

**ON THE EXTREME PERIPHERY.
THE STATUS OF POST-SOVIET NON-RECOGNISED STATES
IN THE WORLD-SYSTEM¹**

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Abstract. *This paper focuses on the status of post-Soviet non-recognised states, viewed through the lens of world-system analysis. The author interprets non-recognised states as an 'extreme periphery' in relation to 'the centre' with its legitimate periphery, international law and global order. The author argues that even though post-Soviet non-recognised states emerged from national movements in a collapsing USSR, with the aim of legitimately building new nation states, in time, they turned into polities that oppose international law and global order. This opposition creates a state model that has proved to be sustainable in spite of conflicts and sanctions, and that proliferates across the region.*

The most recent case of extreme periphery-building is the Russian-backed secession of Eastern Donbas. The establishment of two non-recognised statelets of the so-called 'Donetsk People's Republic' and 'Lugansk People's Republic' (hereafter 'DPR', 'LPR') was affected not only by the political, military and economic sponsorship of Russia, but also in cooperation with the 'governments' and societies of Transnistria and Abkhazia. The latter shared their models of state-building with the ruling groups in Donetsk and Lugansk after 2014. The specificity of this state-building is connected with the opposition to the centre of the core-periphery world-system and to all of the political, legal and economic rules sanctioned by the international organisations and states which constitute this centre.

Key words. *post-Soviet, non-recognised states, de facto states, Abkhazia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Donbas, Donetsk, Georgia, Lugansk, Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Ukraine, world-system, centre, core-periphery, periphery, extreme periphery*

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Today most of the Earth's land surface and its populations are governed or controlled by states. The state, as a form of complex political and socio-economic organisation, has become dominant globally in the last few centuries. Inter-state relations have developed into a complex world-system with its own rules, dynamics and 'ecology.' This world-system has three elements—interpreted in terms of the metaphor of core and centre: (1) an influential core dominating the international legal-political and economic order, (2) a politically and economically influenced periphery, and (3) a semicore/semiperiphery striving for global or regional influence. The elements are unequally correlated and hierarchically bonded (Prebish 1950; Wallerstein 2004; Gotts 2007; Agh 2016). There have been attempts by a number of international and intergovernmental organisations to create international law and globally followed rules granting inter-state equality. Despite this, states, their populations and their economies differ in terms of quality of life, productivity, political influence and their role in global exchange. The core states and the peripheral polities are usually described as interdependent in political, economic and cultural terms, thus constituting some sort of ecological system of global, local, and regional interdependence.

However, stable non-recognised states (NRS) remain outside this interstate system's description. These are peripheral, even with regard to the least influential peripheral states. My key question here is what kind of group do these states constitute in world-system?

To answer this question, I will apply the core-periphery model to their case. In this paper I argue that non-recognised states represent an *extreme periphery*, the fourth element of today's world-system. I use the term *extreme periphery* to signify a group of states that employ extreme measures to enter the class of normal periphery because these states (1) do not enjoy full or partial recognition by other recognised states and members of international relations, (2) do not participate—or if they do participate, participate minimally—in the global economy (because of sanctions against them), (3) have populations face much bigger socio-economic and biopolitical limitations than in any other part of the world, and (4) need an additional source of legitimacy, usually provided by some fully recognised state (sponsor state²) for their survival.

Out of many de facto states existing today around globe, I will test the class of extreme periphery on the six non-recognised polities that emerged in post-Soviet Eastern Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, people engaged in three waves of secessionist processes with the aim of creating new states. The first wave, between 1989 and 1994, started with a number of secessionist movements: some representing the title populations of fifteen Soviet republics; some being smaller movements in the interests of the ethnic groups of Soviet 'nationalities.' When the USSR was dissolved in December 1991, and up until the Budapest Memorandum (1994)³, within the territory of the USSR,

² I use the term of sponsor state here as a generic synonym to other related terms like 'patron state,' 'patronal state,' 'supervising state', etc.

³ This is the international agreement of 1994, according to which Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine refused nuclear weapons (that remained on their territories from Soviet times) in return for a guarantee of their

fifteen fully recognised independent states were established (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan) and four NRS (Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria) (Hale 2005: 57; Broers 2013: 60; Gammer 2014: 40; Bianchini & Minakov 2018: 299).

The second wave, 1994–2008, was connected with the Russian centre's fight to control its territories and the acceptance of a new federal treaty by all federal lands, including Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Tatarstan. During this period, Ukraine coped with secession attempts in 1994/5 in Crimea and in 2004/5 in Donbas (Hale 2005: 57–9; Gammer 2014: 41/2). The Georgian government politically reintegrated Adjara and started preparations for the military reintegration of Southern Ossetia in 2004–8. The regions of Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh turned into zones of 'frozen conflict'. There were no new significant secession movements in other post-Soviet states in this period.

The end of anti-secessionist operations in Russia gave rise to the third wave of post-Soviet secessionism (ongoing since 2008, as at the date of publication of this article). The Russian-Georgian war of 2008 led to the strengthening and partial recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In the six years that followed, Russia annexed Crimea and launched systemic support for secessionist movements in South-Eastern Ukraine. The latter strategy helped to establish two new breakaway regions in Eastern Donbas: 'DPR' and 'LPR'). As a result, since 2014, there has been an increased network of six post-Soviet NRS with a population of over 4 mln people and a history of over a quarter of century of existence.

So these states constitute and group of interconnected phenomena in the history of state-creation and state-building. Most of these states proved to be stable political units with their own role in world-system. As I stated above, I argue that the post-Soviet *de facto* states (DFS) constitute an example of extreme periphery, and namely extreme periphery to the Western core. This extreme peripheral status means that political, economic, social, legal and economic processes in these polities do not happen in the same way as they would do in any other peripheral state, and they do so against the will and interests of the Western core and their patronal states. Thus, the usual interdependency and struggle of core and different semicores and peripheries here is more striking; and thus these DFS have to use extreme measures of security, political and economic measures for survival and development. It leads to the need to add a fourth class to the existing three classes which make up Wallerstein's 'core-peripheries' scale: the *extreme periphery* class.

1. Methodology

1.1. Core-Periphery Differentiation. Ever since 1950-ies, the metaphor of core/centre and periphery has framed the vision of historians, social and political scholars, diplomats,

borders and territories. The guarantors of the memorandum were Russia, USA and UK; France and China were guarantors with reservations. The full text version of the memorandum is accessible here: <http://www.centrepir.org/media/content/files/12/13943175580.pdf> (accessed on 3 October 2019).

politicians, as well as practitioners of international development. This vision stems from the observation of global inequalities in different times, among different states. Raúl Prebisch, Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin, who was among the first scholars to use core-periphery analysis, looked at the differences between core and periphery nations in terms of economy, production and politics (Prebisch 1950, 1981; Frank 1967; Amin 1976). These authors all applied core-periphery metaphor to a new social reality that grew up in the place of a once global imperial/colonial system. Administrative, political and military tools of metropolitan dominance over colonies had become history by the 1970s; however, inequality persisted. Their approaches were summed up in the world-system approach of Immanuel Wallerstein and his followers.

According to the contemporary world-system approach, core and periphery have specific characteristics that have a tendency to change over time, due to inter- and inner-state processes (Wallerstein 2004; Arrighi et al. 2012; Agh 2016). Immanuel Wallerstein defined the main features of core and peripheries as “the degree of profitability of the production processes”, role of monopolies in production and international exchange, where peripheral states lose in economic and political exchange (Wallerstein 2004: 28). Core states are defined as benefiting economically from unequal exchange, and in the 20th century, they were mainly Western states and the USSR (before 1989–91). Core states are innumerable and constantly safeguard their superior position through international law, economic and political means. The strong states that contain the biggest share of core-specific processes focus on protecting their monopolies. Consequently, periphery states are politically and economically weaker than the core nations; they are internally less stable and more dependent on the core in economic and political terms. The weakness of these states impedes their ability to win from global exchange (Wallerstein 2004; Agh 2016).

However, between the two poles of global exchange, there is a dynamic group of ascending semiperipheral and/or descending semicore states. The semicore/semiperipheral states are under constant pressure from core states; the semicore states put pressure on peripheral states, and do whatever possible, through the use of economy, politics and military action, not to slip into the periphery and enter the core state class (Wallerstein 2004: 29ff). Basically, these are states that either exhausted themselves due to the lasting effect of monopolies (like the USSR), or that just started the cycle of power and wealth concentration through monopolisation (like post-Soviet Russia, or modern Turkey) (Kick et al. 2000; Kick & Davies 2001).

There are other states that do not fit into the three above categories. Among them, (1) ‘external areas’ that maintain social and economic divisions of labour, independent of the capitalist world economy (USSR, China, North Korea etc) (Wallerstein 1974); (2) areas controlled by the antisystemic movements that are national liberation movements using the nationalist logic of 19th century capitalism to destroy old states and create new ones by dressing “political claims in cultural clothing” (Arrighi et al. 2012: 1, 25). While the first group has decreased since the 1990s, when Russia and China became important parts of the capitalist world-system, the second group continued their antisystemic action.

