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Role of Russian Peacekeeping in the Pridnestrovian Settlement Process

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Abstract. The study analyses the current situation of the peacekeeping operation in Pridnestrovie (Transnistria), carried out in conditions of a growing clash of interests between Russia and the West, the militarization of Moldova and its aspirations to join the EU and NATO, as well as the proximity of the security zone controlled by peacekeepers to the region of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine. The author summarizes the experience of Russia's peacekeeping activities in the region of the Moldovan-Pridnestrovian conflict, highlights the key features of the Dniester peacekeeping operation and shows its importance for the negotiation process on the Pridnestrovian settlement at the political and diplomatic level. The article provides an overview of the international peacekeeping initiatives in the conflict region, assesses the status of the negotiation process and the related military component of the settlement, identifies the specific features of the peacekeeping format and its control mechanisms, and analyzes the legal status of Russian troops. The author concludes that the peacekeeping operation in Pridnestrovie is still in demand, fully functional and ready for combat. According to the author, in case of withdrawal from the operation of the Republic of Moldova, the Russian military formations stationed in Pridnestrovie may be forced to receive the mandate of a special guarantee military operation to protect the stocks of Russian weapons remaining from Soviet times in the conflict region, to prevent the resumption of armed conflict and to ensure guarantees of peace and security for the population of Pridnestrovie, at least one third of which are citizens of the Russian Federation.

Key words: peacekeeping operation, armed forces of the Russian Federation, armed conflict, Pridnestrovian settlement, negotiation process, 5+2, Pridnestrovie, Moldova

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Роль российского миротворчества в процессе приднестровского урегулирования

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Аннотация. Анализируется текущее положение миротворческой операции в Приднестровье, выполняемой в условиях усиления столкновения интересов России и Запада, милитаризации Молдовы, ее стремления к вступлению в ЕС и НАТО, а также близости контролируемой миротворцами зоны безопасности

к региону выполнения Россией Специальной военной операции (СВО) на Украине. На основе объемного исторического материала и анализа нормативно-правовой базы автор обобщает опыт миротворческой деятельности России в регионе молдавско-приднестровского конфликта, выделяет ключевые особенности действующей операции и показывает ее значение для переговорного процесса по приднестровскому урегулированию на политико-дипломатическом уровне. Дан обзор имевшим место международным миротворческим инициативам, проведена оценка состояния переговорного процесса и связи с ним военного компонента урегулирования, выявлены специфические особенности миротворческого формата и его контрольных механизмов, проанализирован правовой статус российских войск. Автор приходит к выводу, что действующая в Приднестровье миротворческая операция по-прежнему востребована и полностью функциональна. Как представляется, в случае выхода из операции Молдовы дислоцированные в Приднестровье российские воинские формирования могут быть вынужденно наделены мандатом специальной гарантийной военной операции для охраны оставшихся с советских времен в регионе конфликта запасов российского вооружения, предупреждения возобновления вооруженного конфликта и обеспечения гарантий мира и безопасности для РФ.

Ключевые слова: миротворческая операция, вооруженные силы РФ, вооруженный конфликт, приднестровское урегулирование, переговорный процесс, формат 5+2, Приднестровье, Молдова

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Introduction

Over the past decade, Russia's peacekeeping practice has been greatly enriched by operations in Syria, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) peacekeeping mission in Kazakhstan. Special attention should be paid to ad hoc peacekeeping actions within the framework of cooperation between Russia and Turkey in Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh (Shamarov, 2022, p. 27). Such experience increases Russia's role in peacekeeping, serves the country's foreign policy objectives and is in accordance with the provisions of the Russian National Security Strategy.

In Pridnestrovie (Transnistria), where the peacekeeping operation has been carried out under the auspices of the Russian Federation for 30 years, today the geopolitical need to strengthen the Russian presence has acquired a special dimension. The clash of Russian and Western interests in this region, the proximity of the security zone controlled by peacekeepers to the territory of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine, the intention of official Chisinau to join NATO, the systematic attempts of Moldova and its western partners to dismantle the peacemaking mechanism — all this actualizes the generalization of the experience of peacekeeping activities of Russia in the region of the Moldovan-Pridnestrovian conflict.

