

# THE QUEST FOR POWER – WAR, PROPAGANDA AND ARMED RESISTANCE

## THE MOLDAVIAN SOVIET REPUBLIC AS A MEANS FOR THE ANTI-ROMANIZATION OF TRANSNISTRIA (1924–1939)

VADIM GUZUN\*

The Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic emerged on the political map of Europe at a time when the Kremlin leaders understood that the internal and international political situation did not allow an immediate “revolution” in the Balkans, or the annexation of territories belonging to the Russian Empire. Preoccupied and affected directly by the Soviet expansionist policy, Bucharest followed closely this “plan B,” especially since one of its main components was the Romanian element in Transnistria. The documents and materials identified in the Diplomatic Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reveal the concrete means to fulfill the objective of the Soviets, the level of information and the reactions, assessments and interpretation of the events by the Romanian authorities and media.

**Keywords:** Romania; USSR; Moldavian ASSR; Romanians across the Dniester; communism; Sovietization; propaganda

*Motto: “Autonomous Moldova is the cradle of the international tendencies of the peoples subjugated by Romania and by the other Balkan states!”  
G. Staryi, Balta, 19 April 1925*

### In Contradiction with the Spirit of the Soviet-Romanian Arrangements

The establishment of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) in 1924 contributed to bringing to light the existence of hundreds of thousands of Romanians in the USSR. Driven by expansionist instincts, Moscow decided to use the ethnic potential as a piece of a complex game that would give it pretexts for undermining unified Romania and fuel tension in the bilateral relations. Favored by the coming out from international isolation and by the failure of the

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\* “George Barițiu” History Institute, Cluj-Napoca, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romania; vadimguzun@gmail.com.

subversive actions meant to destabilize the situation in Romania, the Transnistrian project was seen as such both in Bucharest and in other European capitals. The ability to appeal only to the segment of autochthonous Romanians and only to a part of the territory inhabited by them had the potential to ensure the success of the initiative in the long run. Analyses, reports, international press monitoring and studies in the Diplomatic Archives reflect the level of knowledge about this strategic plan and the situation of the population on the left bank of the Dniester, who was the target of the experiment.

The idea of writing this paper has its origins in a document I have identified in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, dated after the proclamation of the MASSR. The document is a note on the discussions in an audience requested by the Soviet diplomatic mission in Bucharest with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 24 February 1939. During the meeting with Al. Cretzianu, secretary general of the Ministry, the chargé d'affaires of the USSR, P. G. Kukolev, handed over the book entitled *The Moldavian Republic of the Soviets*, published by Nichita Smochină,<sup>1</sup> stressing out that “the authorization to publish such a book is in contradiction with the letter and spirit of the current arrangements between Romania and the USSR.” The fragments that triggered the Soviets’ protest are the following:

The delimitation of the Moldavian Republic of the Soviets was made more from a political and administrative point of view, without taking into account its historic and ethnic boundaries. /The population evacuated from the Moldavian Republic was four times larger, due to our vicinity, and foreign population was deployed instead. /They are aiming, with tenacity, to change the inhabitants’ conception of life and to replace old habits with new ones, imposed by the state. /The unanimous voice of the Romanians across the Dniester was for the unification with Romania and Bessarabia, into a free and national state. The circumstances, nevertheless, prevented this from happening. /The internationalization by the Soviets has, as a main goal, the accelerated Russification of all the peoples in the Soviet Union. The Moldavians today are divided and antagonized, through the new internal political system forced upon them. /We should have within us the persuasion power needed to overcome any boundaries that are raised against progress and national prosperity, in the way of spiritual unification with our brothers across the Dniester. Faith and patience will take us to victory.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N. P. Smochină, *Republica Moldovenească a Sovietelor* (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 1938).

<sup>2</sup> Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Externe, Bucharest (hereafter: AMAE), fund 71/1920–1944. URSS, vol. 37, fols. 507–508.

The Romanian diplomat declined to give an answer “until I have read the book carefully.” Due to an important volume recently published we now also know the effects of the USSR protest against the author who was publishing in Romania and in France, at his own expense, on the Transnistrian question. After the meeting with the representative of the Soviets, Al. Cretzianu criticized Smochină: “Each time you write something, we receive from Ostrovsky, the Soviet ambassador, vehement protests. When you wrote at the *Cartea Românească Publishing House* the book *The Moldavian Republic of the Soviets*, Ostrovsky made a big fuss, even snapped at the MFA. Then, according to our information, he went to *Cartea Românească* and bought all the stock of books. The Russians, through their agents, are following our every step.” The next day after the meeting, which Smochină deeply regretted, highlighting the passivity and even cowardice of some of the representatives of the Romanian diplomatic corps, he was notified from Iași that the Safety Police had confiscated all the issues from the press.<sup>3</sup>