By the second decade of the 21st century, the role of culture became even more visible in the core-periphery analysis. Core states were seen as centres of cultural hegemony (Rokkan 1967, 1970; Said 1978; Arrighi 1999; Baer et al. 2013; Griffiths & Arnove 2015). These studies show how world-system core states dominate not only through economy and politics, but also through culture and language of legitimacy. A centre imposes hierarchies of identities on the peripheral populations and tends to destroy or subordinate local identities through the centralised use of transnational administrative, economic and education systems, mass media and other propagandistic uses of power and/or cultural practices.

From this perspective, the term ‘extreme periphery’ designates those groups and/or communities who are not included within the hierarchy of identities established by the core but manage to sustain their identity in spite of the core’s policies.

Based on the theoretical and methodological approaches outlined above, I summarise the following key characteristics of core, semicore/semiperipheral, peripheral and extreme-peripheral states:

Table 1. Core-Periphery Characteristics

	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Political</i>	<i>Cultural</i>
Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> quasi-monopolies benefit from unequal exchange suppression of competition high level of added value minimal poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> non-questioned political influence decisive impact on inter- or national legislation and political order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> producers of cultural product definers of identities’ hierarchies centres of education and scholarship with strong impact on legitimacy definitions
Semicore/ Semiperiphery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> quasi-monopolies competing with core bigger role of competing economy lower level of added value considerable poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> questioned political influence sporadic impact on international legislation and political order political competition with core in certain regions for control over peripheries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mixed production and consumption of own and core’s cultural output subjects of biggest pressure from core-defined identities’ hierarchies sporadic influence in global education and scholarship weak impact on global legitimacy definitions
Periphery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> production with minimal added value imposed competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> minimal political influence outside country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consumers of core’s cultural product and identities’ hierarchies

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> widespread poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong impact of core and semicore inside country adaptation to regional order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consumers of education and scholarship products of the core and semicore sporadic impact on legitimacy definitions
Extreme periphery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> production with minimal value added weakest party in competition under international economic sanctions widespread poverty, usually dependent on some sponsor state's economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> minimal political influence mainly in resistance to the centre and parental state⁴ the subject of a strong impact of core and semicore states (especially sponsor state)⁵ adapting to order established by others striving for the status of normal peripheral condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consumers of and resisters to the core's cultural products and the hierarchical identities of the parental state consumers of and resisters to the education and scholarship products of the core and semicore no impact on legitimacy definitions

I will now review the status of post-Soviet NRS across these characteristics to verify my hypothesis that these constitute a special case of extreme periphery in the contemporary Western-dominated world-system.

1.2. *Definition of Non-Recognised States (NRS).* Before I analyse post-Soviet NRS further, I would like to take a closer look at different types of state organisations.

Over centuries, states developed into 'sovereign states.' In his archaeology of contemporary states, Charles Tilly offered the following set of criteria for the 'sovereign state': it is the political entity that (became dominant in Europe after 1500 and in other regions at a later stage, and) (a) controls a well-defined territory, (b) is relatively centralised, (c) differs from other sets of institutions and organisations functioning in the same lands, and (d) has "a monopoly over the concentrated means of physical coercion within its territory" (Tilly 1992: 23). The 'stateness' is measured by "formal autonomy,

⁴ I use the term 'parental state' to designate a recognised state from which the non-recognised state or territory has seceded; from the moment of secession onwards, the parental state has limited *de facto* sovereignty over its territory and population, which results in non-recognition *vis-à-vis* the breakaway region and its political, economic and demographic structures. The parental state usually uses international law (sanctioned by the core states) to impose sanctions against the non-recognised state (and in some cases, against its sponsors).

⁵ I use the term 'sponsor state' here to designate a recognised state that supports breakaway region and sponsors its development into a non- or partially recognised state through economic, political, and other means. The sponsorship is provided to help the non-recognised state survive the challenges of surviving the economic limitations and security challenges imposed from the core and the parental state.

differentiation from non-governmental organizations, centralization, and internal coordination,” and presence of “an organization employing specialized personnel which controls a consolidated territory and is recognized as autonomous and integral by the agents of other states” (Tilly 1992: 12). Thus the functions of state, according to Tilly are (1) war-making (elimination of external threats outside of own territories), (2) state-making (elimination of internal rival forces), (3) protection (elimination of potential threats to the controlled population) and (4) extraction (collection of taxes or revenue that provides a state to secure the means of fulfilling the previous three functions) (ibid., 12). Later functionalists have basically agreed with these criteria (e.g. Ghani & Lockhart 2008: 3).

Practitioners of international relations agree with the above functional definitions as well; however, they add one more feature of contemporary state: recognition. Thus, they refer to Article 1 of the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, where the “capacity to enter into relations with the other states” is ascribed as a necessary characteristic of stateness. Recognition is a formal indicator of such capacity and is key for stateness (Daase 2015; Ker-Lindsey 2017; Coppieters 2018).

To understand the phenomenon of NRS we should bear in mind these five characteristics of a state: (1) defence from external threat of a population living on a certain territory; (2) full control over populations on a given territory through elimination of internal rivals; (3) provision of the state’s exclusive administrative, justice and other services to the population on its territory; (4) collection of taxes and other resources necessary for state’s functionality and reproduction; (5) participation in the international order and in inter-state relations. According to these, NRS do not fulfil the fifth criteria. Should they qualify as states at all, then?

In realistic terms, NRS constitute state-like organisations that vary from almost-states to stateless communities. According the recent studies of NRS and DFS around the world, there are three basic types of those: (1) *as-if states*, that is, internationally recognized states which are therefore fully-fledged actors on the international scene, but cannot perform the basic functions of a state such as controlling their territory or holding a monopoly on the use of force in their area; (2) *almost-states*, that is, para-state organisms that have managed to gain de facto independence from the home country and aspire to the status of a full-fledged state, but are not recognised by the international community; and (3) *black spots*, that is, areas that do not aspire to independence, while yet remaining beyond the control of any state authorities and are administered by local organized crime, clan, or religious groups (Stanislawski 2008: 367; Pęczyńska-Nałęcz, Strachota & Falkowski 2008: 371). These degrees, measured according to the previously defined list of the five functionalities of a sovereign state, include the specificities as described in Table 2.

Table 2. Degrees of NRS

	<i>Defence of territory from external threat</i>	<i>Full control over internal populations</i>	<i>Provision of state's exclusive services</i>	<i>Collection of resources necessary for state's functionality</i>	<i>Recognised by other subjects of international relations</i>
As-if state	no	no	no	no	yes
De facto state/ almost-state/ para-state	yes	yes	yes	yes	no (sometimes partially recognised)
Black spots	partially	partially	partially	partially	no

The analysis of post-Soviet polities across the three definitions of NRS and five state functions shows that post-Soviet NRS, including Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria, are almost-states/para-states, i.e. DFS lacking international recognition and thus unable to enter into international relations with other states.

Henceforth in this paper, I will use NRS and DFS as synonyms for the less-often-used 'almost-states/para-states'. All of these terms refer to state-like organisations that implement the first four functions in a more or less complete form but generally lack external recognition by *de jure* states. I will also use the temporal dimension for differentiating 'break-away territory' from DFS/NRS offered by Pål Kolstø: the authorities of a break-away territory have to "persist in this state of non-recognition for more than two years" (Kolstø 2006: 725/6). This two-year term, however, is quite arbitrary and should be used *cum grano salis*. I agree that the two-year period of existence means that a state-like organisation has sufficient human, military, and financial resources to resist (a) the attempts of a parental state to reintegrate the seceded community and (b) the pressure of the core states as international order guarantors on leaders of the breakaway territory. The ability to maintain such resistance implies the presence of some political and military force that can control population and territory. Nonetheless, it does not imply that this secession is achieved by a legitimate political and legal entity that has the right to recognition. So, in this study, I use the two-year period only as additional factor in defining NRS. All six post-Soviet NRS that are analysed in this paper fulfil these criteria.

Now that *de facto*/non-recognised states have been described, I will apply these descriptions to the post-Soviet NRS and test the hypothesis that they can be classified as the extreme periphery of the contemporary world-system.

1.3. Data on Non-Recognised States. To conduct this research, I not only used published materials by other researchers and analytical centres, but also information from diplomats, journalists, security staff and other people involved in talks, monitoring or other missions in the Southern Caucasus, Moldova and Ukraine in 1992–2018. Literary sources described in the second part of this paper are referred to conventionally; the

interviews are referred to by code letter and number, e.g. a#, d#, j#, m#. A detailed description of the interviewees can be found in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Interviewed experts having first-hand experience and knowledge of the situation in post-Soviet NRS

Professions of interviewees	Number	Place/period of involvement with NRS	Periods when interviews were conducted	Terms on which interview is given
Diplomats (participants of talks, diplomatic observers, UN staff) (coded as d1–d9)	9	Armenia, 1993–7, 2009–11; Georgia 1992–2002, 2008–9; Moldova, 1990–8, 2004–10, 2015–18; Ukraine, 1993–5, 2005–10, 2014–18	2008–10, 2014–18	Anonymous
Monitoring specialists, security background (OSCE, EUBAM) (coded as m1–m7)	7	Armenia, 1993–9; Georgia, 1992–6, 2008–9; Moldova, 1995–9, 2008–10, 2015–18; Ukraine, 2008–10, 2014–18	2008–10, 2014–18	Anonymous
Journalists/reporters (5 from Western media, 3 from Russian media) (coded as j1–j8)	8	Armenia, 1993–5, 2017–18; Georgia 1992–6, 2008–9; Moldova, 1990–94, 2004–7, 2015–16; Ukraine, 1993–5, 2014–18	2014–18	Off-record
International NGO activists (coded as a1–a8)	8	Georgia 1994–6, 2008–9; Ukraine, 2014–18	2014–18	Off-record

The interviews and data collection were based on the cognitive interviewing method. A cognitive interview is (a) the collection of information in a conversation with a person who understands the aim of the conversation, during which (personal and/or acquired collective) memories about the past are recalled and reflected upon (Fisher & Geiselman 1992: 12–13), and, at the same time, (b) the interviewer's self-reflection, testing his/her/their own methods and premises, of the question set and his/her/their honesty in clarifying the goals of the research in the course of conversations with their respondents (Willis 2015: 16). Although this method is related to reflexive sociology and its qualitative research methods, as well as contemporary investigatory practices of witness interrogation, for me, as an academic researcher, this method is also a refined practice of sincere conversation between people who have information not described in official reports or avoided by academic publications. The result of my conversations with many interlocutors has been an opportunity to better understand the situations in which people in conflict-torn societies find themselves. I found the cognitive interview method to be a particularly good tool in helping me move towards this.

