

Newsletter Promo-LEX

Free movement... for Sevciuc's militia

In this edition:

Free movement... for Sevciuc's militia

1

We are approaching the barrier installed by the separatists at the so-called customs point near Bender. There are two Romanian journalists in my car. We go to Transnistria, to the USSR museum, to “hunt” for topics. Officially, we are on our way to my brother's christening in the village Doi-bani-2. One of the passengers, a stylish fellow sporting a rooster haircut, is utterly curious. He opens the window and greets the peacekeepers in Russian, with a strong Romanian accent. They don't answer, but don't lose us from their sight until we reach the barrier to see that we don't take any pictures from the car. A “border guard officer”, dressed in a Soviet military uniform, opens the barrier. When they see Romanian passports, they react like the devil facing a cross. After three failed attempts to speak to us in Russian, he switches to a broken “Moldovan”: “Go to that green cabin!” Then we get interrogated for 20 minutes by ‘the boss’... about the purpose of our visit, the duration, my brother's name, the name on the newborn...

Vitalie Calugareanu for Promo-LEX

They turned our car upside down. They even brought a stick with a mirror at one end and looked under the car. Obviously, they found nothing. All of our shooting equipment was already in Tiraspol. We got it there on a taxi cab with Transnistrian plates. The driver passed through “customs” just by greeting the people at the post, they didn't even check his papers.

We did most of the shooting in Tiraspol on the sly. We shot the city market and visited “Proryv”. The group's headquarters is full of young girls in tiny skirts. On the walls, there are portraits of Putin everywhere, along with those of Soin and Che Guevara.

“10 Euro each and I put my pen down”

On our way out, I decided for myself that I wanted to show the foreign journalists another, more remote exit road – the one via Varnita. We were stopped. “Oh, so you entered by Bender... You should have left the same way,” a man wearing green Soviet military clothes told us in Russian. “Now you're in big trouble. You cannot go back...” They took our papers and left. In about 10 minutes, the man returned: “The driver with the Moldovan passport, go see the chief.” After a 5-minute lecture about the ‘infraction’ we had committed, the ‘chief’ said: “If I start writing down this paper (the protocol of the incident), I will not stop. And you will be in big

Previous issues:

Newsletter 82 click [here](#)
Newsletter 81 click [here](#)

trouble.” We got it - he wanted money to put his pen down. Ten euros each – that was about it. So we paid. It’s better and safer to pay than to have problems with them.

The whole control mechanism of the so-called Transnistrian “customs” is built so that the “customs” and “border guard” officers can collect their wages from bribes. No “customs” and “border guard” officers have even been convicted of corruption. Zero in 22 years. This term is not popular very there in general. The separatist administration cancelled the “official” fees to be paid at the ‘border’ crossing back in 2009. At the same time, the bribes more than doubled.

Below are the sizes of bribes:

- Introduction into the region of books in Latin script - \$100 (no more than 30-35 books)
- Crossing without ID - 80 Euros per person
- Crossing without a warrant for the car - 40 Euros
- Introduction of a computer into the “tmr” - \$20
- Withdrawal of 1 ton of apples from the “tmr” - \$40
- Withdrawal of 1 ton of frozen chickens from the “tmr” - \$170

The illegal checkpoints installed by the separatist regime also represent a real challenge for farmers from the eastern region trying to transport their produce to Chisinau to sell it at a better price. There have been many cases when the goods were seized and the owners ended up beaten and even jailed.

Residents of Transnistria who own cars with Moldovan license plates are ordered to pay a so-called temporary fee for “importing” the car in the region. This fee amounts to 0.18% of the cost of the car and is valid for 60 days. After that period, the owner must fill in a “customs declaration”. And if the period of stay in the region, stated in the “declaration”, is violated, the owner is given a fine amounting to 50% to 100% of the cost of the car – this works as a method of intimidation, which helps extort huge amounts from people. I, as a journalist, fail to understand how any of this is possible. How does a group of people that controls a part of the territory of a recognized state (which is a member of the UN, CoE, OSCE, etc.) manage or is allowed to operate like a real state? How can their alleged currency function? If it's so easy to do, I'm surprised that there are only a few such areas in Eastern Europe. And, in this case, seeing my state (Moldova) intimidated like that, as a taxpayer, I wonder why my government keeps paying contributions to these international organizations? What are the meaning, role and mandate of the OSCE Mission to Moldova? Some time ago, I overheard some civil society members wondering about the accomplishments of the Mission in its 20-plus years in Moldova. It appears (every year) that millions of dollars (which could have been managed more effectively elsewhere) were wasted just to watch and tolerate the violation of all the values that they and others like them call on other occasions?

Russia, denounced at the ECtHR

The case of brothers Viorel and Petru Panteleiciuc is already well known and we can refer to it in public without causing them additional distress. Although they were properly authorized by the Moldovan authorities in Varnita to conduct their business, the two brothers were attacked in that same locality by representatives of the illegal structures of the Transnistrian region. Viorel was kidnapped by the “customs” officers from the region and taken to the municipal “militia” section in Bender, while his brother, a sportier type, managed to flee and sought the help of the Moldovan police. This in fact saved them both. Members of the Joint Control Commission did not show up at the site of the incident, arguing that it was a ‘dispute’ between the Moldovan authorities and the administration of the self-proclaimed ‘tmr’, which was to be resolved by the parties. An alleged ‘court’ in Bender convicted the applicant for the administrative offense of resistance

and sentenced him to three days of administrative detention. The case is pending with the ECtHR, and Moldova and Russia have been called on again as respondents.