### **Transnistrians and Bessarabians as a Target of the Soviet Experiment**

On 13 December 1924 the General Directorate of the Safety Police communicated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a note from the Bessarabian Inspectorate on the political and socio-economic situation in the USSR. According to the accounts from informers across the Dniester, the political situation was characterized by the consolidation of the dictatorship of the Communist Party and the suppression of the opposition, the organization of an efficient anti-Bolshevik resistance being thus impossible. Private initiative had been totally suppressed, and the financial resources were used to maintain the dictatorship and to stir communist movements abroad. The elections were faked, those who opposed the regime were cast aside, and the Secret Police exerted terror on the anti-Soviet elements. In the regions bordering Romania, “the spirits of villagers are agitated because of the fact that in the woods there are still remainders of the counter-revolutionary peasant bands that attack and kill the oppressing communists. But here the authorities have deployed two GPU special regiments stationed at Kamyanets-Podilsky, who have been solely commissioned to maintain the public order.”<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the Moldavian ASSR, the document highlights the artificial character of the entity and analyzes the foreign political and military context that marked the acceleration of the organization process. Once the USSR had come out of its international isolation, the gravity center of the military operations was moved from the north of Europe to the south, where Poland and Romania were of

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<sup>3</sup> V. Corini-Vlad and B. I. Secheli, eds., *Pagini din însemnările unui rebel: Academicianul Nichita Smochină* (Iași: Editura Samia, 2012), 74–75.

<sup>4</sup> AMAE, fund 71/1920–1944. URSS, vol. 37, fols. 296–314.

concern. The existence of the Transnistrian Republic prevented the analysts in Bucharest from excluding the possibility of an armed attack by the Soviets:

The Bessarabian question does not interest anyone in Soviet Russia, besides the current leaders and a few immigrants from Bessarabia. The establishment of the Moldavian SSR is linked to the new war plan of the Soviets. /The Soviet Government cannot start the offensive because it has nothing to justify the need for an offensive war with. A defensive war would find more support from the population. /On that, the Government has used the political apparatus and its press in order to mislead the public opinion and awaken the national spirit as a "proletariat defender" of the masses. /In all the meetings and conferences on the Moldavian SSR, as well as in the press, the Red Army is portrayed as the "savior of the oppressed" and the "Moldavian brothers in Bessarabia" are depicted as being "under the Romanian boyars." /Through this propaganda the Bolsheviks hope to provoke Romania to start the war itself, and, ultimately, to give the Red Army a reason to intervene for the defense of the USSR territory and the liberation of "the subjugated brothers." /From Moscow, approximately 50 Bessarabian refugees were sent to Odessa, under instructions to organize "Soviet Moldova" and to carry out communist propaganda in Bessarabia. /Under different slogans, the Soviets continue to arm themselves. /The latest political developments, and especially the recognition of the Soviets by France, the imminent recognition by Czechoslovakia and other states have cast away the threat of an armed conflict with France and the states that have military ties with Paris. /Thus, involuntarily, the gravity center of the military operations is shifting from the north towards the south. /From the conversations of our informers with former officers in the Tsarist Army, it can be inferred that, until now, there have been three operational plans at the Joint Chief of Staff of the USSR: 1) war with Poland, 2) war with Romania, 3) an allied front of Poland and Romania against the Soviets. /In all these scenarios, Eastern Galicia would be occupied and the front towards the Carpathians fortified, as a threat against Czechoslovakia. This plan fails if Czechoslovakia has a friendly or neutral attitude. /Then, the issue of breaking the front between Romania and Poland plays only a secondary role, since the railway between Cernăuți and Kolomea could be handled by the Red Army in a day, in case of war, and would be guaranteed by Czechoslovakia's attitude. /Thus, only the other two hypotheses stand: 1) a separate war with Poland and 2) with Romania. /The establishment of the Moldavian SSR, the last events in southern Bessarabia, the restitution of Wrangel's Russian Fleet and the isolation of Romania through the policy of resuming official relations with the USSR, all these have determined the Red Commandment to turn its attention to our country.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

In addition to reporting on the composition of the Revolutionary Committee, which was representing the interim executive of the MASSR, the Bessarabian General Inspectorate of the Safety Police was sending the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the following information from across the Dniester:

The mixed commission charged with the border delimitation of this republic says that the future capital of “Moldova” will be at Birzula, an important railway junction, which would allow for a quick connection to all major cities in Russia. /In the districts of Odessa and Podolia, which are part of the Moldavian Republic, a special commission started to study the way of handing over the regional institutions and property, which have gone under the control of the Moldavian Revolutionary Committee. The papers say that the handing over of these institutions and property needs to be done by 1 December 1924, but it can be foreseen that this would not be possible. /Now, the Revolutionary Committee also deals with the editing of literature and school books in Moldavian. On the cultural issue, the Moldavians across the Dniester are split in two: some want the brochures and all publications for the cultural development of the Moldavian people to be printed in Moldavian in Latin alphabet, while the others want all these to be written with Slavic characters.<sup>6</sup>

The Romanian Legation in Warsaw, in its report no. 5614 of 23 December 1924, sent the Ministry of Foreign Affairs information on the composition of the Revolutionary Committee of the entity and the internal political situation in the Soviet Union, which had “worsened a lot lately, both politically and economically.” The financial resources being exhausted, the political scene was dominated by the struggles within the party. Polish diplomatic sources analyzed both the possibility of bankruptcy, as well as that of a war, in order to distract the masses from the internal problems: in case the regime collapsed, “if Stalin is not able to establish the dictatorship for his own good, it is more than likely that anarchy will follow.” It could not be excluded that the “Bolsheviks, seeing the end of the regime they installed, would look for diversion in a war that could bring them some benefits, if it succeeded, even temporarily.”<sup>7</sup> The situation was confirmed on 5 January 1925 by the General Directorate of the Safety Police. From intelligence transmitted by the Bukovina Inspectorate, the diplomats were informed that, besides the struggles within the party, based on a “dark and demoralized mass and some powerful persons strengthened even since the battle with tsarism,” the living conditions were extremely difficult. The situation of the schools was

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., fol. 319.

