MOLDOVAN IDENTITY: FROM INTERWAR BESSARABIA TO POST-SOVIET MOLDOVA

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This article seeks to chart the history of interwar Romania's Bessarabian province and the Soviet and post-Soviet Republic of Moldova with specific reference to the question of Moldovan national identity[1]. The historian confronts at least two major problems in writing such a history. The first of these is the problem of territorial definition. Today "Moldova" commonly refers to the Republic of that name which declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. "Moldova" is also, however, the name of the eastern part of the modern Romanian state. The two "Moldovas" of today previously constituted the principality of Moldova which was founded in the fourteenth century and which in the nineteenth century joined with Wallachia to form the kingdom of Romania. The lands of the present-day Republic of Moldova were a part of the principality of Moldova until 1812 when they were annexed by Russia. The Russian province was known as "Bessarabia" and was incorporated into the Greater Romanian state in 1918. The area of the modern Republic of Moldova only, however, corresponds in part to the geographical area of Russian and Romanian Bessarabia.

The second problem regarding the history of the Republic of Moldova and Moldovan identity is the question of national description and of language. Since the nineteenth century language has been generally understood as the badge of identity. Most historians and commentators in Romania have argued that the "Moldovan" language, adopted as the Republic's official language in 1994, is a dialect of Romanian and, therefore, describe the language as "Romanian" and the people of Moldova as "Romanians". Many people in Moldova would concur with this view and regard themselves as being thus "Romanians".

Moldovan nationalists within the present-day Republic argue, however, that although closely related to the Romanians, the Moldovans form a distinct ethnic and linguistic group, with a separate historical development. Complicated as they are, however, these problems of definition are by no means unique to Moldova. Throughout Eastern Europe, both historic "rights" to territories and national identities are often subject to excessive scrutiny and debate. Indeed, the problems of Moldovan history are the problems of East European history writ small. The example of the Republic of Moldova's Ukrainian neighbor, whose territory and identity are still often hotly contested, is a further illustration. Not only is the territory of Ukraine also a historically "contested space", but Ukrainian identity itself retains an ambiguity, being variously presented as Ukrainian, Little Russian or Ruthene.

The task of writing a history of Moldova is rendered yet more difficult by the partialities of the secondary historical literature. In geographical areas where territorial "rights" and national identities are disputed, all historical statements carry political resonances. Thus, to describe the majority-inhabitants of nineteenth century Russian-ruled Bessarabia as "Romanians", as many Romanian historians are wont, is to imply their affinity with the Romanians living west of the River Prut and to justify their incorporation into the Romanian state in 1918. Soviet historians, on the other hand, often denied any relationship between the Romanian-speaking inhabitants of Bessarabia and the

[1] This article is adapted from the 'Historical Introduction' dealing with the history of Moldova and the question of Moldovan identity in Rebecca Haynes (editor), *Moldova, Bessarabia, Transnistria*, (Occasional Papers in Romanian Studies, No. 3), School of Slavonic and East European Studies –University College London, 2003, pp. 1-142.

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Romanians, and referred to them as "Moldovans". In this way they were able to justify the separate path taken by Moldova east of the River Prut during and after the Second World War.

Interwar Bessarabia

Bessarabia, the lands between the Prut and Dnestr rivers which had been under Russian rule since 1812, became part of the Romanian state in 1918. The integration of the province into Greater Romania's political, social and economic life did not, however, prove to be an easy task for the Romanian government. Bessarabia, in fact, reflected the national problems facing post-First World War Romania as a whole.[2] From being an overwhelmingly homogeneous Romanian kingdom before 1914, some 30% of the population of interwar Romania consisted of national minorities. In Bessarabia, out of a total population of 2, 864, 402 people, only some 56.2% were Moldovans (that is to say, Romanian-speakers), with Russians making up 12.3%, Ukrainians 11%, Jews 7.2% and Bulgarians 5.7% of the population.[3]

Furthermore, while Romanian-speakers throughout Romania were predominantly rural peasants, the urban centres and their related economic and professional sectors were dominated by members of the minority groups – Hungarians, Germans and Jews in Transylvania, for instance, and Russians and Jews in Bessarabia. The Bessarabian provincial capital, Chişinău, was some 46% Jewish and 27% Russian, while some 37% of Bessarabia's total urban population were Jewish.[4] While the Romanian-speaking peasantry tended to distrust the "alien" cities, the urbanized minorities tended to look down on the less educated and poorer Romanian rural population and looked upon Romanian culture in general as "parvenu". The interwar Romanian governments, politicians and intellectuals, for their part, aimed to elevate the status of the Romanian rural majority, who were regarded as having been "disadvantaged" over the course of many centuries as a result of their political domination by other national groups. The purpose of the "romanianization" policies undertaken by the Romanian governments during the 1920s and 1930s, therefore, was aimed at reversing this situation by promoting the Romanians in the educational system, administration and economy and by adjusting the country's cultural life to make it reflect the demographic balance.

Bessarabia's minorities, and even many Moldovans, particularly those in the towns, were clearly ill-disposed towards the Romanian government from the outset and remained staunchly russophile despite the seizure of power in Russia by the bolsheviks. Worryingly for the Romanian authorities in 1920, the French military attaché reported that even the minorities" middle classes would welcome the Russian army into Bessarabia to rid them of the Romanians.[5] A report by a member of the Romanian ministry of the interior the following year, pointed out that the various minority groups in Bessarabia each sought their own "state within a state" which would include their own independent school system. That the urban population in particular was hostile to the new authorities were borne out by a French diplomat in 1922 who noted that the urban population of Bessarabia was "purely Russian and Israelite and violently anti-Romanian".[6]

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[2] For much of what follows on interwar Bessarabia, see Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, Ithaca and London, 1995, pp. 89-127 and Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, Stanford, 2000, pp. 41-51.

[3] The Gagauz made up 3.4% of the population, and Germans 2.8%, with other smaller minorities making up the rest of the population: see Ştefan Ciobanu, *La Bessarabie sa population – son pass- sa culture*, Bucharest, 1941, pp. 42-3.

[4] Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, p. 123.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 99.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 90.

Relations between the Romanians from west of the River Prut and the various peoples of Bessarabia were severely complicated by the continuation of numerous bolshevik incursions into Bessarabia from 1917 onwards, which were frequently combined with anti-Romanian propaganda designed to stir up the population against the Romania authorities. There were some 118 bolshevik incursions over the Dnestr between 1921 and 1925 and several thousand smaller incidents within the province ranging from spying and sabotage of trains to minor incidents of violence. Between 1919 and 1925, the Romanian authorities made 3,002 arrests in connection with bolshevik terrorist organizations in Bessarabia. 818 arrests alone were made in connection with the Tatarbunar rebellion in September 1924, to which we shall return.[7] Independent, and later Russian and Soviet, Ukraine had harbored irredentist ambitions over Bessarabia in 1917 and 1918. The Ukrainian government did not fail to take advantage of Romania's worsening relations with her minorities to disseminate both bolshevik and anti-Romanian propaganda amongst the national minorities. In June 1918 Ukrainian agitators in Ismail informed local people that Bessarabia would soon be annexed to Ukraine and urged the people to flee the province and join the Russian army.[8] It will be remembered that, in any case, many of the inhabitants of Bessarabia had been much involved in the social questions surrounding the revolutionary period in 1917, and were thus open to such propaganda emanating from Russia or Ukraine. The Romanian governments were thus forced to declare a state of emergency along all borders of the country in March 1921 and to censor all bolshevik and anti-Romanian propaganda material.

