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# Passportisation - the new geopolitical strategy?

A comparative analysis of Russia's passportisation policy and its  
effects on brain drain in the Eastern Neighbourhood

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# Abstract

Russia has been issuing passports to Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus since the Soviet dissolution. Most targeted are secessionist regions of former Soviet states, whose populations are now becoming Russian due to passportisation. This has had several effects on the Eastern Neighbourhood, including brain drain, meaning that the highly educated and skilled citizens are emigrating. The brain drain in breakaway regions increases if the relationship between Russia and the secessionist regions is good. This thesis examines Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria who are de facto independent from Georgia and Moldova, respectively. This thesis finds that passportisation was the highest in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and lower in Transnistria, and that the relationship was the best in South Ossetia and Transnistria while being poorer in Abkhazia. This caused South Ossetia to have the highest brain drain, while Abkhazia and Transnistria only had a moderately high brain drain. Russia claims passportisation is conducted on a humanitarian basis, which this thesis aims to disprove. This thesis instead argues that passportisation has geopolitical motivations and is pursued as a Russian strategy to maintain hegemonic power and its sphere of influence in the Eastern Neighbourhood.

*Keywords:* Abkhazia, brain drain, breakaway region, geopolitics, hegemonic power, passportisation, Russia, spheres of influence, South Ossetia, Transnistria

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# 1. Introduction

“Herewith we still have to mention that the issue of massive process of granting Russian passports to the residents of separatist-controlled territories in Georgia and Moldova are directly fuelling escalation of overall situation in the conflict regions” (Alasania & Tulbure 2007: 2).

The quote is from a letter sent by Georgia and Moldova in 2007 to the United Nations Secretary-General concerning Russia’s passportisation policy affecting Georgian and Moldovan secessionist regions (hereafter called breakaway regions). The policy is not unique to these two states and is ongoing in other parts of the Eastern Neighbourhood, which encompasses Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Since 2014, Russia has been present in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine, where two breakaway regions have declared independence from their parent state. Russia militarily supports the breakaway regions, and facilitated the possibility for Donbas inhabitants to get Russian citizenship through passports since 2019 (Coynash 2019; Ponomarenko 2019; Stebelsky 2018: 28-29). Russia’s presence in the region has been questioned and criticised by scholars, state officials and diplomats (Alasania & Tulbure 2007: 2; Gachechiladze 2002: 132-133). The Eastern Neighbourhood overall has been subject to geopolitical strains since the Soviet collapse in 1991. Several states in the region are strengthening their ties with the EU, while remaining closely tied to their formerly sole hegemon Russia. Several states are experiencing ethnic clashes, with some breakaway regions declaring independence from the parent state (Ambrosio & Vandrovec 2013: 460; Huseynov 2016: 72, 81; Makarychev 2014: 185; Morozova 2018: 372-373).

## 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Russia’s passportisation policy in breakaway regions in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus as an expression of geopolitics, spheres of influence and hegemonic power. Passportisation is the process where Russia issues Russian passports to citizens of breakaway regions belonging to former Soviet States. This process has occurred since 2002 and has increased the number of citizens with Russian passports in

other states in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Artman 2013: 684, 690-691; Nagashima 2019: 187). The purpose of this thesis is to understand the motives behind passportisation as well as its consequences. This thesis will more specifically discuss passportisation as a Russian policy, and its effects on brain drain in the breakaway regions where it has been conducted. Brain drain has been selected as an effect because it is previously under-researched in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, which means that this thesis would contribute to filling gaps in the current scientific knowledge about brain drain.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, brain drain could be argued to be a geopolitically desirable effect, as it weakens some states and strengthens others (Makarychev 2014; Makarychev & Yatsyk 2017). As there are likely other factors that could affect passportisation's effect on brain drain, the relationship between the breakaway regions and Russia will also be examined in the thesis. More intervening factors could be examined to gain a broader understanding of the connections and correlations, but due to the limited scope of this thesis, they will not be examined here. Thus, passportisation will be the independent variable, the relationship between Russia and the breakaway regions is the intervening variable, and brain drain is the dependent variable to be examined. This will be discussed more in-depth in section 3.3.

The topic of passportisation has scientific relevance as there is a theory gap concerning the topic and its effects. There is some previous research, but few academics have investigated brain drain as an effect of passportisation. Moreover, there is a theory gap concerning brain drain in the Eastern Neighbourhood, which means that this thesis has scientific relevance for that field too. The topic has societal relevance, as it can contribute to understanding Eastern European and South Caucasian geopolitics and more specifically power dynamics in the Eastern Neighbourhood. As passportisation is currently occurring in the Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine, this thesis can contribute to explaining current events and phenomena by highlighting patterns from the past two decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Brain drain is sometimes referred to as brain circulation in more recent research. However, this term includes both brain drain and brain gain. Since only the former is examined in this thesis, the term brain drain is preferred (Adesote & Osunkoya 2018: 397; GCIM 2005: 31; Lailashvili 2012: 646).

## 1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of the thesis leads on to the following two research questions.

- *Why is Russia using passportisation as a policy in breakaway regions in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus?*
- *How has passportisation and the relationships between Russia and the breakaway regions affected brain drain in the regions?*

## 2. Theory

This section lays out previous research and the theoretical background of the thesis. Why the geopolitical theory and the subfields of spheres of influence and hegemonic power were chosen will also be explained.

### 2.1 Previous Research

There is some previous research on both brain drain and passportisation, which will be presented in this section.

#### 2.1.1 Brain Drain

Brain drain has been extensively studied in the global south (Adesote & Olusesan 2018; Mlambo & Adetiba 2020; Negrón 2010; Owusu-Yeboah 2009). Brain drain means that the highly skilled and highly educated citizens of a state systematically emigrate, and the research suggests that younger people emigrate to a higher extent (Dibeh et al 2018: 5-6; Negrón 2010: 43-45;). Two professions that are typically affected are doctors and educators (Kalipeni et. al. 2012: 153-155; Mlambo & Adetiba 2020: 152; Okey 2016: 27-28; Owusu-Yeboah 2009: 92). However, the brain drain in one state leads to a brain gain in other states, as human capital is moved from one place to another (Negrón 2012: 44-45). The migration tends to be to states with higher development and some form of connection to the origin state, whether that be geographical, historical, cultural or political (Adesote & Olusesan 2018: 395-396; GCIM 2005: 5-6; Mlambo & Adetiba 2020: 154). The migration is in some cases facilitated by looser visa restrictions or by gaining citizenship (Collste 2012: 72-74; GCIM 2005: 23-24). However, brain drain is not exclusive to the global south and the phenomenon also exists in other regions, including the post-Soviet states. Even so, the research on brain drain is lacking in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Cebotari 2018; Gaugas 2004; Mukomel 2008: 2-3). Hence, there is a theory gap regarding brain drain in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, which opens up for more research. This would further elaborate on the brain drain research, as it would study the same phenomenon in a different region.