“terrible,” the Church was split, and the state of mind of the population was depressed.<sup>8</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also received several materials elaborated by the Soviet propaganda and disseminated through the *Plugarul roș* paper. The target of this propaganda was represented by the Transnistrian peasants, especially the Bessarabian ones, who had to be convinced of the “benefits” of the communist society. Reading between the lines in an article published in the issue no. 30 of 12 December 1924, entitled “What Has the Soviet Leadership Done for the Peasants,” one may see that the most acute problem was the fiscal pressure:

The Soviet rule has not only given the land for use with no pay, but also taken away all the heavy taxes that the workers of the land used to pay to the boyars and capitalists. It is true that, for a while, during the Civil War, it was forced to take all the bread crumbs from the peasants for the maintenance of the Red Army, but soon after the war, *prodrazverstka* (supply accounting) was replaced with *prodnalog* (supply taxation). *Prodnalog* started to leave to the worker of the land a good part of its products, with which he could do whatever he pleased.<sup>9</sup>

The note of the General Directorate of the Safety Police of 13 December 1924 refers to the “Communiqué of the leftist social-revolutionaries in Moldova.” The manifesto, obtained from an informer, announced that “the Moldavian Government had to offer a hand to the Bessarabian proletariat, over the heads and bayonets of the Romanian Army and administration, and to prepare there a national movement among the Moldavians and the communist townfolk not Moldavian, so that, by uniting these two factors, comrade pressure would remove the barrier built by the Romanians on the Dniester and thus give the Soviet Government the possibility to proclaim the union with Bessarabia, a union that could take place through revolution and through the forces of the Bessarabian population.” The conclusion was: “In general, nobody thinks seriously in this Moldavian Republic. It is considered as an attribute of the Soviet policy in the southwest of the country, as a tool to achieve certain objectives in Bessarabia and it is supposed that, immediately after the interest in the Bessarabian question fades, this Autonomous Moldavian Republic will slowly end its existence, and will come back from its status as high state priority to its primitive situation, in the old and monotone Novorossiysk province, living daily with its small interests.”<sup>10</sup>

One should also highlight among these materials two Romanian publications: an article by D. Iov, “A Moldavian Republic,” published in the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., vol. 14, fols. 7–12.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., fols. 25–28, 32–33, 40–41, 43.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., vol. 37, fols. 312–313.

November issue, no. 45/9, of *Țara noastră*, and the communication “Transnistrian Romanians and the Moldavian Republic,” signed by I. Nistor. According to the author of the article published in a magazine of Octavian Goga in Cluj, “a Moldavian Republic across the Dniester is no new propaganda. Under Skoropadsky, when Ukraine was independent, the Moldavians across the Dniester, strengthened by nationalist waves, started an intense cultural ethnic movement, with autonomous tendencies. There was no Soviet influence to determine them to do that. It was only their national awakening, it was only their Romanian soul that had just been uncovered by the new developments, from the dirt the centuries had put over them through foreign occupation.” The national emancipation tendencies of the Romanians on the left bank of the Dniester that took place in the year of the Great Union (1918) were developed at the same time with the establishment of the autonomous republic, and after the disappearance of the Soviets, the unification of the Romanians on both banks of the river dividing Romania and the USSR was inevitable.<sup>11</sup>

In a conference in Cernăuți, at the National Theater, in December 1924, I. Nistor referred to the issue of the Romanian Transnistrians, in connection with the new Autonomous SSR, both from the perspective of the settlements between the Dniester and the Bug inhabited by Romanian population, in the eighteenth century, and from the perspective of the common cultural heritage with the Romanian population on the right bank of the Dniester. Regarding the number of Romanians in the Soviet Union, the Bukovina minister stated: “Their villages are located along the Dniester, the Budjak region, all the way towards Elisavetgrad and the Dnieper. Along the Dniester, there are Romanian settlements such as Dubăsari, Tiraspol, all the way to Ovidiopol. If we are to follow on the map the line from Movilău to Balta, and from Dubăsari to Voskresensk, we can find several Romanian settlements. The number of the Romanian population across the Dniester is up to 500,000. The Romanians are scattered especially in Kherson (350,000), Podolia (up to 130,000), Taurida (50,000), and Elisavetgrad (10,000).”<sup>12</sup>

### **The Cradle of Socialist Romania Begins to Function**

On 8 February 1925, the report no. 571 of the Romanian Legation in Warsaw informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the publication in *Rzeczpospolita* of a Moscow correspondence written in January, on the establishment of the Moldavian ASSR. Entitled “A New Republic,” it analyzed the genesis of the entity across the Dniester, its geographic location, territorial expansion and population. In the opinion of the Polish analyst, the nature of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., fol. 246.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., fol. 318, text from a Romanian publication, no title mentioned.

