

Chapter 1

Conflict Management, International Parliamentary Assemblies and Small States: The Cases of Georgia and Moldova



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Abstract The parliamentary assemblies of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe have reputations as bridge-building institutions between western and post-socialist countries. However, territorial disputes between member states pose a challenge to the parliamentary diplomacy of these international parliamentary institutions (IPIs). This article examines how IPIs address conflicts in the cases of two small states facing “frozen” secessionist conflicts, where Russia’s hegemony is involved, namely Georgia with its territorial disputes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia along with Moldova and its secessionist dispute with Transnistria. This contribution unpacks IPI strategies by applying conceptual approaches from parliamentary diplomacy, conflict management and small-states literature, as well as the respective arguments on hegemonic strategies.

Keywords Small states · International relations · International organizations · International parliamentary institutions · OSCE · Council of Europe · Secessionist conflicts

1.1 Introduction¹

The parliamentary assemblies of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe (CoE) have reputations as bridge-building institutions between western countries and post-socialist states. However, territorial disputes between member states pose a challenge to the parliamentary diplomacy of these international parliamentary institutions (IPIs). This article examines the cases of two small states facing “frozen” secessionist conflicts, where Russia’s hegemony is involved: First in Georgia with territorial disputes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and second in Moldova with its long-standing secessionist territory in Transnistria.

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As both IPIs have members from hostile conflict parties, the IPIs face the dilemma of how to position themselves for or against member state activities and how to contribute to international conflict-management strategies vis-à-vis small states.

This contribution aims at explaining variances regarding both IPIs' strategies to cope with these "frozen" territorial conflicts by applying conceptual approaches from parliamentary diplomacy, conflict management and small-states, as well as the respective arguments on hegemonic strategies. An IPIs self-perception as part of conflict management is best illustrated by the OSCE PA's position: "Their elected status gives parliamentarians the independence and advantages that can at times open doors to dialogue...[when] regional tensions flare, multilateral meetings of parliamentarians can foster communication and promote peaceful solutions" (OSCE PA 2018b).

Evidently, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly perceives itself as a conflict management actor. It sketches an ideal scenario, which, however, requires the willingness of parliamentarians from conflict states to cooperate. To maintain cooperation is a fundamental challenge of any International Organization (IO) with member countries having (territorial) conflicts and ignoring fundamental IO norms on non-violence. As IO institutions, IPIs are challenged to address (territorial) conflicts where their parliamentarians' home countries are involved.

Against this background, the essential aim of this contribution is to investigate the strategies IPIs apply to cope with such conflicts. The empirical cases are small states as conflict parties as it is assumed that such states face higher vulnerability at the international level. IPIs are understood as additional international arenas for small states to seek support. There are a number of questions deriving from this, which are to be addressed in this article. It will be explored how both the OSCE PA and PACE pursue their ambition to facilitate conflict-related dialogue between high-level authorities from the small states, the secessionist regions and Russia. Further, do they over- or underestimate their role as confidence-building or mediating institutions?

In terms of political stability, territorial conflicts within or between IO member states pose a risk to any IO. They constitute ongoing violations of fundamental IO norms including state sovereignty, territorial integrity and peaceful cooperation. Moreover, hostile states within an IO undermine intergovernmental cooperation and—within their IPIs—the work of parliamentarians. As a consequence, the IO's overall efficiency is diminished.

Although the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) is regarded as the "second most powerful" IPI after the European Parliament (Šabič 2008: 262), neither PACE nor the OSCE PA is particularly powerful due to their lack of budgetary control and inability to check the power of the executive. PACE ranks among the oldest international parliamentary institutions and has managed to expand its influence over recent decades, establishing itself as Europe's "moral conscience" and is seen as a "school of democracy and human rights" for parliamentarians from Central and Eastern European countries (Gawrich 2014, 2017; Habegger 2005). In comparison, the OSCE PA has less formal power and, although it was explicitly created to foster dialogue between parliamentarians from participating states, the

OSCE PA has an underdeveloped institutional infrastructure, restricting its output (Gawrich 2014; Habegger 2010).

Also, consensus mechanisms and bargaining procedures at the intergovernmental level restrict their roles. Generally speaking, IPIs have greater flexibility to address conflicts in a frank manner. They can much easily exchange with conflict parties than national governments would do. Undoubtedly, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 eroded PACE's and the OSCE PA's relations with the Russian delegation and authorities. Yet the two IPIs' responses to other territorial conflicts in the post-Soviet space remain largely unexplored. Building upon previous research on the implications of the hybrid war between Ukraine and Russia (Gawrich 2017), this paper examines the IPIs' strategies towards two small countries engrossed in protracted "frozen" conflicts, namely Moldova (Transnistria) and Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), as well as Russian hegemony.

