

**The Moldovan ASSR between the Bolshevik “Empire” and Greater Romania:  
Nation- and State- Building in the Soviet Borderland (1917-1940)**

By

Alexandr Voronovici

Submitted to

Central European University

History Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor Constantin Iordachi

Second Reader: Professor Alfred Rieber

Budapest, Hungary

2010

## Statement of copyright

Copyright in the text of this thesis rests with the Author. Copies by any process, either in full or part, may be made only in accordance with the instructions given by the Author and lodged in the Central European Library. Details may be obtained from the librarian. This page must form a part of any such copies made. Further copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the written permission of the Author.



I would like to express my gratitude to the International Visegrad Fund for the support of the second year of my studies at the Central European University and this research project.

## Abstract

The study focuses on the nation- and state- building in the Moldovan ASSR (1924-1940). In historiography the developments of the nationality policy in the MASSR are usually analyzed within the framework of the expansionist, arbitrary, highly centralized, top-down approach. The author reassesses the experience of the Moldovan ASSR, explaining the major decisions, strategies and logic behind them within the all-Union context.

The nation-building in the Moldovan ASSR is analyzed not just as an expansionist project but also as a case of the *korenizatsiia*. The emphasis on the logic of Soviet nationality policy and its relation to the Soviet foreign goals give the possibility to reinterpret major turning points and paradoxes of the nation-building in the Moldovan ASSR.

The author argues that quite radical turns in the nationality policies in the Moldovan ASSR can be explained by the ambiguous opinions of the Soviet authorities on the identity of the Moldovan population. Therefore, different, sometimes opposing, views and dimensions acquired primary importance within the changing Soviet contexts.

## Abbreviations

AOSPRM – Arhiva Organizațiilor Social-Politice a Republicii Moldova [Archive of Social-Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova], Chișinău

Gubkom – Province Committee

KP(b)B – Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Belarus

KP(b)U – Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine

KPZB – Communist Party of Western Belarus

KPZU – Communist Party of Western Ukraine

KUNMZ – Communist University of the National Minorities of the West

KUTV – Communist University of the Toilers of the East

MASSR – Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

MSC – Moldovan Scientific Committee

Narkomindel – People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs

Narkompros – People's Commissar of Enlightenment

NKVD – People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs

Obkom – Regional Committee

Revkom – Revolutionary Committee

RKP(b) – Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)

RSFSR – Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

Rumcherod – Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of Romanian Front, Black Sea Fleet and Odeesan Oblast' (region)

Sovnarkom – People's Soviet of Commissariats

SSR – Soviet Socialist Republic

TsIK – Central Executive Committee

TsK – Central Committee

VKP(b) – All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)

VUTsIK - All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Theoretical Chapter: Soviet Nationality Policies in the Borderlands .....	8
Marxism and nationalism .....	8
Soviet Union as “Empire” .....	10
Soviet federalism.....	15
Korenizatsiia viewed from the local perspective .....	20
Soviet nationalities and transborder ethnic politics in the interwar period.....	23
Two models of the Piedmont Principle.....	25
Nation-Building on the Left Bank of the Dniester before 1924.....	28
Bessarabian SSR – the prototype of the Moldovan ASSR? .....	28
Future leadership of the Moldovan ASSR in the Bessarabian revolutionary underground .....	32
Soviet nationality policies and Ukrainianiization on the left bank of the Dniester before 1924 .....	35
The Establishment of the Moldovan ASSR and First State-Building Steps .....	39
The Memorandum on the Necessity of Creation of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic .....	39
Ukrainian problem in the Soviet Union and the question of the Moldovan ASSR .	44
Counting Moldovans – Drawing borders .....	48
Building the Moldovan Regional Committee of KP(b)U .....	53
The myths of the Moldovan ASSR .....	56
<i>Korenizatsiia</i> on the Moldovan Soil: Moldovanization Campaign, 1924-1932 .....	61
Soviet nationality policies in the 1920s .....	61
From Moldovan language to Moldovan nationality .....	63
“There was a certain misunderstanding ... that the Moldovan Republic was created only for the annexation of Bessarabia” .....	69
Creating Moldovan socialist national culture .....	75

To Latinization and Back, 1932-1940 .....	79
The rehabilitation of Russians and the competing nation-building projects .....	79
Latinization as an expansionist project: Historiographical views.....	82
The Soviet war scare and the shift to Latinization .....	86
Latinization: break or continuation? .....	92
The aftermath of Great Purges.....	95
Conclusion .....	99
Bibliography.....	107

## Introduction

We have a faultless weapon – basic theory of feudalism, elaborated in the silence of offices and laboratories, on the dusty excavations, in imposing discussions...