The set of interview questions was reviewed and clarified several times, which is also a part of the method (Willis 2015, 5ff). However, the basic questionnaire structure remained the same, namely: 1) How did NRS' populations survive sanctions in economic terms? 2) What were the ties between populations of seceded territories and parental states, and how did they change over time? 3) How did political identities emerge and develop in NRS, and what were the roles of local authorities, parental states and sponsor states in the process? 4) How did state-building proceed in the NRS; what were its common features? 5) What were the expectations of the Western/Russian governments *vis-à-vis* NRS, and how did these expectations change over time?

With the above-described conceptual apparatus and sources, I can test the hypothesis that post-Soviet NRS can be classified as the extreme periphery of the contemporary world-system.

2. Post-Soviet Non-Recognised States (NRS)

In December 1991, the Soviet Union was dissolved *de jure*. The *de facto* dissolution, however, had already started in the Perestroika period, when the Baltic countries, as well as Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova announced their sovereignty and decided to not to participate in the referendum of 1991 and the Novo-Ogarevo process that involved the signing of a new Union treaty. After the attempted *coup d'état* in August 1991, the remaining republics within the former USSR saw an opportunity to leave the Union. In December 1991/January 1992, fifteen newly established states in Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia were in the process of formation and receiving international recognition.

However, not only did the secessionist movements of the Perestroika era feature within Soviet republics' 'nationalities'; they also featured within smaller ethnolinguistic groups (Soviet *nationalities*) that did not have their own republics at the end of the 1980s but had some level of autonomy and self-governance. Among them are the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians in Azerbaijan SSR, the Tatars and Chechens in the Russian SFSR, the Ossetians and Abkhazians in the Georgian SSR, and the Russophone populations of the Moldavian SSR (Transnistria) and the Ukrainian SSR (Crimea). Over time, these movements engaged in their own state- and nation-building attempts. These secessionist movements—unlike those of the Soviet republican nationalities—did not lead to the creation of *recognised* states.

As at the end of December 2018, the post-Soviet states that did not have international recognition included six NRS in different stages of creation (see Table 4).

Table 4. Key Characteristics of Post-Soviet NRS

	<i>Population</i>	<i>Territory (km²)</i>	<i>Period of existence</i>	<i>Internationally recognised territory of parental state</i>	<i>States that recognise the non-recognised state</i>

Abkhazia/Apsny	240,750 ⁶	8,660	appx. over 25 years	Georgia	<i>recognised states:</i> Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru and Syria <i>non-recognised states:</i> South Ossetia, Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh and 'DPR'
'Donetsk People's Republic' ('DPR')	2,299,120 ⁷	n/a	appx. over 4 years	Ukraine	No
'Lugansk Peoples Republic' ('LPR')	1,475,841 ⁸	n/a	appx. over 4 years ⁹	Ukraine	No
Nagorno-Karabakh/ Artsakh	150,932 ¹⁰	11,500	appx. over 25 years	Azerbaijan	no
South Ossetia/Alania	53,532 ¹¹	3,900	appx. over 25 years	Georgia	<i>recognised states:</i> Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru and Syria <i>non-recognised states:</i> South Ossetia, Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh and 'DPR'
Transnistria	475,665 ¹²	4,163	appx. over 25 years	Moldova	no

According to this data, over 4 mln people (4,267,840) live in six post-Soviet NRS, two out of which have partial recognition, and several more are recognised by other NRS.

2.1. *The Economic Specifics of Post-Soviet NRS.* Post-Soviet NRS developed in conditions of international sanctions and blockades by patronal states and their allies. In economic terms, international sanctions against NRS created incentives for local populations to encourage their leaders to reintegrate with the parental states. In a

⁶ According to: Abkhaz census 2011.

⁷ See: DNR 2017.

⁸ See: LNR 2017.

⁹ DPR and LPR have signed an agreement on federation, which should be kept in mind. Also, in November 2017 there was a coup in LPR supported by DPR, which shows inequality of relations in this 'federation'.

¹⁰ Data from the 2015 census (source: The Demographic Handbook of Armenia 2016).

¹¹ Data from the 2015 census: Tibilov 2016.

¹² See: *Kratkie Predvaritelnyie Itogi...* 2017.

number of interviews with diplomats and security staff involved in talks between parental states and NRS in the first half of the 1990s, there was a widely shared expectation from Western parties (and in some cases from Moscow) that economic sanctions—and the hardships they cause populations and power groups—would force the authorities in NRS to seek opportunities to compromise with the parental states' governments (Lynch 2002: 833; Kolstø 2006: 724ff; Broers 2015: 288; d1, d2, d4, m1, m3).

These sanctions were intended to create such economic conditions that would force the breakaway communities and regions to return to their parental states. From my interviews with international diplomats who participated in the conflict settlement in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova, I understand the rationale of the first wave of sanctions to have been based on the idea that economic hardships would inspire the authorities in NRS to be more open to economic integration with their parental states. At least two interviewees concluded that they underestimated the value of group identity and the fresh memory of the mutual violence that prevented the expected scenario from being fulfilled. All of them later recognised that economic sanctions made the everyday lives of people living in NRS much harsher than in other post-Soviet countries, as they enforced warlords' power and ethnonational consolidation. It also contributed to DFS depending more on their sponsors for support: Armenia (in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh) and Russia (in all of the remaining cases) (Kolstø 2006: 725; d1, d2, d3, d4, d5).

The first reaction of the ruling groups and the wider populations to post-conflict sanctions was to create unofficial and informal economic institutions and cross-border ties. Over time, these evolved into an economic model specific to the extreme periphery. The extreme periphery model was formed as a result of the need to survive under a regime of sanctions. The model is typical for most NRS, including Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and for the eastern Donbas territories after 2014. People in all of these territories had to survive when borders between the parental state and other neighbours who supported international sanctions were closed for trade and transportation. The behavioural model of the sponsor state also changed from agreeing with the sanctions at first to subsequently denying them, and resuming economic cooperation with NRS. Due to the fact that the Abkhazian economy is studied best and there is enough data about its economic system for analysis, I will describe it as both (1) a specific case of survival under strict international economic sanctions and (2) a generic model for most NRS' economies that were subjected to such sanctions.

Abkhazia, one of the wealthiest regions of the USSR, after the crisis of Soviet planned economy (1990/91) and by the end of Georgian-Abkhazian conflict (1992–93) was extremely impoverished. As a result of ethnic conflict, ethnic cleansing, and the mass emigration of ethnic Georgians, it had lost approximately half of its population (Dale 1997: 100; Kolossov & O'Loughlin 1998: 153). During the 1992–93 war, at least half of its industrial and tourist complexes were destroyed (Derluguian 1998: 262–3). It was only logical for the international parties involved in the conflict settlement to expect that the risk of the economic isolation would force the leaders of the Abkhazian rebels to agree on reintegration with Georgia.

However, in 1993–94, the Abkhazian authorities and populations acted in a way that the West, Georgia and Russia did not envisage (Gegeshidze 2008: 68–70). Economic life moved into the ‘shadow’, promoting corruption, organised crime and smuggling networks inside Abkhazia, as well as on the Abkhazian-Georgian front line and the border with Russia (Oltromonti 2015: 292ff). For security reasons, as well as wanting to force the Abkhazian authorities to comply with the peace plan, Georgia (in 1993) and Russia (in 1994) closed their borders to the movement of goods, finance, transport, and—to some extent—people (Zverev 1996: 177). For example, the Russian government prohibited all Abkhazian men between the ages of 16 and 60 years from entering its territory during the period of the first Chechen war (*ibid.*, 178).

The sanctions regime harshened in 1996 when the Commonwealth of Independent States banned transport, financial, telephone, and trade ties with Abkhazia at state level. Gradually, Soviet documents (passports, IDs, etc) expired, resulting in the reduction of opportunities for members of the Abkhazian populations to travel legally across the Russian border and the Georgian front line (Markedonov 2010; Broers 2015; Oltromonti 2015).