## 2.1.2 Passportisation Theory

Moving from brain drain, one can see another phenomenon in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus: passportisation. This is the process where a patron state systematically issues passports to inhabitants of other states, so-called parent states, thus creating new citizens. Oftentimes this is done by simplifying the procedures for certain groups to obtain the passport of the patron state, by opening administrative passport offices in the parent states and by creating other incentives for the inhabitants of the parent states to apply for citizenship of the patron state (Artman 2013: 690-691; Artman 2014; Molchanova 2019; Nagashima 2019: 189-190). The term passportisation tends to refer to the Russian policy, and this is how it is used in this thesis. In the case of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, Russia is the patron state who issues Russian passports to citizens of breakaway regions belonging to former Soviet States, i.e the parent states. This policy and its processes have increased the number of Russian citizens in other states in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Artman 2013: 684, 690-691; Green 2010: 66; Nagashima 2019: 187). There are some differing claims as to when passportisation as a policy began. Some scholars argue that it began during Soviet times, some argue that it started immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, while others would say that it started later, in 2002, only picking up pace in 2004 after the new citizenship laws in Russia changed the way former Soviet citizens could apply for Russian passports. These new laws made it easier for minorities or stateless people within the post-Soviet space to apply for Russian citizenship, while making it more difficult for majority groups (Artman 2013: 690; Green 2010: 66; Nagashima 2019: 190). Passportisation did occur during the Soviet Union, but as it is different from today, these older policies are not investigated in this thesis. Instead, passportisation as used in this thesis occurred between 2001-2014 (Shearer 2004: 846-849). There is some previous research on passportisation and its consequences from the past two decades. This research explains how Russia set up offices in the breakaway regions to conduct passportisation on an ad-hoc basis. Russia as a patron state contributed with both administrative and monetary support, facilitating the process. Despite the existing research, the topic has not yet been extensively studied or explored (Artman 2013; Nagashima 2019: 186-187). This is especially true in terms of the effects of passportisation on brain drain. Thus, there is another theory gap concerning passportisation which opens up for further research.



Russia claims that its passportisation policy is conducted on a humanitarian basis and if one were to take this theoretical stance, it could be linked to theories on humanitarian intervention. Several scholars have examined passportisation from this theoretical background (Coynash 2019; Kremlin 2019; Larrabee 2010: 37; Szostek 2017: 572). Some scholars have explored Russia's claims of humanitarianism and linked passportisation to biopolitics, which is related to geopolitics but focuses on peoples rather than territories (Green 2010: 55-56; Makarychev & Yatsyk 2017: 26-27, 34; Morozova 2018: 357). However, this thesis examines an alternative explanation: that the passportisation policy is conducted on a basis of geopolitical goals and advances. Thus, Russia's motives are not to use passportisation as a form of humanitarian intervention to ensure the safety of ethnic Russians. Rather, it is conducted as a part of a larger strategy to gain more geopolitical power by increasing and expanding its influence over the region and securing its hegemony (Ambrosio & Vandrovec 2013: 453-454; Artman 2013: 689; Huseynov 2016: 81; Makarychev & Yatsyk 2017: 34). This leads on to the geopolitical theory used in this thesis.

## 2.2 Geopolitical Theory

Classical geopolitics sometimes focus only on geographical positions, while critical geopolitics tend to expand to include discourses on power dynamics between states, both in the local region and globally. Russia has traditionally mainly been researched through classical geopolitics, although more recent research is using a critical approach (Ambrosio & Vandrovec 2013: 436-437). Geopolitics can be tied to passportisation on several bases. Although some scholars would argue that passportisation falls under biopolitics rather than geopolitics, the two concepts are difficult to detangle from one another. Geopolitics in a traditional sense focuses more on territories, while biopolitics instead focuses more on the citizens of those territories. Therefore, Russia's claims to be conducting passportisation as a humanitarian strategy can be linked to biopolitical motivations, while the arguments that it is done as a power strategy falls more closely into geopolitical motivations. Due to this, this thesis uses geopolitics as the overarching theory rather than explicitly biopolitics. It is still worth to note, however, that the two concepts interact and are theoretically similar. As geopolitics is a broad theory in itself, it is narrowed down for this thesis. This simplifies its

operationalisation and makes it more practical for analysing the data. The subfields within geopolitics that are used are spheres of influence and hegemonic power in the Eastern Neighbourhood. As both sub-theories are smaller and relate to each other, they are used complimentary (Makarychev & Yatsyk 2017: 32; Morozova 2018: 372-373; Szostek 2017: 571).

### 2.2.1 Spheres of Influence

Traditionally, spheres of influence refer to a geographical space where an organisation or state has a high level of economic, cultural, military or political influence and is the only one who has that high level of influence (Makarychev 2014: 183-185; Shah & Verma 2018: 7-8; Suslov 2018: 331-334). Russian geopolitics tend to focus on spheres of influence and power dynamics, with Russia aiming to gain power and influence in its near abroad (Makarychev & Yatsyk 2017: 32; Suslov 2018: 333). Russia has had a high level of influence in its near abroad and in the Eastern Neighbourhood, and this region has mainly been part of Russia's sphere of influence. With Russia as the dominating power, both during the Soviet era and after the Soviet dissolution, the other states in the region have been unable to compete for power (Cooley 2017: 3; Morozova 2018: 372-373; Larrabee 2010: 36-37). However, the Russian sphere of influence has begun to weaken, mainly due to the current political climate that has caused some geopolitical changes in the region. Since the EU has launched its Eastern Partnership, some of the states in the Eastern Neighbourhood are moving more towards the EU, causing Russia to lose some of its influence over them (Crombois 2019: 90-93; Maass 2020: 393; Makarychev 2014: 184-185; Morozova 2018: 355).

### 2.2.2 Hegemonic Power in the Eastern Neighbourhood

Hegemonic power can be described as a component of spheres of influence, but it is also considered its own theoretical concept or subfield (Morozova 2018: 372). The hegemon is the actor who dominates the region and by using its power can control and direct other states, both militarily and politically, but also culturally (Huseynov 2016: 75; Morozova 2018: 366). Both the political and cultural domination could be argued to manifest itself in both passportisation, but also in Russia's relationship with other states in the Eastern Neighbourhood. One can also argue that Russia is currently fighting for hegemonic power,

both against the West more globally, and against the EU specifically in terms of power over the Eastern Neighbourhood, where Russia currently is the hegemon, but with other forces gaining ground and influence (Morozova 2018: 355, 372; Szostek 2017: 571). Although Russia has been the clear hegemon in the past, recent shifts in the international system have begun to alter this power dynamic. This would further motivate Russia to explore more strategies to maintain its hegemonic status (Hoch et al 2014: 60; Morozova 2018: 372-373; Szostek 2017: 571).

## 2.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that this thesis is based on draws from the theories and previous research outlined above. The most central concepts and sub-theories are spheres of influence, hegemonic power, passportisation, relationships between breakaway regions and patron states, and brain drain. The overall argument of this thesis is that passportisation is a geopolitical strategy and that one of its consequences is increased brain drain in the region. One can then assume that brain drain in one region would imply a brain gain in another, potentially the patron state Russia. The assumption here is moreover that brain drain strengthens Russia's geopolitical power, both in terms of influence and hegemony.

To operationalise the theoretical framework, geopolitical theory and, in particular, its subfields of spheres of influence and hegemonic power are applied to passportisation to test whether the policy can be explained by these theories. This would then strengthen the argument that spheres of influence and hegemonic power lead on to both passportisation and the relationship between Russia and the breakaway regions, in terms of recognition, a wish for accession into the Russian Federation and control over ethnic Russians. Additionally, this would demonstrate that passportisation is a geopolitical strategy rather than a humanitarian strategy. The spheres of influence and hegemonic power can be argued to benefit from brain drain in the region, as it weakens the surrounding states and decreases the likelihood of them gaining the power to challenge Russia's hegemony or influence. This would further disprove the argument that passportisation is a humanitarian policy, as brain drain is arguably not a humanitarian effect since it weakens the states or regions in which it occurs. The thesis argument is built on two main theoretic factors that are believed to affect the outcome.

Russia's influence in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus and Russia's fight for hegemonic power in the region lead to the passportisation policy conducted in breakaway regions. In turn, this leads to the outcome of increased brain drain. It is further believed that this outcome to some extent is affected by the relationship between the patron state Russia and the breakaway regions. This argument then leads on to the tentative hypotheses of this thesis.

## 2.4 Hypotheses

The hypotheses are:

H1: Russia's passportisation policy in breakaway regions in the Eastern Neighbourhood has caused an increase in brain drain in the regions.

H2: The brain drain is increased if the relationship between Russia and the breakaway regions is good.

H3: The passports are being issued to gain control over the region and brain drain, in turn, helps solidify that control.