Bessarabia's desperate economic plight in the immediate post-war years, and relations between the Romanian authorities and the Bessarabian population, was severely aggravated by the large number of refugees fleeing from east of the River Dnestr into Bessarabia, many of whom were suspected by the authorities of being bolshevik infiltrators. Between January 1918 and April 1922, 168,000 refugees entered Bessarabia and in some towns in the province the "floating population" could be as high as 60% of the overall population. Most of these refugees were of Russian, Ukrainian or Jewish origin.[9] In Chişinău alone, which had a permanent population of 133,000, there were some 66,500 additional people there in 1919.[10] This expansion of the population was clearly difficult for the authorities to cope with in view of Romania's acute post-war economic and social problems.

It was not only the national minorities which the Romanian authorities suspected of Russian and bolshevik sympathies. A further problem was posed by the fact that the majority population, in whose name the province had been acquired by Romania, had little sense of a "Romanian" identity. Amongst the small Moldovan urban middle class and intelligentsia many were strongly russophile and regarded Romanian as a peasant language, and only Russian as the language of high culture. One of the results of the russification process in the nineteenth century had been the alienation of much of the Moldovan intelligentsia from the peasantry and from the Romanian language which they spoke. This was particularly problematic for the Romanian government in the sphere of education where many teachers of Moldovan origin, whom the government hoped to employ as teachers of Romanian, identified so heavily with the Russian language that their knowledge of Romanian was often rudimentary. In part, this was due to the fact that the Romanians of the principalities had converted

[7] Georges Tataresco, *Bessarabie et Moscou. Discours pronnonce a la chamber des députés de Bucarest le 9 décembre 1925*, Bucharest, 1925, pp. 5-35.

[8] Svetlana Suveică, *Integrarea administravă a Basarabiei în România (1918-1925)*, in "Anuarul Institutului de istorie A. D. Xenopol*"*, Vol. 36, 1999, pp. 125-45 (136-40).

[9] Nicolae Enciu, "*Mişcarea migratory a populaţiei rurale din Basarabia (1918*-1940)", in "Revistă de istorie a Moldovei", Vol. 6, no. 2, 1995, pp. 15-24 (16).

[10] Ştefan Ciobanu, *Chişinăul*, no place of publication, 1996, p. 51. This work was originally published in 1925.

from the Old Church Slavonic to the Latin alphabet in 1862, while in Bessarabia, the Slavonic and Russian alphabets had been in use right up to 1918.

We should at this point make some brief comments about the Romanian language and its relationship to "Moldovan". Moldovans, such as Dimitrie Cantemir, for instance, usually referred to the language spoken in the Moldovan principality, and subsequently Bessarabia, as the "Moldovan language". According to one Western commentator, however, "Moldovan" is, in fact, one of the six regional sub-dialects of "Daco-Romanian" and, therefore, "a recognized dialect of standard Romanian …"[11]. In the years following Bessarabia's incorporation into the Soviet Union during the Second World War, many words of Russian origin were incorporated into the language, either through a natural process of assimilation or by "forced injection" by the Soviet authorities. Nevertheless, even in the interwar period there was clearly already a strong Slavonic influence on the language as a result of the Moldovans' long cultural and political relations, and indeed frequent inter-marriage, with the East Slavs, and in particular the Ruthenes and Poles. Dimitrie Cantemir, writing in the early eighteenth century, observed that the "Moldovan language" spoken by the Moldovans who lived on the Dnestr river included many words of Polish origin.[12] The historians Alexandru Boldur and Gheorghe Brătianu likewise observed early in the twentieth century that the Ruthene connection had greatly influenced both the language and customs of the Moldovans over the course of many centuries, especially in the north of the Moldovan principality.[13] The Moldovans had long lived "cheek by jowl" with the Ruthenes and this was reinforced in Bessarabia after 1812 by the number of settlers entering the province from Russian Ukraine. Commenting on the contemporary "Moldovan" language, Donald Dyer states that "Moldovan is a dialect of Romanian which is spoken in Moldova and which displays Romanian dialectical features peculiar to its geographic region. It also shows certain influences on its grammar from the grammars of Russian and the Ukrainian language with which it has been in contact for centuries".[14]

West of the River Prut, however, the introduction of the Latin alphabet in the nineteenth century and the stress on the Romanians" links to the Latin nations of Western Europe, and especially France, led to the introduction of many words of French, Italian and Latin origin into the language during the nineteenth century. As a result, the language was "much changed by terms and phrasing imported from Latinate Western Europe".[15] The different cultural and political orbits of Bessarabia and of the Romanian lands west of the River Prut thus were themselves felt in language and, since language is the badge of nationality, in popular perceptions of identity.

The differences which had developed in the Romanian used on either side of the River Prut, together with the Russian-orientation of many of the Moldovan middle class, made the "romanianization" of education in Bessarabia hard. As early as the summer of 1917 the Romanian government set up courses in the Romanian language for Moldovan teachers. The Latin alphabet was introduced and courses on the literature, history and geography of Romania were also delivered to potential teachers. Adult language courses were set up in rural areas, and Romanian books and maps distributed amongst the population. Romanian libraries were opened throughout Bessarabia and in 1917 the historians Ştefan Ciobanu and Ion Nistor lectured on Romanian culture and history. Nevertheless, the lack of fully-trained Romanian teachers made it necessary to send teachers from

[11] Donald L. Dyer, *The Romanian Dialect of Moldova: A Study in Language and Politics*, Lewiston, 1999, p. 13.

[12] Dimitrie Cantemir, *Descriptio Moldaviae*, translated by Gh. Guţu, Bucharest, 1973, p. 365.

[13] Alexandru Boldur, *Istoria Basarabiei*, Bucharest, 1992, pp. 227-30; Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Die Moldau und ihre historischen Grenzen*, Bucharest, 1941, pp. 24-32.

[14] Dyer, *The Romanian Dialect of Moldova*, p. 35.

[15] Irina Livezeanu, *Moldavia, 1917-1990: Nationalism and Internationalism Then and Now*, in "Armenian Review", vol. 43, no. 2-3/170-171, summer/autumn 1990, pp. 153-93, (158).

elsewhere in Romania to Bessarabia. Language tests were also introduced to ascertain the proficiency of the local teachers. Neither measure was welcomed warmly in Bessarabia.

Specific measures were now taken to "romanianize" the whole education system in Bessarabia. In 1922 the ministry of education in Bucharest banned the use of Russian as a means of communication in schools. Russian teachers were purged from the education system. By the late 1930s, there were no state-financed schools operating in either Russian or Ukrainian. Although minorities were allowed to set up their own privately funded schools, even these schools were forced to give instruction in Romanian. Yet despite the government's efforts at "romanianizing" the province, the Bessarabian population retained an attachment to Russian culture. Many of the new teachers of Romanian continued to converse in Russian at home, and, to the disgust of Romanian officials, peasants were often found to have pictures of the former Russian imperial family still adorning their wall in the 1930s. Indeed, in the 1930s there were indications that the Russian language was re-emerging as the vehicle of instruction in many schools, despite the government's prohibition. Southern Bessarabia, with its large number of long-established minority groups was particularly vulnerable. A school inspector reported in 1936 that "the twenty years of Romanian rule and of nationalization of the minority villages through the school in Cetatea Albă county have not born fruit".[16]

A similar policy of "romanianization" was conducted within the Bessarabian administrative system inherited from the tsarist period. Russian-speaking bureaucrats were gradually squeezed out of the administration, yet even some of the bureaucrats of Moldovan origin were frequently impervious to the admonitions of the Romanian authorities to use the Romanian language or to take an oath of loyalty to the Romanian king and state. As with the "romanianization" of the education-system, however, the lack of Romanian-speaking trained personnel proved a problem, and many administrators had to be sent from Bucharest. Indeed, for several years after the 1918 union russophile functionaries had to be utilized and until 1925 there was considerable administrative overlap between the new Romanian and the old Russian systems. It proved impossible, for example, to immediately dispense with the *zemstvo* system in Bessarabia owing to Russian opposition, despite the many examples of corruption and malpractice which emerged.[17] In October 1924, however, a Romanian language test was introduced for administrators in Bessarabia and in June 1925 the Romanian administrative system was finally applied to Bessarabia.

