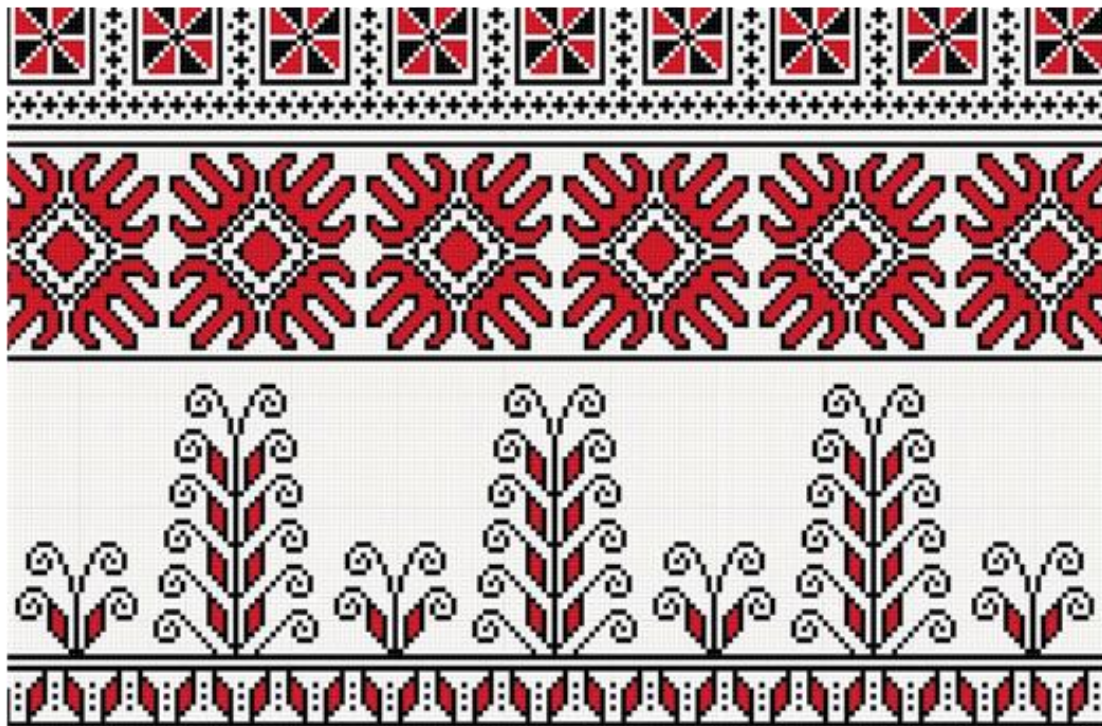# NATIONAL & KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

MASTER'S DEGREE IN SOUTHEAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

THESIS TITLE:

MOLDOVAN NATIONALISM: BETWEEN ROMANIA AND RUSSIA

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Every hour, every minute, every second...

Every sigh, every indignation, every disappointment

I have experienced while working on this thesis is dedicated to every poor

and every orphaned child from Moldova.

Abstract:

The purpose of this dissertation is to follow the thread of the evolution of the national identity of the citizens of modern Republic of Moldova. Moldovan national identity is placed between the process of Russification and the construction of the Moldovan national identity on the one hand, and the Romanian inheritance of the region as a former part of Romanian –speaking principalities on the other. These constructing and deconstructing identities did not allow to a single and strong national identity to emerge. Cultural identification is marked by an ongoing competition between two elites. The core of the ethno-political conflict in Moldova is about emancipation of the cultural majority in front of the previously dominating minority.

Key words: Bessarabia, Romania, national identity, soviet legacies, Russia

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Introduction

The existence and development of a nationalism ideology presupposes the existence of a nation and its need to differentiate itself within the geographical boundaries that determine the span of the homeland in which it resides and develops. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, even the Moldovan nation's existence, is still in question. A succession of constructing and deconstructing identities imposed did not allow to the inhabitants of this land to develop a single, strong national identity. The discussions on the Moldovan national identity are placed between the process of Russification by the Russian Empire and its refinement by the Soviets who began the project of constructing a Moldovan nation on the one hand, and the Romanian inheritance of the region as a former part of the Romanian –speaking principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, on the other.

The Republic of Moldova became for the first time a self-governed and independent state just a quarter of the century ago, however it inherited from the Soviet Union a number of serious challenges rooted in the cultural and ethnic make-up of its population. Constructing a nation from what used to be the ethnically and culturally diverse population of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic has proved to be a difficult process, which was taking place simultaneously with other major social transformations. Moreover, according to Lee Dutter a nation state in order to be classified as such is necessary to be distinguished by three features: its geographic area should be bounded, it has to have a centralized and institutionalized governmental structure and an ethnically and culturally homogenous population. The Republic of Moldova can be said as having only the first one of them, although even this is disputed.

There are three potential starting points that may serve as the basis of the discussion about the Moldovan national identity. The Romanian past of Bessarabia is the first one. The second potential starting point is the creation of the MSSR and the construction of the Moldovan national identity by the Soviets. The third point is the year of 1991. Constructing and de-constructing identities may eventually have led to the emergence of a new national identity in Moldova. The devotees of the new identity leave both the Romanian and Russian/ Soviet pasts of the country on

the dusty and shelves of history, focusing on the mold of the Moldovan people's dishes. An inclusive statement about Moldova's nationalism and nation-building process by definition requires the inclusion of all three starting points. The purpose of the dissertation is not to examine the capacity of the Moldovan state apparatus, nor to highlight the reasons why Moldova is the poorest country in Europe. The purpose of this dissertation is to follow the thread of the evolution of the national identity of the citizens of modern Republic of Moldova.

The dissertation consists of two parts. The first one is divided into two chapters. The first one introduces the reader to the concepts of *nationalism* and *nation,* additionally, the main differences about how these concepts were perceived in Western and Eastern Europe are presented. The second chapter offers a panorama of how the Romanian national identity was formulated and how the Romanian nationalism developed itself. The second part is also divided into two chapters. The third chapter focuses on the soviet approach to nationalities and on the construction of the Moldovan national identity by the Soviets. Furthermore, the struggle for independence after the collapse of the USSR is being presented along with the national re-awakening of the Moldovans in the early 1980's. Finally, the fourth chapter underlines the need of Moldova to develop as single and strong identity in order to secure a safer future.

"In itself, every idea is neutral, or should be; but man animates ideas, projects his flames and flaws into them; impure, transformed into beliefs, ideas take their place in time, take shape as *events*: the trajectory is complete, from logic to epilepsy . . . whence the birth of ideologies, doctrines, deadly games."

— Emil M. Cioran, a Short History of Decay

"Nationalism is both a vital medicine and a dangerous drug"

- Geoffrey Blainey

The world history is full of ideologies and doctrines. They served as reasons and causes for almost every human warfare by triggering the competition between individuals and groups. Every system of beliefs and values steps over the previous one, it rejects some of its elements and integrates and assimilates some others. Our history consists of many layers each one with its own tensions and tones, colors and flaws. Since the disintegration of the Charlemagne Empire in Western Europe and the fall of the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Europe, the whole European continent seems to be divided into nation-states and nations aspiring to develop into nation-states. So when and why did this new layer of human history started to form itself?

The 18th century gave birth to one of the most powerful ideologies, to nationalism, *an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity of a human population, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential "nation"*. (Smith's, 1996) Nationalism houses the need and the intention to fight for the attainment and the maintenance of the *autonomy, unity and identity of a human population.* The struggle for autonomy suggests that this population was or remains a part of a larger population and a larger political formation. The need for unity implies that across the larger political formation there might be members of the specific human population and hence they should be all united. Once autonomy and unity are achieved the struggle for the maintenance of the identity begins. *Some of whose members*, who are they and what needs and/or intentions motivate them to form these ideas? In the majority of the cases they are members of the intelligentsia, which appears as perhaps the only social constant of nationalism.

Smith defines a *nation* as a "*named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and memories, a mass public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members.* (Smith's, 1996) Ernest Renan suggests that: "*A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle*". (Renan, 1990)It shares its common past and memories and its desire to continue to exist as a nation, however it does possess a political and territorial element. A state, on the other hand, is primarily a political construction. The nation as the modern state is a territorial unit and requires for its full realization and expression a recognized homeland which belongs to it due to a historic association and origin. Nationalism aspires first to develop a nation into a nation-state, and after the formation of it, nationalism strives to maintain and develop the nation- state. The lack of temporal and spatial fit between a state and a nation is one of the major causes of today's national conflicts.

For the majority of post-war scholars, nations and nationalisms are recent phenomena which arose immediately after the French Revolution. The modern era brought to light new questions and concerns and nor religion or other system of beliefs were capable of giving answers anymore. In the 18th century the man started to respect his individuality, he had a great idea of his own rights and he felt ready to act according to this new image of him. Ernest Gellner suggests that nations are not only relatively recent but he also locates the genealogy of the nation in the requirements of the modernity. (Gellner's, 1996) To the antipode there is the primordial theory according to which what the world witnessed in the 18th century was the re-awakening of the nations that had existed for many centuries. (Smith's, 1996) Whereas the modernists have to explain what events led to the birth and the creation of the nations, the primordialists have to explain why the nations "woke up" during that period.