In addition to Russian and CIS sanctions, other international prohibitions were imposed on Abkhazia. According to the list provided by Archil Gegeshidze, five further elements contributed to Abkhazia’s isolation. (1) UN Security Council resolution 876 (UNSCR 1993) issued “to prevent the provision from their territories or by persons under their jurisdiction of all assistance, other than humanitarian assistance, to the Abkhazian side and, in particular, to prevent the supply of any weapons and munitions.” (2) The Georgian government’s decision to close the port of Sukhumi and establish a maritime blockade in Abkhazian offshore waters. (3) The Georgian government’s decision not to open up Sukhumi airport to international flights, as well as (4) The closure of the Trans-Caucasian railway through Abkhazia. (5) The ban, by Tbilisi, on almost all economic cooperation with Abkhazia (with one exception: the joint operation of the Inguri power station) (Gegeshidze 2008: 68).

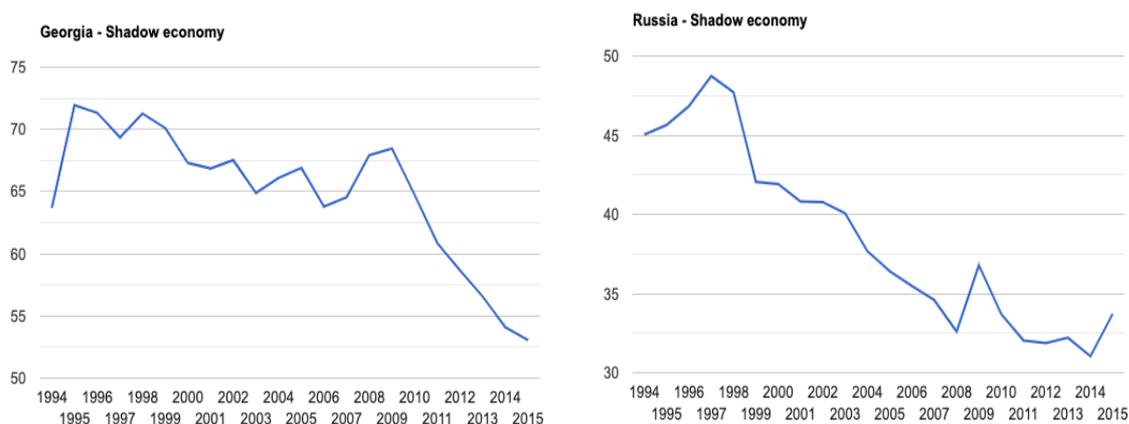
According to statements in several interviews and to published research (Markedonov 2010; Oltromonti 2015; m1, m2, j3, a1, a3), economically, Abkhazia was deindustrialising, deurbanising and ruralising fast. Private gardens and small farms—both in the capital, Sukhumi, and in other cities—provided households with necessary food supplies. Connections between rural and urban populations intensified (Oltromonti 2015: 293). For at least a decade, the collection and smuggling of scrap metal became one of the businesses controlled by the Abkhazian authorities; this scrap metal was illegally transported to Russian and Turkish metallurgic plants (Oltromonti 2015: 294; m1, m2). The passionate collection of scrap metal added to deindustrialisation since the scrap metal was often taken from equipment from non-working plants. These processes had the political and ideological consequences of spreading neotraditionalism and ethno-conservatism, that in turn supported warlordism and ethnonationalism in Abkhazia (Derluguian 2007: 169/70).

Illegal trade and smuggling became a central means of delivering goods and services that were officially and internationally banned. Since the shadow economy was

growing also in Russia and Georgia, the Abkhazian informal trade networks were finding partner shadow economic structures that were booming in the neighbouring countries (Aslund 2002: 89ff; Oltramonti 2015: 293–95). In three interviews, information was provided by eye witnesses on everyday bribery on the Abkhazian-Georgian dividing line and Abkhazian-Russian border in the 1990s (m2, d1, d3). Accordingly, under the sanctions, the shuttle trade networks with Georgia, Russia and Turkey became the dominant means of trade for Abkhazia. And the change in Russian policy towards sanctions in 1999–2003 did little to change the centrality of this type of trade: up until 2003, smuggling prevailed in cross-border trade with Russia. It remains dominant in trade with Georgia and Turkey (m1, m2, d1, d3; Eissler 2013: 126; Oltramonti 2015: 293/4).

By 1999, the political economy of Abkhazia was structured in such a way that informal economic mechanisms provided the basis for the country's development. Political institutions had to play a double role: formal and informal. Formally, the authorities followed officially sanctioned rules and norms; informally, they controlled and gained from the shadow economy.

Figure 1. The Shadow Economy in Georgia and Russia (1994–2015)



Data source for the tables: https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/shadow_economy/

There is no specific data for the Abkhazian shadow economy. However, as two security staff interviewees who were in Georgia and Abkhazia in the mid- to late 90s stated, it was “much higher and much more systemic than in Georgia at the time” (i.e. 1994–99) (m2, m3; Kolossov & O’Loughlin 1998: 160). Based on the data in Figure 1, one may reasonably assume that in 1994–2000, the role of the shadow economy in Abkhazia was above 70% (the average level for Georgia in this period).

Between 1999 and 2003, the Russian government changed its policy towards Abkhazia and Georgia. The border with Russia was gradually opened for the movement of people, goods, natural resources and services (Diasamidze 2003, 349/50; Oltramonti 2015: 294/5). The Russian government started letting in members of the male population of Abkhazia; it also recognised documents provided by the Abkhazian authorities. By 2006, Russian and Turkish investments in transport infrastructure, tourism and natural resources delivery had reached sizeable levels (Closson 2007; Sepashvili 2004). In 2005, the tourist business brought in over fifty thousand tourists and earned Abkhazia about 50

mIn USD (Lynch 2006: 49; Trier et al. 2010: 110). So, by 2008, when the Russian-Georgian war led to Russia's recognition of Abkhazian sovereignty and independence, Abkhazia already had its economy developed to a level that provided members of the local population to live better and the non-recognised state with some resources to sustain its existence.

However, this level of economic development was not sufficient to enable Abkhazian authorities to fully rely on their own economy and income from taxation. Being in an extreme situation, even by comparison with other post-Soviet peripheral countries, Abkhazia developed its economic, financial and tax institutions in a way that supported its elites and populations in their survival efforts and created a stable socio-economic model in which smuggling was extremely important. Government-controlled smuggling was no longer a crime in the non-recognised state; it became an institutionalised practice that defined the development of the *de facto* state under sanctions. Nonetheless, a stable and profitable shadow economy results in a lack of sufficient resources to support the existence of official institutes of power.

One of the consequences of this kind of economic development is the situation the Abkhazian government consistently finds itself in: it is unable to collect sufficient taxes for the proper functioning of the state. As was shown in the introductory part of this article, one of the four defining functions of a state is the collection of resources needed for the government operations. There are trustworthy statistics available for the GDP and the state income of Abkhazia only after 2010. According to this data, even after the 'normalization' of relations between Abkhazia and the Russian Federation, as well as after Russia's recognition of Abkhazia as a sovereign state in 2008, the country's government remains heavily dependent on Russia's financial support.

Table 5. Abkhazia's State Budget and Russia's Financial Support (in mln Rus. Rubles):

	2010	2015	2016	2017
Abkhazian GDP	20,777	28,569.2	30,292.2	30,397.1
State income total	4,676.1	6,343.1	10,071.9	10,200.9
Russia's financial support	approx. 5*	approx. 7*	10,530.2	10,713.0

Source: Information collected from the Apsny State Statistics Service website¹³ (for 2016–17) and 'Abkhazia v tsyfrakh 2016' statistical report (for 2010–16).¹⁴

* deduced from the data provided.

According to this data, the Russian Federation provided approximately half of the Abkhazian state budget in 2010–17. It is quite plausible to assume that this support was not smaller in previous periods (for more information, see: Broers 2015).

¹³ Information from the following official resource, accessed on November 18, 2018, http://ugsra.org/ofitsialnaya-statistika.php?ELEMENT_ID=294 and [\[http://ugsra.org/ofitsialnaya-statistika.php?ELEMENT_ID=138\]](http://ugsra.org/ofitsialnaya-statistika.php?ELEMENT_ID=138).

¹⁴ See: Abkhazia v tsyfrakh 2016.

In addition to direct budgetary support (as indicated in Table 5), there were other important ways in which Russia provided indirect economic support to Abkhazia. The International Crisis Group has long been monitoring this kind of support. For example, between 2010 and 2012, Russia invested about 350 mln USD in infrastructure projects in Abkhazia, and it planned to treble the amount in 2014–15 (Schreiber 2014). However, in 2018, the International Crisis Group issued a report in which it stated that—due to international sanctions on Russia (imposed since 2014)—the Russian government decreased its level of financial support to Abkhazia (and other NRS) (International Crisis Group 2018a, 2018b). While Russia’s direct support continued, its indirect support of the Abkhazian economy was substantially cut. As the authors of the above report show, to cover the shortfall, Abkhazian economic players increased illegal trade with Georgia. This data proves that the extreme periphery model outlined here does not necessarily collapse if a sponsor state fails to deliver the necessary support to the authorities in NRS.

