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The Construction, Deconstruction and Conflict of National Identities in Moldova

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Introduction

The idea of nation-state has become so deeply embedded in our socio-political vocabulary that it is almost impossible to conceive of other forms of socio-political organization or expression without reference to it.

> People of new states are animated by a powerful motive: to be noticed, it is a search for identity, and a demand that identity be publicly acknowledged as having import, a social assertion of the self as 'being somebody in the world.'[1]

The nation-state develops only where nationalism and a state, oriented towards a particular nationalism, converge. Although the governments of post-Soviet Moldova intended to develop a unitary national identity to serve as a foundation for the state, after more than two decades, Moldova is still not a nation-state. Not because it lacks nationalism, but because it has two competing, diverging versions of nationalism. The story of Bessarabia/Moldavia/Moldova clearly illustrates the process of a disputed national identity, caused by a succession of constructed and de-constructed identities imposed on the people inhabiting this land. [2]

This paper attempts to shed light on the way identities were constructed and deconstructed in the case of Moldova, which led to the present-day conflict between Romanian and Moldovan

1. Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States* (New York, 1963), 108.
2. Note that the terms "Moldavia/Moldavians" designate the medieval state and the population residing in it while it was under Russian and Soviet control and the population which had no national identity or an ethnic Moldovan identity. The name of "Bessarabia" was introduced when the Eastern part of the principality of Moldavia (present day Moldova) was annexed in 1812 by Russia. This name has been used as a synonym for Eastern Moldavia ever since. The modern name "Moldova" was (re) introduced by the nationalist movement in the 1980s and has been used since then to designate the modern Republic of Moldova.

nationalists. Part 1 briefly introduces the theoretical debate on what constitutes ethnic/national identity and presents the evolution of various identities in Moldova. Part 2 gives an overview of the creation of Bessarabia, the Russian (and later Soviet) policies towards the formation of "Moldavian nation" and the rise of supporters of this "Moldovan" identity. Part 3 presents how Romanian ethnic nationalism emerged Bessarabia and later in Soviet Moldavia. Part 4 examines the struggle of the Romanian and Moldovan nationalist camps in Moldova today.

1. National Identity and Its Evolution in Moldova

The primordialist school claims that ethnicity constitutes a fundamental feature of society and that ethnic/national identity is natural and unalienable.[3] They see ethnic identity as "essential" to human identity and mostly inalterable. This means that ethnicity forms slowly and once formed, tends to be exceptionally durable and persistent. Ethnicity, therefore, is defined by cultural and biological heritage and is territorially rooted. In contrast, the instrumentalist approach emphasizes the rational-choice and interest-driven character of nationalism.[4] Instrumentalism focuses on elite competition for resources and suggests that the manipulation of symbols is vital for gaining the support of the masses and achieving political goals. The structuralists (also known as materialists and Marxists), identify some variation of material advancements in human history (modern state and its needs: print, public education, middle class) as the progenitor of nationalism.[5] Unlike structuralists, who posit the existence of deterministic structures, the

3. This theory is also called essentialist, ethnonationalist, ethnosymbolist. Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism, A quest to understanding* (Princeton University Press, 1994); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986).
4. Daniel Bell, "Ethnicity and Social Change," in *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, edited by N. Glazer and D.P. Moynihan, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Sage Publications: New Delhi, 1991).
5. Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York:

cultural approach (Max Weber, Liah Greenfeld) emphasizes meaning and human action.[6] Ethnicity does not constitute an objective group, but only "facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere."[7] And it is this political community "no matter how artificially organized that inspires the belief in common ethnicity."[8] According to Greenfeld, identity (national and not only) is not a reflection of material world, but a mental process. "It is a mental image of the social structure and one's specific place in it…, [which] orients [one's] actions."[9] Therefore, nationalism must precede the nation, because it is the worldview that "locates the source of individual identity within a people, which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity."[10]

According to Greenfeld, a nationalist vision of reality is predicated on three principles: it is an essentially secular vision, fundamentally egalitarian, and it assumes popular sovereignty. Nations removed sovereignty from traditional authorities, such as God or a royal lineage, and vested it within the people.[11]

We are presently witnessing a conflict between the "Moldovan" identity constructed by the Russian authorities in the nineteenth century and perfected by the Soviets in the twentieth century; and the Romanian national identity which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century under Russian control, developed when Moldova was united with Romania in the interwar year, and reappeared in the 1980s when Moldova was part of the Soviet Union. Today, the Romanian

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Verso, 1983). Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).
6. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Charles Wittich (Berkeley: California University Press, 1978). Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Harvard University Press, 1992).
7. Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads*, 389.
8. Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads*, 391.
9. Liah Greenfeld and Nicholas Prevelakis, "The Formation of Ethnic and National Identities," in the *International Studies Encyclopedia*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 2516.
10. Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads*, 3.
11. Greenfeld and Prevelakis, "The Formation of Ethnic," 2516.

and Moldovan nationalisms are fighting to dictate the terms of this new, Post-Soviet national identity. The two centuries of overlapping and intermittent Russian and Romanian control over this land provided plenty of ammunition for each camp.