Although Antony Smith also categorizes nations and nationalism as modern phenomena, he also introduces the ethno-symbolic approach which emphasizes the significant role of memories, myths, values and symbols. (Smith, 2009) Its contribution is located between the modernist theories defending the recent nature of nations and nationalism and the perennialist theories emphasizing the permanence of the nations. Smith tracks the origins of nations and national identity in the ethnic identity, a pre-modern form of collective cultural identity. The latter does not refer to a uniformity of elements over generations, but to a sense of continuity and shared memories. Although ethno- symbolism focuses on the cultural aspect of nations, it is not "apolitical". The myths, symbols, heroes and the traditions which this approach studies constitute the key elements of any nationalist doctrine.

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The nature of nations and nationalism remains a highly debatable issue. Debating about such an elusive phenomenon is always interesting but not always fruitful. Perhaps it is more important to understand the reasons that made nationalism such a powerful ideology. First of all it does not need a specific social class in order to emerge, only the intelligentsia appears to be necessary. Secondly, diversity in the social composition of its supporters also makes nationalism so powerful and its spread so easy. Furthermore, this kind of diversity is accompanied by the idea that all members of the national community are theoretically equal participants of it and the masses are invited in this way into history by incorporating the individuals as historic agents. Thus, egalitarianism contributes to nationalism's strength and persistence. Another important element is its plasticity and the ability to intertwine with so many different political ideologies. (Lekkas, 1996)

Chapter 1.b

Nationalism in Eastern Europe

In the broad field of communist and soviet studies, nationalism was an under-conceptualized topic. Observers who were interested in nationality issues of the area either focused on rather narrow ethnographic or minority topics, or engaged in grand political scenarios. This changed dramatically in the late 1980s. The televised role of popular movements in the last days of communism, the break-up of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and the regained national sovereignty of the East European states brought nationalism back on the agenda. (Muller & Pickel, 2007)

The collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and in the countries of Soviet Union's area, brought to the resurrection of nationalism. Although this process was common to all the East European countries, it differed on the views of how these nationalistic aspirations had turned into political actions and into relations among nationalities. The conflicts between opposite interests in some cases, as in Estonia, found a pacific solution, in others, as in the war of Yugoslavia, caused a real devastation, in some others, as Moldova, they provoked violence and division of territories, *de facto* before than *de jure.*

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As Hobsbawm underlines, in English political thought, the term "nation" was assimilated to the concept of *"people"* and *"State",* this kind of nationalism is called "territorial nationalism" and it is typical of countries as England and France. (Hobsbawm, 1992)The French nationalism, more than the English one, influenced the European political thought, nonetheless, this influence brought also negative effects, as notices Hanna Arendt, because the national idea was really different in those societies in which it remained an "*unarticulated ethnic consciousness*" and in which there was not a consolidated identity among territory, population and State. (Arendt, 1958)

Whereas in the western European countries we are talking about a kind of nationalism that Hans Kohn calls "western territorialism", in the central-eastern Europe we discussing about "ethnic nationalism" (Shulman, 2002), which is based on principles based on the common-blood origins, common culture and language. That is what Hanna Arendt called "*forms of tribal nationalism"*. (Arendt, 1958)Thus, the nation is not considered the territory limited by borders, but all the contexts in which the members of the "tribe" could have lived. So, the affirmation of the principle of ethnic and cultural homogeneity as the base of the state-legitimization would have necessary brought dramatic effects.

In view of the process of secularization, the loss of legitimization of traditional political power and the social conflicts generated by industrialization, the nationalistic development of State, that favored social cohesion in western countries, got into contradiction with the multicultural and multi-ethnical great Empires. Pan-nationalists didn't bring on the irredentist claims of the 19th century's nationalism, but aimed to overstep the limits of national borders and to construct a *people's community* with the same destiny and with the same political message.

An attempt of overstepping the problem of "territory" was made by the theory of *"nationalism without territory"*. Bauer, refusing the romantic conception of "spirit of people", refers to the cultural autonomy of community. (Smith, et al., 2001)He considered community as a whole of persons interacting each other, who elaborated their own communications' code and a specific interpretation of world. Nationality is not the result of a biologic and racial belonging but of a common history that passes on customs and beliefs, which are going to become inner. It's a sort of cultural nationalism without territory. Nations can be countless because they are not subject to those spatial limits which, in any case, would determine their numbers. So, nationalities become

communities culturally autonomous but subjects to the same institutions and supporting the same interests.

The conception of nationalism without territory had a great fortune in all the socialist parties and in some countries of Eastern Europe, because it seemed to offer the way to overstep the contradictions between the nationalistic conflicts and the internationalism of class' conflict. Even Lenin, who firstly opposed the idea of a federal party structured in order to represent the different national identities, after 1905 changed his mind and realized that from the nationalistic conflicts could come the necessary aid to the success of proletarian revolution. (Stalin, 1913)Adopting a classification and a hierarchy of nationalities, the Soviet Communist Party tried to make together two contradictory elements: the principle of nationality and the internationalism of the class war.

The collapse of Communism and the internationalist ideology ended up by saving, in all the ex-communist's influence countries, that national belonging as the sole element of historical continuity. The terrible crisis that involved, with the burning out of collectivistic system, all the ex-communist countries, was not only an economic crisis, because it involved also the construction of a system of values and a legislative order. It was a deep crisis that brought to searching a national identity that could favor the self-recognizing and the self-evaluation.

Moldova is the only successor state in which the indigenous population can identify with a nation outside the former Soviet Union. The dilemma of Moldovan identity is best exemplified by a lack of consensus even as to the *name* of the state language – referred to either as 'Romanian' or 'Moldovan'. This largely reflects Moldova's position between Romania and Russia, which have both laid claims on the territory of Moldova. The main societal polarization is found between the speakers of Russian and of the state language, Romanian/Moldovan. The Soviet official discourse treated 'Moldovan' as a separate language from Romanian. Although the issue of a possible separate Moldovan language is still contested, it has been argued that 'Moldovan' is merely a form of diglossia, and that the Moldovan language is virtually indistinguishable from Romanian. The only discernible difference during the Soviet period was the alphabet – Cyrillic in the case of 'Moldovan', Latin for Romanian. As the other commonly used language in Moldova is Russian, Moldova does not have a unique linguistic identity that can differentiate it from other (nation-)states.

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A succession of constructing and deconstructing identities imposed did not allow to the inhabitants of this land to develop a single, strong national identity. The land has gone through two centuries of overlapping and intermittent Russian and Romanian control: the Russian authorities in the 19th century constructed a national identity, which was perfected by the Soviets during the next century, and the Romanian national identity which emerged at the end of the 19th century, reached its peak when Moldova was united with Romania in the interwar and reappeared in the 1980's while Moldova was still under soviet control. It was the intellectuals who embraced nationalism both in Russian Bessarabia and later in soviet Moldova. Unlike the more linear case of emergence of nationalism, Moldova has seen a rather angular trajectory of nationalism. Being passed back and forth from government to government has stripped the Moldovan people of any collective identity which they once had.

To you

Chapter 2.a

Bessarabia as part of the Romanian principalities

The mouth of the Danube River during the 14th century was a frontier zone. The Byzantine authority over the lower reaches of the Danube was threatened by the Tatar presence north of the Delta. The Genoese were periodically in conflict with the Tatars in the Kipchak since their settlements and colonies were in ports whose hinterlands were subject to Tatar authority. In the immediate area of the lower Danube the rival claims of the emerging principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, coupled with the ambitions of successive local rulers to the south, complicated the equation of power and interest. The Genoese founding fortified commercial outposts on the Dniester in the 14th century paved the way for contact with Western culture, but Bessarabia's development depended on the rise of the principalities of Moldavia and Walachia which soon expanded to include the territory. (Cojocaru, 2015)

The history of the Moldavian people is characterized by numerous annexations, acquisitions, and invasions. This dates back to the end of the 14th century when the southern portion of the region became part of Wallachia, and during the next century the entire province was incorporated into the principality of Moldavia. The latter was founded by a group of Vlachs led by Dragoş, who emigrated eastward from Maramureş in the Hungarian-controlled Carpathian Mountains. Moldavia achieved its independence in approximately 1349 under its prince, Bogdan. At its greatest extent, the principality included Bessarabia and was bounded on the north and northeast by the Dniester River on the south by the Black Sea, Dobruja and Walachia, and on the west by Transylvania. The new principality successfully resisted pressures from Hungary and

Poland, and, under Prince Stephen IV the Great, it also tried to defend its independence against Turkish encroachments. (Cojocaru, 2015)

However, by the middle of the 16th century Moldavia had become an autonomous, tribute-paying vassal-state of the Ottoman Empire. Shortly thereafter the Turks invaded and captured Ackermann and Chilia (1484) and annexed the southern portion of Bessarabia, dividing it into two sancaks (districts) of the Ottoman Empire. For the next 300 years the principality remained subject to the Turks, except for a few brief periods when Moldavia rejected Turkish domination—e.g. when Michael the Brave, prince of Walachia, united his principality with Moldavia and Transylvania in 1600. The Turks dominated Moldavia's markets and often had a decisive voice in selecting its princes. Initially the princes came from among the native dynasty but after 1711 from the Phanariotes, as Greeks had acquired great economic and political power in the Ottoman Empire.

During the 18th century, although Moldavia remained nominally subject to the Ottoman Empire, Russian influence in the principality increased. In the periods of hostility between Russia and Turkey (1806-1812), the main object of Russian expansion was the area later known as Romania—the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Walachia. At this time, the national spirit in Eastern Moldavia/Bessarabia was "weak", self-interest of family or class were more important. In 1812 Moldavia was partitioned between Russia and Turkey: the eastern half, under the name of Bessarabia, was annexed to Russia.