Even attempts to "romanianize" the Orthodox church in Bessarabia proved controversial.[18] In an ironic reversal of the russification policies of the previous century, Russian churches were either closed or forced to conduct their services in Romanian. This outraged Russian priests and their congregations and, early in 1918, the last Russian archbishop in Bessarabia, Anastasie, vainly attempted to create an autonomous Bessarabia church outside Romanian control. There was also opposition amongst the Orthodox faithful of all national groups to the conversion from the traditional Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar in use west of the Prut. It was recognized by many Romanians from west of the River Prut that religious life in Bessarabia had a markedly different quality to that in the rest of Romania, being suffused with Russian influences. The existence of the so-called "Bessarabian Orthodoxy" often created tensions between the local population and Romanian officials as a result of the relative religious indifference often displayed by teachers, administrators and policemen "imported" from elsewhere in Romania. In particular, the "faithful" in Bessarabia resented the fact that many priests were detained by the civil authorities in the early years of the union on suspicion of being pro-Russian. The Romanian authorities feared that the Orthodox church in

[16] Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, p. 120.

[17] Suveica, *Integrarea administravă a Basarabiei în România (1918-1925)*, pp. 125-35.

[18] Boris Buzilă, *Din istoria vieţii bisericeşti din Basarabia (1812-1918; 1918-1944)*, Bucharest and Chişinău, 1996, pp. 209-52.

Bessarabia might become a "stalking horse" for Soviet Russia. In 1930 a professor from Iaşi reported to the metropolitan of Moldova that the Russian elements within the Orthodox church in Bessarabia, including the continued use of Russian music, constituted "a national peril".

Bessarabia's interwar economic problems also made it difficult to reconcile the Bessarabian population to the Romanian central government, even though few of Bessarabia's problems can be ascribed directly to the machinations of Bucharest politicians.[19] The general economic problems affecting Romania as a whole during this period were, however, particularly acute in Bessarabia which had a greater proportion of rural peasants amongst its population than any other part of Greater Romania. Land reform failed to solve the problem of rural overpopulation. As the population grew, peasant holdings were further sub-divided and were soon unable to provide for the needs of the peasant households. There was already a rural crisis in Bessarabia in the early 1920s as a result of the loss of agricultural markets east of the Dnestr and the closure of the border with Russia. The fruit-growing villages on the Lower Dnestr were especially affected by this, and many plantations close to the border were simply neglected. To this we should add the problems created by the liquidation of the Russian banks in 1918 and the lack of cheap peasant credit. Some peasants were paying interest as high as 40% to their creditors. As a result many were forced to sell their livestock to make money. Whereas the number of horses and livestock had stood at over four million animals in 1923, this had fallen to well under three million by 1929. Matters were made worse by the frequent droughts which afflicted southern Bessarabia and by the onset of the Great Depression after 1929 which depressed the price of grain in Bessarabia by 30 to 50%.[20]

Matters did improve in the agricultural sector in the later 1930s as a result of Romania's exploitation of new European markets, primarily in Germany, for the export of fruit and grapes. Fruit-growing on the Lower Dnestr revived and the area became one of Romania's most important economic regions. Its produce accounted for almost one-quarter of Romania's total exports and was dubbed the "California of Romania".[21]

The Romanian central government, however, made no attempt to expand Bessarabia's tiny industrial sector, envisaging that Bessarabia would remain an agricultural producer. Industrial levels in the 1930s were much the same as they had been in the late tsarist period, and were largely restricted to food processing. This included flour milling and the production of vegetable oil, as well as basic consumables such as textiles and soap. Much of the food-processing industry, it should be noted, was barely industrialized. The Bessarabian milling industry, which was the best developed in the whole of Greater Romania, consisted of one thousand small peasant-owned mills.

There was certainly a feeling amongst many in Bessarabia that the central government was doing little to help Bessarabia's economic plight. The vegetable oil industry, for example, was damaged by competition from Bucharest factories which were able to undercut Bessarabian producers as a result of preferential rates of transport on the railways. Likewise, Bessarabia's small textile industry was now forced to acquire wool from Romanian middle-men instead of directly from abroad, forcing the closure of many factories. The establishment of a new transport infrastructure and of rail links to the rest of Romania did not relieve the overall condition of poverty in Bessarabia.

On the eve of the Second World War, Bessarabia, of all the territories Romania had acquired after the First World War, was still the least assimilated into the body of Greater Romania. It was by no means clear that the Romanian government had persuaded the Moldovans that they were indeed "Romanians". Many amongst the russophile Moldovan middle class remained largely

[19] For what follows on the economy in interwar Bessarabia, see Ion Agrigoroaiei and Gheorghe Palade, *Basarabia în cadrul României întregite 1918-1940*, Chişinău, pp. 81-7.

[20] Charles Upson Clark, *United Roumania*, New York, 1932, pp. 89-90.

[21] Agrigoroaiei and Palade, *Basarabia în cadrul României întregite*, p. 84.

unmoved by the attempts to persuade them of their affinities with the Romanians west of the Prut, while many of the "pan-Romanianists", who had favoured Bessarabia's unification with Romania since before the First World War, had long since left Bessarabia for other parts of Romania. Moreover, although literacy rates had risen, the literate still only amounted to some 30% of the Bessarabian population, compared to some 60% of the population in Transylvania.[22] Continued confusion over the use of the Latin alphabet probably accounted for some of this, as well as traditionally low attendance at school. Almost 30% of children in Bessarabia were still not attending elementary education as late as 1939.[23] It seems unlikely, therefore, that the Romanian authorities had great success using the education structure to persuade the peasantry that they were, in fact, Romanians.

Moreover, Bessarabia's urban environment continued to be overwhelmingly dominated by Russians and Jews in the 1930s, despite the "romanianization" policies. Even the daily press in Chişinău and other cities remained largely in their hands.

The Jewish population of Bessarabia, in particular, remained a community apart from the Moldovan peasant majority. Of the 206,958 Jews in Bessarabia in 1930, some 201,278 declared Yiddish to be their native language, while their second language of operation was invariably Russian rather than Romanian.[24] Traditional anti-semitic feelings in the province and elsewhere in Romania, were exacerbated by the Romanian authorities" suspicions of the Jews as bolshevik agents, following the influx of Jewish refugees into Bessarabia in the wake of the Russian civil war.

The Moldovans" weak sense of kinship with the Romanians west of the Prut, and the province's other national divisions and social and economic problems, made Bessarabia, as we have seen, an easy target for infiltration by its powerful Soviet neighbor. As a contemporary observer noted, "Bessarabia was honey-combed with revolutionary organizations, financed and directed from Soviet Russia. These exploited the post-war economic and political difficulties of the country, [and] the mistakes of the new regime …"[25] Although this account doubtless exaggerates the extent of revolutionary activity, there can be no doubt that Bessarabia remained a target of Soviet ambition.

The Soviet Union and Bessarabia

The most significant Soviet incursion into Bessarabian territory occurred on 14 September 1924, when the revolutionary agitator known as Nenin, (Andrei Culschnikoff), a former revolutionary commissar and head of the Odessa revolutionary committee, launched an occupation of the southern Bessarabian town of Tatarbunar, mainly inhabited by ethnic Bulgarians. Nenin, armed by the Russians, hoped to incite the local population into rebellion against the Romanians. Although the Romanian authorities were able to curb the uprising, Nenin's frequent references to the imminent foundation of a "soviet republic of Moldova" indicated that the Soviets were not about to end their pressure on Bessarabia. Only a few weeks later, in October 1924, the Soviet Union announced the creation of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), created out of Ukrainian lands on the left bank of the Dnestr, which the Romanians knew as "Transnistria". The purpose of the

[22] Eugen Şt. Holban, *Contribuţia Basarabiei la cultura românească. Toponime şi identitate naţională*, Chişinău, 1997, p. 6.