It's a pity that Don Reba knows nothing about this theory.

Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Hard to be a God* (1964)

On February 4, 1924 a short document of several pages was sent to TsK RKP(b) with a copy to TsK KP(b)U. The document had the classification *Top Secret* and was signed by several major figures of the Romanian Communist movement, while the list was headed by the famous and influential Red Army commander G.I. Kotovskii. The paper was entitled *Memorandum on the Necessity of the Creation of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic*. It advocated the idea of the establishment of the Moldovan Socialist Republic, which would become the springboard for the recession of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union and even the strategic gate for the expansion of the socialist revolution to the Balkans and Central Europe. The document received more or less positive reaction of the central authorities and in less than a year on October 12 the Third Session of VUTsIK proclaimed the establishment of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.<sup>1</sup>

In the thesis I will tell the story of nation- and state- building in the Moldovan ASSR, a small republic on the left bank of the Dniester. In historiography the story of the nation-building of the Moldovan ASSR is held hostage by the approach, which emphasizes the expansionist, highly centralized top-down character of the policies in the Republic.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> All the translations of the primary sources from Romanian/Moldovan, Ukrainian and Russian are mine. The decree can be found in *Obrazovanie Moldavskoi SSR i Sozdanie Kommunisticheskoi Partii Moldavii: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov* [The Establishment of the Moldavian SSR and the Creation of the Communist Party of Moldavia: Collection of Documents and Materials] (Chişinău: 1984), 84-86.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Fischer-Galati was especially explicit on the issue: "The foundation of the Moldavian Republic ... was unrelated to any internal needs of the Soviet Union... From its inception the Moldavian Republic was a Soviet instrument for political action against Romania," Stephen Fischer-Galati, "The Moldavian Soviet Republic in Soviet Domestic and Foreign Policy," in (ed.) Roman Szporluk, *The Influence of East Europe and the Soviet West on the USSR* (New York: Praeger, 1975, c1976), 229; see also Nicholas Dima, *Bessarabia and Bukovina: the Soviet-Romanian Territorial Dispute* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1982), 22-23.

Historians usually treat the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR on the left bank of the river Dniester and the subsequent implemented policies exclusively as the product of the Soviet Union's or Stalin's expansionist policy. From this perspective the developments in the region were subjugated to the goal of the recession of Bessarabia, a part of the Romanov Empire from 1812, which united with the Romanian Old Kingdom in 1918. The 1918 Unification was never recognized by the Bolsheviks, who considered the river Prut and not Dniester to be the state border of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately in many cases the perception of the Moldovan ASSR as an expansionist, top-down organized project, which frequently carries along implicit or explicit political agenda<sup>3</sup>, is both an analytical framework and at the same time the answer to all questions. It exempted the scholars from the necessity to ask and seek answers to controversial and crucial questions, which in a measure undermine the rhetoric of totalitarian expansionism.

The authors, who are writing in the Romanian national-oriented tradition, often also add to the Soviet expansionist goals the deromanization policy pursued by Soviet government in order to detach local Romanian-speaking population from its "inherent culture"<sup>4</sup> by "moldovanizing" it. At the same time these authors neglect the logical and factual contradictions arising from putting both expansionist and deromanizing political strategies together: since the supposed target of the Soviet propaganda was the Romanian population, the deromanization of the population of the Moldovan ASSR should have increased the distance between two banks of the Dniester and thus undermine the propagandistic potential of the autonomous socialist republic.

---

<sup>3</sup> Frequently historians project their position in the present day identity issues in the Republic of Moldova on the developments in the interwar Moldovan ASSR.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Elena Negru, *Politica Etnoculturala in R.A.S.S. Moldoveneasca* [Ethnocultural Policy in the Moldavian ASSR] (Chişinău: Prut International, 2003); Anton Moraru, *Istoria Romaniilor: Basarabia si Transnistria (1812-1993)* [The History of Romanians: Bessarabia and Transnistria (1812-1993)] (Chişinău: Universal, 1995), 282-311.

