 Interview with Dmitri Gvaramia, Abkhazia's deputy minister of education, May 2016.

provide scholarships (including fees, accommodation and a stipend) for the full course of BA studies to foreign students.

Health

Health is perhaps the single sector where all types of external actors have been involved in capacity building efforts, and one of the few contexts in which international organisations do not shy away from directly contributing to the capacities of the de facto government. Unicef, World Vision, as well as UNDP with EU-financed projects, among others, have conducted initiatives in coordination with Abkhazia's ministry of health, have contributed to the modernisation of medical infrastructure, and sponsored training programmes. International organisations mostly offer small scale support, such as refurbishing maternity wards (UNDP, in Gali and Gagra),[26] creating child rehabilitation centres in currently existing hospitals (World Vision, in Tkvarchali, Ochamchire and Gali), or providing methodological support and training for a rehabilitation centre for children with disabilities built by local authorities thanks to Russian support.[27] In an interview with the author, Abkhazia's deputy minister of health Tamaz Tsakhnakia made the point that while any support was extremely useful in the early post-war years, assistance on such a small scale is now not any more crucial, and as Abkhazia's state capacity grows humanitarian organisations understandably move to were there is more urgent need.[28] He argued that at this stage Unicef was effectively the only international organisation offering support to the ministry of health on a significant scale by providing for free all the vaccines needed to run immunisation programmes in Abkhazia, covering costs that would otherwise amount to an estimated 200 million roubles (or about 3 million USD at average 2016 exchange rates) per year.[29]

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26 According to local media reports, the new maternity ward in Gagra cost about 900 000 USD, while the one in Gali about 400 000 USD (Apsnypress 2013).

27 Even an EU programme mostly focused on confidence building such as the "Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM)" have occasionally sponsored initiatives in the health sector, such as for example a 56 000 EUR project run by the title "Supporting Capacity Building for Provision of Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Early Detection Services in Abkhazia, Georgia" (Coberm 2011).

28 For example, 'Doctors without borders' used to run an anti-tuberculosis programme, but it was phased out in 2013 and is currently fully managed by local authorities.

Among external actors involved in sponsoring activities in the health sector it is also worth mentioning the 'International Fund Apsny', which is a local foundation registered in Sukhumi, but which receives a substantial part of its budget through donations by successful members of Abkhazia's diaspora in Turkey, with part of their business activities taking place in Abkhazia itself.[30] The Apsny Fund supports a number of small initiatives in the social and health sector, including renovation works in health facilities, or sponsoring healthcare treatments abroad together with other local foundations.[31]

Russia's assistance is taking place at a different scale and fundamentally contributes to capacity building and service delivery in Abkhazia's health sector. In line with the Abkhazia-Russia treaty, Russia paid for substantial increases of salaries of medical staff, which is fundamental in attracting new medical specialists that Abkhazia traditionally lacked; rates varied among categories, but deputy health minister estimated that salaries doubled between 2015 and 2016. Russia's government offers scholarships for students from Abkhazia studying in Russia's medical faculties as part of its support programme for higher education (see above), and direct contacts with universities or health centres in Russia provide additional opportunities for trainings.[32] From its own budget, Abkhazia's ministry of health sends its specialists for refresher trainings or advanced courses, and under certain conditions pays for the cures of its citizens in Russia when such services are not available in Abkhazia.[33] From university education to advanced

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29 Interview with Abkhazia's deputy minister for health Tamaz Tsakhnakia, Sukhumi, May 2016.

30 Formally, donor companies of Apsny Fund are registered in Abkhazia, but they are still mentioned here in the context of external relations as many of them originate in Abkhazia's diaspora in Turkey (Apsny Fund 2016).

31 Interestingly, such efforts do not necessarily involve only healthcare specialists or facilities from either Russia or Turkey (where the Fund has strong contacts); in 2017, for example, the Fund sponsored treatment in a clinic in Armenia for a group of children with cerebral palsy (Intenational Fund Apsny 2017).

32 News items from Apsnypress refer to training and support programmes involving institutes in Moscow, Ufa, Nizhny Novgorod, Stavropol, as well as trainings taking place in Armenia.

33 In 2015, 60 million roubles, or about 1 million USD, has been spent for Abkhazians receiving healthcare in Russia (Apsnypress 2016b), and 50 million roubles, or about 750 000 USD, were included in the budget for 2016. (Apsnypress 2016a). Statistics related to 2013 presented even higher figures: 735 individuals receiving healthcare in Russia for a

trainings, from clinical protocols to standard settings and certifications, Abkhazia's health system is dependent on interactions with actors based in the Russian Federation. Since there is no medical faculty in Abkhazia, almost all medical staff at all levels are obtaining their qualification, specialisation and first working experiences in Russia, inevitably leading to a long-term convergence of practices.

While not contributing to local capacity building, it is worth highlighting that Georgia also provides healthcare support to Abkhazia residents. The scheme is specifically targeted at residents who do not hold a Georgian passport, and accordingly it mostly does not apply to ethnic Georgian residents in Gali, who often hold a Georgian passport for other reasons, including for collecting pensions and IDP benefits. This programme (sometimes referred to as 'health diplomacy') is perhaps one of the most successful confidence building initiatives taken by Tbilisi, not least because there has been a conscious effort to leave the matter mostly out of political debates, even if not completely out of the news. Through this initiative, residents of Abkhazia can go to Tbilisi carrying exclusively their Abkhazian passport issued by the de facto authorities, which is implicitly accepted as a valid identification document, and – unlike Georgian citizens – benefit of quality healthcare services completely free of costs.[34] While conflict narratives may suggest that few would trust the enemy side with their lives, it appears that in recent years the number of those benefiting from the programme can be counted in hundreds. According to the *de jure* minister of health and social affairs of Tbilisi-based 'government of the autonomous republic of Abkhazia' the number of people from Abkhazia receiving such services has grown substantially from about 30 in 2012 and 2013, to 450 individuals in 2014, 540 in 2015, and 1 409 in 2016 (Nasha Abkhazia 2017).[35] Abkhazia's MFA in Sukhumi confirmed they are aware of this phenomenon,

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total expenditure of 76 million roubles, or about 2.4 million USD, at 2013 average exchange rates (Apsnypress 2014). USD calculated on the basis of the average exchange rate for the relevant year.

34 Only in the case of cures for hepatitis C, which is very expensive (about 120 000 USD) and currently offered in Georgia through US sponsors, Abkhazians are requested to obtain Georgian citizenship.

35 Interview with Ketevan Bakaradze, minister of health and social affairs of Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, Tbilisi, May 2016. According to Georgia's deputy minister for health, the total number of people from both Abkhazia and South Ossetia who have received healthcare in Georgia is 624 in 2013, 941 in 2014, and 1 577 in 2015, for a total cost in 2015

and claimed that Abkhazians who benefit of the system inform them of their intention to leave Abkhazia; according to their figures, 141 did so in 2015.[36]

In order to further advance this programme, Georgia built a brand new hospital just across the de facto border with Abkhazia, with costs nearing 18 million USD and due for completion in 2017 (Agenda.ge 2016). Apparently in order to contrast this initiative, in January 2017 Abkhazia finally reached an agreement that would allow its residents with Russian citizenship to receive free healthcare in Russia (Sharia 2017). Abkhazia's health minister Andzor Goov claimed that this would make possible "to close tightly the border [with Georgia] as we give the possibility to receive healthcare in any Russian clinic" (Sputnik Abkhazia 2017). The new agreement may well reduce the number of residents deciding to go to Georgia, but it is unlikely to stop the flow completely; this agreement gives the right to Abkhazian residents to refer to Russian clinics on the same terms as local residents, including for what concerns the long waiting times, the inefficiencies and the widespread corruption that characterise the Russian public healthcare system (Gordeev, Pavlova, and Groot 2014), rather than the corruption-free first class service that Abkhazians currently receive in Georgia.

Other sectors

Cooperation between Abkhazia and Russia practically involves all imaginable sectors of state activity. The extensive list of sectors of cooperation included in the treaty "on alliance and strategic partnership" (Kremlin.ru 2014) has been integrated and developed in a further series of bilateral treaties between ministries and departments. The variety of sectors involved partially emerges also from the subset of ApsnyPress articles on trainings used as a starting point for this section: they include references to capacity building initiatives coming from the Russian side aimed at journalists, librarians, sport trainers, fiscal officers, staff of emergency services, and various other categories.

Close and extensive cooperation with Russian state actors has been confirmed by interviews held by the author at the level of deputy minister at the ministry of foreign affairs, ministry of health, ministry of education, and ministry of labour and social

of 4 477 000 Georgian Lari, or about two million USD (Accent.com.ge 2016). For more details on how healthcare is provided, see in particular this talk show realised with the support of EU's Coberm programme and realised by Studio Re (2013).

36 Interview with Kan Taniya, Abkhazia's deputy minister of foreign affairs, Sukhumi, May 2016.

development; all of them made reference to direct contacts with colleagues within relevant Russian structures, mentioned training programmes and highlighted friendly relations, including the practice of consulting their counterparts in the Russian Federation on specific issues in case of need. One of the interviewees made reference to previous experience working in relevant structures of the Russian Federation. Another, mentioned an MBA programme organised by Russia and specifically targeted at top governmental officials aimed at enhancing their administration skills. Members of Abkhazia's parliament have also been attending for two and a half years dedicated masters programmes titled "Parliamentary activity and inter-parliamentary cooperation" at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration in Moscow (Abkhazia's parliament 2016).

The ministry of foreign affairs is among state institutions that benefits of a strong relationship with its Russian counterpart at multiple levels. Firstly, this means education and training programmes: Abkhazia's MFA (2017b) is in charge of selecting five students every year who will receive a full scholarship to proceed with their studies at the Russian MFA's own Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO).[37] Besides, MFA staff members regularly attend trainings at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian ministry of foreign affairs. Secondly, this means an open channel for consultation: when authorities in Sukhumi encounter issues or have not relevant experience in dealing with a given matter, or wish to hear more about best practices, they can refer to their Russian counterparts for advice. In the case of the MFA, such consultations may involve for example issues of diplomatic protocol, diplomatic etiquette, signing of treaties, as well as other technical issues that may arise due to the limited experience of the MFA in Sukhumi.[38] Finally, the MFA can count on direct assistance from Russia's MFA in both pragmatic and political issues, from facilitating the speedy issuance of urgent visas for the hundreds of participants that took part to the Conifa football championship in June 2016, to providing assistance in conflict negotiations or in other international interactions.

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37 It is worth highlighting that – even beyond the realm of international relations – MGIMO is the most exclusive university in Russia, and having a dedicated quota for Abkhazian citizens is to be understood as an important privilege.

38 Interview with Abkhazia's deputy minister for foreign affairs Kan Taniya, Sukhumi, May 2016.

Strong cooperation with Russia can be found across all of Abkhazia's government institutions. There are, however, initiatives that the Russian government seems unwilling to finance, and sometimes international organisations fill this gap. For example, Abkhazian officials have long insisted that Russian financial assistance should have a more explicit focus on fostering the local economy, which – it is hoped – will in time increase Abkhazia's chances to be self-sufficient. Russia has sponsored pensions, raises in the salaries of public employees, as well as building schools, healthcare facilities, and roads. However, it has not provided substantial stimuli for the local economy such as micro-credit initiatives, facilitated credit for local business (e.g., in the tourism sector), or direct support to local farmers for scaling up their production beyond subsistence.

On the contrary, even if mostly at small scales, international organisations do sponsor some of these activities. Livelihood projects, often (but not always) focused on Eastern Abkhazia, have offered micro-credit to local residents (see Illustration 6.2 and Illustration 6.3), or even direct monetary transfers for residents willing to start up or develop a business. Agriculture has been object of specific support, including through projects sponsored or implemented by the European Union, UNDP, Action Against Hunger, and others. Overall, some of these programmes involve resources that may be unimpressive by international development standards, but are still substantial in a small territory such as Abkhazia: EU's ENPARD (European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) Georgia II programme, for example, has earmarked 4 million USD specifically for Abkhazia (European Union 2015, 18).[39] In particular in the Gali district, such funding has effectively been complementary to Russian assistance: Russia paid for new roads, renovation of schools and other public infrastructures, but has not done anything to support the livelihood of residents or prop up the local economy, which is no less important for Abkhazia's long-term state building project.

An even more straightforward example of how international organisations' assistance can be complementary to Russia, and – as a side effect – contribute to the declared goals

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39 The objectives are defined as follows in the project description: "improve employment and living conditions in rural areas of Abkhazia through the gradual adoption of a rural development approach based on the diversification of the rural economy" (European Union 2015, 16).

of the de facto leadership is the case of Syrian "repatriates" in Abkhazia.[40] Since the early 1990s, Abkhazia's authorities have set up a 'State Committee for Repatriation' in order to support people of Abkhazian origins (whose ancestors were mostly forced to abandon their homeland and resettle in Turkey and the Middle East in the second half of the 19th century) who are willing to "return" to Abkhazia. The initiative clearly aims at changing the ethnic balance in the territory by increasing the number of self-identified ethnic Abkhaz; due to its nature, the issue of "repatriates" is highly sensible in terms of conflict dynamics.

Between May 2012 and July 2013, the Committee for Repatriation facilitated the arrival of close to 500 individuals of Abkhazian heritage from Syria by paying their transfer via charter flights from Beirut to Sochi and by offering accommodation and a stipend once arrived.[41] In the first year of the programme, Abkhazia's authorities spent about 1.5 mln USD specifically for taking care of this group (Abkhazia's MFA 2013). According to Abkhazia's constitutional law 'On repatriation', people who come to Abkhazia as "repatriates" maintain a special status that entitles them to have access to housing and benefits for five years (President of Abkhazia 1998, art. 7), which makes the initiative economically burdensome for de facto authorities.

In June 2014, Unhcr through the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) started to support projects aimed at improving livelihoods of "persons of concern from Syria in Abkhazia", as emerges from reports issued by these organisations (Danish Refugee Council 2015a, 2016). Such initiatives include language classes (in Russian and Abkhaz) to facilitate their integration in the local society, and other initiatives aimed at increasing access to livelihood, such as small start-up grants for those who have the skills to establish an own business in the local environment, work placement programmes for others, as well as support for students (Danish Refugee Council 2015b). In 2016, DRC (with Unhcr funding) implemented projects by the value of

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40 Beyond the reports quoted in-line, this section has been informed by an interview with UNHCR officer in Tbilisi (May 2016), and a conversation with a DRC officer in Abkhazia (May 2016). "Repatriates" and "return" is used in this context in order to reflect the terminology employed by authorities in Sukhumi, but is put in inverted commas in order to highlight the inadequacy of this terminology. For a more extended debate on the issue of Syrian "repatriates" to Abkhazia, see Lundgren (2017b).

41 According to Abkhazia's MFA (2014), more than 50 per cent of them are "mixed Abkhaz-Adyg families".

almost 1 mln USD aimed at improving the livelihood of persons of concerns from Syria and Ukraine in Abkhazia (Danish Refugee Council 2016).

Unhcr's and DRC's engagement with Syrian "repatriates" is the result of a series of concurring dynamics. On the one hand, after Aleksander Ankvab's removal from the presidential office in Sukhumi in 2014, it became once again possible for international NGOs to work throughout Abkhazia (rather than only in its Eastern districts). On the other, while Unhcr was about to disengage from its livelihood programmes in Gali and presumably close its office there, it could still find resources from budget lines dedicated to refugees and people of concern from Syria. Besides, Abkhazia's budget was apparently struggling to continue its support of the "repatriation" programme, at least in part due to decreased Russian funding and the fall of the exchange rate of the Russian rouble in late 2014, substantially increasing the need of external assistance for a sector of activity that the Russian side had no interest in sponsoring.[42] Finally, the humanitarian nature of the initiative – among other things – led authorities in Tbilisi to allow the implementation of this programme, in spite of its potentially sensitive political background.

Ultimately, however, no matter the combination of factors that made this specific programme possible, it appears that non-Russian assistance to Abkhazia in some circumstances effectively complements Russian support, providing resources for activities (such as support for agriculture or for the "repatriate" programme) that Moscow is unwilling to sponsor, or projects such as the one on vaccination that would otherwise weigh on Abkhazia's limited domestic resources.

6.4. State and capacity building in Transnistria

Interactions with the Russian Federation

Out of a total of 40 721 items published on Transnistria's state news agency between August 1999 and 1 March 2017, there are 333 articles including reference to "training"/"enhancing qualifications". More than half of them (182 items) did not explicitly relate to trainings involving external interactions; among those which did, the

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42 Apparently, the extra-budgetary nature of the Abkhazia's 'Repatriation Fund', and the seeming incapacity of the fund to collect its credits, contributed to limited availability of resources. As of March 2016, the "Repatriation Fund" had credits that it was unable to collect from a number of Abkhazian companies for almost 200 000 USD (Bargandzhia 2016).

vast majority (122) made reference to interactions with a Russian actor (see Table 6.2). It is worth highlighting that often references are not to federal Russian authorities, but rather to specific universities or institutions of higher education (e.g. in Bryansk, Voronezh, or Nizhny Novgorod), city administrations (in particular, Moscow), professional organisations (e.g. procurors), or a specific sector of state activities (in particular, customs services). Sectors mentioned most frequently in the subset of media reports at the basis of this analysis are education (mentioned in 45 out of 151 cases), health (39), customs officers (15), as well as veterinary and agriculture (14).[43] Prosecutors, judges and employees of the anti-monopoly services are also among those that have received trainings in Russia.

Relations between Transnistria and Russia have been formalised chiefly with two protocols (Zhukov-Smirnov protocol signed in May 2006, and the Rogozin-Shevchuk protocol in October 2013) that have served as the basis for stipulating a number of agreements between ministries, departments and state agencies. Such direct agreements have allowed for extended technical support, including study visits to Russia by Transnistrian bureaucrats from different sectors, to take place in fully formalised fashion, in spite of the fact that Russia did not recognise Transnistria's independence.[44] Indeed, going beyond the strict parameters of this preliminary analysis, local media in Transnistria report consultations, cooperation or technical support from Russia across all imaginable sectors of state activities, from road building to the banking sector, from the postal service to archives and museums.

Along branches of relevant ministries providing consultations and trainings in line with bilateral agreements, there are other emanations of the Russian government providing assistance to Transnistria. For example, Russia's state aid agency 'Rossotrudnichestvo' offers scholarships to local students wishing to continue their studies in a Russian university and sponsors training programmes for state employees. The fund 'Russky Mir', created by a presidential order by Vladimir Putin in 2007 to promote Russian language and culture abroad, has opened its own centre in Tiraspol's university in 2009 and sponsors a range of activities, focussing in particular on the education sector. Finally, in recent years, a new vehicle of Russian assistance to Transnistria has been

43 This may be related to the fact that agriculture and farming issues, following established Soviet practices, are frequently object of news reporting in Transnistrian media.

44 Distance learning is also being increasingly used across a number of sectors.

established and soon became a trademark of Moscow's support to Tiraspol: "autonomous non-commercial organisation 'Eurasian Integration'."

Founded in 2012 by Aleksey Zhuravlev, a Duma member and head of Russia's 'Motherland' party, 'Eurasian Integration' has become one of the main sources of support for socially oriented programmes in Transnistria, including building schools and hospitals, as well as sponsoring relevant training programmes; it has its headquarters in Moscow, and a representation office in "Tiraspol, Moldova" according to its official website. Little information is publicly available about its exact sources of funding, however there can be no doubt about the fact that this should effectively be considered the same as Russian governmental assistance. Official involvement is made explicit by the active participation of Russia's deputy-prime minister Dmitri Rogozin in discussions on the activities of this "autonomous non-governmental organisation," as well as by the fact that a number of buildings realised with its funding display a marble plate with the following words engraved in golden letters: 'gift of V.V. Putin to Transnistria' (Pridnestrovecrf 2015; Samodelova 2016).[45] Initiatives by 'Eurasian Integration' have very high visibility on the streets of Tiraspol (see Illustration 6.4), in Transnistria's news (see Illustration 6.5), as well as, for example, on the official website of Transnistria's government, which includes a dedicated section on initiatives sponsored by 'Eurasian integration' directly on its homepage. 'Eurasian integration' was established with a budget of 120 mln USD (IA Regnum 2013), mostly tied to plans for building kindergartens, schools, healthcare facilities, and, among other things, a new medical faculty for the local university. Funding include resources for fully refurbishing the new structures as well as for capacity building.

Overall, reliance on Russia has increased in recent years. According to one of the news items included in the 'training' subset, in 2003 then minister of justice of Transnistria highlighted low capacities among its own bureaucrats, and asked "to heads of departments to make their choice, if it is worth it to send employees to study in the Republic of Moldova, or if it is better to provide financing for developing specialists in Transnistria, who would be guaranteed to stay and work in the republic" (Ol'via Press

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45 In an interview to Transnistria's state television channel, director of "Eurasian integration" Aleksandr Argunov highlighted that he reports about the advancement of works to Moscow, claimed that Rogozin's office receives thankful notes about the activities of the organisation, and made clear that "the Russian Federation" is behind the organisation (Transnistria's First Channel 2016).

2003a). In the same year, authorities celebrated the opening in Tiraspol of a branch of the Ukrainian 'Odessa juridical academy', and then-minister of education highlighted how, along with students, "judges, bureaucrats, representatives of the ministry of interior and the ministry of defence would attend courses of re-qualification at the academy" (Ol'via Press 2003b). A decade later, as relations with Russia strengthened, and those with Ukraine worsened substantially after Yanukovykh was ousted in 2014, it seems unlikely that Transnistrian authorities would primarily refer to Moldova or Ukraine to train state officials.[46]

Interactions with Ukraine

While the 'training' subset does not include any reference to activities initiated by central authorities in Ukraine, there are substantial examples of initiatives involving actors based in Ukraine. Transnistrian Ukrainian-language schools, for example, were reported to have active contacts with schools in Kiev and Vinnitsa, and Ukrainian language teachers could attend courses of qualification in Ukraine (Ol'via Press 2002). Students of the history faculty of Tiraspol University went for trainings to the state archive of Ukraine's Vinnitsa region (Ustimenko 2008b). Even more recently, Ukraine remained a point of reference for training medical staff: according to a 2012 news report, only nine members of medical staff from Transnistria went through courses of qualification in Russia, while more than 350 did so in Ukraine (Novosti Pridnestrov'ya 2012). Apparently, even when Russia sponsored trainings of medical staff the following year, this was at least in part accomplished through Ukrainian specialists (Novosti Pridnestrov'ya 2014).

International support

The 'training' subset shows effectively no trace of assistance from international organisations before 2012, which is likely due to a combination of factors. The more direct cause for this change at this specific point in time is likely related to the elections in late 2011 that led to the ousting of Transnistria's long-standing president Igor Smirnov by Yevgeny Shevchuk, who came to power showing a more friendly approach towards the international community. However, various internal and external dynamics

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46 At the time, it was still presented as an achievement that members of the Duma elected in part with votes from Transnistria were able to ensure that a group of medical staff from Tiraspol could go to Smolensk for trainings (Ol'via Press 2004), while a decade later such initiatives had become routine.

have also been at play. On the one hand, as discussed in Chapter 5, Transnistria's economy was doing relatively well until the mid-2000s, and it is only at that point that Russia started to directly subsidise authorities in Tiraspol. Social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals inherited from the Soviet times where broadly functional through the 1990s and 2000s, but by the 2010s both infrastructure and capacities – in particular in the health sector – were becoming increasingly inadequate. As a representative of Transnistria's government put it, not a single new school or kindergarten has been built in Transnistria since the end of the Soviet Union until the large-scale projects sponsored by Russia through its 'Eurasian integration' process started being implemented.[47] Finally, it is only in recent years that an important donor such as the European Union increased its direct involvement in Moldova (in particular, after the Association Agreement was signed in 2014).

