

Sheriff, the Russian special services and their network of human rights violators in the Transnistrian region

Over 400,000 people live in the temporarily occupied territory of the country, in an environment that fundamentally contradicts democratic citizenship and human rights. This profoundly antidemocratic and illiberal order has been developed and consolidated for over 30 years not by abstract entities, but by specific individuals within the Transnistrian structures. For these individuals, the language of democracy, justice, and fundamental freedoms represent a threat to their authoritarian and discretionary power. Therefore, they have invested resources and exploited the vicious climate of impunity to institute and impose various repressive mechanisms.

Although this situation has persisted for over three decades, in the past three years, we have observed how critical and dissenting voices are portrayed as a threat to the security of the Transnistrian region. Freedom of expression has become a form of extremism, while reporting cases of torture is labeled as spreading false information. This alarming state of affairs led to the conviction of Victor Pleșcanov in 2022 for displaying the Ukrainian flag on the balcony of his apartment in Tiraspol, and the accusation of Vadim Pogorlețchi of treason for openly expressing opinions and photographing military unit no. 4043 in Tiraspol.

Since 2018, we have monitored the actions of leaders and representatives of Transnistrian structures who have adopted abusive decisions, ostracized critical voices, and subjected them to inhumane treatment, to bring these injustices to the

public's attention. We started with the conviction that authentic justice cannot exist for the region's inhabitants as long as we do not know who are the initiators of these repressive mechanisms and who executes the illegal orders dictated by the leaders of Transnistrian structures. Identifying these individuals becomes even more important as data regarding Transnistrian representatives are increasingly classified, and access to information of public interest is drastically limited.

The analysis conducted by Promo-LEX shows that human rights abuses and violations are not committed solely by a small group of people, but by a network of individuals and structures affiliated with the Sheriff conglomerate and Russian services. Among those responsible for human rights violations in the Transnistrian region are alleged deputies from the so-called "Obnovlenie" party ("Renewal" in English), individuals who have held positions in "Sheriff" holding and continue to enjoy its support, as well as individuals who have built careers in Russian security structures. Some of them vehemently advocate for aligning with Russian legislation and replicating the Russian autocratic model in the left bank of the Dniester and Bender municipality.

The analysis also reveals that most of the abuses and violations committed in 2022 and 2023 against individuals or groups lacking protection are justified under the guise of security concerns and norms which are invented, exaggerated, and completely unfounded. The concepts of security and extremism are deliberately distorted by the leaders and representatives of the Transnistrian structures. In this way, they have been able to claim the role of securitization agents to institute exceptional measures and fortify a culture of fear.

This analysis does not represent a verdict and cannot replace the tasks of the justice system in any way. However, it reflects some of the alarming realities in the Transnistrian

region of the Republic of Moldova and highlights the serious repercussions of impunity: the lack of protection for the region's inhabitants and the systematic expansion of authoritarian patterns of Transnistrian structures.

Instead of conclusions, it is worth mentioning that, up to this point, we have managed to identify over 400 individuals responsible for human rights violations in the Transnistrian region. None of the identified individuals has been held accountable for their actions, despite authorities repeatedly stating that they will take prompt measures to hold them accountable and deter future transgressions.

The analysis can be accessed [here](#).