## 3. Methodology

This section outlines the methodology of the thesis, including research design, case selection, variables, data collection and data analysis. The section argues for why the different methods were chosen over alternative means of researching material.

### 3.1 Research Design

This thesis conducts a comparative small-N study. As it is a small-N study, its internal validity is higher, while its external validity is lower (Halperin & Heath 2017: 153, 217-218). Thus, it is easier to guarantee that the research measures what it intends to measure than that the findings are generalisable beyond this research (Halperin & Heath 2017: 174-175). There are several advantages and disadvantages to using this type of research design. Most notably, a small-N study allows for in-depth research while still comparing cases to more broadly explain a phenomenon and its consequences. Although it does not allow for as broad generalisations as a large-N study, nor can go into as much detail as a single-N study, it combines elements of both (Halperin & Heath 2017: 225-227). As the research topic chosen is not extensively studied, as mentioned in section 2, comparing a small number of cases is believed to best contribute to the research area. Moreover, given the population of cases that is described in the section below, a large-N or quantitative study are not possible for this specific research question.

### 3.2 Case Selection

In a small-N case study, the risk of selection bias is prominent. The cases must be chosen transparently, to shed light on any potential bias that may exist (Halperin & Heath 2017: 174-175, 223-227; Höglund 2011: 116-117). The criteria for potential cases are 1) that the breakaway region has declared independence from its parent state, 2) that its parent state is a post-Soviet state, and 3) that Russia has issued passports to citizens of that region after their de facto independence from the parent state. Thus, the population of cases consists of Abkhazia, Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, South Ossetia, and Transnistria (Artman 2013: 683-685; Artman 2014; Ganohariti 2020: 176-177; Grigas 2016; Ponomarenko 2019). Of these cases, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria have been chosen. As Crimea is

annexed by Russia, and is therefore not de facto independent, it would not be suitable for comparison with the other cases, which is why it has not been chosen (Cooley 2017: 3; Morozova 2018: 356). Since passportisation began in Donetsk and Luhansk in 2019 and is ongoing, they are too recent to be suitable for analysis (Ponomarenko 2019, von Twickel 2019). Hence, they have not been selected either. Some scholars argue that passportisation did not occur in Transnistria, as they claim that passportisation needs to be conducted during a very limited time (Nagashima 2019: 194-196). However, this thesis argues against this, and means that passportisation as a process is not necessarily time-restricted, but rather that pace is a factor within passportisation. This is why Transnistria is considered a suitable case (Necsutu 2019).

### 3.3 Defining and Operationalising the Variables

For this thesis, one independent, one intervening and one dependent variable are examined. The thesis wants to examine if there is a correlation, or some degree of causal relationship, between the independent and dependent variable that is further increased by the intervening variable. All three variables are defined, conceptualised and operationalised in this section. At the end of the section a table summarising the values each variable can assume is presented for clarity.

Passportisation is the independent variable to be examined. To conceptualise it, passportisation can be defined as Russia issuing passports to regions who have declared independence from their post-Soviet parent states (Nagashima 2019: 188). To operationalise the concept, it is the number of issued passports during a specific time period that is to be examined. The time periods vary slightly among cases, due to the different processes of passportisation there. However, they are 4, 6, and 13 years. The different values the variable can assume as defined in this thesis are high, moderately high and low. It is difficult to put an exact numerical value on what is a high, moderately high or low number of passports, especially across the three cases. Due to this, the thesis assesses what is deemed high, moderately high or low per case by both examining the increase of Russian passport holders in percent and the time for the increase, and by examining other scholars' assessments.

The intervening variable of interest is the relationship between Russia and the breakaway region. This variable is predicted to increase the correlation between the independent and the dependent variable, i.e the relationship between the breakaway region and the patron state Russia is predicted to affect how much passportisation leads to brain drain. If the relationship between the breakaway region and Russia is good, the hypotheses predict that it will increase brain drain in the breakaway region. If it is poor, the hypotheses predict it will instead moderate the effect of passportisation on brain drain. Thus, the intervening variable acts as an enhancer. To conceptualise the intervening variable, the relationship can be defined as Russia's declared view on the breakaway region, and the breakaway region's declared view on Russia. To operationalise the concept, the following indicators are measured: if Russia has recognised the breakaway region as an independent state, if the leadership of the breakaway region has expressed a will to join the Russian Federation, and the level of ethnic Russians in the breakaway region. The values it can assume are good, moderately good and poor. For this variable, the three different indicators are not equally weighted in how they affect the value the variable assumes. The second indicator, if the leadership of the breakaway region has expressed a will to join the Russian Federation, is deemed more important than the level of ethnic Russians or the recognition of the breakaway region. The value good signifies that the second indicator and one or both of the others are positive, i.e the region wants to join the Russian Federation and Russia has recognised the independence of the breakaway region and/or there is a high level of ethnic Russians, over 7,5%, in the region. 7,5% has been set as the limit as the level of ethnic Russian has reduced over a longer time period, partly due ethnic Russians re-identifying as other ethnic groups. Therefore, 10% would likely be too high to measure accurately (Dostál & Jelen 2015: 760). Moderately good signifies that either only the second indicator is positive, i.e the region wants to join the Russian Federation, or that the two others are both positive, as both of these indicators are deemed necessary but not sufficient on their own. Poor signifies that none of them is positive.

Brain drain is the dependent variable to be examined. To conceptualise it, brain drain can be defined as a phenomenon where highly skilled and highly educated people in a state systematically emigrate (Adesote & Olusesan 2018: 397-398; Negrón 2012: 43). To measure this, one must then specify what highly skilled and highly educated mean. As mentioned in

section 2.1, brain drain often means that young people emigrate, which increases the average age in the state. Two professions often affected by this are doctors and teachers (Mlambo & Adetiba 2020: 152; Okey 2016: 27-28; Owusu-Yeboah 2009: 92). To operationalise brain drain, the following indicators are examined: population, demographic changes concerning median age, changes in the share of doctors and teachers. Due to a lack of credible data concerning the exact number of doctors and teachers, this thesis instead looks at more general trends to see if there has been any decline. Several other scholars who have examined brain drain in sub-Saharan Africa and Central America have investigated these indicators, which would indicate that they can be used to accurately measure brain drain (Mlambo & Adetiba 2020: 158; Negrón 2012: 43-45; Owusu-Yeboah 2009: 93-94). The brain drain variable can, as defined in this thesis, assume three distinct values, high, moderately high, and low. High signifies a decrease of more than 15% of the population, a median age increase by more than 2 years, and that both doctors and teachers have declined. Moderately high signifies a decrease of over 10% of the population, a median age increase by more than 1 year, and that both doctors and teachers have declined. Low signifies a decrease smaller than 10% of the population, a median age increase by less than 1 year and no decline in doctors or teachers. The criteria for the different values have been decided based on previous research of brain drain in other regions (Adesote & Osunkoya 2018; Mlambo & Adetiba 2020; Negrón 2012; Owusu-Yeboah 2009). The time period for the decrease is 10 years. However, if data from population censuses or other similar sources is unavailable for that specific time frame, the closest censuses on either side is used. This will still be able to indicate a trend over time, even if it is not the exact year.

	High value	Moderately high value	Low value
Passportisation	Percentage and pace assessed for each case	Percentage and pace assessed for each case	Percentage and pace assessed for each case
Relationship	Will to join Russia, recognition, and/or > 7,5% ethnic Russians	Will to join Russia or recognition and > 7,5% ethnic Russians	No indicator fulfilled
Brain drain	> -15% population, > +2 years median age, decline of doctors & teachers	> -10% population, > +1 year median age, decline of doctors & teachers	< -10% population, < +1 year median age, no decline of doctors or teachers

*Table 1: Values the variables can assume.*



## 3.4 Collecting the Data

The data has been collected mainly by examining academic papers, news articles, reports made by international organisations, and statements made by official representatives of the breakaway regions, their parent states, and their patron state Russia. As some of the specific numbers on the numbers of passports issued by Russia to the breakaway regions are only estimates and unconfirmed by more official outside sources, a method of triangulation has been used to ensure their reliability. Although this cannot ensure perfect reliability and accuracy, it still improves the reliability of the findings.