An earlier form of EU involvement in the region relates to the establishment in 2005 of the 'European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine' (Eubam). Headquartered in Odessa, Eubam "is an advisory, technical body mandated to enhance the border-management capacities of its partners – the border guard and customs authorities and other law enforcement agencies of Moldova and Ukraine," but – as part of its mandate – interacts also with authorities in Tiraspol (Eubam n.d.). At first, Eubam's presence may have been perceived as threatening by Transnistrian authorities, but it has likely contributed to solve in a pragmatic manner long-standing issues, as well as negative stereotypes on Transnistria as a black hole and a smuggling paradise. Eubam can serve as a contact point for economic actors and authorities in Tiraspol for approaching issues related to trade as new regulations are being implemented (e.g., introduction of the DCFTA), ultimately contributing to enhance their operations in a difficult context. There have also been a few instances of Eubam facilitating study visits - e.g. Transnistrian customs officials visiting the German-Swiss border near Basel (PMR State Customs Committee 2013) – or organised practical workshops – e.g. for phytosanitary experts (Eubam 2017b). Finally, Eubam's negotiating and monitoring role facilitated, for example, an agreement that allowed to reduce the travel time of the passenger train between Odessa and Chișinău (Eubam 2017a).[48]

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47 Interview with representative of Transnistria's MFA, Tiraspol, February 2016.

48 This section has benefited from a meeting with a Eubam officer in Chișinău in February 2016.

The main framework for EU assistance to Transnistria is a programme running since 2009 called 'Support to Confidence Building Measures Programme', and as of this writing in its fourth iteration for the period 2015-2018. The total budget for the four phases (2009-2018) amounts to about 24 mln Euro; the programme targets beneficiaries on both banks of the Dniester river, and is largely managed by UNDP as an implementing partner (UNDP 2015c).[49] The programme includes different sectors of activities, and engages at different levels with economic actors, NGOs, local governments offices and central authorities in Tiraspol.[50] EU-sponsored activities may be complemented by assistance from other partner donors. For example, the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency through UNDP provided almost 2 mln USD in assistance to Transnistria's health sector, focusing in particular on perinatal institutions and involving also the World Health Organisations and Unicef (UNDP 2015b, 2016a). Swedish cooperation sponsors a programme on human rights involving a number of UN agencies, with a budget of over 1 mln USD for the period 2015-2018 (UNDP 2015a, 2016b).

While the range of activities is broad, most of these programmes focus on the social sector and health in particular, in line with local needs and structural constraints on international involvement in the region. Investments are substantial, but relatively small when compared with Russian assistance: rather than building a new hospital or school, for example, such funds allow to renovate a specific section, equip relevant institutions, or provide training. Some activities include an explicit confidence building component that involve actors from both sides in a shared activity (e.g. a training programme), but in many instances this initiative is pragmatically operationalised as a development assistance programme.

Non-recognition impacts on assistance at multiple levels. Firstly, international organisations operate in consultation with Moldova's government in Chişinău, but in line with Transnistria's legislation (President of Transnistria 2008), activities must also be approved by a dedicated "coordination council on humanitarian and technical assistance" in Tiraspol. Similarly to what happens in Abkhazia, this "double bottleneck"

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49 Support to Confidence Building Measures had 3.7 mln Euro budget for 2009-2012 (phase 1 and 2), 10.6 mln Euro for 2012-2014, and 10 mln Euro for 2015-2018. For reference, total allocation for EU assistance to Moldova for the period 2014-2017 "can range from EUR 335 million to EUR 410 million based on successful implementation" (EEAS 2016).

50 For a detailed list of activities and related budget, see UNDP (2016c).

leads to a focus on social infrastructure, the health sector and business support, and effectively precludes activities in sectors at the core of EU assistance to Moldova such as public administration and police reform (EEAS 2016).

Under EU-sponsored initiatives, need assessments take place in dialogue with the de facto authorities, but reconstruction works or new facilities cannot be transferred to state authorities in Tiraspol: contracts and grants are made either with local authorities at municipality or district level, or with local initiative groups such as a parent association or a local NGO.[51] This approach may complicate implementation of activities at times, but makes assistance acceptable to all actors involved. The fact that capacity building initiatives, for example in the health sector, necessarily involve what are ultimately Transnistrian state-employees has so far not been an obstacle to trainings in this sector.

Assistance to non-governmental organisations based in Transnistria has been taking place for years, but not without complications. UNDP accepts applications and provides funding also to NGOs that are registered only in Tiraspol, but when the EU delegation to Moldova implemented directly a programme targeted to civil society in 2016, it included among eligibility criteria the requirement that NGOs be registered also at the ministry of justice in Chișinău, which reduced substantially the number of potential applicants.[52] Besides, even when projects involve only NGOs, they often have to go through the above-mentioned coordination council (and must do so if they want to apply for relevant tax breaks). [53]

In spite of broad contiguity between assistance programmes implemented by Russia's 'Eurasian Integration' and that conducted by international organisations, there is no coordination of any sort taking place among them, as has been confirmed in interviews by representatives of international organisations based in Chișinău. Presumably, this gives more discretion to authorities in Tiraspol, who are in the position to discuss priority areas with different donors separately.

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51 Russian-sponsored initiatives such as 'Eurasian integration' have no such limitations and work directly with central authorities in Tiraspol.

52 In reply to a direct question by a potential applicant, the EU delegation to Moldova replied that also "co-applicants [from Transnistria] have to be registered at the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova" (EU delegation to Moldova 2016).

53 For more details on the coordinating role of the MFA in Transnistria, see Chapter 7, section 7.4.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that many Transnistrian enterprises are registered also in Chişinău, and may have affiliated companies in other jurisdictions, thus making it easy for them to have access to technological innovations or professional training programmes through regular business channels. This may have had some impact on capacity building, for example, in the health sector, with seminars taking place in Tiraspol and involving representatives from pharmaceutical companies from countries such as Slovenia, Hungary, and Switzerland (e.g. Ustimenko 2008a).

6.5. State and capacity building in Nagorno Karabakh

In the case of Nagorno Karabakh, the 'training' subset offers few insights. Among the 15 209 news published between January 2014 and December 2016, only 21 items make reference to 'trainings', and almost none of them explicitly characterises actors based in Nagorno Karabakh as recipients of training. In this context, there is not a single reference to international organisations. There is one reference to employees of 'Artsakhbank' who may attend courses in Yerevan if there will be such a need, and one to courses for judges in Armenia. Other news items refer to trainings offered by the Russian side to Armenia (in sectors such as emergency situations, and defence), without clarifying if representatives of Nagorno Karabakh are in any way involved.

Lack of relevant news is not surprising, as in Nagorno Karabakh, the support of international organisations has been much less prominent than in Abkhazia and Transnistria, and has been largely supplanted by support from both Armenia and the Armenian diaspora. Indeed, across most sectors of state activities, state building in Nagorno Karabakh proceeds in the footsteps of Yerevan, with direct cooperation across the spectrum of state activities, from education to defence. As argued by Panossian (2001, 150), Nagorno Karabakh can be seen on many levels as "an informal region of Armenia", due not only to intertwined political dynamics, but to overall convergence of institutional functioning, including harmonisation of laws.[54] Initiatives emanating from actors based in Yerevan are structurally embedded in the everyday life of Nagorno Karabakh, are not effectively perceived as a form of *external* assistance, and, as a consequence, they are not considered newsworthy.

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54 'Harmonisation' is perhaps not a strong enough word: as highlighted by Waters (2006, 410), "in the vast majority of cases, Armenian laws are adopted verbatim, with the only change being in the name of the republic in the title of the act. Lawyers and judges in the Republic are as likely to have a copy of the Armenian civil code on their desks as the Karabakh version."

The Armenian diaspora

As highlighted in Chapter 5, Armenia's government provides more than 50 per cent of incomes to Nagorno Karabakh's budget, covering for an important part of current expenses. However, in terms of sponsoring infrastructure development, support from the diaspora is no less important. The largest diaspora organisation focused on fund raising in favour of Nagorno Karabakh is Los Angeles-based 'Hayastan All Armenian Fund'. Its yearly Thanksgiving Day telethon specifically aimed at raising funds for Nagorno Karabakh surpassed 15 mln USD in donations in 2016, and has raised more than 100 mln USD in the last decade. An overview of their records shows that these resources finance activities that would otherwise have to be financed by the budget (or remain unfunded), such as building roads, social housing, as well as construction and renovation of education and health facilities (Armenia Fund 2017).[55] The news section of the website of the 'Hayastan All Armenian Fund' provides a regular stream of news regarding the inauguration of new facilities, and as of early 2017 its 'ongoing projects' section includes about two dozens initiatives, such as the construction of community centres, kindergartens, schools, and even a highway (Hayastan All Armenian Fund 2017).

Quoting the prime minister of Nagorno Karabakh, Caspersen (2009, 54) pointed out that "in 2009, the Armenian diaspora is expected to finance half of all public construction in the entity, including schools, hospitals and water supply." This claim does not fully align with data issued by the local statistical office, but may be a more accurate description of the actual state of affairs, since statistics are due to report all of construction works paid from the state budget, but may underestimate what it considers 'humanitarian relief'. Yet, even according to official data, infrastructures built through 'humanitarian relief' account for a large part of public constructions; for example, according to figures released by the Nagorno Karabakh statistical office, construction activities financed through 'humanitarian relief' amounted to 9.6 mln USD in 2015, compared to 16.6 mln USD financed from the state budget (which includes domestic resources as well as Yerevan's official assistance; see Illustration 6.6 for a summary of relevant data).

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55 Already in the 1990s, MacFarlane and Minear (1997, 67) characterised assistance by the Armenia Fund as "major contributions of quasi-governmental nature."

International organisations

Due to strong opposition from Azerbaijan, the funding of projects in Nagorno Karabakh is severely limited, as few governments or organisations unaffiliated with the Armenian diaspora sponsor activities in Nagorno Karabakh. It is also worth highlighting that the situation stabilised soon after the war ended, and that Nagorno Karabakh did not stand out as a humanitarian emergency by regional standards. MacFarlane and Minear (1997, 61–62) claim that "by mid-1996, […] reconstruction of damaged and destroyed buildings in Stepanakert itself was largely complete […], the humanitarian emergency in Nagorno Karabakh largely has been overcome, […] [and] Nagorno Karabakh appears to be in a better condition than Azerbaijan from a humanitarian perspective."

In particular in the 1990s, however, a few international organisations (including Doctors Without Borders, Halo Trust, and Christian Solidarity) were present and carried out activities in Nagorno Karabakh. The International Red Cross, active in Nagorno Karabakh since 1992, engaged in a wide spectrum of activities, including food distribution, rehabilitation of destroyed villages, reconstruction of water supplies, and programmes aimed at facilitating agricultural self-sufficiency (MacFarlane and Minear 1997, 65). As recently as 2010 it would still list among its activities in Nagorno Karabakh support to primary health-care services, provision of food and household items to vulnerable people, water projects, and "construction of infrastructure such as safe play areas for children" (ICRC 2010). According to public records, the ICRC has scaled down such activities in recent years and has focused more on clarifying the fate of missing people from the conflict area, as well as facilitating exchange of prisoners or residents across the de facto border.

The US are the only country – beyond Armenia – providing direct assistance to Nagorno Karabakh; "in 1998 Congress for the first time designated Nagorno Karabakh a recipient of humanitarian aid distinct from Azerbaijan" (International Crisis Group 2005). USAID assistance enabled activities of international organisations such as Halo Trust and Save the Children (e.g. Asbarez 1999), and sponsored projects in Nagorno Karabakh mostly aimed at "humanitarian relief and assistance" for a total of 45 mln USD between 1998 and 2015 (Beglaryan 2015).[56] USAID-sponsored activities,

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56 The Armenian National Committee of Armenia (ANCA) claims that successive US administrations have failed to maintain the level of expenditure on Nagorno Karabakh intended by Congress: according to their calculations, 25 mln USD more should have actually been spent on Nagorno Karabakh in the period 1998-2010 (ANCA 2010).

however, must take place within the boundaries of Soviet-time NKAO,[57] and this condition is not without consequence for UK-based Halo Trust, a demining organisation active in Nagorno Karabakh since 2000 which received most of its funding for activities in the region from USAID (HALO Trust 2017). In this case, it is again diaspora organisations which increased their involvement in order to provide additional resources, for example by organising successful crowd-funding campaign specifically targeting demining activities.[58]

Since 2010, the European Union has been sponsoring the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno Karabakh (EPNK), a multi-million peace building programme aimed at invigorating dialogue across the conflict line and at enhancing the capacities of civil society organizations and media that are willing to join such initiatives.[59] Starting with 2017, through its Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the European Union has been financing a new programme – 'Peacebuilding through Capacity Enhancement and Civic Engagement' (PeaCE) – with a budget of 1.86 mln EUR for a three-year period. Even if its name may suggest otherwise, the programme is again strictly focused on civil society actors and peace building initiatives. Unlike EU-sponsored initiatives in Transnistria and Abkhazia, neither of these projects includes financial assistance for social infrastructure or for capacity building initiatives beyond the NGO sector.

6.6. Conclusions

As emerges from this chapter, lack of recognition is hardly synonymous with international isolation. In recent years, a variety of external actors have contributed to state and capacity building in post-Soviet de facto states, in particular in sectors such as

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57 NKAO, or Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast', is the administrative unit that delimited Nagorno Karabakh in Soviet times. Since the conflict in the early 1990s, Armenian forces control a substantially larger territory. Apparently, not only USAID, but also the ICRC (MacFarlane and Minear 1997, 65) and even the 'Hayastan All Armenian Fund' (International Crisis Group 2005, 13) do not sponsor projects in this extended area.

58 For an account of how one such effort by US-based ONEArmenia managed to raise 95 000 USD from donors between February and April 2017 using modern approaches to crowd-funding, see ONEArmenia (ONEArmenia 2017).

59 EPNK funding is substantial, with EPNK-2 (2012-2015) and EPNK-3 (2016-2019) worth 6 mln EUR each (EPNK 2014, 2016).

health and education. Indeed, even if for different reasons, both the patron and other international actors largely focus on social issues and welfare.

In the case of international actors working in these territories this is due to a combination of factors. On the one hand, the parent state would mostly protest against any activity that explicitly relates to state building in these territories. With the partial exception of the US providing direct assistance to Nagorno Karabakh without requesting Baku's approval, international organisations and state donors comply with the regulations set by the parent state, and often directly discuss activities with relevant institutions of the governments in Tbilisi and Chişinău. As a consequence, only activities that have a humanitarian or confidence building dimension receive approval. From their side, de facto authorities are effectively in the position to veto any initiative by international organisations that is not of their liking, thus excluding, for example, democracy promotion or activities aimed at enhancing governance that are frequently found in the recognised countries of the region. In the case of the patron state, assistance is also framed as humanitarian; however, well beyond direct support, both Russia and Armenia effectively serve as models, and state and capacity building initiatives sponsored by the patron structurally lead to convergence of governance practices.

Lack of recognition and prevalent dynamics lead to the fact that conditionality – a common staple of international assistance in the region – cannot be applied to post-Soviet de facto states. On the contrary, as appears particularly in the case of Abkhazia, de facto authorities are sometimes in the position to cherry-pick from the (admittedly, limited) set of activities that international organisations would be willing to offer. Emboldened by substantial support from the patron, they insist that assistance from international organisations is of little importance to them: interviewees representing Abkhazian authorities have been overall dismissive of the importance of international donors, and claimed they could easily do without them.[60] Due to the fact that

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60 This approach appears also from relevant press releases. For example, when UNHCR representatives met with Georgian authorities in Tbilisi, they were thanked – as it is customary – for their work (UNHCRC Georgia 2017). When UNHCR representatives visited Abkhazia's MFA in Sukhumi, it was on the contrary UNHCR which "thanked the Foreign Minister of Abkhazia for the opportunity to carry out their activities in the country" (Abkhazia's MFA 2017a). According to the press-release issued by the MFA itself, the Abkhazian side did not express gratitude, in spite of the fact that a large part of UNHCR work in Abkhazia is now focused on - effectively – supporting Abkhazia's "repatriation" programme. Rather than being simply a matter of diplomatic courtesy, this difference is

international organisations and donors wish to remain engaged in Abkhazia and are afraid of the implicit (or explicit) threat of not being allowed to continue their activities, they mostly keep a pliant approach, accepting the limitations on the scope of activities they implement. Abkhazian authorities would not be happy to see these organisations leave, but feel confident enough of their will to stay to demand substantial limitations to their activities.

Besides, non-recognition removes many of the levers needed to apply conditionality on recipient countries. Countries in the region such as Moldova and Ukraine accept conditionality and must demonstrate a degree of goodwill in implementing reforms in order to receive financial assistance from actors such as the European Union or the International Monetary Fund, but since no such assistance is offered to de facto states due to non-recognition, there is also no basis for conditionality. In other words, an upside of the inability of de facto states to access international credits and thus grow an external debt is the fact that neither markets nor creditor countries can put pressure on domestic policy-making; as a consequence, under the current circumstances, the patron is the only actor able to apply conditionality on the governments of de facto states.[61]

Without a doubt, assistance from Russia comes loaded with implicit conditionality which limits foreign policy choices available to de facto states. However, given the circumstances and the fact that – even without considering security guarantees – Russian assistance is offered on a scale that brings an immediate and positive impact on the livelihood of large sections of the resident population, such limitations are seemingly perceived as an acceptable price to pay.[62] Among other things, Russian assistance to Abkhazia and South Ossetia allowed to boost the salary of state

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emblematic of the perceived fragility of the position of international organisations in Abkhazia, and reflects power relations. This approach is reflected also by the scant coverage given by state media to activities by international organisations: for example, among the dozens of news items mentioning Syrian repatriates published by ApsnyPress. there is not a single reference to the support given by UNHCR through DRC in favour of Syrian "repatriates", in spite of the fact that they effectively finance a large share of the total activities in favour of "repatriates" in Abkhazia.

61 In the case of Transnistria, which does not share a border with the Russian Federation and trades mostly with Moldova and EU countries, the situation is less straightforward: the possibility to give or deny access to key markets at favourable conditions gives the EU and Moldova more leverage on Tiraspol in relation to business regulations and standards.

employees, increase pensions, enhance the quality of services in key sectors such as health and education, and gave the possibility to hundreds of residents every year to receive full scholarships for their whole course of studies. In Transnistria, it allowed to start a large-scale programme of building and renovating social infrastructure, to offer gas at discounted prices to residents, and keep higher pensions (as well as a lower pension age) compared to neighbouring countries. Finally, by not recognising in principle political processes taking place in these territories, international actors such as the European Union lose another potential lever to push for more inclusive democratic practices.

As highlighted in Chapter 5, budget transfers to de facto states from the patron reach levels unseen in recognised countries of the region. Non-budget support from both the patron and international donors is also substantial. Interestingly, if only funding aimed at social issues is taken in consideration, de facto states may actually be receiving more support from international organizations per capita than their recognised peers in the region. EU assistance to Moldova and Georgia for the period 2014-2017, for example, is concentrated on the priority areas defined by the respective 'Single Support Framework': public administration reform, agriculture and rural development, and police reform and border management in the case of Moldova (EEAS 2016) as well as justice sector reform in Georgia (EEAS 2014). The priority areas are defined jointly with the recipient governments; they may well reflect their needs and contribute to long-term development of these countries. However, this also implies that few external resources go to socially-oriented programmes that would have a more direct impact on the life of many residents of the region.

The dynamics outlined in this chapter also highlight Russia's "statalist" approach when acting as a donor towards these territory. Almost all of Russia's assistance is aimed at enhancing state capacities, at building or renovating infrastructures that directly belong to state authorities, and provide trainings to civil servants across all sectors of state activities. On the contrary, and only partly due to non-recognition, international donors such as the European Union prefer interacting with civil society and private economic actors.

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62 Occasionally, public figures in Abkhazia make the argument that Sukhumi should stop accepting financial assistance from Russia (Zavodskaya 2015); they are, however, isolated voices with little influence on actual policy-making.

Finally, insistence on including a large part of international assistance to Abkhazia and Transnistria under the label of confidence building initiatives partly contributes to defeat their nominal purpose. Acknowledging that straightforward confidence building initiatives may not be viable or fruitful in these contexts, local officers often pragmatically decline confidence building measures as – effectively – traditional development assistance. However, authorities and individuals in de facto states often look suspiciously at such interventions, assuming that their final goal is territorial reintegration with the parent state, rather than their welfare; given public insistence of most international actors on territorial integrity of the parent state, this is hardly surprising. This state of affairs leads to a paradoxical situation. If similar programmes were labelled as development assistance, they would likely be received more warmly by local authorities and residents alike in de facto states, and may increase confidence of local societies towards international organisations and perhaps even the parent state. On the contrary, the label of 'confidence building' politicises what could otherwise be welcomed as humanitarian or development assistance; as things stand, de facto states remain understandably suspicious of the motivations behind these initiatives, and disapprove of the seemingly unaltruistic nature of assistance.[63]

To summarise, the patron remains the main external actors for state and capacity building in post-Soviet de facto states well beyond direct budget support. However, a variety of actors may have a role that is far from negligible, and in some respects complement the patron's assistance. The "triple bottleneck" imposed on assistance by the parent state, by de facto authorities, and by the limited number of sectors that international donors are willing to support leads to increased focus on social infrastructure and healthcare; this state of affairs is largely to be imputed to non-recognition, as it would be unusual for small dependent jurisdictions, independent states in the region, or post-conflict territories.

This analysis of the impact of non-recognition on the external relations of post-Soviet de facto states continues in the next chapter by focusing on the ministry of foreign affairs of de facto states. Since the MFA does not even exist as such in sub-state entities or in post-conflict territories that do not have a claim to sovereign independence, and

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63 In reference to the negative impact of limited international involvement in Nagorno Karabakh, MacFarlane and Minear (1997, 70) argue that "if effective humanitarian aid can serve as a confidence-building device, its absence in this instance seems to have had the opposite effect."

conducts many of its activities through diplomatic networks that remains mostly unavailable to unrecognised states, it seems to be a promising venue for pointing at some of the ways in which contested status impacts on the external relations of an entity.

6.7. Illustrations and tables

Sector	All external	Russia	Others
education	50	43	7
health	38	16	22
journalism	14	10	4
disappeared	8	0	8
customs	6	5	1
business	5	3	2
human rights	5	0	5
MFA	5	4	1
invalids	4	1	3
justice	4	4	0
library	4	4	0
women rights	5	0	5
youth	4	4	0
bureaucrats	3	3	0
emergency situations	3	3	0
police	3	2	1
procuror	3	3	0
university	3	2	1
defence	2	2	0
fiscal	2	2	0
sport	2	2	0
tourism	2	2	0
translation	2	0	2
water	2	0	2
access to information	1	0	1
child care	1	1	0
comprehensive	1	1	0
conflict resolution	1	0	1
elections	1	1	0
financial control	1	1	0
interior	1	1	0
migration	1	1	0
minorities	1	0	1
museum	1	0	1
Total	**189**	**121**	**68**

Table 6.1: Number of references to sector of activity by actor for all items included in the ApsnyPress (Abkhazia) 'training' dataset making reference to an external actor

Sector	All external	Russia	Others
education	44	35	9
health	39	28	11
customs	14	14	0
veterinary	11	10	1
bureaucracy	8	7	1
culture	6	5	1
justice	4	3	1
anti-monopoly	3	3	0
business	3	1	2
MFA	3	3	0
procuror	3	2	1
agriculture	2	2	0
archiving	2	1	1
comprehensive	2	1	1
finance	2	2	0
journalism	2	2	0
youth	2	1	1
accounting	1	1	0
arts	1	1	0
banking	1	1	0
engineering	1	1	0
machine-building	1	1	0
police	1	1	0
social	1	0	1
sport	1	1	0
Total	**158**	**127**	**31**

Table 6.2: Number of references to sector of activity by actor for all items included in the Novosti Pridnestrov'ya (Transnistria) 'training' dataset making reference to an external actor

Illustration 6.1: The headquarters of the 'Moscow house' in Sukhumi, built by the city administration of Moscow. It includes hotel rooms and a number of other facilities (http://mkdc-sukhum.com/). Photo by the author, May 2016.