Thus, the economic model that Abkhazia developed between the post-conflict period and today, in spite of the changing roles of parental and sponsor states, is characterised by (1) the long-term prevalence of a shadow economy over the official one, (2) institutionalised informal trade ties that make sanctions ineffective, and (3) the dependency of state institutes and organisations on foreign sponsorship. The post-Soviet Abkhazian transition to a market economy took place in conditions of limited access to credits, and the insignificant reconstruction of its industrial potential; it was based on distorted economic practices that were even worse than those found in its parental state of Georgia.

As I stated above, the Abkhazian model is applicable to the cases of Nagorno-Karabakh (blockaded by Azerbaijan and Turkey, sanctioned internationally, sponsored by Armenia), South Ossetia (blockaded by Georgia, sanctioned internationally, sponsored by Russia), as well as ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’ (blockaded by Ukraine, sanctioned internationally, sponsored by Russia).¹⁵ Thus, the same three peculiarities fully apply to the first two cases, and are developing in the latter two (see: Mirimanova 2019: 2/3; von Twickel 2019: 25ff). Taking into account the size of ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’ populations and industry, the level of Russia’s support to them has reached 5.6 bln Euros per year (von Twickel 2019: 27) whilst the budget of the ‘DPR’ was 68 bln Roubles and that of the ‘LPR’ was 42 bln roubles in 2017 (ibid., 27/8).

In the case of **Transnistria**, one can see a different pattern of post-conflict development but with pretty much the same result in terms of economic model. Unlike the cases of Abkhazia, ‘LPR’ or ‘DPR’, the conflict in Transnistria was much less damaging, and much more internationalised. The clashes between Moldovan and separatist militias in 1990 and in 1992 led to Russia’s decision to enter the conflict zone. The 14th Soviet (later, Russian) army entered the territory and stopped the bloodshed (Emerson & Vahl 2004: 170ff). During the period of talks in the first half of 1992, Russia denied OSCE-led peacekeeping forces the opportunity to enter the area. Thus, in July 1992, president Snegur had to sign a treaty relating to a Russian peacekeeping mission co-signed by President Yeltsin (Portela & Orbie 2014). Since then, the Republic of Moldova and the

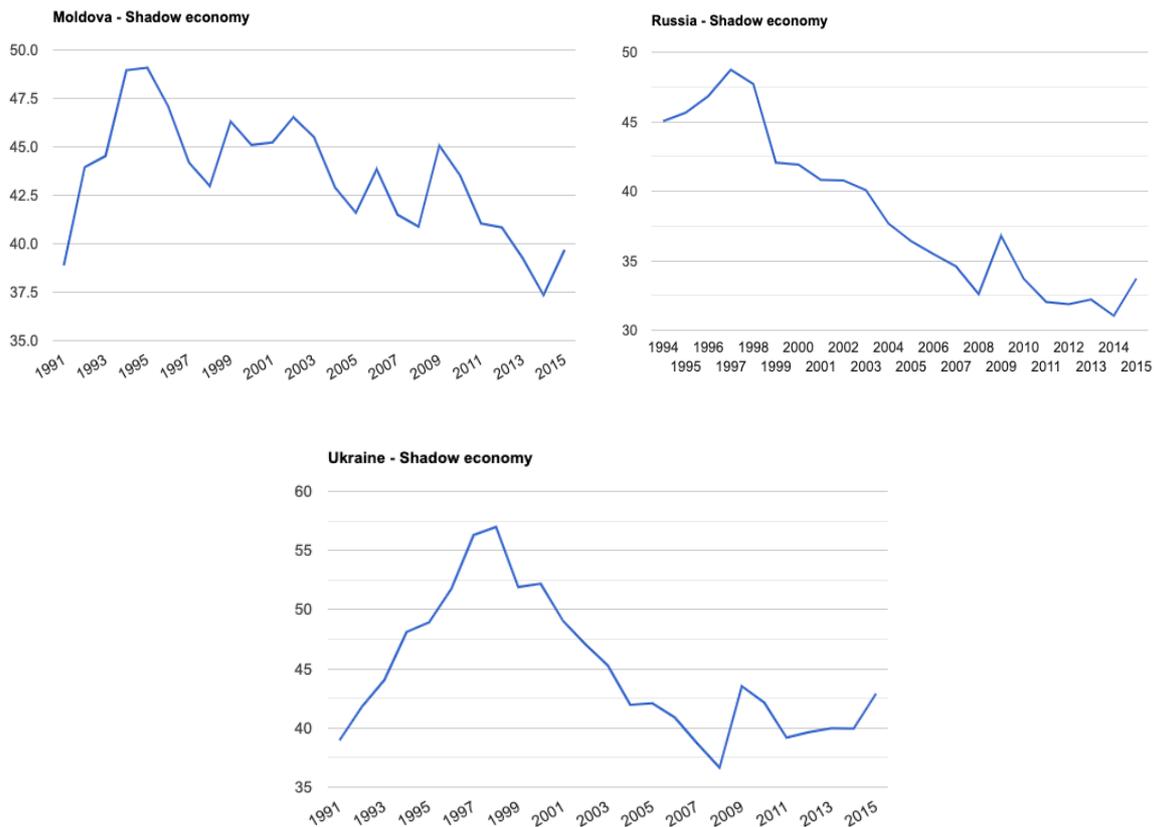
¹⁵ These similarities are well described in: Gerrits & Bader 2016: 297–301.

Transnistrian authorities have existed under conditions of frozen conflict with the strong presence of Russian, EU and US missions.

The Transnistrian economy developed without strict sanctions being imposed. The settlement and reconciliation process in 1993–2003 saved the Transnistrian population from the experience of the Abkhazian people. Where sanctions were imposed, these were mainly personal, not collective; issued against individual rulers, not against the population as a whole. For example, in 2003, the US and the EU attempted to encourage progress in a political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, so restrictive measures were imposed on 17 leaders of the breakaway region. However, these sanctions “proved to be rather weak in achieving their goals” (Lehmkuhl & Shagina 2015: 66).

The Transnistrian economy developed without being cut off from Moldova, Ukraine and Russia. However, Transnistria's hardships were similar to those of the Moldovan and Ukrainian regions nearby. As Deon Geldenhuys points out, this region was economically very open for integration: about half of its exports (consisting of metal and mineral products, equipment, textiles and food) went to CIS countries, and another half to the Western markets (Geldenhuys 2009: 94ff).

Figure 2. Shadow Economies in Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine (1991/4–2015)



Data source for the tables: https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/shadow_economy/

In spite of much smaller sanctions, the Transnistrian economy developed in such a way as to be able to adjust to the vulnerabilities of the recognised states around it in 1993-2003. Smuggling, as a structural part of Transnistrian economy, had beneficiaries

not only in this non-recognised state, but also in Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine (Geldenhuys 2009: 99ff). According to the data in Figure 2, it is logical to assume, the Transnistrian shadow economy was well above average in Moldova and Ukraine. The vicinity of the port of Odessa and the fragile state of law and order in Moldova and Ukraine created a special smuggling industry in Transnistria by the early 1990-ies. This gave the Moldovan and Ukrainian governments a reason to act against such an economy in their neighbourhood.

In 2005, after the political change in Kiev, Ukraine and Moldova launched a programme of cross-border cooperation. With the Joint Declaration of 3 March 2006, all exports from Moldova to or via Ukraine needed to have Moldovan documentation (Chiveri 2016: 6). Furthermore, in 2005–2006, the EU, in cooperation with the Ukrainian and Moldovan governments, had to start a special border mission programme (EUBAM) to limit the damage that the smuggling was doing to EU economies.

It is interesting that Transnistrian authorities were eager to continue self-isolation. Attempts by Moldova, Ukraine and the EU to properly document trade in 2005, or to open up the Moldovan economy, including Transnistria (as in the AA/DCFTA of 2015 between the EU and Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine respectively) provoked leaders of Transnistria to try to close the borders they shared with their parental state and to describe these acts at “military actions” (Chiveri 2016: 5, 13).

For over two decades, the Transnistrian economy has been based on funds created by the sale of Russian gas, cash remittances from migrants working abroad, and financial support from Moscow (Catus 2013: 1–3) which hindered the economy from becoming self-sufficient. At the same time, Moscow promoted the division of Transnistria from Moscow and Transnistria’s closer economic integration with Moldova (ibid., 3, 7).

Yet state capacity-building depends largely on economic reconstruction. This aspect of state- and economy-building concerns not only social security for the population but also the government’s budgetary income, including tax collection. In an effort to make their economy work, NRS create their own economic institutions and fiscal policies, independent from central states (Dembinska & Campana 2017: 4). Tiraspol established the Transnistrian Republican Bank and issued its own currency in 1994 (Isachenko & Schlichte 2007: 20/1).

The official economy of Transnistria was import-oriented. In 2012, the value of products exported from Transnistrian companies was almost 700 mln USD, equivalent to approximately 70% of the Transnistrian economy. However, its foreign trade structure has obviously lacked diversity. 75% of all export revenues were generated by metallurgical and textile industries, as well as companies producing electricity. Exports were to mainland Moldova (250 mln USD), Russia (154.7 mln USD), Romania (103.1 mln USD) with some small amounts to Ukraine and Italy (Catus, 2013: 3).