The problem of Russian peacemaking in Pridnestrovie is most often considered by researchers through the functional aspect of the unique and unique trilateral peacemaking format involving military contingents of the conflict parties in the operation.[1] Several works are devoted to the analysis of international legal aspects of the peacekeeping operation and the status of Russian armed formations in the conflict region (Yazkova, 2014; Bejan, 2017; Zadohyn, 2018). In some works, the Russian peacekeeping on the coast of the Dniester appears as a geopolitical resource (Dergachev, 2018; Kowalski & Movilanu, 2020; Velikaya

[1] Shevchuk N. V. Peacemaking on the Dniester: Unlearned Lessons // Russian International Affairs Council. January 15, 2020. (In Russian). URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/mirotvorchestvo-v-pridnestrove-nevyuchennye-uroki/ (accessed: 02.02.2023). See also: (Romanchuk, 2014; Ignat'ev, 2015).

& Tatarov, 2021; Shamarov, 2022; Potter, 2022). However, the important non-military functions of peacekeeping missions, such as ensuring the peace process by creating the right conditions for political and diplomatic negotiations, have escaped contemporary scholars.

The aim of this work is to identify the specific features of Russia's peacekeeping activities in Pridnestrovie and to assess their significance for the process of peaceful political settlement of the conflict, including the negotiation process.

The "Frozen" Settlement

The conflict in Pridnestrovie arose in the late 1980s in the context of growing nationalist sentiment in what was then Soviet Moldova. The policy of national and linguistic discrimination and the desire of the Moldovan elites to unite with Romania have become a source of threats for the industrialized region of Moldova — Pridnestrovie. This brought together a multi-ethnic population to defend its rights and preserve a distinct but multi-ethnic identity.

The dissolution of the USSR, unsettled in terms of internal Soviet law and contradictory in terms of key principles of international law, created a dilemma of self-determination for the peoples of the former Soviet republics and prepared the ground for bloody conflicts in various parts of the post-Soviet space. Pridnestrovie was no exception, faced with armed aggression from the young national state — the Republic of Moldova, which justified the invasion with the need to restore constitutional order. The bloodiest stage of the Moldovan-Pridnestrovian conflict took place in June-July 1992. Then, thanks to the intervention of the Russian Federation, the 14th Guards Army of the Soviet and Russian Armed Forces was deployed in Pridnestrovie to separate the parties.

The ceasefire was followed by a peace agreement signed by the presidents of Russia and Moldova. Analyzing the provisions of this document, especially today, it can be stated that the 1992 Agreement on the Principles of Peaceful Settlement of the Armed Conflict in the Pridnestrovian Region of the Republic of Moldova[2] (hereinafter — the 1992 Agreement) laid the foundation for the entire settlement process. First of all, the document established a cease-fire regime, established a peacekeeping operation and its governing body — a Joint Control Commission (JCC), as well as a "security zone" along the line of separation, which the peacekeepers control to this day.

In general, contemporary research on the Pridnestrovian conflict mentions the 1992 Agreement in connection with these elements of peacemaking. However, all these important mechanisms were undoubtedly designed to guarantee that the parties would not only refrain from military action, but also from the use of sanctions and blockades. In addition, the document recorded the obligations of the parties to the conflict to remove obstacles to the movement of goods and people and to start negotiations immediately. Thus, the key parameters of the process of peaceful political settlement of the conflict in Pridnestrovie were established.

Despite the fact that the parties were able to start substantive negotiations in 1995, and the format of the negotiations has since been expanded to "5+2,"[3] Chisinau and Tiraspol have not yet been able to find a mutually acceptable formula for coexistence. Various settlement plans implying a federation or confederation have been repeatedly rejected.

[2] Agreement on the Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Armed Conflict in the Dniester Region of the Republic of Moldova // UN Peacemaker. July 21, 1992. (In Russian). URL: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/MD%20RU_920000_AgreementPrinciplesPpeacefulSettlementDniestrConflict%28ru%29.pdf (accessed: 13.01.2023).

[3] Today the participants of the "Permanent Meeting..." (5+2) are: the parties — the Republic of Moldova and Pridnestrovie, the mediators — the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the OSCE, as well as observers — the European Union and the USA.

The sides categorically refuse to accept each other's ideas: the reintegration project from the Moldovan side, and the separation with the subsequent building of good-neighbourly equal relations on the Pridnestrovian side.