This article expands upon three strands of literature: *first*, approaches to IPI diplomacy, *second*, conflict-management strategies and *third*, small-states' foreign policy analysis, including approaches on hegemons within IOs as Russia's role in these conflicts merits consideration.

1.2 Conflict Management and Strategies of Parliamentary Diplomacy

While referring to Burton and Dukes (1990), Michael Butler conceives of conflict management as "any effort to control or contain an ongoing conflict between politically motivated actors, operating at the state or sub-state level, typically through the involvement of a third party" (Butler 2009: 13). He defines *international* conflict management as the "efforts of third parties [to] limit the spread or escalation of a conflict, to minimize suffering and to create an environment for interaction without resorting to violence" (Ibid., p.15).

International actors, at a minimum, employ strategic *conflict containment*. However, in contrast to more powerful actors who might directly partake in international conflict management via classical international conflict management tools (e.g. crafting legal settlements, brokering agreements, setting up monitoring missions, see e.g. Bercovitch and Regan (2004) per Butler 2009: 14), IPIs have more limited capacities. Their tactics are confined primarily to: *first*, encouraging compliance with an IO's authoritative norm (e.g. PACE's membership monitoring, which might refer to territorial conflicts or the OSCE PA's election observations, which usually do not) and *second*, utilizing deliberate, dialogue-based instruments such as informal meetings to mediate between conflicting parties. Whereas the first strategy is rooted in rationalist views (with little potential to sanction), the second is grounded in social constructivist approaches and focuses on persuasion related to IO norms (for dialogue based instruments and socialization within IOs, see e.g. Checkel 2005; for conditionality, see, e.g. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005).

The parliamentary diplomacy strategies (Cofelice and Stavridis 2014; Cutler 2006; Jančić 2015a; Weisglas and Boear 2007) IPIs choose might be explained by their lack of substantial powers of control. IPIs compensate for their weak formal power by focusing on control through communication (e.g. with intergovernmental level or member states) or policy dialogue (e.g. monitoring) (Jančić 2014). They predominantly focus on human rights, democracy and conflict management (Šabič 2008, 262f; Marschall 2005, Jun and Kuper 1997; Lotter 1997). The rise in the number of international institutions and networks since the Cold War has forged new opportunities for IPIs to act as norm entrepreneurs, albeit dependent on the different domestic constraints, financial limitations and individual engagement (Šabič 2013).

Based on international liberal peace norms, international institutions seek to contain conflicts within their sphere of influence to mitigate insecurity. Furthermore, both PACE and the OSCE-PA operate under the assumed mandate to uphold European peace. However, they possess limited power and restrict their activities to supervision and dialogue.

Two distinctive IPI strategies are thus evident to approach the cases of Georgia and Moldova (building especially on Cutler 2001, 217; Cutler 2013; Gawrich 2017; Šabič 2008; Marschall 2005, Jun and Kuper 1997; Lotter 1997; Stegen 2000; Šabič 2013):

- (i) *Supervision of compliance with IO rules*, including operational activities in the form of monitoring reports on a country's compliance with IO rules or election observations in member countries;
- (ii) *Conflict-related dialogue*, whereby PAs counterbalance their lack of formal power through soft communicative activities to foster dialogue among conflicting parties at different diplomatic levels.

1.3 Conceptualizing Small States and Hegemons in IOs

Against this backdrop of supervision and dialogue, small states, like Georgia and Moldova, at the international level are considered as vulnerable, lacking both power and capacities (Katzenstein 1985), and pursue a host of strategies (e.g. bandwagoning with great powers) to cope with their disadvantages (Gvalia et al. 2013; Ingebritsen et al. 2006; Mouritzen and Wivel 2005; Thorhallsson 2018).² Two strategies are frequently pursued by small states at the international level:

Status-seeking strategies: Small states suffer from status insecurity more than medium or great powers do (Carvalho and Neumann 2015: 1). Consequently, they aim to improve or maintain their place in the international hierarchy. Status-seeking strategies within an IPI related to frozen conflicts are *operationalized* related to attempts by Moldovan and Georgian MPs' to stress their country's national integrity

² See on indicators *Statistics Times Country Statistics* (2018); Bertelsmann Foundation (2018); *World Population Review Country Statistics* (2018).

within both assemblies. It is assumed that the conflict framing builds on the own countries' victimization within the conflicts.

Shelter Seeking Strategies: They compensate for their vulnerability through joining IOs and allying with more powerful states (Thorhallsson 2018: 26). Hence, they avoid isolation and stagnation. The territorial conflicts in Georgia and Moldova have contributed to domestic social stagnation due to heavy costs, both material, for example in border management, security provisions, trade embargos; and immaterial costs, such as mistrust or hatred between majority and secessionist entities, and Russian propaganda. For the purpose of this article, shelter seeking is understood as Georgian and Moldovan MPs' attempts to push for PACE and OSCE PA activities to blame the Russian government for its role within the secessionist territories. In this regard, IPIs would be perceived as "neutral brokers".