Illustration 6.2: Advertisement by World Vision of credit opportunities for small business found at a crossroad next to Sukhumi's central market. Photo by the author, September 2011.
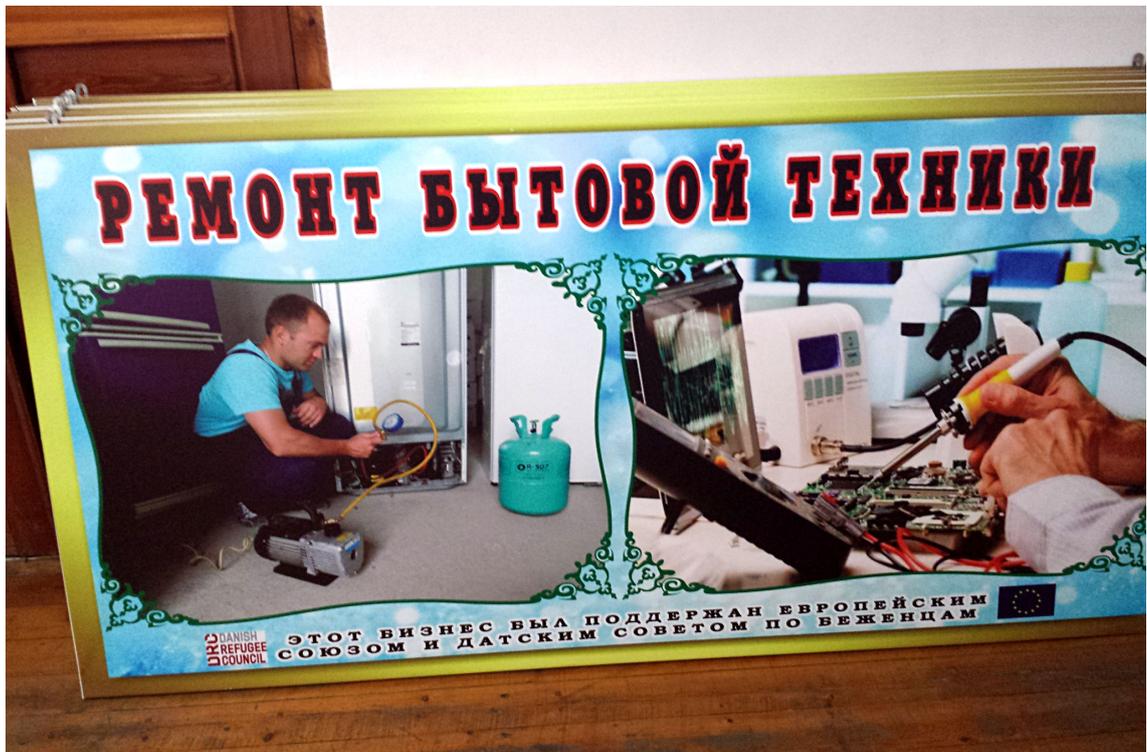
Illustration 6.3: Shop sign in Gali including the notice "this business has been supported by the European Union and the Danish Refugee Council." Photo by the author, May 2016.

Illustration 6.4: Trolleybus in Tiraspol decorated with a Russian flag, the symbol of "Eurasian integration" (the main organisation building social infrastructure in Transnistria through Russian funds), and the words "future together with Russia!". Photo by the author, February 2016.

Number of occurrences of selected external actors on 'Novosti Pridnestrov'ia'
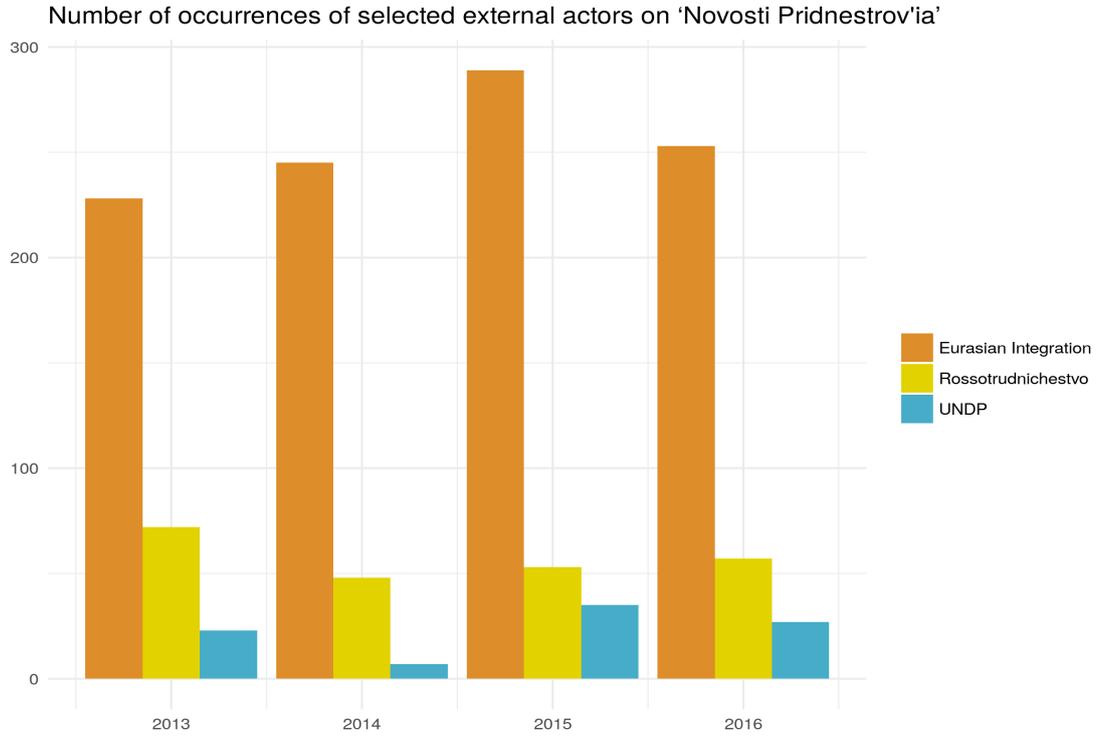
Illustration 6.5: Number of occurrences of selected external actors in all news items (n = 44 449) published by 'Novosti Pridnestrov'ia' in the period 2013-2016.

Volume of construction in Nagorno Karabakh by sources of financing
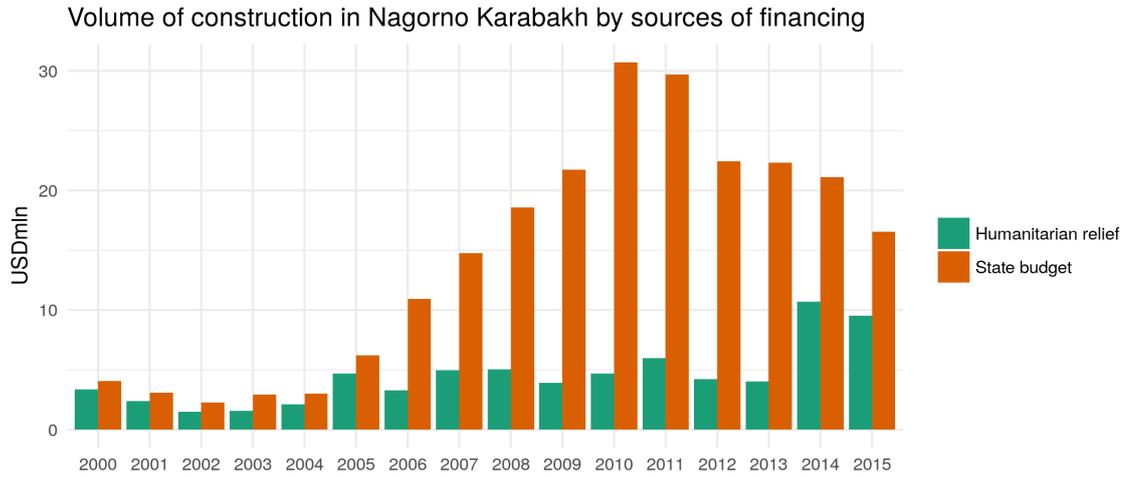
Source: statistical office of Nagorno Karabakh;
Armenian Central Bank for exchange rates

Illustration 6.6: Volume of construction in Nagorno Karabakh by source of funding (2000-2015)

Chapter 7.

MFAs in post-Soviet de facto states

"Dear Max,

are you there?"

(Baudelaire 2014)

"Letters to Max", a film by French artist and film-maker Eric Baudelaire (2014) released in 2014, recounts of the epistolary encounter between the author and then Abkhazia's minister of foreign affairs Maxim Gvinjia. The film is built around letters sent by post from Paris to the address of Abkhazia's ministry of foreign affairs in Sukhumi, including only brief and often ostentatiously naive questions, starting with an uncertain "Max, are you there?". Further correspondence includes queries on issues such as war and memory, as well as pragmatic aspects ("Dear Max, what does a diplomat for a country that isn't recognised do when he comes to the office in the morning?")[1]. In the 110 minutes of film, as images from contemporary Abkhazia fill the screen, the spectator hears Maxim Gvinjia's slow, warm voice answering all these

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1 Gvinjia's answer: "A diplomat of country which is not recognised does exactly the same as one of a recognised country. Maybe I even have more job to do because I have to make every time the first step. […] I spent three hours for correspondence in the morning, then another three or four hours for correspondence in the evening" (Baudelaire 2014).

questions, talking about Abkhazia, and reasoning on the unusual condition of living in an unrecognised country.[2]

This chapter does not deal with the minutiae of daily activities of diplomats of de facto states, but rather strives to offer an overview of public activities of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states, as well as of those efforts that are given less visibility, but directly relate to the mechanisms that enable external assistance to post-Soviet de facto states. As will be seen, a consistent part of the work of the MFAs of these entities can be be framed around its role as both a facilitator and gatekeeper of external relations, as well as that of "narrative-builder" for domestic and international audiences.

In relation to the main questions underlying this research, two aspects are given particular attention. First, how does non-recognition impact the activities of an institution such as that of the MFA? Second, given the prominence of external assistance in ensuring domestic capabilities, how does the MFA come into play?

Since there is no data that can directly serve as a basis for comparison for MFAs, this chapter takes an exploratory approach based on word frequency analysis. In a first section, in order to appreciate the relative importance of MFAs versus other branches of government in de facto states, frequency of mentions of the names of all members of government in the main local news agencies based in these territories are presented. Based on the contents of news reports and contextual knowledge of these entities, this section serves to outline the main priorities of MFAs of de facto states as seen from a local perspective.

The following section looks at the press releases of MFAs of de facto states, in order to point at differences among them. The comparison is then extended to highlight some of the ways in which MFAs in de facto states act (and communicate their activities) differently from their peers in uncontested territories. Such a comparison is complicated, and admittedly problematic on many levels. First, MFAs of many micro-states or small jurisdictions, including all of the cases chosen as terms of reference in Chapter 5 (MIRAB economies and US compact island states), do not even have an own

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2   The film was then complemented by a series of events called "The secession sessions", a touring exhibition that made it to major art museums around the world (including the MOMA in New York), and even an "Abkhazian Anembassy", a month-long performance at Bétonsalon in Paris that consisted in Maxim Gvinjia (by then already *former* foreign minister of Abkhazia) actually holding regular office hours as "Anambassador" of Abkhazia (MOMA 2015; Bétonsalon 2014).

website (or if they do, it is not updated). This observation is in itself telling (MFAs of small uncontested states have seemingly little reason to bother with an on-line presence or with issuing official statements), yet it does not enable a more structured comparison. Even if sub-state entities engage in external relations and sub-state diplomacy (as discussed in Chapter 3), they are unlikely to have an institution that can directly be compared with an MFA. Instead of discarding completely the possibility to look at MFAs comparatively, and acknowledging the substantial limitations of this approach, this chapter introduces a comparison based on word frequency analysis of press-releases issued in a three-year period by 13 different MFAs including internationally recognised countries bordering post-Soviet de facto states, countries of recent independence, and European micro-states.

It is argued that, even if a comparison based on a limited number of keywords is not sufficient to provide a comprehensive description of the visible activities of these MFAs, it still enables to point at important ways in which non-recognition bears an impact on the activity of institutions in de facto states. Within the scope of this research, this part is complemented by a section on the coordinating role of MFAs, based on an analysis of relevant legislation, interviews with representatives of the MFAs of Transnistria and Abkhazia, as well as with international actors that interact with them. As will be seen in particular in the case of Abkhazia and Transnistria, even beyond conflict negotiations, MFAs play a central role in particular in relation to initiatives involving international organisations; indeed, specific legislation "on the coordinating role" of the MFA aimed at ensuring this role is in place in both cases, and is taken as a starting point to analyse their activities in this respect.

In the conclusions to this chapter, the insights gained through these two different approaches are summed up in order to highlight the impact of non-recognition on the activities of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states.

7.1. The role of MFAs in post-Soviet de facto states

Post-Soviet de facto states largely based their institutions on pre-existing Soviet structures. With the partial exception of Transnistria, each of them had some local correspondent of a ministry for education or ministry for health, for example, as well as a local parliament. However, the ministry of foreign affairs had to be built from scratch, as no correspondent institution existed in any of these places. De facto states are not unique in this respect, since this is true for most countries that achieve independence,

including in the context of decolonisation: there was no comparable office in previous colonial governments (East 1973, 497). But lack of recognition posed additional challenges, well beyond the lack of domestic capacities. Due to their unrecognised status, some of the commitments that absorb a significant part of the work of MFAs, including consular and diplomatic activities, as well as interactions through organisations such as the UN, are largely to be excluded. Interactions with officials of foreign countries or governments are additionally complicated by the fact that any such meeting could be construed as proof of the international standing of the local government and some sort of recognition (or acceptance) at the international level; as Ker-Lindsay (2015, 278) put it "[t]he one official post that presents a problem in almost all cases is the foreign minister of a contested state," exactly because non-sovereign jurisdictions do not have an MFA. It is often easier for representatives of NGOs as well as economic actors to move across borders, and be received in their personal capacity, without involvement of government authorities.

Activities of MFAs of de facto states, as well as their foreign policy priorities have received some scholarly attention (Owtram 2011), in particular in the case of Transnistria (Kosienkowski 2012a), and Abkhazia (Frear 2014). Owtram (2011, 145–46) thus summarises the main aims of foreign policy for de facto states:

> "The first aim of these unrecognized states is survival – militarily, politically, and economically – in the form of promotion of trade, investment, or aid. […] The second aim is to acquire material resources in the form of aid and foreign investment. The third aim is to engage in foreign policy to demonstrate the apparatus and behaviour of a state […]. Underlying all this is a fourth aim, which is to increase the degree of recognition by recognized states, either of a de facto or of a formal kind."

Indeed, while the issue of international recognition is routinely mentioned among top priorities in relevant document and interviews,[3] it has increasingly been left on the back-burner, under the understanding that international recognition is more likely to come as a result of big power politics or so-called 'chequebook diplomacy' (Ó Beacháin, Comai, and Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili 2016, 452–54), rather than the merits or efforts of a given group. In the first place, however, the above quote highlights the

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3   For example, in the official 'foreign policy concept' of Transnistria, achieving "legal international recognition and becoming a member of the United Nations" is listed first among foreign Tiraspol's policy goals (Transnistria's MFA 2012b).

central role of ensuring external assistance among foreign policy goals of de facto states.

7.2. Outlining priorities of MFAs through their relative importance

In the context of decolonisation, East (1973, 503) argued that the value of the MFA is at least in part proved by the extent to which it can contribute in achieving key domestic goals:

> "Because of the high priority given to state building and economic development in [small developing] states, the ministries primarily responsible for these areas are likely to be the most influential in the government. The MFA will be considered important to the extent that it aids in achieving these objectives."

Applying this reasoning to post-Soviet de facto states, it would appear that the relative importance of the MFA can to some extent be used as a measure of the MFA's contribution to matters of public interest. In order to approach this question, visibility on local media is taken as a proxy for relative importance of the MFA in the governments of de facto states. By comparing the frequency of mentions for each minister in the local media, it should be possible to gauge the relative importance of the MFA, in relation to other ministries. Illustrations 6.1 to 6.7 present the number of mentions that each member of government received on national media in post-Soviet de facto states, based on the Russian-language version of state-owned Novosti Pridnestrov'ya (Transnistria), ApsnyPress (Abkhazia), and Cominf (South Ossetia), as well as privately-owned ArtsakhPress for Nagorno Karabakh (which has no state-owned news agency). The data refer to the latest two governments for each of the cases, excluding governments that lasted less than six months.[4] The head of the MFA is highlighted among other members of government in the graphs.[5]

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4   In the case of Nagorno Karabakh, where Araik Arutyunyan has been serving since 2007, the data account for change in ministerial seats for the period for which data are available, i.e. since 2014.

5   Focus on the individual which heads the ministry may be partially misleading, as in some cases deputy-ministers may have relatively high visibility in the media, while in others they may be almost invisible. All things considered, this approach still seems to be more robust than alternatives, as it can be uniformly applied across cases.

The data show that the head of the MFA is in almost all cases among the most frequently mentioned ministers. Some of the differences may partly be explained by the personalities involved and contextual political dynamics. In the case of Transnistria, for example, Nina Shtanski was notoriously outspoken and media-friendly, was known for her pro-active use of social media (Kosienkowski 2012b), and would eventually leave her post to marry then president of Transnistria Evgeny Shevchuk. But as appears from Illustration 7.2 even her successor Vitaly Ignatiev, has been highly visible during his tenure, appearing in the media much more frequently than all other ministers, excluding the prime minister.

Also in the case of Abkhazia both Vyacheslav Chirikba and Daur Kove have been among the most frequently mentioned ministers of their government, yet without distancing themselves from all other ministers as is the case in Transnistria. In South Ossetia, on the contrary, it seems that the MFA is an unremarkable ministry: David Sanakoev did feature among the most frequently mentioned members of government, but he was a former presidential candidate and the leader of a political party ('New Ossetia'), so not all mentions were related to his job as a foreign minister. His successor Kazbulat Tskhovrebov, which had no other major reason to be mentioned in the media beyond his role as head of the MFA, was among the least frequently mentioned ministers of his government. In Nagorno Karabakh, minister of foreign affairs Karen Mirzoyan is also mentioned exceptionally frequently, on a par with the ministry of Defence, yet much more than all other members of government, including the prime minister (Illustration 7.7).

Due to its prestige, its international standing, and the media appeal that derives from meetings with international guests, or from visits to foreign country, the ministry of foreign affairs is traditionally among the ministries that appear most frequently in the media also in big, recognised states.[6] This succinct analysis is insufficient to generalise results, yet it offers the opportunity to introduce some of the differences among the MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states. Inductively, beyond the political weight or media-friendliness of a given minister, there seems to be three main determinants of the visibility of the MFA. One is the actual relevance of the MFA in dealing with issues that

6   For example, an analysis of all news items published on Russia's First Channel under the tenure of Dmitri Medvedev's government (including data for the period May 2012-May 2017) shows that Russian Minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov is, after Medvedev himself, by far the most frequently mentioned member of government.

have a direct impact on the life of residents, including initiatives related to state building and availability of services. A second aspect is the frequency of meaningful international interactions: how often the head of the MFA travels abroad, or how often newsworthy international guests visit the entity. As will be seen, interactions with the patron often do not matter in this regards, as beyond framework agreements they mostly do not involve the MFA. Finally, another key element is the role of the MFA in countering the claims of the parent state; while such statements are ostensibly addressed at the international community (and thus must be channelled by the MFA), they are no less important for domestic purposes in strengthening the narrative that the entity is under constant threat.

In the case of Transnistria, the MFA's involvement in negotiations with authorities in Chişinău on matters such as car insurance regulations and border crossings make it structurally part of the daily news routine. Besides, frequent statements by the MFA pointing at some new unfriendly move by Chişinău or Kyiv serve as a reminder of the fact that Transnistria is surrounded by enemies, which is a central component of the narrative that legitimises the government in Tiraspol. Finally, the MFA takes part to official negotiations with foreign representatives (e.g. in the 5+2 format), interacts with the OSCE, and receives foreign guests: each of these interactions is newsworthy in Transnistria, as it highlights the international status of the authorities in Tiraspol. It is worth pointing out that interactions with Russia mostly do not involve the MFA: if they are at a high political level, then Transnistria's president is usually directly involved, while if they regard regular assistance, then they go directly through competent authorities in the relevant departments.[7]

In the case of Abkhazia, the MFA certainly maintains some prestige; the head of the MFA does occasional foreign travels, takes part to the regular conflict negotiations in Geneva, interacts with representatives of the diaspora, as well as the occasional foreign guest. However, unlike its counterpart in Transnistria, Abkhazia's MFA is not involved in regular negotiations bearing a direct impact on the life of residents, and does not focus as much as it did in previous years to counter statements and initiatives taken by Georgia; indeed, Georgia is less and less frequently mentioned in Abkhazia's media

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7   This observation is in line with the hypothesis brought forward by Underdal (1987, 175), who – in a different context – posited that "Other things being equal, the role of the MFA relative to those of 'domestic' agencies tends to decline the higher the volume of communication and transaction between actor and 'recipient'."

(Illustration 7.8), as the legitimising narrative shifts from that of a territory living under constant threat of the enemy to one of a secure and independent state looking confidently and safely at its future. Similarly to what happens in Transnistria, Abkhazia's MFA is involved only in the negotiation of framework agreements with Russia; besides direct meetings between Russia's and Abkhazia's MFA (e.g. Apsnypress 2017), regular interactions with Russian authorities, ministries and department happen without the public involvement of the MFA. Finally, a key sector of activity of the MFA, i.e. that of interacting with international organisations active in the territory, only rarely appears in the media, as external assistance coming from the West does not fit into the mainstream narrative that authorities present to their domestic audience.

In the case of South Ossetia, there are effectively few occasions that give the role of protagonist to the MFA. Similarly to Abkhazia, South Ossetia's MFA takes part to conflict negotiations in Geneva, but does little foreign travels beyond that. Since almost all external interactions of South Ossetia take place with Russia, and these mostly happen without the involvement of the MFA, the minister of foreign affairs has fewer occasion of visibility. There are almost no international organisations active in South Ossetia (only the International Red Cross has a local office), and, as is the case with Abkhazia, Georgia appears less and less in the local news (Illustration 7.9).