The Russian administration had at first been liberal as it tried to make the Russian rule attractive for Christian Orthodox peoples of the Balkans. Autonomy had been granted in 1818 and had remained in force until 1828. A Moldavian boyar had been made governor and a Moldavian archbishop installed. Although Bessarabia was one of the richest parts of the Moldavian land, many people left the region because of the growing Russian presence in the region and because they were fearing the introduction of serfdom. The migration stopped in 1856 when Russia was forced to leave the region and the Treaty of Paris in 1856 restored southern Bessarabia, at that time divided into three districts, Ismail, Kagul or Cahul and Bolgrad to Moldavia. (Cojocaru, 2015)

After the Crimean war and Russia's defeat, the rebellion in Poland in 1863 and the union of the Romanian Principalities in 1859, the Russian administration no longer remained liberal but focused on imposing full control over Bessarabia in order to prevent Romanian claims over this

territory. The Russian administration employed large-scale Russification policies in schools, administration and churches. Even a Russian Interior Ministry's employee, Pompey Batyushkov, who was a staunch Russian nationalist, was sent to prove that Bessarabian Moldavians are not Romanian. He insisted that the Slavs had been the predominant element in Bessarabia from the sixth century onward and the 1812 annexation was nothing but "*a reunion of Bessarabia with Russia.*" Batyushkov openly recommended that authorities use the public education system to russify the locals: "*If we want to save Bessarabia from being the object of Romanophile ambitions and agitations, and if we want to form an organic union with Russia, then we must hasten to utilize our schools for the purpose of changing (let us hope) half of these Moldavian peasants into Russians*". (Cojocaru, 2015) Some historians and writers, mostly with Slavic background, rehashed Batyuskov's claims and began to asset the existence of a unique Moldavian nationality, with a language and a history apart from that of Romania.

Under Russian rule, Romanian language newspapers appeared sporadically and briefly: out of 254 periodicals publications during 1854-1916, only 16 were in Romanian language. Similar language restrictions were imposed in churches. The newly appointed Metropolitan Pavel Lebedev suppressed the Romanian version of the official newspaper of the church and burned all the books in Romanian at the Chisinau Seminary. All church registries and documents were kept in Russian. His policies met a lot of resistance as most priests kept using the Romanian language, not because they were ardent nationalists but because their parishioners were illiterate. Although most of the new public schools were teaching in Russian since 1824, this did not help to combat high illiteracy among rural population (mostly Moldavians) and thus they remained mostly unaffected by the Russian culture and the process of Russification. The Russians also encouraged non-Romanian ethnic groups to settle in the territory: Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Jews, Bulgarians and Gagauz, planting the seeds of conflict that undermine until now the process of national identity formation and state building. (Cojocaru, 2015)

The flourishing cultural space of Romania attracted the Bessarabian intellectuals, whereas the majority of the nobility found benefits (lands and service careers) in remaining loyal to Russia. Few pro-Romanian voices were left in Bessarabia. Only when the youth went to study to other Russian cities did a national consciousness emerge in their minds. The young Bessarabians became active members of the political underground world. One of the strongest circles was in University of Dorpat in Tartu, Estonia. Russification policies failed to fully dislodge the Romanian

culture from the minds of the new generation of ethnic Moldavian intellectuals. Since the old guard of historians and writers (from Tiraspol) had to retire, some works of Romanian writers like Eminescu, Cosbuc, and Goga were re-introduced in the school textbooks. The Bessarabian nationalists did not have to write their history and literature, nor to reinvent their origin. All they had to do was to adopt the culture across the Prut River.

Chapter 2.b

"We do not live in a country, we live in a language"

- Emil Cioran

The Romanian national identity

The Romanian national identity was shaped by a myth of origin and ethnic descent, which defines two crucial elements: the ancestry and the spatial origins. Romania has been historically divided into several provinces and Romanian was the predominant language of each of them. Some of the provinces were semi-autonomous, while others fell under the domination of frequently alternating foreign powers: the Banat, located in the western-most region of modern Romania, Bukovina located in the north, Bessarabia, located in the east of present-day Romania, and Eastern Moldavia situated on the eastern border. (Kelllog, 1995)The idea of one contiguous area encompassing all Romanian speakers was not seriously advocated for until after the unification of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859.

The research of a glorious identity comes from the Romanian leadership's perception of being at the borders of European civilization. The Romanian-speaking principalities were settled between Christianity and Islamism and hence they became a cross-point of cultures, traditions and religions in which the Byzantine heritage was melted with the Turkish influence and the western suggestions. All these elements were reflected on the conception of power and on the legitimacy of

the principles about the birth of nations. The legitimacy of the people was found in a return to Rome's greatness.

The subject of the descent from Romanian Empire appeared firstly in the Renaissance era, in the works of commentators as Ureche, Miron Costin and Dimitre Cantemir. The first systematic encounters between the revolutionary elites in Transylvania, Moldova and Wallachia during the turmoil of 1848 also influenced the adoption of this unique collective identity. It was this generation that understood that in order to define national identity, the Romanians were in great need to *forge a common history out of entangled, but mostly parallel stories.* Dimitre Cantemir tells that the invasions of Sarmatians, Huns and Goths destroyed Moldavia and Romanian colonies. The inhabitants ran away on the mountains of Maramures. After many years, one of them, Dragoș, stated to go beyond the mountains. During a hunt, Dragoș' beloved dog, Molda, died in a river and he, in memory of his dog, named the river "Moldova" and gave to the territory in which the sad fact happened the name of his people "Roman". The companions of Dragoș considered him the first prince of those lands.

According to Eliade, the myth of Dragoș is a typical tale of a culture of hunters. Since the ancient time, the animal escaping leads to an unknown land which becomes occupied, represents a breaking point from death to life, from pagan to sacral, from ordinary condition to sovereignty. Drago's legend represented for Moldavians and Romanians the evidence a posteriori of their specific and unquestionable descent from Ancient Romans, and in the same moment the originally difference from their "neighbors". Eliade, in his volume "From Zalmoxis to Gensis Khan", seems to enforce the thesis by Rumanian historiography and Rumanian political class, of a descent from Romans progenitors, justifying, in this way, the continuity of Rumanians' settlements in those lands. (Baar & Jakubek, n.d.)

The popular ballad *Miorita*, by the poet Vasile Alecsandri, published in 1850, was also very important for the construction of a national feeling as it represented the best evidence of the creative genius of Rumanian people. Although, *Miorita* represents a little literary masterpiece, it doesn't offer a great image of Rumanian people. This ballad talks about a lamb, which informs its shepherd that two companions of him, envious of his flocks, have decided to kill him. The shepherd decides to accept his destiny and goes to die in a valley rich of flowers. He asks the killers to bury him next to his lambs and his dogs and not to tell anyone of his death. However, he

goes on, and tells that they have to say to a desperate mother that he got married with the "*first of the queen and the owner of the world*".

This peaceful acceptance of death and this lack of rebellion is typical of the Romanian people, as Alecsandri explains in a letter of 1861. He says that Romanians believe in faith and destiny and they are also superstitious. The largest part of cultural interpretations of Miorita underlines the pessimistic vision of reality. Lucien Eliade researches ancient symbolic representation in order to best comprehend some passages of the ballad and he recognizes that in the ballad there is a strong poetical effort to turn a painful event into a sacramental one. He believes that this national feeling is the necessary consequence of the geopolitical position and the related events that involved Romanians against too much stronger "neighbors". (Huma, 2016)

Chapter 2.c

Nationalism in "Greater Romania"

From Bessarabia to the "Moldavian Democratic Republic

Within the context of the collapse of the multinational empires, the Romanians outside the borders of the country intensified the battle for getting out from the authority of Russia and Austria-Hungary and for unifying with Romania. World War I brought a rise in political and cultural awareness in the population. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, Bessarabia elected its own parliament, Sfatul Țărei, which formed its government and proclaimed the "Moldavian Democratic Republic" and its independence from Russia. On April 9 of 1918, Sfatul Țărei decided with 86 votes for, 3 against and 36 abstaining, for union with the Kingdom of Romania, conditional upon the fulfillment of agrarian reform, local autonomy, and respect for universal human rights. (Cojocaru, 2015)

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The condition for agrarian reform was debated and approved in November 1918, and following this, Sfatul Ţărei voted a motion which removed all the other conditions, trusting that Romania would be a democratic country. The vote, which renounced Bessarabia's autonomy, has been judged illegitimate, since there was no quorum: only 44 of the 125 members took part in. Nevertheless, the historian Bernard Newman, who traveled by bicycle through the whole of Greater Romania, claimed there is little doubt that the vote represented the prevailing wish in Bessarabia and that the events leading to the unification indicate there was no question of a "seizure", but a voluntary act on the part of its people.

In the autumn of 1919, general elections were held in Bessarabia to elect 90 deputies and 35 senators to the Romanian parliament - the Constituent Assembly. On 20 December 1919, the elected representatives ratified, along with their colleagues from the other historic provinces, the unification acts that had been approved by Sfatul Ţărei and the National Congresses in Transylvania and Bukovina. During the peace talks between the Great Powers and Romania, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George talked with Ion I. C. Brătianu and, after the withdrawal of the Romanian government's delegation, Lloyd George proposed that Romania's claims be analyzed by a territorial commission that would examine historical, ethnographic, geographic, strategic, but not political facts.