Although status- and shelter-seeking strategies provide appropriate starting points to examine the relevance of both IPIs to Moldovan and Georgian conflict management, the other side of the coin must be considered as well, namely the role of hegemons within an IO involved in the respective conflicts, in this case Russia. As hegemons are active in IOs and spend resources to push them in a certain direction, small states hope hegemons will respond to an IO's directives (Hurrell 1995; e.g. Mattli 2010). According to the self-perception of both IPIs as trust-generating institutions, their activities towards Russian hegemony include blaming and conflict-related dialogue.

Lobell et al. explain a state's behavior (referring to both hegemons and less influential states) within an IO as when a "state has two or more games or arenas in which it must choose between alternate strategies seeking to maximize beneficial outcomes. The opposing actor in each game will be different and will have its own set of strategies and outcomes. Each game can be thought of as a different arena in which a particular factor is the overriding concern" (2015: 150).

Transferred to this field of study, this article operationalizes the hegemonic strategy of Russian representatives, for example, Russian MPs within both PAs and Russian officials communicating with both PAs, to reject accountability for norm violations through their involvement in the Moldovan and Georgian territorial conflicts.

In this context, five types of activities can be identified which actors involved in IPI conflict management efforts might use. The IPIs *first* apply their legal rights to compliance supervision and, *second*, they implement conflict-related dialogues towards the parties of each conflict (hence, Georgia + Russia and Moldova + Russia). The *third and fourth* strategies refer to Georgian and Moldovan MPs' shelter- and status-seeking. Finally, the *fifth* rejection strategy refers to those, which engage with Russian MPs and Russian authorities.

1.4 Short Characterization of the Conflict Cases and Both PA's Initial Positions on the Conflicts

1.4.1 *The Case of Moldova*

The Transnistrian conflict erupted shortly before the dissolution of the USSR in November 1990 when Transnistrian authorities and the central government fundamentally disagreed on Moldova's state language policy and its political orientation (see Axyonova and Gawrich 2018). After increased violence between the Moldovan Army, secessionist and Russian forces in March 1992, a ceasefire was agreed upon in July. Although several hundred died and approximately 100,000 were internally displaced, this has been the least violent post-Soviet territorial dispute.

As concerns both PAs, they referenced the conflict at an early stage: As Moldova became a participating state of the CSCE (later OSCE) shortly after its independence, the CSCE PA (later OSCE PA) demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldovan territory as well as a ceasefire agreement (CSCE Parliamentary Assembly 1992).

Prior to Moldova's accession to the CoE in 1995, PACE was considerably optimistic on improved prospects for conflict settlement (PACE 1995). However, various international mediation efforts have not resolved the conflict and it persists in a "frozen" or "protracted" state (Baban 2015). Nevertheless, progress at practical and technical levels is visible (Hill 2018). This has been broadly driven by Moldova's Europeanization efforts. Transnistria benefits from Moldovan integration into the EU's Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, which requires trade-related exchange between Tiraspol and Chişinău (Waal and Twickel 2020).

1.4.2 *The Case of Georgia*

The South Ossetian conflict in Georgia has deep historical roots and intensified after the dissolution of the USSR 1991 (see Axyonova and Gawrich 2018), when the Georgian government intended to reincorporate the region. However, South Ossetia pursued reunification with Russian North Ossetia. Russia brokered a ceasefire agreement in June 1992, but hostilities have resumed at frequent intervals, e.g. in 2004, followed by minor conflict spikes in subsequent years. A full-fledged five-day war erupted in August 2008 over Tbilisi's renewed strategy to increase control over South Ossetia. Russian military directly supported secessionist South Ossetia and later recognized the region's independence (Fischer 2016). Hence, the respective ceasefire agreement left the status of the secessionist entity unresolved (BBC 2008) and remains contested by the Georgian government to date.

The Abkhaz conflict similarly has historical and linguist-nationalistic roots (Petersen 2008). After the collapse of the USSR, the 1992 war led to thousands of civilian casualties and 250,000 IDPs (Hansen 1999), followed by a 1993 Abkhaz

counter-offensive aided by the Russian military (Fischer 2016). Russia brokered a ceasefire agreement in May 1994 which largely held. The Russo-Georgian War in August 2008 spilled into Abkhazia and led to the Russian recognition of the region's independence. The conflict in Abkhazia has since remained frozen. As concerns both secessionist regions, there have been no recent substantial changes to the status quo and it is broadly expected to remain frozen for the time being (Waal and Twickel 2020).