The absence of significant escalation and armed incidents in this region has placed the conflict into the "frozen" category, often allowing experts to speak of it as the most easily solved in comparison with other protracted crises in Europe. But in 2006 the negotiation process to resolve the conflict was also "frozen." Until the beginning of 2012, the parties did not maintain any official contacts either at the highest level or at the level of diplomats and political representatives of Tiraspol and Chisinau. According to Russian researcher S.V. Rastoltsev, this stagnation of the negotiation process is a consequence of the fact that the conflict continues to be stereotyped as "frozen," where nothing happens, and the illusion that it can resolve itself (Rastoltsev, 2018, p. 85). In fact, in the absence of negotiations, many new problems are added to the contradictions underlying the conflict, exacerbating the already conflicting relationship between the parties.

Having carried out "work on mistakes," Tiraspol and Chisinau, with the active assistance of mediators and above all Russia, managed to return to the negotiating table after a six-year break. The parties agreed on the tactic of "small steps," which presupposed a joint solution of the least conflict and non-politicized issues in order to improve the well-being of the residents of the region and to form the atmosphere of trust necessary for normalization of relations (Shevchuk, 2022, p. 39).

For seven years, this tactic has enabled a complex interaction in the settlement at several levels, despite intermittent pauses. At the bilateral level, meetings were held between leaders and political representatives of Chisinau and Tiraspol. At the multilateral level, cooperation took place within the framework of the peacekeeping operation and its governing bodies, including the JCC and the Joint Military Command. In addition, work was carried out in the "5+2" format and its subsidiary platform, the expert working groups, as well as during "shuttle diplomacy" by mediators and observers through rotating meetings with the leadership of the sides in Transnistria and Moldova. However, in 2019 the Moldovan authorities decided to return to the most sensitive and contentious issue of the status of Pridnestrovie within the Republic of Moldova. This led to the collapse of the next round of "5+2" in Bratislava, after which the parties were unable to return to the negotiating table.

Nowadays, the interaction at the highest bilateral level is nullified and work on the political-diplomatic track has seriously deteriorated. In the current geopolitical reality, neither Chisinau and Tiraspol nor co-mediators — Russia, Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) are considering the possibility of reactivating the "5+2" format. Moldovan President Maia Sandu has never met with the leaders of Pridnestrovie since her election in 2020. The political representatives of the parties — Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration of the Republic of Moldova Oleg Serebin and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (PMR) Vitaly Ignat'ev met only a few times ad hoc in 2022 to resolve operational issues, mainly related to the energy sector. The intensity of work at a complementary level to the negotiation process — meetings of expert working groups — has halved over the past year. However, a few meetings that can be held are organized online, while the epidemiological situation with the COVID-19 pandemic has normalized. For the present "no war, no peace" situation, it is quite appropriate to introduce a new category and, by analogy with the "frozen conflict," consider the peace process in Pridnestrovie as a "frozen settlement."

Ironically, given the aspirations of the Moldovan authorities and their Western

partners to dismantle the peacekeeping mechanism on the banks of the Dniester River, the most effective work in the region of the Moldovan-Pridnestrovian conflict remains today within the peacekeeping operation. This level of interaction also plays a special role in the settlement process, as the security issues agreed upon by the participants of the "5+2" format are not discussed in the framework of the negotiation process and remain in the exclusive competence of the peacekeepers — the JCC. This structure deals with the prevention of escalation and the political settlement of possible escalations of the situation, as well as the Joint Peacekeeping Forces from the armed contingents of the three parties (Russia, Pridnestrovie, Moldova) and military observers from Ukraine. It is worth noting that, contrary to popular misconception, Ukraine did not withdraw from the peacekeeping operation after the 2014 crisis, which it joined by sending a group of its military observers back in 1998. Despite the fact that Ukraine has withdrawn from a number of agreements and, together with Moldova, refused to comply with the obligations to ensure conditions for the rotation of the Russian contingent, the provision of equipment for peacekeeping forces and the passage of related cargoes, the Ukrainian side rotated its soldiers until 2019 (Shevchuk, 2020, p. 154).

In March 2022, the Ambassador of Ukraine to Moldova, Mark Shevchenko, sent to the JCC an official notification of the decision of the President of Ukraine to temporarily suspend the tasks of the military observer group of the Joint Peacekeeping Force.[4] The document stressed that the suspension of the activities of military observers could not be interpreted as the termination of Ukraine's participation in the Joint Peacekeeping Forces in the security zone and other mechanisms of the Pridnestrovian settlement.