Foreign delegations wishing to visit the left bank are still required to notify the region's de facto government in advance and seek authorization. Foreign journalists are required to obtain an alleged accreditation to avoid arrest and allegations of espionage during their stay in that region of Moldova. Let's not forget the "arrest" and "conviction" of Moldovan journalist Ernest Vardanean, who was freed in the end thanks to the concerted effort and pressure by the international community. In 2010, Vardanean was found "guilty" of espionage (analytical reports based on open sources) and "treason" (of a non-existent homeland). This is as funny as it is tragic.

Interview with Dumitru Paduret, victim of separatist repressions

Dumitru Paduret from village Cocieri, raion Dubasari, was "detained" in 2010 by Dubasari "customs officials" right in Cocieri (a village under the control of the constitutional authorities). They seized his car and 2,500 kg of onions on the grounds that he had circumvented the "customs control" by crossing Nistru river by ferry near Molovata. His case is now pending examination by the European Court.

We know that the Moldovan police from village Ustia started a criminal case against the two men who attacked you. What is the current status of the case?

Dumitru Paduret: The case has been suspended. I don't hear anything about it. But please know that I don't have any expectation that the police will do me justice. If they wanted to, they would have arrested the two Transnistrians who attacked me long ago. They've been in our village more than once. They met our police...and nothing happened. They talk amongst themselves, strike deals, make schemes on how to extort more money, while we delude ourselves that we will get justice. I'm all grown up now, I do not believe in fairytales anymore.

But you were seized by those two representatives of the separatist regime on the territory controlled by Chisinau, right?

Dumitru Paduret: That is correct. They said that I was avoiding paying taxes. But why should I pay their taxes? How and where to pay them so long as there are no clear instructions or guidelines? According to the [Moldovan] constitutional authorities, we need to pay taxes to them, and we should not pay anything to the illegal unconstitutional regime. Whom should I listen to? What rules or laws have I broken? And I don't understand why I was not defended by the constitutional bodies since the police told me that I did not violate any law. Later however I learned that some officials in Chisinau called me a "smuggler". I don't seem to understand anything – some say one thing, and others another. Don't the various constitutional bodies coordinate their work or talk among themselves? And if they do, what's the difference between them and Sevcuic's militiamen? And I am called a "smuggler" because I did not pay taxes in Tiraspol? I've seen so much injustice in the recent years that I got used to it. I'm afraid that soon I will no longer acknowledge the rather abnormal things that happen to us here.

What do you do now? Do you keep transporting your goods?

Dumitru Paduret: I do. That is all I can do to make a living. It's a daily risk to take the merchandise and cross the river by ferry near Molovata. Winter is coming, the water in Nistru will freeze and then I don't know what I will do.

In the end, did you pay the so-called “fine” demanded by the separatists?

Dumitru Paduret: I did. I wouldn't have gotten my car and merchandise back otherwise. I paid 1,500 Euros. They are laughing at our expense here. They testing us like lab rats to see how patient we are. All my hope now goes to the ECtHR. My case is already there, it was admitted, so we are waiting.

After these stories, one realizes once more that the Republic of Moldova has not affirmed itself as a state yet, and it does not enforce its laws. And if a state cannot instill order and respect for the law, the people receive a very clear message, namely that the Moldovan society is based on the rule of the jungle, where everyone is doing what they can and only the luckiest survive. It is unfortunate however is so few of the numerous journalists, diplomats or national and foreign experts realize these things. Many see them as normal even if they have a clear mandate when they come to work in Moldova.

This article was developed within the Project „Institutional Support for Human Rights” implemented by Promo-LEX Association with the support of Civil Rights Defenders from Sida funds. The views expressed in the article reflect the views and position of the author and not necessarily the position of Promo-LEX and Civil Rights Defenders.

All rights protected. The content of the article may be used and reproduced for non-profit purposes and without Promo-LEX's prior agreement by indicating the source of information.

Vitalie Calugareanu,
DW Chisinau

Promo - LEX

Advancing democracy and human rights



**National Endowment
for Democracy**

Supporting freedom around the world

Edition coordinated by:

Carolina Bondarciuc

E-mail: crdt@promolex.md

Web: www.promolex.md

Tel/Fax: (373 22) 45-00-24

GSM: 069637849

The **Promo-LEX Association** is a Non-Governmental Organisation focused on promoting democratic values, whose purpose is to advance democracy in the Republic of Moldova, including the Transnistrian region through promoting and defending human rights, monitoring democratic processes and strengthening the civil society.

Promo-LEX Association provides free legal aid assistance on issues of human rights violations for the inhabitants from the Transnistrian region of Moldova. For consultations please contact: Tel: 022 310945

The opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily express the views of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).