When Georgia joined the Council of Europe in 1999, PACE acknowledged Georgia's efforts to improve the political climate through increased exchange with both secessionist regions (PACE 1999). In contrast, the CSCE PA's annual declarations of 1993, 1994 and 1995 never referenced either conflict (CSCE Parliamentary Assembly 1993, 1994; OSCE PA 1995).

1.5 The Moldovan and Georgian Conflict Cases in the PACE

PACE established a considerably powerful monitoring mechanism over time inspired by the accession of new members in the 1990s. This does not allow for immediate sanctions but empowers PACE with naming and shaming capacities (see Gawrich 2015). The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ensuing war in Eastern Ukraine marked a turning point in PACE's strategy towards Russia. In April 2014, PACE suspended the Russian delegation's participation rights, which PACE has used sparingly (e.g. not during the Russian-Georgian war in 2008).

This PACE strategy towards Russian MPs in the context of the Ukraine war led to *spill-over effects* in the treatment of the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia: a parliamentary "Sub-Committee on Conflicts between Council of Europe Member States" was established in 2016 to reinforce its conflict-related strategies (PACE 2015; PACE Monitoring Committee 2016b). The Sub-Committee performs specific monitoring activities and encourages conflict-related dialogue between MPs from Russia, Georgia, Moldova and other inter-state disputes in the region.

As concerns Moldova, the conflict in Transnistria has been under constant PACE supervision. The conflict's freezing occurred prior to Moldova's accession to the CoE in 1995 and PACE has consistently demanded "rapprochement" between Moldova and Transnistria (PACE Monitoring Committee 7/13/2015b). PACE's strategy to monitor the social, economic and political conditions both in Moldova as well as in Transnistria evokes criticism from Moldovan authorities given their skepticism towards any quasi-statehood concessions to Transnistria. However, PACE's demand for full reintegration of the country under Chişinău's government does not quell the fears of Moldovan officials (PACE Monitoring Committee 2008a, b, 2012, 2015, 2016a).

Even though the frozen conflicts in Georgia turned hot during the August 2008 war, its two breakaway regions did not receive much attention from PACE's Monitoring Committee before 2008 (PACE Monitoring Committee 2008a). Prior to and after the 2008 war, PACE's overall strategy towards Georgia called for peaceful relations with the secessionist entities. Yet, monitoring reports also reveal patience for Georgia's lack of democratic and institutional progress, acknowledging the challenges the Georgian administration faces in coping with the regions (e.g. PACE Monitoring Committee 2004, 2006). PACE pursues a balanced approach, not only supporting Georgian efforts to unify the country, but demanding Georgian authorities treat non-Georgian minorities fairly (including Russians, South Ossetians and Abkhaz people) (PACE Monitoring Committee 2010), e.g. through demanding fair prosecution of violations committed by *all* conflict parties (including Georgians) after the 2008 war (PACE Monitoring Committee 4/30/2009).

Russia is still regarded as a hegemon in the region and designs its role in all regional organizations covering Eurasia through a number of influential strategies (Willerton et al. 2015). As for the treatment of this still remaining Russian hegemony in these territorial conflicts, PACE did not systematically refer to its activities in Moldova or Georgia and did not repeatedly qualify Russia as an aggressor in these conflicts while monitoring developments (e.g. PACE Monitoring Committee 2002). Instead, PACE mainly referred to shortcomings related to democratic values and human rights violations in the Russian Federation itself (PACE Monitoring Committee 2016a).

Russian hegemonic strategies, on the other hand, are more limited since the Russian PACE delegation had its membership credentials suspended between April 2014 and June 2019 during which its MPs could not vote or participate in the leading Assembly bodies, leading Russia to withdraw from parliamentary participation in 2015 (Steininger 2018). Furthermore, Russia's rejection of PACE's sanctioning of Russian MPs is visible: According to Chairman Leonid Slutsky of the International Committee of the Russian State Duma, the sanctions are "anti-Russian hysteria" and accused PACE of being influenced by a "Russophobic minority" (2018).

PACE reinforced its general commitment to territorial integrity and sovereignty as the Georgian-Russian war in August 2008 compelled the Assembly to formulate a resolution on national sovereignty and statehood (PACE 2011). This document was meant to become PACE's point of reference in future territorial conflicts among member states.

To sum up, Russia was not sanctioned for its involvement in either conflict. Moldova and Georgia were encouraged to increase their internal relations with the secessionist entities (despite profound skepticism) and to treat all people equally. Instead of qualifying Russia as an aggressor too sharply, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War contributed to PACE's norm reinforcement related to territorial disputes in general. Russia's self-imposed role and understanding as a peace broker in Eurasia is well-illustrated by its contribution to the negotiation of the ceasefire agreement, which ended the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan between September and November 2020, as well as its attempt to keep other international organizations out of this conflict zone (Sporrer and Knoll 2021).