Currently, the tasks of the peacekeepers and the leadership of the peacekeeping operation to ensure security are routinely performed, the interaction of the peacekeeping units is not interrupted, the systematic work of military observers (temporarily without the participation of the Ukrainian side) and the rapid reaction teams continues, and service is being provided at all peacekeeping posts.[5] All this together guarantees peace. The situation in the security zone remains manageable and controlled, and the conduct of the peacekeeping operation remains an important part of the process of settling the conflict by peaceful political means, as enshrined in the 1992 Agreement.

Peace Initiatives

It is rarely mentioned today that before the establishment of the peacekeeping operation on the banks of the Dniester, there were other attempts to organize an international peacekeeping presence — first to prevent military escalation and then to maintain the ceasefire. In the spring of 1992, for example, the first large-scale armed actions against Pridnestrovian settlements took place. The Supreme Council of the unrecognized PMR appealed to Russia and Ukraine to act as guarantors of a peaceful settlement and to help repel the military aggression (Myalo, 2002, p. 46). However, at that time both Russia and Ukraine were already involved in the negotiating format for the resolution of the "Pridnestrovian problem," established at the initiative of Romania and Moldova in April 1992. Several rounds of consultations were held in Chisinau in a quadripartite format at the level of Foreign Ministers of Moldova, Russia,

[4] Ukraine Withdrew Its Military Observers from the JCC // Pridnestrovian News. March 17, 2022. (In Russian). URL: https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/22-03-17/ukraina-otozvala-svoih-voennyh-nablyudateley-iz-sostava-sovmestnyh (accessed: 13.01.2023).

[5] Oleg Belyakov: There are no military preparations from Pridnestrovie and Moldova // Pridnestrovian News. February 28, 2023. (In Russian). URL: https://novostipmr.com/ru/hash/oleg-belyakov (accessed: 13.03.2023).

Romania and Ukraine.[6] Following the negotiations, without the participation of Pridnestrovian representatives, the parties signed a declaration on a cease-fire and established a quadripartite joint commission to control the situation in the conflict zone (Troitskiy, 2016, p. 29). The members of this mission subsequently spent several months until the beginning of a large-scale offensive of the Moldovan armed forces against the PMR on June 19, 1992. They were stationed in the Pridnestrovian town of Bendery. Some observers left Bender the day before the start of the armed attack on the town, and some members of the group were evacuated within days. The mission failed in its monitoring and verification responsibilities to ensure that sporadic violence did not recur. The second attempt to organize international peacemaking participation in the settlement was made by the Moldovan authorities immediately after the ceasefire.

On 6 July, on the eve of the consultations with the Russian side on the parameters of the peace agreement on Pridnestrovian conflict scheduled for July 7, 1992, Moldovan President Mircea Snegur raised the question of sending the Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS) peacekeeping force, which would include Moldovan, Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian contingents, to the conflict zone at the meeting of the leaders of the CIS member-states.[7] According to the authoritative Russian scholar A.I. Nikitin, the initiative of M. Snegur was explained by fears of unilateral military intervention of Russia (Nikitin, 2009). A similar opinion can be found in foreign works, when the implementation of the peacekeeping operation under the auspices of Russia is described as forced, taking into account the Russian arsenal of weapons over which the Pridnestrovian side would otherwise have control (Lutterjohann, 2023, p. 66).

Moreover, at the insistence of the Moldovan side, the Russian contingent should not have included units of the 14th Guards Army stationed in Pridnestrovie, which had been directly involved in ending hostilities in the conflict region.

It should be noted that the Moldovan authorities initially expected that the 14th Guards Army, subordinated to the Commander-in-Chief of the CIS United Armed Forces in the spring of 1992, would not intervene in the conflict and would not prevent the Moldovan armed attack on the rebel Pridnestrovie. The basis for this calculation was the April decree of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, which prohibited the use of these troops in inter-ethnic conflicts (Gubar, 2022, p. 204). The initiative to launch the CIS collective peacekeeping mechanism was not supported by the leaders of the participating countries, and as a result the mission was organized without the mandate of the CIS, and the peacekeeping force in accordance with the 1992 Agreement included the Moldovan, Russian and Pridnestrovian contingents.

Immediately afterwards, another attempt was made to internationalize the peacekeeping format. The Supreme Security Council of Moldova recommended to M. Snegur that, during the Moscow meeting, Romania and Ukraine should be included in the peacekeeping force as countries interested in guaranteeing peace near their borders. Subsequently, the signing of the Agreement in Moscow with the fixing of the dominant role of Russia and without the involvement of third countries not involved in the conflict was called by M. Snegur's opponents as a military and moral capitulation (Kowalski, Antoch & Scobioale, 2019, p. 43).