### 3.4.1 Source Criticism

There are some potential problems with the data used for this thesis that are important to note. As the breakaway regions are not included in most indexes for data on states, including population sizes and demographic changes, these types of sources are not useable. Instead, the data must be collected from other sources, including newspapers, reports and official statements by representatives from the breakaway regions or their parent and patron state. This complicates comparison between the cases somewhat, as it is not always a given that the same data and time frames are available in all three cases. Therefore, this thesis cannot accurately show exact relationships between the variables in the different breakaway regions in strictly numerical terms. However, it can still indicate trends and shifts in all three regions, which can still be used to answer the research question and explain the relationship between the independent variable passportisation and the dependent variable brain drain.

## 3.5 Analysing the Data

The data is analysed by using a method of structured focused comparison. Thus, several questions are asked to the data for each of the three cases to both ensure that the same things are being examined in all cases, and to ensure a structured and coherent analysis (George & Bennett 2005: 67, 86-88). The main goal is to conduct a comparative analysis of primary and secondary data.

The questions relate back to the framework outlined in section 2.3 and their purpose is to help answer the research question successfully. The following questions are asked to the data:

- 1) How many passports were issued to the breakaway regions and what was the pace of the passportisation?
- 2) How was passportisation conducted?
- 3) What appears to be the relationship between Russia and the breakaway region?
- 4) How has the demography changed since passportisation in the breakaway region and its parent state, in terms of population, median age, the share of doctors and teachers?
- 5) Have the migrants emigrated to Russia or other states?

These questions help to analyse the data and provide both a structured comparison between the cases, as well as answering the research question. Based on the material available, this is the most suitable method for analysing the data and answering the research question. In future research, if more statistical data is available, one could pursue a more quantitative method for analysing the data and answering the questions. However, as this is currently not possible, this broader set of questions facilitates the analysis better.

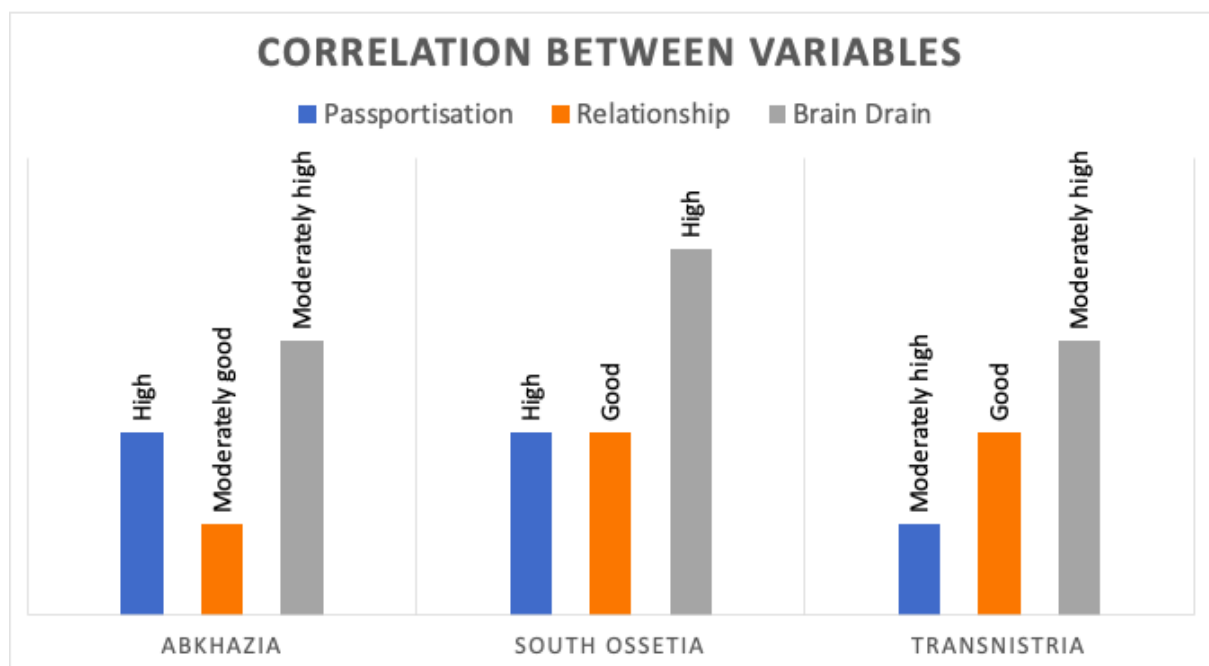
## 4. Results

This section presents the empirical findings and results of the data collection process. The findings are both described in text, as well as by using supplementary tables and graphs. Here, a table and graph summarising the values each variable assumes for each case is presented to provide a clear overview before reading more in-depth.

	Abkhazia	South Ossetia	Transnistria
Passportisation	High	High	Moderately high
Relationship	Moderately good	Good	Good
Brain drain	Moderately high/low	High	Moderately high

*Table 2: Results for variables across cases.*

Here, one can see that South Ossetia is the only breakaway region where all three variables assume the highest value, while both Abkhazia and Transnistria have medium or moderate values on two variables each.



*Graph 1: Correlation between variables across cases.*

This graph further illustrates the correlation between the variables. Their relationship is discussed in section 5.

## 4.1 Passportisation

As mentioned in section 2.1.2, passportisation is the policy where Russia issues passports to citizens of post-Soviet states. It is mainly occurring in breakaway regions in those states, and the passports are predominantly issued to ethnic Russians (Artman 2013: 690-691; Makarychev & Yatsyk 2017: 27, 31; Nagashima 2019: 187). This section examines passportisation using the indicator of the number of passports issued during the passportisation process. As the time frames vary greatly between the cases, as explained in section 3.3, the pace of passportisation is equally of interest as the number of people obtaining Russian citizenship. How passportisation was conducted and the percentage of people in the breakaway regions obtaining Russian passports are also of interest for this variable and is commented on for each case in this section as well as in the discussion of the thesis.<sup>2</sup>

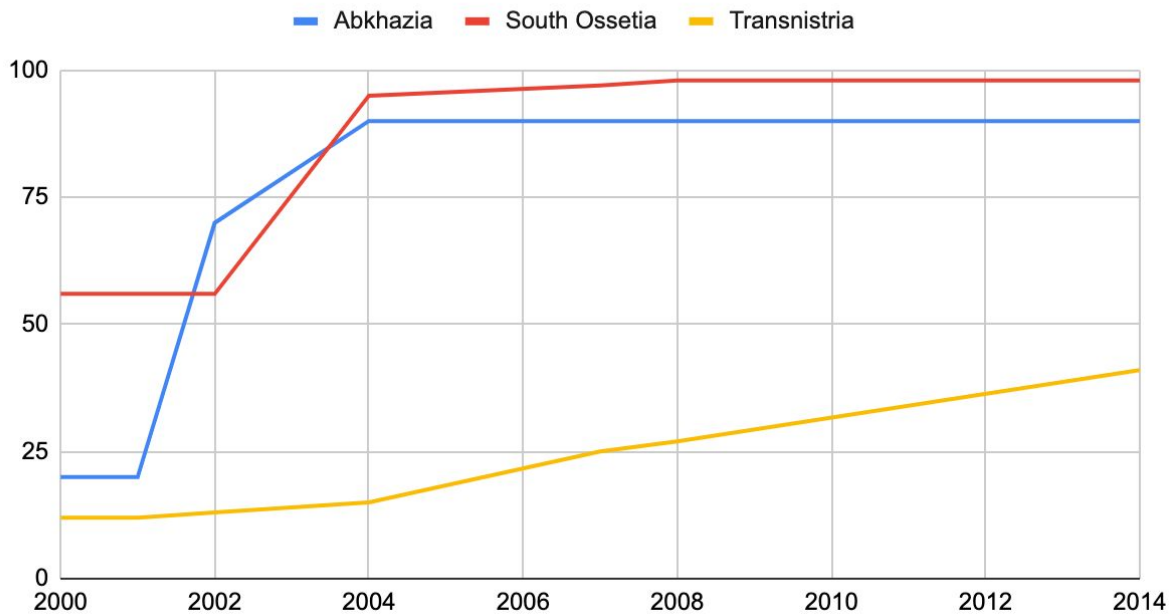
	Abkhazia	South Ossetia	Transnistria
2000	20%	56%	12%
2001	20%	56%	12%
2002	70%	56%	13%
2004	90%	95%	15%
2007	90%	97%	25%
2008	90%	98%	27%
2014	90%	98%	41%