Finally, in the case of Nagorno Karabakh, the situation is again different. The MFA is not involved in direct negotiations that bear an impact on the life of residents (such as the ones found in Transnistria) and is not involved in formal conflict negotiations (such as 5+2 format for Transnistria, or the meetings in Geneva for Abkhazia and South Ossetia). The MFA is only mildly involved in external assistance coming from Armenia, as this takes place in the form of direct budget support or direct interactions with relevant authorities in Nagorno Karabakh. Yet, the MFA has high visibility, due to foreign travel, interactions with the diaspora, and its central role in reminding to the world (and in the process, to domestic audiences) the constant threat coming from Baku.

7.3. <u>What MFAs say about themselves</u>

This exploration of the role and activities of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states proceeds by focusing on the visible activities of post-Soviet de facto states, as they themselves describe them in the press-releases they publish on their websites. This exercise based on word frequency analysis is used to offer a characterisation of the activities of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states, first by outlining which countries are

mentioned most frequently in their communication materials, second by exploring differences in the priorities of de facto MFAs by comparing the frequency of a set of keywords representing potential sectors of activity, and finally by expanding the comparison to other MFAs in order to point at features that are peculiar to post-Soviet de facto states.

Which countries are mentioned most frequently?

At least in part tue to their lack of international recognition, post-Soviet de facto states have limited formal interactions with the outside world. Given the fact that any such meeting can be presented as proof of the international standing of the local government and some sort of recognition (or acceptance) at the international level, whenever a representative of the MFA of a de facto state has a meeting involving a foreign official, this is duly reported in a press release on the MFA's official website. To the extent that they are considered newsworthy, even meetings with delegations or individuals that do not officially represent a foreign country are reported on the official website of the MFAs.[8] A word-frequency analysis of the news section of the official website of the MFA of a de facto state should thus provide information about which countries are more frequently involved in such interactions, as well as which countries are mentioned for other reasons.

Without access to the data, based on knowledge of the environment in which post-Soviet de facto state operate, it would be reasonable to expect frequent mentions of the patron state (reporting meetings, agreements, and instances of cooperation), of the parent state (mostly, to denounce its policies or to voice past grievances), of other states or de facto states that have recognised the independence of the territory (recording meetings or publicizing congratulatory statements), as well as countries where significant communities of ethnic kins are located. In order to test if such hypotheses are confirmed in practice, the frequency with which each UN member state is mentioned in press releases of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states has been calculated. A small group of international organisations involved in conflict resolution mechanisms or active in these territories (EU, UN, OSCE, ICRC), as well as 'Geneva' (as a signifier for conflict negotiations), have been included for reference.[9]

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8   In some instances, even visits by foreign scholars – a most unremarkable event by other standards – have been advertised on the website of the MFA of de facto states (e.g. Transnistria's MFA 2012a).

As appears from Illustration 7.10, 7.11, 7.12, and 7.13, based on all press releases published in the 5 years between 1 May 2012 and 30 April 2017, most of the results fall broadly in line with expectations. These data offer an additional opportunity to explore some of the reasons behind the prevalence of a determinate set of entities in each of the cases included in the analysis. First, it is worth highlighting that the parent state is either the first or the second most frequently mentioned country in all cases; in the case of South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh, the patron is mentioned about half as often as the parent. This observation points at the fact that denouncing the policies and narratives of the parent state continues to be a central element of the mission of MFAs, even in a case such as South Ossetia where interactions with the parent state are limited, and the impact of Georgian policies on the local population minimal.[10] Second, the relatively high number of mentions of entities associated with conflict-related negotiations (OSCE for Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh, 'Geneva' for Abkhazia and South Ossetia) hints at the fact that international negotiations continue to be one of the main priority areas for MFAs in post-Soviet de facto states. Both the high number of mentions to conflict-related venues, and frequent references to the parent state suggest that conflict-related dynamics still shape a prominent part of the activities of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states, as they are presented on their official websites.

Third, the fact that countries which at some point conferred recognition to Abkhazia and South Ossetia such as Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru and Tuvalu appear in the top spots among most frequently mentioned countries hints at the ceremonial nature of many of the press releases issued by the MFAs of de facto states. Given the fact that limited actual interactions beyond diplomatic formalities exist with countries in Central

9   The list of world countries on which this exercise is based has been extracted from the list of member states of the United Nations (United Nations 2017). After adding de facto states, adequate measures have been taken to ensure that all relevant occurrences are properly captured; for example, occurrences of 'United Kingdom', 'Great Britain', and 'UK' are all counted as United Kingdom; 'Moldova' is counted as such only if the preceding or following word does not imply that the reference is actually to Transnistria in order to prevent 'Transnistrian Moldovan Republic' to be counted as both 'Moldova' and 'Transnistria'; most frequent alternative spelling of relevant entities have also been accounted for.

10   The Tbilisi-sponsored scheme offering free healthcare treatment to residents of South Ossetia (and discussed is Chapter 6) is perhaps the most significant exception. Yet, this policy does not appear in press releases issued by the MFA in Tskhinvali.

America, and even less with Pacific Island states, the relatively high frequency of mentions of these countries effectively serves as a reminder of the very limited number of countries with which the MFA engages in substantive interactions.

Indeed, the MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states seem to mention with any regularity only few countries, beyond those belonging to the above-mentioned categories. It should also be highlighted that even apparent exceptions are not necessarily the result of any substantive relationship, but may appear for a number of reasons, such as to describe the nationality of a visiting representative of an international organisation; for example, in the case of Nagorno Karabakh, references to Czech Republic, Bulgaria, United Kingdom, and Hungary are almost exclusively related to the nationality of members of the OSCE team that regularly monitors the line of contact. In terms of the analysis being proposed, such references should be considered 'background noise'; the fact that basically no country beyond those belonging to the above-mentioned categories emerges from such noise effectively confirms that MFAs of de facto states do not engage in regular, public, and meaningful interactions with representatives of third countries.

Italy appears as the most evident exception in the case of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There is no particularly strong economic connection between Italy and these two territories, and the the Italian authorities in Rome have been consistent in their non-recognition policy and in their support to Georgian territorial integrity as much any other country in Europe. As an overlook at the actual contents of the press releases shows, it appears that Abkhazia *in primis*, and to a lesser extent South Ossetia, have established direct relations with various individuals in Italy, who have facilitated formal agreements with municipalities, associations, and business organisations in different Italian regions as well as in San Marino. The question of why there is all this activity around Italy, and almost nothing around other European countries is certainly interesting, but goes well beyond the scope of this research.[11] In reference to the main

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11 Tentative explanations should be sought in a combination of factors, including direct engagement of a small group of individuals, geographic proximity with Geneva (which makes it easy and cost-effective to visit Italy after conflict negotiations there), the presence in Italy of various and diverse secessionist movements, and the sympathy that the Abkhazian cause in particular attracts in two different contexts. On the one hand, a part of Italy's anti-imperialist left maintains sympathy for the struggle of small peoples, and somewhat instinctively combines it with a mix of anti-Americanism and pro-Russian feelings. On the other hand, there seems to be groups of business-oriented people who may

question at the basis of this research, it suffices to say that such interactions with actors based in Italy do not contribute in any form to Abkhazia's state-building efforts, nor do they lead to technical or financial assistance from either private or public partners based in Italy.

Key terms in de facto states

In order to present some of the features of the visible part of activities of MFAs of de facto states, this section presents a series of comparisons based on word frequency analysis. First, it looks at terms such as 'trade'/'economy' and 'support'/'assistance' as signifiers for pragmatic activities conducted by the MFA.[12] Then it looks at 'independence'/'recognition', and finally at 'anniversary'/'congratulations', which have been chosen as signifiers for communications that are formalistic, or mostly expression of the strand of activity that Owtram (2011, 146) characterised as to "engage in foreign policy to demonstrate the apparatus and behaviour of a state" (see Illustration 7.14-7.21)

This comparison points at some differences in the priorities of MFAs of de facto states. Given its economic structure and its geographical location, trade-related issues are a top priority for Transnistria's MFA, much more so than for the MFAs of other de facto states. On the other hand, in its statements, Transnistria's MFA seems to focus less on issues such as independence and international recognition, and publishes relatively less celebratory and congratulatory notes. There is no substantial difference in the frequency of references to 'support', but 'assistance' is most frequently mentioned by those

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express support for the causes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia at least partially in the hope to facilitate lucrative business opportunities with Russian companies. As for direct contacts, in earlier years they were largely enabled by Abkhazia's former representative to Italy Mauro Murgia, who after a public spat with Abkhazia's MFA in 2015 (Abkhazia's MFA 2015) has been working exclusively on South Ossetia. In recent years, this connection has been partly supplanted, partly complemented by direct contacts of Abkhazia's deputy minister of foreign affairs Kan Taniya, who had obtained his MA degree in Italy and speaks fluently in Italian. Finally, it is worth highlighting that central ministries in Rome have issued direct notices towards municipalities that engaged with representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia or have visited these territories, but are ultimately powerless, since they have no authority over local authorities on such matters.

12 For example, in one of the rare studies specifically dealing with the activities of the MFA in Pacific micro-states in their constitutive years, 'trade' and 'aid' have been mentioned as the first two functions of the MFA in the Cook Islands (Jonassen 1982).

territories (Transnistria and Abkhazia) which have more regular occasions of interaction with international partners.

In order to proceed beyond the descriptive, and to understand if along these measures the MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states differ substantially from those of other potential terms of reference, MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states are compared with the MFAs of parent states (Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan), countries bordering de facto states (Ukraine, Russia, Armenia, Iran), de facto states elsewhere in Europe (North Cyprus), countries of recent independence in Europe (Kosovo and Montenegro), as well as similarly sized micro-states in Europe (Malta, Iceland and San Marino).[13] For this example, in order to offer consistent results, only the English language version of the websites of MFAs are considered; English is not an official language of either of the territories included (with the exception of Malta), and it is assumed here that a self-respecting MFA in Europe today would use English to highlight its international activities, and would write about them on its official website. The analysis is limited to the two-year period between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2016, for which data is mostly available for all the MFAs included in the comparison.[14]

Some preliminary insights can be gained simply by looking at how frequently do all of these MFAs publish. A quick overview (Illustration 7.22) shows that MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states mostly publish less often than the bigger and recognised states that border with them, but more often than similarly sized but wealthier and long-established micro-states elsewhere in Europe, such as Iceland and San Marino, which may have less pressing concerns. Even if frequency of online publications cannot be considered a meaningful proxy of the level of activities of these MFAs, the capacity and practice of issuing regular press releases in English should not be taken as a given. Indeed, the MFA of a recognised country such as Moldova has not always been able to publish

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13 The MFAs of smaller European countries such as Andorra, Liechtenstein and Monaco are not included because they do not have a full-fledged English language website.

14 Table 7.1 details the date of earliest available publication for each of the websites included. In the case of Georgia, the archive of press-releases is patchy for the early years and includes regular English-language updates only starting with 2015. Since the analysis presented in the following pages is based on word frequency, rather than absolute number of occurrences, this should not have a substantive impact on the results.

regularly press releases in English, and sometimes has left the English language version of its website without updates for lengthy periods.[15]

Proceeding with this comparison by looking at the word frequency of the above-mentioned keywords provides additional evidence on some of the elements that differentiate the public activities of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states from those of their recognised peers. Looking at the word frequency of 'trade' and 'economy' for all MFAs included in this analysis (Illustration 7.23 and Illustration 7.24), for example, allows to appreciate how Transnistria is not effectively an outlier in terms of references to 'trade', and that it mentions 'economy' just about as frequently as the MFA in Chişinău. MFAs of other post-Soviet de facto states make reference to these terms considerably less often than all of their their recognised peers; in the case of South Ossetia, 'trade' does not appear even once in the whole two years included in this analysis.[16]

The pair of keywords 'support'/'assistance' refers directly to one of the central issues discussed in this research. If one of the main goals of MFAs of de facto states was that of ensuring availability of streams of aid from external partners, it would be reasonable to expect frequent mentions to these keywords, as part of messages aimed at thanking donors, or presenting ongoing negotiations. In contrast with this hypothesis, post-Soviet de facto states make reference to 'support' noticeably less frequently than all other cases included in this analysis (Illustration 7.25). Frequency of references to 'assistance' (Illustration 7.26) are perhaps even more telling: among all cases, it is the MFAs of Ukraine and Moldova (countries which have been involved in lengthy negotiations on

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15 For example, an archived version of the home page of Moldova's MFA retrieved in July 2013, still shows only news from 2012 (Moldova's MFA 2013). Since 2015, the website of Moldova's MFA has been working thanks to support of foreign donors and carries a notice on its home page that is more characteristic of a civil society project, rather than of an MFA of a sovereign state: "This web site was developed with the financial support of the Estonian Government within the Project 'Building Institutional Capacity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration' implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Moldova. The opinions expressed in this website are the authors' opinions and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Estonian Government, UNDP Moldova."

16 'Trade' is mentioned, however infrequently, both before June 2014 and after July 2016; the fact that not even a passing reference to trade has been made during two full years remains however telling.

assistance packages from international donors in the period under analysis) which mention this keyword much more frequently than all others. Among post-Soviet de facto states, it is those entities that have more interactions with international organisations (Abkhazia and Transnistria) that make reference to 'assistance' more frequently.

With the exception of Transnistria, MFAs of unrecognised states talk more frequently of issues such as 'independence' and 'recognition' than other cases included in the sample (Illustration 7.27 and Illustration 7.28). 'Independence' is found in the press releases issued by MFAs of unrecognised states about twice as often as in those by their internationally recognised peers. In the case of Kosovo, 'recognition' and 'independence' are mentioned about as frequently as in the case of South Caucasus de facto states, at least in part due to its relatively recent achievements in having its independence recognised. In the case of North Cyprus, it is on the contrary remarkable how rarely 'independence' or 'recognition' are mentioned at all: these data, as well as the relatively low figures related to Transnistria, point at the fact that not all MFAs of de facto states need to focus ostentatiously on their struggle for internationally recognised independence. Tentatively, such staggering differences may be explained by the fact that internationally recognised independence is not effectively a priority for either North Cyprus or Transnistria, or at least not to the extent found in other other contested territories. The relatively high frequency of such mentions in the case of South Ossetia is largely to be explained by the celebratory nature of many of these statements.

Other keywords selected as signifiers of ceremonial aspects are 'anniversary' and 'congratulations' (Illustration 7.29 and Illustration 7.30). Do MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states issue a disproportionate amount of press-releases to congratulate foreign leaders or celebrate anniversaries? The data seem to support this hypothesis in reference to 'anniversary' (with the only exception of Transnistria).[17] However, in the case of congratulatory messages, only Abkhazia's MFA stands out. This peculiarity may be related to better internal organisation in Sukhumi's MFA, which may have a structured procedure to publicly issue relevant notes on key occasions.

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17 The high figure for Armenia's MFA in relation to 'anniversary' can be explained by the fact that in the period under analysis Armenia commemorated one-hundred years since the Armenian genocide.

7.4. <u>On the coordinating role of the MFA</u>

While the above sections focused on the visible activities of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states, the next part deals with an aspect that is central to the main question at the basis of this research: how do MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states contribute to the external relations of these territories, and in particular those that enable access to services for the local population. Similarly to the first part of this chapter, also this section starts with a quote from East's (1973) study on how Uganda's recently established MFA functioned in its early post-colonial years, a study that seems to be – perhaps surprisingly – relevant to the study of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states. One of the issues approached by East relates to the level of control that the MFA should have in managing interactions with external actors; in the context of Uganda at the time, at least in part due to low capacities from the side of the MFA, a large part of activities and assistance programmes took place through direct interactions between international organisations and various state agencies, without any involvement of the MFA. East argues in favour of delegating specialised activities to competent ministries, but makes the point that the MFA should at least serve the role of a gatekeeper:

> […] it is argued that the MFA should maintain its role as the principal agency responsible for all of Uganda's relations with other states and the external world in general. In order to carry out this function at even a minimal level of effectiveness, the ministry should be able to act as the central clearing house and coordinator for those activities being carried out elsewhere in the government.

There is a scholarly and practical debate on the extent to which the MFA should be in control of external relations, and to what extent "domestic" branches of government should engage in international interactions. In general, there is a broad expectation that the MFA keeps at least a coordinating role in matters of foreign policy, as lack thereof may lead to what Underdal (1987, 170) called "'vertical disintegration' of foreign policy, whereby 'micro-decisions' tend to be de-coupled from the overall policy purpose and strategy". As will be discussed in the next pages, this risk has been taken particularly seriously in post-Soviet de facto states, where coordinating actions with external actors seems to be one of the main tasks of the MFA, and specific legislation "on the coordinating role of the MFA" has been introduced.

Transnistria (President of Transnistria 2002, 2012), Abkhazia (President of Abkhazia 2006) and South Ossetia (President of South Ossetia 2005) have all introduced a law "On the Coordinating Role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs […] in the Conduct of a

Unified Foreign Policy Line." This trend may have found some inspiration in legislation originally introduced in Russia by Boris Yeltsin in 1996 (President of Russia 1996) and then updated under the presidency of Dmitri Medvedev in 2011 (President of Russia 2011), as the title of the law is almost identical. However, the contents of the law are quite different in each of the cases. The Russian version is significantly longer, as it deals in details with the procedures for external interactions involving federal subjects, but it is ultimately less restrictive than the one found in Transnistria or Abkhazia, i.e. it mandates consultations with the MFA in fewer circumstances.

The MFA as a gatekeeper in Transnistria

Indeed, in the case of Transnistria, both law and practice go quite far in demanding coordination with the MFA. According to the law 'On the coordinating role', the MFA is responsible for all international interactions of state organs, including the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary (art. 1.). Government representatives must coordinate and agree with the MFA any meeting with external actors, explicitly including among them also international organisations and foreign NGOs (art. 2), unless the meeting takes place by initiative of the president or of the prime minister.

All representatives of state institutions must inform the MFA about any work-related trips, consultations, and negotiations (art. 3). Interactions or agreements by "administrative-territorial units" (cities and districts) with counterparts abroad or by departments of state institutions must be coordinated with the MFA (art. 4). Only the MFA and the president are entitled to make statements related to Transnistria's foreign policy (art. 6). Other sections of the law make clear that any state institution must inform the MFA of any work-related travel of its staff beyond the borders of Transnistria, including for meetings organised by NGOs and research centres. Within seven days after the foreign visit, a written report must be sent to inform the MFA about the mission. Finally, all local organisations implementing projects financed by international organisations or NGOs must inform the MFA of their activities.

The law is far-reaching, and in some parts it seems to give to the MFA a role of control of any sort of foreign activity (excluding private and economic activities) that is traditionally associated with the security services. It is difficult to ascertain with certainty if this law is thoroughly implemented. However, this author has been confirmed that, for example, university professors (who are state employees) must receive approval from the MFA before attending conferences abroad. Before accepting

to be interviewed, some of my interlocutors made sure that the MFA was informed about my visit to Transnistria. In reply to a direct question on this matter, a representative of the MFA said that in the case of an independent researcher, they would not strictly speaking be required to consult with the MFA, but they may still do so it if they feel it is appropriate.[18] If, however, an individual is representing an international organisation, then preliminary coordination with the MFA would be mandatory. He also highlighted that the main goal is not to exercise some form of control on people, but rather – considering local specificities – the need to keep a common line: since the MFA is aware of all international initiatives, it is also best-positioned to ensure that there is no duplication of activities, or other such problems.[19]

International organisations and donors based in Chişinău confirmed that basically all of the initiatives taking place in Transnistria that they sponsor must be approved by the relevant committee in Tiraspol. Even if (as discussed in Chapter 6) donors go at great lengths in finding local partners and initiative groups that are not directly part of the state authorities, they must necessarily coordinate activities with them, and the MFA plays a clear coordinating role in the process.

Finally, economic actors based in Transnistria do not need to interact with the MFA to conduct their international activities. As highlighted by a representative of the MFA in an interview with the author, from many points of view, commercial enterprises are best positioned to gain access to new technologies without worrying about the issue of non-recognition; for example, a large company such as as Interdnestrkom (the privately-owned monopolist of mobile communication and fast internet in Transnistria), can license all the technology it needs from international vendors, including through subsidiary companies in third countries if needed. Services such as banking and money transfers are also available in Transnistria mostly through the activity of private companies. The involvement of the MFA is needed only when specific technical cross-border issues emerge (e.g. on the frequencies to be used by mobile phone operators, or calls to landline numbers in Transnistria, which as of this writing cannot be reached from Chişinău); in such cases, the issue is brought to the negotiating table, through the assistance of the MFA, and with the involvement of relevant economic actors when needed.

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18 Interview with representative of Transnistria's MFA, Tiraspol, February 2016.

19 Interview with representative of Transnistria's MFA, Tiraspol, February 2016.

In brief, excluding private and economic activities, in Transnistria the MFA seems indeed to function as a gatekeeper of all external interactions that involve to any extent state institutions, or that involve local NGOs but are sponsored by foreign donors. The fact that in the law 'On the coordinating role' interactions with Chişinău are explicitly mentioned as requiring coordination with the MFA, suggests that such measures are largely in place to prevent a process of "creeping reintegration" with Moldova. Due to its lack of a shared border with its patron, and unlike de facto states in the South Caucasus, Transnistria had to accept a number of compromise solutions that link Transnistrian actors to the republic of Moldova on matters such as trade, licensing, mail, and others.[20] Beyond elite political discourse, interaction across the de facto border is not stigmatized, and partly as a consequence relations that may be undesirable from the point of view the government must be formally policed, at least in part with the involvement of the MFA, rather than left to a combination of self-restraint and social condemnation.[21]

The MFA as point of reference for international organisations in Abkhazia

In the case of Abkhazia, the corresponding law (President of Abkhazia 2006) is less restrictive than in Transnistria, as it mostly applies only to the executive branch of government. However, also in Abkhazia 'administrative-territorial units' are requested to concord with the MFA projects of international agreements.[22] Even if it is less demanding, the law includes a number of provisions similar to those found in the case of Transnistria, and makes clear that in Abkhazia the MFA "is the chief coordinating organ for relations with foreign countries and international organisations" (it is understood that this includes both governmental and non-governmental organisations).

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20 For example, international mail reaches Tiraspol through Chişinău; postal offices in Tiraspol routinely sell Moldovan postal stamps for all mailings to addressees located outside of Transnistria.

21 One of the features that make it less problematic to be registered as 'Moldovan' may be terminological; after all, the full name of Transnistria is 'Pridnestrovian *Moldavian* Republic', and 'Moldovanism' has long been a central part of the Transnistrian nation building project (Dembinska and Danero Iglesias 2013).

22 It is worth highlighting that it is exactly the lack of a similar provision in other countries that gave the opportunity to municipalities in Abkhazia to stipulate agreements with counterparts in EU countries such as Italy, or Russia before 2008.

Abkhazia's MFA works as both a gatekeeper and a facilitator for the activities of international organisations and NGOs. Since citizens of most-countries (excluding CIS countries) need to apply for a visa to enter Abkhazia, in principle the MFA is in the position to control who enters and exits the territory. However, none of the interviewees that accepted to meet the author in this or previous visits to the region asked if the MFA had been informed about the visit. Broadly speaking, when local NGOs in Abkhazia consider applying for a grant or for implementing a project, they do not seem to be worried about formal procedures by the authorities denying them the possibility to do so. Instead, they seem to be more worried about their domestic legitimacy, and instinctively know what initiative they can engage with and what projects would be considered socially unacceptable.