Significant studies on the history of region were published by the local Soviet historians, who depicted MASSR as the first steps in the building of the socialist Moldovan statehood<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, despite the socialist successes in society and the economy the cultural and nation-building spheres were considered by Soviet historians to be heavily influenced by various kinds of “bourgeois nationalist deviations”. That predominant assumption – just like in Romanian historiography the perception of the arbitrary character of the MASSR policies – in most cases substituted the serious analysis of the historical problems in the Soviet publications. However, the studies published in socialist period usually relied on the various archival materials, therefore providing the reader with rich factual data, though omitting the “taboo” issues, such as inter-ethnic relations. At the same time the Soviet historians, just like their Romanian colleagues, emphasized the recession of Bessarabia as the primary goal of the Moldovan ASSR, especially in the light of the eventual success of this endeavor.

Therefore, the purpose of the thesis is to loosen the bonds of the expansionist approach on the field under study. This does not, though, presuppose the other extreme, namely the exclusion of the foreign dimension in local policies in the Moldovan ASSR. Rather I attempt to relativize and historicize the nation-building in the Moldovan ASSR. The recession of Bessarabia was a crucial issue in the discourse and mythology of local Moldovan and Soviet authorities. Yet, what I propose in the thesis is much more careful attention to the changing contexts, balances of power and specific circumstances of major decisions in the interwar USSR. At the same time it should be mentioned that the text is not an extensive critique of the expansionist or any other approach, which would have consisted of the thorough analysis of each and every contradiction or omission in the published works

---

<sup>5</sup> For example A. Repida, *Obrazovanie Moldavskoi ASSR* [The Establishment of the Moldavian ASSR] (Chişinău: Stiinta, 1974); S. Afteniuk, *Leninskaia Natsional'naia Politika Kommunisticheskoi Partii i Obrazovanie Sovetskoi Gosudarstvennosti Moldavskogo Naroda* [Leninist Nationality Policy of the Communist Party and the Creation of the Statehood of the Moldavian People] (Chişinău: Cartea Moldoveneasca, 1971).

on the topic. Instead, I am focusing on the possible alternative interpretations and explanations of the major changes in the nationality policies in the Moldovan ASSR.

The considerations outlined in previous paragraphs to a large extent determined the approach/framework used in the research. The experience of the Moldovan ASSR is put in the all-Soviet changing context during the interwar years. As a result, the re-contextualization provides the study with the possibilities to de-isolate the Moldovan ASSR from the limits of the national historiographies, which subordinate the discussion of the case to the analysis of the Bessarabian question with the respective claims on each side. In addition to the references to Bessarabia, I treat the nation-building in the Moldovan ASSR as a case of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization, nativization; Soviet nationality policy), though with certain specificities. The definition of the Moldovanization campaign (1924-1932) and to a lesser degree of the Latinization campaign (1932-1937) as examples of the Soviet nationality policies provides the basis for the reassessment of the logic and balances of power involved in the major decision-making process.

In addition, the approach presupposes a more complex understanding of the Soviet centralization. The centralization is not treated as a default characteristic of the Soviet Stalinist regime, but as a process, aspiration or tendency, which gradually evolved in the interwar years. Despite their centralizing aspirations, in the 1920s and early 1930s Bolsheviks tended to provide significant autonomy to non-Russians in terms of the nationality policies. The desire to reject the Imperial Russian experience was crucial for the emergence of such policy. In this light I underscore the fragmentation of the opinions on the Moldovan nation-building, which emerged at different party levels during the period of the initiation of the Moldovan ASSR in 1924 and in the subsequent years. I agree with Charles King, when he writes that “the origins of the effort to construct a distinctly Moldovan identity were not simply the result of Soviet foreign policy needs... Moldovan nation-building in the MASSR emerged not as a mere by-product of Soviet expansionism, but

rather as a result of the interplay of central foreign-policy goals, existing forms of indigenous identity, and the agendas of cultural and political elites inside the autonomous republic itself.”<sup>6</sup>

The analysis of the nation-building in the Moldovan ASSR cannot be separated from the discussion of the foreign implications of the Republic and its borderland position. There was a link between the Soviet preferential treatment of the Moldovan population and the attempts to attract the population on the other side of the border – “Piedmont Principle”. Bolsheviks considered the Moldovan ASSR in this light a “Piedmont” for Bessarabia or even Romania depending on the proposed national project within the republic. Yet, the contexts of both *korenizatsiia* and its foreign implications were changing throughout the interwar period.

