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Divided National Identity in Moldova

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Abstract

This paper discusses the competing processes between Moldovan and Romanian identities for the creation of a national identity in the Republic of Moldova. The issue of a common national identity for the people of the Republic of Moldova has been a problem since the beginning of this state's independence. Throughout the 25 years of independence, different concepts of a Moldovan nation have competed in public, scientific, and political discourse. As a result of the historical context, the region has a linguistic specificity, which is based on the example of the Romanians, Moldovans, and Russians living in this region. Through archival research, field research, and interviews with Moldovan intellectuals and officials, this study recognizes the need for a national identity in the creation of unity and a sense of nationalism for Moldovan citizens.

Keywords

national identity; Moldova; nationalism

Introduction

Since the Russian annexation of 1812, identity politics has been the long-term subject of interest and dispute for a relatively large part of the population as well as the politically relevant inhabitants and state structures of Romania, Moldova, and Russia. This is true for the period before World War I, the interwar period, during World War II, and after it. It intensified in form after the country gained political independence, connected to the disintegration of the Russian–Soviet imperial realm. Russian efforts to create new national identities after the annexation of foreign territories were successful in some cases, e.g., the division of ethnic Karels from the Finns and the splitting

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of North Caucasian Circassians into Adyghean, Cherkess, Kabardian, and Shapsug ethnic groups. Moldovan Romanians were also in a similar position.

This work is constructed as a qualitative research, which aims to "understand the unique examined phenomenon in the historical and cultural contexts in which it is set. The purpose of the research is not to reach conclusions applicable for further cases, but is an effort to understand the inner connections of the only examined case" (Hendl 2005, 57). Specifically, it is a singular case study aimed at "holistic and deep comprehension of the complex phenomenon without ambition to contribute to the deepening of knowledge about other phenomena" (Kořan 2008, 34).

The methodology for the creation of this work consisted of the initial gathering of a sufficient quantity of relevant information sources related to the investigated issues. Sorting and thorough analysis of the gathered information followed. After a critical evaluation of the studied data, the resulting findings were complemented with own opinions and the data from field researches executed between 2015 and 2016, obtained from interviews with academics, journalists, and representatives of political parties in Moldova and Romania.

The authors attempt to answer the research questions through the study of primary sources, documents, and works published in the Romanian, Moldovan, Russian, and English languages and to formulate the conclusion of the work through a method of induction, i.e., the process of formulation of general conclusions from partial findings. Selected methods of discourse analysis and content analysis are also used in such a way as to correspond to the theme, form, and extent of the study. Mostly qualitative data are used in the presented essay, because most of the sources have the character of scientific texts. Occasionally, quantitative data adopted from official censuses are also used. In addition, data acquired from interviews conducted in the environment of the local academic community and political society are used. The interviews were arranged in advance by e-mail. The names of the interviewed persons are not published, due to concerns for their safety.

Because qualitative methods are mainly intended for understanding the analyzed phenomena in their historical and cultural contexts, in particular, descriptive and historical-analytical methods will be used, enabling evaluation of the historical circumstances that have significantly influenced the examined issues.

The work is based on the assumption that language and religion are important factors of national identity.[2] Belonging to one of the two Orthodox churches

2 From the linguistic point of view, the Moldovan and Romanian languages are very similar.

– Moldovan (under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church) and Bessarabian (which operates within the Romanian Orthodox Church) is a side effect of the differences between the Moldovan and Romanian identities.[3] Both churches logically have ambitions to intervene in the political sphere of the state, including the foreign relations of Moldova. The main objective of the study is to determine how they influence the own identity of the Moldovan population and whether they somehow also participate in the internal and external policies of the state.

The text is focused on the territory of the present-day Republic of Moldova. The most often used geonyms therefore are Moldova and Bessarabia. The meaning of the word "Moldova" ("Moldavia") in the text is connected with the historical territory of the Moldavian Principality, which was situated on part of the territories of present-day Romania and Ukraine (Bukovina was part of the Moldavian Principality until 1775) and on the territory of the present Republic of Moldova until 1812 (excluding the territory of Transnistria). The denomination "Moldavia" is also used in the text for the period of Soviet domination from 1940 until the gaining of independence. The denomination "Bessarabia" relates to the territory between the Prut and Dniester Rivers – the east of the Moldavian Principality obtained this designation after the Russian annexation in 1812, when Russia extended this term used by the Romanians only for the coastal area (now part of Ukraine)[4] for strategic reasons – the new name was intended to demonstrate that the occupied territory was no longer Moldavia. Romania also used the term "Bessarabia" between 1918 and 1940 (and in 1941–44) and it has remained in the minds of part of the local population to this day – as reflected in the name of the Bessarabian Church.

Historical Aspects of Romanian Identity

An unquestionable substrate of the Romanian–Moldovan ethnogenesis comprises the Thracian tribes of Dacians and Gatae, speaking related dialects of the Thracian language and professing the cult of the god Zalmoxis. In the course of the first century BC, King Burebista united the Dacians with the Gatae and even managed to interfere in Roman power issues – militarily supporting Pompey against Julius Caesar. Coincidentally, shortly after the assassination of Caesar, Burebista encountered the same fate. However, while Rome was subsequently strengthened, the Dacian–Gataean Kingdom fell

3 In a similar way, a differential line stretches between Serbian and Montenegrin, as well as between Bulgarian and Macedonian identities.

4 The Ottoman Empire annexed this region, in a slightly different definition, and administered it from 1484 under the name Budzhak as an integral part of the Empire, while the Moldavian Principality was a vassal state of the Ottomans.

apart. In subsequent decades, finally in 106 AD, it became part of Rome. Gradual Romanization, and later Christianization, of the local population followed – this process was so spontaneous that Romanians and Moldovans, unlike other Christian nations, have no fixed (not even approximately set) date of acceptance of Christianity. Moreover, except for the Rhaeto–Romanic people, only Romanians have designated themselves as Romans from the fall of the Roman Empire to the present time.[5]

The present-day existence of two independent states on the ethnic Romanian, or Romanian–Moldovan territory, has historical roots. Its foundations grew from the integration of small feudal units led by district governors, princes, or voivodes in the long period from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. Firstly, in about 1310, a principality known by the name of Wallachia (however, in the Romanian language, the territory was called "Romanian country" – Țara românească) was founded by Besarab I. A little later, in 1359, in the Prut River basin, the voivode Bogdan founded the Principality of Moldavia. In addition, there was Transylvania —a third political formation with a predominance of Romanian population. However, it was established as an autonomous unit within the Kingdom of Hungary, led by a voivode (in the Hungarian language, it was called Erdély/"wooded country"/while in German, it was Siebenbürgen, i.e., "Seven Castles"). In the course of the fifteenth century, Wallachia and Moldavia became the vassals of the Ottoman Sultanate with internal autonomy, although for a short time, between 1600 and 1602, the two countries were combined into a single state, together with Transylvania, under Michael the Brave.

However, Moldavia did not just become an object of Ottoman interests. The territory was desired by the Polish–Lithuanian state in seeking access to the Black Sea, and from the late eighteenth century by the expanding Russia, for whom Moldavia constituted a barrier to expansion into the Balkans. Annexation of the eastern part in 1812 was the first step toward the fulfillment of Russia's geopolitical strategy – to connect the Orthodox Balkans to Russia and to gain direct access to the Mediterranean Sea. However, Romania considers present-day Moldova to be a lost Romanian territory and Moldovans part of the Romanian nation. This is despite the fact that, due to different developments in the period of strong Soviet propaganda, a section of Moldovans even prefers the new Moldovan identity.

5 The Greeks designated themselves as Romans (*Romaioi*) until the fall of Constantinople. Thereafter, they accepted the ethnonym *Hellenes*. It is possible to add that other Roman-speaking populations in the Balkans follow the Roman identity in their endonyms (Istroromanians, Aromanians, and Meglenoromanians).

To understand the subtle differences between Romanian and Moldovan identities, it should be remembered that Walachia and truncated (western) Moldavia were permanently connected in 1859 by the formation of a personal union, transformed 3 years later into a real union under the name of Romania. Before that, as a consequence of losing the Crimean War, in 1856, Russia had to cede part of the former Budzhak to Moldavia. However, Russia reannexed it in 1878 and returned it to Bessarabian guberniya. As we shall see later, not even strong Russification or anti-Romanian policy was at that time able to destroy the Romanian identity in the part of Moldavia occupied by Russia. This was fully manifested at the end of World War I, when a weakened Russia was unable to prevent the connection of Eastern Moldavia to Romania. However, this condition did not last for long – an agreement between two totalitarian states, Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union, in 1940, forced Romania to again cede the territory known as Bessarabia to the Russian–Soviet Empire, which immediately formed a new federal republic from it (the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic [MSSR]). However, at the same time, it separated the area of historical Budzhak from it, joining it to Ukraine. With the exception of the short-term return of Bessarabia to Romania (1941–44), the reduced Moldavia remained part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) until its disintegration.