Abkhazia's deputy minister of foreign affairs Kan Taniya, who is responsible for interactions with international organisations, highlighted in an interview with the author the role of facilitator played by the MFA, as a first port of call for international organisations active on the territory. He mentioned the fact that he holds regular meetings with representatives of the most active among the international organisations headquartered in Abkhazia, and that he interacts with them by phone to deal with any issue that may arise with the implementation of projects, including when other state institutions are involved:

> "if there are difficulties we can support them, and ensure their work proceeds smoothly; on the one hand, we coordinate, on the other we offer support with accreditation, documentation, and such."[23]

Indeed, the MFA serves also as a "middle-man" for interactions between certain state institutions and international organisations; for example, if the tax service needs information on a contract that involves international organisations, they would request it through the MFA.

At the same time, the MFA also serves as a gatekeeper, deciding which initiatives are acceptable for Abkhazia. As an example of this role, deputy minister of foreign affairs Taniya told a local newspaper that a project on 'Native-language learning' proposed by Unicef that was allegedly meant to address only the Georgian-speaking population was to be extended in order to include also the Abkhazian and Armenian groups upon request of the MFA: "if a project is not useful for our country, then we reject it, or

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23 Interview with Kan Taniya, deputy minister of foreign affairs, Sukhumi, May 2016.

demand adjustments" (Kvaratskhelia 2016).[24] Representatives of other ministries interviewed by this author also made reference to their role in defining which projects would be acceptable to the Abkhazian side, so it seems that while the MFA is formally tasked with the vetting process, the process involves also direct interactions between representatives of international organisations and relevant ministries or departments.

Even if from the point of view of Abkhazia's authorities Russia is to be considered a foreign country, it does not seem that all initiatives involving Russian actors require the involvement of the MFA. For example, the 'Moscow House' in Sukhumi or the office of 'Rossotrudnichestvo' are to be considered from the legal standpoint of authorities in Sukhumi as foreign organisations, yet they are never mentioned among international organisations working in Abkhazia. In interviews with the author, representatives of these organisations mentioned interactions with the ministry of education, but not with the MFA. In all likelihood, their activities take place on the basis of a framework agreement that initially involved also the MFA, however, unlike with what happens with non-Russian international organisations, their activities do not seem to require recurrent approval and monitoring from the MFA.

Indeed, while the work of international organisations takes place under the constant monitoring required by the law 'On the coordinating role of the MFA', it appears that relevant provisions are not consistently applied in other contexts. Former minister of foreign affairs Vyacheslav Chirikba stated during an official meeting with Abkhazia's president specifically dedicated to this issue (President of Abkhazia 2016) that that law is "systemically violated in all its parts", and that "the list of officials who break this law would be very long; it is violated also at the highest level [of government]." In the same occasion, president Khajimba pointed out that heads of ministries must inform the MFA of their foreign journeys, as well as of visits they receive from foreign colleagues, and that the MFA must then report to him about this: none of this was apparently taking place, if not sporadically.

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24 This account of events has not been independently verified, and is provided here as an example of how the MFA presents its role to a domestic audience. It is also worth highlighting that domestic priorities change, and as highlighted in Chapter 6, the previous Abkhazian government specifically requested that international organisations limit their activities to the Abkhazia's eastern districts, where ethnic Georgians live compactly.

7.5. Conclusions

In order to explore, analyse and compare the activities of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states, this chapter took two distinct approaches. First, in line with the considerations presented in Appendix B, different textual datasets have been used to explore the relative importance of MFAs within post-Soviet de facto states (looking at mentions of members of government in local media), to find out more about which countries are involved in interactions with these MFAs (looking at press-releases issued by the MFAs themselves), and to compare these MFAs with those of selected terms of comparison along a set of keywords. The second part of this chapter dealt specifically with the role of MFAs in Abkhazia and Transnistria in coordinating the external relations of these territories, by analysing relevant legislation, media reports, and insights gained during interviews with relevant actors.

Results obtained with primitive tools such as word frequency should not be considered exhaustive evidence, but rather as additional information that may be used to build, corroborate, integrate, or enhance one's argument. The conscious choice of limiting the analysis to carefully selected keywords, rather than extended thematic dictionaries or more advanced techniques, while certainly oversimplifying, provides meaningful results that can be understood and interpreted by any informed reader.

The data presented in this chapter point at some of the ways in which non-recognition impacts the activities of MFAs in post-Soviet de facto states. First, and at least in part due to their contested status, all of these MFAs have an active on-line presence; while uncontested micro-states in other parts of the world do not even bother to set up a website, post-Soviet de facto states need it to present their perspective to the outside world. Indeed, as appears from the high frequency of mentions of the parent state, as well as to signifiers of conflict negotiations, conflict dynamics continue to shape the public activities of post-Soviet de facto states.

Second, as appears from their own websites, MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states have very limited interactions with third countries, beyond the patron state and countries which host a substantial number of ethnic kins. Also micro-states in Europe and other world regions interact directly with a limited number of countries (mostly, their patron and neighbours), in line with their pragmatic interests, but membership to international organizations gives them the opportunity to have regular contacts with a much larger number of countries and to some extent take part to debates on regional issues or global questions.

The relatively high frequency of terms related to conflict dynamics, also points at the role of the MFA as a narrative builder for both domestic and international audiences. Frequent mentions of 'independence' and 'recognition' similarly serve to highlight these entities' international standing. The regular publication of press-releases, partly made possible by the relatively frequent issuing of ceremonial statements, contributes to demonstrate the capability of these institutions to interact with the rest of the world.

However, it appears that in some cases the MFAs of de facto states engage in activities that are not advertised publicly, as projects involving international organisations are implemented in these territories through mechanisms that involve the MFA, but only rarely feature in their communication materials. In Abkhazia, such interactions are frequent and seemingly regularly accompany the activities of international organisations (but mostly not those involving Russia). In Transnistria, local actors associated with state-authorities must coordinate with the MFA all of their foreign interactions. While it is common for the MFA to serve as a point of reference in foreign policy matters, it seems that in the context of non-recognition and contested independence, such practices gain more prominence. These policies have certainly a pragmatic function (the goals of external donors may not coincide with those of the local leadership), but they also serve as a constant reminder for the need of national unity against external threats, as well as to depict the de facto authorities as strenuous defenders of these entities' independence.

Methodologically, this chapter introduced content analysis of contents extracted from the web as a new approach to explore the activities of institutions of post-Soviet de facto states, as well as to compare them with those of other entities in a context in which there are no self-evident measures that can be used for comparison. In terms of contents, it contributed to provide a picture of the ways in which the MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states differ from those of their recognised peers, by working both as facilitator and gatekeeper of external relations, as well as by contributing to promote its own narratives for domestic and international audiences. Finally, it also highlighted differences among post-Soviet de facto states, with both external circumstances and domestic priorities having an important impact on the activities and communication strategies enacted by the MFAs of these entities.

7.6. Illustrations and tables

Members of Turanskaya's government (Transnistria)

By number of mentions on NovostiPmr.com during the tenure of the government
(10 July 2013-13 October 2015)

Member	Mentions
Nina Shtanski (Foreign affairs)	1042
Tatʹyana Turanskaya (PM)	1009
Svetlana Fadeyeva (Education)	328
Mayya Parnas (Deputy PM, economy)	328
Yelena Girzhul (Finance)	276
Vitaliy Ulitka (Deputy PM, anti-monopoly)	261
Oksana Bulanova (Labour)	260
Natalʹya Nikiforova (Deputy PM, social policies)	148
Gennadiy Yevstratiy (Agriculture)	143
Aleksandr Kisnichan (Justice)	103
Aleksandr Lukʹyanenko (Defence)	88
Sergey Monul (Interior)	45
Vasiliy Gumennyy (Health)	6

Illustration 7.1 Members of Turanskaya's government (Transnistria) by number of mentions on NovostiPmr.com during the tenure of the government (10 July 2013-13 October 2015)

Members of Prokudin's government (Transnistria)

By number of mentions on NovostiPmr.com during the tenure of the government
(25 December 2015-17 December 2016)

Member	Mentions
Pavel Prokudin (PM)	624
Vitaliy Ignatʹyev (Foreign affairs)	512
Dmitriy Boltrushko (Economic development)	265
Alevtina Slinchenko (Deputy PM)	160
Yelena Kulichenko (Labour)	146
Olʹga Zvarych (Justice)	137
Tatʹyana Tsivinskaya (Education)	124
Irina Molokanova (Finance)	117
Stanislav Romanyuk (Interior)	106
Svetlana Timotina (Agriculture)	105
Tatʹyana Skrypnik (Health)	96
Aleksandr Kisnichan (Head of staff)	88
Ruslan Paulesko (Defence, since 2016-08)	55
Petr Guzhev (Regional development)	37
Oleg Gomenyuk (Defence, until 2016-08)	22

Illustration 7.2 Members of Prokudin's government (Transnistria) by number of mentions on NovostiPmr.com during the tenure of the government (25 December 2015-17 December 2016)

Members of Mikvabia's government (Abkhazia)

By number of mentions on ApsnyPress.info during the tenure of the government
(20 March 2015-26 July 2016)

Member	Mentions
Artur Mikvabiya (PM)	455
Shamilʹ Adzynba (First deputy PM)	188
Elʹvira Arsaliya (Culture)	129
Vyacheslav Chirikba (Foreign affairs)	94
Adgur Ardzinba (Economy)	86
Andzor Goov (Health)	84
Timur Eshba (Agriculture)	71
Mirab Kishmariya (Defence)	55
Dmitriy Serikov (Deputy PM)	53
Amra Kvarandziya (Finance)	50
Adgur Kakoba (Education)	35
Avtandil Gartskiya (Tourism)	23
Suren Kerselyan (Lanour)	22
Rauf Tsimtsba (Taxes)	21
Lev Kvitsiniya (Emergency situations)	17
Raulʹ Lolua (Interior)	13
Marina Piliya (Justice)	5

Illustration 7.3 Members of Mikvabia's government (Abkhazia) by number of mentions on ApsnyPress.info during the tenure of the government (20 March 2015-26 July 2016)

Members of Bartsits's government (Abkhazia)

By number of mentions on ApsnyPress.info during the tenure of the government
(4 October 2016-)*

Member	Mentions
Beslan Bartsits (PM)	106
Daur Kove (Foreign affairs)	77
Adgur Ardzinba (Economy)	73
Aslan Kobakhiya (First deputy PM, Interior)	67
Elʹvira Arsaliya (Culture)	57
Andzor Goov (Health)	36
Mirab Kishmariya (Defence)	32
Adgur Kakoba (Education)	30
Beslan Eshba (Deputy PM)	26
Avtandil Gartskiya (Tourism)	23
Daur Tarba (Agriculture)	19
Lev Kvitsiniya (Emergency situations)	16
Dmitriy Serikov (Deputy PM, Finance)	14
Marina Piliya (Justice)	4
Ruslan Adzhba (Labour)	4
Daur Kurmaziya (Taxes)	2

Includes data until 25 May 2017

Illustration 7.4 Members of Bartits' government (Abkhazia) by number of mentions on ApsnyPress.info during the tenure of the government (4 October 2016 -)

Members of Khurgaev's government (South Ossetia)
By number of mentions on cominf.org during the tenure of the government
(26 April 2012-20 January 2014)
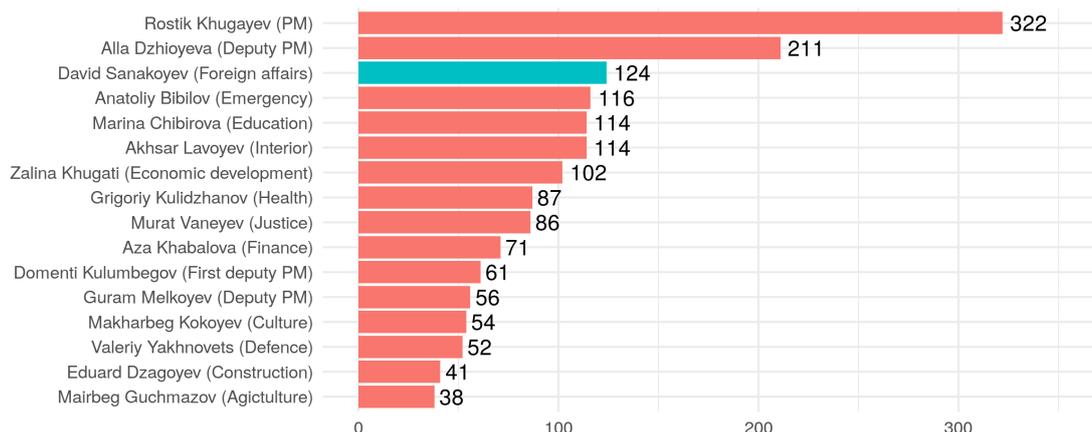
Illustration 7.5 Members of Khurgaev's government (South Ossetia) by number of mentions on cominf.org during the tenure of the government (26 April 2012-20 January 2014).

Members of Kulumbegov's government (South Ossetia)
By number of mentions on cominf.org during the tenure of the government
(21 January 2014-24 April 2017)
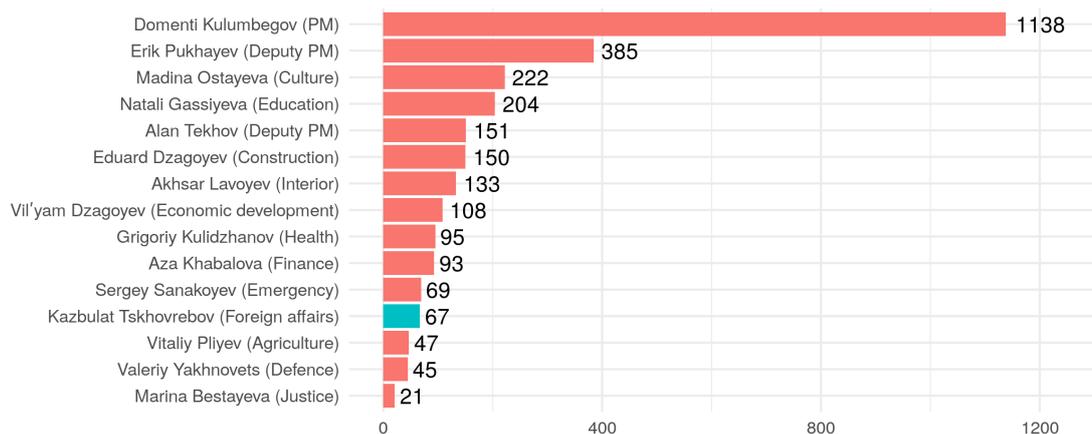
Illustration 7.6 Members of Kulumbegov's government (South Ossetia) by number of mentions on cominf.org during the tenure of the government (21 January 2014-24 April 2017).

Members of Arutyunyan's government (Nagorno Karabakh)

By number of mentions on ArtsakhPress*

Minister	Mentions
Karen Mirzoyan (Foreign affairs)	159
Araik Arutyunyan (PM)	143
Movses Akopyan (Defence, until 2016-09)	93
Leva Mnatsakanyan (Defence, since 2016-09)	60
Narine Agabalyan (Culture)	33
Andranik Khachatryan (Economy, agriculture until 2015-07)	17
Sergey Movsisyan (Health, until 2016-03)	17
Samvel Avanesyan (Labour)	9
Karen Shakhramanyan (Construction)	8
Spartak Tevosyan (Finance)	6
Aram Mkhoyan (Agriculture, since 2015-07)	5
Ararat Daniyelyan (Justice)	4
Karina Atayan (Health, since 2016-03)	4
Slavik Asryan (Education)	1

*Based on all Russian-language publication available on ArtsakhPress.am, starting with January 2014 and until May 2017.
List of ministers compiled in May 2017

Illustration 7.7 Members of Arutyunyan's government by number of mentions on the Russian language version of ArtsakhPress.am between January 2014 and May 2017

Word frequency of 'Russia', 'Georgia', and 'European Union' on ApsnyPress.info

Terms
— Russia
— Georgia
— EU

Russia=росси*+москв*
Georgia=грузи*+тбилис*
EU=евросоюз*+ес+брюссел*
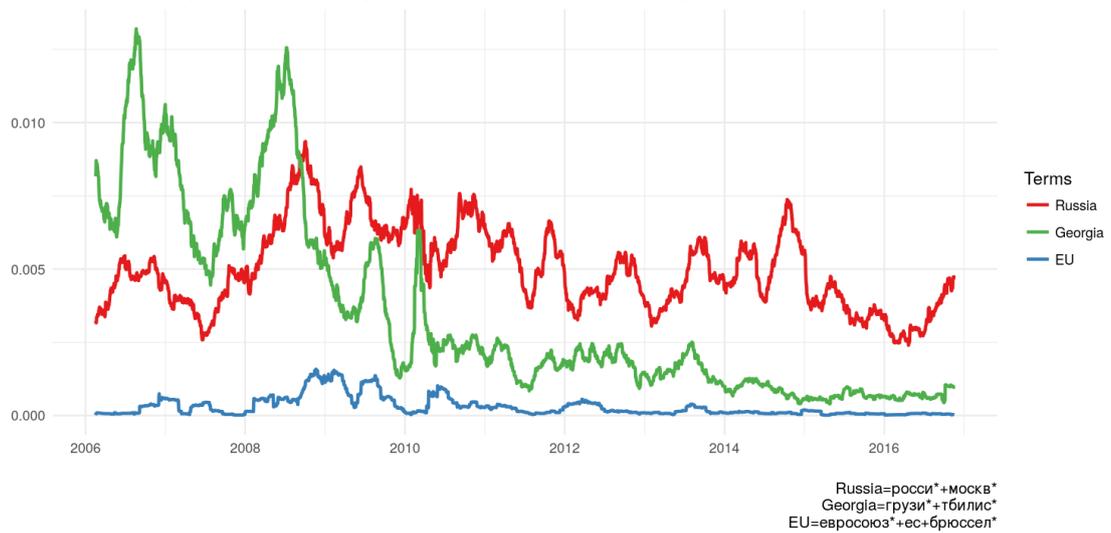
Illustration 7.8 Word frequency of 'Russia, 'Georgia', and 'European Union' in all articles published on the website of Abkhazia's news agency ApsnyPress between 1 January 2006 and 31 December 2016 (N=25 618), calculated on a rolling average of 90 days for clarity.

Word frequency of "Russia", "Georgia", "European Union"
Calculated on a rolling average of 90 days for clarity

Russia=росси*+москв*
Georgia=грузи*+тбилис*
European Union=евросоюз*+ес+брюссел*
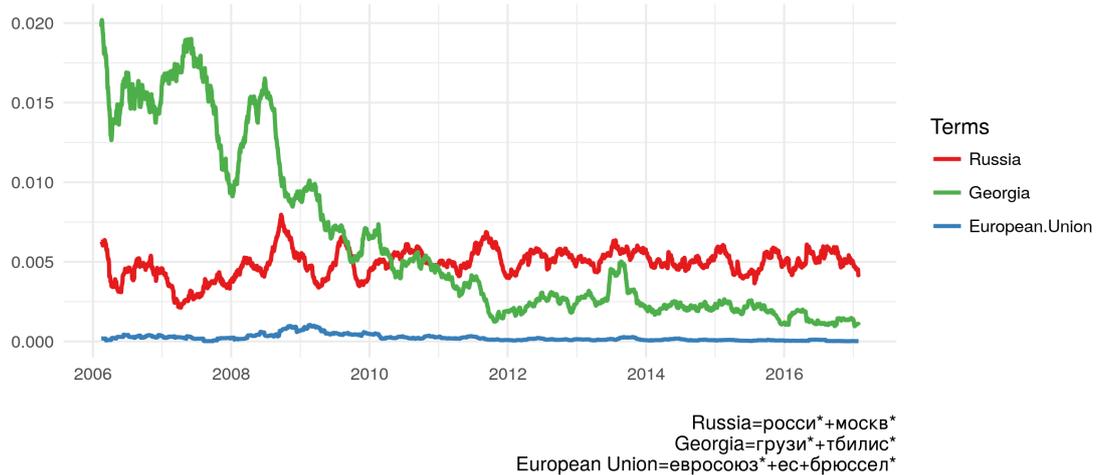
Illustration 7.9: Word frequency of 'Russia, 'Georgia', and 'European Union' in all articles published on the website of South Ossetia's news agency Cominf.org between 1 January 2006 and 31 December 2016 (N=30 664), calculated on a rolling average of 90 days for clarity.