[23] Agrigoroaiei and Palade, *Basarabia în cadrul României întregite*, p. 99.

[24] Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, p. 123.

[25] Charles Upson Clark, *Bessarabia: Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea*, New York, 1927, p. 261.

MASSR was to place pressure on the Romanian state regarding its sovereignty over Bessarabia and to stimulate revolution in Bessarabia against Romania. Consequently, the Soviets declared the whole of Romanian Bessarabia to be officially part of the new MASSR, with the official capital at Chişinău (in Romanian Bessarabia) but with a provisional capital first at Balta and later at Tiraspol, both on the left bank of the Dnestr.

Although the new republic was ostensibly "Moldovan", almost 50% of its population was in fact Ukrainian, and there were also substantial Russian and Jewish minorities. Less than a third of the MASSR's population were Romanian-speaking. Furthermore, the territory of the new MASSR had never formerly been a part either of the historic principality of Moldova or the subsequent Romanian state. Nevertheless, the MASSR provided a territorial base from which the Soviets could continue their physical and propagandistic incursions into Romanian Bessarabia. Moreover, it was hoped that the Soviet republic would act as a magnet to the Moldovans of Bessarabia and thus help to undermine the unity of the Greater Romanian state.

To this end, the Soviet authorities within the MASSR began to claim that the Moldovans of Bessarabia and the MASSR were an ethnic group distinct from the Romanians, who spoke a separate and entirely independent language.[26] Soviet linguists set about to create a Moldovan language, based upon the language spoken by the Moldovan peasantry in Bessarabia and in Transnistria, where the peasants had been particularly influenced by the Ukrainian language. Out of this, they hoped to construct a standardized grammar and a literary Moldovan which would be quite distinct from the "frenchified" Romanian employed west of the Prut. Thus, in 1929 a Moldovan grammar, in the Cyrillic script and based upon the language spoken by the peasantry of Bessarabia and Transnistria, was produced by the linguist Leonid Madan, who even went so far as to claim that there were racial differences between the Moldovans and the Romanians.

The Soviet authorities then began a campaign to impose this language on the Romanian-speaking population of the MASSR. They very quickly, however, ran into the problems that had faced the imperial "russifiers" in the nineteenth century and the "romanianizers" in interwar Bessarabia: a lack of trained teachers and sufficient textbooks. In any case in 1932, the Soviet authorities did an about turn in their "moldovanization" campaign and drew a halt to the theory of a separate Moldovan identity. The Latin alphabet was introduced to the MASSR and linguists were now informed that the Moldovan language should be comprehensible throughout Romania. The Soviets now hoped that, through these policies, they could facilitate Soviet influence throughout Greater Romania and exploit the political tensions that had developed in Bucharest as a result of King Carol II"s return to the throne in 1930. Madan's works, together with those of his colleagues who had advocated the existence of a separate Moldovan language and identity, were removed from all libraries. In 1938, however, the Latinization phase also came to an end, and the Cyrillic alphabet was re-introduced, as part of a policy which covered the whole of the Soviet Union. Despite the change to the Cyrillic script, however, there was no reversion to Madan's construction, so that thereafter, the Moldovan written language "represented little more than a Cyrillic version of literary Romanian".[27]

By the mid-1930s there was some improvement in Soviet-Romanian relations and in 1934 Romania finally established full diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. The Soviets, however, still refused to acknowledge Romanian sovereignty over Bessarabia. This factor, together with the strong anti-bolshevik sentiments of King Carol II and the Romanian political establishment, as well as that of Romania's Polish ally, prevented the Romanian foreign minister, Nicolae Titulescu, from

[26] For what follows on Soviet policies in the MASSR, see King, *The Moldovans*, pp. 51-88.
[27] *Ibidem*, p. 85.

concluding a mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union in 1936.[28] Indeed, from 1936 onwards, particularly following France's failure to respond to Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936, a growing number of people in Romania began to see in Germany a potential counter-weight to the spread of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe and as a bulwark against Soviet ambitions regarding Bessarabia.

In 1937 incidents once again flared on the Soviet-Romanian frontier on the River Dnestr as Soviet-Romanian relations worsened. With the German-Soviet carve-up of Poland in September 1939, Romania lost her sole military ally against a potential Soviet attack. Moreover, with the Soviet Union's occupation of Polish territory which bordered on to Romania, the Soviets were now regarded as an immediate military threat to Romanian security. In late September 1939, when the French ambassador in Bucharest informed the Romanian foreign minister, Grigore Gafencu that France's aim in the war was the complete defeat of Germany, Gafencu replied that this was contrary to Romanian interests, "for if Germany is destroyed, bolshevism will come to Central Europe and Romania will be lost".[29]

During the winter of 1939 and 1940, rumors began to circulate in Bucharest regarding the Soviet Union's "interest" in Bessarabia, as agreed under the terms of the August 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact. Romanian diplomats attempted to convince German officials of their countries" common anti-bolshevism and need to contain Soviet expansion. Germany's need to retain Soviet goodwill throughout 1940, and the concentration of German forces in western and northern Europe meant, however, that Germany was in no position to support Romania against the Soviet claim to Bessarabia, which they had, in any case, already accepted in the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Taking advantage of Germany's concentration on events in western Europe in the summer of 1940, the Soviet's presented their ultimatum for the surrender of Bessarabia, together with the northern Bukovina, which had not formed part of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and to which the Soviet Union had no historic claim. In addition, the Soviets demanded the town of Herţa, which belonged to neither Bessarabia nor the northern Bukovina, but was in fact part of Romanian Moldova. The Soviet annexation of Herţa came about due to a conveniently thick pencil line drawn by Molotov, the Soviet commissar of foreign affairs, on a map of the area which he handed to the Romanians on 26 June. The line covered a seven-mile band of territory which the Soviets, needless to say, interpreted to their own advantage.

Although the Romanian government had at first been prepared to fight for Bessarabia, King Carol eventually accepted the ultimatum on 28 June 1940. He had been strongly advised to do so by German and Italian advisers, who feared that Romania was not militarily prepared for a conflict with the Soviet Union. As a result of the annexation, Romania lost 51,000 sq km of territory and some 3.9 million people, of whom the largest national group were the Moldovans.

The loss of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, and the fear of further Soviet incursions into Romania, led directly to King Carol's rapprochement with Germany and requests for an alliance during the summer of 1940. Such a policy seemed justified in view of the fact that during July and August, the Soviets began to back Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionist claims on Romania openly. By late August, the Romanians were expecting an imminent invasion by the Soviets from newly-annexed northern Bukovina. Romanian rapprochement with Germany, however, did not prevent Romania's loss of northern Transylvania to Hungary under the Axis Vienna Award of 30 August 1940. Nevertheless, during the course of events in the summer of 1940 which led to Romania's loss of northern Transylvania to Hungary, it was clear that both the Romanian government and public opinion regarded Transylvania as more integral to the Romanian state than Bessarabia, hard though

[28] For much of what follows on interwar Romania's diplomacy with regard to Bessarabia, see Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy towards Germany, 1936-1940*, London, 2000, esp. pp. 2-6, 99-166.