Soviet intervention was a political one and it threatened Romania's integrity. In the long term, the Kremlin action sought to Sovietize both Romania and the Balkan states:

Wishing to manifest goodwill and sincere intentions towards the Moldavians, the Government in Moscow set up a "spontaneous movement" of the Moldavian population on the left bank of the Dniester along the Bessarabian border, which looks like a national separation. At the same time the Government established the Moldavian Republic, wishing to have on USSR territory an administrative unit ready for Bessarabia, when separated from Romania, to affiliate with, on condition of respecting all the appearances of independence (...) /One thing is clear, that such an autonomous republic is an artificial creation, with no chance to develop independently, not only politically, but also culturally and economically. Its importance for the Soviets is that it would be a political platform for propaganda and is driven only by foreign policy considerations. /It should also be underlined that not only has the establishment of the Moldavian Republic a well-defined political goal – hostile towards Romania –, but the creation of this entity aims to facilitate the interventionist policy of the Soviets in the Balkans, seeking to modify the status quo of the Balkan states and their Sovietization.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, according to the note of the General Directorate of the Safety Police of 28 April 1925, based on the communications of the Constanța Inspectorate, addressed to the minister of Foreign Affairs, at the first "congress" of the MASSR Soviets (Balta, 19 April 1925), G. Saryi would declare that the republic was small, "but its word is heard by all the bourgeoisie in Europe, which realizes that Autonomous Moldova is the cradle of the international tendencies of the peoples subjugated by Romania and the other Balkan states!" The Congress, presided by Saryi, was a "protest against the Romanians, who occupy most of Moldova without justification and by the force of arms. Romania flooded Bessarabia with thousands of soldiers and exerted a barbarian terror on the workers who fight against the Romanian oppression with all their revolutionary energy!" According to the source of the Inspectorate, at the end of the statement, someone in the audience shouted: "Long live the future capital of Moldova, Red Chișinău!"<sup>14</sup> These were slogans that could be found in most of the manifestos spread by subversive communist organizations in the territory of the province on the right bank of the Dniester.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., fols. 316–318.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., fol. 323.

<sup>15</sup> See V. A. Bogdanova et al., *Листовки коммунистического подполья Бессарабии: 1918–1940* (Chișinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1960).



The next detailed note on the works of the first “congress” of the Moldavian Soviets, based on the communications of the Chişinău Inspectorate of the Safety Police, will be addressed to the minister of Foreign Affairs by the General Directorate of the Safety Police on 30 April 1925. Besides the fervent speeches of the communist servants on the importance of the new republic, “several peasants and women made statements showing that life was better in the Moldavian Republic than in oppressed Bessarabia, and almost all ended by saying ‘Long live general Kotovsky, who freed Bessarabia!’” Rakovsky, in the telegram addressed to the reunion, expressed the hope that the second congress, which would be called for all the Moldavians, would take place in Chişinău. Also, around the first anniversary of 1 May in the new republic, the sources across the Dniester informed on the mood of the population and the rumors spread on the imminent war between Romania and the Soviets:

Along the Dniester, on the Romanian and Polish border, occasional meetings and demonstrations will take place. The population, though, is unhappy with the preparations and does not answer the calls for donations, saying that, “Our holiday is Easter and the rain!” Komsomol members, having made antireligious demonstrations in the villages on Easter, had stirred incidents, and many were beaten up by the believers. The Christian churches were full, and where they had priests and churches, the peasants forced them to hand over the keys to the church and had the orthodox priests celebrate the Resurrection. Many Red soldiers were unhappy that they were forbidden to go to church, and after Easter, while on leave, most of them, under disguise, spent their free time in church. /The rumor of an imminent war with Romania is widely spread, because of Bessarabia, but this war will not be declared by the Soviets, but rather provoked by the partisans in this province, who will spark off the uprising of the population. To this end, terrorist groups and ammunition will be sent to Bessarabia.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly afterwards, the same allegations found in the anti-Romanian messages conveyed to the public during the congress in Balta through the agents of the Soviet political police mandated with the execution of the plan to establish and organize the Moldavian ASSR would also be spread by the central press of the Kremlin. As an example, *Izvestia*, no. 110 (2443) of 16 May 1925 published a speech of G. I. Staryi, for the Third Union Congress, as well as commentaries on the disjunction between the Romanian nation and the “Moldavian” one, the “occupation” of Bessarabia, and the need to liberate it:

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<sup>16</sup> AMAE, fund 71/1920–1944. URSS, vol. 37, fols. 332–335.