To emphasize the antagonism created by various viewpoints, contemporary literature regarding these significant dates in Moldavian history (1812, 1918, and 1940) must be examined. Both Romanianist and Moldovanist historical research selects 1812, 1918, and the 1940s as important dates to be analyzed. These are undoubtedly the key periods in the history of both countries, as well as significant turning points in Moldovan history (King 2000).

By their association with other nations, e.g. Russia, these dates demonstrate the contrasting views on national identity by Romanianists and Moldovanists. Romanianist and Moldovanist historiography, although bearing similar elements, differ vastly in the methods of their narration. Two different sources for the study of the history of Moldovanism are provided by Soviet and Moldovan historiography and school textbooks (Solonari 2002).

Post-Soviet Moldovanist literature indicates a changing viewpoint, with an emphasis on the positive portrayal of external and Russian influences (Solonari 2002). Russian/Eastern Slav influence is depicted as being positive with regard to the ethnogenesis process and the cultural development of the nation.

Important factors in both historical discourses on the Principality of Moldavia from 1359 to 1812 include the struggle against the Ottoman Empire and

the reign of Ştefan cel Mare. Ştefan cel Mare is still an all-important figure in Moldova. His portrait is on Moldovan banknotes, his name is on streets, and his statues are seen in towns and cities. Moreover, Ştefan cel Mare and his time period are vital for the understanding of the similarities between Romanianist and Moldovanist versions of the historical narrative.

Ştefan cel Mare, a Moldavian Prince between 1457 and 1504, was actually a Romanian Prince, according to Ghimpu (2002). He bases this on his language having been called "Romanian" in his chancellery documents and also in foreign documents. On the contrary, the Communists made Ştefan cel Mare a central figure in Moldovan history and in the continuity of the Moldovan state. They refute the Romanian argument by stating that, as Prince of Moldavia, he could not have been Romanian. In addition, he punished the Wallachian princes for collaborating with the Ottoman Empire.

On May 16, 1812, after the Treaty of Bucharest, the eastern part of the medieval Principality of Moldavia was removed from Moldavian control and it came under Russian administration. This was a crucial point in Moldavian history, as it represents the date of liberation from the centuries-old Ottoman "yoke" (Stati 2014). A similar viewpoint is seen in Moldovanist textbooks, with an emphasis on the word "absorption", omitting all negative connotations of the Russian actions (Solonari 2002). However, Romanianists refuse to see these events as liberation, describing it as a trade-off between two empires. They quote Romanian statesman Nicolae Iorga: "The Romanian people never asked the Tsar to be liberated" (Ghimpu 2002).

1918 is the next key date, marking the formation of Greater Romania. On December 2, 1917, Bessarabia declared its independence from Tsarist Russia. However, on March 27, 1918, it was united with Romania by a decision of the Moldavian Assembly. Both in 1859 and in 1918, the Moldavian element in the process of Romanian unification was of crucial importance (Ghimpu 2002). In 1859, Moldavian Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza was elected in both principalities, formalizing the official union. However, in 1918, Moldavia decided on unification. Bukovina and Transylvania waited until November and December 1918, respectively.

There is an emphasis on the unity perceived between the Moldovans west of the Prut and the Moldovans in the Republic of Moldova, in the recognition of Moldova as a part of Romania. The Moldovanist argument is that the choice made by the Moldavian Assembly in 1918 was a pragmatic one. However, this is disputed by the Romanianist narrative in stating that the choice was made so as to avoid being annexed by Ukraine. The Romanianist interpretation of history marks 1918 as a key event in the unification process. It portrays the

subsequent period as having positive features. On the contrary, Moldovanists consider 1918 as marking the beginning of the Romanian occupation of the Republic of Moldova.

Romanianist historiography regards June 1940 as the beginning of the Soviet occupation of Romania. However, Moldovanists legitimize this Soviet annexation as being a consequence of the Tsar annexing Moldavia in 1812, in order to protect its Russophone population. This view is not accepted throughout Romanianism. Ghimpu (2002) argues that Romania "ceded without the smallest of opposition in order to save national dignity [¼] against the wish of a lot of Romanians". However, Romanianists regard the intervention as an occupation, to a certain extent blaming Romania. Blame for the 1940 events is a complex issue, for which Romanianists provide various conclusions.

It is clear that there are two opposing versions of history regarding the two main national identity discourses, representing different interpretations of the same significant events.

Formation of Ecclesial Structures

A specific ecclesial structure began to be formed in Romanian ethnic territories shortly after the creation of the statehood. Within the Patriarchate of Constantinople, autonomous metropolitanship for Wallachia was established in 1359, under which was also the Romanian Orthodoxy in Hungary (officially called the Hungarian–Wallachian metropolitanship). A metropolitanship was established for Moldavia in 1394, but a Metropolitan was only appointed in 1401. A common Romanian metropolitanship was only created in 1865 and, 7 years later, declared itself to be the autocephalous Romanian Orthodox Church, but its autocephalousness was only acknowledged by Constantinople in 1885. Since 1925, the Metropolitans of the Romanian Orthodox Church have been using the title of Patriarch. It is needless to say that the territory of Budzhak, together with Dobrudzha, was not part of any Romanian metropolitanship until the Russian annexation, but in the form of a bishopric, fell directly under Constantinople. This was also one of the reasons why this region was handed over to Ukraine. In 1813, the Russian annexation of Bessarabia led to the subordination of all local dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, by connecting to Romania in 1918, the territory was subordinated to the Romanian Orthodox Church, which established the autonomous Bessarabian metropolitanship in 1928. After the Soviet annexation in 1940, the situation returned to what it had been before 1918, and the Moldavian territory formed one bishopric of the Russian Orthodox

Church. With the progressive disintegration of the USSR, it was elevated to an archbishopric. In 1992, one year after the declaration of independence, the autonomous Moldavian Orthodox Church was created under the Moscow Patriarchate. In the same year, the autonomous Bessarabian metropolitanship resumed its activities. Although several other churches professing Orthodoxy are active in Moldova (including "Old Believers"), the number of their members is marginal, in terms of hundreds. However, what is unique about the Orthodox ecclesiastical structures in Moldova is that there are two competing autocephalous patriarchates. In other environments that arose in predominantly Orthodox postcommunist countries, it is common that one canonical autocephalous church competes with one or several noncanonical (often "Old Calendarist") denominations (Ukraine, Macedonia, Montenegro, and so on). It is also specific for Moldova that no church that would declare itself independent of Moscow and Bucharest has emerged.

Development of Romanian–Moldovan Language

Historians believe that the formation process of the Romanian population and its language was completed in the eighth or ninth century. According to Romanian historian, Adolf Armbruster (of Saxon origin), Romanians are also referred to in medieval literature as Valah či Olah (Ghimpu 2002). Pro-Russian authors, Mikhail Guboglo[6] and Valentin Dergachev[7], disagree with this concept and argue that it is merely a construct of Romanian nationalists from the early nineteenth century. They associated not only the names Valah and Olah, but also later the derivatives Vlah, Voloh, Wolosz, Voloshin, and similar names with the newly forming Romanian ethnonym. These authors also claim that, based on this version, all Romani nations east of the Adriatic Sea from Bug were identified by Romanian scientists as being Romanians, which they consider as symptoms of Romanian nationalism and historical theories (Stati in Guboglo and Dergachev 2010, 13).[8] Vasile Stati[9] stated the following in his book: "The last attempt to extend Romanian origin to the

6 The Constantinople patriarchate did not accept this change and only recognized the joining of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1918.

7 Russian sociologist of Gagauzian origin, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

8 Moldovan historian of Russian origin, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova.

9 It is basically understandable that the Russian view of the joint Romanian–Moldovan history is different, e.g., Mikhail Guboglo, Valentin Dergachev, and Vasile Stati. Nevertheless, the fact is that the ethnonym *Vlah* in various forms was, and sometimes still is, a wider ethnonym for a population speaking Romance languages in the Balkans (Aromanians, Istroromanians, and Meglenoromanians). In some languages, the ethnonym *Vlach* is also used to this day for Italians (Polish: *Włoch*).

east was made in the period 1941–1943 by soldiers and colonists. They failed. They got only as far as the Don River¼" (Stati 2013, 227). Stati's pro-Russian view also supports the allegation that the name "Romania" was a result of a propaganda campaign spread by Wallachian/Muntenian intellectuals in the 1940s (Stati 2013, 232).

The term "Romanian" in the sense of national designation, is documented in a letter from Stephen the Great (Moldavian Prince in the period 1457–1504), dated March 13, 1489. The growing importance of the ethnic designation "Romanian" can also be seen in the works by Moldavian chroniclers (Grigore Ureche, Miron Costin, Nicolae Costin, Varlaam, and Dosoftei). The population, which was created as a result of the admixture of Romans and Dacians, spoke a language known as Danube or Balkan Latin. However, one Byzantine chronicle had mentioned the Balkan–Roman (proto-Romanian) sentence "torna, torna, fratre" ("turn, turn, brother") in 583 (Gramelová et al. 2012, 71).