[29] Ibidem, p. 109.

the loss of this province was. On 27 August 1940, the Romanian minister president, Ion Gigurtu, sent a letter to German foreign minister Ribbentrop. Gigurtu stated that public opinion had accepted the need to cede Bessarabia to the Soviet Union in June 1940, on Axis advice, in order to avoid war with the Soviet Union. The question of ceding part of Transylvania to Hungary, however, was of a quite different order since, "Transylvania", wrote Gigurtu, "was always considered by us as a fortress of Romanianism, in which our nation … developed". The Romanian people had accepted the necessity to cede Bessarabia, argued Gigurtu, precisely in order to be able to resist revisionist claims on Transylvania where the Romanians "have lived for eighteen centuries".[30]

Despite the great shock and anger resulting from the loss of northern Transylvania, it was clear to King Carol and the majority of Romanian politicians, that in view of the geographic distance which separated Romania from the West, protection from further attack by the Soviet Union, and indeed the possible disappearance of Romania from the map of Europe, could only be provided by Germany. Moreover, alliance with, and loyalty to, Germany in a war against the Soviet Union might bring with it the possibility of the return of both northern Transylvania and Bessarabia as part of a post-war peace settlement

Ion Antonescu"s signing of the Tripartite Pact on 23 November 1940 was thus the culmination of the policy of rapprochement with Germany begun by King Carol as a direct result of the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia in June 1940. One year later, on 22 June 1941, the Romanian army, commanded by Marshal Antonescu, crossed the River Prut into Soviet Bessarabia as Germany's ally in the invasion of the Soviet Union. By late July, the Romanian territories annexed by the Soviet Union had been re-conquered and on 3 September 1941, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina were officially reincorporated into Romania. Although Antonescu took the decision to continue the fight against the Soviet Union beyond the former Romanian-Soviet Dnestr frontier, Antonescu did not wish the Romania occupation of Transnistria to become permanent. He feared that in this event, the Germans would regard Romanian gains in the east against the Soviet Union as a sufficient compensation to the Romanians for their loss of northern Transylvania to Hungary. Antonescu's objective was the reconstruction of Romania in its pre-June 1940 borders, and not an expansion of Romanian territory to the east.[31] It was, nevertheless, necessary for Antonescu to establish a Romanian-run administration, for the duration of the occupation, pending a post-war settlement. As it turned out, the Romanian occupation only lasted until late in 1943 when the Romanians withdrew in the face of the Red Army"s victorious advance through Ukraine.

Despite Antonescu's unwillingness to countenance a permanent occupation of Transnistria, a number of works were published during the Romanian occupation justifying a Romanian claim to the area on historic and national grounds. Indeed, such claims to Transnistria had been put forward shortly after the First World War. The industrious historians Nicolae Iorga and Ion Nistor had claimed that the Romanian population of the Transnistria area was some 400-500,000. This was clearly an exaggeration since in the 1920s the Romanian population was only some 10% of a total population of about two-and-a half million. Iorga and Nistor further claimed that although the River Dnestr had been the eastern border of the medieval principality of Moldova, it was a political, rather than a national, border. As Iorga wrote, "by 1400 the Dnestr was not only a Moldovan border, but a Romanian river". In other words, the Dnestr river was populated on both banks by Romanian-speakers. Both historians stressed the importance of Moldovan landowners and traders throughout the

[30] Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (Archive for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest, Fond 71/Germania, Vol. 80, pp. 129-34, Letter Addressed to His Excellency Ribbentrop, Reich Foreign Minister, by the Prime Minister, I. Gigurtu, on 27 August 1940.

[31] Ion Constantin, *România, marile puteri şi problema Basarabiei*, Bucharest, 1995, pp. 146-54.

centuries in Transnistria which, as we have discussed, was not without foundation, but denied any significant Slavonic presence or influence in the area before the eighteenth century, (in the face of much evidence to the contrary).[32]

These themes were taken up again during the Romanian occupation of Transnistria in the Second World War. Thus, Emil Diaconescu claimed a continuous Romanian-speaking presence in the area from antiquity up until the contemporary occupation. Diaconescu argued that the Dacian ruler Burebista's ancient kingdom stretched further east than the lands of twentieth-century Romania, indeed even beyond the River Bug. Like Iorga before him, Diaconescu stressed a Romanian-speaking presence in, and administration over, the Transnistrian area right up until Catherine the Great's conquests of the lands in the late eighteenth century. Diaconescu claimed that before Catherine's reign, "life in Moldova beyond the Dnestr did not differ from the rest of the Romanian lands".[33] A more explicitly "blood and soil" argument was put forward by Vasile Netea who stated in 1943 that "The Transnistrians are blood of our blood and their soul part of the great soul of Romania", and failed to find any differences in life-style, culture or folklore between the "Romanians" on either side of the Dnestr.[34] Without denying the presence and influence of Romanian-speakers beyond the Dnestr throughout the previous centuries, their true numbers in Romanian-occupied Transnistria in the early 1940s were hardly sufficient to justify long-term occupation.

The existence of the works cited, however, suggests that some Romanians believed the permanent annexation of Transnistria to Romania to be possible. The Romanian Orthodox Church was particularly active in war-time Transnistria and a number of writers stressed the links between the Orthodox churches in Moldova and Transnistria from the seventeenth century onwards. There is some truth in this in that ecclesiastical links on either side of the Dnestr were strong during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, when Gavril Bănulescu-Bodoni was active in both the Russian church and the church in the Romanian principalities. In particular, the eparchy of Chişinău and Hotin created in 1813 and presided over by Bodoni and his successor Sulima had extended from the Prut to the Bug river until 1837, when a separate archbishopric of Odessa and Cherson was created.[35]

During August 1941, when the Romanian administration was being established in Transnistria, the organization *Misiunii Ortodoxe Române în Transnis*tria was also set up, with the intention of "re-christianizing" the area and reorganizing the church. Some 250 "missionary" priests were sent to the area from Romania to work together with 219 local priests. By 1943 the mission had apparently rebuilt several hundred churches and chapels and re-established religious instruction in schools in Transnistria. Two seminaries had also been opened as well as a theology department in Odessa.[36]

Notwithstanding these successes in the revival of Christianity in Transnistria, it became clear to the Romanians following the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943 that the Soviet Union was capable of defeating Germany. The Romanians, therefore, opened negotiations with the Western Allies, and subsequently the Soviet Union as well, in order to bring Romania into the war on the Allied side, hoping thereby to restore Romania to her pre-1940 borders. By March 1944, however, the Red Army

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[32] Nicolae Iorga, *Romînii de peste Nistru. Lămuriri pentru a-i ajuta în lupta lor*, Iaşi, 1918, pp. 3-35 (8); Ion I Nistor, *Românii Transnistrieni*, Extras din "Codrul Cosminului", "Buletinul Institutului de istorie şi limbă dela Universitatea din Cernăuţi", 1925, pp. 4-22.

[33] Emil Diaconescu, *Românii din răsărit: Transnistria*, Iaşi, 1942, pp. 13-4, (121). See also, Constantin C. Giurescu, *Populaţă moldoveneasca dela gura Niprului şi a Bugului in veacurile XVII şi XVIII*, Craiova, 1942.

[34] Vasile Netea, *Transnistria*, Bucharest, 1943, pp. 11-20 (14).

[35] Diaconescu, *România din răsărit*, p. 155; Antim Nica, *Viaţă religioasă în Transnistria*, Chişinău, 1943, pp. 5-17.

[36] *Ibidem*, pp. 69-75.

had reached the River Prut, and in April the Soviet government declared the Prut to be the frontier between Romania and the Soviet Union. This was confirmed in the armistice between Romania and the Soviet Union which was signed following the "palace coup" of 23 August 1944 which led to Marshal Antonescu's fall from power and Romania's entry into the war on the Allied side. The Soviet Union's possession of Bessarabia, northern Bukovina and Herţa was subsequently confirmed by the Paris peace treaty of February 1947.