After that, the speaker underlines that the Moldavian nation is not the Romanian nation. The Romanian Government considers it Romanian, like the Russian Government considers the Ukrainians and Byelorussians as Russians. /“It would be useless to protest here against the oppression of the Romanian Government in Bessarabia. The Romanian Government is the most despicable of all, since all it does is to supervise when something goes wrong, thus our protest would not help. But from here, above the head of the Romanian Government, we have to address the workers of all countries and to protest over what is going on in Bessarabia.” /Comrade Saryi notes the ratification by several states of a so-called Decision of the Ambassadors in 1920 on “the accession of Bessarabia to Romania,” a fact that is totally unacceptable and illegal from the point of view of international relations. (...) /In conclusion, Comrade Saryi notes the weakness of the Romanian bourgeoisie, who has no support from the people or the army. /The speaker calls Romania “a compact Alsace-Lorraine.” /If this state can be maintained now, it is only thanks to the known help and struggle of the big capitalist countries. /“In conclusion, I ask the Congress to delegate our future central government to declare for all that not only does it not recognize the theft of Bessarabia by Romania, who carried out a revolution together with us, but also any ratification of this theft is equivalent with an allotment of the moon!”<sup>17</sup>

Confronted with a *fait accompli*, Romania continued to monitor down to the last detail, through its competent authorities, the evolution of the entity established at its eastern border. For example, it is worth mentioning an article in *Plugarul roş* of 10 November 1925, entitled “How the Moldavian Republic Came into Being: The Awakening of the Moldavian People,” and mentioned in the Soviet press report of 5 December 1925. The article gives an account of the “Moldovan” accomplishments in agriculture and, especially, in culture: the land divisions were made for 40% of the territory, 50 Moldavian schools were opened and training sessions for teachers were organized, other 25 schools were under preparation, and the state publishing house had edited several manuals (reading, mathematics, etc.). Extensive coverage is given to the statement of the so-called president of the republic, Saryi, who, as a spokesman for the Kremlin, had highlighted the aid given by the brothers in the Union, not forgetting to criticize the “bourgeoisie in all countries,” the one in Romania, and especially the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs:

The establishment of the Republic worries the bourgeoisie in all countries, especially in Romania, and our White emigration. They have insinuated things on our behalf and asserted that the establishment of the Moldavian

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., fols. 338–340.

Republic serves imperialist goals, etc. They told fairy tales about our army, while arming theirs, strengthening intelligence, arresting and beating the peasants. They were doing all these things out of fear that the communist bug would enter the dull head of the Romanian soldier. /Mr. Duca sleeps now unpeacefully. One year passed by, and the fears of the Romanian oligarchs are not gone. And “Mister” Duca, the minister of Foreign Affairs, now seems more of a peace lover. He speaks again about peace, this, of course, in case we should give up Bessarabia. /He does not see far and understands little if he believes that in order to sleep peacefully it is enough for leaders of one territory or another not to have claims over that province; if he does not understand the meaning of all our trials in Bessarabia, with hundreds of peasants criminally prosecuted, if he does not understand the meaning of the revolutionary uprisings in Bessarabia. It is not enough to renounce your claims, even if that were to happen.<sup>18</sup>

A century later, the similarity with the allegations addressed to Bucharest by communist or neo-communist puppets from Chişinău and Tiraspol, a Romanian town transformed into an anti-Romanian stronghold, cannot go unnoticed.

### **Why Harvest a Raw Fruit?**

“Why harvest a raw fruit? When the fruit of Bessarabia is ripe, it will fall itself in our hands!” The statement belongs to Leon Trotsky, and was taken up by the President of the Commissars’ Council of the Moldavian ASSR, on the occasion of the elections for the Soviet Congress in Tiraspol. It also appeared in the Japanese press in April 1931, and was thus sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the chargé d’affaires of Romania in Tokyo. The Soviet agent evoked on that occasion the accomplishments of the forced collectivization process in agriculture, while the population in Bessarabia was “depleted and fed up with the Romanian occupation.”<sup>19</sup>

Between the two world wars, this kind of attacks would become permanent and would not stop until the end of the last stage of the expansionist plan directed by the Stalinist elite – the dismantlement of Greater Romania. The monitoring of the developments on the left bank of the Dniester made by the diplomatic corps in Bucharest and the General Safety would last until Romania was subordinated to the Kremlin for good. The preparatory acts, the moment of the proclamation, and the immediate organization of the Moldavian ASSR would also become subject to analysis after these episodes occurred. Of interest here are the documents in the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., fols. 344–347.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., fol. 355, bulletin no. 10 of 1 June 1939, of the Eastern Political Division, Eastern Section.

Diplomatic Archives which show how the invention of this artificial entity was perceived towards the end of its existence. These show that the temporal detachment from the moment of the establishment of the entity does expand the vision of the analysts on the issue.