*Table 3: Percentages of citizens with Russian passports in the three breakaway regions.*

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that citizens of the breakaway regions are often allowed dual citizenship, meaning they are not stateless. In Abkhazia, dual citizenship is only allowed with Abkhazian and Russian passports. South Ossetia and Transnistria allow the citizens to be Georgian and Moldovan, respectively (Ganohariti 2020).

## Percentages of Russian citizens 2000-2014



*Graph 2: Percentages of Russian citizens in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria 2000-2014.*

As this table and graph demonstrate, there are some differences in both the speed and scope of passportisation between the three breakaway regions. Most notably, and as is described in section 4.1.3, Transnistria had a significantly slower pace of passportisation, as well as having fewer passports issued overall. This is combined with a lower starting rate of Russian passport holders in the region. South Ossetia has the highest level of passports after passportisation had been conducted, although this may be affected by its higher starting number. Of all three regions, Abkhazia is the one where the number of Russian passport holders increased the most during passportisation. This is further explained for each case below.

### 4.1.1 Abkhazia

Abkhazia declared independence from Georgia in 1992 and gained de facto independence after the war in Abkhazia in 1992-1993. During this time Abkhazian citizens could obtain Russian passports, but not to the same extent as during passportisation (UNPO 2015: 3-4; Kopeček et al 2016: 89). Passportisation subsequently began in Abkhazia in 2002. However,

the rate that passports were being issued was relatively low until 2004, where it increased significantly (Artman 2013: 689-691; Khasig 2002; Nagashima 2019: 187-189). The time frame of interest here is the 6 years from 2002 to when passportisation came to a halt in 2008 (Artman 2013: 690).

Before the start of passportisation in 2002, it is speculated that around 50 000 Abkhazians possessed Russian passports, with an additional 150 000 acquiring passports in June of 2002, bringing the total to 200 000, or 70% of the Abkhazian population (Khasig 2002). Other scholars confirm this speculation, stating that the number of Russian passport holders in Abkhazia was 70 000 or 20% before the inception of passportisation in June 2002. The majority of these people had received their Russian passports shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in the early 1990s. During the month of June, around 8 000 Abkhazians are believed to have received Russian citizenship daily (Nagashima 2019: 188). The rate slowed down somewhat after this, due to new citizenship laws in Russia changing the procedure for applying for citizenship. However, the pace increased again in 2004, and by 2008, 90% of all Abkhazians had become Russian citizens (Artman 2013: 683-684, 690; Kopecek et al 2016: 97). In Abkhazia, passports were issued from several temporary offices in most districts. Russia provided administrative support, which enabled the mass-issuing of Russian citizenship. Moreover, Russia conducted several campaigns to promote Russian passports, as well as facilitated the process for obtaining passports for inhabitants in more remote areas of the breakaway region. This meant that not only the urban parts of Abkhazia were affected by Russia's passportisation policy, but rather that the whole breakaway region was encompassed in the process (Khasig 2002; Littlefield 2009: 1473; Nagashima 2019: 188-189). Most non-ethnic Georgians were positive to passportisation, as it increased opportunities for jobs, travelling and pensions, thus creating benefits that would otherwise be unavailable to the Abkhazian inhabitants (Artman 2013: 690-691). Because passportisation increased the percentage of Russian citizens in Abkhazia with around 70% over 6 years, it is deemed high. Other researchers have also stated that Abkhazian passportisation was high, which confirms this assessment (Artman 2013; Nagashima 2019). Thus, the independent variable for Abkhazia assumes the value high.

#### 4.1.2 South Ossetia

South Ossetia declared independence from Georgia in 1992 and gained de facto independence simultaneously. Passports were issued at this time, but not as systematically as during passportisation (Hoch et al 2014: 54-55; Littlefield 2009: 1465-1466). Passportisation commenced in May 2004 (Artman 2013: 689-691; Littlefield 2009: 1473; Nagashima 2019: 187-189; 194). The time frame that is examined in South Ossetia is the 4 years between 2004-2008, when passportisation stopped (Artman 2013: 690).

In South Ossetia, it is believed that around 56% of the population had Russian passports before passportisation began in 2004 and that the share of Russian citizens in the breakaway region had remained at that level since 2002. This being in spite of the South Ossetian government preparing for passportisation to begin simultaneously with Abkhazia in 2002 (Nagashima 2019: 189). There is still no conclusive answer as to why passportisation began later in South Ossetia than in Abkhazia, but one of the main instigators for it to ultimately start in 2004 was tensions in other separatists regions within Georgia that Russia had not been able to influence as successfully as Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Hence, by passportisation Russia was able to solidify and maintain its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space (Artman 2013: 687-689; Nagashima 2019: 188-189, 193-194). Passportisation in South Ossetia was conducted similarly to in Abkhazia, with administrative offices operating on an ad-hoc basis issuing passports at a fast speed. By mid-June 2004, 80% of South Ossetian citizens had received Russian passports, and by the end of the month this number was at 90%, according to South Ossetian news and statements made by the president of the breakaway region. Ultimately, in September 2004, 98% of South Ossetians were reported to have Russian passports (Artman 2013: 689; Nagashima 2019: 188-189). Although these reports and statements were mainly made by officials from South Ossetia and have to be viewed critically, other sources confirm that at least by 2008 - when the Russo-Georgian war took place - virtually all inhabitants of South Ossetia had become Russian (Artman 2013: 690; de Waal 2019). Since passportisation in South Ossetia increased Russian passport holders with 42% over 4 years, it is considered to be high. South Ossetia's passportisation has been categorised as high by scholars, which confirms the assessment made in this thesis (Artman

2013; Littlefield 2009). Thus, the independent variable for South Ossetia assumes the value high.

#### 4.1.3 Transnistria

Transnistria declared independence from Moldova in 1990 and again in 1991, becoming de facto independent in 1992 after a civil war, although this independence has not been widely recognised (Nagashima 2019: 194; Rogstad 2016: 51). Although some scholars have argued that passportisation as such did not occur in Transnistria, this thesis argues that it did, as discussed in section 3.3. Passports were being issued in Transnistria in the early 1990s, in the same way as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact time that passportisation began in the breakaway region, as sources are conflicting. However, by 2001 it was already occurring (Nagashima 2019: 195). The time frame that is examined in Transnistria is the 13 years between 2001-2014, as this was the main time for passportisation, although it is to some extent still conducted today (Necsutu 2019).