[6] Oazu N. Origins and prospects for the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict // Art of War. November 22, 2011. (In Russian). URL: http://artofwar.ru/i/iwan_d/text_0350.shtml (accessed: 12.01.2023).

[7] The emergence and development of the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova // Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. (In Russian). URL: https://structure.mil.ru/mission/peacekeeping_operations/more.htm?id=10336232@cms Article (accessed: 13.01.2023).

After the 1992 Agreement came into force, Chisinau tried to involve the Romanian side in the work of the JCC as a military observer group. However, this was not considered necessary (Nikitin, 2009). At the same time, in 1994, representatives of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) were given the opportunity to observe the meetings of the JCC, and military observers from Ukraine joined the peacekeeping operation, as mentioned above, in 1998.

It should be noted that Russia itself, during the so-called "Kozyrev diplomacy" of the first half of the 1990s, tried to partially replace the Russian contingent with UN and CSCE forces, but its appeals were not satisfied. The initiative of Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev to equate the Russian peacekeeping operation with the actions of these organizations has not found support in the West either.[8] The Russian diplomat Mikhail Mayorov, who was in charge of the Russian part of the Joint Control Commission for the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict in the beginning of 2000s, recalls in his book on Russian peacekeepers, how in 1993, at the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of CSCE, Russia was denied the status of a CSCE peacekeeping force to the military units in the "hot spots" of the post-Soviet space (Mayorov, 2007, p. 46). In turn, the United Nations in late 1992, through its special mission, inspected the activities of Russian peacekeepers and JCC's in Pridnestrovie and recognized it as quite effective, thus rejecting the Russian request to involve the United Nations in the peacekeeping format (Shevchuk, 2020, p. 155).

Much later, in the early 2000s, various parties tried to involve the EU in the peacekeeping process. The Netherlands first took initiatives during its OSCE chairmanship in 2003, then in 2005 by Ukraine within the framework of the "Yushchenko Plan" proposed at the Georgia — Ukraine — Azerbaijan — Moldova (GUAM) summit, and repeatedly by Moldova.

The first was to replace the tripartite format of the Joint Peacekeeping Force with an EU-led OSCE contingent. At the same time, the participation of other "stakeholders" was allowed (Troitskiy, 2016, p. 33). The second proposed the establishment of an international mechanism of European military and civilian observers under the auspices of the OSCE.[9] These ideas were born against the background of the EU's desire to increase its influence in the post-Soviet area and the EU's eastward enlargement. The latter, according to the Polish scholar Marcin Kosienkowski, contributed to the further strengthening of Russia's patronage in relation to Pridnestrovie (Kosienkowski, 2019, p. 186). Finally, Chisinau does not abandon the idea of dismantling the current peacekeeping operation and then replacing it with a world-wide civilian surveillance mission. According to Moldovan President Maia Sandu, such activities could be developed under the auspices of the OSCE.[10]

These initiatives, though widely supported among the Moldovan elites and the expert community,[11] found no support in either Tiraspol or Moscow. And a possible solution at the OSCE level would require the consent of

[8] Kozyrev A. Russia alone bears the burden of real peacekeeping in conflicts along the perimeter of its borders // Nezavisimaya Gazeta. 1993. September 22. (In Russian).

[9] Shevchuk N. V. Mistakes at the start: What does the new Moldovan president not know about the status of Russian troops in Pridnestrovie? // Russia in Global Affairs. December 8, 2020. (In Russian). URL: https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/oshibki-na-starte/ (accessed: 02.02.2023).

[10] Sandu proposed a new format for a peacekeeping mission in Pridnestrovie // Eurasia. Expert. November 30, 2020. (In Russian). URL: https://eurasia.expert/sandu-predlozhila-novyy-format-mirotvorcheskoy-missii-v-pridnestrove/ (accessed: 12.01.2023).

[11] Popescu N., Litra L. Transnistria: A bottom-up solution // European Council on Foreign Relations. September 25, 2012. URL: https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECFR63_TRANSNISTRIA_BRIEF_AW.pdf (accessed: 12.01.2023).

all 57 OSCE member states, which was difficult to imagine in 2003—2005, and even more unlikely in the current geopolitical situation. By the way, in 2009, Chisinau and Tiraspol discussed the transfer of the OSCE peacekeeping mandate at the Moscow summit. As a result, a joint statement was signed by the presidents of the conflicting parties.[12] The document noted the stabilizing role of the peacekeeping operation and agreed on the expediency of its transformation into a peace-guarantee operation under the auspices of the OSCE, but following the outcome of the Pridnestrovian settlement. The parties have not been able to approach such outcomes in the years since.