As PACE's supervision mechanism towards both small states and the regional hegemon focuses on demanding Moldova and Georgia pursue reunification rather than strongly criticizing Russia, its approach avoids unilateral blaming and emphasizes the responsibility of all conflict parties. Consequently, the status- and shelter-seeking preferences of Georgian and Moldovan representatives could not align with PACE's priorities.

1.6 Conflict-Related Dialogue

Within PACE's conflict-related dialogues, MPs visit Moldova *and* the breakaway Transnistrian region. They have met with de facto secessionist authorities to discuss normalization of relations and a potential conflict resolution (PACE Monitoring Committee 2008b). This strategy is ambiguous as Moldovan authorities fear that PACE MP's dialogue with Transnistrian authorities reinforces its international legitimacy. However, PACE repeatedly demanded conflict-related dialogue between Moldovan and Transnistrian officials (see e.g. PACE Monitoring Committee 2012) and perceives its role as a *platform* for conflict-related dialogue (e.g. multiple PACE presidents have offered the Moldovan parliament dialogue facilitation with Transnistria) (PACE 2006, 2012).

PACE was less successful in establishing dialogue with the authorities from the breakaway regions in *Georgia*, as it failed to arrange meetings in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2013. Instead, they held meetings in Tbilisi and Moscow and publicly denounced the contradictory views on the 2008 war (PACE Monitoring Committee 2013). Hence, PACE was more cautious in pushing for dialogue between Georgians and secessionists than in the Moldovan case (PACE Monitoring Committee 2009).

Hence, according to its perceived advantage of parliamentary independence, PACE pursued conflict-related dialogue with all involved parties in both cases. However, the conditions were comparably more conducive in Moldova than in Georgia, where PACE did not get access to the breakaway regions.

1.7 Status-Seeking, Shelter-Seeking and Hegemonic Strategies

Modest use of shelter-seeking and status-seeking strategies can be discerned amongst parliamentary "motions" initiated by Moldovan parliamentarians. Since joining the CoE in 1995, around 65 MPs or substitute MPs have represented Moldova.³ Of

³ For information on the Moldovan PACE MPs, as well as on the activities of single MPs, see <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/AssemblyList/MP-Search-Country-Archives.EN.asp?CountryID=28> (accessed 07.01.19). The overall number of MPs of all national delegations depends on the length of the term of each MP. The Moldovan PACE delegation consists of 5 delegates. Furthermore, how

those, more than 30 never participated in any visible parliamentary activity such as initiating a motion, posing a question to the CoE ministers, etc. Generally, the number of Moldovan PACE MPs who initiated motions or drafted declarations and questions related to Transnistria has been low.

Hence, they have infrequently used shelter-seeking strategies: In 1998, a Moldovan parliamentarian supported by nearly 50 MPs from various countries (among them four Moldovans and a handful of Romanians) initiated a motion to condemn Transnistrian separatist activities, however the motion was not heard in the plenary discussion (PACE 1998). In 2000, the same MP initiated a similar motion with the support of around 20 MPs which again failed to reach the plenary (PACE 2000). Both motions called for improved conflict settlement efforts by all conflict parties. A further unsuccessful attempt came after the political climate reignited following the 2014 annexation of Crimea when another Moldovan MP attempted to rally PACE to strengthen legal standards preventing separatism in CoE countries (PACE 2014). Clearly, the moderate shelter-seeking strategy by Moldovan MPs since 1995 failed to gain substantial support due to a lack of interest among other PACE parliamentarians.

Apart from motions related to Transnistria, a spattering of Moldovan MPs supported initiatives related to other regional conflicts (e.g. the Balkan conflicts or the annexation of Crimea) or conflict management in general (PACE 2018). Furthermore, MPs attempted to pursue status-seeking strategies related to Moldova's deficient democracy standards for which a few Moldovan MPs attempted to increase pressure from the CoE to push their governments into a more compliant direction (e.g. PACE 2003, 2016a, d). It can be concluded that Moldovan parliamentarians within PACE were not especially active in employing shelter- and status-seeking strategies. There is no obvious pattern explaining this behavior. Were it due to a lack of experience with PACE's procedures shortly after Moldova's CoE accession, then their activities would later increase, which has not been observable. There is also no pattern in the age of active or passive MPs, hence, their political socialization during the Soviet era or after does not provide an alternative explanation.