Before the defined start of passportisation in this thesis, 2001, around 65 000 people or 12% of Transnistrian inhabitants had Russian citizenship, which is lower than the equivalents in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. From 2001 to 2004, around 12 000 Transnistrians received Russian passports annually. This is once again significantly lower than in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Nagashima 2019: 195). By 2007, 110 000 inhabitants had acquired Russian passports, while an additional 12 000 were awaiting passports. The pace remained at approximately the same level after this, and in 2014, 200 000 of Transnistria's 480 000 inhabitants possessed Russian passports, and since then the increase has remained slow but steady (Nagashima 2019: 194; Necsutu 2019). In the 10 years from 2004 to 2014 around 10 000 Transnistrians obtained Russian passports per year (Nagashima 2019: 195). Passportisation was conducted slightly differently in Transnistria than in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The main difference is a significantly slower pace of the issuing of passports, which caused the Transnistrian government to voice concerns over Russia's inability to meet the high demand for passports in Transnistria (Nagashima 2019: 195; Necsutu 2019). Moreover, as Transnistria not only has an ethnically Russian population, but also an ethnically Ukrainian population, the rush for foreign passports was not only directed towards Russia, but also



Ukraine (Nagashima 2019: 194). As passportisation increased the number of Transnistrians with Russian passports by 29% over 13 years, it is deemed to be moderately high. The percentage did increase significantly, however the pace was quite slow. Other scholars have found that Transnistria’s passportisation was lower than in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Some have categorised it as low, and some as moderately high (Artman 2013; Littlefield 2009; Nagashima 2019). Based on the assessment made in this thesis, the independent variable for Transnistria assumes the value moderately high.

## 4.2 Relationship

The relationship between Russia and the breakaway regions is examined next. The three indicators to be examined are: if Russia has recognised the breakaway region as an independent state, if the leadership of the breakaway region has expressed a will to join the Russian Federation, and the share of ethnic Russians in the breakaway region. The values that the variable assumes in the three cases is here summarised in a table for clarity.

	Abkhazia	South Ossetia	Transnistria
Recognition	Yes	Yes	No
Will to join the Russian Federation	No	Yes	Yes
Ethnic Russians	9% 2011	1,1% 2015	29,1% 2015

*Table 4: Indicators for the relationship variable across cases.*

### 4.2.1 Abkhazia

Russia recognised Abkhazia as an independent state in August 2008, following the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. In the statement made by then-president Medvedev, he urged other states to follow suit and recognise Abkhazia’s independence from Georgia (Medvedev 2008). As Russia’s declared view on Abkhazia and their relationship is positive, the first indicator is also positive. In turn, Abkhazia and its government has not expressed a wish to join the Russian Federation, but rather to remain independent with support from Russia (de Waal 2019). In interviews with citizens of Abkhazia in 2009, researchers found that 80% of the ethnically Abkhaz wanted to be fully independent rather than part of Russia, the latter only accounting for 20%. The ethnically Russian were a bit more divided, with 60% preferring full

independence and 40% preferring accession to the Russian Federation (Toal & O'Loughlin 2014). Since neither the Abkhazian government or its citizens have expressed a wish to join Russia, the second indicator is negative. The estimated percentage of ethnic Russians in Abkhazia is 9%, according to a 2011 census (Ganohariti 2020: 182). As this is above 7,5%, this indicator is deemed positive. This means that two of the three indicators are positive, making the relationship variable assume the value moderately good.

#### 4.2.2 South Ossetia

Russia recognised South Ossetia as an independent state simultaneously with Abkhazia in August 2008. President Medvedev also urged the international community to recognise South Ossetia as an independent state, highlighting the humanitarian significance of the act (Medvedev 2008). This means that the first indicator is positive. The South Ossetian leadership has expressed a wish to accede into the Russian Federation, mainly citing that this would ensure that they could keep their culture and be protected against Georgian nationalism (Littlefield 2009: 1465-1466). The will to join Russia largely stems from the wish to reunite with North Ossetia, a region in the Russian Federation that is, as South Ossetia, inhabited by Ossetian people (de Waal 2018: 10; Hoch et al 2014: 56-57). There is a notable animosity from South Ossetians towards Georgia, and some inhabitants have stated that they would prefer to be stateless than to be Georgian (Artman 2013: 688; Littlefield 2009: 1473). Due to this expressed wish to be a part of the Russian Federation, the second indicator is also positive. South Ossetia has a low number of ethnic Russians. According to the 2015 census held in the breakaway region, it was 1,1%. Despite this, the largest ethnic group are Ossetians, a people who, as mentioned above, also live in the Russian region North Ossetia. The ethnic ties to Russia could be argued to stem from this ethnic group rather than from ethnic Russians (Hoch et al 2014: 56-57). Even though the third indicator is technically negative, as the percentage of ethnic Russians is lower than 7,5%, one should keep in mind that the main will for South Ossetians is not to unite with Russians, but with other Ossetians belonging to Russia. However, as South Ossetia has two positive indicators and one negative, the relationship assumes the value moderately good. It is still worth noting that the value could be argued to be good if one were to argue that ethnic Ossetians replaces ethnic Russians in this instance. In this thesis, though, this is not done.

### 4.2.3 Transnistria

Russia has not recognised Transnistria as an independent state and has not shared any plans to do so in the near future (de Waal 2018: 2; Kolstø 2014; Rogstad 2016: 52). In contrast, Russia has openly declared that Transnistria should not gain independence from Moldova (Cooley 2017: 3; Nagashima 2019: 196). Therefore, the first indicator is negative. Meanwhile, Transnistrian citizens have expressed a wish for accession into the Russian Federation. This is most evident in their 2006 referendum where 97% of voters, within the 77% turnout, voted in favour of gaining independence from Moldova and subsequently joining the Russian Federation (Kolstø 2014; Herd 2007: 99). The leadership of the breakaway region has also expressed these wishes, both demonstrated by organising the 2006 referendum and by expressing wishes for Moscow to accept the referendum and its results (Herd 2007: 99-100). Thus, the second indicator is positive. According to the 2015 Transnistrian census, Russians were the largest ethnic group, making up 29,1% of the total population in the breakaway region (Dostál & Jelen 2015: 758; Ganohariti 2020: 182; Nagashima 2019: 194). As this is higher than 7,5%, the third indicator for Transnistria is positive. Since Transnistria has one negative and two positive indicators, the relationship variable assumes the value moderately good.

## 4.3 Brain Drain

Brain drain in the breakaway regions is examined in this section. The indicators to be measured are population, median age and the share of doctors and teachers, as discussed in the methods section 3.3. A table summarising the values assumed for each case is presented here, once again to provide clarity.

	Abkhazia	South Ossetia	Transnistria
Population	-5,7% to -16,3% or +11,6%	-28,6% to -57,2%	-14,3%
Median age	+ 3 years	+ 3 years	+ 3,2 years
Doctors & teachers	decrease	decrease	decrease

*Table 4: Indicators for the brain drain variable across cases.*

### 4.3.1 Abkhazia

There are some contradicting statistics on the population size in Abkhazia. In the 2003 census carried out by Abkhazia, the population was reported to be around 215 000 (Ó Beacháin 2016: 217). However, a Georgian census found that the Abkhazian population was only 179 000 in 2003 and 178 000 in 2005. An estimate made by the International Crisis Group found the Abkhazian population to be between 157 000 and 190 000 in 2006. Thus, there is a clear discrepancy between different sources (Hakkert 2017: 3). The Abkhazian population was reported to be 240 000 in 2011 according to an Abkhazian census, although Georgian authorities have once again stated this estimate to be too high (O'Loughlin et al 2014: 433). Estimates from UNDP indicate that 220 000 people lived in either Abkhazia or South Ossetia in 2011, with most likely 150 000 to 170 000 of them residing in Abkhazia (Hakkert 2017: 3). As this shows, it is difficult to say what the population actually is, as the local estimates differ greatly from external estimates. However, by the Abkhazian estimates, the population has increased with 11,6% from 2003 to 2011. By the UNDP and ICG estimates the population has instead decreased with between 5,7% to 16,3% in the same time span (Hakkert 2017: 3; Ó Beacháin 2016: 217; O'Loughlin et al 2014: 433). Judging by the Abkhazian estimates, the first indicator is low, and judging by the external estimates its average would be moderately high at 11%.