The Unique Format

The complexity of the process of organizing the peacekeeping operation in Pridnestrovie was initially determined by the fact that the Russian initiator, at the time of the establishment of the mission, was already involved in the conflict for a cease-fire and used elements of peace enforcement through the preventive deployment and demonstration of force (Nikitin, 2009). This stimulated the negotiations and the organization of peacemaking in Chisinau, which hoped for a wide internationalization of the format of the future mission and the avoidance of Russia's primacy in the peace process. For a different configuration of forces within the peacekeeping format, Moldova had neither the required international support nor resources. In this regard, the authoritative Western expert Dov Lynch wrote that it was the resource constraints that prompted the Moldovan Ministry of Defense to shift "peacekeeping responsibility" to the former 14th Guards Army (Lynch, 2000, p. 68).

For the EU and the USA, the Pridnestrovian settlement, as well as the peace processes in other "hot spots" of the former USSR, was not among the priorities of foreign policy at that time. According to E.F. Troitskiy, the United States and leading European countries did not have a formed strategy of post-Soviet politics at that time, and the conflict in the periphery of the Soviet Union did not affect the interests of these actors (Troitskiy, 2016, p. 30). Given these factors, there is no reason to doubt that Russia was fully capable of deploying the operation itself and determining its key parameters. Nevertheless, Moscow demonstrated flexibility. Despite the fact that the text of the 1992 Agreement did not contain provisions on the non-participation of 14th Guards Army servicemen in the peacekeeping operation, M. Snegur's request was taken into account and, according to the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation; the Russian peacekeeping contingent did not join the 14th Guards Army.[13] The Temporary Regulation on Military Contingents, adopted a week later,[14] stated that they would be formed from the number of servicemen "not participating in operations during the armed conflict in the Pridnestrovian region of the Republic of

[12] The Presidents of Russia, Moldova and Pridnestrovie signed a joint statement following the meeting in Moscow // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PMR. March 18, 2009. (In Russian). URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20220513144500/https://mid.gospmr.org/ru/Rbz (accessed: 12.01.2023).

[13] The emergence and development of the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova // Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. (In Russian). URL: https://structure.mil.ru/mission/peacekeeping_operations/more.htm?id=10336232@cmsArticle (accessed: 13.01.2023).

[14] Temporary regulation on the basic principles of the creation and activities of groups of military observers and military contingents intended to end the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova // Delegation of Representatives in the Joint Control Commission from the PMR. July 29, 1992. (In Russian). URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20190411110520/http://www.okk-pridnestrovie.org/download/Vremennoe-polozhenie.rar (accessed: 13.01.2023).

Moldova."[15] To this end, Russia provided its peacekeeping contingent of soldiers of the battalions of the 45th Guards Motor Rifle Division from the Leningrad Military District, units of the 106th Guards Airborne Division and the 27th Guards Motor Rifle Division (Nikitin, 2009).

According to A.I. Nikitin, the exclusion of 14th Guards Army servicemen who had participated in the events of 1992 from the peacekeeping forces and the rotation of military personnel from Russia's remote regions characterized the pursuit of the standards of the operation as peacekeeping and prevented the undesirable identification of Russia as supporting only one of the parties to the conflict (Nikitin, 2009).

In April 1995, the units of the 14th Guards Army stationed in Pridnestrovie were renamed the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF) in accordance with the Order of the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation No. 314/2/0296, which is still stationed in Pridnestrovie on the basis of the 1994 Russian-Moldovan agreement on the legal status, procedure and terms of withdrawal of military formations of the Russian Federation temporarily stationed on the territory of the Republic of Moldova.[16] According to this document, the withdrawal of Russian military formations from the region should be synchronized with the "political settlement of the Pridnestrovian conflict and the determination of the special status of the Pridnestrovian region of the Republic of Moldova."[17]

Today, the peacekeeping battalion of the Russian Federation is part of the OGRF, whose main tasks are to protect the armories of the former 14th Guards Army stored in the Pridnestrovian village of Kolbasna and to carry out the peacekeeping operation. At the meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in April 2020, the Permanent Representative of Russia to the OSCE, Alexander Lukashevich, stressed that the OGRF participates in the rotation of Russian peacekeepers, being part of the functioning of the unified mechanism of the peacekeeping operation, what is necessary for the continuation of the peace process.[18]

