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Nation- and Statehood in Moldova

Ideological and political dynamics
since the 1980s

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Preface

Similar to many places in the region, language questions in Moldova are a touchy issue. In a country in which the political stance of a person is often conveyed by the way he writes the vowel [i], whether in the modern Romanian way as â or the 'Moldovan' way as î, it is impossible to write a text without being a priori classified. In order to overcome this problem, the author of this study has decided to use the following approach:

For names of persons and places located within the Republic of Moldova, the Romanian transliteration is used. This also concerns the names of persons and places located in Gagauzia or in the Pridnestrovian region.

– In those cases where Russian uses the palatalizing soft sign ь but the Romanian transliteration does not, the sign will not be written. Examples: Игорь and Тирасполь will be transliterated as Igor and Tiraspol and not as Igor' and Tiraspol'.

– The vowel [i] shall be always translated as î, except for those personal names where it is explicitly written as â. An exception is the Gagauz Halkı movement that shall be written in its Gagauz form by using the letter ı for [i]. Thus names like Хадыркэ, Галинский and Бомешко shall be written as Hadârcă, Galinschi and Bomeşco. Рыбница in turn as Rîbniţa and not Rybnica or Râbniţa.

– For places carrying both a Russian and a Romanian name, both shall be used. Places carrying a Russian and a Romanian spelling, the Romanian spelling shall be used. Thus what is Бендеры in Russian and Tighina in Romanian shall be written as Tighina (Bender) or Bender (Tighina).

Except for the above mentioned exceptions, all Russian texts are transliterated according to the ISO/R 9:1968 system.

This study shall be using the term Pridnestrovie or the PMR instead of Transnistria, as the latter is the term that was given to the area during the Romanian administration in 1941–44 and carries negative connotations among the population of the territory. For easier reading, the author shall not always use the adjective *unrecognised* when referring to Pridnestrovie or the PMR. This choice does not imply that the author of the study recognises the independence of this self-proclaimed state. The same is valid for the unrecognised Gagauz Republic, which existed between 1990 and 1994, where the adjective shall not be always added.

Since the term *Moldovan* is ambiguous and refers simultaneously to the Moldovan/Romanian speakers and to all citizens of Moldova, this study shall use the term *titular nation* or the term *Moldovan/Romanian speakers* to distinguish between the Moldovan/Romanian speakers and those citizens of Moldova with a different linguistic heritage (such as the Russian, Gagauz, Ukrainian and Bulgarians). Furthermore, the term *titular nation* does not convey an a priori stance on the question whether the Moldovan/Romanian speakers are actually Moldovans or Romanians.

To avoid lengthy sociolinguistic discussions and clarifications outside of the scope of this dissertation, the language of the titular nation shall be referred to herein as Moldovan/Romanian.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are my own.

Chapter One: Introduction

The disintegration of the Soviet Union has shown that the collapse of non-democratic regimes is often not only connected to the dissatisfaction with the previous regime, but also to profound polity issues. Defining who actually constitutes the demos might not correspond to the actual demos of a given state and, since the basis for any democracy is the participation of the entire population of the state in political life, defining who is to be considered member of the nation and/or the state can become a major source of conflict in any democratising state.[1]

An example for such a case is the Republic of Moldova. When the "the tide of nationalism"[2] rose throughout the Soviet Union in 1988, different ideas on Moldova's nation- and statehood (re-)surfaced and were discussed by the country's cultural and political elites. The key question in this regard was whether or to what extent the Romanian/Moldovan speakers, the titular nation of the country, were really Romanians or actually Moldovans. This question was of peculiar importance, since it was tied to the future of Moldova's statehood. If the choice had been for a Romanian identity, a merger with Romania (with independence as an intermediate step) would have been the ultimate consequence. If the option had been Moldovan, then Moldova would have become either an independent state with its own Moldovan identity, or remained within the Soviet Union. Thereby it was also discussed, whether Moldova should have been conceptualized as a state with the titular nation as the only legitimate owner of the country, or as a state for all its inhabitants. The conflict over these issues continued to escalate to such an extent, that in 1990 Moldova broke apart into three entities: the centre loyal to the central government in Chișinău, the highly industrialised eastern part located on the left bank of the Dniester (Nistru) River[3] with Tiraspol as its main city, and the mainly rural southern part of the country centred around the city of Comrat. Each of the entities began with the establishment of its own parallel structures.

When the Republic of Moldova gained full independence from the Soviet Union on the 25th of December 1991, it was already divided. Besides the Republic of Moldova claiming sovereignty over the entire territory, two parallel quasi-state structures existed. These were the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (Pridnestrovskaja Moldavskaja Respublika – PMR) located mainly on the left side of the Nistru (Dniester) River and the Gagauz Republic, a conglomerate of villages concentrated in the

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1   Linz and Stepan 1996, 16.

2   Beisinger 2002.

3   As the terms *left* and *right* bank are attributed according to the direction in which the river flows, the term *left bank* refers to the geographic east and *right bank* to the geographic west.