This Romance language, which was later preserved in a foreign language environment (Slavic and Hungarian), was very significant. It became a strong, nation-consolidation factor. It was the language that distinguished Romanians from their neighbors, united them, and connected them to other Romance nations (Rychlík 2009). Representatives of all Romanian regions (Moldavia, Wallachia, Transylvania, Bukovina, Maramures, and others) participated in the process of the creation and stabilization of the Romanian language. Translations of Slavic liturgical texts and works of a religious nature from 1482 are considered the oldest evidence of Romanian literary language, according to the place of origin, called, among others, Maramures texts (Treptow 2000, 103). What is certain, Romanian developed in a radically different environment, compared to the Western Romance languages. The latter developed in close cultural symbiosis with the Latin language and the Catholic Church, while the Romanian language developed within the environment of the Orthodox Church with Old Slavonic liturgy, under the cultural influence of the Greek language (and of Hungarian in Transylvania), and in the political thralldom of the Islamic Ottoman Empire (Price 1998). Because these external influences were suppressed in Romania, after annexation by Russia, the language in Bessarabia was exposed to strong Russification. In the Soviet period, this culminated in the creation of a specific regional version – the Moldavian language. Through education, together with ideological indoctrination about a specific Moldavian identity, the language was forced upon the local Romanian population.

Comparison of Romanian and Moldavian languages:

Romanian	**Moldavian**	**Moldavian in Cyrillic**	**English**
În	în	ын	In
Mic	mik	мик	Small
Limba	limba	лимба	Language

The fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union brought about the resurrection of national self-consciousness, which had seemed lost during the reign of the Soviet regime. The process of national awareness was common to all of Eastern Europe. However, we see differences in the way that these nationalistic tendencies were used by politicians and local ethnic groups (Montanari 2001). With gradual nationalization in other Soviet republics, such as the Baltic states and Central Asia, Moldovans were also becoming aware of their national identity.

Weakening of central power and the lessening of censorship were accompanied by ethnic tensions in Moldova. Since the first years of independence, the country has been facing very difficult problems, including separatist tendencies in the east (Transnistria) and south (Gagauzia) of the country, as well as a very complicated economic situation. The revision of Soviet policy and events at the beginning of the 1990s had an impact on the political discourse and the formation of a national identity. The first option after the Declaration of Independence was to create an independent state, which would assume responsibility for the resolution of ethnic problems. This option also counted on the use of the Russian language. which should have a special status (in accordance with the status that this language had within the USSR), and maintenance of close relations with Russia and other countries of the disintegrating Soviet Union. The second possibility, which was broadly discussed by Moldovan society, was the connection with Romania. Proponents of this idea hoped that the Romanian and Moldovan governments would renew the validity of the 1918 decision when both territories had united. Eventually, the political context predestined the Moldovan path to independence. The result was the adoption of the Constitution, which refers to the continuity of the statehood of the Moldovan nation and highlights the desire of the people to become a nation.[10]

10 The Moldovan Constitution, among others, constitutes as follows: "…in response to many years of aspirations of the population to live in a sovereign state, expressed in the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova, with regard to the continuity of Moldovan statehood in historical and ethnic context…" (Constituţia Republicii Moldova).

In subsequent years, the options of Moldova's future significantly influenced the political discourse concerning the creation of a national identity and additionally divided Moldovan society into supporters of two different approaches of national identity: "Moldovanism" and "Romanianism". The main differences between the two approaches consist of the different interpretations of historical events, name of the language, ethnic heritage, and nation.

Political and Cultural Roots of Moldovanism

The problem of regaining a language and national identity occurs most frequently in a population that has been forcibly subjected to a stronger state and exposed to assimilation processes. There are several motivational elements for regaining its own national identity – self-awareness, understanding the loss of identity, desire to advance one step ahead, and liberation from the position of a colonized country – and identity represents such a step (Buzu 2012, 1).

The national problem was particularly acute in Tsarist Russia, with the only official and educational language being Russian, and annexed Bessarabia was no exception. The creation of a Russian administration was soon followed by steps taken with the objective of gradual Russification and denationalization of the entire Bessarabian region. The reasons were especially the concerns of the Tsarist regime that the local population would be inspired by the growing Greek nationalism, which had achieved the renewal of Greece (King 2000, 25).

Russian sources have long avoided the term "annexation" and write about the "integration of Prussian-Dniester Moldavia" into the Russian Empire on the basis of the Bucharest Peace Treaty. According to Russian sources, the activity of Russian troops in Bessarabia was seen very positively and led to the political, economic, and cultural development of the region (e.g., Stati in Guboglo and Dergachev 2010, 33). The fact is that such an assertion was nothing new, and the same cliché was used in relation to all the conquered territories.

Until the Russian occupation in 1812, culture in the territory between the Prut and Dniester Rivers developed consistently with Moldavian culture. The church remained the main factor of cultural development, but the region entered the phase of secularization gradually after 1812. Churches and monasteries simultaneously served as places where reading and writing were taught. The national movement had a leading role in the establishment of the educational system in the mother tongue. Cultural development during the

Tsarist regime between 1812 and 1917 was influenced by many unfavorable conditions. Romanian culture was considered as being secondary and was to be assimilated gradually within the Russian culture. The extent of the use of the Romanian language was so limited that, in 1870, it was completely prohibited from use in state administration, schools, and the church. At the same time, the policy of the national and cultural isolation of Romania was supported (King 2000, 23).

The Paris Peace Treaty was signed at the end of the Crimean War on March 30, 1856. Russia had to agree to cede Southern Bessarabia (Budzhak) to the Moldavian Principality. Inhabitants of the Southern Bessarabian districts of Cahul, Cetatea Albă, and Izmail experienced how close the unification of Romanian countries was. Southern Bessarabia searched for the renewal of contact with its mother tongue. Izmail became the cultural and spiritual center of Bessarabian Romanians. The press in the Romanian language also flourished. Newly published newspapers included *Gazeta de Ismail, Ecoul Basarabiei,* and *Curierul Basarabiei*. However, the principles of the Paris Peace Treaty did not last long and another Russo-Turkish War erupted in 1877–1878. Even before the end of this Russo-Turkish War, Russian Foreign Minister Gorchakov informed the Romanian government that Russia intended to take back Southern Bessarabia. Romania was advised to withdraw from the area and received the Danube Delta and Northern Dobrudzha as compensation. The fact that Romanians from the Budzhak territory became part of the Moldavian Principality again until February 19/March 3,[11] 1878 (end of the above-mentioned Russo-Turkish War by the preliminary Russo-Turkish Treaty of San Stefano) was very important in the resistance against Russification. After the repeated annexation, the Tsarist government reacted very actively to the fact that there was a strong Romanian national consciousness in those Southern Bessarabian regions.

The process of Russification began through Russified church organization, which played a very significant role in the course of the denationalization of Bessarabian Romanians. Russification was undoubtedly facilitated by the Orthodox faith shared with the Russians. However, the very low literacy level, especially in rural areas, also enabled the survival of the Romanian colloquial language in subsequent generations. The theological seminary founded on January 13, 1813, in Chișinău by the Metropolitan, Gavrilo Bănulescu-Bodoni, played a very important role in the spiritual and cultural life of Bessarabia. Here, education in Romanian as well as the Russian language was provided (Buzu 2012, 8). However, the condition of acceptance to a university

11 The first date is stated according to the Julian and the second date according to the Gregorian calendar.

at that time was especially the knowledge of the Russian language. National consciousness was under immense pressure, but intellectuals (Gheorghe Asachi, Constantin Negruzzi, and others) who were engaged in the culture and poetry of Bessarabian Romanians deserve great credit for its preservation (Buzu 2012, 10).

In 1848, the *Românul* newspaper began to be published in Chișinău. However, in the 1950s, it was already bilingual in Russian and Romanian. The unification of Wallachia and Moldavia in 1859, which strengthened the faith of Bessarabian inhabitants in a common national identity and language, provided great inspiration to Bessarabian Romanians. Tsarist Russia, however, immediately adopted another series of measures to prevent the convergence of the inhabitants of Bessarabia with those of Romania. In the period 1856–1884, the Russian Empire tried to implement many steps in the transformation of society. Nevertheless, these were recorded negatively in history. The ultimate goal was the total Russification of the inhabitants of Bessarabia. The first steps included closing of the Romanian language department at St Petersburg University on August 28, 1858. The department was opened in 1848 with the intention of preparing judges and officials deployed in Bessarabia to be able to understand local documents. Russian authorities paid great attention to the young generation. No schoolbooks that featured passages referring to a common Romanian nation could be printed in Romanian. However, Ioan Doncev, a Romanian language teacher at the Chișinău Grammar School, published books in the Romanian language intended for children *(Cursulu primitivu de limba rumâna, Abeceda rumâna).* These were probably the first publications for children in Bessarabia written in the Roman alphabet (Buzu 2012, 14). This reflected the changes occurring in 1860 in the neighboring United Principalities, where Cyrillic was officially replaced by the Roman alphabet. In any case, authorities in Bessarabia still insisted on using Cyrillic. Nevertheless, political and cultural changes forced Russia to take further steps. Teaching of the Romanian language was gradually eliminated and, on February 9, 1866, was abolished at the last school – the Chișinău Grammar School. The authorities argued that students used the language practically and it was not necessary to study it for any other reasons (Buzu 2012, 44).