Soviet and Post-Soviet Moldova

The boundaries of the post-war Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) were not, however, identical to those of Romanian inter-war Bessarabia. Following the Soviet seizure of Romanian territories in June 1940, Stalin had incorporated the northern Bukovina, together with the Herţa region, the northern Bessarabian district of Hotin and the southern Bessarabian districts of Cetatea Albă and Ismail, which included the port of Chilia, into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. All these territories had substantial Ukrainian populations, and Chilia and Cetatea Albă were renamed Kilija and Bilhorod Dnistrovsky respectively. In placing large areas of Bessarabian territory within the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Stalin ensured that the strategically important Danube mouth and a large area of the Black Sea coast was in the more loyal hands of the Ukrainians, although thereby Ukraine also gained some 337,000 Moldovans.[37]

On 2 August 1940 the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) had been created from the union of the remainder of Bessarabia with the western part of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), which the Soviets had created on the left bank of the River Dnestr in 1924. The area which formed part of the new MSSR thus included left-bank towns such as Tiraspol and Dubăsari which had never belonged to the principality of Moldova or to Bessarabia.[38] The larger eastern area of the former MASSR was returned to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, from whom the lands making up the MASSR had been taken in 1924. The MSSR was reconstituted in the above form following the withdrawal of the Romanian army early in 1944. The population of the new MSSR was some 2.4 million of which Moldovans made up some 68.8% of the population in 1941, with 11.1% Ukrainians and 6.7% Russians.[39] Ironically, the one "benefit" of Bessarabia's annexation by the Soviet Union was thus to increase the proportion of Moldovans in the population through the award of the areas with high Ukrainian populations to Ukraine.

The population of the MSSR had already suffered greatly as a result of the executions and deportations which were the inevitable result of the Soviet annexation of the province in June 1940. Between 1940 and the Romanian re-annexation in 1941, some 25,000 Moldovans were deported.[40] Economically primitive at the best of times, Moldova was devastated by the war, with massive loss of livestock and agricultural equipment. With the onset of Soviet agricultural collectivization, came the attendant evils of grain requisitioning and "de-kulakization", which was especially aimed at the Moldovan peasantry. These factors, together with a drought in 1946, led to a famine in which at least

[37] King, *The Moldovans*, p. 94; Ciobanu, *La Bessarabie Sa Population – son passé – sa culture*, pp. 42-3: in 1930 Hotin had 137, 348 Moldovans, 53, 453 Russians and 163, 267 Ukrainians. Cetatea Albă had 62, 949 Moldovans, 58, 922 Russians and 70, 095 Ukrainians. Ismail in 1930 had 72, 020 Moldovans, 66, 987 Russians but only 10, 655 Ukrainians.

[38] As Ronald Hill has written with regard to Tiraspol's position within the post-war MSSR, the city 'is the only large settlement within Moldavia's present day borders that has always been within either the [Russian] Empire, or the Soviet Union'. See, Ronald J. Hill, *Soviet Political Elites: The Case of Tiraspol*, London, 1977, p. 14. Having been capital of the interwar MASSR, Tiraspol was subordinated to Chişinău in 1941.

[39] King, *The Moldovans*, p. 101. These statistics are from a census of 1941.

[40] George Ciorănescu, *Bessarabia: Disputed Land between East and W*est, Bucharest, 1993, p. 207.

115, 000 peasants died.[41] Waves of deportation to Central Asia and Siberia, again primarily aimed at the Moldovans, took place following Moldova"s incorporation into the Soviet Union, with the intelligentsia, landowners and "kulaks" specifically targeted. In the 1950s a policy of "voluntary migration" to collective farms in the Soviet east also began. An accurate number of the persons deported is difficult to assess, but may have up to half-a-million people between 1944 and the 1960s.[42] The levels of deportation were sufficiently high such that by the 1950s there were villages made up solely of Romanian-speakers in the area between the Urals and Altai mountains in the Soviet Union.[43]

The purpose of the Soviet deportations was clearly aimed to ensure economic and ideological conformity. Furthermore, Stalin was well-known for his persecution of peoples who had been exposed to non-communist systems. Thus, the Soviets clearly regarded the Moldovans, who had belonged to "bourgeois" and "capitalist" Romania during the interwar period, as less trustworthy than the Slavs. Similarly, in the decades after 1945 Soviet leaders sought to "dilute" the potentially disloyal indigenous Moldovan population by encouraging immigration by Russians and Ukrainians into the MSSR. Between 1944 and 1979 more than half-a-million Slavs migrated into the republic, which had the effect of neutralizing the Moldovans" higher birth rate. Nevertheless, by 1989 the Moldovan population which had stood at 68.8% of the total population in 1941 was still relatively "healthy" at 64.5% of the total population, with a Ukrainian population of 13.8% (11.1% in 1941) and an increased Russian population of 13% in 1989, compared with 6.7% in 1941.[44]

Significantly, however, it was primarily the Russians and Ukrainians who dominated the communist party in Moldova together with its organs of coercion and the state-run economic sector. Moldovans who did rise to importance, such as Semion Grossu, first secretary from 1980-1989, tended to come from the left bank, or "Transnistrian" side, of the Dnestr, and were completely loyal to the Soviet Union. They were integrated into Russian culture, much like the russophile Moldovan nobility in imperial Bessarabia. As we have already noted above, the left bank of the Dnestr had never formed part of the Romanian state as such, apart from the brief period of occupation during the Second World War, nor officially to the medieval principality of Moldova, or to Russian Bessarabia. Despite the contacts between right and left bank Moldovans, the Moldovan population on the left bank of the Dnestr had been more heavily influenced by the numerically predominant Slavonic population for centuries, which had also left its imprint on the Moldovan spoken on the left bank of the river. [45]

The Cyrillic alphabet had been introduced into the MSSR in May 1941 and during the 1940s "Moldovan" was once again regarded as a separate language to Romanian and the Slavonic elements within Moldovan history and culture were stressed. There was a general agreement on this among Soviet linguists until the 1970s.[46] The stress on the use of the Russian language of the "Soviet people" from the early 1960s onwards, however, and the consequent "russification" of the Soviet

[41] King, *The Moldovans*, p. 96; Mihai Gribincea, *Agricultural Collectivization in Moldavia: Basarabia during Stalinism, 1944-1950*, Boulder CO, 1996, pp. 71-97.

[42] Hofbauer and Roman, *Bukowina, Bessarabien, Moldawien*, p. 103; Wim P. van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question in Communist Historiography: Nationalist and Communist Politics and History-Writing*, Boulder CO, 1994, p. 123.

[43] Ciorănescu, *Bessarabia: Disputed Land between East and West*, p. 214.

[44] Charles King, *The Moldovans*, p. 101.

[45] Pål Kolstø and Andrei Malgin, *The Transnistrian Republic: A Case of Politicized Regionalism*, in *Nationality Papers*, Vol. 26, no. 1, 1998, pp. 103-27 (106).

[46] For a detailed account of Soviet language policies in the MASSR and MSSR, see Michael Bruchis, *One Step Back, Two Steps Forward: on the Language Policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the National Republics: (Moldavian: A Look Back, a Survey, and Perspectives, 1924-1980)*, Boulder, CO, 1982.