Twenty years after the accomplishment of the Union ideal, which placed hundreds of thousands of Romanians outside the political borders of the Romanian State and which, at the same time, forced the Kremlin to identify another kind of “unification,” a communist one, between Bessarabia and the Moldavian ASSR, Nichita Smochină, in *The Moldavian Republic of the Soviets* deals also with the establishment of the autonomous republic. According to the author of the book that triggered the protests of the Stalinist diplomatic corps mentioned in the beginning of the study, the entity originated before 12 October 1924 and went through three stages of Romanian development: the era of Duca Vodă, when the Dniester disappears as borderline and Romanian settlements are developed, the era of Catherine the Great, and the Soviet era. A strong element, very little perceived in the documents of 1924–1925, is the Ukrainian one. The analyst underlines the role of this element in the fabrication of the entity on the left bank of the Dniester, as well as the pressure it put on the process of Ukrainization of the Romanians. A different perspective from the one given in most of the diplomatic sources at the beginning of the Transnistrian Plan is the one that places it within the context of the existence of a national movement:

At this congress (1917), as well as before and after this date, the unanimous voice of the Romanians across the Dniester was in favor of uniting with Bessarabia and Romania, in a free national state. The circumstances, though, prevented this from happening. /The Ukrainian movement and the Ukrainization of the state apparatus set them in motion again. Entire regions oppose the Ukrainization that is threatening them. The Moldavians rise spontaneously everywhere and request the establishment of a national state. Even the Ukrainians scattered in separate villages among the Moldavians adhered to this movement. *Plugarul roș*, the first Romanian newspaper published in Odessa, was serving this movement. Still, the Government was postponing solving the problem. Then, on 28 September 1924, at the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the Gubernial Executive Committee in Odessa, a delegation from all the Moldavian villages participated (...). It explained the threat of Ukrainization to which it was exposed, based on the principles of self-determination, requesting the recognition of the Autonomous Republic. /Since this appeal was not taken into account, at the assembly of the Pan-Ukrainian Executive Committee, that took place between 8 and 12 October 1924, the delegation from all the Moldavian rayons was present (...). /Only after this endeavor, the Soviets recognized the Transnistrian province, as a Moldavian state, but only autonomous and not independent, although the Russians favored the latter. The Ukrainian Party fought strongly. Even if it

did not succeed in preventing the establishment of the republic, it did succeed for the Moldavians not to be included within their ethnic and historic borders, and it also succeeded, in agreement with Moscow, in changing its political directives. The Ukrainian Party feared that the Moldavians in the south, if included in their state, would attract Odessa into the Transnistrian sphere of influence. A small part of these Moldavians are now grouped in over 54 rayons, while the rest live in compact groups in other parts of the Soviet Union, having to learn the language of those states, such as Tatar in Crimea, Ukrainian, Georgian in Caucasus, even Jewish for the Moldavians in the Amur Valley in Siberia. /The political directive of the new Moldavian state was clearly set against Romania.<sup>20</sup>

Another material, written on 9 October 1939, by the Ministry for Minorities, the Department of Intelligence Studies, entitled “The 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Moldavian Soviet Republic,” shows the constant interest of the authorities in Bucharest in the issue. Analyzing the establishment of the Moldavian ASSR, the author shares the opinion of Nichita Smochină on the catalyzing role of the process of Ukrainization in mobilizing the Moldavians. Moreover, he highlights the negative contribution of the Ukrainian communists in the territorial and demographic delimitation of the new entity – they were responsible for the autonomous status of the republic and not the union, as well as for not including all the Romanians across the Dniester in the new entity:

The movement for the creation of the Republic started as early as 1923. The Moldavian intellectuals form a resistance block against the Ukrainization of the state apparatus, proclaimed by the Decree of 1 August 1923. /On 1 May, 1924, the paper *Plugarul roș* – today *Socialist Moldova* – is published, a newspaper of the party and local government. /On 3 September 1924, at Balta, the assembly of the delegations from the Moldavian villages takes place; in the resolution adopted unanimously they request national rights. Consequently, on 12 October 1924 the Soviet Moldavian Republic is born, and on 19 April 1925, the first Pan-Moldavian Congress adopts the Constitution of the new state. /The creation of the Moldavian Republic was not well seen by the Ukrainian Communist Party. This was regarding it as a diminishment of its territorial rights. Moscow, on the other hand, tried to use the movement, giving it an anti-Romanian character. Thus, the Bessarabian fugitives, most of the Jews and members of the Komintern sent by the Government in Moscow, at the Congress on 12 October 1924, imposed the vote on a resolution with claims over Bessarabia. They set the capital at Chișinău, and the current Moldavian Republic was considered as integral part of Bessarabia. The interim capital was set at Balta; in 1929 it was moved to Tiraspol, on the bank of the Dniester, across from Tighina. /The Ukrainian

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, fols. 515–517.

Communists managed to obtain the following: a) this Moldavian state was part of the Ukrainian state, as an administrative unit and b) the Moldavians living in the immediate vicinity of the borders of the new state were not included in this Moldavian Republic. /From this moment on, the political and administrative leadership was given, almost exclusively, to Bessarabian Jews, in order to provoke the masses and build an anti-Romanian irredentist nucleus. /At the same time, the Moldavians were deported to Siberia or killed. The intellectuals, several times, suffered the same punishment, under the pretext of being chauvinist and wanting the unification of the Moldavian Republic with the Romanian State.<sup>21</sup>

The study “The Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic,” written no earlier than 1939, archived in the thematic file on the issue in the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is signed by Valeriu Ciobanu. The analyst demonstrates that, despite the false Soviet statistics, most of the population in the Autonomous Republic consisted of Moldavian Romanians.<sup>22</sup> In the section regarding the establishment of the Moldavian ASSR, it is considered “a notion not based on the conceptions and ideals of the Romanians in Transnistria.” In comparison with the evaluations made at the time of the emergence of the entity, we can see the same forced placement of the initiative of establishing a new pseudo-entity in the area of the self-determination tendencies of the Transnistrian Romanians. Moscow’s machinations were mixed with such tendencies. The author also highlights the connection with the Ukrainian factor:

After the consolidation of the Bolshevik power, in the areas across the Dniester inhabited by Romanians, the Moldavians’ fight to obtain at least a relative independence inside the Soviet Union begins. /In 1923, with the start of the Ukrainization of Ukraine, the desire to cultivate their language rises among the Moldavians. Also, the so-called “Society of Bessarabian Emigrants” takes part in this movement, being composed of provoking minorities, most of them being on the wrong side of the law. /In the same year, the Odessa Gubernial Communist Ukrainian Committee organizes a Moldavian section. /On 1 May 1924, the paper *Plugarul roș* is published in Odessa, in Moldavian. This newspaper carries out propaganda for the establishment of a Moldavian Republic. Through this, they contribute to enhancing the desire of the Romanian peasants across the Dniester to create their own national life. /In 1924, several meetings take place in the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., fols. 551–553.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., fols. 568–576. With regard to the statistics, historian Gh. I. Brătianu mentions: “Romania is interested in this region with Moldavian population, much larger to the east of the Dniester, and even the Bug, than the Russian statistics show.” See Gh. I. Brătianu, *Basarabia: Drepturi naționale istorice* (Bucharest: Editura Tritonic, 2004), 197–198.

Moldavian villages, especially in those on the bank of the Dniester. At these meetings the people ask for the establishment of a Moldavian Republic, the use of their national language in schools, institutions, and request their own cultural life. “Resolutions” are adopted, and parts of them are published in *Plugarul roș*. (...) There are also Ukrainian villages that support the establishment of the Moldavian Republic. /Following these movements and manifestations in several villages between the Dniester and the Bug, the press in the entire Soviet Union supports those who feel the need for the creation of a Moldavian Republic. It was not known what territory it would encompass and how it would be organized. (...) /At the third session of the VUTIK,<sup>23</sup> held in the capital of Ukraine, in October 1924, a delegation of Moldavians from Transnistria is also present. They represent the rayons Râbnița, Dubăsari, Tiraspol and Ananiev. At the meetings of the Executive Committee of the entire Ukraine, several Moldavians take the floor to express their wishes: G. I. Staryi, the head of the delegation, P. Chioru, Ienachi, Korniușin and Sunsky. On 29 October 1924, the VUTIK establishes a Revkom, in charge of organizing the “Moldavian (Autonomous) Soviet Socialist Republic.”<sup>24</sup>

According to Valeriu Ciobanu, the ethnic origin, the provenance of those recruited to implement Moscow’s directives and the exclusion of the autochthonous Romanians in the organizational scheme of the republic represent arguments in favor of the provocative character against Romania. The recognition of the Romanians across the Dniester, the Romanian-Balkan stake of the Stalinist initiative, and the inclusion of communists from Romania are elements specific to the mechanism observed in most of the diplomatic and intelligence analyses, made before or immediately after the initiation of the “ethno-cultural machination” whose denationalizing effects can be seen today:<sup>25</sup>

Taking into account the ethnic origin of the people assigned by the Soviets to organize the Moldavian Republic and the regions they come from, we can infer the intentions of the communist Government. Out of the eight persons who were supposed to organize the republic, only two are Romanians, and those are not from Transnistria. G. Buciuscanu is from Bessarabia, and E. Arbore is from Bucharest. Staryi, Krivorukov and Badeev are workers from Bessarabia. In the Committee there is no Moldovan from Transnistria, this being represented by four Russians. (...) /Besides the fact that the establishment of Soviet Moldova is the recognition of the Romanian population across the Dniester, it is also a provocation towards Romania. The

<sup>23</sup> Short from Russian *ВЦИК* – Ukrainian Central Executive Committee.

<sup>24</sup> AMAE, fund 71/1920–1944. URSS, vol. 37, fols. 588–591.

<sup>25</sup> This expression belongs to the Bessarabian historian Gheorghe Cojocaru, *Cominternul și originile “moldovenismului”* (Chișinău: Editura Civitas, 2009), 7–8.

establishment of the Republic targets Bessarabia directly. This is why, in the above-mentioned Committee, there are a few Bessarabians present. /The Bolshevik authorities do not hide this: they consider Bessarabia, theoretically, as part of Soviet Moldova. The town of Balta, the first capital of the new political organization, and then Tiraspol, is considered only an interim center of the republic, the real capital of the republic being, in their opinion, Chişinău. /The foreign press considers the gesture of the Soviet Union, besides a recognition that Romanians live in compact groups between Dniester and Bug, an act of provocation against Romania. In reality, they were preparing a center of communist propaganda for entire Romania. “By Moldova, it is understood the whole territory inhabited by Moldavians, including the Moldavian ASSR, Bessarabia and the Moldova across the Prut.” /Moreover, the Moldavian ASSR should be, according to the Bolsheviks, a revolutionary stimulus for the entire region of the Balkans. /Effectively, the Republic is established on 5 December 1924. There were fears that the Ukrainians on Moldavian territory would be Moldovanized. Because of this, probably, there are “three state languages”: Moldavian, Russian, and Ukrainian.<sup>26</sup>