The Territorial Commission on Romanian Affairs was formed, by which the representatives of the Big Four Powers presented their proposals and decided Romanian's territorial future. During the debates the only issue related to Romania on which the representatives agreed was that Bessarabia should belong to Romania. The Treaty of Paris awarded the Banat, Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Transylvania, all historical, Romanian-speaking territories, to Romania. The population of the "Greater Romania," increased more than twofold, however there was no radical shift from a predominantly rural to a new more urban population. The problem lied within the character of the newly acquired urban territories' identity. The cities acquired by the treaty were made up primarily of minorities who were highly cultured and relatively wealthy in comparison to urban elites in the Old Kingdom. In Transylvania, the new urban elites were primarily composed of Germans, Hungarians, and Jews who did not recognize the legitimacy of the Romanian territorial gains. Romanian fears of irredentism quickly subsumed the initial euphoria.

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Educational policy promulgated from Bucharest was the vehicle by which the Romanian state hoped to replace the minority elites in the new provinces with native Romanians. Educational policy was quickly centralized. Individual interests became secondary to state interests. Regional school systems were subjected to state standards and forced to use state-written, state-sanctioned curriculum and materials, all of which promoted national consciousness. By the mid-1920's, Romanian educational policy had succeeded in raising literacy levels by opening hundreds of new schools across the country-sides and in cities. Romanian language had become mandatory in the minority regions. The lack of adequate materials and resistance to compulsory education, however, still did not stanch the spread of education to the country-side. (Livizeanu, 1995)

Educational opportunities had greatly increased as after the war the Romanian state invested heavily in subsidizing those who could not afford it. The increase of university students came mostly as "a result from a spontaneous social response to the opportunities and rhetoric of national expansion." These students were, much like the rest of the new nation, caught up in the euphoria of expansion, unification, and hope for the future. Universities had become a melting pot of nationalist ideology and extreme right-wing nationalist sentiment won out. Romanian university populations had expanded at rates that were unsustainable. Many students were feeling flustered and cheated out of their futures. The race factor quickly came in to play as students blamed their academic woes on minorities, especially Jews, who represented a disproportionate percentage of the student population in comparison to the Romanian population at large.

The combination of nationalist rhetoric prominent before the war and widely propagated after the war and student resentment, was combined in an ultimately lethal ideology of exclusive nationalism that first found its most eloquent and charismatic voice in Corneliu Codreanu, the founder of the League of the Archangel Michael, more popularly known as the Iron Cross. The racist, anti-Semitic propaganda ideology propagated by Codreanu and his colleagues was underwritten and legitimated by older anti-Semites. Codreanu's ideology, however, was much more radicalized. The young Romanian nationalists were not in the mood to wait for the displacement of minorities by ethnic Romanians to take place and called for the total and permanent expulsion of all ethnic minorities, first from the universities, and later, from Romania. (Livizeanu, 1995)

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Chapter 2.d

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National Communism

After the communist takeover, national history was completely rewritten, according to new political and methodological guidelines. The *political* implication upon historical writing meant, above all, the glorification of the supporting role of Russia and the Soviet Union. The *methodological* implication was the reinterpretation of the entire national history on the basis of the Marxist historical materialism, whose consequence was the emergence in history of a new hero: "the people," always progressive in comparison either to the reactionary local leaders or to the oppressing neighboring empires. The Slavs, mentioned hitherto only as one of the many migratory groups, became after 1945 the third important cultural group in the "ethno-genesis" of the Romanians. (Petrescu, 2012)Nevertheless, the Latin origins were never a matter of controversy under communism. On the contrary, the interpretation given by the pre-communist historians was dressed in Marxist language and promoted as such by the historians of the Stalinist period.

The glorification of the Soviet Union and subsequently of Russia was gradually removed after 1958. National history would be again rewritten this time overlooking all external—Western or Eastern— influences throughout the Romanians' history, and at the same bringing back the local pantheon of heroes. Consequently, *the national narrative became much more ethnocentric than it was ever before the communist takeover.* The only issue where the official line dictated by the Soviet interests conflicted with the pre-communist historical narrative was that of the territorial attachment to the homeland as defined in pre-communist historiography. The postwar territorial redefinition was leaving untouched the region of Transylvania. Bessarabia, on the other hand, was still part of the national narrative.

The final and most radical step in the process of transforming the national narrative occurred under the Ceausescu regime. Local historical heroes became more important ideological references than Marx and Lenin themselves. Ceausescu placed himself in direct descendance from the ancient Dacian kings, going through the medieval rulers up to the first local prince of united Romania in the 19th century. Thus, Romania's repositioning within the Soviet camp was mirrored in historical writing in quite a radical way. The national narrative codified under Ceausescu *represented a new teleological reading of the past*, but one which managed to reconcile the pre-1945 and post-1945 versions of national history. The two teleological readings were merged in a quite original way: the communist party was defined as the only true follower of the social and national aspirations of the Romanian people throughout its entire history. (Petrescu, 2012)

Although, ideological constraints were lifted after the Revolution of 1989, many of the historians continued to write history in the way they used to do it under communism. Ethnocentricity of the national narrative was not really challenged by any of the attempts to cover the non-Romanian communities whose histories were entangled with that of the Romanian-speaking group. A radical break with the past occurred with the publication of the works of Lucian Boia. His post-communist writings shook the idea of "national" history shared by a majority of the academic community in Romania. Boia's approached touched upon the very idea that history could be objectively written, and implicitly that of the uniqueness of the national narrative. In Romania of the 1990's such a message was an absolute novelty.

The "*national tradition*" was generally perceived in early post-communism as the only basis for the renewal of historical writing. In Romania, not even the so-called critical school of interwar historians was ever able to overcome the legacy of the 19th century national-Romanticism. Boia's first and foremost merit was the initiation of a more critical approach to the entire pantheon of national history. His writings became quickly popular and gradually, not only the national-communist codification of the national history, but also the Romanticist heroic narrative about the past were deconstructed.

The communist regime had once offered a simple, unique, compulsory, but convincing answer to the question of who the Romanians are. In post-communist Romania, historians have rewritten episodes of the past in tune with the current standards of the discipline. This however

had a limited impact upon the national master narrative. Neither the Latin Origins of the Romanians nor their continuity on the homeland territory was seriously debated. When one attempted to do this, the public opinion was outraged. These two ideas are taken for granted. Without them, who would after all the Romanians be? (Petrescu, 2012)

To you

Part 2

Chapter 3

"Nationalism cannot flower if it does not grow in the garden of internationalism."

-Sukarno

Soviet approach to nationalities and nationhood

The Soviets had a primordialist and essentialist approach to nationalities. Tishkov described the Soviet essentialist approach to ethnicity, in which 'core' attributes were assigned to each minority, so as to enable nationalities' codification and subdivision. Ethnologist Lev Gumilev saw ethnic groups as regulated by natural rather than social processes. Although the Soviet doctrines did not see groups as immutable and fixed, but able to evolve, groups also had an essence, found in specific traits. These primordial characteristics would develop, and evolve, under the Soviet guidance. This concept came to be seen as the groups' 'coming together' (*sblizhenie*): while maintaining some internal traits groups would progress towards the creation of the *Soviet narod*. Soviet policies saw the 'coming together' through the creation of *homo sovieticus*, which would mark the transcendence of difference, flattened out by communism. (Prina, 2015)

The existing diversity, however, required immediate attention and mechanisms to manage it. Language was considered the predominant ethnic marker in the Soviet Union. Thus, the state established schools in minority languages and the local administration was transferred to local leaders through the process of 'indigenization'. Overall, in local government titular groups were overrepresented, and affirmative action policies continued up to the *perestroika.* One's nationality was reinforced through the census takers, and in its being specified in internal Soviet passports and all documents, obliging people to continue to restate their nationality. At the same time, while minority languages were promoted through education, Russian tended to dominate in most spheres of language use, as it served as language of inter-ethnic communication throughout the Soviet Union.

Additionally, as ethnicity affected one's life, the population of the Soviet Union developed a heightened perception of their own ethnicity. Hirsch notes a major shift in the 1930s: populations that previously had had no specific awareness of their ethnicity had developed a well-

defined consciousness of it. This came with the awareness that their claims could be made on the basis of their nationality. Tishkov believes that some individuals and groups started using their ethnicity in an opportunistic fashion to defend personal interests and address their particularistic needs camouflaged as 'national interests'. Also, Tishkov argues that: 'The very process of civic nation-building lost its sense, replaced by the clumsy slogan of 'making the Soviet people' from many nations'. (Hosking, 2007)

The case of Moldovan SSR

The case of the Moldovan SSR was exceptional amongst the western Soviet republics in that Soviet identity-building aimed to create a nation when little sense of nationhood existed. The ingredients for the indigenization policy, as invoked by the architects of Soviet nation-building policies, were promoted in Soviet Moldova in order to stress 'Moldovan' primordialism and its distinctiveness from Romania. Thus, the main task of the Soviet Moldovan writers and "creative intellectuals" was to create a system of cultural values which would legitimate the existence of a Moldovan "socialist nation".

The Soviet Moldovan national project was designed and implemented in a very short time so as to "catch up" with more advanced nations. Both in MASSR (1924-1940) and, later on, in MSSR (1940-1991), the local administration and intellectuals were divided in two antagonistic groups according to the geographic origin and "political capital" of their members. Throughout the 30s, the MASSR administrative and intellectual elite becomes the battleground of the fight, both symbolically and administratively, between two camps – the so-called *Moldovenists* and the *Romanianists* –, who got their names from their respective positions on the issue of the national language of the Republic.