Entities mentioned most often on the website of Transnistria's MFA
Between 1 May 2012 and 30 April 2017

Entity	Number of occurrences
Russia	2468
Moldova	1476
Ukraine	1174
OSCE	753
European Union	354
Abkhazia	202
United Nations	200
Romania	199
South Ossetia	151
Serbia	124
Germany	82
Sweden	73
Austria	54
Belarus	51
Nagorno Karabakh	47
France	46
United Kingdom	34
Turkey	33
Hungary	32
Kazakhstan	28

Type
- Post-Soviet de facto
- Parent state
- Patron state
- Substantial ethnic kins
- International organisation
- Other

Illustration 7.10: Entities mentioned most often on the website of Transnistria's MFA
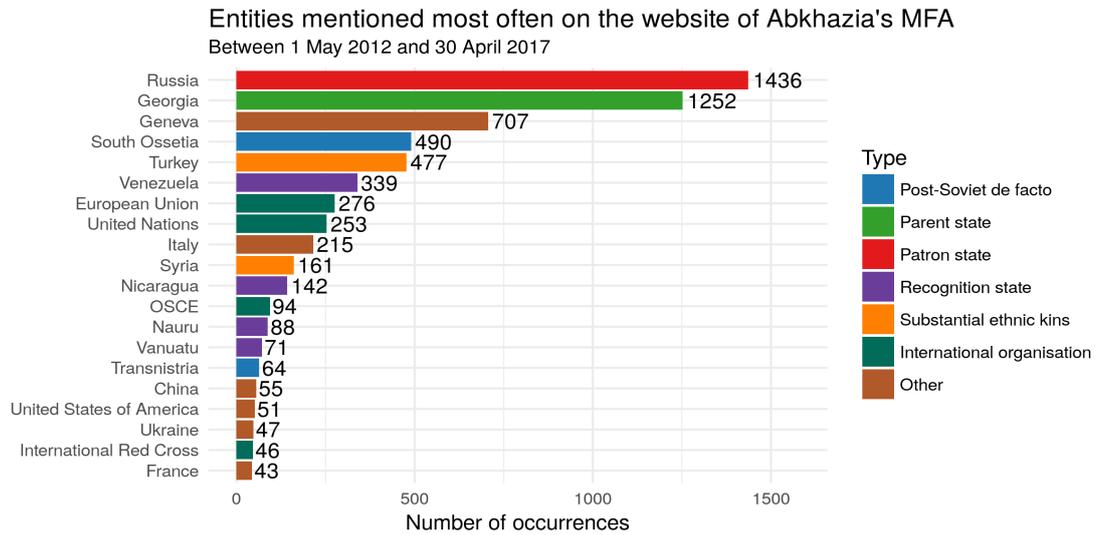
Illustration 7.11: Entities mentioned most often on the website of Abkhazia's MFA
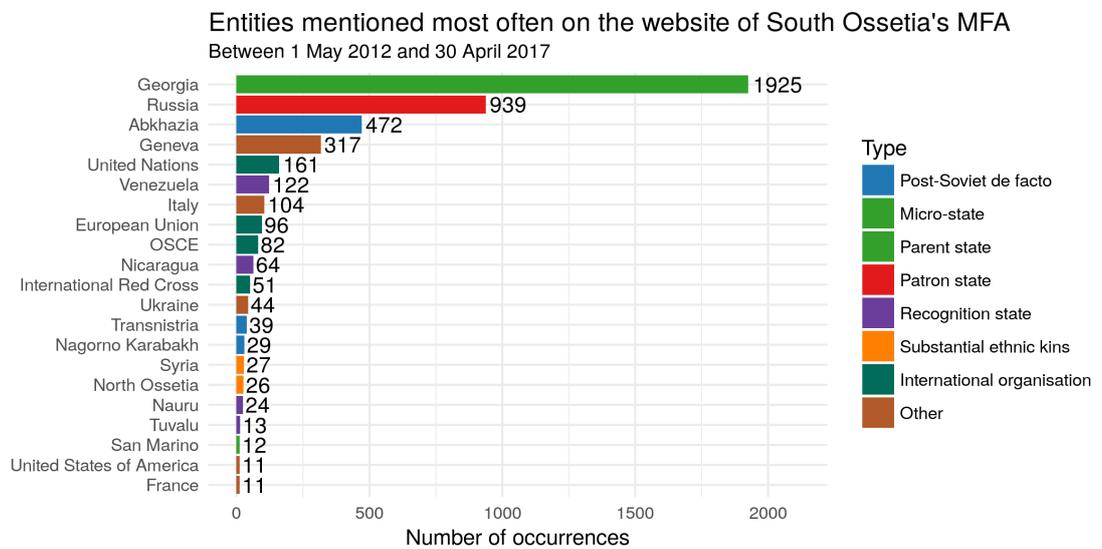
Illustration 7.12: Entities mentioned most often on the website of South Ossetia's MFA

214
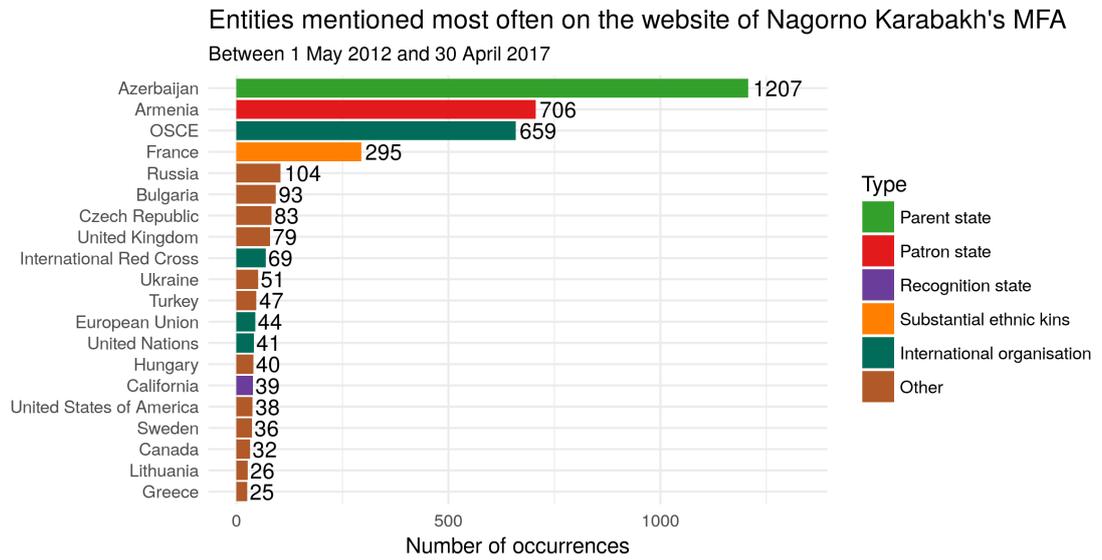
Illustration 7.13: Entities mentioned most often on the website of Nagorno Karabakh's MFA
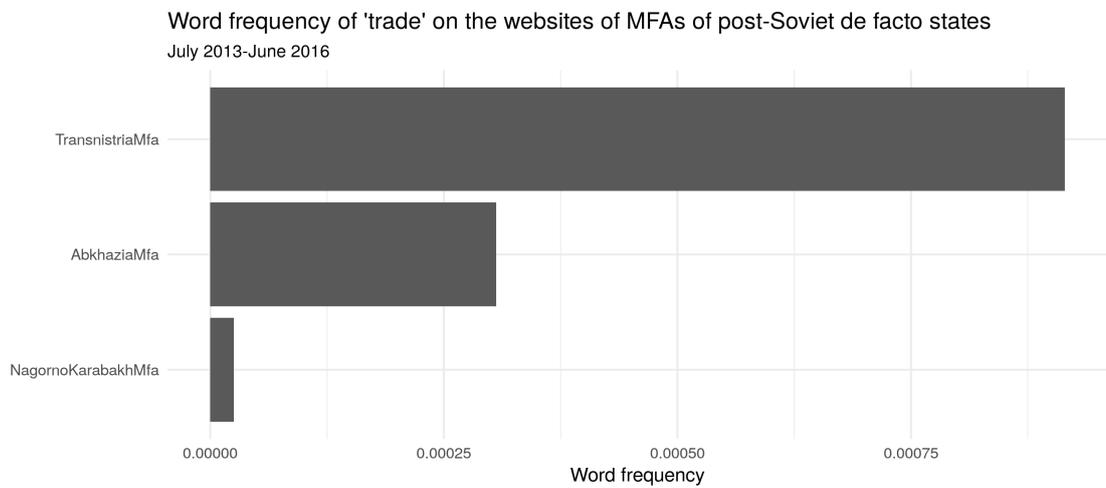
Illustration 7.14 Word frequency of 'trade' on the websites of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states
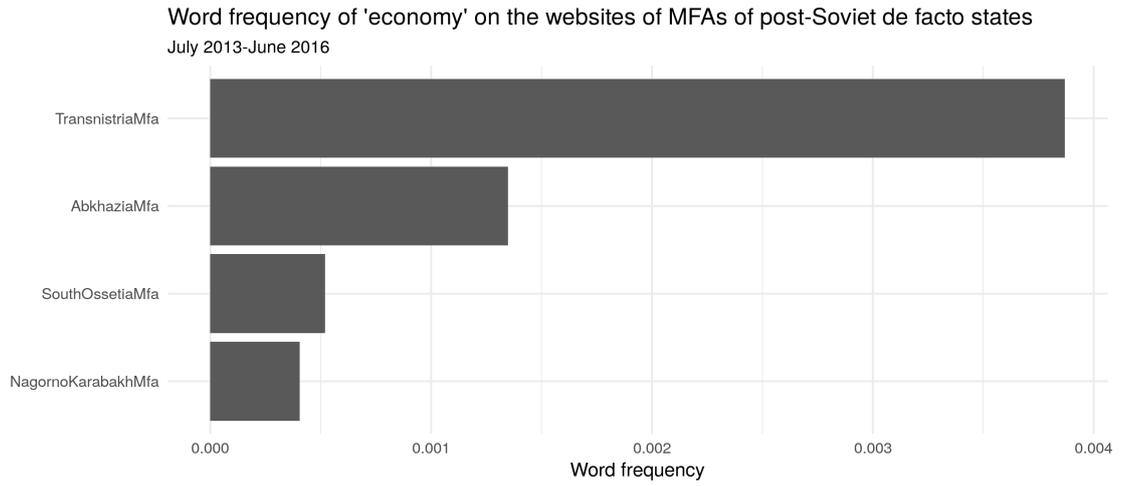
Illustration 7.15 Word frequency of 'economy' on the websites of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states
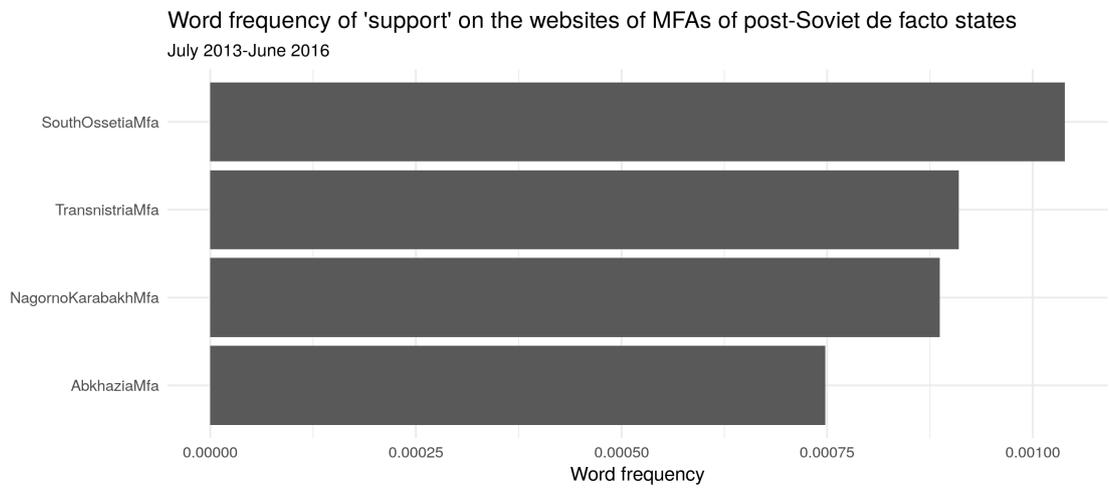
Illustration 7.16 Word frequency of 'support' on the websites of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states

Word frequency of 'assistance' on the websites of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states

July 2013-June 2016
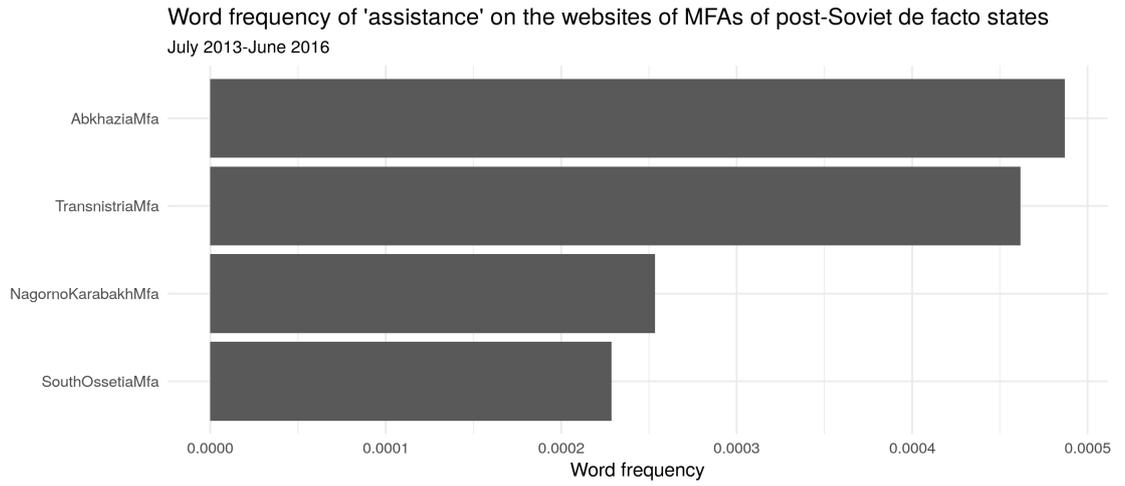
Illustration 7.17 Word frequency of 'assistance' on the websites of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states

Word frequency of 'independence' on the websites of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states

July 2013-June 2016
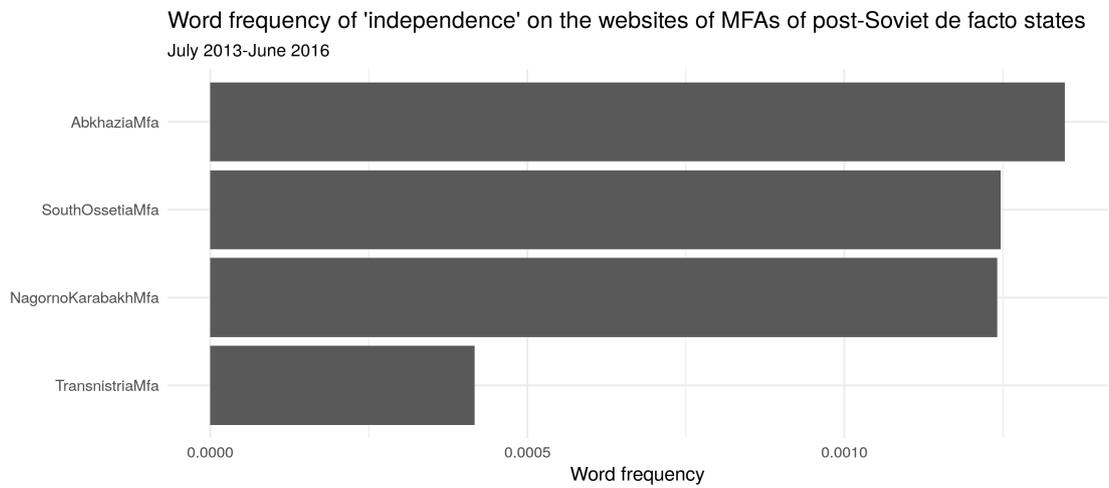
Illustration 7.18 Word frequency of 'independence' on the websites of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states
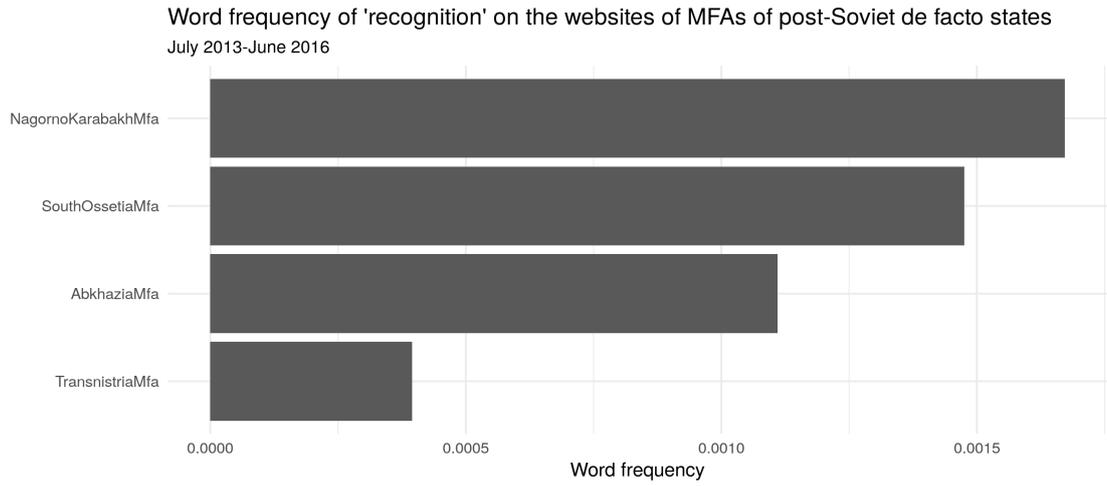
Illustration 7.19 Word frequency of 'recognition' on the websites of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states
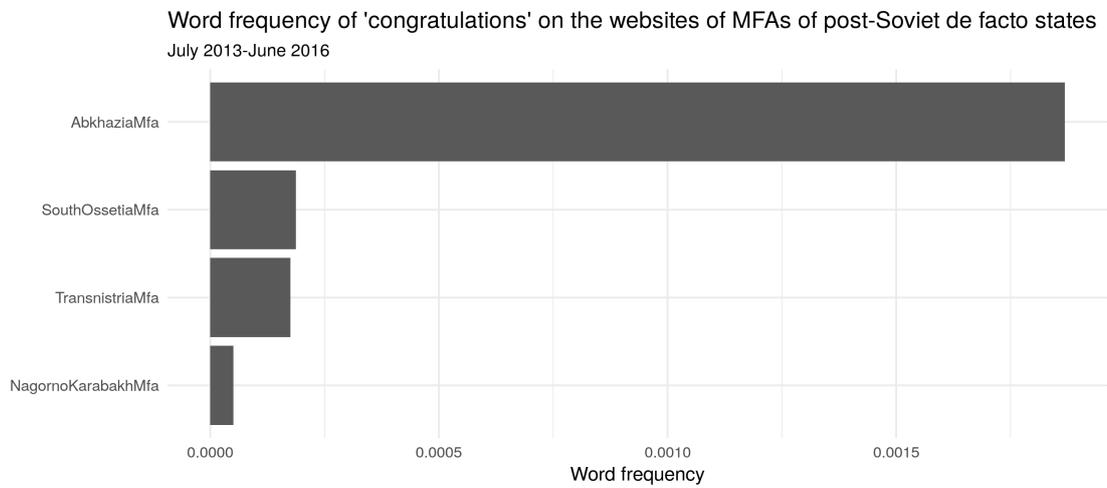
Illustration 7.20 Word frequency of 'congratulations' on the websites of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states
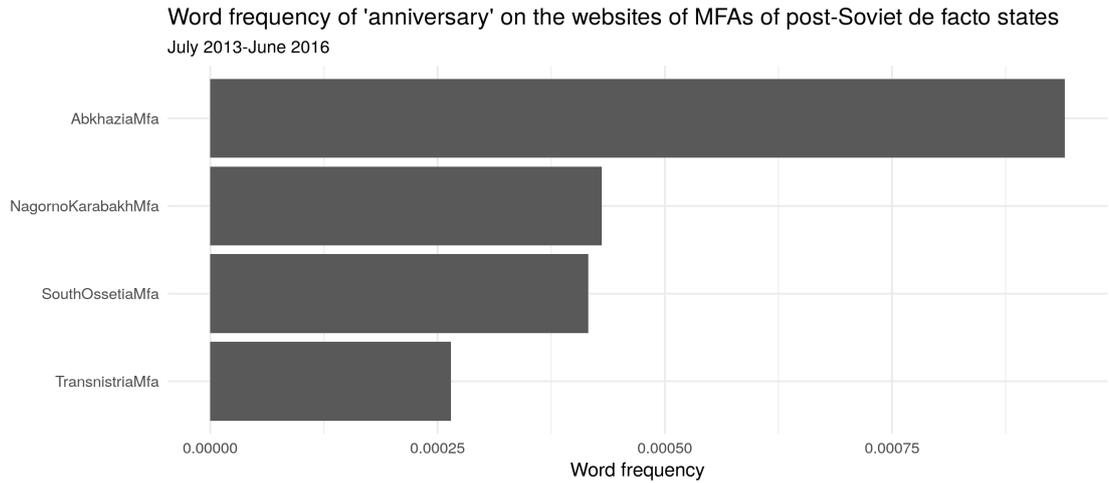
Illustration 7.21 Word frequency of 'anniversary' on the websites of MFAs of post-Soviet de facto states
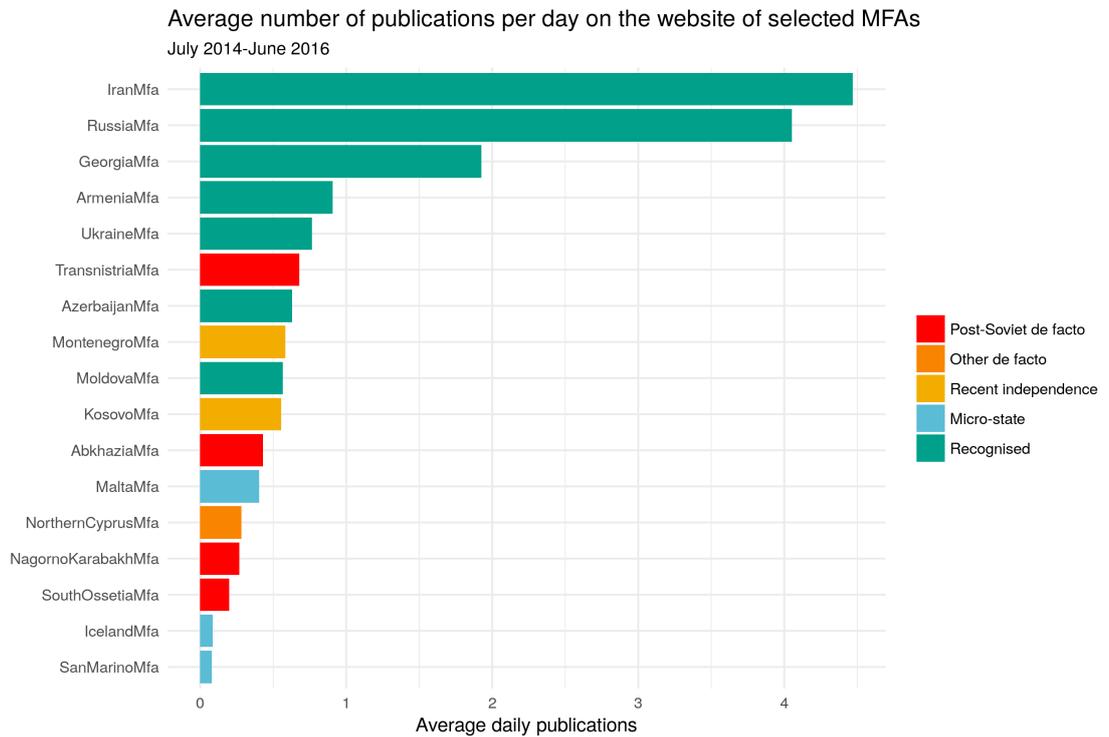
Illustration 7.22 Average number of publications per day on the website of selected MFAs