Union's languages had a marked effect on the "Moldovan" spoken in the MSSR.[47] The increasing Russian influence on spoken "Moldovan" was thus a result of the spread of bilingualism amongst the Moldovans. As Dennis Deletant wrote in 1989, as a result of this, "colloquial Moldavian shows significant Russian lexical influence … [but] the language of Soviet Moldavian writers is that of their Romanian counterparts west of the River Prut …".[48]

Charles King has described the Soviet years in Moldova as being marked by "the quiet acceptance of standard literary Romanian (albeit in the Cyrillic alphabet) as the linguistic norm for the MSSR…".[49] Following the Soviet abandonment of attempts to create a Moldovan literary language in the MASSR in the 1930s from the language spoken by the peasantry, linguists in Moldova were forced to turn to the literary Romanian used west of the River Prut. As a result, according to King, "…Moldovan in its standard form was more Romanian by the 1980s than at any point in its history".[50]

Meanwhile, in post-war communist Romania, all references to Bessarabia in history books were quietly dropped and Romanian historiography began to tow a slavish pro-Russian line in which the historic links between the Romanians and Slavs, and especially the Russians, were stressed to an absurd degree. As Wim van Meurs has written, "the Russian state and people were consistently portrayed as altruistically aiding the Romanian people in its struggle against foreign imperialists and oppressors".[51] Typical of the genre is an article written by Victor Cheresteşiu in 1953 in which he traces the course of the close bonds between the Russian and Romanian peoples from the reign of Stephen the Great, through that of Michael the Brave and Dimitrie Cantemir, whose genuine links with Russia are much dwelt upon. From there we eventually arrive at the Second World War when the Romanian workers and peasants threw down their tools in a frenzied rush to join the Red Army to fight with their Soviet comrades. In this interpretation of events, Romania's previous engagement on the German side is conveniently forgotten.[52] The deterioration of Russo-Romanian relations from the early 1960s, however, saw a reduction in such historiographical excesses. With the closure of various Russian cultural institutions in Romania, such as the *Institutul romîno-sovietic* in 1963, the brief russophile tendency in Romanian historiography can be said to have come to an end. The institution of the Ceauşescu regime and the policy of "independence" from Moscow saw a return to the theory of the Latin origins of the Romanians and a consequent diminution of the Romanians" historic links with the Slavs.[53]

The Bessarabian "question" re-emerged in public debate in 1964. In particular, the Romanians published works by Marx and Engels in which the founding fathers of socialism themselves condemned the Russian seizure of Bessarabia in 1812. As Adrian Pop has written elsewhere, "… Romanian historiography was one of the main channels through which many of the signs of insubordination towards the Kremlin were diffused". By the 1970s Romanian historians were

[47] Charles E King, *Soviet Policy in the Annexed East European Borderlands: Language, Politics and Ethnicity in Moldova*, in Odd Arne Westad, Sven Holtsmark, and Iver B. Neumann (eds), *The Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, 1945-89*, London, 1994, pp. 63-93.

[48] Dennis Deletant, *Language Policy and Linguistic Trends in Soviet Moldavia*, in *Studies in Romanian History*, Bucharest, 1991, pp. 304-31 (314).

[49] For what follows, see King, *The Moldovans*, pp. 106-16 (107).

[50] *Ibidem*, p. 108.

[51] Van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question in Communist Historiography*, p. 229.

[52] Victor Cheresteşiu, 'Marele învăţaţ, om politic şi luptător activ pentru prietenia româno-rusă, in "Studii revistă de istorie şi filosofie", Vol. 6, no. 4, October-December 1953, pp. 75-89.

[53] See, for example, Ciorănescu's comment on post-war russification in Moldova in which he claims that 'the number of Russians is growing faster than that of the other nationalities of the republic, despite the fact that the Russians are as alien there as the French in Africa'. See, George Ciorănescu, *Bessarabia: Disputed Land between East and West*, Bucharest, 1993, p. 197.

arguing the case for the Romanian nature of the lands between the Rivers Prut and Dnestr so vehemently that there were rumours in 1976 of a Soviet intervention on the Prut.[54] None of this was lost on the Moldovans, many of whom by the late 1960s were demanding the official recognition of Moldovan and Romanian as the same language and the use of the Latin alphabet. As a result, the Soviet authorities renewed their stress on the supposed "independence" of Moldovan from the Romanian language during the 1970s.

The MSSR remained a relatively "conservative" backwater of the USSR right through into the 1980s. There had been little attempt in the post-war years to fully industrialize the republic, and what little industry was developed was located on the eastern side of the Dnestr. During the 1980s *glasnost* era of Soviet politics, the leadership in Chişinău, much like Ceauşescu in Bucharest, refused to "liberalize". Nevertheless, the decade witnessed a growing "pan-Romanian" intellectual movement, the adherents of which argued that the Moldovans were a part of the Romanian nation and demanded a greater use of the Moldovan language within the republic.[55] The "Popular Front of Moldova" (PFM) was established in May 1989, and its members looked forward to Moldova's ultimate political union with Romania. On 31 August 1989 the Moldovan Supreme Soviet officially declared Moldovan, in the Latin script, to be the state language, and recognized its unity with the Romanian language. Both Russian and Moldovan, however, were to be the languages of inter-ethnic communication. As Michael Kirkwood correctly predicted shortly after the introduction of these laws, however, the introduction of the Latin script, with which many Moldovans, as well as the republic"s numerous national groups, were unfamiliar, as well as the reinforcement of Russian as a language of communication, made it highly likely that "the new law will continue to act as a focus for inter-ethnic strife rather than as a blueprint for ethnic harmony".[56]

In elections early the following year, the PFM won the largest number of seats to the Moldovan Supreme Soviet. The soviet adopted a modified version of the Romanian flag as the Moldovan national flag, replacing the previous red flag with a green stripe which had been adorned with the hammer and sickle motif. In June 1990, the Moldovan soviet issued a declaration of sovereignty which specified the supremacy of the Moldovan constitution and laws throughout the republic. The Supreme Soviet, furthermore, declared that the name of the republic was the Romanian "Moldova", rather than "Moldavia" as used by the Soviets, an apparent victory for the pan-Romanianist view of Moldova as an integral part of Romania. On the following day, on the anniversary of the Soviet Union's annexation of Bessarabia fifty years previously, thousands of citizens of Romania and Moldova formed a "human chain" across the River Prut as an act of national solidarity.

The backlash by other national groups, predicted by Kirkwood, was not long in coming. Fearing that they would be "romanianized", in August 1990 five counties in southern Moldova declared independence as the "Gagauz Soviet Socialist Republic". One month later an autonomous Transnistrian Soviet Socialist Republic was also declared. This republic announced its independence late in 1991, following the Republic of Moldova"s declaration of independence on 27 August 1991. Civil war broke out late in 1991 in Transnistria between the "Dnestr guard" and Moldovan government troops and in 1995 Transnistria declared its independence.

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[54] Adrian Pop, *When the Mouse Challenges the Cat: Bessarabia in Post-War Soviet-Romanian Relations*, in Westad, Holtsmark and Neumann (eds), *The Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, pp. 94-109 (101).

[55] For the growth of the Moldovan national movement and the development of the Transnistrian dipute, see King, *The Moldovans*, pp. 120-44, 178-208.

[56] Michael Kirkwood, *Soviet Language Laws: 1989-1990*, in Peter J. S. Duncan and Martyn Rady (eds), *Towards a New Community: Culture and Politics in Post-Totalitarian Europe*, London, 1993, pp. 147-60 (156).