Adding to the Moscow diplomatic vision mentioned in the beginning of this study, it must be said that documents such as the ones included above were qualified by the Soviet post-Stalinist historiography as being nationalist, chauvinist, and fascist, as manifestations of an “anti-Soviet hysteria,” and not as an expression of a normal national interest. In the Soviet logic, the interest in the Transnistrian Romanians shown by historians such as N. Iorga, I. Nistor, Gh. I. Brătianu, N. Smochină and others was revanchist, aggressive, belonging to the “dirty and shameful propagandistic orgy” of the Romanian bourgeois historiography, executing “military orders” needed to “justify the occupation of new Soviet territories.” Needless to say, the same Soviet historiography embraces the “comeback” of the politically enrolled historians to the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the events that had a severe impact on the Romanian-Soviet relations, after the “liberation” of Romania and the victory of the “popular revolution” on the right bank of the Prut.<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusions

The price paid by the Romanians in the Ukrainian SSR, representatives of an invented nation at a time when the Communist Party continued to fight against “Ukrainian nationalism, imperial chauvinism,” and also against the “Moldavian local

<sup>26</sup> AMAE, fund 71/1920–1944. URSS, vol. 37, fols. 592–593.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, A. M. Lazarev, *Молдавская советская государственность и бессарабский вопрос* (Chişinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1974), 40–42.



nationalism,”<sup>28</sup> is highlighted by documents in the former Soviet archives. In “The Revolution of the Archives”<sup>29</sup> and “The Famine of One of the Most Backward Nations”<sup>30</sup> I presented several documents published by researchers in the Russian Federation and Ukraine, after the collapse of the USSR. Also relevant are the documents in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania. It is certain that the brutal ethno-demographical changes in Transnistria after the end of the consolidation stage of the Stalinist regime, as well as in the Romanian provinces reoccupied by the Soviet Army after the end of World War Two or in Romania, are one more argument for the role of the deliberate policy of weakening the Romanian element by cutting the links with Romania and consolidating the Russian-Ukrainian element.<sup>31</sup> At this stage, one may speak of the process of anti-Romanization in Transnistria as a reality, and the process of Sovietizing Romania as a fatality.

Without obtaining the *de jure* recognition from Romania, after the proclamation of the Moldavian ASSR, Joseph Stalin (Djugashvili) started a new stage of the Soviet Foreign Policy, concurrently with launching the first Five Year Economic-Military Plan and naming Maxim Litvinov as commissar at the Foreign Commissariat. In critical need of stability, and in order to ensure the time needed to solve its serious internal problems, the Soviet Union appeared to Europe as an “active peace factor.” The first significant move of the Kremlin was made in 1929, by imposing the *Litvinov Protocol*, and the second in 1932, by initiating the non-aggression pacts with its western neighbors, the latter also accepted by Romania. The personal relations of the new minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolae Titulescu, with his Soviet counterpart would contribute to the unfolding of the third move in the European political arena in 1933, in London, the Convention on the Definition of the Aggression.<sup>32</sup>

Having obtained agreements of non-aggression from the Soviets (ephemera), including the *de facto* recognition of the territory over which it was exercising its sovereignty, and also constrained by the political attitudes towards Moscow of its traditional allies, the Government in Bucharest agreed to renew diplomatic relations with the totalitarian Bolshevik regime.<sup>33</sup> At this stage, all the other issues,

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<sup>28</sup> See “Report on National-Cultural Construction in MASSR,” presented at the Ninth Regional Party Conference by the head of the Culture and Propaganda Section of the Moldavian Party Committee, E. Negru, *Politica etnoculturală în RASS Moldovenească (1924–1940)* (Chișinău: Prut Internațional, 2003), 195.

<sup>29</sup> V. Guzun, *Marea foamete sovietică, 1926–1936* (Baia Mare: Universitatea de Nord, 2011), 105–200.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 41–104.

<sup>31</sup> See N. Dima, *From Moldavia to Moldova: The Soviet-Romanian Territorial Dispute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 61.

<sup>32</sup> AMAE, fund 71/1920–1944. URSS, vol. 130, fols. 361–362.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, fols. 362–363.

whether or not on the agenda of the bilateral relations (e.g. the situation of the Romanian minority in the USSR), were marked by the complex and ongoing Bessarabian question. Only in 1941, after repudiating the Sovietization operations in the territories annexed after the Hitler-Stalin Pact signed on 23 August 1939, Mihai Antonescu, the Romanian minister of Foreign Affairs, told Manfred von Killinger, the German ambassador in Bucharest, in explanation for the order given to the Romanian army to cross the Dniester, that engaging in this military action also across the Dniester was necessary in order both to consolidate the Romanian border, and to “protect our Romanian population across the Dniester.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Gh. Buzatu, *Mareşalul Antonescu în faţa istoriei*, vol. 1 (Iaşi: BAI, 1990), 273.