Therefore, the interrelations between the local *korenizatsiia* and foreign policy goals within the nation- and state- building policies in the Moldovan ASSR will be one of the central issues of the thesis. Hence, in the thesis I will not focus on *korenizatsiia per se*, but on its specificity within the borderland Moldovan ASSR. As I will argue, in different periods the balance between the two above-mentioned dimensions depended to a significant extent on the certain general transformations taking place in the interwar Soviet Union as well as the local and regional balances of power between various political and intellectual groups.

Examining the problems, which I have outlined above, I will try to give some explanations to the paradoxes, which one encounters carefully studying the interwar history of the Moldovan ASSR. For example, I mention some of them. Why the political elite of the Moldovan ASSR in the 1920s was formed not from the group that initiated the creation of the republic? Why did the authorities add the predominantly Ukrainian and Russian

---

<sup>6</sup> Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 63.

territories to the MASSR already after its official establishment? Why did in 1932-1933 a turn to the Latin script and more Romanian-based nationality policies occur, while at the same time the predominant attitude towards the borderlands at that moment was that of the fear of intervention, suspicion etc?

Structurally the thesis is organized into 5 chapters. The first chapter deals with the theoretical issues of the *korenizatsiia* and borderland policies. I will start with the short discussion of the theoretical inter-relations of Marxism and Nationalism. Afterwards, I will discuss such concepts as empire and federalism in their relation to the Soviet Union. Assessing *korenizatsiia* in the local contexts, I will explain my usage of the terms nation-building and state-building in the thesis. The chapter will end with the discussion of the intersection of the *korenizatsiia* and Soviet foreign policy – Piedmont Principle. In this light I will propose the scheme of two ideal types – minority-oriented and majority-oriented Piedmont Principle – along which the experience of the Moldovan ASSR will be assessed in the paper.

In the second chapter I will briefly describe the nationality policies in the region before the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR in 1924. This will give the opportunity to assess the degree of the change in the policies after the creation of the republic and outline the local conditions, in which the Moldovan ASSR emerged. In addition, I will provide a sketchy account of the subversive communist activity<sup>7</sup> in Bessarabia, especially strong before 1924. I will argue that different experiences of the future MASSR's political leaders during this period to some extent influenced their subsequent aspirations in the nationality policies.

---

<sup>7</sup> By subversive communist activity I mean the attempts of the local communists (with the Soviet support) to instigate popular insurrection in the region and their propaganda, which was aiming at the deligitimization of the Romanian authorities and state in general.

The third chapter will explore the issue of the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR and first nation- and state- building steps. I will present the main political groups, which were dealing with the Bessarabian/Moldovan question, and their conflicting views. The issue of the choice of the group, which would form the political and cultural elite of the republic, would be the core problem of the chapter. In order to explain some paradoxical choices I will outline the specificity of the Ukrainian question in the Soviet Union and its importance for the Moldovan case. That would give the possibility to explain the choice of the elite made as well as the subsequent drawing of the republican borders and some other issues of state-building process.

In the fourth chapter I will deal with the nation-building in the Moldovan ASSR in the period of the flourishing of the *korenizatsiia*. For the Moldovan ASSR this period lasted from 1924 to 1932 and was characterized by the predominance of the “Moldovanization” process. As I will try to show, during this period the local policies of *korenizatsiia* occupied predominant role in comparison with the foreign policy goals. At the same time I will argue that the choice in favor of Moldovanization in contrast to more Romanian-oriented projects suited better the mid-1920s’ Soviet context.

The last chapter will outline the nation-building directions after the turn to the Latin script in the Moldovan ASSR (1932-1938). This turn roughly coincided with the “rehabilitation” of the Russians in the Soviet Union, who after a decade of oblivion became the “first among equals.” Therefore, its potential was significantly limited. At the same time I will put the turn to Latinization within the context of the Soviet war scare in the early 1930s. In conclusion of the chapter I will outline the consequences of the Great Purges for the nationality policies in the Moldovan ASSR.