Taking into account the data from Figure 2, it is logical to assume that Transnistria’s shadow economy was the same as—or higher than—that of Ukraine and Moldova, which means it is unlikely that it dipped below 40%. Even though a shadow economy provides populations with the means of survival and provides considerable

privileges to the elites, it hits NRS' governments and political institutions. In the case of Transnistria, the government was—and still is—unable to raise enough funds to fulfil its state monopolistic functions. So even in the Transnistrian case, where the economy was developing better than in Abkhazia, the government continued to depend on foreign sponsorship. For example, according to the Transnistrian law on the state budget in 2018, the government budget was approved with an income of 1,640,363,327 roubles and expenses of 3,238,556,806 roubles (Zakon PMR 2018). So the budget was approved with a deficit of 1,538,255,756¹⁶ roubles (approx. 47% of the budget). The same level of dependency existed in 2013 (Całus 2013: 4). Contrary to the case of Abkhazia, there is no official data about the source of income to cover the state deficit, but it is an established fact that it was covered by the Russian government (Całus 2013: 5; j8, a7, a8, m6, m7). According to Kamil Całus, Russia supported the Transnistrian budget with approx. 27 mln USD annually between 2006 and 2012 (Całus 2013: 4). Also there were additional subsidies that could have reached amounts ranging from 10–30 mln USD annually (ibid., 4/5).

Thus, in spite of rather different economic development conditions than those in Abkhazia, the Transnistrian economy also showed (1) the prevalence of a shadow economy, (2) institutionalised informal trade ties that make the sanctions regime ineffective, and (3) the dependency of its government on foreign sponsorship.

There is also a growing body of evidence that the extreme position of the NRS' economies are used by international criminal networks for production and transportation of drugs and weapons (Popescu 2005; Lynch 2002: 834ff; m6, m7, d7, d9). These sources confirm that NRS' leaders benefit from a criminal economy, which makes the possibility of them ruling in the interests of local constituencies highly questionable.

So my conclusion here is that NRS have entered a niche in the world-system where they survive under core-imposed sanctions by undermining the cooperation between the core and the states commonly seen as peripheral. A shadow economy, smuggling, participation in criminal economies, and a dependency on semicore (Russian) or peripheral (Armenian) foreign governments all allow the populations of NRS in general to survive economically, but to survive is not to thrive. These are exactly the *extreme measures* that the de facto authorities use for survival of their jurisdictions.

These societies, being in a constant situation of extreme survival from an economic point of view, are in the weakest position in terms of global economic competition. So, the Wallersteinian concept of unequal exchange here has its extreme example. The surplus-value from this type of exchange that NRS' populations are involved in goes either to shadow economic players in the sponsor and parental states, or to local warlords/elites (Broers 2015: 288). And this also has a strong impact on how the political systems and cultures of the NRS examined here have developed in their three decades of existence. The political systems specific to the extreme periphery will be analysed in the following section.

¹⁶ This is the figure in the document, although mathematically the difference is 1,598,193,479 roubles.

2.2. *Political Systems of Post-Soviet NRS.* Post-Soviet NRS have been adapting not only their economies, but also their public and private institutions of power. Political systems in NRS developed in a way that, on one hand, tried to fulfil as many state functions as possible, and, on the other hand, to adapt to the need to be simultaneously responsive to the variety of needs of their own citizens, to the need to defend themselves from their parental states and the sanctioning global core, to preserve a complex connection with their sponsor states, and to develop as many international relations as they could, whilst functioning as unrecognised or partially recognised states. Accordingly, they developed institutions and organisations that met these conditions and needs.

In connection with the complex and contradictory conditions of their existence, post-Soviet NRS have invited discussion around the direction of their development. Pål Kolstø has argued logically that the future of NRS is fourfold. NRS would either (a) merge with the sponsor state, (b) become fully independent, or (c1) would return to the parental state in the status of a usual administrative unit or (c2) as a unit with special rights. He is among a group of scholars who see NRS as transitional, abnormal phases of state-building (Kolstø 2006: 734ff).

However, the longer NRS exist, and the more they proliferate in the post-Soviet region, the less evident their transitional nature becomes. At least from a mid- to long-term perspective, these states seem to be evolving into more stable model. This stable nature of the NRS' political systems is supported by studies by Daria Isachenko, Magdalena Dembinska and Aurelie Campana (Isachenko 2012: 3ff; Dembinska & Campana 2017: 2ff). For example, the latter correctly state that “we cannot but recognize that some de facto states have succeeded in building a form of authority sustained by a new political order and an infrastructural capacity over a contested territory. In essence, rather than viewing de facto states as atypical, deviant, temporarily limited black holes, we view them as dynamic political entities” (Dembinska & Campana 2017: 2ff). Furthermore, my own research shows that the dynamics of these polities implies dissemination of the institutional model of ‘informal state’ to other areas of conflicts in the post-Soviet and other areas (Minakov 2017b). E.g. the case of the creation of NRS in the Eastern Donbas that borrowed a lot from the experiences of Abkhazia and Transnistria. These have existed for over two years, survived several changes of rulers, developed some sort of local identity and evolved from irredentist situations into NRS. All of this adds to the argument that the post-Soviet NRS are a special case of the global periphery: the extreme periphery, rather than temporary political setups related to contested territories.

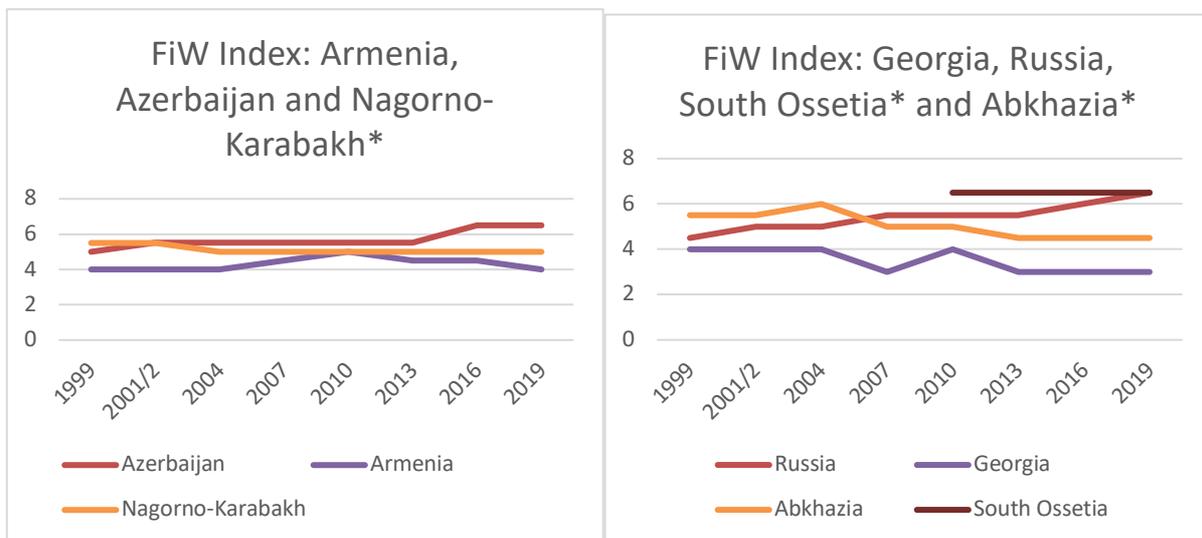
Concerning their responsiveness to their populations, the institutes of power in NRS show a certain level of responsibility regarding the basic needs of their citizens. Usually, as a result of conflict or some forms of nationalist mobilisation (whether ethnic, as in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh or Abkhazia, or civic, as in the case of Transnistria), NRS offer defence against the alleged ‘aggression’ of the parental states. Thus, the defence of their contested territory, which is one of a state’s fundamental functions—even if it is unrecognised—coincides with the interest of the remaining populations in terms of their personal and collective security. To a large extent, post-

Soviet NRS can fulfil this function with the use of military and diplomatic support from their sponsor states (Hale 2005: 56ff; Gammer 2014: 40). Thus, economic interests are not the only things that contribute to NRS' dependency on their sponsor states.

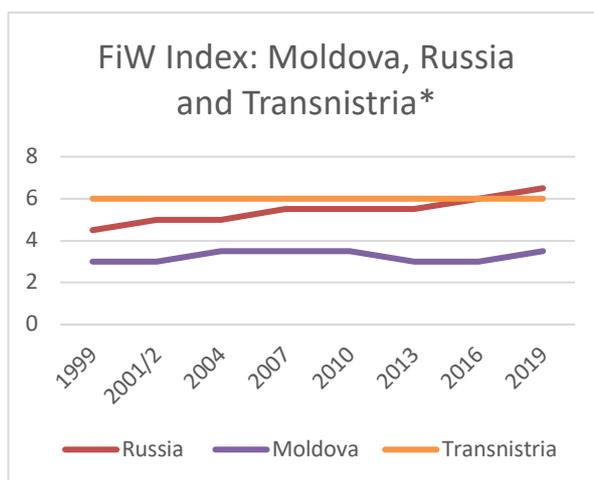
Another area where the local populations have their interests respected by NRS' authorities is local self-governance. According to data published by Freedom House, which has been monitoring political and civic liberties in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria for over fifteen years, local administration and self-governance are areas where NRS exercise democratic control (Freedom House 2019). To some extent, elections function as a legal means for the elites' rotation in NRS' parliaments.¹⁷ The same reports show that the legislatures had a say during the changeover of presidents in Abkhazia and Transnistria. However, this role only develops in a state of emergency (Kolstø and Blakkisrud 2012: 142; Popescu 2006; Clogg 2008; Bakke et al. 2014; Dembinska & Campana 2017: 14).