A series of prohibitions also concerned the media. Previously, in 1863, the Russian government did not allow Georghe Gore to publish newspapers in Romanian and, in 1884, the Romanian newspaper *Mesagerul Basarabiei* was banned. This formally ended the public use of the Romanian language in Bessarabia. However, due to the low level of literacy, Romanian still survived

as colloquial Moldavian. Similarly, other dialects continued to live on in Romania alongside codified Romanian.

Attempts of boyars Constantin Cristi and Nicolae Casse to reintroduce the Roman alphabet in Chișinău at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively, did not meet with success.[12] The reason was the concern that the population might again identify with the "Romanian language" and demand the reunification of Bessarabia with Romania (Buzu 2012, 14).

In 1890, at the end of the nineteenth century, Bessarabian Romanians in Bucharest founded the Milcov Association[13] and then the Cultural League of Bessarabian Romanians (Liga Culturală a Românilor Basarabeni). Both organizations were managed by Hasdeu, a famous scientist and author from Bessarabia, and both brought together refugees from Bessarabia. Their objective was also to contribute to the national emancipation of Bessarabian Romanians (Pop, Bulei 2012, 85). This was naturally limited by the low level of literacy – at the time of joining Romania, it did not even reach 20% and was even lower among the Romanian-speaking population. For comparison, it should be mentioned that the proportion of literate persons in Romania was double and, in the joined Transylvania, exceeded 50% – but only 22% among Transylvanian Romanians (Treptow 2000, 295).

In order to dilute the Romanian population, Russian authorities encouraged the immigration of the Slavic population and the removal of Romanians to the left bank of the Dniester, i.e., beyond the borders of Bessarabia. If, in 1817, Romanians accounted for 86% of the population, in 1871, it was 67%, and in the first Russian real census, it was already only 47.6% out of the total number of 2 million people (Treptow 2000, 225).

12 The Romanian language used Cyrillic in the written form (1521 – the first known text by nobleman Neacșu, addressed to the City Council in Brasov), which was gradually replaced by the Roman alphabet. The Roman alphabet was already used in Transylvania from the end of the sixteenth century. Cyrillic was replaced in Wallachia in 1860 and in Moldavia in 1863 (Gramelová et al. 2012, 72). However, the Cyrillic alphabet continued to be used in the territory of Bessarabia until 1920. However, this was not the same type of Cyrillic that was in use in Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) from 1926 and then in Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in the period 1940–1989 (with the exception of 1941–1944), known as the Russian alphabet.

13 The Milcov River is only 79 km long, but it had a symbolic meaning for unionists. By the decision of Stephen the Great, in 1482, it became the short but natural border between Wallachia and Moldavia. This river was considered by unionists as a symbol of division and newly the unification of Romanian principalities. In 1856, composer Vasile Alecsandri wrote a poem called The Hora of Unity (*Hora Unirii*), for which Alexandru Flechtenmacher composed the music – the poem is about the removal of this boundary. This song, together with the dance performance (Hora is a type of circle dance), is always performed on January 24 – the Day of Unification.

Temporary Return to Romanian Identity

The events of the twentieth century (Russo–Japanese War in 1904–1905, Russian bourgeois revolution in 1905–1907, and others) affected the national movement in Bessarabia (Pop, Bulei 2012, 85). On May 24, 1906, the Chișinău-based Romanian newspaper *Basarabia,* with a nationally democratic orientation, began to be published to awaken national consciousness. In addition, other significant contemporary personalities, such as Constantin Stere, Emanuil Gavriliță, Ion Pelivan, Mihai Vântu, Alexis Nour, Alexei Mateevici, and Sergiu Cujbă, contributed to this. In addition to articles about the national movement in Bessarabia, the newspaper also provided information about happenings in Romania. Each issue featured prose or excerpts of Romanian twentieth -century literature. However, after the newspaper published the Romanian national anthem, *"Desteaptă-te, române*" (Wake up, Romanians) in 1907, it was banned (Buzu 2012, 14). The editors of this newspaper later became members of the National Moldavian Party (Partidul National Moldovenesc),[14] which participated in the constituting of Parliament in 1918. This political party was connected with the Bessarabian newspaper *Cuvânt moldovenesc* (Moldavian Word). As a result of the liberalization of political life between 1905 and 1906, and progress of the national movement, the situation in Bessarabia had improved in 1917. Many books were published in Romanian, whose authors were, among others, Gheorghe Codreanu, Pantelimon Halippa, Constantin Popescu, Mihail Ciachir, and Stefan Ciobanu.

Historical scientific activity was implemented only on the initiative of enthusiasts, who were divided into two camps: one loyal to the Tsarist regime, with production of an exclusively propagandistic nature, such as Alexis Nacco and his Russian-written work *"Istoria Bessarabii s drevneisih vremion"* (1873–1876). On the other hand, there was the position of "Romanianists", professing their Romanian ancestors. Among them were Gheorghe Gore, Iustin Frăţiman, Ioan Halippa, Paul Gore, Gurie Grosu, and Alexei Mateevici. The survival of Romanian culture in Bessarabia in its traditional form depended on the preservation of the Romanian language as the basic factor of connection with the Romanian nation in this region (Buzu 2012, 18).

14 In February 1917, the Congress of Priests and Teachers was held in Chișinău, which requested from the Romanian Metropolitan the creation of a body to command the legislature as well as the executive. Bessarabian intellectuals discussed the need to create a political Romanian party to fight for national liberation. The political party, called the National Moldavian Party, was established on April 2, 1917. Vasile Stroescu became the Party leader, with deputies Vladimir Herţa and Paul Gore (Pop and Bulei 2012, 111).

Russian influence was manifested the most markedly in the economic, social, and cultural development of Bessarabian Romanians. The process of Russification was also devastating in the areas of education and cultural isolation, when almost the entire population of Bessarabian Romanians was illiterate. Only a few intellectuals maintained contact with Romanians across the Prut River. Many of these Bessarabian educated persons studied at the university in Estonian Dorpat (now Tartu). Later, the main protagonists of the liberation movement of the "Bessarabian Villagers" (*Pământeina Basarabeană*) Association were headed by Ion Pelivan (King 2000, 28).

The reaction to the harsh policy of Russification in the Orthodox Church, under the leadership of Bishop Serafim Ciceagov, was the escape of many inhabitants of Bessarabia from the left bank of the Dniester, surprisingly to the town of Balta (now the territory of Ukraine), later the capital of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) from 1924 to 1929.[15] The oppressive policy of Russification gave rise to many movements and sects. In 1909, the "Baltic Movement", known also under the name "Inochentism",[16] emerged in Balto, to lead services in the Romanian language (Păcurariu 2012, 163).

An important milestone in the political development of Bessarabia was the overthrow of the monarchy in Russia. This was the impetus for the development of nationalism in most non-Russian nations, subsequently leading to separatism from the Baltics across the Caucasus up to Central Asia. In the case of Bessarabia, however, it was an irredentist movement, which had aimed for more than a century for reintegration with Romania. In April 1917, the aforementioned National Moldavian Party was led by Vasile Stroescu. As Treptow writes, it "originally requested political, administrative, educational and religious autonomy, that is, a programme proclaimed by the Chişinău-based newspaper, *Romanian Word (Cuvântul românesc)*" (Treptow 2000, 255). This program was also acknowledged by soldiers of Romanian origin from Bessarabia. Bessarabian priests requested that church institutions be led by Romanians; teachers requested Romanization of education and the introduction of the Roman alphabet. After the autumn communist coup in Russia, the situation in Bessarabia was radicalized. In December 1917, political parties agreed on the creation of a Country Council (Sfatul Ţării), formed by representatives appointed by them. Through an election on December

15 The capital of MASSR in 1929–1940 was Tiraspol.

16 This Christian movement was born by splitting from the Eastern Orthodox religion at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was founded by the Romanian monk Inochentie Ţurcanu, who adopted the name of Ioan Levizor after Unification.

15, the Moldavian Democratic Republic (voted for by 62% of delegates) was declared as part of the anti-Communist Russian Federation. The Bolsheviks did not accept this and forcibly occupied Chișinău. For this reason, the Moldavian government requested Romania for military intervention. Because Romanians had obtained the consent of the states for the Agreement, at the end of January, Romanian troops crossed the Prut River. Events evolved fast – on February 6, 1918, the Country Council declared independence from Russia and began to negotiate to join Romania. This was voted for on April 9, 1918 – Romania passed the decree on connection on April 22. The fact is that the number of voters was exactly the same as during the December voting, i.e., 86. Only three voted against it (December 6). The remaining members of Parliament, representing Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish, German, Bulgarian, Armenian, and Polish minorities, did not participate in the election. The vote on connection to Romania was also held in the Austrian province of Bukovina and in Hungarian Transylvania in October. Romania reacted positively to all irredentist movements. On December 24, 1918, the dream of unification of all Romanians into one state also became a reality from the legal perspective.