The *Moldovenists* were advocates of a stand-alone "Moldovan" language, in clear-cut rupture with literary Romanian language norms. On the other hand, *Romanianists* were in favor of a literary "Moldovan" language every bit identical with the language written and spoken in Romania. As with other Soviet republics, the central power instrumentalized the social and political divide at the level of the local administration and intellectual elite and regularly interfered

to determine the power relations and the spheres of influence between the two groups. (Cojocaru, 2015)Thus, the authority transfer from one group to the other automatically brought about a reversal in terms of linguistic policies.

Between 1924 and 1956, Soviet Moldova was subject to seven linguistic "reforms", going back and forth between *Moldovanism* and *Romanianism*. (Cojocaru, 2015)For over thirty years, both the Moldovan administration and intellectuals oscillated between two opposed cultural and linguistic conceptions which lead to a split in the ethnic and national identity of the Moldovan population. The inconsistency of the national, linguistic and cultural policies promoted in Soviet Moldova can be accounted also on the lack of decision making on the part of Soviet central and local authorities.

Throughout the Stalinist era, Moldovan literature was building an antagonistic identity discourse that praises Soviet Moldova and disqualifies anything related to the Romanian administration. The positive pole of this ideological construct emphasizes the agrarian nature of Moldova. The "glorious past" and "the luminous present" of Moldova were tightly linked to another positive aspect of this identity construct: Russia. The idyllic and prosperous image of Soviet Moldova is even stronger against the background of dire poverty allegedly associated with life in inter-war Bessarabia." Building on the schools and other mass culture institutions, Moldovan literature in the Soviet era participated in the spreading of an ethical and cultural value system. This allegedly legitimate value system was durably inculcated in the Moldovan population through a process that Pierre Bourdieu calls *symbolic violence*. (Negura, 2012)

In the late 50s, a new generation of Moldovan writers gains membership in the Moldovan Writers' Union (MWU) as part of an *indigenization* policy, promoted by Khrushchev starting with 1956. Most of them are graduates of Romanian high schools subsequently trained in Soviet higher education institutions. These writers had, however, serious shortcomings in terms of Romanian and universal literature and culture as these subjects are removed from Moldovan secondary and higher education curricula in the mid-1950s. Trained in this era of relative liberalization, the writers of the 1960s generation assimilated the new Soviet slogans and, simultaneously, a certain kind of critical thinking. Without questioning the legitimacy of the Soviet system or communist ideology as a whole, the public positions of Moldovan writers, qualified as nationalistic by the authorities, are the only type of disagreement with the Soviet regime.

Moldovan nationalism: Between Romania and Russia

As a result, during the 3rd Congress of the MWU, the two generations of writers united to openly challenge the Russification of the Moldovan population and to claim the adoption of the Latin alphabet. The writers' congress, attended by high members of the Republic's government, upset the latter and became the pretext for renewed calls on the Moldovan "creative intellectuals" to behave. The Brezhnev era, also known as the "stagnation era", is remembered by several Moldovan writers as a time of decline of literary probity. The "stagnation era" was also characterized by "crippled" sociability given the writers' constant fear of the law enforcement agents. While most writers simply followed the routine or fade into the anonymity of administrative hierarchies, a new generation of writers emerged in the early 1980s announcing the literary effervescence and "national rebirth" driven by the *perestroika* and *glasnost* policies. (Negura, 2012)

A few thoughts on the construction of the Moldovan national identity

According to the work of Hans Kohn, there are several methods by which both states and nations form their identities. He sets the stage for identity studies saying that "nationalism is first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness". He goes on to say that the idea of nationalism is constantly shifting and changing so it is nearly impossible to control or define. Over time, the practical implications of nationalism have shifted toward the modern nation-state, but one thing that has remained constant is that the foundation of nationalism is simply a state of mind. (Rogers, 2014) If this concept is only formulated in people's minds, then how can anyone control it?

Francis Fukuyama and Jill E. Hickson offer insight to this dilemma. Fukuyama asserts that the first rule we must recognize is that identity cannot be imposed from external sources, it must be forged from within. (Rogers, 2014)This rule is evidenced throughout history during the fall of the age of colonialism. One by one, colonies began to reject the identity of their colonizers and claim independence. The justification for this argument is that identity is formed upon shared elements of a population, which one cannot create or impose.

Hickson further delineates these shared elements as being made up of common land, shared institutions, cultural values, a common past, linguistic ties and a conception of equality. While some state's citizens may hold a few of these traits in common, if at least one is obviously absent, then having a common identity is nearly impossible. The solution to this problem lies in the

fabrication of these qualities. According to him, when one is missing, it is the role of the government to use their resources to create the illusion of its presence. (Rogers, 2014) The other great threat facing the state if identity indifference continues is the chance of reverting back to a Soviet style government. While returning to a government that controlled the Soviet States may seem far-fetched, Moldovans would not be the first group of people in history to think in such a manner.

Stalin was one of the most successful leaders in recent history when it came to forming identity. The Soviet Union covered a vast array of different countries, governments, and cultures; however they all became quickly unified under the Soviet Union. One explanation given for this phenomenon is Frances W Harrison's visual approach to national identity, which is most evident in Moldova through architecture and Soviet monuments. The Soviet government realized that to create unity, there must be a perception of equality, so architecture became very homogenous with no one structure presumably any better than another. This forced equality is evident in the picture on the next page of a Soviet-era apartment building.

Another way that Stalinism proved successful was in unifying the people through language. Fukuyama recognizes the power behind language as a unifying agent, and cites Indonesia and Tanzania as examples where forcing a common language proved to be very successful. This began in the Soviet Union by introducing Russian into the new States, and in Moldova creating an entirely new alphabet. (Rogers, 2014)The Moldovan Cyrillic alphabet was in effect throughout the occupation, and is still the official language of Transnistria. Russian was taught in all schools at the time, and Russian became the operating language for all government and business proceedings. After independence, a divide still existed in Moldova between ethnic Russians and ethnic Romanians.

Although Moldova was the first post-Soviet state to declare their own official language other than Russian, it was not entirely effective. At this point, ethnic Russians had lived for so long in a world where their language was required, and that Romanian acclimation became a major

problem. Moldovan in essence is almost exactly the same as Romanian, and many critics argue that there is absolutely no difference. There has only been one strong movement to enact policy requiring the entire nation to revert back to speaking Russian. In 2001, President Vladimir Voronin attempted to make learning Russian compulsory alongside Romanian. The public was outraged and took to the streets in protest, and eventually the motion was withdrawn. (Prina, 2015) Today, there is still a major divide.

Chapter 3.b

"The Romanians in Moldova woke up in the late eighties, but forgot to get out of their beds"

- Ion Druta

From MSSR to the Republic of Moldova

In the late 1980's, Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* and the Glasnost's reforms opened up the space for criticism and allowed opposition to the Communist Party to emerge. One of the few republics that remained a relative backwater was the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) under the First Secretary of the local branch of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Semion Grossu. He skillfully dodged the numerous warnings from Moscow throughout the 1980's concerning political and economic corruption and denounced any expression of discontent as 'local nationalism'. (Panici, 2003)This way, Grossu became the first Soviet Union official to admit the significance of nationalism on the territory that would soon become the Republic of Moldova.

The first time that the question of a Moldovan identity together with the status of interethnic relations on the territory of the MSSR received special attention was in early 1988, when the ethnic 'problem' was one of the most hotly debated issues on the agenda at 20th Congress of the Communist Party of Moldova. The most serious issue addressed in this context was the poor state of Moldovan language instruction. The recognition by the pro-union forces of

the ethnic question as a legitimate subject for a discussion gave impetus to various Moldovan 'informal organizations' that emerged in the summer of 1988. (Crowther, 1993)

Perhaps the most important among them was the Alexei Mateevici Literary-Musical Club, named after the author of the 'Limba Noastra' (Our Language) poem – a pillar of Bessarabian culture in the early twentieth century. The 'informals' included prominent writers, journalists, educators and artists who called on the local party to increase resources for Moldovan language training and openly address previously forbidden questions regarding Bessarabian history. By addressing Moscow directly and by introducing themselves as leaders of the local reform-minded elite, they hoped to bypass the local party leadership and trigger the rebirth of the national culture within a framework of political and economic reforms. These movements initially focused on a series of political and economic demands, including the transformation of the Soviet Union into a true confederation of sovereign states, the introduction of a market economy and appropriate new property laws, and the guarantee of fundamental human rights. However, by the second half of the year all these movements reformulated their priorities, coming up with a joint three pronged demand that the central authority recognize the shared identity of the Romanian and the Moldovan languages, that Moldovan be declared the state language of the MSSR, and that the Latin alphabet be adopted. (Chinn & Roper, 1995)

As a response, local party conservatives attempted to denounce the actions of the 'informals' as threats to the public order caused by 'nationalists' and 'kulaks '. However, increasing public support for these illegal demonstrations held by the 'informals' in the center of the capital city Chisinau pressed Grossu's party for an official response. Moldovan communists issued a set of guidelines for implementing perestroika in the republic, entitled 'Let Us Affirm Restructuring through Concrete Actions'. The text acknowledged the mistakes made between the 1960s and the 1980s. Although, initially the position of the party on the important language issue remained unchanged, in December 1988, under pressure from all levels of Moldovan society, Grossu was forced to accept the change of alphabet. However, the position of the ruling party on the language issue became unsustainable in less than a year. By accepting one of the three demands, Grossu put himself in an almost impossible position *vis-à-vis* the other two. (Chinn & Roper, 1995) Once the language started to be written in Latin script, one could no longer distinguish Moldovan from Romanian.