Altogether, the data in Figure 3 shows that, in spite of all of their drawbacks, the freedom ratings of NRS can actually be better than those of their parent states (as in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan) or sponsor states (as in the cases of Abkhazia and Transnistria and Russia).

Figure 3. Freedom in the World Index (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh; Georgia, Russia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia; Moldova, Russia and Transnistria)



¹⁷ However, the NRS parliaments have very little independence from the executive. At the same time, presidential elections in NRS are usually (with rare exclusions) manipulated and their results predetermined by sponsor state and local security structures that are inseparable from the security services and political elites of the sponsor state (Freedom House 2019; Isachenko 2012; Isachenko 2019).



Source for all three tables: Freedom in The World Reports, 1998/9–2019. The higher the grade on the Y axes, the less free the country.

* marks the NRS with the disputed territories.

The six post-Soviet NRS of Abkhazia, Artsakh, South Ossetia, Moldova, Donetsk, and Lugansk are formally constituted as presidential-parliamentary republics.¹⁸ The presidents of the NRS oversee executives headed by a prime minister, a local army and security agencies. Informally, the president and their administration are power institutions that in usual, non-urgent situations are autonomous from any type of formal domestic parliamentary control. At the same time, they need to balance informal control by the sponsor state with local informal control by power groups and clans. The presidents control all types of military units on their territories (except for the sponsor state's troops, where applicable). They control the central budget and financial flows from the sponsor state, as well as the most profitable sectors of their formal and shadow economies. The analysis of the biographies of the presidents of the NRS featured in this study shows that—at least since 2000—they have all been connected either to sponsor states' security services or armies. Even though formally all NRS' presidents were elected to their positions, the elections were neither free, nor fair (Freedom House 2019; d6, d7, d9, m5, m6, m7, a7, a8).

So far, the relations described above between the key elements of the NRS' political systems look pretty much the same as in some post-Soviet periphery states. Indeed, in the NRS' political systems, there is no functional executive oversight of parliament, which pretty much resembles Russian or Azerbaijani political models. However, NRS' political systems differ in the establishment of a special informal institute of *kuratory* (caretakers), who represent sponsor states in NRS.

The *kuratory* are “officials tasked with making things work often bypassing, and sometimes competing with, formal institutions” who negotiate Russia's control over post-Soviet NRS (Isachenko 2019: 2). Between the mid-1990s, when the first *kuratory* appear

¹⁸ See the following NRS constitutions: Konstitutsia Respubliki Abkhazia 1999; Constitution of the Republic of Artsakh 2006; Konstitutsia Respubliki Yuzhnaya Osetia 2016; Konstitutsia Pridnestrovskoi Moldavskoi Respubliki 2016; Konstitutsia Donetskoi Narodnoi Respubliki 2018; Konstitutsia Luganskoi Narodnoi Respubliki 2018.

in Russian foreign politics for Transnistria, and 2012, when they were an established form of cooperation with—and oversight by—sponsor states, these officials combined the status of Presidential Administration employees and, most often, affiliation with one of the security services, e.g. FSB or GRU (d6, d7, d9, m5, m6, m7, j 4, j5, a4, a7, a8; Isachenko 2019: 4ff). Among the most visible *kuratory* are Vladislav Surkov, Ramzan Kadyrov or Dmitriy Kozak (Pavlovsky 2016: 12/13; Wolff 2011: 866/7).

Usually, *kuratory* are multitasked officials who work within several ‘republics’. For example, Surkov was concurrently ‘taking care’ of Abkhazia, ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’ in 2014–18. In Abkhazia, he dealt with security, political and economic issues; in Donbas, with political and security issues only. Economic and social issues were taken care of by Kozak (Isachenko 2019: 5ff; Pavlovsky 2016: 3ff; Gerrits & Bader, 2016: 300–302; d6, d7, m5, m4).

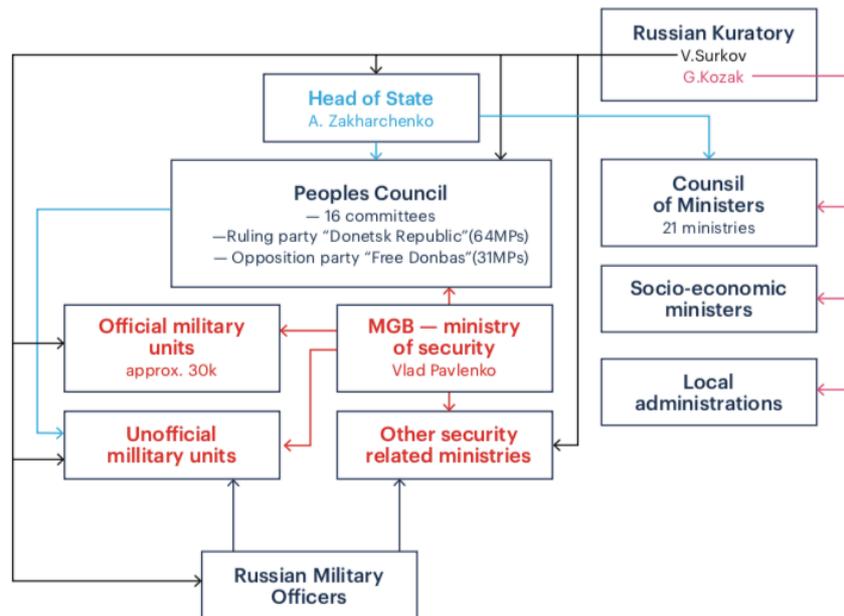
According to available sources, to make sure that they could effectively oversee sponsored NRS, the *kuratory* were given exclusive control over ‘directorates’ which are formally parts of ‘presidential’ administrations in Abkhazia or Donetsk. However, these ‘directorates’ are autonomous from the formal heads of NRS: their staff are responsible for day-to-day communication with their Moscow-based bosses, monitoring the use of provided resources, the political situation in NRS, as well commenting on events in social and economic spheres.

It is important to point out that Nagorno-Karabakh is a special case in the relations between a sponsor state and NRS. Even though *kuratory* exist here, the sponsor state also has a strong long-term dependency on its client state. During 1990s, influential groups of Karabakhian and Armenian ‘field commanders’ evolved into the so-called ‘Karabakh clan’ that established non-formal control over most of the Armenian centres of power (Geldenhuys 2009: 101). This reciprocity of relations between sponsor and client states does not seem to exist in case of Russia (as sponsor state) and Abkhazia or Transnistria (as client states).

As ‘importers’ of political and security systems, NRS have another important non- or semi-formal power institution which brings together senior security and military staff members of the sponsor state and those of the non-recognised state (Blakkisrud & Kolstø 2011: 185; Gerrits & Bader, 2016: 305; Dembinska & Campana 2017: 4; ICG 2010; d1, d2, d4, d5, d8, d9, m1, m2, m5, m6, j1, j3, j4, j8, a1, a3, a4, a7, a8). During the ‘hot phases’ of the conflict periods of the early 1990s (in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria), 2008 (in South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and 2014–15 (in Donbas) the stable model of a military command centre evolved. The centre usually includes local senior militia and security service officers and senior officers from the sponsor state. For example, in the case of ‘DNR’, the centre currently includes members of Russia’s Armed Forces, and FSB and GRU officers who were officially ‘on vacation’ or ‘in retirement’ (*otpuskniki* and *otstavniki*—at different times, their number varied from 700 to 1,400) and local senior officers. This super-structure controlled the ‘people’s militia’ facing Ukrainian Armed Forces on the front line, the Ministry of State Security (*MGB*) and security groups that function as police (Jarabik & Minakov 2016a, 2016b; Kudelia 2017: 214ff; Mirimanova 2019: 4; d9, m6, m7, j6, j8, a7, a8).

The Donbas ‘republics’ were modelled according to lessons learned from previous non-recognised-state-building processes, which allowed me to compose the following diagram which shows the major ‘DPR’ power institutes and the relations between them as at the end of July 2018. The diagram is based on the use of information from open sources and interviews with experts and insiders.¹⁹

Figure 4. Power structures in the ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’, as at the end of July 2018



In this diagram, I demonstrate that the combination of *kuratory*, *head of state*, local ‘cabinet,’ ‘parliament,’ and security agencies have a certain vertical logic of power which involves cooperation between local and sponsor state agencies. While this diagram describes the situation in the ‘DPR,’ in general terms, it resembles the situation in Abkhazia, ‘LPR,’ South Ossetia, and Transnistria. In a way, this model summarises the post-Soviet non-recognised state-building experience.

The post-Soviet NRS are in regular communication with each other. Deon Geldenhuys analysed this communication in terms of the official meetings and stable cooperation between NRS’ presidents, cabinets and ministries of foreign affairs (Geldenhuys 2009: 76ff). These states have permanent diplomatic relations, defence treaties and cooperation agreements; they recognised each others’ independence by 2006 (ibid., 77). In 2007, these kinds of activities led to signing a ‘Declaration on Principles of Peaceful and Fair Settlement of Conflicts on the Territory of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan’. This declaration showed that the ‘extreme periphery’ polities fully

¹⁹ Open sources include reports in Ukrainian and Russian mass media, information from the websites of separatist authorities and published reports from the OSCE and EU (e.g. von Twickel 2019; Miriminaova 2019, etc), The State of the Donbass. A study of eastern Ukraine’s separatist-held areas. Brussels: CEPS; less open sources included those who still live in Donetsk or visit the city often, and Ukrainian and international experts with proven knowledge of the situation in ‘DPR’ (d9, m6, m7, j6, j8, a7, a8).

understand the sameness of their position in the world-system and strive to reach the status of the usual periphery (Deklaratsia 2007).