The main uniqueness of the peacekeeping format is that the operation is being carried out by the Joint Peacekeeping Force, which includes, in addition to the Russian, military contingents from the parties to the conflict — Moldova and Pridnestrovie. Thus, according to experts, the operation in Pridnestrovie created a special precedent that is absolutely atypical for peacekeeping missions. In this context, A.I. Nikitin rightly recalls the inclusion of certain paramilitary units, mostly police, from the parties to the conflict in some of the functions related to the peacekeeping operation and agreed with the main peacekeeping forces (Nikitin, 2009). First of all, the UN operations in Eastern Slavonia and post-Dayton in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Nikitin, 2009). Today, the activities of the Russian-Turkish Joint Monitoring Centre (RTJMC) to monitor the cease-fire and all military activities in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, organized on the territory of Azerbaijan, can be placed in the same line. The experience of establishing

[15] Shevchuk N. V. Mistakes at the start: That does the new Moldovan president not know about the status of Russian troops in Pridnestrovie? // Russia in Global Affairs. December 8, 2020. (In Russian). URL: https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/oshibki-na-starte/ (accessed: 02.02.2023).

[16] Ibid.

[17] Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova on the legal status, procedure and timing of the withdrawal of military units of the Russian Federation temporarily located on the territory of the Republic of Moldova // UN Peacemaker. October 21, 1994. (In Russian). URL: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/MD-RU_911021_AgreementOnWithdrawalOfRussianForces%28ru%29.pdf (accessed: 13.01.2023).

[18] Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation A.K. Lukashevich at an online meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council // OCSE. April 30, 2020. (In Russian). URL: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/3/451651.pdf (accessed: 13.01.2023).

direct lines of communication with the military control bodies of the parties to the conflict — Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as with the headquarters of the Russian peacekeeping contingent, has yet to be studied by modern researchers.

However, in these cases there was no direct link to the peacekeeping operation, as in Pridnestrovie. In addition, in the context of the Pridnestrovian conflict, law enforcement agencies are also involved in a number of peacekeeping functions and in the work of the operation's governing body, the JCCs. Representatives of the Ministries of Internal Affairs, State Security Structures, as well as the Foreign Affairs Departments of Moldova and Pridnestrovie are included in the permanent delegations to the JCC. However, such activities are not the same as the joint service on peacekeeping posts and on the perimeter of the security zone. Similar experience was later applied during the peacekeeping operation in Georgia and South Ossetia. According to experts, these cases are considered a special type of international peacekeeping (Nikitin, 2009).

The basic principles of interaction between the participants in the peacekeeping format in Pridnestrovie have not changed for 30 years. Thus, the principle of consensus must be respected in all decision-making, both within the JCC and at the level of the constituent elements of the operation, including the Joint Headquarters and the military observer teams of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces. The principle of direct cooperation between the parties is also important, not only in terms of joint combat duty, but also in weekly monitoring of the security zone by military observers, regular meetings. Compliance with the principle of territoriality in law enforcement activities is also monitored through the efforts of peacekeepers. This is particularly important given that the ceasefire in 1992 resulted in a decision to fix the so-called "status quo of presence," when both the Moldovan and Pridnestrovian administrations remained simultaneously in parts of the city of Bender, as in some of the surrounding villages.

In these settlements there are both Moldovan and Pridnestrovian security forces (police, transport and railway police, prosecutors, security services, penitentiary institutions and others). In order to avoid incidents in which armed security forces of the parties to the conflict may be involved, the JCC has agreed on the principle of territoriality in the security zone. This means that a party's law enforcement agency is responsible only for the territory under its administrative control.

At the political and diplomatic level, Chisinau and Tiraspol have failed to cooperate in law enforcement. In 1999, the parties agreed on the "Comprehensive Programme of Joint Measures against Organized Crime, Illicit Trafficking in Drugs and Weapons," which contained commitments to exchange information on the search for fugitives from investigation or prosecution.[19] But ten years later, Moldova has withdrawn from this and other documents regulating the fight against crime and the interaction of penitentiary systems.