The Georgian example strikes a contrast: Since Georgia joined the CoE in 1999, four years after Moldova, the number of total Georgian MPs in PACE is considerably lower, although the size of both countries' delegations has remained at 5 MPs. Of the 58 Georgian MPs and their substitutes, more than two-thirds showed evident parliamentary activity.⁴ Hence, Georgian MPs were considerably more enterprising than their Moldovan colleagues. However, only a small number supported (or initiated) motions, resolutions or written declarations related to the conflicts in South Ossetia or Abkhazia and their consequences, none of which reached the plenary level. Their activities sought to increase pressure on Russia, addressing its influence

often a MP was represented by his/her substitute cannot be traced. Hence, both groups of MPs, representatives and their substitutes, are treated in the same way for this analysis.

⁴For information on the Georgian PACE MPs, as well as on the activities of single MPs, see <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/AssemblyList/MP-Search-Country-Archives-EN.asp?CountryID=16> (accessed 08.01.19).

on the separatist territories and its unilateral recognition of both territories. Some of these initiatives explicitly framed the conflicts, e.g. as a Russian “de facto annexation” of both territories and blamed the international community for its “lack of serious international attention” before the 2008 war (PACE 2001a, b, 2002, 2008).

Georgian MPs attempted to use shelter-seeking strategies by blaming the Russian hegemon for its non-compliance with CoE rules and criticizing its annexation of Crimea and hybrid war in Ukraine (PACE 2016c). Similar to Moldovan MPs, Georgian MPs have backed motions or declarations related to other Eastern European conflicts and urged PACE to devote more attention (PACE 2016b).

This evidence reveals how both countries’ delegations deployed status- and shelter-seeking strategies in PACE and that their attempts constituted a modest pattern as they were not especially prolific. Georgian MPs pursued visible parliamentary activities more often than Moldovan MPs and more frequently tried to raise conflict issues at plenary debates.

The Russian delegation is comparably bigger with 18 members in PACE.⁵ Between Russia’s (internationally highly contested) accession to the CoE in 1998 and the suspension of its delegation in 2014, the delegation’s general level of activity rose in the late 2000s. However, any action related to conflicts involving Russia was avoided entirely. What is more: the CoE monitoring reports on Georgia and Ukraine which take into account the challenges imposed on these countries by Russia are flatly rejected by individual MPs. The Russian rejection strategy is also accompanied by a misdirection strategy known as “whataboutism”, by which MPs direct attention away from Russia to other international actors, with “worse” infractions than Russia—without facing sanctions (for more, see Dougherty 2014).

1.8 The Moldovan and Georgian Conflict Cases in the OSCE-PA

The OSCE PA’s capacity to effectively *supervise norm compliance* and *initiate conflict-related dialogue* differs substantially from PACE. The parliamentary work is less institutionalized. The PA has less power to monitor non-compliance among OSCE states or conflict parties due to the lack of a specific monitoring committee. Nevertheless, the OSCE PA’s Rules of Procedure do cover policy-related dimensions which explicitly define a responsibility to “develop and promote mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts” (Rule 3 Responsibilities and Objectives of the Assembly, par. c) OSCE PA 2018d).

⁵ For information on the Russian PACE MPs, as well as on the activities of single MPs, see <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/AssemblyList/MP-Search-Country-Archives-EN.asp?CountryID=35> (accessed 9.1.19).

1.8.1 Supervision

Evidence of the OSCE PA's strategy to supervise participating state compliance is primarily found in the declarations and resolutions announced in its annual plenary sessions, which are the most influential and visible PA documents.

In contrast to the Russian PACE delegation, the Russian OSCE PA representatives were not suspended after the annexation of Crimea. This was attributed to the greater number of presumably pro-Russian national delegations such as Belarus and Central Asian countries. Nevertheless, the OSCE PA was remarkably vocal at its Annual Session declaration in Berlin 2018 when it urged Russia to “withdraw its military units from the territory of Georgia and reverse its recognition of Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia, as independent States”. The PA also articulated its support of “the policy of the Government of Georgia towards a peaceful conflict resolution, directed towards the de-occupation of Georgian regions, on the one hand, and reconciliation and confidence-building between the communities divided by occupation lines, on the other hand” (OSCE PA 2018a).

As declarations and resolutions from other annual sessions show, the OSCE PA's supervision of non-compliance related to the Georgian and Moldovan conflicts has been ongoing (OSCE PA 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2018a). For example, in a special resolution on Moldova articulated at the 2016 Annual Session in Tbilisi, the OSCE PA deemed the Transnistrian conflict “a serious threat to security and stability in Europe and the OSCE area”, framing the issue as a hazard for all of Europe (OSCE PA 2016). At the 2015 Session in Helsinki, on the 40th anniversary of the signing of the OSCE's founding 1975 Helsinki Document, the OSCE PA adopted a resolution on Russia broadly deriding its non-compliance with OSCE commitments, including its role in the conflicts in Moldova and Georgia, while affirming the “right of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova to be free of coercive external influence from the Russian Federation and [reconfirming] its support for their independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity” (OSCE PA 2015). However, a specific decision denouncing a hegemon like Russia for its involvement in two conflict areas is rare. Thus, the OSCE-PA's contribution to *conflict containment* by using a strategy of supervision of a hegemon is limited to announcing its position prominently and framing the issue in a particular light.