Nationalism is attractive to large masses of people because it provides its holders with dignity. In many societies, the individuals most attuned to issues of identity and concerned about dignity are the intellectuals. Oftentimes, alienated from the traditional society, *intelligentsia* felt a disequilibrium between perceived high self-value and its low social status. This imbalance also known as *anomie* acted as the motivating factor in the creation of new ideology of nationalism, which propels them to a new dignified social status.[12] Not accidentally, it was the intellectuals who embraced nationalism, both in Russian Bessarabia and later in Soviet Moldavia. Moreover, Moldova, like most post–Soviet societies, experienced cultural trauma as a consequence of the unexpected, rapid and fundamental changes brought by the end of the Soviet Union. Insecurity and uncertainty became a normal experience of daily life for many citizens. A breakdown of social trust and a loss of a sense of agency - anomie - ensued. Suddenly, culturally shared templates were no longer appropriate for guiding behaviors in the changing socioeconomic and cultural contexts and therefore national identity became the default identity.[13]

The table below summarizes the historical evolution of identities in Bessarabia, Soviet Moldavia, and Moldova. Each identity was filled with various cultural elements and had its promoters. Some identities have been shared only by a minority, while others have been held by a majority of the population.

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12. Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in the *Interpretation of Cultures,* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 204. See also Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: Free Press 1984).
13. Piotr Sztompka, "The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Post-Communist Societies," In J. C. Alexander et al., eds., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2004).

Ethnic Identities in Moldova 1812-2015

Identity	Period	Agents/Interested Party	Population	Character/content
Bessarabian Moldavians	1812-1991	None	Majority (peasants)	Local, Christian, non-national identity
Assimilated Moldavians/ Russians	1840-1918 1945-1989	Tsarist Russia	Nobility, Communist members (career opportunity)	Russian nationalism, Russian culture (language and literature), xenophobia, anti-Semitism
Bessarabian Romanians	1840-1940	Romanian Nationalists both in Romania and Bessarabia	Intellectuals (with time most of the literate population)	Romanian nationalism – Romanian language, literature, history; xenophobic and anti-Semitic as well
Moldavians (Soviet)	1924-1989	USSR, Communist Party	Initially Party Members; With time – majority (peasants, workers)	Class-based initially (Moldavians were the working people, Romanians were bourgeois exploiters and their administration). Transformed into ethnic identity (Cyrillic alphabet, Slavonic words)
Moldovans	1989-2015	Former-party members, collective farm managers, politicians	Majority (peasants, workers)	Moldovan nationalism – historical claims from Medieval Moldavia, admits Russian influence and avoids cultural debates as much as possible; claims of civic nationalism, "Moldavian" language in

				the Constitution
Romanians	1960s – 2015	Intellectuals	Minority (journalists, teachers, writers)	Romanian nationalism – cultural unity with Romania (Latin alphabet, Romanian history and literature)

Note that many in rural Moldova have attached to neither a Romanian nor a Moldovan national identity, but rather have a non-national, localized ethnic identity.

2. The Birth of Bessarabia and the Construction of Moldovan Identity

During the 1806-1812 war with the Ottoman empire, Russia's goal was the annexation of both Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, but the threat of invasion from Napoleon's France forced Russia to settle for a smaller territory – Eastern Moldavia/Bessarabia (a territory on which present-day Republic of Moldova lies). After annexation, in order to make Russian rule attractive for Christian Orthodox people of the Balkans, Tsar Alexander I decided to leave the local laws in place and exempted the population from poll taxes and military service for three years.[14]
At this time, the national spirit in Bessarabia was "weak" and "self-interest of family or class was more important [than nationality]."[15]

After the Crimean war (1853-1856), the rebellion in Poland (1863), and the Union of Romanian Principalities (1859), Russia focused on imposing full control over Bessarabia to

14. Dinu Postarencu, *O istorie a Basarabiei in date si documente, 1812-1940* [A History of Bessarabia in dates and Documents] (Chisinau: Cartier, 1998), 66.
15. George Jewsbury, *The Russian Annexation of Bessarabia: 1774-1828, A study of Imperial Expansion* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1976), 8.

prevent Romanian claims on this territory. Russian administration employed large-scale Russification policies in schools, administration and churches. In 1892, Pompey Batyushkov, a Russian Interior Ministry's employee, was sent to prove that Bessarabian Moldavians are not Romanian. A staunch Russian nationalist, Batyushkov described his role as a Russian scholar to present "the Russian point of view and to prove Bessarabia's ancient bonds to the Slavic-Russian tribe."[16] Batyushkov 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."[17] 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.[18]

Under Russian rule, Romanian-language newspapers appeared sporadically and briefly. Out of 254 periodical publications in Bessarabia in the period 1854-1916, only sixteen were in Romanian language.[19] With trans-border traffic restricted, access to Romanian and Western books dwindled severely. Some Romanian books made their way into Bessarabia, but only if purchased in St. Petersburg or Moscow and with authorization from a censure committee in Odessa.[20] Alexei Mateevici, a Bessarabian poet, complained:

> The greatest difficulty I had was that I lacked the necessary books for guidance. I was totally isolated from literature published in *Regat* [Romanian Kingdom]. […] The hunger for books in our native language is indescribable.[21]

16. Pompey Batyushkov, *Bessarabia: A Historical Description, [Bessarabia, istoricheskoe opisaniye]* (St. Petersburg, Edition of the Ministry of the Interior, 1892), 2.
17. Batyushkov, *Bessarabia: A Historical Description*, 5.
18. Batyushkov, *Bessarabia: A Historical Description*, 172.
19. Boris Trubetskoi, *Периодические Печати Бессарабии* [Periodical Prints of Bessarabia], in Jewsbury, *The Russian Annexation of Bessarabia*, 9.
20. Zamfir Arbore, *Basarabia in Secolul XIX* [Bessarabia in XIX century] (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Gobl, 1898), 529.
21. Alexei Mateevici, *Scrieri* (Iasi, 1989), 108.

Similar language restrictions were imposed in churches. In 1871, the newly appointed Metropolitan Pavel Lebedev discovered that many of the priests spoke little, if any Russian.[22] Infuriated by this, he suppressed the Romanian version of the official newspaper of Bessarabian Church and burned all the books in Romanian at the Chisinau Seminary.[23] All Church documents and registries were now kept only in Russian language and priests were given a six months deadline to learn Russian.[24] Metropolitan Lebedev's language policies raised a lot of resistance as most priests kept using Romanian language, not because they were ardent nationalists, but mostly because their parishioners were illiterate and resistant to the imposition of a foreign language.

In education, most of the new public schools were teaching in Russian language since 1824, when count Vorontsov instructed that "Moldavian [Romanian] should be taught to the students who want to learn it only as a second language."[25] By 1912, out of 1,709 primary schools only one third taught in Romanian language.[26] This fact did not help combat high illiteracy among rural population (mostly Moldavians) and ensured that Moldavians were mostly unaffected by Russian culture and Russification of the schools, churches, mass-media, and administration.

After the Union of Bessarabia with Romania in 1918, the new Soviet government never recognized the union and insisted that Bessarabia's majority population constituted a separate nation whose cultural distinctiveness was being obfuscated by Romania. To prove

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22. Petre Constantinescu-Iasi, *Circulaţia vechilor cărţi bisericeşti româneşti în Basarabia sub ruşi* [The Circulation of Old Church Books in Bessarabia under Russian control] (Chisinau, 1929), 5.
23. This happened the same year when Bessarabia lost its privileged status and became a gubernya.
24. Charles Upson, Clark, *Bessarabia. Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea*, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927), 104.
25. Ion G. Pelivan, *La Bessarabie sous le régime russe* (Paris, 1919), 19.
26. Ştefan Ciobanu, *Basarabia* (Chisinau: Universitas, 1993), 260.

this thesis, some historians and writers - most of whom had a Slavic and not a Romanian background – rehashed Batyushkov's old claims and began to assert the existence of a unique Moldavian nationality with a language and history distinct from that of Romania.[27] The same theory was later espoused by the Soviet authorities when they regained Bessarabia after World War II and named it Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). In his 1974 book, Artem Lazarev, the head of the Soviet Moldavian Academy of Science, claimed that there are two East Romance nationalities – Moldavian and Romanian.[28] A variation of this view was later embraced by many "Moldovanists," who stated that the Bessarabian population developed into a separate nation in the nineteenth century when Bessarabians did not share the historical and cultural experiences of the unified Romanian nation.

Before USSR regained Bessarabia from Romania, in 1924 the Soviets decided to establish a Soviet autonomous republic on the eastern bank of Nistru river, the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR).[29] The goal behind MASSR was either to Sovietize Romania or to annex Bessarabia, thus "uniting the separated Moldavian nation." Either way, the MASSR represented an element of Soviet political pressure on Romania.[30]

To support their claims on Bessarabia, the Soviets engaged in an entire process of fabricating a new language.[31] The Cyrillic alphabet was immediately introduced in the "Moldavian" language in MASSR. Because the newly-fabricated language was based on a very

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27. This is also the period when the Transnistria was artificially created, carved up out of Ukrainian territory in order to claim unification with Moldova, see Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
28. Artem Lazarev, *Молдавская Советская Госыдарственность и Бессарабский Вопрос* [Soviet Moldavian Statehood and Bessarabian Question], (Chisinau: Cartea Moldoveneasca, 1974), 530-535.
29. Charles King, *The Moldovans. Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture.* (Stanford*:* Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 52.
30. King, *The Moldovans. Romania, Russia,* 55.
31. Charles King "The Ambivalence of Authenticity, or How the Moldovan Language Was Made." *Slavic Review* 58 (1999).

archaic vocabulary and lacked the necessary terminology, the Communists had problems using it in press, science, or in official communiqués. To address this, a whole new vocabulary of Russian words with Romanian suffixes was introduced. However, the new tongue was so removed from the actual language spoken by the population that it was incomprehensible to the masses.[32]

Stalin's policies in Soviet Moldavian Republic after the World War II focused on the negation of national culture and the destruction of any form of social organization outside the Communist Party, which consisted of mass killings, arrests and deportations. Among those hundreds of thousands deported were teachers, priests, policemen, holders of political and administrative positions, etc.