Moldovan nationalism: Between Romania and Russia

Language provided a vehicle of national expression less threatening to the center than an outright move for political independence would have been. Reform-oriented intellectuals gained editorial control over several mass circulation newspapers and began to espouse publically the case for radical restructuring. Intellectuals organized themselves into a cohesive movement, the "Moldovan National Front" and demanded to be recognized that Romanian and "Moldavian" are one and the same tongue. By winning ten of the sixteen constituencies, the 'informals' proved that they had become a serious threat to the CPM. However, once the plans for major cultural changes in Moldova were made public, tensions rose between the ethnic majority and minority populations, particularly the Slavs and Gagauz, who felt threatened by the prospects of removing Russian as the *de facto* official language. (Crowther, 1993)

The tensions escalated during the summer of 1989 when the Moldovans, the Slavs and the Gagauz, all created their own unified fronts. The members of the Mateevici Club, together with other informal movements, created the Popular Front of Moldova; the Gagauz formed *Gagauz Halki* (Gagauz People) and the Slavic population established *Yedinstvo* (Unity). The former grew out of a Gagauz cultural club in the Southern city of Comrat and had vaguely articulated a few political goals. A much more militant group, *Yedinstvo* emerged from the all-union Interfront movement that united the minority population and other opponents of cultural reforms. The summer was supposed to culminate with the Moldovan Supreme Soviet session. During this session, the delegates mainly debated the language issue. (Panici, 2003)

While the debates were held inside the Supreme Soviet building, the Popular Front of Moldova called a Grand National Assembly (*Marea Adunare Nationala*). Inspired by the nationalistic acclamations of the Front, the demonstration was attended by 500,000 people carrying Romanian flags and placards written with Latin letters and denouncing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia and the decline of Moldovan culture over the past five decades. The assembly was the first major event where linguistic and cultural reforms began to receive consideration on an equal basis with other important demands. It pressed for complete sovereignty and demanded immediate withdrawal of the Soviet army from the territory of Moldova. The final document adopted by the Assembly was titled 'On State Sovereignty and Our Right to the Future'. (Cojocaru, 2015)

The manifesto outlined the history of the region, the partition of historic Moldova as a result of Russian imperial policy, the unification with Romania in 1918 and the subsequent Soviet annexation of Bessarabia. The most important demands made in the document were for full national sovereignty, veto power over union laws that contravened the laws of the republic, republican control over the relations with foreign powers, a law on citizenship and the right to secession from the Soviet Union. Moldova followed the Baltics and Tajikistan in passing a law making the language of the indigenous population the state language. The August 1989 law required those working in public services and education and those holding leadership in enterprises to acquire facility in both Russian and Romanian by 1994. The law though ultimately containing a compromise establishing "Moldovan" as the state language and the languages of populations of other nationalities as the languages of communications, provided the catalyst for the independence movement. While the passage of five years had not resulted in the majority of Russians learning Romanian, it brought a significant change of attitude. Until then Russians felt comfortable in Moldova. They had their own schools and cultural institutions and even after the independence, Moldovan leaders took rather moderate positions vis-a–vis Russians and other minorities. (Chinn, n.d.)

As momentum gathered to change from Russian to Moldovan/Romanian, so did the fear on the part of the Russian-speaking population. Although, the PF was pro-Romanian and a strong anti-Russian sentiment was evident, the Front soon moderated its anti-Russian rhetoric and the unification movement lost support. Both the government and the parliament supported legislation to accommodate the linguistic and cultural interests of all the minorities. However, the damage of the initial nationalist rhetoric was already done. As a result of the parliamentary elections in 1990, the power shifted from the Communists to the Popular Front, a largely Romanian-dominated coalition. Mircea Snegur, one of the PF's key governmental supporters, was first elected Chairman of the Moldovan Supreme Soviet, then President of it after the position was created. The government was replaced with PF supporters in May 1990 with the selection of Mircea Snegur as prime minister and the Moldova Supreme Soviet adopted a declaration of sovereignty which decreed that Moldovan law superseded Soviet law. The declaration was as far- reaching as any other adopted to that point by the former union republics. (Chinn, n.d.)

In December 1990 the leadership called a Grand National Assembly in Chisinau and almost a million supporters took the streets. It was a response to Moscow's pressure and was also

used both to communicate and develop that national sentiment. The February 1991 Supreme Soviet session resulted in a series of votes rejecting the holding of the all-union referendum on Moldovan territory and endorsing an association of sovereign states with no central power, sometimes labeled as the "fifteen plus zero" confederation. The boycott against the referendum on union was successful. The military actions in the Baltic had shocked even the local Russian inhabitants and many were beginning to lean toward Chisinau rather than Moscow. According to a series of opinion polls the Russian population on the right bank was divided, like in the Baltic. The PF, also, had moderated its initial positions and had taken a more accommodative position on both language and citizenship toward the non-Romanian groups. In contrast, left-bank and Gagauz voting in the referendum and support for union were very high. (Panici, 2003)

The protest over the language law in 1989 developed into a revolt in 1990 and further into a mature break away movement in 1991. Russian and Ukrainians workers went on a strike after the passage of the language law crippling a large number of industrial enterprises. The strikes were primarily organized by the Edinstvo Organization on the right bank and the Union of Work Collectives on the left. The Gagauz SSR proclaimed its independence on August 19th, 1991 and Transnistria followed on September 2nd. Both breakaway territories, Transnistria and Gagauzia, formed military units and stressed ideological rather than ethnic aspects of the conflict. The left-bank leaders took an "internationalist" position criticizing the Moldovan steps to destroy both socialism and the union. (Panici, 2003) Chisinau responded accusing their wanting to maintain the soviet political and economic system. Moscow initially ignored the developments in Moldova and then sided with the breakaway territories.

As the left bank situation escalated, Romania played an increasing role as both a military and diplomatic supporter for Chisinau. This role was particularly unsettling for the Russian population, since it feared that the "two state" rhetoric would be only temporary. While the Romanian leadership articulated the same "tow states" position, the opposition forces in Romania advocated reunification; the Romanian public, however, seemed to have little interest in the subject. A joint decree was issued by the Romanian and the Moldovan Parliaments in 1992. While the decree recognized the important historical relationship between the two countries, it also affirmed the separate status of Romania and Moldova.

The 1991 coup cemented the divisions between the right and the left bank forces. On the 1ˢᵗ day of the coup Moldovans leaders came out publically against the usurpation of the power by the Emergency Committee and the military. President Snegur and others stated that the Emergency Committee's decrees had no validity on Moldovan territory and called upon the population to take the streets and protect public buildings and communication facilities. Recalling the spring events in the Baltics, the leadership mobilized popular support to block troops that might try to take over the city. People from throughout the republic barricaded entrances to Chisinau. Blocked by human walls on the nights of 19ᵗʰ and 20ᵗʰ August, soviet troops never used force to push past the unarmed civilians. Immediately after the botched coup, Moldova declared its independence from the Soviet Union. The Moldovan declaration of independence on 27 August 1991 was most ambiguous on the issue of reunification vs. Moldovan nation-building, but crystal clear as regards the ethnic definition of the nation. Independence was declared 'in recognition of the thousand year existence of our people and its uninterrupted statehood within the historical and ethnic boundaries of its national formation'. (Chinn & Roper, 1995)

Romania was the first state to recognize the independence of the Republic of Moldova. All parties in Bucharest agreed that the annexation in 1940 was illegal, that there was no question about the true Romanian identity of the Moldovans and that in an ideal world the two states would certainly be joined into a reconstituted Greater Romania. The Romanian nationalists maintain their claim that Moldovans are nothing but ethnic Romanian who were late to develop Romanian consciousness because of the Russification policies applied in Moldova during the last two centuries. On the other hand, the Moldovanists claim that they are a distinct nation, because it formed separately from Romania and under impact of the Russian culture. They accept that Moldovans share some aspects of culture with Romanians, but nevertheless, they claim that a separate historical experience caused Moldovans to develop a distinct identity.

A few thoughts about the case of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist

The goal behind MASSR's formation was either to Sovietize Romania or to annex Bessarabia, thus "uniting the separated Moldavian nations. The Russian population in Transnistria is made up mostly of migrants from the industrialization of the 1960's and 1970's. In the first half of 1992, Transniestrian military personnel and communist leaders expanded their control over Moldovan villages on the left bank and increasingly made inroads to the Russian cities on the right bank. The Transniestrian loyalists organized into military units took over administrative buildings and police stations in the rural areas and replaced the indigenous Romanians with Russians. The local officials at first offered almost no resistance in order to avoid confrontation and bloodshed. Finally, the Moldovan leadership concluded that its appeasement had not been successful and President Snegur declared a state of emergency. In early July, Snegur and Yeltsin agreed to a cease-fire and the need to divide the combats. They signed the bilateral agreement to end the fighting in Transnistria with the use of Russian, Moldovan and Transniestrian troops as peace-keepers. Transnistria received the right to decide its own fate if Moldova were to combine with Romania at some future time. (Chinn & Roper, 1995)

Interestingly, many of the arguments made by Moldova in justifying its separation from the Soviet Union have been made by the Transniestrians and Gagauz in arguing for their own authority. Buchanan argues that secession may have legitimacy if the people are indigenous, have no other ethnic homeland, or were incorporated involuntarily. Chisinau's strategy of cultural autonomy, though genuinely and relatively successful with right bank Russians and Ukrainians, has thus far failed to provide the necessary framework for either Transniestrians or Gagauz incorporation into a Moldovan state. Rejai and Enloe contend that neither a minority-oriented language nor religious policy can serve as the "integrative cement" of a society. They argue that the most effective integrative policies are political and economic rather than cultural. To be successful states must manipulate political and economic elements even though this is more difficult. Chisinau's attempt

to build a multi-ethnic coalition, offering political positions to both the Transniestrians and Gagauz, is a step in developing such a political framework. (Chinn & Roper, 1995)