1.9 Conflict-Related Dialogue

As introduced above, the OSCE PA's self-perception refers to its alleged ability as a facilitator of dialogue in situations of regional tensions (OSCE PA 2018b). The PA's principal strategy in addressing political conflicts is to appoint *Special Representatives* (SR) for various fields of parliamentary diplomacy. Three such SRs have been assigned with mandates relevant to the conflicts under examination.

The *SR on the South Caucasus* was installed in 2010 (OSCE 2011) to promote dialogue and confidence-building measures in the region (Armenpress 2013). The post was held by Bulgarian MP Kristian Vigenin (OSCE PA 2018c), who resigned a few years later due to his lack of power. SR Vigenin concluded that his position “in the current conditions will remain purely ceremonial [as] the situation on the ground does not provide an opening for broader dialogue and initiatives which reach beyond the well-known zone of comfort for the players [and] there is no financial support for his/her work” (Vigenin 2018). Although the SR on the South Caucasus visited Nagorno-Karabakh, the disputed border region between Armenia and Azerbaijan (OSCE PA 2017b), he was not allowed inside the secessionist territories in Georgia, a fact which the OSCE PA lamented in its 2018 resolution (OSCE PA 2018a). Hence, the PA was hindered in establishing conflict-related dialogue in the disputed territories of Georgia. Russia has been made explicitly responsible for the denial of access to international monitors in both regions, whereas the Georgian government’s efforts to normalize relations has been valued highly by PA documents (OSCE PA 2019a).

In 2017, the OSCE PA appointed an *SR on Eastern Europe* whose mandate included “spheres of parliamentary diplomacy, confidence building, reconciliation and dialogue facilitation”. Although this position was held by former OSCE PA Vice-President Kent Harstedt, the SR did not appear to be especially active and the position ceased to exist after Harstedt departed the PA (for the mandates of the individual SRs, see OSCE PA 2019b; OSCE Parliamentary Assembly International Secretariat 2019).

The position of the *SR on Mediation*, created in 2016 for some years pursued conflict-related dialogue. The office was held by former OSCE PA President and ex-Finish Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva with a mandate to strengthen “the PA’s preparedness for mediation and dialogue facilitation” (for the mandates and initial reports, see OSCE PA 2019b). SR Kanerva has concentrated on raising the profile of parliamentary mediation among influential OSCE bodies (OSCE PA International Secretariat 2017), and from early she did emphasize the potential outbreak of Transnistrian conflict in Moldova (Kanerva 2016).

In 2000 the OSCE PA established a specific mechanism to foster conflict-related dialogue in Moldova, a *Parliamentary Team* “to promote peace, stability and the rule of law..., while affirming the unity of the State, by engaging in and promoting dialogue between...different sections of the Moldovan population” and with a priority on resolving the status of Transnistria (OSCE PA 2010a), which managed to establish contacts between both conflict parties (OSCE PA 2010b; OSCE PA International Secretariat 2012). High-level meetings with the two conflict parties were also held by then-PA President Petros Efthymiou (OSCE PA International Secretariat 2011b), who emphasized conflict dialogue within the OSCE area as his priority (OSCE PA International Secretariat 2011a, 2016a), as did the then PA President Ilkka Kanerva in 2015 towards Duma representatives. He lamented the “absence of [our] Russian colleagues from the Annual Session” in the aftermath of the Annexation of Crimea. He valued “the important contribution of the Russian Delegation to the OSCE PA” and framed their prospective return to the PA as part of the PA’s attempt to contribute to “a diplomatic resolution to the crisis in and around Ukraine” (OSCE

PA International Secretariat 2015). Similar inclusive approaches towards Russia have been pursued by other PA presidents (e.g. OSCE PA International Secretariat) and build on earlier traditions as could have been shown after the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 (OSCE PA International Secretariat 2008a, c).

Overall, the OSCE PA contributed differently to the conflict-related dialogues in both states. In the case of Georgia, frustration over the SR's lack of success dominated. In contrast, the Parliamentary Team on Moldova initiated dialogue with the conflict parties more successfully. Evidently, the OSCE PA's parliamentary independence, which it frames as an advantage, was only fruitful in the Moldovan case. As for the PA's involvement with the Russian delegation, its attempts to maintain close and positive cooperation has been evident.