> The deportations, arrests, executions and deliberately induced famines were applied in Soviet Moldavia with a rigor which probably claimed the life of one Moldavian out of ten between 1945 and 1953.[33]

With most of the local intellectual elite gone to Romania or deported to Siberia, the memory and the identity of "Romanianness" diminished drastically after the war. There were only isolated incidents of anti-Soviet resistance in.[34]

After independence, newly-elected Moldovan president Mircea Snegur and his supporters refused to associate with anything Romanian, maintaining the Soviet view that Moldovans are ethnically distinct from Romanians. The Moldovanist politicians understood that moving too close to Romania would jeopardize their positions of power.[35] Snegur denounced pan-

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32. For example all modern scientific words were replaced with the limited words that existed in the vocabulary of the peasants at the time. This led to some hilarious results. For instance the term "uric acid" was replaced with "oţet chişălnic" [piss-vinegar]!
33. Jonathan Eyal, "Moldavians." In *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union.* edited by Graham Smith, (Longman, 1990), 126.
34. Igor Grecul, *Расцвет Молдавской Социалистической Нации. [The Flourishing of Moldavian Socialist Nation]* (Chisinau: Cartea Moldovenească, 1974), 158.
35. Charles King, "Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism," Slavic Review 53 (1994).

Romanianism as betrayal and accused Moldova's intellectuals of doubting "the legitimacy and historical foundation of our right to be a state, to call ourselves the Moldovan people."[36]

3. Rise of Romanian Nationalism

Just like other nationalist movements in Eastern Europe, Romanian nationalist movement, which emerged in the nineteenth century, adopted the national model from the West, but filled it with domestic cultural content. Although, they were initially inspired by French nationalism, Romanian intellectuals had settled on the ethnic-collectivistic version of nationalism espoused by German intellectuals. The reason for this is that unlike the French, but similarly to the Germans, Romanians built a nation and a national culture before they could have a state. Just like in Germany, Romanian intellectuals imprinted an ethnic character to their national identity, because they had to focused on the task of creating an original literature, composing music, writing history and philosophy, publishing magazines and newspapers, establishing theaters and museums, educating teachers and opening public schools.[37] After the 1859 Union that formed Romania, Romanian intellectuals obtained their nation-state and focused on spreading that identity to the masses.

In Bessarabia, Romanian national ideas emerged a few decades later than in the Romanian Principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia). Some nobles and intellectuals were connected to the cultural life of Romania and developed a Romanian national identity, despite all the efforts of the Russian authorities to prevent it. Ion Doncev's fifth edition of the ABC in 1863

36. Mircea Snegur, "Republica Moldova este ţara tuturor cetaţenilor săi," Pamînt şi Oameni, 12 February 1994, 3.
37 Romanian nationalism emerged in the nineteenth century, but signs of national consciousness appeared much earlier in the seventeenth century. First, it was the Moldavian humanists, who under the influence of the Polish Catholic schools discovered the common Latin/Roman origin of Moldavians, Wallachians, and Transylvanians. Later, the Union between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches in Transylvania gave rise to first cogent nationalist program espoused by the Uniate bishop, Inochentie Micu-Klein. Later, the rebellion of Tudor Vladimirescu in Wallachia (1821) spread nationalist ideas from the clergy to the lower nobility and the military. Only a decade later, after the opening of the trade with Western Europe when young boyars traveled to Western Europe and were exposed to nationalist ideas, Romanian nationalism emerged.

no longer had the word "Moldavian" in the title but was named *"Cursul primitiv de limba rumînă"* [The Primary Course of Romanian Language].[38] Doncev's book was printed in Latin script and had content similar to the ones published in the Romania.

The most prominent intellectual of his generation, the historian and philosopher, Alexandru Haşdeu (1811-1874) despite studying in Russia and Germany, was a staunch Romanian nationalist. On the occasion of the 1859 Union of the Principalities, he sent a famous letter addressed to "our Romanian brothers":

> I belong with body and bone to the same bones from which you are made; and in my veins flows the same Romanian blood as it does in yours. […] to live without you and outside of you, oh, my dear Fatherland is possible, but a life like this is worse than dying a thousand times and resurrecting every time just for a moment.[39]

As first nationalist ideas emerged in Bessarabia throughout the nineteenth century, most of the holders of these ideas had to flee to Romania to avoid being censured or imprisoned by the Russian authorities. This is how the émigré Alecu Russo described his impression of his life in Bessarabia:

> We are fugitives in the parental hut and foreigners in the land paid by with our blood! The intruders told us: "This is our land and all who live on it belong to us, as well as the fields, the hills, the hamlets, the towns and the villages, the houses with their yards, all that moves and breaths." [40]

If the flourishing cultural space of Romania attracted the Bessarabian intellectuals, the nobility found benefits (land and service careers) in remaining loyal to Russia. Romanian nationalists/ intellectuals lambasted and criticized what they saw an act of betrayal on the part of the nobility (the boyars). Because they valued their culture so much, it was inconceivable for these intellectuals that someone could renounce one's culture. Zamfir Arbore was among those who strongly condemned the boyars for losing their language and culture:

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38. Postarencu, *O istorie a Basarabiei in date si documente*, 117.
39. Arbore, *Basarabia in Secolul XIX*, 470.
40. Mihai Adauge, "Istoria şi faptele," [History and Facts] *Dnestr*, 4 Chisinau, (1990): 115.