The case of Moldova reinforces the importance of state-strength in avoiding inter-ethnic conflict renewal. Two factors led to Moldova's relatively strong post-partition states. First, due to factors unique to Moldova's situation, Pridnestrovie authorities managed to secure territorial control before the separatist war began. Second, the state security infrastructure in both territories was not severely affected by the war. The war was not waged by Tiraspol to gain independence, but rather waged by Chişinău to regain lost territory. Tiraspol, in 1992, was defending its de facto independent status. The regional identity of Transniestrian people represents multivariable and multi component content of mentality. The mentality is developed by leadership into myths appealing to Transniestrian society and trying to differentiate it culturally from Moldovan society. Such differentiation is reinforced by myths, memories and symbols of ethnic heritage, through which, political leaders' eager for economic rewards and status forged their strategies. As Iver Neumann points out, "Identity is inconceivable without difference" and in constructing new identities nationalists and new ruling elites are forced "to contrast that identity to something different". Nation- and state-building projects generate the self and 'Others' in the course of the formation of the polity. Nationalistic politics aided by the mass media contributed to creation negative stereotypes and fear of another group. (Chinn & Roper, 1995)

Republic of Moldova

After having rallied under the banner of national independence during perestroika, the Popular Front switched to a program of reunification with Romania shortly after independence had been achieved. However, the Front soon realized that such a program was out of step with the population at large, as well as with significant sections of the Moldovan elite. Not only ethnic minorities but also most Moldovans had quickly realized that Romania was by far no social or economic paradise. Additionally, bleak memories of hard times under Romanian rule in the interwar period resurfaced. Snegur, foreseeing the failure of the Popular Front, left the party to become the main spokesperson of the pro-Moldovan camp.

He denounced Pan-Romanianism as betrayal and accused Moldova's intellectuals of doubting "the legitimacy and historical foundations of our right to be a state, to call ourselves Moldovan People." People like Snegur were not familiarized with Romanian culture, as they grew up immersed in Russian culture and thought themselves as Moldavians. Moldovanists and their electorate felt awkward when speaking literary Romanian. With their thick accent, Russian calques and archaic dialectal expression, Moldovanists felt out of place and embarrassed when contrasted their speech to the highly educated intellectuals, just as they were embarrassed by the Russian cultural dominance under the Soviets. To eschew this feeling of frustration they chose a third way-neither with Romanian nor with Russia.

During a trip to Bucharest in February 1992, Snegur addressed a joint session of the Romanian parliament and spoke favorably of 'our sister country – Romania', while at the same time carefully emphasizing the sovereignty of Moldova. In fact, his indirect reference to the historical borders of Moldova – including areas in Romania and Ukraine – pointed toward the birth of a 'Greater Moldova' nationalism, allegedly to fend off the calls for a Greater Romania coming from Bucharest. By the spring of 1992, Snegur and most of the Moldovan political elite had settled for a 'two states' doctrine: continuously defending Moldovan independence while maintaining strong cultural ties with Bucharest. (Panici, 2003)

By embracing an indigenous Moldovan nationalism and resurrecting the notion of an independent Moldovan language, Snegur attempted to portray himself and his government as guarantors of independence and territorial integrity. The strategy generated its first results during the parliamentary elections in 1994 where the Agrarian Democratic Party (ADP) won. The new parliament started reversing many of the reforms introduced under the Popular Front in the early 1990s. The national anthem was changed from 'Deşteaptă-te, Române!' (Romanian, Beware!) –the same anthem as in Romania – to 'Limba Noastra' (Our Language), a song that reflects both 'the independence of the state and the aspiration of people to prosperity', but does not mention whether 'our language' was 'Romanian' or 'Moldovan'. (Crowther, 1993)

The 1994 referendum on independence, initiated by the Moldovan president, marked, at least temporally, a closing of the window of opportunity for the active pursuit of the unification agenda. Among the battles that Moldovanists chose not to take up in was the question of teaching history. Starting in the early 1990s the "History of Romanians" became the official version of history taught in Moldovan schools. Textbooks on the "History of Romanians" used the term "Romanian" to describe Moldova's titular group and its language. Hesitation on the part of successive Moldovanist governments to change the teaching of history, which undermines the very legitimacy of the Moldovanist discourse, is attributed to the predominance and entrenchment of Romanianists - oriented intellectuals and artists in educational and cultural institutions.

A second peak of nationalism occurred in 1995, the second year of Snegur's pan-Moldovan rhetoric. The government was planning a reform of the country's education system, changing two subjects in the curriculum: 'Romanian' language and 'Romanian' history were to become 'Moldovan' language and 'Moldovan' history. However, public reactions were unexpectedly hostile. Huge waves of demonstrations were launched immediately throughout the country. In Chisinau, tens of thousands of students were picketing both the Parliament and the Presidency demanding the immediate annulment of the 'shameful law'. Most of the leaders of this new identity movement were high school and university professors and representatives of the Moldovan intelligentsia. They created a party to run in the presidential elections in fall 1996.

Snegur, attempting to recapture popular support, called on the Agrarian-dominated parliament to modify the constitution, declaring Romanian the official language. Despite the efforts, he was defeated in the 1996 presidential elections by Petru Lucinschi who won 54% of the

vote after a campaign dominated by nationalistic rhetoric and almost completely screening out the economic and social problems of the country. There was little difference between him different and Snegur, except for his conviction that Moldova would be much better off if the country repaired its ties with the Russian Federation. However, Moldova's foreign policy remained unchanged. Lucinschi's election to the presidential post represented little more than a continuation of the course of moderate reform that the country had pursued since its independence. (Cojocaru, 2015)

Nevertheless, the 1998 parliamentary elections did signal an important change. The resurrected Party of Communists secured 30% of the vote and the largest number of seats in the parliament. The party was headed by Vladimir Voronin. The law prohibited the use of the old name – the 'Communist Party of Moldova', hence the unusual 'Party of Communists'. From that point on and until the parliamentary elections of 2001, the dominant and competing trends in Moldovan politics were, on the one hand, the general attempt of containment of communism, and the steady development of a strong network of influence by the communist party on the other. All political alliances during these years were built with the sole reason of forming a parliamentary majority and of blocking legislation introduced or supported by the communists.

Tensions arose when the newly – elected President Voronin from the "Party of Communists" tried to introduce Russian as a second national language as well as insist that the Moldovan state language be called Moldovan. The government mainly renounced these plans, but Russian was eventually re-introduced as a compulsory subject in Moldovan schools. Relationship between Moldova and Russia deteriorated in November 2003 over a Russian proposal for the solution of the Transniestrian conflict, which Moldovan authorities refused to accept. In the wake of the deadlock with Russia a series of shifts in the external policy of Moldova occurred, targeted at rapprochement with the European Union. In the following election of 2005 the Party of the Communists and Voronin were re-elected on a pro-Western platform. (Zeller & Wilson, 2013)

The Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) won a majority of seats for the third consecutive occasion, in 2009. A wave of civil unrest began in major cities of Moldova after the results of the election were announced. The demonstrators claimed that the elections were fraudulent, and alternatively demanded a recount, a new election, or resignation of the government. In Chișinău the demonstration escalated into a riot. Rioters attacked the parliament

building and presidential office. The protest resulted in four deaths, 270 injured and several people jailed, among allegations of use of torture by the police, and a diplomatic row with Romania, after President Voronin accused Romania of being the force behind the riots in Chişinău.

After the civil unrest, the climate in Moldova became extremely polarized. The parliament failed to elect a new president and new elections were held. The polls were won by the Communist Party again and four Moldovan parties – the Liberal Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, the Democratic Party and Our Moldova Alliance agreed to create a governing coalition that will push the Communist Party into opposition. The name of the coalition was Alliance for European Integration. The result of the next parliamentary elections in 2010 maintained the status quo following the constitutional deadlock. (Zeller & Wilson, 2013) Four years later, in 2014, the eighth parliamentary election were held in Moldova since 1991, and the pro-Russian Socialist Party (PSRM), composed of former communists, emerged as the winner of the 2014 elections and the strongest party in Parliament. (e-Democracy., 2014)

The last presidential election of 2016 resulted in the victory of Igor Dodon, a pro-Russian candidate. In Moldova, the labels "pro-Russian" and "pro-European" have not had quite the same meaning as in neighboring Ukraine, where they have often been associated with anti- and pro-reform agendas respectively. In Moldova, political leaders of both geopolitical persuasions have been known to disappoint when it came to the quality of their governance and reform. However, even though the presidency in Moldova does not have strong executive authority, the newly elected head of state has promised to scrap the Association Agreement, a move that would be welcome in Moscow and deliver a major blow to the reform agenda.