In times of growing alienation between Russia and other OSCE participating states, hence, we are witnessing some degree of erosion of the relation between Russia and other European states. Nevertheless, the OSCE's PA strength is its maintenance of channels of communication among members of parliament of all member states, by keeping the dialogue on equal footing and without pressure to produce a specific outcome of any kind.

1.9.1 Status-Seeking, Shelter-Seeking and Hegemonic Strategies

The OSCE PA does not provide detailed information about the activities or initiatives of individual MPs. Hence, there is limited empirical knowledge about its Georgian and Moldovan MPs *status-* and/or *shelter-seeking* strategies. Nevertheless, high-level authorities in both countries have been observed cooperating with representatives of the OSCE PA and thus appreciate the PA's support for dialogue-based solutions to the conflicts (e.g. OSCE PA International Secretariat 2008b, 2010, 2011a, 2018). However, there is no indication that representatives from Georgia or Moldova consider the OSCE PA an institution capable of elevating their international status or providing shelter against threats. This was apparent when the SR on the South Caucasus remarked in early 2018: "My assumption that parliamentarians are more flexible and more free to embrace new options and ideas was wrong in this setting—when it comes to issues of high sensitivity, related to national security and core national interests, Parliaments inevitably respect and follow strictly the general line established by Presidents and governments" (Vigenin 2018).

Although this pessimistic view is mainly directed towards the SR's experiences in pursuing dialogue in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, his findings are relevant to all three South Caucasian countries. The SR's conclusion identifies fundamental skepticism towards international parliamentary diplomacy in conflict-prone settings. In high-level politics, members of the OSCE PA tend to primarily follow their own government's foreign policy priorities instead of crossing the lines of national interests towards broader joint parliamentary coalition-building.

In addition, there is no evidence that Russian MPs pursued a strategy related to the country's conflicts with other OSCE states. On the one hand, Russian MPs showed their willingness to dialogue with Georgian MPs at the Fall Session 2008 (see above) shortly after the Russian-Georgian war and repeated this after the start of the hybrid war in Ukraine (see Gawrich 2017). On the other hand, there is no indication that the Russian delegation attempted to divert the OSCE PA's conflict perception.

1.10 Conclusion

Studies on IPI's parliamentary diplomacy strategies regarding territorial conflicts between small states and a hegemon require improved conceptual foundations and empirical tests. This article sets out to identify the strategies with which both PAs operate to address conflicts between member states as well as the outcome of these strategies. Such an approach allows for the following results:

The *Supervision of compliance* is a fundamental strategy in both PAs, albeit far better equipped in PACE than in the OSCE PA. Both PAs deployed their supervision strategies to address the conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, yet the PAs only intermittently engaged the issue. More generally, Russia's hegemony was frequently monitored and criticized mainly as it pertained to severe regime-related breaches of both IOs' norms. However, criticism regarding the conflict regions was not central to either PAs' Russia-related documents.

As far as *conflict-related dialogue* is concerned, both IOs showed similar ambitions and self-perceptions to act as platforms for dialogue for all conflict parties. Consequently, the ambition to facilitate conflict-related dialogue between high-level authorities from the small states, the secessionist regions and Russia was visible in both IPIs and went hand in hand with the PAs' overestimation of their own capacities. Their rhetoric revealed a struggle to define their own roles as mediators as opposed to mere intergovernmental arenas. However, although there is little evidence of progress in conflict management, the effects of international parliamentary discussions on the conflicts and effects of international parliamentary confidence building through dialogue with authorities might not be measurable as they do not provide visible effects. Nevertheless, more influential intergovernmental formats (e.g. the 5 + 2 talks in Moldova and the Geneva International Discussions on Georgia) were also unsuccessful.

This article's findings have shown there is a tangible gap between the IPIs' perceptions of their capacities as mediation platforms between conflict parties. Furthermore, the Georgian and Moldovan MPs alongside their national counterparts do not (in the case of the OSCE PA) or only to a low degree as in the case of PACE, perceive the PAs as adequate havens for shelter or support in their conflicts. This is mirrored by Russia's reactions as the regional hegemon involved in the conflicts. In the case of PACE, Russia modestly rejected any blame and attempted to pursue diversionary tactics. In the case of the OSCE PA, there was no need to do so.

To conclude, three issues are now clear: *First*, the presumed benefit of IPI MPs in dialogue facilitation cannot be confirmed. One explanation could be that PACE could only feebly suspend conflict parties (a now defunct tool), while the OSCE PA never could. *Second*, the Georgian and Moldovan MPs have shown little effort in encouraging the IPIs' supervision and dialogue mechanisms. This might be explained by an inability to garner the support of MPs from bigger and more influential countries or their relative inexperience at the international level. *Third*, however, although we cannot measure substantial effects, IPIs must be conceptualized as part of multi-track diplomacy in international conflict management, which has been mostly overlooked.

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