219
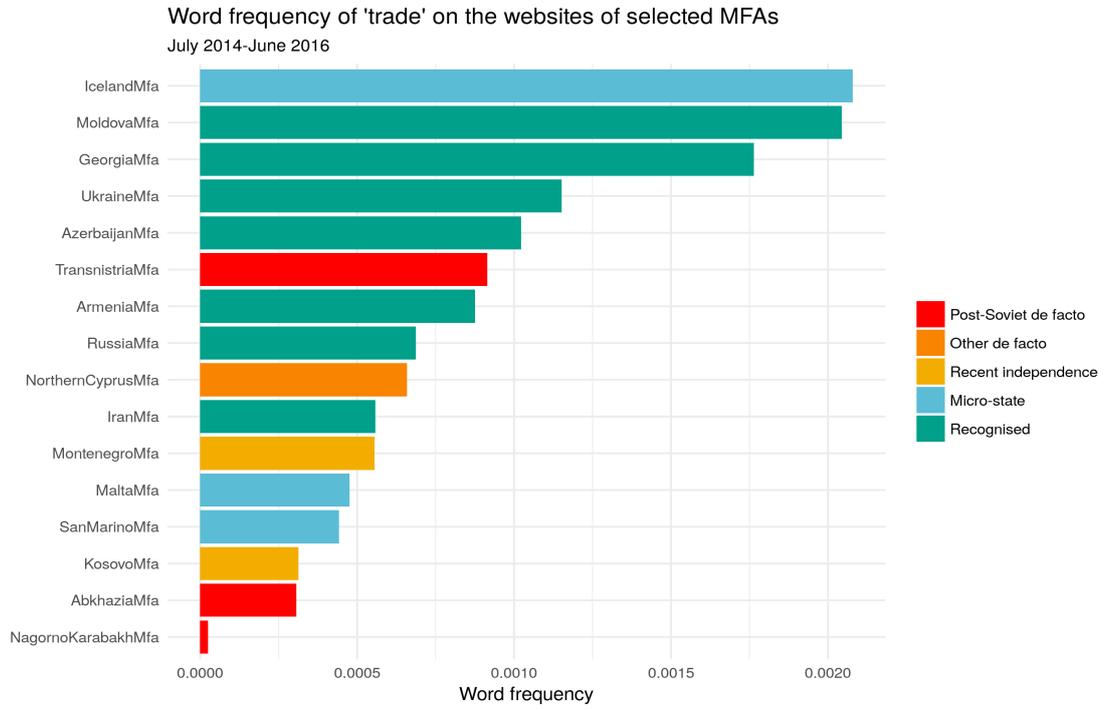
Illustration 7.23 Word frequency of 'trade' on the websites of selected MFAs
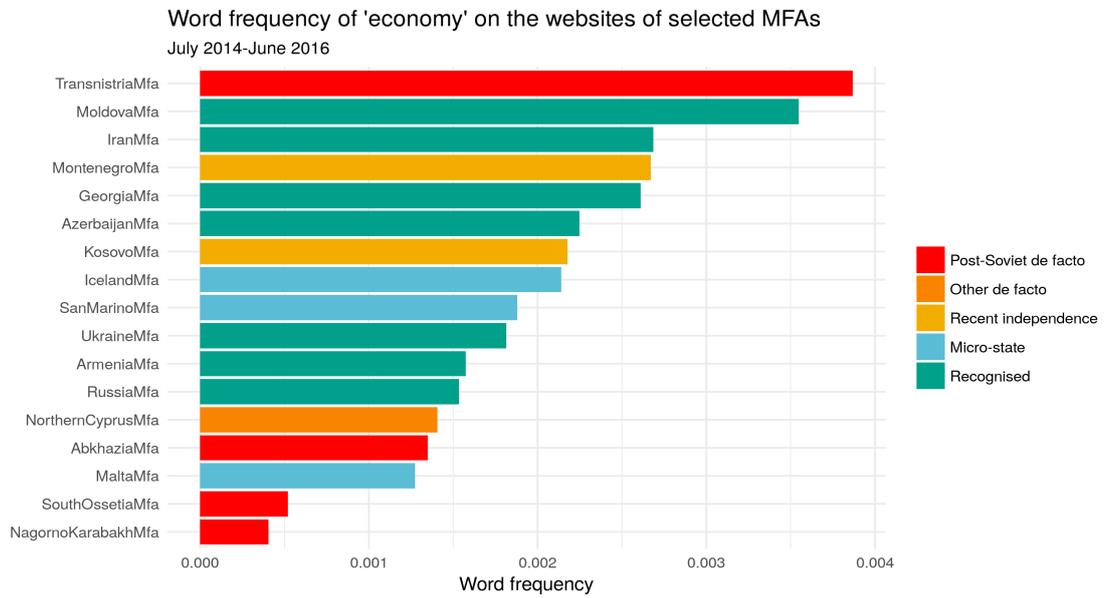
Illustration 7.24 Word frequency of 'economy' on the websites of selected MFAs
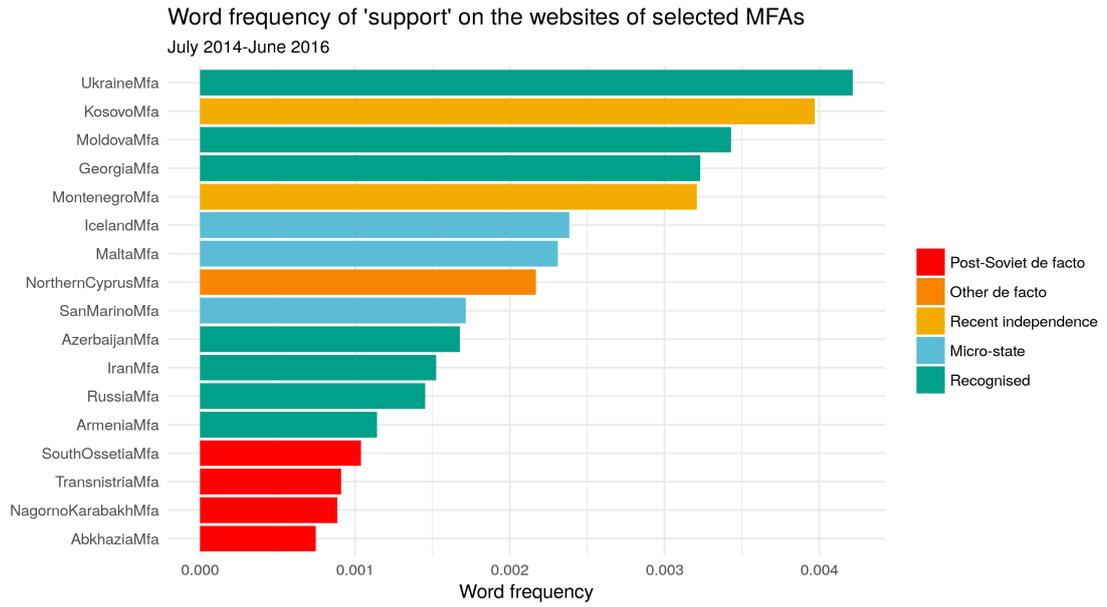
Illustration 7.25 Word frequency of 'support' on the websites of selected MFAs
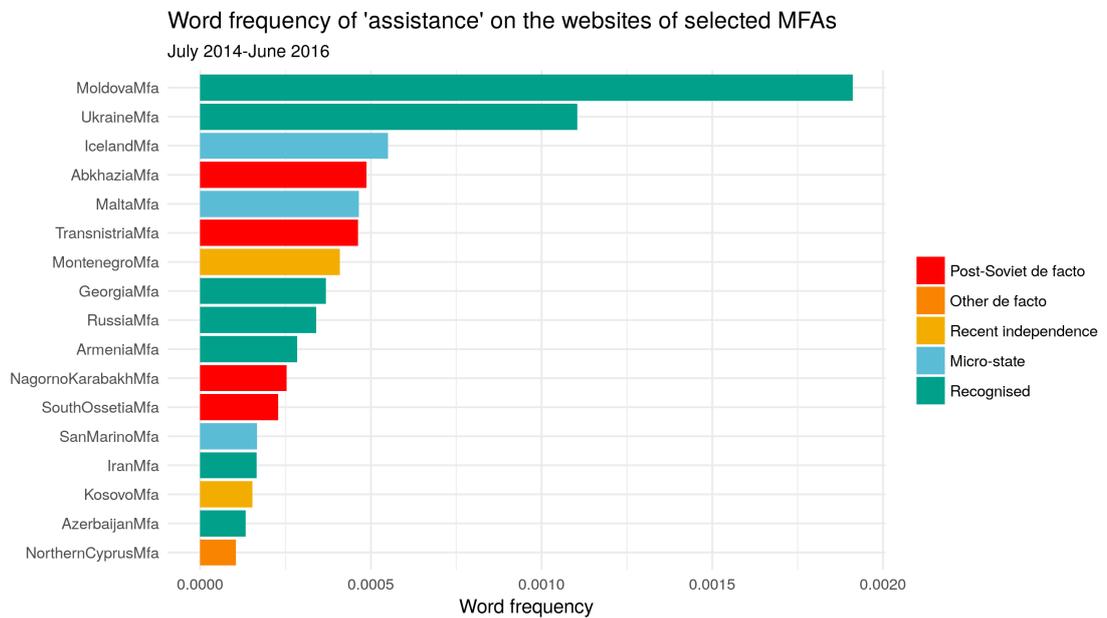
Illustration 7.26 Word frequency of 'assistance' on the websites of selected MFAs
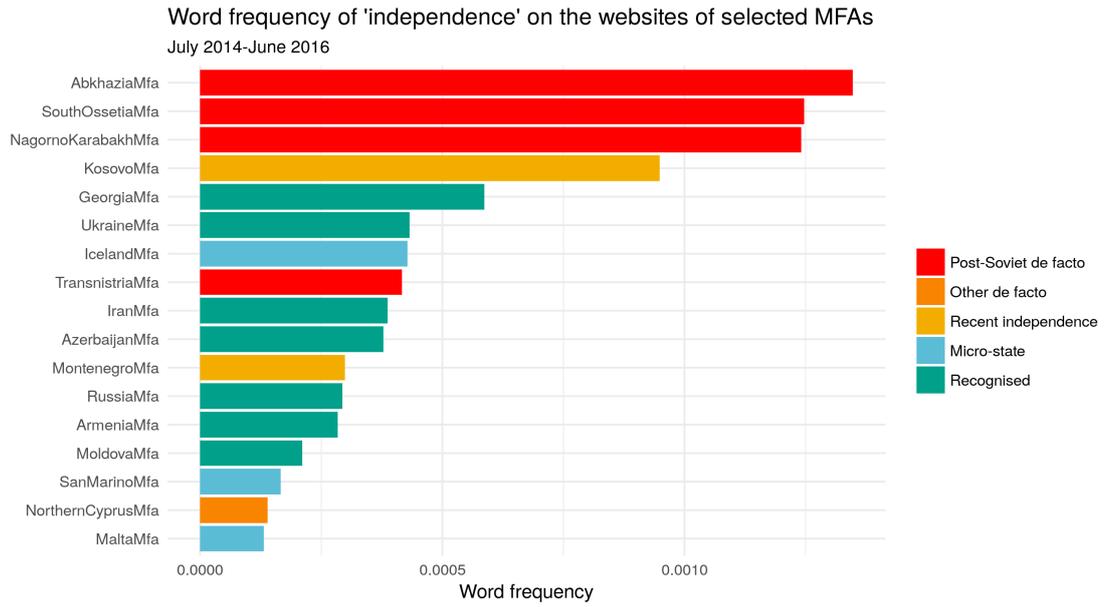
Illustration 7.27 Word frequency of 'independence' on the websites of selected MFAs
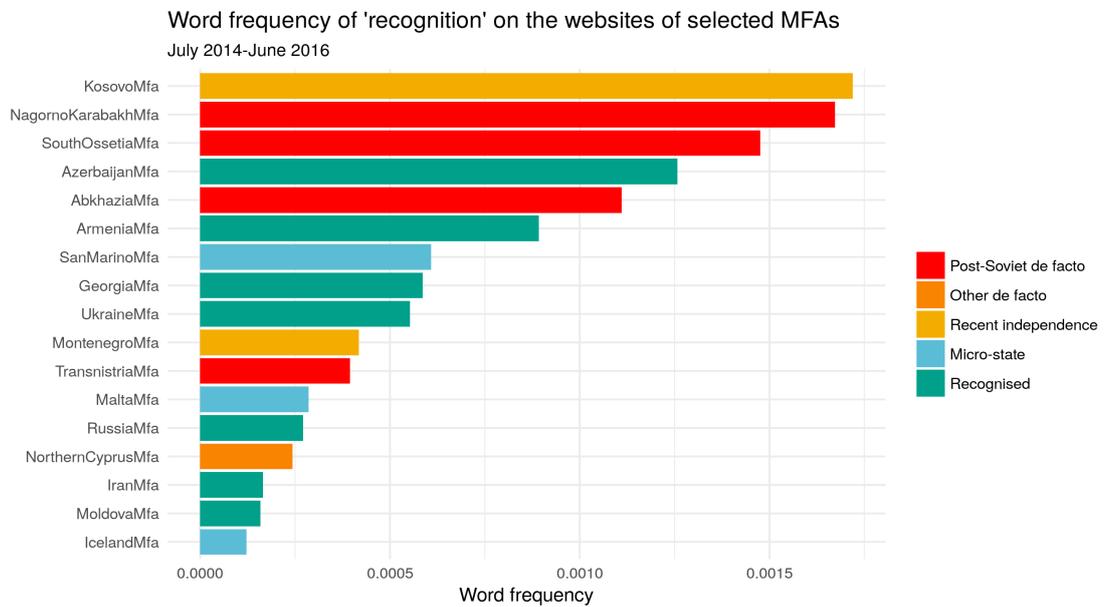
Illustration 7.28 Word frequency of 'recognition' on the websites of selected MFAs
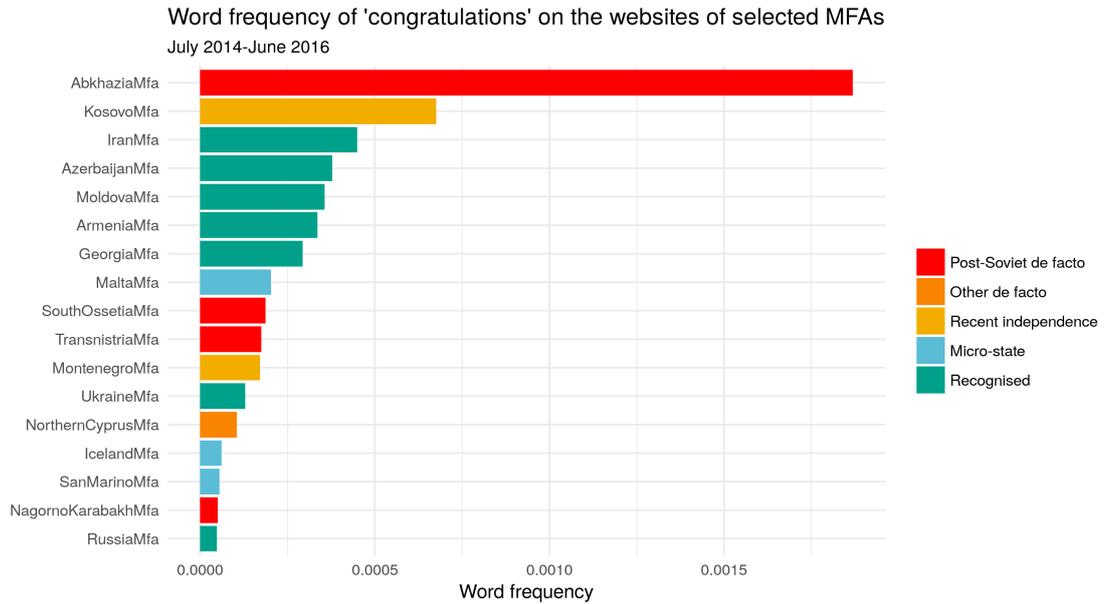
Illustration 7.29 Word frequency of 'congratulations' on the websites of selected MFAs
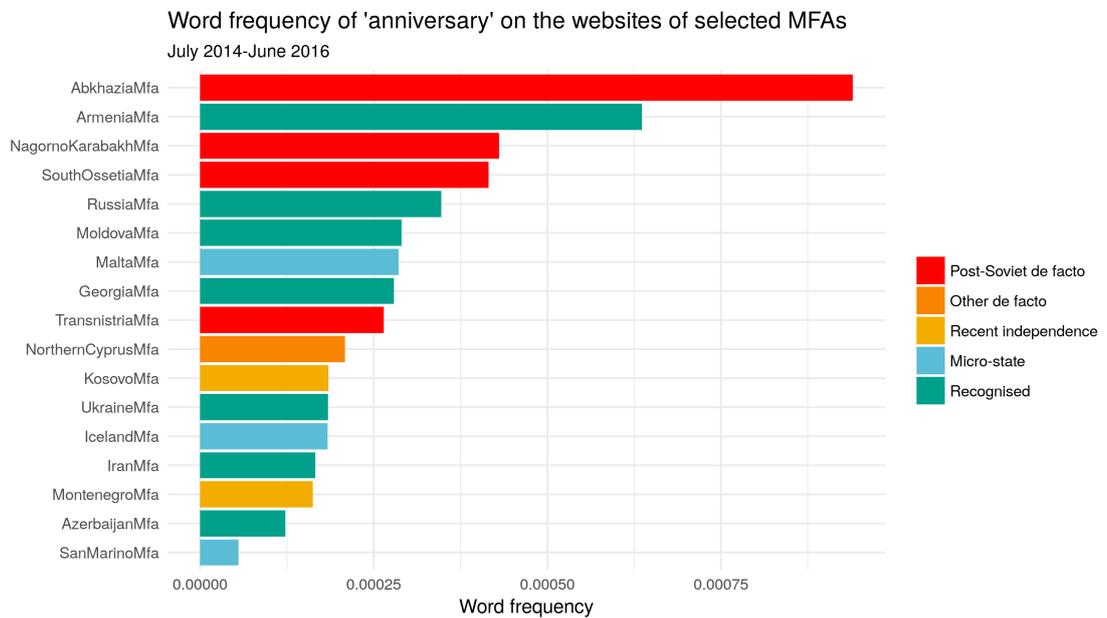
Illustration 7.30 Word frequency of 'anniversary' on the websites of selected MFAs

Name of website	Earliest publication available	Total number of publications	Average number of publications per day
Abkhazia MFA	2012-04-16	734	0.48
Armenia MFA	2007-01-09	1 873	0.54
Azerbaijan MFA	2012-03-05	1 049	0.67
Georgia MFA	2015-01-05	1 057	1.95
Iceland MFA	1995-05-15	821	0.11
Iran MFA	2001-02-20	10 179	1.82
Kosovo MFA	2008-12-03	1 330	0.27
Malta MFA	2013-03-15	411	0.34

Moldova MFA	2007-03-07	963	0.28
Montenegro MFA	2013-07-25	497	0.64
Nagorno Karabakh MFA	2008-11-05	488	0.17
North Cyprus MFA	2013-02-12	361	0.29
Russia MFA	2003-01-04	16 229	3.30
San Marino MFA	2007-04-20	267	0.08
South Ossetia MFA	2010-04-19	347	0.15
Transnistria MFA	2009-01-06	1 335	0.49
Ukraine MFA	2010-01-12	1 812	0.77

Table 7.1: List of websites included in the analysis and date of earliest publication available for each of them. Data reflect the situation of 30 June 2016, and refer to the frequency of publications for the whole period for which data are available.

Chapter 8.

Conclusions

8.1. How should we study de facto states?

De facto states are here to stay, not only as a component part of the international system of the 21st century, but also as an analytical category. As long as non-recognition remains the main criteria for case selection – as has been the case in this research – it seems only natural for researchers to focus on issues related to the contested status of these territories. However, researchers dealing with these entities should not be blinded by lack of international recognition, and explore both their external relations and their domestic developments along established patterns, employing analytical tools routinely used in uncontested territories, looking for relevant terms of reference well beyond other de facto states and conflict regions.

Research on external assistance may well deal with the issue of dependency and its impact on on the meaning of sovereignty in the contemporary international system, but, in developing a new research agenda on post-Soviet de facto states, other venues of research typically associated with external assistance in other contexts should also be explored, including questions on the effectiveness of aid, the potential impact of aid volatility, issues of sustainability, of domestic legitimacy, etc. It is argued here that shifting the focus away from the issue of recognition allows not only to gain a better understanding of ongoing dynamics in these territories, but will also ultimately contribute to find better answers to questions related to the issue of status and

international sovereignty. In other words, the richer understanding of these territories that would emerge as a result would then usefully contribute to established debates on the nature of de facto states, and their place in the contemporary international system.

Normative issues have also been an obstacle to developing a more vibrant research agenda on these territories. For example, there is a relatively large scholarship on possible long-term "solutions" for post-Soviet de facto states, but many of them seem to be based on a problematic set of assumptions. More than two decades after they were established, the understanding that de facto states are a temporary phenomenon, and that their situation must somehow be "normalised" to fit into established categories of the international system seems to be still widespread. Even in relatively recent publications (e.g. L. Anderson 2011), such "normalisation" is debated largely within the context of different options for territorial reintegration. This trend is of course understandable for research explicitly aimed at Western policy-making, yet the prevalence of such approaches is analytically problematic, as it leaves little space for structured research on what at this stage should be considered the most likely trajectory of development for this places; as international recognition or territorial reintegration seem equally unrealistic in the short and medium-term (and difficult to imagine in the long term), researchers would do well to consider more explicitly in their research the possibility that these entities will continue to exist in their current contested configuration for the foreseeable future, likely proceeding in their path towards further integration with the patron. Fundamentally, and arguably unlike in the 1990s, local policy-makers have also started to earnestly think in the long-term about their course of development,[1] and do not seem to have real expectations of an international breakthrough in relation to the status issue (as some of them had at least in late 2008).

Normative issues have seemingly had an impact also on the terminology employed to describe empirically observable dynamics. Many of the activities conducted by Russia in these territories would undoubtedly fall under established categories of institution-building, capacity-building, or development aid, but, apparently because such activities are sponsored by Moscow instead of international organisations or Western actors, the same vocabulary is rarely applied. This is analytically problematic, as it

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[1] For example, in 2015 Abkhazia's government has issued the development of a "Strategy for the social-economic development of Abkhazia until 2025" (Tsentr strategicheskikh issledovanij pri Prezidente Respubliki Abkhazii 2015).

prevents employing established analytical tools to gain a better understanding of ongoing dynamics.

Even when Russia's implementation of certain forms of assistance is evidently quite distant from established international practices, it may still be useful to apply the terminology and analytical tools used in other contexts, even if only to highlight the differences. For example, a rich debate on Russian peacekeeping in its "near abroad" in the 1990s (Baev 1994; Allison 1994; Shashenkov 1994; Baev 1999; Mackinlay and Cross 2003) has allowed to gain important insights on the peculiar dynamics sustaining Russian peacekeeping missions. By the same token, analysing Russian assistance to post-Soviet de facto states as a (possibly, but not necessarily) *sui generis* case of externally-led state building may also prove to offer valuable insights. Even applying a concept such as 'security sector reform', often associated with a democratisation agenda,[2] to – for example – Russia's assistance in revamping Abkhazia's police, military and customs service may contribute to shed light on the impact of Russia's "occupation" on local governance dynamics, and Moscow's role in the region. It is worth highlighting that applying the language of 'state building' and 'security sector reform' does not imply a positive value judgement on these policies; for example, even scholars who may normatively disapprove of the US policy in Iraq, and use terms such as 'invasion' and 'occupation' to describe it, would still apply to American assistance in the region concepts such as institution-building, development aid, and security sector reform, even if only to criticise how such activities have been implemented.

As has been pointed out in the introduction, there is nothing "magic" about de facto states; non-recognition does not confer any special aura to the political, economic and social processes taking place in this context. In brief, they should be studied employing the same concepts and analytical tools that are used in other contexts.

8.2. De facto states as small dependent jurisdictions

Without denying the usefulness of established characterisations of post-Soviet de facto states as 'unrecognised', '(post-)conflict', and 'post-Soviet' entities, it is argued here that conceptualising them as small dependent jurisdictions may contribute to a better

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2 For example, Sedra (2007, 7) pointed out how the model of security sector reform has been associated with "a normative framework featuring a holistic vision of reform that balanced the need to enhance the effectiveness of the security forces with the imperative of entrenching principles of democratic governance and the rule of law."

understanding of underlying dynamics across a number of possible areas of research, well beyond that of external relations at the centre of this study.

Fundamentally, conceptualising post-Soviet de facto states as small dependent jurisdictions contributes to reset expectations about their long-term perspectives of development and their external dependence. The clash between a stereotyped idea of the sovereign nation state (broadly accepted and replicated by the leadership of de facto states themselves in self-celebrating narratives of proud nations fighting for independence) and high levels of dependence and integration with the patron, is oftentimes used to highlight how these territories are not "de facto independent."

Proud narratives and idealised understandings of independence and sovereignty that ill-apply to the realities of the 21st century represent an unrealistic term of comparison that cannot be taken as a starting point for an impartial analysis of post-Soviet de facto states. Many of the apparently anomalous features attributed to post-Soviet de facto states become "normal" as soon as they are conceptualised as small dependent jurisdictions: strong dependence as well as widespread popular support for further integration with a patron is common in small jurisdictions. This special relation brings with it a number of important benefits, including security guarantees and an unusually high amount of aid per capita. Finally, similarly to small dependent jurisdictions elsewhere in the world, post-Soviet de facto states do not seem to have much of a choice: being "more independent" but destitute and externally vulnerable is hardly an alluring perspective.[3]

This conceptualisation opens the door to an apparently distant literature that, as discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, may usefully contribute to a better understanding of post-Soviet de facto states. For example, the experience of small island states demonstrates that lack of self-sufficiency does not imply unsustainability, as long as external sources of support remain in place thanks to 'aid entitlement'. As other sources of rent, 'aid entitlement' may disappear one day, but may as well offer sustainable incomes for decades as has been the case in both sovereign and non-sovereign small dependent jurisdictions around the world.