Meanwhile, in Moldova itself the "pan-Romanianists" were beginning to lose public support. In the country's first multi-party elections in February 1994, the Agrarian Democratic Party emerged as the largest party, and the Christian Democratic Popular Front (the former PFM) had a weak showing. The following month, an opinion poll showed that only some 5% of the Moldovan population favoured union with Romania. The fall in popularity for union with Romania may have been caused by the slow pace of political and economic reforms within Romania itself in the early 1990s, together with a perception that Romania was pressurizing the republic into union, which revived "collective memories" of Bessarabia's often harsh treatment within interwar Greater Romania. Within the Romanian nationalist-right in the early 1990s, there was certainly a strong "annexationist" contingent.[57]

The ruling Agrarian Democrats and their "Moldovanist" supporters were, therefore, able to revive, in a modified form, the former Soviet arguments regarding the distinctiveness of the Moldovans in relation to the Romanians, and thereby to argue that Moldova should remain independent. The "Moldovanists" argued that although the Moldovans and Romanians share "common origins in Trajan's Dacia … the annexation of Bessarabia by the Russian empire in 1812 … the proclamation of an independent [Moldovan] republic in 1918, the oppressive nature of Romanian rule between the wars, and the construction of a modern Moldovan state in the Soviet period have all contributed to the growth of a unique Moldovan nation".[58] Significantly, the government confirmed Moldova"s membership of the CIS in April 1994, a move which gave a clear indication that the government was not considering union with Romania. In July 1994 the government declared Moldova to be a sovereign and independent state with "Moldovan", written in the Latin script, as its official language. The parliament consistently refused the demands made by the "pan-Romanian" nationalists that the language should be officially renamed as "Romanian". Moreover, in Romania itself by the mid-1990s there was a growing feeling that union with their economically troubled Moldovan neighbour would place an unbearable strain upon the faltering Romanian economy. The Romanian elections of 1996, which brought the "pro-Western" Democratic Convention to power, reflected the fact that for most Romanians attempts to join Western institutions such as the EU and NATO were more important than union with Moldova.

The worsening economic climate in Moldova and the unresolved tensions between the Moldovans and the national minorities brought the Communist Party of Moldova back to power in the 1998 elections and again in 2001. In April 2001 President Voronin pledged to strengthen the country's political and economic ties with Russia and to boost the status of the Russian language within the republic. Policies to increase the status of Russian and to de-emphasize the historic links between Moldova and Romania, however, met with stiff opposition and the re-emergence of the "pan-Romanianist" right-wing. Public demonstrations early in 2002 over the language issue, and the intervention of the Parliamentary Association of the Council of Europe, forced the government to withdraw proposals to introduce compulsory Russian language classes. Further evidence that the "pan-Romanianist" position is far from dead, is reflected in the attempt by some Orthodox priests to found a "Bessarabian metropolitan" which would be subordinated not to the Russian patriarchate, as is the case with the metropolitan church of Moldova, but to the Romanian patriarchate in Bucharest. The Moldovan government has refused to register the church, but has now been set a deadline for so doing by the Council of Europe.

[57] See, for example, Victor Crăciun, who called for the union of Moldova with Romania, as well as the annexation of Bessarabian lands lost to Ukraine in 1940, together with northern Bukovina, in *Pierdem Basarabia? Liga culturală pentru unitatea românilor de pretutindeni*, no place of publication, 1992, p. 112.

[58] Charles King, *Who are the Moldovans*?, in Dennis Deletant (ed.), *Occasional Papers in Romanian Studies*, No.1, London, 1995, pp. 61-9 (65).

Neither has the government been successful in resolving the Transnistrian dispute, despite its "slavophile" credentials. On his installment in early 2001, President Voronin offered Transnistria a large measure of autonomy. Pro-Russian separatists replied to this by demanding a loose confederation of two sovereign and independent states. At the time of writing, the relationship between the Moldovan government and Transnistrian break-away government remains unresolved and Transnistria continues to run its own affairs.

The status of the Russian army in Transnistria likewise remains unresolved. The agreement for withdrawal of Russian troops signed by Moldova and Russia in 1994 has still not been ratified by the Russian parliament. Despite the 1999 OSCE agreement under which Russia pledged to withdraw all its troops and weapons from Transnistria by the end of 2002, so far Russia has made progress only on the removal of weapons. In November 2001, Moldova and Russia signed a basic treaty on friendship and cooperation which gave Russia various roles within Moldovan affairs, such as that of a peace guarantor in Transnistria. A plan drawn up by President Putin's government, which would give Transnistria considerable autonomy and influence within the Moldovan legislature, proved, however, to be unacceptable even to President Voronin, let alone the nationalist right-wing in Moldova.

Relations between the Moldovan government and the Gagauz Yeri autonomous area were also in decline in 2002 following Gagauz demands for an autonomous "republic" with its own budget, as well as greater representation within the central parliament. At the same time, Moldova's official relations with Romania also appear to be deteriorating. In late 2001 the Moldovan justice minister accused the Romanian government of "expansionism" and in 2002 President Voronin accused the Romanians of sponsoring the nationalist opposition, who were at the time demonstrating against his pro-Russian language policies, with the aim of reincorporating "Bessarabia" into Romania. Nevertheless, Moldova's incorporation into various international organizations continues. In June 2001 the republic entered the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe and in July 2001 entered the World Trade Organization.

As yet, however, there is no end in sight to the bleak economic conditions which prevailed during the late 1990s, as described by Ronald Hill in this volume. On 9 July 2001, BBC 2"s "Newsnight" programme, reported on a growing number of young men in Moldova who are prepared to sell their kidneys for money. These young men are transported to Turkey, many of them in the belief that they are simply giving blood, where the operation is carried out, and are paid the sum of $2000. The organs are then sold on to Israel which has a serious problem with kidney donorship. In one village in Moldova as many as fourteen young men had sold their kidneys, with inevitable consequences for their health. Moreover, "The Economist" on 15 July 2002 confirmed that Moldova was the poorest country in Europe, even as it had been in 1999, beating Albania to reach this unenviable position. The average wage in 2002 was only $3 per day and some staggering 600,000 people have left the country over the past few years.

In the midst of this economic crisis, the Moldovan "conundrum" regarding the national identity of the Moldovans, their relationship to the Romanians across the River Prut, and their political orientation within the wider European context persists. Although President Voronin maintains aspirations to eventually join the EU, his government's relations with Russia are currently far warmer than his relations with his western neighbours. The last few years have seen the emergence of two other alternative identities and political orientations to those put forward by the "Moldovanists" and the "pan-Romanianists". One can be described as the "European" orientation whose adherents regard the Romanians and Moldovans as related but different. Thus, the "Europeanists" regard use of the Romanian language by the Moldovans as a "given" but acknowledge that differences have developed between the Romanians and Moldovans as a result of diverging historical paths in the nineteenth century. Their vision for Moldova's future development rests upon the strengthening of democracy and civil society and of cultural rights for ethnic minorities within a

European framework. They are prepared to accept partnership with Russia only if that country is oriented towards the West. The "neo-Soviets", on the other hand, are openly pro-Russian. They place no importance on the use of the Romanian language and regard the russification process which took place in the twentieth century as a positive process of "modernization". They regard the independence of the Republic of Moldova as a historical "accident" and seek union for Moldova with Russia and Belarus. Thus, the neo-Soviets have no interest in orientation towards Western Europe. At the time of writing, the neo-Soviet vision of Moldova's future appears to be dominant.[59]

Throughout its history, Moldova has stood at the edge of empire – of the Roman and Byzantine empires, of the empires of the nomads, of the expanding Hungarian kingdom and of the Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian empires. Moldova's people have on occasions been able to utilize this circumstance, balancing one neighbour against the other in order to preserve a fragile independence. On other occasions, however, the contest for its space has led to Moldova's dismemberment and partition. The age of empires has given way to the age of nations, and with this the nature of the contest for Moldova has been rewritten in terms of linguistic affiliation and cultural orientation. Moldovan identity rests, however, on foundations as fluid as its territory. It is for this reason likely to remain for the foreseeable future as contested a space as it has always been.

[59] Tamara Cărăus, *How Can One Be a Moldovan?*, lecture given at SSEES-UCL on 27 February 2002.