> The Russian administration transformed the Moldavian boyars into bureaucrats devoted to Russia and enemies of Romanian people. One can rarely hear Romanian spoken in their houses and many do not know how to speak it.[41]

With the access to Romanian literature and media severely restricted, there were few pro-Romanian voices left in Bessarabia. Only when the youth (some of them, Russified) went to study in other Russian cities and encountered representatives of other national groups from the empire, did a national consciousness emerge in their minds. Studying in the cities of the Russian empire, young Bessarabians became active members of the political underground world. One of the strongest circles was at the Dorpat University in Tartu, Estonia. The leader of the Dorpat group, Ioan Pelivan, had experienced an interesting life transition from a loyal Russian subject to becoming a staunch Romanian nationalist.

Like many other Bessarabian intellectuals and nationalists, Pelivan started his education at the Kishinev (Chisinau) seminary, where studies were conducted in Russian, while Romanian was relegated by teachers to the status of "the language of the *mujiks*." At the seminary "all our thoughts, our love and our minds were directed towards Russia," recalled Pelivan in his memoirs.[42] It was later, in his college years at Dorpat when, by contagion with other national groups, Pelivan developed a sense of national identity of his own. The sight of portraits of national poets and writers in their colleagues' dorm rooms (like the Ukrainian Taras Shevchenko; the Poles - Mickiewicz and Sienkiewicz), "left a feeling of shame with all of us Moldavians who knew nothing about our past and had no knowledge of a Bessarabian poet or writer."[43]

Pelivan and others decided to form the *Pământenia Basarabeană* [Bessarabian Compatriots] - students' cultural association - at whose meetings they started reading Romanian

41. Arbore, *Basarabia in Secolul XIX*, 541.
42. Ioan Pelivan, "Basarabia cea diferita de Rusia," [Bessarabia different from Russia] *Magazin istoric* 3 (2006): 38.
43. Idem, 38.

literature and singing folk songs. They contacted cultural clubs and other Bessarabians in Romania and started smuggling Romanian literature into the Russian cities in which they were studying. For example, in a letter written on October 25, 1901, Pelivan asked Gheorghe Madan to send some books, mentioning that "the boys are developing the taste for Romanian books and culture, and are awakening a national consciousness."[44] His colleague, Vasile Oatu, who could barely write in Romanian, sent a letter asking Madan to ship more books about Romanian history, saying: "Myself a Romanian, I've been looking for a long time now to accustom myself with Romanian culture and especially its history."[45] In 1902, however, most of the members of *Pământenia* were arrested and sentenced to prison on several accounts: for organizing an illegal and revolutionary society; for political propaganda against the regime; and for Moldavian separatism.

Half a century later, in Soviet Moldavia, despite the fact that whole villages and most of intellectuals were executed or deported to Siberia, Romanian nationalism persisted. In 1966, Mihai Morosanu, a student at the Polytechnic Institute in Chisinau, was condemned to three years of work camp for protesting the removal of the statue of Stephen the Great from the center of Chişinau. The same year, another nationalist, Gheorghe Muruziuc, had a similar fate for raising the tricolor flag on a sugar factory in Alexandreni. In 1967, three conservatory students (Postolache, Cuciureanu, and Cemârtan) received sentences between four and seven years, for anti-Soviet propaganda and "nationalism" because they had promoted the reunification of Moldavia and Bukovina with Romania. Many nationalists were forcibly interred into psychiatric clinics, while many others lost their jobs and careers.[46]

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44. Pelivan's Correspondence in *Destin Romanesc*, 5-6 (1999): 6.
45. Idem, 7.
46. Vasile Graur, De te voi uita Basarabie [If I Forget You, Bessarabia] (Chisinau, 1999), 8.

Russification policies failed to fully dislodge Romanian culture from the minds of the new generation of ethnic Moldavian intellectuals. Since the old guard of historians and writers educated at Tiraspol Pedagogical Institute in Transnistria had to retire, some works of Romanian writers like Eminescu, Coşbuc and Goga were reintroduced in the school textbooks while a course on local history was introduced in some universities.[47] By early 1970s, this new generation of Moldavian intellectuals made the inference that, if classics of their literature with whom they identified, like Eminescu and Alecsandri, considered themselves Romanian, therefore they themselves were also Romanian.[48]

Many young nationalists in Soviet Moldavia left Chisinau to escape Communist harassment. In the Russian cities, young Moldavians had access to libraries and bookstores filled with Romanian literature, history, and press, which were forbidden in their home capital, Chişinău. Although, they could not organize like their predecessors at Dorpat and Kiev (who formed *Pământenia Basarabeană* and *Desteparea*), the young nationalists had meetings to sing and recite Romanian poetry. Moreover, they were encouraging their friends and acquaintances to continue their "fight for Romanian revival." This is what Mircea Druc, who would later become the prime-minister of Moldova from the nationalist Popular Front, wrote to his younger brother Vlad in 1962:

> You should try and open a discussion club for improvement of the language. You have to teach people around you about the necessity of studying their own language, to read Romanian literature, to pronounce correctly. First of all, do not forget that we are Moldavians, and, therefore, Romanians."[49]

Romanian nationalists like Alexandru Şoltoianu, Gheorghe Ghimpu, Valeriu Graur, and Alexandru Usatiuc were arrested and tried in 1972 organizing a nationalist organization - The

47. Until then only the history of USSR and the Communist Party were studied.
48. King, *The Moldovans. Romania, Russia*, 108.
49. Viorel Patrichi, *Mircea Druc sau Lupta cu Ultimul Imperiu. [Mircea Druc and the Battle with The Last Empire]* (Bucharest: Zamolxe, 1998), 55.

National Front. They were fighting to establish Romanian language as a state language, to organize free and fair elections; to exit Soviet Union and to ultimately unite with Romania. Most in the group had the fate of their Bessarabian predecessors who were sentenced and sent to harsh Siberian prisons.

These cases are indicative of how education and culture in both Bessarabia and Soviet Moldavia led inevitably to Romanian nationalism. Drawn to the cultural space represented by Romania, these nationalists did not have to write their own history and literature, or reinvent their origin. All they had to do was to adopt the culture from across the Prut River.[50] This importance of culture in the formation of Romanian nationalism imprinted the ethnic character to it. This is how one of the Romanian nationalists, Iurie Roşca, described his identity in 1995:

> Like any Romanian, I was born in the midst of a Church, in the midst of a kind, in the midst of a family. These are realities given to me by God which I cannot and wish not modify. Because these realities do not represent an act of volition, I cannot do anything else but orient all my efforts to preserve and affirm these values which I received through birth.[51]

After Gorbachev's *Glasnost'* reform in the 1980s opened up the public space for criticism and allowed opposition to the Communist Party to emerge, Romanian intellectuals in Moldavia quickly took on that role. Reform-oriented intellectuals gained editorial control of several mass circulation newspapers (*Literatura şi Arta* [Literature and Art] and *Invăţamînt Public* [Public Education]) and began to espouse publicly the case for radical restructuring.[52] The intellectuals used the newfound free speech and freedom of assembly to organize themselves into a cohesive

50. Gheorghe Negru in the Introduction to "Ioan Pelivan's Correspondence," in Destin Romanesc 5-6 (63-64) (2009): 7.
51. Iurie Rosca, "Dupa Exercitii de luciditate," *Contrafort,* (August 1995).
52. William Crowther, "The Politics of Ethno-National Mobilization: Nationalism and Reform in Soviet Moldavia," The Russian Review 50 (1991): 188.

movement – the Moldovan Popular Front. Soon the Front would rally thousands to gather in Chişinău to protest the status of their native language.[53]

The Front demanded to recognize that Romanian and "Moldavian" are one and the same tongue.[54] The claims to language and cultural affirmation of the intellectuals made it increasingly clear, once again after 1900s, that this new identity could not be defined without reference to Romania.[55] Latin script was soon adopted along with the Romanian anthem *Deşteaptă-te Române* [Romanian Arise] as Moldova's anthem and Romanian tricolor as the official flag of Moldova. The Popular Front eschewed the "Moldavian" Soviet identity and declared:

> The historic name of our people, which we have carried for centuries – a right to which chronicles and manuscripts, historical documents from the modern and contemporary periods, and the classics of marxism-leninism testify – is Romanian and the name of the language is Romanian Language.[56]

At its second congress in February 1990, the Popular Front openly called for exit from USSR and for union with Romania. However, the majority of the population was fearful of such drastic changes, especially since the Moldovanist politicians opposed the nationalists from the Front and rallied the peasants to oppose the union with Romania.[57] In 1993, the Front split when a group left and formed the Congress of Intellectuals which militated for a slower and gradual integration with Romania, rather than immediate political union. Among them, poet Grigore Vieru admitted that intellectuals would first have to take up the difficult task of reawakening the sense of

53. The leaders of the Front were mainly writers and journalists like Grigore Vieru, Leonida Lari, Dumitru Matcovschi, Nicolae Daija, Valentin Mandacanu, Nicolae Matcas, Constantin Tanase, and Vasile Bahnaru.
54. *Eyal, "Moldavians,"* 132.
55. Eyal, *"Moldavians,"*131.
56. "Documentul final al Marii Adunari Naţionale," [The Final Document of The Great National Meeting] Literatura si Arta, 31 August, 1989, 2.
57. In retrospect, the union was possible as the case of East Germany illustrates. Even there the polls were showing for a long time that there was not a majority for the union. Many East Germans feared to be seen inferior by those in the western part and hesitated. In Moldova, Snegur and many of his deputies opposed the union because they realized that it would mean their political death.