Incidents in peacekeepers' areas of responsibility have been frequent, increasing the need for joint action in a peacekeeping format. In recent years alone, the JCC has responded to and discussed the removal of ammunition from the population, abductions of civilians by security forces, and other incidents involving law enforcement agencies.[20]

[19] Comprehensive Program of Joint Measures to Combat Organized Crime, Illicit Drug and Arms Trafficking // International Center on Conflict and Negotiation. July 13, 1999. P. 3—6. (In Russian). URL: http://iccn.ge/files/protocol___moldova_and__pridnestrovie_on_economy_trade_and_science_technology___13_july_1999.pdf (accessed: 13.01.2023).

[20] Oleg Belyakov: The kidnapping of Pridnestrovian citizens will lead to an escalation in the Security Zone //

Election periods in the Republic of Moldova are particularly difficult, when Moldovan nationalist parties carry out many provocations at the crossing points in order to exclude Moldovan citizens living in the territory of Pridnestrovie, including skirmishes with border guards, fights with local residents and other unfriendly acts. The Russian commandant was among the victims of such actions.[21] The concerted action of peacekeepers, who often had to confront the rioters with the separation wall, has prevented the escalation of the situation in the security zone and curbed such acts.[22]

Conclusion

Pridnestrovie is the only example in Eastern Europe where the hostilities were stopped after the deployment of the peacekeeping contingent and were not resumed by the parties to the conflict. The unique format of the operation conducted on the Dniester River, the effectiveness of its mechanisms and principles enrich the international peacekeeping experience and make a valuable contribution to the development and improvement of Russian peacekeeping.

Despite the obstacles to the normal functioning of the peacekeeping operation, connected primarily with the problems of logistics and the rotation of the Russian peacekeeping contingent due to the actions of Ukraine and Moldova, the peacekeeping forces remain fully operational. In addition, the dialogue capacity of the JCCs has been maintained, as diplomatic officials of the parties continue to attend its meetings as civilian observers.[23]

Russian peacekeeping in this region is both an instrument of ensuring regional security and a military-political mechanism for protecting their own national interests abroad (Shamarov, 2022, p. 19), as well as a mechanism to ensure the peaceful settlement and sustainability of political and diplomatic cooperation between the parties to the conflict in the framework of the negotiation process.

The dismantling of peacekeeping in Pridnestrovie not only destroys the system of security cooperation built by the Russian-Moldovan Peace Agreement of 1992. But also the “unfreezing” of the conflict, returning Chisinau and Tiraspol to a state of armed confrontation. In such a scenario, in the absence of any other security guarantees, Russia will be obliged to protect the security of its citizens, who now number more than 200,000 in Pridnestrovie.[24] Incidentally, this responsibility to protect is given considerable weight in Western studies (Bejan, 2017; Kosienkowski, 2019; Rotaru, 2022).

The rash and abrupt steps of Chisinau could lead to the forced endowment of Russian military formations stationed in Pridnestrovie being forcibly given the mandate of a special guarantee military operation. The same mechanisms can also be used to protect the remnants of disposed weapons of the 14th Guards Army in the Pridnestrovian village of Kolbasna. In such conditions, the implementation of peacekeeping functions on the territory of Pridnestrovie can be carried out

Pridnestrovian News. April 15, 2021. (In Russian). URL: https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/21-04-15/oleg-belyakov-pohishchenie-grazhdan-pridnestrovya-privedet-k (accessed: 13.01.2023).

[21] The peacekeeping mission creates conditions for a peaceful settlement // Pridnestrovian News. July 29, 2021. (In Russian). URL: https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/21-07-29/mirotvorcheskaya-missiya-sozdaet-usloviya-dlya-mirnogo (accessed: 13.01.2023).

[22] Ibid.

[23] In addition, in early 2023 Moldova appointed Alexander Flenk as the head of its delegation to the JCC, who for many years was involved in the negotiation process “5+2” (first as an employee of the OSCE Mission in Chisinau and later as the chief negotiator — political representative of Chisinau).

[24] Vadim Krasnoselsky: Russian peacekeepers are the only guarantee of peace // RIA Novosti. December 24, 2021. (In Russian). URL: https://ria.ru/20211224/krasnoselskiy-1765195410.html (accessed: 13.01.2023).

on the basis of a bilateral agreement with Moscow, which, among other things, allows increasing the number of Russian military formations from the number of Russian citizens living in Pridnestrovie. One way or another, the parties will have to resolve all their differences again at the negotiating table, and today there is both the potential for this and the conditions that are provided by the current peacekeeping mission.

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