Still, the pro-European, pro-reform agenda is publicly favored by the Democratic Party of Moldova, which currently holds a majority of seats in the parliament. Its leader is Moldova's most prominent businessman Vladimir Plahotniuc. Among other assets, he controls four of Moldova's five national television outlets. Plahotniuc does not hold any official post but has publicly embraced the cause of European integration and declared his resolve to keep the party and the country on a pro-U.S. and pro-EU course. The sincerity of this commitment is the subject of various conspiracy theories, which include speculation about collusion between Dodon and

Plahotniuc as well as the latter's alleged motive to consolidate all economic and political power in the country in his hands. (Calus & Kononczuk, 2017)

Over its quarter century of independence, despite many external and internal challenges, the country has held a series of contested elections whose outcomes were not foregone conclusions—a rare occurrence in the former Soviet states. In the course of its quarter century of independence, Moldova has seen more than its fair share of political turbulence. The list of scandals associated with a succession of governments of various political persuasions and geopolitical leanings is long. Corruption remain a major problem for Moldova. In 2016, the country ranked 123 out of 176 countries surveyed. In 2015, it ranked 103. Combined with a fractious domestic political environment, frequent government changes, poverty, and the presence of powerful business interests, corruption has been a major impediment to the functioning of the government and development of the country's private sector and investment.

Moldova needs to secure a safe. In order to do that, the country must have a strong identity. The question now is: what is standing in the way?

There are four barriers between Moldova and a sense of national identity: Economic reality, lack of political will, corruption, and remnants of a Soviet past. The most obvious thing standing between Moldova and serious reform is the state of the economy. Being the poorest country in Europe, both the government and the private sector lack the necessary resources to accomplish anything substantive. While officials may recognize a need for a nationalistic curriculum, the government cannot afford to publish and supply textbooks when schools are hardly staffed in the first place.

The other side of this economic reality is the lack of personal wealth in the country. Hickson asserts that traditionally, it is the role of the upper class to enact identification reforms, but in Moldova, this class is practically nonexistent. Recent estimates show that there are approximately 190 millionaires in Moldova. Although, this number sounds relatively high for such a small population, it is based off of a million Moldovan lei rather than US dollars. Moreover, many of those Moldovans, who do make considerable wages, often spend their time and money in Western Europe instead of putting it back into the Moldovan economy. With an absent or passive upper class, there is no one pushing economic growth and national reform.

The second economic barrier according to Hickson is lack of political will. There is a noticeable lack of national dialogue or governmental action on this issue. Perhaps it is because the urgency present is not being communicated. Or perhaps it is because the country feels that other problems at hand are more important. But in any regard, the government must create and maintain an active role first, and by doing so give the people a reason to support the nationalistic

ideals. Along with these changes, the government must also fight internal corruption to gain the trust of their people. No citizen of any country would want to be associated with or be proud of a government with corruption numbers as high as these. The last major barrier to Identity reform is the remnants left from the Soviet past.

Biblical tradition holds that the Israelites, after being enslaved in Egypt for approximately 400 years, were freed from Pharaoh's control by Moses. However, after being freed they were forced to wonder around the wilderness for 40 years. Even though this was a mere tenth of the time spent in Egypt, eventually they grew tired of the wandering and began to gripe and complain. The Israelites were treated harshly in Egypt. Despite all of the forced labor and punishment, what they remember just a couple of years later is not the harsh reality of their former situation, but it is the fact that they had food to eat. Instead of thinking back to Egypt and remembering how miserable they were and how they begged and cried to be released, they consciously or sub-consciously choose to remember the good. In psychology, this is referred to as positivity bias, or the Pollyanna Principle.

The Pollyanna Principle states that the human mind is selective in its memory and sub-consciously chooses to respond to positive stimuli with more clarity than negative stimuli. Margaret Matlin and David Stang take this further in his research by proving that the greater amount of time there is between memory and recall, the more selective the brain becomes. This basically means that as time passes our memories become more happily oriented. This correlates to a term Fukuyama refers to as "historical amnesia" where a State as a whole either consciously or sub-consciously forgets their past if it is rooted in violence. When looking at the Israelites, over time they sub-consciously began to only remember the good they experienced under oppression. There is a direct correlation to present day Moldovans and their perception of the period of Soviet rule. Although the Soviet Union has only been dissolved for a little over 20 years, recent history has seen Moldovans reverting back to voting for leaders within the Communist party despite the connection many make to the Soviet Communist rule.

Sports and identity

Language may be one of the most obvious unifying (or dividing) traits of a country, but one trait can bring people together better than any other. Only one trait can force two people who may be polar opposites to stand, cheer, scream, or cry in perfect unison. That trait is a nation's sport. A nation's sports often reveal a lot about the people, government, and culture. Can Moldova use sport as a building block for a unique identity?

Today, Moldova can compete at the international level with many sports; however two sports truly stand out as helping to build a national identity. These two are the national sport and the country's most popular sport: tranta (a Moldovan form of wrestling) and soccer. While the Soviets attempted to transform completely Moldovan sport, tranta was one athletic tradition that survived the occupation. Part of this success in Moldova is due to the fact that this sport does not require any equipment. With Moldova's economic status, tranta is extremely important because it can be played in villages where materials and fields for other sports are scarce.

Another reason for its popularity is its uniqueness. It is a style of wrestling that focuses on peace and cooperation and has roots dating back to ancient Egypt. Dr. Serghei Busuioc explains that the mat the athletes compete on is always circular and yellow with a red center in order to honor Horus the Egyptian sun god. Busuioc goes on to say that tranta combines these Egyptian traditions with Biblical principles such as not beating a man after he has fallen down, a ritualistic crossing of hands before each match, and the use of three rounds and three referees to represent the Trinity. The entire match is set around friendship and camaraderie. Before the match competitors meet each other and shake hands, and then after it is over, it is normal for the fighters to all celebrate together, often sharing a glass of Moldovan wine.

While other larger countries have forms of fighting focused on injuring or killing their opponent, Busuioc notes that since Moldova is such a small nation, they all need each other desperately so it is seen as hurting the nation to injure or kill your fellow Moldovan. Then there are traditions of the game that are uniquely Moldovan, one being the prize system. Although in official arenas it is becoming more common to give out medals or trophies, in several small village set-ups where tranta is often played on the dirt or maybe a large blanket at the most, the traditional

prizes are still used. If there are two divisions, the younger winner will receive a rooster and the older victor will receive a ram. If there are three divisions, then the winner of the middle division receives a rabbit. (Rogers, 2014)

So tranta is more than just a game. It truly acts as a way Moldovans view themselves, combining their ancient historical roots, their religious practices, and their own traditions and customs. Recently tranta has acted as a way to deter violence and restore relations with Transnistria. In 2010, what started as a small tournament for youth wrestlers in Transnistria quickly grew and became a national event. Young athletes from all over the country came together to compete with each other in an act of unity that has not been seen before between the two regions. In recent years, this sport has started to gain a certain amount of international recognition. At a martial arts festival in Korea, Moldova was ranked near the top of the 35 states that were all present. What does this international recognition mean for tranta and for Moldova? Official regulated tranta will continue to grow and be supported by the government. It will be seen as a way for the international community to view this state that is struggling to find an identity.

Conclusion

Moldova has usually been regarded as a Romanian irredenta, and separate Moldovan nation-building was believed to be utterly quixotic. The ethnic consolidation of the Moldovan group was incomplete, not because it contained any significant subgroups, but because it was itself regarded as a subgroup of another ethnos. The existing concept of ethnicity and the description of ethnic groups in Moldova pertains to a primordial ancestral identification and is not the main source of cultural identification or political action. The core of the ethno-political conflict in Moldova is about emancipation of the cultural majority in front of the previously dominating minority.

The relationship between Moldova and Romania is a complex and it is viewed quite differently on the two sides of the Prut. For fifty years the Soviets tried to persuade "Moldovans" and Romanians that they were different peoples in spite of the similarities of their languages, cultures and history. Even before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Moldova had attained enough autonomy to allow it to begin Latinizing the Romanian language and emphasizing its cultural unity with Romania. While this linkage is important in its own right, it colors the situation in which the Russian minority in Moldova finds itself.

For two centuries, Russians travelled to the fringes of the Russian and Soviet. The migrants did not perceive themselves to be going abroad or living in another country; they viewed their country to be bigger that the lands of Russia proper. The dissolution of the Soviet Union has changed neither these Russians' psychological connections to the center, nor the center's perception that its responsibilities go beyond the Russian Federation and include the welfare of the Russians living in the successors states. Russians in the so-called "near abroad" remain both a domestic and a foreign policy issue in Moscow. Moldova provides a particularly sensitive, but hardly unique, example of the interplay of domestic and foreign policies.

Developments in post-Soviet Moldovan society have clear parallels in the national movement of the late-1980s. For some, the movement meant the rediscovery of the Moldovans' 'true' Romanian identity after decades of official Soviet slavery. Others saw the nationalistic manifestations as the assertion of the Moldovan local sovereignty over imperial interests. Finally,

there were some that perceived the changes as a defeat of Soviet 'internationalism' at the hands of a narrow- minded ethnic chauvinism. By the 1990s, the Moldovans were still a nation divided over their common 'national' identity. For some, they were simply Romanians who, due to the treachery of the Soviets, had not been allowed to express their national identity openly. For others, they were an independent historical nation, related to, but distinct from the Romanians to the west. Still for others, they were something in-between, part of a general Romanian cultural space, yet existing as a discrete and sovereign people with individual traditions, aspirations, and their own communal identity.

As with many post-Soviet states, Moldova must balance between recognizing its multi-ethnic character, adopting federal structures and providing collective minority rights. Violent repression of minorities because of the fear of separatism and unwillingness to recognize an inherited multi-ethnicity merely led to ethnic conflict with the Trans-Dniester and Gagauz regions. The Moldovan state's borders are those bequeathed to it from the former USSR. Accepting them requires the Moldovan state to also accept its inherited multi-ethnic character and accommodate cultural diversity.

Maria Turcan

And to you

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