"Romanianness" within the rest of the population, before unification could be considered.[58] In other words, in order to construct the Romanian identity they had the task of de-constructing the Soviet project of "Moldavian" nation.

4. Moldovanism versus Romanian Nationalism

The first Russian census in Bessarabia was conducted in 1817 and found Moldavians (Romanians) to represent 86 percent of the population, Ukrainians – 6.5 percent, Jews – 4.2 percent.[59] Because of Russian colonization, by mid-century the proportion of Moldavians (Romanians) in Bessarabia's population decreased to 65 percent.[60] A century later, in 1992, the census revealed that 64.5 percent were Moldavians (Romanians), 13.8 percent Ukrainians, 13 percent Russians, 3.5 percent Gagauz, 3 percent Bulgarians.

The identity issue has been used in every electoral campaign, socio-economic and political topics being replaced by debates about history and language. Some experts and commentators (i.e. King and Druc), believe that the rise of Moldovanist movement was mostly interest-based and prompted by the desire to hold the positions of power. Although this is true, the main reason for the rejection of Romanian culture is that people like Snegur and his allies were not ready for such a step. They were not familiarized with Romanian culture, as they grew up immersed in Russian culture, and thought of themselves as Moldavians. Moldovanists and their electorate formed mostly of peasants, felt too awkward when speaking literary Romanian. With their thick accent, Russian calques and archaic dialectal expressions, Moldovanists felt out of place and embarrassed when contrasted their speech to the highly educated intellectuals, just like they were

58. Grigore Vieru, "Unirea nu se proclama la mitinguri," Dimineata, 27 November 1991, 1, 5.
59. Ion Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei.* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991), 103.
60. Idem.

embarrassed by the Russian cultural dominance under the Soviets. To eschew this feeling of frustration, they chose a third way - neither with Romania, nor with Russia.

The isolation of the Bessarabian peasants protected them from the Russification, thus helping preserve a localized and village-based identity. In fact, there were two parallel worlds coexisting in Bessarabia and Soviet Moldavia: the rural world, illiterate and mainly Romanian-speaking and lacking any national identity; and the urban, much smaller in size, ethnically-diverse and dominated by the Russian language and culture. The rural world had no national consciousness, only a folklore-based culture, which was preserved due to its isolation from the city. The urban world was dominated by other ethnic groups (usually Jews, followed by Russians and Ukrainians, and some Germans in the South). In the nineteenth century, a Romanian nationalist discourse had no audience in the cities while in villages the message and its vectors were not adjusted to the illiterate audience. However, with time, more Moldavians moved into the cities and were exposed to education and nationalist idea. Throughout the twentieth century a majority of peasants remained with a local ethnic identity despite the efforts of the Soviet and Romanian authorities.[61]

Lately, every year, Romanians organize marches to celebrate the 1918 union of Bessarabia with Romania on March 27th and promote the idea of reuniting with Romania. In turn, they are accused by Moldovanists of destroying Moldova's socio-political stability and Moldova's statehood.

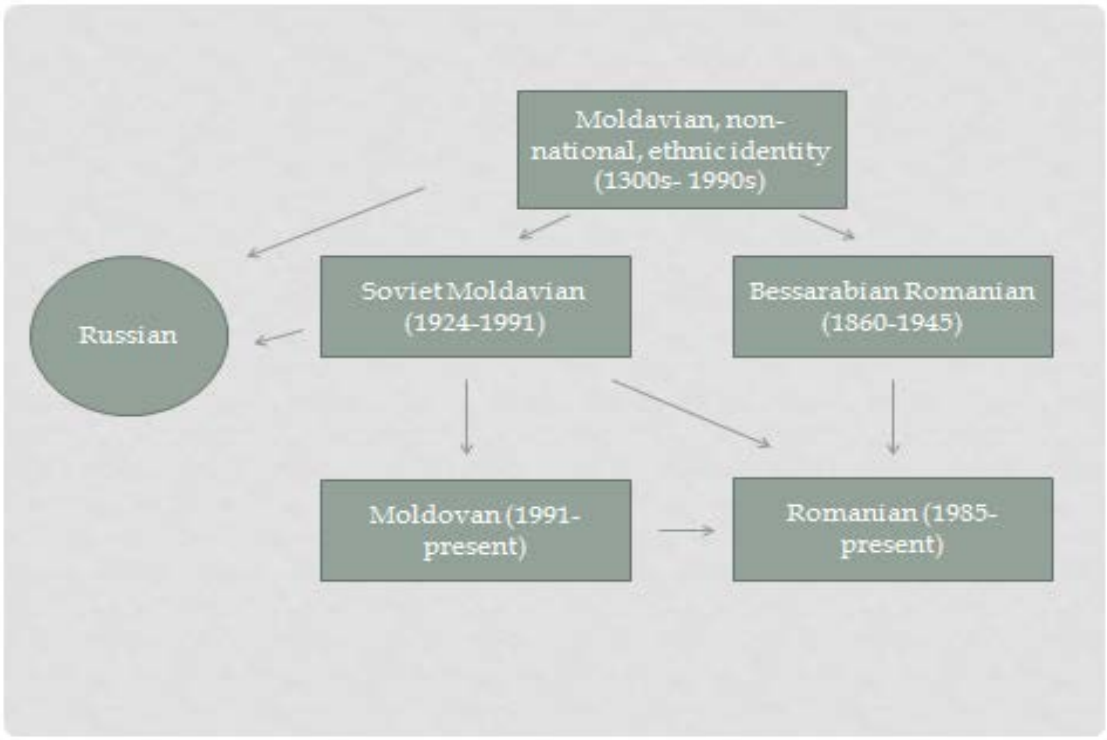
> We are celebrating a historic date in the past of our people - March 27 – the Union of Bessarabia with Romania. We believe that, just like those who criticize us have the right to identify as Moldovans; we also have the right to call ourselves Romanians.[62]