## Theoretical Chapter: Soviet Nationality Policies in the Borderlands

### *Marxism and nationalism*

Martin Mevius has pointed out two myths that were characteristic for the views on the relationship between communism and nationalism. The first asserts the mutually exclusive character of communism and nationalism, due to the radical differences in the modernizing projects. The second presupposes that the nationalism was oppressed in the socialist camp and came up triumphant only after 1989.<sup>8</sup>

Walker Connor reinforces the first myth starting his more than 600-page account on the place of the national question in Marxism-Leninism with the statement: “Nationalism and Marxism are philosophically incompatible.” Marxism rests upon the conviction that the human society is divided according to horizontal class lines, while nationalism emphasizes the vertical national lines cutting across the classes.<sup>9</sup> Even if such philosophical incompatibility between two ideologies exists, still they could reconcile in one’s political outlook and even more often political practice.<sup>10</sup> In terms of practical conciliation the best example would be the Soviet Union and after the Second World War other countries of the socialist bloc. Marxist-based ideologies and nationalism fused, shuffled and reinforced each other in various ways, though not rarely also conflicting. Walker Connor’s account itself provides multiple examples of the Marxist and Leninist flirtation with nationalism in both intellectual and practical dimensions from various geographical and chronological contexts.

---

<sup>8</sup> Martin Mevius, “Reappraising Communism and Nationalism,” *Nationalities Papers* 37 (2009): 377.

<sup>9</sup> Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 6.

<sup>10</sup> George L. Mosse has convincingly demonstrated how many left-oriented intellectuals in interwar Europe turned to Fascism and Nazism. The ideologies’ fascination with the nation was even appealing for the intellectuals and frequently found comfortable place within the Marxist-based analysis, George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: H. Fertig, 1999), 95-116.

The uneasiness of Marxism with nationalism is grounded to a significant extent in the vagueness of the founders' positions on the issue. For both Marx and to a lesser degree Engels the national question was on the periphery of their interests and nations as such were a temporary phenomenon. Engels slightly broadened the class-based analysis by his preoccupation with human associations in terms of families, tribes, kinship systems in pre-revolutionary (pre-class) times.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Marx' and Engels' remarks on the national issue remained rather unsystematic, scattered in their writings on other topics and mostly dealing with precise individual cases and not with the theoretical conceptualization. Despite the marginality of the national question Ephraim Nimni argued that Marx' and Engels' legacy represent a cohesive line of argumentation determined by the "Marxist parameters of analysis of the national question."<sup>12</sup> At the same time Nimni himself added that these parameters were not specific to the discussion of the national question.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, it is possible to detect certain logic behind the founders' remarks on the national question, but it was hardly evident for their followers. Unlike the social and economic question there existed neither a conceptual framework nor practical recommendations in the intellectual legacy of Marx and Engels. As the result "there was no single 'true' Marxist notion of political nationalism" and each Marxist could insist that "his or her own variant was really faithful to the original system."<sup>14</sup> Therefore many Marxist groups engaged in the attempts to fill the gap in the theory and practical recommendations, frequently basing their answers on their own local context. Austro-Marxists, first of all by

---

<sup>11</sup> A. James Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 162.

<sup>12</sup> Nimni points out the following parameters: a) the theory of the universal evolution of the forces of production; b) the theory of economic reductionism; c) the Eurocentric bias in concrete disillusion of the universal process of change, Ephraim Nimni, *Marxism and Nationalism: Theoretical Origins of a Political Crisis* (London: Pluto Press, 1994, c1991), 6-14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>14</sup> Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism*, 165.

Otto Bauer, elaborated the most comprehensive position on the question. They advocated the necessity of the non-territorial national autonomy. The Bolshevik theoretical answer to the national question emerged in the debate with Austro-Marxists and their followers in the Imperial Russian context, the Bund. The practical Bolshevik answer emerged to a larger degree from the lessons of the First World War and the Russian Civil War.

Due to the above-mentioned myths there were relatively few studies that deal in detail with the relations of nationalism and communism.<sup>15</sup> In this respect the year 1989 can be seen as a breaking point. Many studies that take up the issues of both intellectual and practical relations of nationalism and communism appeared. Some of them will be mentioned in the text.

In my thesis I am interested not in the intellectual evolution of the relations between nationalism and communism, but in actual policies. In the text I will refer from time to time to the intellectual origins of some of the policies, but the main aim of the paper is to understand the logic behind and the contexts of the major policies and political decision in the Moldovan ASSR.

### *Soviet Union as "Empire"*

In the title of the thesis the Soviet Union is labeled as the *Bolshevik "Empire."* It is no coincidence that the word *empire* is put into the quotation marks. As some other notions, for example, nation/nationalism and identity<sup>16</sup>, *empire* has not only scholarly usage, but is also actively invoked in the politics and everyday life. Therefore, unlike strictly scholar notions, the term has acquired specific connotations that presuppose, in addition, certain

---

<sup>15</sup> Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: the Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism, 1941-1953* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 5.