The period when Bessarabia was part of Romania (1918–40 and again 1941–44) is considered a period of successes as well as failures. This was partly because of the aggressive policy of the neighboring USSR, the global economic crisis, and the insufficient evolvement of democratic thinking of the Romanian kingdom. Russian sources did not mention the reunion of two Slavic nations, but the assault and occupation of Bessarabia on the part of Romania.[17] According to Stati, the Romanian army attacked Moldavia on December 7, 1917. The telegram from the President of Moldavia's Soviet, Erchan, to the Romanian government, dated January 6, 1918, read as follows: "We protest against occupation of Moldavian territory by Romanian troops of the Romanian army. With the arrival of the Romanian army in Bessarabia, there is a risk of civil war which has already started in many places." (Stati 2014, 291).

Despite the failure to create a Bessarabian SSR in 1919, i.e., in the period of the civil war of sovietized Russia, further development showed that the communist leadership of the USSR definitely did not intend to reconcile itself

17 The Bolsheviks were not reconciled to the loss of Bessarabia – on May 1, 1919, they proclaimed the establishment of the Bessarabian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in Odessa, Ukraine, and called on the Romanian government to withdraw its soldiers from Bessarabia and return the territory to Soviet Russia. At that time, there was also a battle for independence in Ukraine, which is why the self-proclaimed Bessarabian "government" moved to Tiraspol on August 2. This was also to become the future center of resistance against the uniting of Bessarabia with Romania. The subsequent Polish intervention in Ukraine, however, led to the dispersal of the Bolshevik government and the demise of the proclaimed, but actually nonexistent, Bessarabian SSR.

to the loss of Bessarabia/Moldavia. The establishment of the Soviet Ukraine was no problem in the totalitarian state. The power center in Moscow decided to single out a small territory on the left bank of the Dniester on March 7, 1924, and make it a Moldavian autonomous region. On October 12 of the same year, it was changed into the MASSR, subordinated to the Ukrainian SSR. It did not matter at all that the historical Moldavia had never extended eastward from the Dniester. It was sufficient that there were approximately 120,000 Moldavians living there, concentrated in a narrow strip along the Dniester,[18] to where they had been moved in the times of Russian administration. According to the 1926 census, Moldavians comprised 30.1 %, while in 1939, the ratio dropped to 28.5 % (Zhiromskaya 1990). However, in the Balta metropolis, the figure was only 1.5 %, like in Tiraspol, where they had been moved to by the central authorities in 1929. It was important that a signal be sent to Romania and the world that Moldavia was becoming part of the Russian–Soviet Empire. For that matter, the soviet leadership announced that "the western border of Moldavia will extend, in due time, along the Prut" (Treptow 2000, 307).

The content of the cultural policy of MASSR emphasized the difference between local Moldavian and Romanian identities. Stati stated in his book that, in MASSR, the educated class was born and the foundations of Moldavian science were laid (Stati 2014, 379). However, educational and scientific institutions were subordinate to the strict control of communist structures. Between 1925 and 1926, within the MASSR, the Moldavian Scientific Committee and the Committee for Moldovization and Ukrainization were founded, largely contributing to the creation of the Moldavian language on the basis of the Transnistrian dialect and the formation of a Moldavian national identity. Historians and linguists began to emphasize the dialectal differences between the Moldavian and Romanian languages. The Moldavian language itself was significantly influenced in particular by Russian technical terminology.[19] A significant role was played by the preference for the work by Dimitrie Cantemir (1673–1723), in particular *Descriptio Moldaviae*, which points out the peculiarity of the Moldavian language and Moldavian statehood (Cantemir 1726). On August 2, 1940, after the reoccupation of Bessarabia by

18 Interview with a journalist of *Komsomolskaya pravda Moldova* Internet portal and newspapers confirmed this pro-Russian view in February 2016.

19 The formation of the Moldavian language was significantly affected by the communist conviction that a new, "proletarian" Moldavian language would be created as an antipole to the "Bourgeois" Romanian, which would also be implemented in Romania in the future. Paradoxically, in 1932, the Moldavian language was converted into the Roman alphabet (this trend was initiated for most non-Slavic languages in the USSR in the 1920s). However, to reinforce power and start large-scale repression in the entire USSR, Stalin stopped the Latinization. This happened in Moldavia in 1938.

the Soviet Union, the MSSR was declared.[20] The theory of Moldovanism was manifested in practice by the formation of the above-mentioned MASSR and later by the MSSR. It is obvious that Moldovanism was created as a pretext for tearing off part of the historical Romanian territory (Pospíšil 2009).

We can only assume that the negative experiences of developments between 1918 and 1940 and events from the period of World War II also contributed to the later decision in the 1990s to become a separate, independent country. The achievements were important for two groups of the Bessarabian population, especially for peasants (regardless of ethnic origin), who formed up to 85% of the population in 1918. Land reforms between 1920 and 1923 were particularly important. The Romanian parliament passed the decision in which it redistributed approximately 1.8 million hectares of land to all peasants (King 2000, 41). Representatives of the autochthonous population (Moldavian Romanians), who formed approximately 70% of the population in 1930, also had success when they obtained the right of education in their mother tongue, i.e., in Romanian. At that time, the educational system of the Romanian Kingdom was adopted in Bessarabia. The system was based on the French model and considered as one of the most advanced in the whole of the Balkan Peninsula (Buzu 2012, 59).

Most peasants benefited from the land reforms and enthusiastically welcomed the return of the use of Romanian language in churches, state administration, and schools. At the end of the 1930s, the successful synchronization of the Bessarabian Romanians with Romanians in other historical Romanian territories could already be observed. This was especially due to the common language. In addition, the increasing literacy in the Bessarabian population, the level of culture, and the sense of belonging to the same nation played their role. This process of integration and synchronization was interrupted in the summer of 1940, when the Soviet Union regained the territory of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and Herta from Romania as a consequence of a secret agreement with Nazi Germany (the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact). According to Stati, actions by the Soviet Union were stimulated in this connection by Romania itself, which had changed into a legionary-fascist state. Under these threatening conditions, the Soviet Union regarded it as its right to take the decision of a diplomatic nature, which was intended to liberate some occupied territories (Stati 2014, 388). However, the shameful Nazi–Communist Pact of 1939 clearly proves that the Soviet Union only continued the imperial policy of Tsarist Russia and the accusation of Romania was intentional.

20 Taking into consideration the Russian literature, on June 28, 1940, Bessarabia was liberated from Romanian occupation (Subbotina in Guboglo, Dergachev 2010, 109).

Directly after the annexation of Moldavia in June 1940, the secret police began to murder people connected with the Romanian government and to deport others to Siberia. The return to Romanian administration was welcomed as a liberation, but it was only of short duration. When the war was over, the Soviet Union again strengthened its influence in Bessarabia by deportations of peasants, priests, and intellectuals to the labor camps in Siberia, organized famine between 1946 and 1947, forcible collectivization, and forced work in mines in Ukraine and Russia. According to the last executed investigation in the Chișinău archives of 2011, more than 300,000 Bessarabian inhabitants were forcibly sent into exile in Siberia and other remote parts of Russia between 1940 and 1941 as well as between 1944 and 1956 (Buzu 2012, 80). It should also be noted that several thousand Bessarabian intellectuals escaped from the communist regime to the Romanian Kingdom in the course of those years. According to Guboglo and Dergachev, there were no causes in MSSR, whether political, sociocultural, or economic, to motivate separatism. Stalinist repressions were motivated sociopolitically, but not nationally. According to the aforementioned authors, the Soviet Union "secured real sovereignty over Moldavian SSR, as over each of its subjects" (Shornikov in Guboglo and Dergachev 2010, 137). The publication of such lies proves that the idea of Russian imperialism is still alive and the distortion of history is one of its manifestations.

Liquidation of Moldavian elites and mass "reeducation in the spirit of Marxism–Leninism" in the educational as well as labor spheres were aimed at building a new Moldavian nation that would cease to strive for connection with Romanians. Nevertheless, Moldavians successfully managed to recall their Romanian past and unity from time to time – obviously this was contributed to by the fact that Romania was also drawn into the Soviet power sphere and Soviet authorities thus did not have to continue so actively in the enforcement of Moldovanism. Forms of manifestations of Romanian national pride under Soviet annexation included the opening of the Alley of Classics in Chișinău in 1957 by writer Mihail Sadoveanu and poet Andrei Lupan. Twelve busts of Bessarabian and Romanian writers, defenders of the Romanian literary and cultural heritage, were unveiled in Chișinău Park (A. Donici, A. Russo, A. Hâjdău, C. Stamati, B. P. Hasdeu, N. Milescu Spătarul, D. Cantemir, Ion Neculce, C. Negruzzi, V. Alecsandri, Ion Creangă, and Mihai Eminescu). The Monument of Stephen the Great,[21] which was built in

21 Stephen III of Moldavia (*Ștefan cel Mare* 1433–1504) was the most significant Moldavian Prince, who defended the country against the Turks. Although at the end of his reign, he had to start paying them a vassal tribute, his previous achievements earned him the epithet of "The Great".