It is difficult to assess to what exact extent the Abkhazian demographics have been affected by passportisation, as there is not much available data reporting on it. However, the attitude among the Abkhazian youth appears to be a scepticism towards Georgia, with many youths seeing emigration to Russia as the best option for obtaining an education. Despite this, there have been some peacemaking efforts towards Georgia on a grassroots level (Lagurashvili 2016). Although there is a lack of credible data over the median age and share of young people in Abkhazia, there is data over these indicators in Georgia as a whole, which can still provide some indication over the changes in the breakaway region. In Georgian censuses from 2002 and 2014, one can see a decrease in the number of citizens in the 20-29 age groups, even though the overall population has increased during the same time period. Moreover, the median age has increased from 34,5 to 37,7 in the 12 years (Hakkert 2017:

5-7). The UN data covering roughly the same time period shows that the median age in Georgia, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia, increased from 35,0 in 2005 to 38,0 in 2015, meaning that the increase is 3,0 years over 10 years (UN 2017: 323). Thus, this indicator is high. The Abkhazian teachers and doctors have become fewer since the start of passportisation (Hammarberg & Grono 2017: 33, 43-44). Doctors in the breakaway region are struggling with under-funding and low salaries, which could increase the incentives to leave Abkhazia. Moreover, many Abkhazian inhabitants would, if possible, travel to Georgia or Russia to seek health care instead (Hammarberg & Grono 2017: 43-44). Already before passportisation began, the breakaway region lacked medical staff, as the non-Abkhazian doctors and nurses had been forced to leave the territory during the 1992 independence, and have not been replaced (MSF 2002: 10-11). There is also a lack of both educational resources and educational staff which makes it difficult for children in the breakaway region to obtain a sufficient education. The teachers that remain in Abkhazia often have low qualifications which further complicates education (Hammarberg & Grono 2017: 8-9, 33-37). This means that the third indicator is positive.

Despite the conflicting numbers on the Abkhazian population changes, one can see trends in their emigration patterns. The Abkhazian migrants appear to have emigrated mainly to Russia, and not to other states to the same extent (Minority Rights Group International 2008; State Commission on Migration Issues 2015: 12). To summarise, as the first indicator is moderately high according to external data, the second indicator is high, and the third indicator is positive, Abkhazia has a moderately high brain drain. If one were to look at the internal data for the first indicator, this would instead be low, ultimately making Abkhazia's brain drain low.

#### 4.3.2 South Ossetia

The South Ossetian population has decreased since passportisation began, although there is some difficulty in determining the exact number. The South Ossetian population is most often estimated to have been 70 000 before passportisation, in 2004 (Hakkert 2017: 3). In 2014 the population estimate was between 30 000 and 50 000, which means a decrease of between 20 000 and 40 000 people (O'Loughlin et al 2014: 426-427). Based on these numbers, the South

Ossetian population decreased between 28,6% and 57,2% from 2004 to 2014 (Hakkert 2017:3; O'Loughlin et al 2014: 426-427). As both these numbers are higher than 15%, the first indicator is high. South Ossetian demographics have also changed since passportisation. Young people have been leaving the breakaway region for better prospects (Yanovskaya 2018). The same data for Georgia in its entirety that was used for Abkhazia can be used for South Ossetia, meaning that the demographic changes would be roughly the same, with an increase in the median age of 3,2 years from 2002 to 2014 and 3,0 years from 2005 to 2015 (Hakkert 2017: 5-7; UN 2017: 323). This makes the second indicator high.

Shares of both doctors and teachers have declined since passportisation began, although they may have been low to begin with (Tskhurbayev 2007). The number of medical staff and doctors has been low since the decline after South Ossetia's de facto independence, and most citizens travel to North Ossetia or Georgia to receive medical attention if possible (Tskhurbayev 2007). Moreover, the share of teachers declined and some South Ossetian children have instead gone to North Ossetia to receive an education. Additionally, Georgian teachers previously working in the breakaway region have been forced to leave, which further decreases the number of educators in South Ossetia (Edwards 2017). This means that the third indicator is positive. Many South Ossetians have migrated to North Ossetia for better life and employment opportunities (de Waal 2014). Data from the Georgian government on the overall migration patterns of the state, including South Ossetia, shows that the vast majority of migrants emigrate to Russia (State Commission on Migration Issues 2015: 12). Hence, the majority have migrated to Russia, and not other states. To summarise, as the first and second indicators are high, and the third indicator is positive, South Ossetia has had a high brain drain.

### 4.3.3 Transnistria

The population of Transnistria has been affected by passportisation. According to the 2004 and 2015 censuses conducted by the Transnistrian government, the population size has changed in the breakaway region. In 2004, the population of Transnistria was 555 347, while having decreased to 475 665 in 2015 (PMR Gov 2016; Ostavnaia 2017: 17). Thus, there has been a 14,3% decrease in population during those 11 years (IOM Moldova 2017: 11). This

means that the first indicator is moderately high, as it is more than 10% but less than 15%. The Transnistrian youth has decreased since passportisation, and the attitude among Transnistrian youth appears to be that they would rather have a low-skilled job in Russia, than look for employment in, for example, the Transnistrian civil service sector (Lungu 2016). Transnistrian youths are also seeking higher education abroad, both in Russia and Ukraine, with the majority not returning to the breakaway region after graduating (IOM Moldova 2017: 24). Although there is a lack of data on the exact changes in average age, one can look at the overall trend in Moldova as a whole, including Transnistria. There, the median age has increased from 32,4 in 2005 to 35,6 in 2015. This means an increase of 3,2 years over 10 years (UN 2017: 627-628). This makes the second indicator high.

Doctors and other medical staff have decreased in Transnistria as a result of emigration and are especially low in the rural areas of the breakaway region. Although there are no exact numbers to illustrate the decrease due to a lack of surveys being carried out, reports on the Transnistrian healthcare still point to a trend in the emigration of doctors (IOM Moldova 2017: 50; Ostavnaia 2017: 27). The share of teachers is also decreasing annually, mostly due to emigration. The main incentive for educators to emigrate is the low wages offered in Transnistria and the possibility to make a better living abroad (IOM Moldova 2017: 48-49). This means that the third indicator is positive.

There is some conflicting information on where Transnistrian citizens emigrate to, as many do not declare their intended destination or temporarily stay in Moldova or Ukraine before continuing to their final destination (IOM Moldova 2017: 17). However, in interviews conducted, 61,4% of Transnistrian citizens responded that they would prefer to work in Russia, above other states outside of Transnistria and Moldova. The majority of the respondents had family members or relatives working in Russia, above other states (IOM Moldova 2017: 18). Of those who declared to have emigrated to Russia, 56% were ethnically Russian and 90,4% of the same emigrants possessed Russian citizenship (Ostavnaia 2017: 163). This would indicate that passportisation has facilitated their migration, since they would benefit from more opportunities and possibilities to emigrate to Russia than if they had to obtain visas and work permits. As the first indicator is moderately high, the second is high and the third is positive, Transnistria has had a moderately high brain drain.

## 5. Discussion

This section interprets and discusses the results presented and analysed in section 4, connecting them to the theoretical framework described in section 2.3.