61. Jennifer Cash, "Origins, Memory, and Identity: "Villages" and the Politics of Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova." *East European Politics and Societies* 21 (2007).
62. "Declaratia Platformei Civice Actiuinea 2012," Jurnal MD, March 26, 2012.

Romanian nationalists also commemorate the day of invasion of Romanian Bessarabia by the Soviets in June 1940. In contrast, the Moldovanist camp avoids mentioning the deportations and famine caused by the Soviets after the annexation of Bessarabia. In fact, they treat Russians as liberators and celebrate Victory Day on May 9th. Even Christmas is a subject of debate: Romanians celebrate it following the Gregorian calendar on December 25th, while Moldovanists follow the Russian Church and Julian calendar which celebrates Christmas on January 7th. Thus even the celebration of Christmas serves as identity marker in this battle of nationalisms.

The chart below is a summary of all the various identity transitions of people residing on this land.

Evolution of Ethnic Identities in Moldova since 1300s



- Moldavian into Russian: many Moldavian nobles have assimilated into Russian culture. In fact, it was a transition from an ethnic local identity into the Russian national identity.
- Moldavian into Romanian: most intellectuals like Haşdeu, Stere and Pelivan. This was the

transition from an ethnic local identity to the Romanian national identity.

- Moldavian into Soviet Moldavian: Communist ideologues who helped build the concept of "Moldavian" nation. It is difficult to say whether it was a national identity, but it definitely presented elements of ethnicity.
- Soviet Moldavian into Russian: many mixed families and assimilated locals.
- Soviet Moldavian into Moldovan: many politicians like Snegur, who transitioned effortlessly to this new identity after the fall of the USSR.
- Soviet Moldavian to Romanian: many intellectuals and urbanites who discovered their belonging to Romanian culture
- Bessarabian Romanian to Romanian: Mircea Druc and many in the older generation of intellectuals, who had their identity instilled by their family in their youth after World War II, despite the efforts of the Soviets to dislodge it.
- Moldovan to Romanian: the younger educated generation of post-Soviet era.

To summarize, Romanian ethnic nationalism reemerged under Soviet rule despite all the attempts to eliminate it. Romanian nationalists were the strongest in the period of 1988-1991, when they were at the forefront of liberation and language movement. Once independence was achieved, Moldovanists took control of the power and marginalized the nationalists. Since then, Moldovanists have tried to build a separate national identity to legitimize the existence of the new state, while Romanian nationalists have strived to thwart their efforts and keep pushing for union with Romania. The Moldovanist camp has managed to maintain independence, but continues to struggle in creating a unified national identity, because Romanian nationalists (along with Russian nationalists and other minorities) challenge the legitimacy of the state itself. Romanian nationalism has historical and cultural support, but is shared mostly by a minority of

educated people. The 2004 census 75.8 percent declared themselves Moldavians and only 2.2 percent of the population self-identified as Romanians.[63] However, in period since the census, various surveys indicated that between 5 and 28 percent of the population self-identified as Romanians.[64]

The Romanian nationalist maintain their claim that Moldovans are nothing but ethnic Romanians who were late to develop Romanian consciousness because of the Russification policies applied in Moldova during the last two centuries. They show disdain for Moldovan identity because they see it as an artificial Soviet construct. On the other side, the Moldovanists claim that Moldovans are a distinct nation, because it formed separately from Romania and under the 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.

Unlike the more linear cases of emergence of nationalism, Moldova has seen a rather angular trajectory of nationalism: Romanian nationalism (late nineteenth century and early twentieth century), followed by a Moldavian nationalism (constructed by the Soviets); the rise of Romanian nationalism under the Soviets; and finally the battle of the two ethnic nationalisms today.

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63. Many sociologists and pollsters suspect that there was a lot of interviewer error and bias in the way the questions in the census were designed. This suspicion was confirmed to me in a private conversation by Doru Petruți, the director of IMAS polling institute.
Moreover, another factor that must be taken into account is that Romanian government offers citizenship to all Moldovans who can prove residence or genealogical connection to Moldova prior to World War II. As Romanian citizenship provides the right to travel to European Union, hundreds of thousands of unemployed Moldovans choose to obtain the Romanian citizenship and the advantages that come with it. As this might affect the self-identification of many Moldovans, the degree of its influence must be further studied.
64. The survey with the highest number was conducted in 2005 by a Moldovan polling agency 'ABC X'.

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