After the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, South Ossetia and Abkhazia attained the status of ‘partially recognised states,’ which showed that Pål Kolstø’s option (b) is a desired aim for these entities. However, the partial recognition did not change much in real terms for either Abkhazia or South Ossetia. After the first wave of recognition (by Russia and Nicaragua in 2008, Venezuela and Nauru in 2009, and Syria in 2018), some states (like Vanuatu and Tuvalu) rescinded their recognition in 2013–14.

With the Russian-backed secessionist revolt in Donbas and the establishment of the ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’, these new NRS were unofficially supported by the old NRS. There is a growing network of cooperation between separate ministries, industries and social organisations across the NRS, but mutual recognition between old and new NRS is not in place. For example, while the ‘DPR’ has recognised Abkhazia’s sovereignty, Abkhazia does not recognise the ‘DPR’. So, in spite of high levels of cooperation, post-Soviet NRS have their own logic of non-recognition.

Thus, in this section, on the one hand, I have provided arguments that support the view that post-Soviet NRS are peripheral polities based on their economic and political models. The descriptions of the NRS are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6. The Post-Soviet NRS’ Economies and Political Systems, and their Roles in Core-Periphery Relations

	<i>Economy</i>	<i>Politics</i>	<i>C-P role</i>
Abkhazia/Apsny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> depends on Russia, non-self-sufficient economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> depends on Russia, growing local volatility, established state structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> included in the world system as a non-competing economy and a competing political unit through Russia as semicore opposing core extreme periphery with no clear perspectives of recognition or integration into Russia
‘DPR’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> depends on Russia, non-self-sufficient economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> depends on Russia, emerging state structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> included in the world system as a non-competing economy and a competing political unit through Russia as semicore opposing core blockaded by Ukraine extreme periphery with no perspective of recognition or integration into Russia; some possibility of reintegration with Ukraine remains
‘LPR’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> depends on Russia, non-self-sufficient economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> depends on Russia, emerging state structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> included in the world system as a non-competing economy and a competing political unit through Russia as semicore opposing core

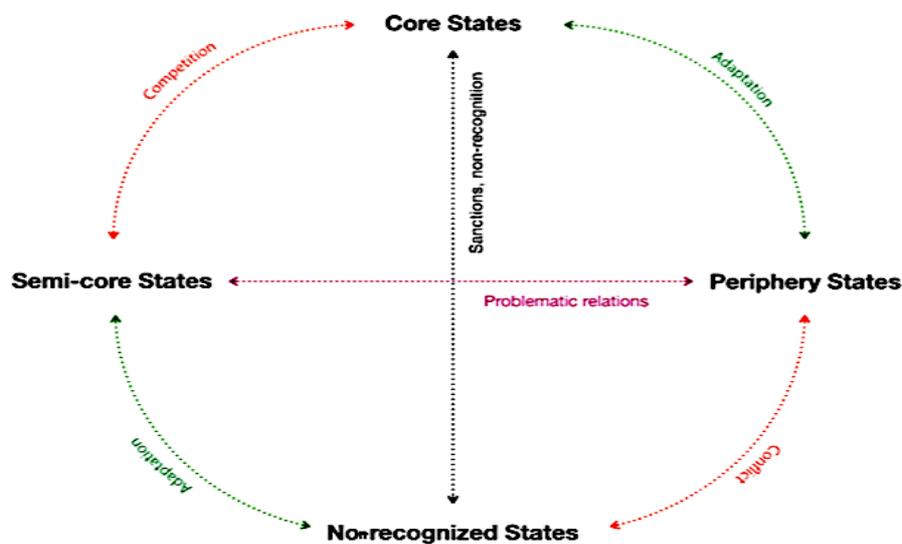
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blockaded by Ukraine • extreme periphery with no perspectives of recognition or integration into Russia; some possibility of reintegration with Ukraine remains
Nagorno-Karabakh/ Artsakh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depends on Armenia, • weak, non-self-sufficient economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depends on Armenia, • history of long, strong political impact on Armenia, • established state institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • included in the world system as a non-competing economy and a competing political unit through Armenia as periphery obedient to EU/West and Russia • blockaded by Azerbaijan and Turkey • extreme periphery with no perspective of integration with Armenia, or of recognition
South Ossetia/ Alania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depends on Russia, • non-self-sufficient economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depends on Russia, • established state structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • included in the world system as a non-competing economy and a competing political unit through Russia as semicore opposing core • extreme periphery with no perspective of integration to Russia or Georgia, or of recognition
Transnistria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depends on trade with Moldova and Ukraine and financial support from Russia, • non-self-sufficient economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depends on Russia, with sporadic local volatility, • strong state structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • included in the world system as a non-competing economy and a competing political unit through Russia as semicore, opposing core • extreme periphery with no perspective of integration to Moldova or Russia, or of recognition

3. Findings and Conclusions

Above, I have provided arguments that demonstrate that the six post-Soviet NRS constitute a special type of state-like organisation that inhabits a certain niche in the world system. These NRS developed economically and politically under extreme conditions of limitations imposed on them by their parental states and by core states. Thus, these NRS evolved into extreme peripheral polities. Their formal economic and political institutions are weak. Their informal structures are much stronger than their formal institutions—or the same institutions in their parental states—and they are dependent on their constituencies, whilst being under the strong control of a sponsor state.

All of the post-Soviet NRS were established due to conflicts which led to the fragmentation of metropolitan states. In these conflicts, local populations and foreign states cooperated to help local authorities establish borders, military institutions, government structures and economic sectors. Parental states cooperated with the Western states (the core) to reverse fragmentation and re-establish control over the seceded communities. This cooperation established a number of specific relations between all of the elements of the contemporary world system: core, semicore/semiperiphery, periphery and extreme periphery. These relations are described in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Relations of Core, Semicore, Periphery and Extreme Periphery States in the Context of Post-Soviet NRS



Accordingly, the NRS are under multilateral pressure. First, as violators of international law imposed and enforced by the core states, these *de facto* states are under sanctions and are not recognised as normal elements of the world-system. The core states are interested in the punishment of violators to prevent other antisystemic groups or regions with strong separatist movements from secession. Core states support paternal periphery states in their attempts of reintegration, however, with respect to international law (as in the Russian-Georgian war of 2008). Some core states compete with the semicore states and may impose sanctions not only on the NRS but on their sponsors as well (as, e.g., in the case of ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’).

Secondly, all post-Soviet NRS exist under sanctions imposed by their parental states. The latter attempt to return seceded territories and communities, but usually lack the resources to do so by military force. The fact of secession puts the parental periphery states into a position of weakened polities unable to control all of the territory that is internationally recognised as theirs. The fact of secession provides radical parties in parental states with additional legitimacy which limits the opportunities of these states to explore more inclusive, West-like development, as well as their ability to join NATO or the EU.

Thirdly, the core and semicore states are in permanent competition for positions of influence in the post-Soviet peripheries. Sponsor semicore states like Russia gain leverage against pro-core parental states (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) in their plans to join NATO or EU. This competition makes the sponsor states invest a lot of resources into support of NRS and thus invest less in their own development, which, in turn, makes the semicore states less competitive with the core.

Fourthly, peripheral states adapt to the norms and practices offered by core states. In return, they expect their territorial integrity to be respected and expect support to be provided, in cases when some territories/communities try to secede. At the same time, relations between periphery states and the semicore state that functions as a sponsor state for seceded territories vary from military conflict, proxy war, and isolation from each other, to limited cooperation on some sectoral issues.

Finally, relations between a semicore state (functioning as a sponsor state) and NRS start with a process of two-way adaptation involving both parties, leading to the creation of formal and informal institutions that reconcile the different interests of the parties. The sponsor state provides security and financial support in return for loyalty and responsiveness to its national interests. The NRS import security and get support in different forms from their sponsor state. This cooperation, in at least two cases (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), has led to a partial recognition of NRS by their sponsor state. The sponsorship also means the provision of support to NRS populations in terms of travel and cultural ties.

The extreme periphery is thus a class of states that is transgressive in nature. States of this kind try to become legitimate part of the world-system and reach out for international recognition. However, as contradictory as it is, in order to survive they need to use 'shadow' economic and political strategies, and thus get the stigma of international outcasts. In this paper, I have looked at the extreme periphery from the perspective of NRS; however, this class of state may involve other states, i.e. *as-if* states, *black spots* or failed states. None of these fulfil all state functionalities and thus need extreme measures for survival and development. However, the survival and development strategies contradict each other and keep the extreme periphery states in a transgressive position towards the world-system.

The above arguments provide us not only with a deeper understanding of the conditions in which the NRS exist, but also with evidence supporting the view that the threefold scheme of the core-, semicore/semiperiphery, periphery world system model needs updating. A fourth class should be added to the model: the extreme periphery class.

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