Chișinău in 1945, also surprisingly survived in its place for the whole Soviet period and today serves as a reminder of Romanian national identity.

In the area of language policy, from the establishment of the MSSR, Moscow enforced the Moldavian language, which, due to its structure being based on the Transdniestrian dialect, was actually slightly different from the Romanian language.[22] It is interesting that the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia affected the formation of Moldovanism. It caused a serious worsening of Russian–Romanian relations, because Romania condemned this invasion. Moscow's change of attitude toward Romania was felt especially by Romanians in Soviet Moldavia. Any cultural Romanian–Moldavian programs were paused. The sale of Romanian books was prohibited and, from 1969, it was prohibited to subscribe to newspapers and magazines from Romania. In addition, the conditions of visits to relatives in Romania were significantly tightened.

The National Patriotic Front of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina (Frontul Național Patriotic din Basarabia și Nordul Bucovinei) was founded in 1972, led by biophysicist and university professor Gheorghe Ghimpu. Based on Ceausescu's refusal to intervene in Czechoslovakia in 1968, this group decided to ask communist Romania for support in the struggle against the Soviet power. Unfortunately, the Chairman of the Council for National Security of Romania, Ion Stănescu, informed the then Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopanosti (KGB) Chairman, Yuri Andropov, of these attempts. Immediately, persons connected to the National Patriotic Front were arrested and deported. Professor Ghimpu lost his position at the university and spent 6 years in prison for "subversive activity". Thereafter, he became a prominent dissident, active in the Moldavian independent movement in the period of Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika[23].

A big change came about with the Russian politician Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. Through reforms of Perestroika and Glasnost, he opened up new possibilities in the history of the Soviet Empire. The events that took place in the 1980s were crucial for the revival of national and linguistic identities. The national movement and journalists played an important role. According to some estimates, approximately 800 articles were published between 1988 and 1989 to support a return to the Roman alphabet and the Romanian language

22 From the linguistic point of view, the Moldavian language has the same validity as, e.g., the Banat dialect used in Moravia. This position of Moldavian is quite imprecise because the term "Moldavian" language should cover the entire historical period of Moldova, including the left bank of the Prut River (Pospíšil 2009, 10).

23 More at http://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/un-dizident-basarabean-tradat-de-ceausescu-si-a-lansat-o-carte-la-bucuresti-557928

(Buzu 2012, 84). The requirements of the national movement were fulfilled in August 1989 when language laws were adopted that reestablished Romanian/Moldavian as a state language, and a transition to the Roman alphabet was codified. On the contrary, Guboglo and Dergachev emphasize that the national movement in the 1980s and '90s was created due to the breakdown of the Moldavian cultural tradition. This followed in two stages, in 1920–1930 and in the period of World War II, also due to the immense war costs of Moldavian Intelligence (Shornikov in Guboglo and Dergachev 2010, 138).

The anti-Communist uprising in 1989 had a positive impact on the national identity of Bessarabian Romanians. From the 1990–1991 academic year, the Romanian language written in the Roman alphabet was introduced in primary and secondary schools, as well as universities. The situation of the Romanian language in Moldavia at that time may be characterized by the following terms: unclear, uncertain, divided, duplicated, and similar. Language laws adopted on August 31, 1989, by the Supreme Soviet of the MSSR had a positive impact on life in Moldavia in the early 1990s. The Moldavian government adopted a series of measures to facilitate the adoption of language barriers in practice. More than 2,500 language courses were created, making it possible to learn the Romanian language (Buzu 2012, 72).

Nevertheless, not all the inhabitants of Bessarabia were happy about these changes. Transnistrian elites, supported by Moscow, did not want to subordinate themselves to the Chișinău proposal of language change. On September 2, 1990, they founded the separate Transnistrian MSSR. The conflicts culminated in spring 1992, when armed conflict took place in Transnistria. Turkish Gagauz people were also not satisfied with the Chișinău policy, and in 1989, they declared the Gagauz ASSR. Some politicians in Chișinău also believed in the support of the voters by designating a return to the cultural roots of Romania as a danger of the "Romanianization" of Moldavian society and the unification of Moldavia with Romania.

Internal disintegration problems and the economic collapse brought nationalist and anti-Romanian parties to power in the parliamentary election. Parliament, controlled by them, approved a new Constitution, which, among others, advocated autonomy for Transnistria and Gagauzia. However, Article 13 defined the language as Moldavian. However, schools still called the language Romanian. This dichotomy irritated supporters of Moldovanism, but it was preserved. However, the pro-Russian elite of the 1990s continued to support the untruths about the Moldavian language and spread a campaign against Romania, which was aimed at destabilizing the relations between the ethnic groups living in Moldova (Buzu 2012, 86).

Development of Moldovan Identity in the Twenty-First Century

After 2001, when the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Comuniștilor din Republica Moldova)[24] won the elections, the language situation in Moldova was very tense. Tensions culminated with the adoption of a concept that the ruling party initiated on December 19, 2003. This concept goes back to the theory of two East Romanian languages (Moldavian and Romanian) and returns to Moldavian–Russian bilingualism (although the Russian language had obtained the status of a lingua franca). This led to support of the (antinational) thesis that there are two languages in Moldova – one official (Moldovan), the other for interethnic communication (Russian), which was actually considered to be the main language (Buzu 2012, 73).

No sovereign independent state allows a minority to use its language for communication between ethnic groups. Professor Anatol Ciobanu of the Chișinău University stated "something is not all right in our country if the language of the minority Russian ethnic community is elevated to the language for interethnic communication. A similar situation can only happen in the former colonies in Africa" (Buzu 2012, 73).

During the census in 2004, commissioners loyal to the ruling Communist Party refused to count ballot papers on which the nationality entered was Romanian. Some Bessarabian intellectuals (e.g., writer Mihai Ciubotaru) filed a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights even before the census. After a protracted process, the court in Strasburg decided in favor of the Bessarabian Romanians. From 2004, the inhabitants of Moldova can declare Romanian nationality in their identification documents. Despite the disapproval of the Moldovan government, these Moldovan citizens achieved the right to enter their nationality as Romanian in the 2004 census. According to the first data published by the Moldovan media, 75 % of inhabitants declared themselves to be Moldovans, but 40% of them also entered Romanian as their nationality. Very soon after publishing these figures, their further publication was halted. In 2006, entirely different figures were released. The new results claimed that there are 75% of Moldovans and only 2.8% of Romanians. The number of inhabitants claiming Russian nationality ranged at approximately 8 % (Buzu 2012, 87). The current figures available on the pages of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova are again different. The 2004 census figures state that 75.8 % of inhabitants consider themselves to be Moldovans and only 2.2% are inclined to Romanian nationality. This is less than Ukrainians (8.4 %), Russians (5.9 %), or Gagauz

24 Vladimir Voronin, Chairman from 1994, held the function of Moldovan President from 2001 to 2009.

(4.4%). Concerning language, 78.4% of inhabitants stated their native tongue as Moldovan and only 18.8% of respondents stated it as Romanian (Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova 2015).

The political situation in Moldova has been very insecure in recent years. In 2015, there was a change of five Prime Ministers. All these facts play into the hands of Russia and its ever-increasing influence in Moldova, deepening the crisis of national identity. The political crisis, economic situation, and omnipresent corruption have discredited the concept of European integration within Moldovan society. Pro-Russian voices are increasingly loud.[25]

Existing development shows that advocates of only one Romanian language face a similar problem to that of Bulgarians defending the unity of the Bulgarian language and refusing the specificity of Macedonian, of Serbians in relation to the Bosnian language, and of the newly defined Montenegrin. Romanian linguists advocate the unity of language – e.g., Romanian Professor Eugen Coseriu wrote: "The Moldavian language is Romanian, support of Moldavian is a naïve mistake or scientific fraud from the linguistic point of view, nonsense and utopia from the historical and practical point of view, and interfering in the national and cultural identity of one nation, i.e. ethnic-cultural genocide, from the political view" (Buzu 2012, 75).

On the other hand, Guboglo and Dergachev state that the Moldavian language is part of the Eastern group of Romanian languages, together with Wallachian (now Romanian), Wlachian (in Bulgaria and Vojvodina), and Dalmatian (this language is no longer used). According to these authors, such a division is anchored in the "*Universalnaya Desyatichnay Klassifikikaciya"* of 1986, where the Moldavian language is listed under number 805.92. The aforementioned classification (Publication No. UDC 9704, Bucharest 1998) also confirms Moldovan language under the code 135.1 (478). In this connection, Romanian linguist Ovid Densușianu (1873–1938) is quoted as follows: "it was especially contact with the Slavs which changed Moldavian into a separate language" (Stati in Guboglo and Dergachev 2010, 85). Nevertheless, international language standard International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 639, which originally listed "mo" and "mol" as Moldavian codes, has not included this language since the beginning of the new millennium. Moreover, the Ethnologue World Database ignores Moldavian,[26] which is surprising, considering the detailed description of approximately 7,000 languages.