Based on the findings in 4.1, passportisation was high and fast-paced in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while being lower and slower-paced in Transnistria, despite the high demand for Russian passports. This difference possibly has geopolitical motives, as Russia did not perceive Transnistria as equally important to include in its sphere of influence as Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The geographical position of Transnistria may also have affected the number of resources that Russia was willing to spend there, as it is not directly bordering Russia, but Ukraine instead. Furthermore, perhaps Russia would rather focus its strategies for influence and hegemonic power on Moldova as a whole, instead of limiting its influence to Transnistria only. Restricting the passportisation in Transnistria may have been a strategy to win over Moldova (Kolstø 2014; Nagashima 2019: 194-196; Rogstad 2016: 18-21). The findings show that passportisation was conducted similarly in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with many administrative offices operating on an ad-hoc basis around the breakaway regions. The efforts there were extensive and targeted both the urban and rural areas of the breakaway regions. In Transnistria, there were also administrative offices, but far fewer and with less administrative support from Russia. Passportisation has been conducted in spite of criticism from the international community, as mentioned in section 1, and continued to drain the breakaway regions of their highly skilled and educated citizens, as shown in section 4.3. Weakening surrounding de facto states and enhancing their ties to Russia appears to be a geopolitical strategy as it cements Russia as the clear hegemon in the region and maintains the control it has over its sphere of influence. This would indicate that passportisation is a manifestation of spheres of influence and hegemonic power.

The findings in 4.2 show that the relationship between Russia and the breakaway regions varies, with Abkhazia having a moderately good relationship with Russia, while both South Ossetia and Transnistria have good relationships with the patron state. The reasoning for Russia not to recognise Transnistria's independence may be the same as the reasoning for restricting the passportisation in the breakaway region, as this would appeal to Moldova as a



whole and possibly improve the relationship between Chisinau and Moscow. Thus, it would be a strategy to secure influence and power over Moldova (Kolstø 2014; Nagashima 2019: 194-196). Abkhazia not wanting to accede into the Russian Federation despite having a high level of ethnic Russians, but still receiving Russian support, could indicate that Russia does not view accession as necessary for maintaining hegemonic power and control over the region (Morozova 2018: 372-373; Szostek 2017: 571).

The results presented in section 4.3 demonstrate that brain drain is the highest in South Ossetia, while being moderately high in Transnistria and either moderately high or low in Abkhazia depending on externally or internally reported data. As passportisation was higher in South Ossetia than Transnistria, and the relationship is good in both, it can explain why brain drain was high in South Ossetia and only moderately high in Transnistria. Concerning the conflicting results for Abkhazia, one needs to assess which data can be deemed more reliable. It is worth to note that internal reportings could be seen as more reliable since they are not subject to external bias, and the internal censuses may have more access to the entirety of the breakaway region. However, there may be reason for bias there as well, as Abkhazia may benefit from claiming to have a larger population and a population growth rather than a decline. This could strengthen Abkhazia's position in the Eastern Neighbourhood, and make it appear more legitimate as a sovereign state than if its population were significantly smaller and decreasing. Overstating the population numbers may, therefore, be a geopolitical strategy to gain legitimacy and agency. The external reportings from UNDP, on the other hand, are confirmed by Georgian reportings who claim that Abkhazia's census results are likely overstated. Moreover, the UNDP may have less to gain from distorting the population numbers, as it does not necessarily have a direct geopolitical interest in the region as such (Hakkert 2017: 3). Due to this reasoning, this thesis views the external data on Abkhazia's population as more credible than the internal data, most notably since it is confirmed by more than one source. This would mean that Abkhazia's brain drain is moderately high. This means that it is the same as in Transnistria while being lower than in South Ossetia, which would further align with the thesis argument. As passportisation in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia is high, it appears to be the variation in the relationship - with Abkhazia's being moderately good and South Ossetia's being good - that affects brain drain. For the comparison between Abkhazia and Transnistria, it seems that if passportisation and

the relationship do not both assume the highest value, brain drain will not be high either. Thus, both the independent and the intervening variable need to assume the highest value for the dependent variable to assume the value high as well. This would strengthen the argument that passportisation does, in fact, lead to brain drain, and that it is increased by the relationship between the breakaway regions and the patron state Russia. Furthermore, as the majority of migrants from all three breakaway regions emigrate to Russia over other states, the patron state benefits from human capital and is thus further strengthened.

Russia's declared humanitarian motives can be seen in several instances. One is Russia's declared reasoning for recognising Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, highlighting the need for recognition to save human lives (Medvedev 2008). However, the way passportisation was conducted, especially in Transnistria, indicates that the policy was not founded on a humanitarian basis, but rather to gain power and influence. As Transnistria is the case with the highest share of ethnic Russians - which Russia has declared they want to protect - this region should, based on this logic alone, have been subject to the highest rate of passportisation. This, combined with several pleas to Russia to increase the capacity for passportisation, indicates that the share of Russian passport holders could have increased far more than it did during passportisation, provided that Russia had increased its administrative efforts. One could speculate that Russia did not perceive a geopolitical advantage in making a higher percentage of Transnistrian inhabitants become Russian citizens. Instead, Russia used passportisation as a means for exerting power, by creating or removing offices as incentives and reprimands for Transnistria depending on how their actions aligned with Russia's plans (Ambrosio & Vandrovec 2013: 453-454, 460; Kolstø 2014; Nagashima 2019: 195).

The findings ultimately demonstrate that brain drain has occurred in the breakaway regions and increased at the same time as passportisation has occurred. Moreover, brain drain appears to increase when the relationship between Russia and the breakaway regions is good and decrease when the relationship is poorer. Likely other factors not explored in this thesis are affecting the outcome, and further research would be needed to examine these. Hence, it is not possible to say with complete certainty that the phenomena have a direct causal relationship. However, the correlation between them is evident, as graph 2 demonstrated above in section 4. This leads on to the conclusions of the thesis.

## 6. Conclusions

This section presents the conclusions of the thesis, and suggests future research on the topic.

This thesis has several findings relating back to the research questions. It has found that Russia's passportisation policy is likely motivated by geopolitics, most notably by spheres of influence and hegemonic power, and not by humanitarian concerns for the citizens of the breakaway regions. As discussed in sections 4 and 5, how passportisation was conducted aligns more with strategies of influence and power, and less with humanitarian motives. As passportisation has led to a weakening of the breakaway regions in terms of skilled and educated citizens, and continues to be conducted in spite of this, Russia does not appear to be concerned with the development of the breakaway regions. This would argue against Russia's declared humanitarian motives, and instead support the theoretical arguments of this thesis.

To answer the initial research questions, this thesis concludes that Russia used passportisation as a geopolitical strategy to maintain its hegemonic power and uphold its sphere of influence in the Eastern Neighbourhood. This thesis also concludes that passportisation has led to brain drain in the Eastern European and South Caucasian breakaway regions. The correlation between the two phenomena has further been facilitated by the relationship between Russia and the breakaway regions, as a lack in the relationship caused a lower brain drain, even when passportisation was high. As discussed in section 5, South Ossetia is the breakaway region where brain drain is the highest, while also being the region where passportisation and the relationship were the highest. Abkhazia and Transnistria both had a moderately high brain drain, with Abkhazia lacking in the relationship and Transnistria lacking in passportisation. This means that the initial hypotheses presented in 2.4 have been confirmed.

This thesis has mainly made an empirical contribution to the field of brain drain and passportisation by examining the correlation between them and expanding on the existing research. As brain drain has not been widely studied in the Eastern Neighbourhood, this thesis has contributed to that field by examining the phenomenon in a different region. However, this thesis has also made a theoretical contribution by further demonstrating that power and influence can take on many distinct forms, not only as war or direct power

politics, but also as more soft power and persuasive strategies to gain human capital and weaken other states.

## 6.1 Future Research

This thesis opens up for further research on the topic. It would be useful to investigate passportisation and brain drain in the breakaway regions Donetsk and Luhansk in Ukraine, once passportisation has stopped and its effects can be seen more clearly. This would help test the hypothesis and theory more accurately, as it would include more cases. These findings could also be used to identify possible new regions where passportisation may occur, by testing other potential cases and examining what characteristics a state/region typically possesses for passportisation to be likely to occur. Future research could also investigate other effects of passportisation in the breakaway regions examined here, such as democracy and sovereignty. This would increase the understanding of passportisation and how it affects the regions where it occurs. This would contribute to the field of passportisation, which is, as stated in the introduction, under-researched.

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