As argued in Chapter 5, conflict and lack of international recognition have been determinant in making these territories dependent and relatively isolated. However,

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3 In principle, de facto states could also opt for reintegration with the parent state. However, at the time of this writing, the parent state is still mostly perceived more as an existential threat than as a potential port of salvation.

since there is no indication that widespread international recognition, reintegration or some other form of agreement on their status is forthcoming, such features (being small, dependent, and not fully integrated into the international system) should be analytically considered inherent characteristics of these entities in all studies aimed at understanding and explaining – rather than changing – the object of research.[4]

8.3. Limitations of the comparison and new venues of research

In its juxtaposition of post-Soviet de facto states and small dependent jurisdictions, this research solidly focuses on similarities between distant jurisdictions that, as has been highlighted, share a number of features, without explicitly discussing the all too apparent differences. This selective approach, which has previously been employed by scholars working on the post-Soviet space in order to break out of the boundaries of area studies, does not aim at discounting geography (in particular, the actual remoteness of many island jurisdictions, and the physical distance between them and their patron), or the different histories and cultures that pertain to small dependent jurisdictions in different world regions. Instead, it points at sectors in which – in spite of all the differences – analytical approaches developed in the context of small dependent jurisdictions may contribute to our understanding of post-Soviet de facto states.

This juxtaposition, however, has important limitations. For example, highlighting that both sets of jurisdictions are not striving towards fully-fledged independence does not imply that they are facing choices on status in similar conditions. Indeed, unlike post-Soviet de facto states, many other small dependent jurisdictions were actually given the possibility to head towards sovereign independence, and detach themselves from their former colonial master. In recent decades, irrespective of the formal international status achieved by these jurisdictions, they instead mostly sought to adjust, retain, and sometimes reinforce ties with a patron. As the alternative was in many cases economic deprivation, this choice can hardly be characterised as fully free. Yet, they were arguably open-ended debates based on democratic consultations, even if they took place in circumstances that were less than ideal. In the case of post-Soviet de facto states, non-sovereignty is the outcome of conflict dynamics and prevalent international norms, not a "rational and pragmatic" choice based on a cost-benefit analysis, which is a

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4   Of course, research that is explicitly oriented at policy-making or conflict resolution may well take a different perspective.

popular albeit not unproblematic narrative used to explain the outcome of status debates in small dependent jurisdictions (Veenendaal 2016, 153). Yet, it is argued, awareness of the experience of small dependent jurisdictions around the globe can usefully contribute to our understanding of prevalent dynamics in post-Soviet de facto states, including in reference to the sustained preference among a majority of residents for close ties with their patron (Toal and O'Loughlin 2016).

Besides, the fact that the dynamics that generated and sustain the patron-client relationship in these different sets of territories are fundamentally dissimilar does not preclude the applicability to post-Soviet de facto states of approaches established in the study of small dependent jurisdictions. This article has preliminary explored the applicability of the MIRAB model to post-Soviet de facto states. While the model is in itself descriptive, further research aimed at observing the accuracy and the shortcomings of MIRAB in the context of post-Soviet de facto states may inform in-depth analysis on one of the long-standing questions on post-Soviet de facto states (e.g. Kolstø 2006): how do these entities sustain themselves? Approaching this question through the prism of MIRAB allows to fully acknowledge the importance of the patron, but also to explore local dynamics that enable the sustained existence of these entities and fundamentally contribute to shape their political economy. Awareness of criticism to the MIRAB model (Bertram 1999, 113–15) contributes to avoid potential pitfalls, or at least to include them in the analytical process (e.g. does MIRAB's focus on macro-economic aspects effectively misrepresent prevalent dynamics on the ground? does MIRAB discount too easily the potential for domestic economic development?).

Finally, conceptualising post-Soviet de facto states as small dependent jurisdictions provides inputs well beyond economic aspects. For example, research on elections and democratic processes in de facto states may find it useful to refer to literature on democracy in very small polities. Relevant studies show that micro-states tend to be more democratic than bigger states (Anckar 2008), but also point at the prevalence of personalistic politics (Veenendaal 2013b), at the dominance of the executive government, at lack of checks and balances, and at widespread nepotism and pork barrel politics (Baldacchino 2012, 107). Other features of the political context of post-Soviet de facto states (largely associated with post-conflict dynamics) are also found in small dependent jurisdictions that have not experienced conflict. For example, Baldacchino (2012, 109) argues that in small island societies there is frequently 'a set of homogeneous values […] to which significant social players conform and subscribe (at

least in public)'; in the case of non-compliance, 'the threat of ostracism is immense.' Tapping into the scholarship on small jurisdictions may contribute to point at some of the ways in which smallness interacts with perceived external threats to shape public discourse and political competition in post-Soviet de facto states.

8.4. Extending the comparison

Small dependent jurisdictions come in different shapes, and post-Soviet de facto states may have more in common with some of them than with others, also depending on the angle of analysis. The juxtaposition between post-Soviet de facto states and small dependent jurisdictions outlined in this study has focused on the issue of external assistance, but even in this context there would be room for considering alternative terms of comparison.

The role of military bases

For example, should the patron's military presence in these territories be understood as part of the assistance package to residents (and thus aimed at enhancing their security), or rather as the main motivation behind the patron-client relationship? In the case of islands jurisdictions that receive assistance from the United States, for example, financial and technical assistance should largely be understood as a side effect of the US desire to secure basing rights for their military, or – particularly in the past - grounds for testing weaponry. As argued by Vine (2015, 179), "one could reasonably regard all the federal spending in each territory as the cost of maintaining bases and troops there." Quite clearly, initiatives such as military nuclear testing in the Bikini Atoll, which had major health consequences for generations of Marshallese residents, cannot possibly be understood as "military assistance" to residents of the Marshall Islands. The primary motivation for US presence in remote islands has clearly been military, and the welfare of residents has been at best a secondary matter, to be kept in consideration to the extent that it prevents or reduces local opposition to the US military presence. Indeed, in a few instances, the US have removed the population from places such as Diego Garcia and the Bikini Atoll in order to use the islands exclusively for military purposes (Vine 2015, chap. 3).

While the US have been rather straightforward about the military nature of their interest in Pacific islands, Russia has justified its interventions in its "near abroad" with a number of reasons, foremost among them the need to defend its own citizens and Russian speakers under threat. Few analysts, however, would take such motivations at

face value, and many would be willing to accept that Russian interventions in its "near abroad" and its support to de facto states in the region can at least in part be explained by a desire for military positioning and military posturing. At the same time, in post-Soviet de facto states Russian military presence is actually welcomed as a source of security by a large majority of residents, rather than tolerated for its economic side effects, as emerges also from surveys conducted in these territories (Toal and O'Loughlin 2016, 117–18).

Depending on the research question, for analytical purposes it may be useful to simplify complex dynamics, as - for example – Poirine (1999) does when he argues that assistance to small jurisdictions should be understood as "a payment for an invisible strategic service" and ultimately as a surrogate to outright annexation and colonialism.[5] Yet, as is the case with other patron-client relationships, also Russian assistance to post-Soviet de facto states is likely related to a combination of factors. Military considerations, hard security interests, as well as "affective geopolitics involving identity, status, and memory" (Toal 2017, 257) are deeply intertwined.

More broadly, the dynamics that have developed around small territories that host US military bases could be taken in consideration as a source of inspiration, rather than a direct term of comparison, for approaching a number of research questions well beyond the issue of external assistance. For example, it is clear that the presence of military bases has influenced domestic politics in hosting countries, and most notably in time of unrest or coup. For example, "during the 2009 coup against Zelaya, the Honduran military flew the president from Tegucigalpa to [U.S. military base] Soto Cano before sending him into exile in Costa Rica, fueling suspicion about a U.S. role in the overthrow" (Vine 2015, 93). When Abkhazia's president Ankvab was ousted in a coup in 2014, he took refuge in a Russian military base before fleeing to Russia (Beacháin 2015, 243). The context is so different that it hardly calls for direct comparison, yet the role of foreign military bases in facilitating or impeding the overthrow of a sitting president may well be relevant also in the case of post-Soviet de facto states, and the literature on US bases in hosting countries may provide useful hints for aspects that should be kept in consideration.

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5   As Poirine (1999, 835) put it, "the payment of a strategic rent, generally qualified as aid, has replaced military conquest and colonization as a means of securing strategic outposts throughout the world."

Not only MIRAB

Island jurisdictions such as the Cayman Islands, the Isle of Man, and the British Virgin Islands have been found to have a political economy that is substantially different from that of MIRAB presented in some detail in Chapter 4 (Bertram 2006, 7). They are unlikely, however, to serve as models for post-Soviet de facto states, since they lack the key features that make British offshore jurisdictions so attractive: full access to global financial markets, and a solid legal and judiciary system. A so far minor exception relates to South Ossetia, which due to the jigsaw puzzle of recognitions in the post-Soviet context has been best-positioned to provide financial services for the "Donetsk People's republic" (Twickel 2017).[6]

Post-Soviet de facto states have been characterised as inherently ideal locations for murky business. They may indeed offer some room for smuggling and shady transactions across boundary lines, as well as, under certain circumstances, provide a context that enables more advanced financial schemes (e.g. Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2017, 511). But while the concern that Transnistria was being used for "the laundering of criminal finance" (Wiersma 2002) may have not been completely misplaced, the volumes involved pale in comparison with money laundering schemes involving uncontested small jurisdictions. It is not de facto states, but small jurisdictions such as the British Virgin Islands which feature most prominently in publications dealing with money laundering in the post-Soviet space.[7] Leaks of documents related to offshore financial activities such as the "Panama papers" (Obermayer and Obermaier 2017) have vividly demonstrated the centrality of small offshore jurisdictions to illicit financial schemes and legal, but no less scandalous, tax avoidance strategies. De facto states have occasionally featured in this context (e.g. Cushevici and Thoric 2016), but it is clearly other, uncontested small jurisdictions which are the real protagonists of both global and regional money laundering strategies.

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6   The fact that Russia recognised the independence of South Ossetia, and South Ossetia recognised the independence of DNR, made it possible to have fully formalised transactions between banks in Donetsk and Russia through South Ossetia.

7   See, for example, the recent damning portrayal of crooked elites and crony capitalism in Central Asia by Cooley and Heathershaw (2017).

Former de facto states

Finally, reasoning on the nature of external assistance to small dependent jurisdictions may shed some light on the dynamics that underpin the political economy of territories that for a time have been de facto states, but have finally been reintegrated by their parent state or have been making their way towards wide internationally recognised independence.

The political economy of contemporary Chechnya, for example, is largely determined by the patron-client relationship that unites central authorities in Moscow with Grozny. Moscow has spent at least 14 billion USD in reconstruction in Chechnya starting with 2001 (Yaffa 2016), and the local economy has largely been built upon subsidies from the federal centre. The flow of external assistance is determinant for the current power balance in Chechnya, as it ensures a degree of state capacity and gives to the current leadership the means (both coercive and economic) to dissuade potential challengers to its power. On the contrary, Chechnya as a de facto state in the period 1996-1999 (Caspersen 2012, 12) clearly lacked a solid patron able to provide extensive assistance and to put limits to domestic infighting. Indeed, Chechnya as a de facto states (1996-1999) eventually failed for a number of reasons, and the renewed strength of central authorities in Moscow was only one of them: internal infighting and collapsing de facto institutions were no less important, and an external patron is often instrumental in preventing both.

Republika Srpska Krajina (Caspersen 2007; Kolstø and Paukovic 2014), a de facto state within the internationally recognised borders of Croatia between 1991 and 1995, is another case in point, as dwindling assistance from its patron Serbia and the distancing between the de facto leadership and Belgrade have been key determinants of its eventual collapse.

In the case of Gagauzia (Kosienkowski 2017) – a former de facto state peacefully reintegrated in the Republic of Moldova - the situation is more complex, at least in part due to the fact that Gagauzia lacked an obvious patron and that, after reintegration, central authorities in Chişinău would not have the resources to bankroll Comrat even if they wished to do so. Yet, Gagauzia is still trying to make the most of its position in order to gain increased access to direct external funding; in spite of (or perhaps, because of) the largely pro-Russian rhetoric expressed by its leadership, Comrat has been able to attract direct funding from a large number of external donors, including from the European Union (Barbăroşie 2017; Nica 2016).

What about Kosovo, a rare occurrences of a de facto state that has achieved widespread international recognition? In spite of the different outcome, Kosovo's economy seems to fit quite well the MIRAB model found in small dependent jurisdictions as well as in post-Soviet de facto states, with aid and remittances covering for a large part of household incomes (Lemay-Hébert and Murshed 2016).

To summarise, this brief section reiterates a central point of this research: small dependent jurisdictions are a useful and so far unexplored term of comparison for post-Soviet de facto states. This juxtaposition, however, is not to be understood as exclusive, but rather as complementary to both established terms of comparisons (e.g. other de facto states) as well as a starting board for other and yet unexplored comparisons, including jurisdictions hosting military bases. In this context, depending on the research question, even more explicit references to the literature on post-colonialism may be appropriate.

8.5. Structured analysis of textual contents published on the web

Physically visiting places, observing ongoing dynamics first-hand, and interviewing relevant actors remains a crucial part of research in area studies and in the scholarship on de facto states in particular. However, researchers should use all available opportunities that are available to them to find pieces of evidence that may help in answering their research questions. As has been highlighted in different parts of this research and elsewhere (Comai 2017), looking at websites as a structured source of textual contents, rather than as an inordinate mass of materials, offers substantial benefits. Firstly, such an approach allows to formalize the exploration of online sources, which in recent years has become an important (even if mostly unacknowledged) part of the research process for scholars working on contemporary issues. Beyond that, basic quantitative analysis of contents based on word frequency can be usefully integrated into qualitative studies in order to provide additional background information, fine-tune interview guides, or corroborate evidence. Word frequency analysis can also be used to compare among cases, as well as to offer effective illustrations of trends.

As the amount of textual contents available on-line produced even in previously isolated (and, sometimes, still inaccessible) territories grows, and structured analysis becomes less technically complex, structured analysis of web contents should become more common in the study of de facto states, and in area studies more in general.

8.6. What is the effect of non-recognition on the external relations of de facto states?

Finally, it is time to approach the main question that has led this research endeavour: what is the effect of non-recognition on the external relations of de facto states?

Once these entities are conceptualised as small, dependent, and partly isolated jurisdictions, many seemingly unusual features of their external relations can be explained without reference to lack of recognition. Indeed, prevalent dynamics of external relations found in these territories, such as strong dependence on a patron, are compatible with those found in uncontested territories on both sides of the sovereignty divide. Most features of external relations described in different parts of this research can be related to underlying dynamics, rather than - strictly speaking - lack of recognition. Ultimately, non-recognition is a symptom rather than the cause of the complex environment that surrounds these entities and determines the boundaries of their external relations.

In other words, the effect of non-recognition cannot effectively be disentangled from that of post-conflict dynamics and geopolitical realities, as both conflict and lack of recognition have been fundamental in making these territories dependent and partly isolated. In principle, it would be possible to explore the effect of non-recognition through counter-factuals, but how far can such a thought-exercise go before it becomes completely meaningless? For example, if not for non-recognition, these territories would have likely qualified for substantial international support in line with the principle of 'state building for peace'. However, given the sheer amount of resources that Russia has transferred to these territories after 2008, such assistance may have been, at least in financial terms, inferior to what de facto states have actually received through their patron-client relationship. Also, post-conflict assistance tends to dry up quickly, while patron's assistance is expected to continue for the long term. On the other hand, openness to the wider world enabled by an uncontested status may have opened the door for more economic opportunities. But such opportunities should also not be overestimated, as the attractiveness of the region to foreign investors has been limited.[8] In brief, exploring possible paths of development for post-Soviet de facto states if their

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8   Even in the current situation, lack of widespread international recognition can hardly be presented as an obstacle to potential Russian investments to Transnistria, Abkhazia, or South Ossetia.

status was not contested soon becomes a futile exercise, at least in part due to the fact that no realistic solution to the status issue is in sight.

In conclusion, the main contribution of this research is not that of offering a definitive answer to possible counterfactuals, but rather to provide a better analytical framework for understanding the external relations of post-Soviet de facto states, and how they are determinant in shaping societal, economic and political dynamics within these territories.

Appendix A.

Fieldwork

List of interviews and meetings

Sukhumi/Gali

Kogonia, Ol'ga. Abkhazia's deputy minister for labour, employment and welfare. Sukhumi, May 2016.

Gvaramia, David. Abkhazia's deputy minister for education. Sukhumi, May 2016.

Taniya, Kan. Abkhazia's deputy minister for foreign affairs. Sukhumi, May 2016.

Tsakhnakia, Tamaz. Abkhazia's deputy minister for health. Sukhumi, May 2016.

Representatives of international NGOs working in Abkhazia, including with representatives of International Red Cross, Danish Refugee Council, Action Against Hunger, and World Vision, as well as representatives of local organisations, in particular the Centre for Humanitarian Programmes, Inva-sodeistvie and the International Fund Apsny.

Tbilisi

Bakaradze, Ketevan. Minister of health and social affairs, Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. Tbilisi, May 2016.

Officers from the EU delegation in Tbilisi, as well as from Unhcr's office in Tbilisi (April 2016).

Tiraspol

Vataman, Aleksandr. Abkhazia's consul in Transnistria. Tiraspol, February 2016.

Khonitski, Aleksandr. Head of the department for the countries of the far abroad and international organizations, Transnistria's ministry of foreign affairs. Tiraspol, February 2016.

Lysenko, Vlada. Vice-rector, Transnistria state university in Tiraspol, February 2016.

Chișinău

Moroz, Nicolai. Office for reintegration, Moldovan government. Chișinău, February 2016.

Officers of EU delegation in Moldova, EUBAM, UNDP, as well as head of child-protection NGO. Chișinău, February 2016.

Appendix B.

Introducing 'castarter'

A human-readable version of the technicalities involved

Creating a textual dataset from a website involves multiple steps. In most cases, the researcher is interested only in specific sections of a website (e.g. its 'news' section, rather than the 'about' or 'contacts' pages), and in almost all cases it is not interested in the menu, banners, or other clutter that that is frequently found around the textual content of a specific page (see Illustration B.1 and B.2).

'castarter' facilitates the process of creating direct links to archival pages of a section of a website by mimicking the functioning of the content management system of a given website, e.g. by creating URLs that correspond to pages that would appear by clicking on "previous" or "load more" in index pages of a given section. Once index pages have been downloaded, it then facilitates the process of systematically extracting direct links to individual pages (while excluding irrelevant links to other sections of the website or to advertisement); this is accomplished mostly either by defining a common pattern in all links of interest (e.g. all URLs include the string "/press-release/"), or by delimiting the area of the page from which links are to be extracted (e.g., selecting only the central column in a complex page). As a result of this process, a list of URLs to all web pages including relevant content is created. On institutional websites such as MFAs of de facto states, these may just be a few hundred items; on media websites such as the news

agencies of de facto states, the number grows into thousands; on websites of larger media organisations, there may well be hundreds of thousands of news items. As of early 2017, for example, Abkhazia's state news agency *ApsnyPress* makes available online more than 15 000 news items, Transnistria's *Novosti Pridnestrov'ya* about 50 000, while Russia's state-owned news broadcaster *Vesti.ru* more than half a million.

Illustration B.1: Extracting textual contents and metadata from a web page

In order to limit the load on the servers hosting the respective websites, by default 'castarter' waits for at least one second between each page download attempt: this inevitably slows significantly the download process, but within the scope of research projects such as this one, letting a process run for a few hours (or a few days) on a computer seems an acceptable compromise. Once all pages have been downloaded, 'castarter' can then be used to extract title, date, and main contents for each of the

pages, after the user sets a few criteria, such as information on the date format (e.g. if it is 'dd.mm.yyyy', or 'dd month, yyyy') or the page element that contains the main text.[1]

The resulting ouput can be then filtered in order to conduct qualitative analysis (as has been done, for example, to outline training programmes conducted with the involvement of external actors in Chapter 6) or quantitatively, as has been done in Chapter 7 to describe and compare MFAs. 'castarter' includes a number of functions that facilitate polishing the output and preparing it for analysis with other established packages. It also allows to create a straightforward web interface that can be used to analyse data interactively, or to to give the possibility to colleagues and the wider public to explore data independently by accessing a limited set of visualisations (see Illustration B.3).

```
> meta(corpus[[958]])
Metadata:
  author       : Abkhazia's MFA
  datetimestamp: 2014-05-28
  description  : character(0)
  heading      : A telephone conversation took place between Viacheslav Chirikba and Grigory Karasin
  id           : ABK2461
  language     : en
  origin       : http://mfaapsny.org/en/information/?ID=2461
> corpus[[958]]
<<PlainTextDocument (metadata: 7)>>
28.05.2014
A telephone conversation took place between Viacheslav Chirikba and Grigory Karasin
During the telephone conversation of the Abkhazian Foreign Minister Viacheslav Chirikba with the Dep
uty Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin, V. Chirikba acquainted G. Karasin with the prevailing situatio
n in Abkhazia.
Karasin "expressed concern about the worsening political situation in Abkhazia, where on May 27 acti
ons were held organized by the opposition." "The Russian side with attention and concern follows the
events in the friendly Republic and considers it important that the political processes there evolve
d exclusively in the legal course," - said the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia.
```

Illustration B.2: Metadata and textual contents after extraction

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[1] Libraries that allow for automatic identification of the main contents of a web page exist (e.g. Annau and Kohlschuetter 2015), but when the number of websites involved in the analysis is limited, custom solutions are likely to be more reliable.

Illustration B.3: Screenshot of web interface created with 'castarter' and available, as of July 2017, at https://giocomai.shinyapps.io/SouthCaucasusPresidents/.

Further development and new venues for sharing data

'castarter' is publicly available and still under active development as an open source project. Beyond improving its efficiency, planned features include the development a web interface that facilitates the creation of new datasets without the need to input data into a terminal, as well as integration with online data repositories. In due time, this may allow researchers with limited technical skills to create new datasets relevant to their research, as well as give to other users the possibility to access them and conduct basic analysis online, directly from within the browser. In such an environment, it would become increasingly easy to make new comparisons, or to preliminarily test hypotheses, as datasets created for one research could easily be used (or integrated) in order to deal with other, unrelated research questions. For example, the dataset with all press-releases of more than a dozen MFAs presented in Chapter 7 could reasonably be integrated with other cases and used by researchers with no interest in the issue of post-Soviet de facto states. By using exclusively free, open source technologies and making it possible to share scripts used to generate datasets it becomes possible to effectively enable online analysis of such datasets without breaching the rights of respective copyright holders.

It is anyway worth highlighting that some government websites include explicit copyright wavers. For example, all contents available on the official website of the Russian president (www.kremlin.ru) are published with a Creative Commons license (CC BY 4.0) that explicitly allows to "copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format", to "adapt, remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially", under the only condition that full attribution is given. As a consequence, in the case of Kremlin.ru, it would be perfectly legal to share the full textual dataset of all press releases issued by Russia's president in any format. In other cases, when licensing may be an issue, it would still be possible to allow the creation of word-frequency graphs, to show keywords in context (which is effectively what established search engines have been doing for years), and to share the scripts used to generate the dataset (thus ensuring the possibility to review the research process, and replicate the procedure if needed). In any case, the full procedure would be open and freely reproducible by anybody with a computer and an internet connection, without requiring access to databases that are often prohibitively expensive for researchers without institutional access.

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