25 Source: Personal interview with an academic employee at the Moldovan State University, conducted in February 2016.

26 More at http://www.ethnologue.com/country/MD

Because the above-mentioned national language problems exceed the borders of Moldova, we cannot accept this problem as an internal matter for Chișinău. The European Union is supposed to participate in the solving of problems, as a partner financing many important projects in the country, in Romania as well as in other states whose situation is similar to that of Moldova.

In 2013, as already mentioned, the Moldovan Constitutional Court solved the constitutional dichotomy in favor of Romanian. The national linguistic situation has gradually been improving, with positive effects both on domestic policy and in the regional geopolitical context. Considering the Romanians, the process of renewal of the language and national identity of Bessarabian Romanians is proceeding slowly. However, after more than 150 years of Russian occupation, this is relatively successful. The renewal could even have been in faster motion, were it not for the interests organized in Tiraspol, Chișinău, and Moscow, which promoted the Moldovan language and Moldovan national identity. It is clear from the development to date that the attitude of the state to "Moldovanism" is part of the political struggle and changes are according to the election results. Supported since 1990 by their colleagues from Bucharest, Iași, Cluj-Napoca, and other Romanian cultural center intellectuals (journalists, writers, as well as research and academic employees) have opposed the thesis of "Moldovanism". The national identity and situation of the Romanian language in Moldova will certainly also remain a complicated theme in the future.

Moldovan National Identity – "Between" Moldovanism and Romanianism

Moldovanism and Romanianism are two opposing interpretations of Moldovan ethnic identity. Both interpretations consist of well-defined values and beliefs. In the public domain, these serve for political mobilization, as well as for policy agendas and political goals. History, culture, religion, and language are essential unifying features to Moldovanists. They claim all of these as being distinct from Romanian. Moldovanism insists that Moldovan people are different from Romanians. First, they speak Moldovan. Moreover, Romania and Romanianism are regarded as threats to Moldovan independence. Romanianists question these differences and regard them as regional variations of a common Romanian history and pan-Romanian culture. They believe that Moldovans are Romanian, stating as proof their linguistic identity and their history of being part of the three main Romanian medieval principalities and of Greater Romania from 1918 to 1940 (King 2000).

Romanianists regard Moldovan and Romanian identities as being complementary. On the contrary, Moldovanists regard the two identities as being competitive. Moldovanism wishes to promote a specific Moldovan culture, history, symbols, and a multidirectional foreign policy. Romanianism wishes to place culture, history, and symbols within the pan-Romanian context. It has a decidedly Western orientation of its foreign policy. Contrary to Romanianism, Moldovanism defends Moldovan statehood. Moldovanism also includes an important civic element, which advocates the position of the Russian language in Moldovan society, as well as the rights of ethnic minorities.

The debate around national identity and the Moldavian–Romanian language raises many controversies. Through the process of Russification, which started in 1812, "Moldovanism" became the tool of the transitional phase of this process. The theory of "Moldovanism" has a unique anti-Romanian ideological subtext, which aims to impose a new identity on the local population. From the outset, the creation of a new identity of Moldavians was a very well thought-out strategic plan by Imperial Russia and then by the Soviet Union. The optimal solution was to create an artificial ideology of "Moldovanism", whose purpose was to separate the local population from their original Romanian identity. The fact is that Imperial Russia did not have an elaborated theory of Moldovanism and, e.g., sometimes designated the language as Romanian and, at other times, as Moldavian. The theory of Moldovanianism surfaced only in the time when the Communists came into power in Russia.

However, this strategic plan of Russian politics about the change of national identity and the name of the language is much older. Bolshevists were only the executioners of power to implement the plan of Catherine II, who already intended to Russify this Romanian territory during her reign. In 1793, after Russia connected the northern Black Sea territory and the Tatars were expelled from Crimea, Count Panin (advisor to Catherine II) created a political plan for the colonization of Southern Transnistria. Due to the Tsarist policy, many inhabitants of Bessarabia had to flee their homes and mostly found refuge across the Prut River in Romania. To halt the exodus, the Tsarist authorities used extreme measures, such as artificial quarantine introduced for an alleged plague, and all transport across the Prut River was prohibited for 6 months (Buzu 2012, 40).

After the restoration of Bessarabia to Romania in 1918, the ideological and political center of "Moldovanism" moved directly to Odessa, where the Soviets began to organize a new strategy, containing elements of power and

terror against the Romanian population. On June 26, 1924, the Moldavian Institute for Education was opened in Odessa. All similar attempts were used by propagandists to underline the differences between Bessarabian Romanians and Romanians across the Prut River. In one century, the Soviets managed to arouse Soviet national sentiment in the Bessarabian population. Through the Bolshevik ideology, "Moldovanism" and anti-Romanian sentiments were institutionalized.

The question of national identity is one of the thorniest problems faced by Moldova. In a time of multiculturalism, when nationalism is starting to prevail, the problem of national identity divided into two camps is very dangerous. According to the theory of "Moldovanism", Moldovans are a nation who founded this state together with representatives of other ethnic groups (Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, Jews, Romanians, Belarusians, Poles, and others). This assertion seems to be in order, because it respects the cultural background of ethnic groups and minorities. The formal correctness of this statement is only undermined by the integration of Romanians, or another ethnic group different from Moldovans (Petrencu 2011, 72). Of course, this theory is not new but is often present in articles about Moldovans, published in particular in Tiraspol and Moscow. In compliance with democratic principles, the difference between Romanians and Moldovans is acquiring a strange legitimacy. Recognition and acceptance of differences of other ethnic groups is a fundamental condition of multiculturalism and multinationalism. Unlike other ethnic groups in Moldova, e.g., Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, and so on, which recognize mutual differences, many Moldovans and Romanians do not perceive any differences between each other. Support of multiculturalism and respect for ethnic diversity is the right solution for the integration of Ukrainians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, and Belarusians, but not for Moldovans and Romanians where their common national identity plays a key role.

The concept of "Moldovanism" repeatedly stresses that the Moldovan language be used in all areas of political, cultural, economic, and social life. The concept further states that it is necessary to preserve and develop the specifics of the Moldovan language and Moldovan culture with respect to its Roman history and the cultural and linguistic specifics of the inhabitants of Transnistria. To support this concept, many publications have been issued, e.g., in 2003, the above-mentioned controversial Moldovan historian and former representative of the Communist Party, Vasile Stati, published a Moldovan–Romanian dictionary (*Dicţionarul moldovenesc-românesc* 2011). It highlights the differences between the two languages – Moldovan reputedly contains

many words borrowed from Slavic, and Romanian has words borrowed from the Gypsy language. Needless to say, the dictionary faced strong criticism by Romanian and Moldovan experts.[27]

Romanian authors criticize the fact that one of the definitions of "Moldovanism" characterizes this term with reference to the "specific features of the Moldovan language". This concept of the definition, however, does not reveal the context of national identity, which is contained in the name "Moldovanism" (Nantoi and Iovu 2012, 44). Although there is no official position of "Moldovanism" as a national identity, the political context as well as use of this term in the mass media enables the creation of this definition. In this way, through "Moldovanism", references are created to elements forming national identity, based on language, ethnicity, i.e., symbols of Moldovan identity that are depicted with an emphasis on the difference from Romanian symbols. An identity that emphasizes the opposite to "Moldovanism" is called "Romanianism".[28] It focuses on Romanian national feeling (the Romanian national spirit) and refers to Romanian history, a common language, and common culture. Under the term "Romanianism" is understood a set of values and symbols that define the Moldovan nation, language, and national identity, identical to the Romanian national identity (Nantoi and Iovu 2012, 45).

Promoters of "Moldovanism" (among others, M. Guboglo, V. Dergachev, V. Stati, P. Shornikov, and P. Luchinski) list the basic arguments for the creation of this identity. As the first argument, they consider the fact that Moldovans and Romanians are two different ethnic communities. They also mention a historical example: Moldovans and Romanians (Wallachians) lived separately throughout history and did not significantly interact. The cultural legacy of "Moldovanism" is based especially on Slavic culture and the Moldovan language, which, according to the advocates of this theory, is the foundation stone in the creation of the Romanian language (according to this theory, Moldovan was created earlier than the Romanian language). The second argument of advocates of "Moldovanism" is the historical precedent connected with the existence of the Moldovan state called the Principality of Moldavia (1359–1812 and 1862). Advocates of this discourse of Moldovan identity also refer to the preamble of the Moldovan Constitution, which refers to Moldovan statehood, ethnicity, and nationality.

27 Vasile Stati remains faithful to his idea and a strong orientation to Russia to this day. One of the authors of this essay met him personally in February 2015.

28 According to the explanation by Guboglo and Dergachev, "Romanianism" is the official ideology of Romania, which emphasises Romanian nationality with the objective of seizing Moldova and part of Ukraine (Shornikov in Guboglo and Dergachev 2010, 137).

There are also many arguments on the side of "Romanianism" as proof of national identity. The first argument of "Romanianists" is the language – Romanian. Advocates of "Romanianism" (among others, A. Petrencu and M. Cernenco) categorically reject the name "Moldovan language". The second argument refers to the existence of a common nation and ethnicity. Proponents of "Romanianism" insist on the history, culture, and religion shared with Romania. The third argument is the existence of the Kingdom of Romania, which according to the authors of this idea, make "Romanianism" legitimate and entitled to existence. On March 27, 1918, the National Assembly of the Republic of Moldavia voted for unification with Romania and, on April 22, the decision was accepted by the Romanian parliament. Romania was also the first country to recognize the independence of Moldova in 1991.[29]

These propositions of "Moldovanism" and "Romanianism" have created two opposing theses of identity that dominate the formation of national identity in Moldova. The problem with these two theses is based on attempts to formulate the national identity of Moldova's population. This theme is the basic dispute permeating society and representatives of social and political groups (Nantoi and Iovu 2012, 47).

According to an academic employee of the Moldovan State University, the position of Romanianism has currently receded into the background. Moldovans no longer wish to be part of the European Union; they are afraid of the corruption and dictation on the part of Brussels, as well as of the current immigration policy of Germany.[30] His words are also confirmed by the survey held in January 8–16, 2016, when 38% of respondents were in favor of joining the European Union and 40% of the Eurasian Union (infotag. md 2016).

Political Parties and National Identity

The political parties in Moldova are also characterized by crisis and conflict. At the end of the 1990s, society was polarized around two political parties (Popular Front and Interfront). In the context of national identity, we can characterize these two political parties as the foundations for "Moldovanism" and "Romanianism". The Popular Front was created from the national movement at the end of the 1980s to promote the return of Romanian as the official language. Interfront was created as a political movement whose

29 Similar problems emerged in the case of the Declaration of Independence of Macedonia. In neighboring Bulgaria, at that time, the opinion of the Bulgarian identity of Macedonians culminated, but most Macedonians did not share it. Nevertheless, Bulgaria was the first state to acknowledge Macedonia.

30 Source: Personal interview with an academic employee at the Moldova State University in February 2016.

members were representatives of the minorities who opposed the preservation of the MSSR within the Soviet Union. This movement also included advocates of the Communist Party, which, however, was prohibited by the Moldovan Parliament on August 23, 1991. Subsequently, the Popular Front as well as Interfront disintegrated into many smaller political parties, and in 1994, the communists renewed their party under a new name. In this connection, the problem of national identity is a result of unresolved disputes, and it is affected by insufficient constructive dialogue between the political elite on the formation of national identity and its effect on the future of the country. In 2001, the Communist Party won a majority in the Moldovan parliament. The Communist Party pledged in the preelection program that it would protect the rights of the Moldovan nation related to the historical name Moldovans– as well as the Moldovan language with reference to its famous history and ancient origin, and that it would not allow the history of Moldavian statehood, dating back to 1359, to be ignored.

The first step to the legalization of "Moldovanism" was the government's decision number 180 of February 15, 2002, on the acceptance of the "history of Moldova". This decision was to change the interpretation of history in school textbooks. After 7-day protests and demonstrations, the Moldovan government decided to create a special commission to investigate the concept of the school curriculum in order to change the content of History classes (Petrencu 2011, 57).

Another important step was the adoption of Act 546 of December 19, 2003, in which the Concept of the National Policy of the Republic of Moldova was adopted. We may consider the Concept to be an ideological document, which strengthened the foundations of "Moldovanism". In this context, we may presume that the Communist Party had the strategy of reducing Romanians to a minority in their native country. With the objective of pointing out the unjustified discussions on "Romanianism" in Moldova, Guboglo and Dergachev expressed the Russian view of the aforementioned census and stated that the data collected during Russian–American research, conducted under the supervision of three experts – M. Guboglo (Moscow, Russia), D. Leiting (Chicago, USA), V. Zelenchuk (Chișinău, Moldova) – were confirmed. Among others, they stated the finding that the number of people who considered themselves to be Romanians in Moldova did not exceed 5–6%. Guboglo and Dergachev also added the explanation to the data about the choice of a native tongue. They considered that the fact that 18.8% of inhabitants declared that Romanian was their mother tongue proved the nationalistic tendencies triggered by Romanian agents operating in Moldova.

The objective was to disrupt the existence of Moldova as a sovereign state and, in this context, its connection with the neighboring country. Thus, Moldovans would become part of one Romanian nation (Guboglo and Dergachev 2010, 95).

John Kelly, representative of the Council of Europe, said that questions concerning nationality and language caused confusion among the respondents (Nantoi and Iovu 2012, 23). In addition, seven out of ten observers said that the election committee had advised people to declare themselves to be Moldovan instead of Romanian. With regard to the methodology of the 2004 census, the critic pointed out that quantitative data cannot serve as an objective image of the national identity of Moldovans, especially due to the confusion among respondents in connection to issues regarding nationality and language. Subsequent research initiated by the Public Policy Institute proved that 89 % of inhabitants feel that they are Moldovans in compliance with their place of residence. The research showed that respondents are not against the Romanian language or Romanian history. Only 5.9% of inhabitants expressed their identity in the spirit of "Moldovanism" (Nantoi and Iovu 2012, 54).

The events of April 2009, when protesting demonstrators attacked the Parliament building and the building of the Presidential Office, were the culmination of the dispute over the national identity of Moldovans. Inhabitants thus reacted to the repeated changes in the results of the census. Although the organizers of the violent protests were not officially punished, it was clear to everybody that the question of national identity is a very sensitive problem in Moldova. Events of 2009 deepened the crisis of national identity and resulted in an increase of identity in the political rhetoric, especially among left-wing parties. These events strengthened and improved the position of advocates of "Moldovanism" and also those of "Romanianism". The events were interpreted by the Moldovan government in Chișinău as an attempt at a state takeover on the side of Romania (Nantoi and Iovu 2012, 54).

Conclusion

The objective of this contribution is to analyze the process of formation of a national identity in Moldova, with emphasis on the dichotomy of the national identity of "Moldovanism" and "Romanianism". This work revealed that there is no clear vision or political agreement in relation to national identity. The discourse of national identity is polarized between the theses of "Moldovanism" and "Romanianism", which are based on entirely different thoughts. This contribution also highlights how differently historical events

and facts can be interpreted. National identity in Moldova is built on the dialectic opposites of two identities: advocates of "Moldovanism" despise "Romanianism", and vice versa. This fact has transformed the topic of national identity in Moldova into a very delicate and conflicting theme, which is an obstacle to ensuring security, in addition to being misused in political clashes. It is needless to add that the main factor in the formation of political parties is the antagonism of national identity. The crisis of national identity in Moldova has lasted for more than 25 years. It can be overcome by the creation of a civil nation and functioning state institutions that will be able to fulfill the expectations of the citizens of Moldova.

The current reality is that young people in Moldova are confused. According to the words of an academic employee at the Moldova State University, the situation is worsening not only due to the deep-rooted problem of the reign of oligarchs but also due to the Russian propaganda in the Moldovan media. In his opinion, Russian-speaking people occupy 80% of the media market.[31]

In addition, the official language designation is quite problematic. According to the Moldovan Constitution (Art. 13), Moldovan is the state language. However, authorities and official websites have changed the name to Romanian. The language situation has been going through a difficult period since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which systematically destroyed the language and ethnic rights of non-Russian nations. Almost 25 years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there actually is Romanian–Russian bilingualism. Although Russian did not obtain the status of an official language, it officially fulfills the function of a language of interethnic communication. The Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova, which was ratified on August 27, 1991, declares "Romanian" to be the official language. However, on July 29, 1994, the new Constitution of the Republic of Moldova again returned to the designation "Moldovan". Nevertheless, the Romanian language is taught in schools. When, in 2013, the Gagauz Parliament suggested that the designation "Romanian language" should not be used because it contradicted the Constitution, the Constitutional Court decided that the Declaration is an integral part of the Constitution and, in the case of a difference in the text, the text of the Declaration has priority.[32]

Moldovan national identity is very divided. Moldovans wanted to break free from the arms of Russia, but oligarchic structures and bonds to this country made the option very difficult. The political situation also assisted

31 Source: Personal interview with an academic employee at the Moldova State University in February 2016.

32 More at https://lenta.ru/news/2013/12/05/language/

national identity. At the time when the pro-European coalition was in power, an amount of approximately US$1 billion was lost in one of the Moldovan banks in 2014.[33] The political crisis and bad economic situation led to the growing popularity of pro-Russian political parties, which mostly promoted Moldovanism and the joining of Moldova to the Eurasian Union.

Despite the fact that already 25 years have passed, there is, across society, no common view of identity that would lead to social and political consensus. In addition, the heterogeneity between the center and periphery, leading to a splitting of political parties in Moldova, plays an important role in the political sphere and polarizes society into proponents of "Moldovanism" and "Romanianism". The dynamics of the conflict of national identity in Moldova suggest that antagonism between "Moldovanism" and "Romanianism" will continue to exist in the political discourse and that social and political unrest will continue to deepen.

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33 Source: Personal interview with an academic employee at the Moldova State University in February 2016.

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