<sup>16</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond Identity," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1-2.

moral assessment. Hence, Dominic Lieven's assertion that "Empire is a difficult concept."<sup>17</sup> At the same time the popularity of the concept in the everyday life sometimes results in its uncritical incorporation into the scholarly analysis. The ambiguity of the concept led some scholars to substitute it with a more value-free and flexible notion - "imperial rule"<sup>18</sup>.

In relation to the Soviet Union the question, whether the Soviet Union was an empire or not, started to be discussed only recently. Previously there were several general attitudes to the imperial character of the Soviet Union. For some scholars, especially the representatives of the totalitarian school, the Soviet Union was by definition an empire.<sup>19</sup> Usually these scholars do not even discuss the concept empire in its relation to the Soviet Union. The Cold War conjuncture, which presupposed the struggle of two major world powers, reinforced that impression. Another important feature of this approach in terms of the nationality policies was its focus on Moscow, Russians and centralized decision-making.<sup>20</sup> Other nationalities emerge mostly only as victims of the deliberately violent policies of the Moscow Bolsheviks or Russians etc.<sup>21</sup>

The revisionist school, which emerged as a reaction to the inflexible and usually highly politicized totalitarian school, paid much less attention to the political dimension of the Soviet developments, focusing more on the social and economical spheres. Therefore in these works the reader can hardly encounter the term.

---

<sup>17</sup> Dominic Lieven, "The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as Imperial Polities," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995): 607.

<sup>18</sup> Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber, "Introduction: Imperial Rule," in Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (ed), *Imperial Rule* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004), 1-2.

<sup>19</sup>For example, Richard Pipes, *Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954); Robert Conquest (ed), *The Last Empire: Nationality and the Soviet Future* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> The focus of Sovietology on Moscow and Russian made the issue of the Soviet nationality policies peripheral, Alexander J. Motyl, "Building Bridges and Changing Landmarks: Theory and Concept in the Study of Soviet Nationalities," in Alexandr J. Motyl (ed), *Thinking Theoretically about Soviet Nationalities: History and Comparison in the Study of the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 258.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, Robert Conquest, *Nation Killers: the Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (London: Macmillan, 1970).

As Ronald Grigor Suny pointed out, the term *empire* as an attribute of the Soviet Union reemerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union along republican (~national) lines. As the result, scholars have rediscovered the non-Russian nationalities, as important political actors in the Soviet history.<sup>22</sup> The logic behind the usage of the concept *empire* in this case was the following: the Soviet Union disintegrated along the national lines, like all other empires, therefore the USSR was an empire. Basically, the conclusion was that the Soviet Union, being an empire, was predestined by the historical laws to collapse. After labeling the USSR an empire basing upon the criterion of its collapse, the scholars started to project the imperial framework backwards, on the Soviet history, looking for the Soviet imperial features in the past.<sup>23</sup>

Another approach, which was only recently applied to the Soviet case, was an attempt to assess the imperial character of the Soviet Union against some kind of Weberian ideal type of an empire. Usually scholars drew the ideal type from other more “evident” (British, Ottoman, French, Russian etc) empires, embodied it in a set of certain measurable characteristics or elements and put together in a definition of an empire. The imperial features that are usually mentioned are the following: rather clear-cut distinction between center and periphery, size, authoritarianism, domination of the center, multi-ethnic (cultural) composition and the expansionist aspirations. To cite few examples of the definitions: “Empire, I shall argue, is a system of interaction between two political entities, one of which, the dominant metropole, exerts political control over the internal and external policy – the effective sovereignty – of the other, the subordinate periphery”<sup>24</sup> and “Empire is, first

---

<sup>22</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, “National” Identity, and Theories of Empire,” in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (ed), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Building in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23.

<sup>23</sup> Terry Martin, “The Soviet Union as Empire: Salvaging a Dubious Analytical Category,” *Ab Imperio* no.2 (2002): 91.

<sup>24</sup> Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 12, see also 19.

and foremost, a very great power that has left its mark on the international relations of an era. I also mean a polity that rules over wide territories and many peoples, since the management of space and multiethnicity is one of the great perennial dilemmas of empire. For me, an empire is by definition not a democracy ...”<sup>25</sup> When applying these definitions and characteristics to the Soviet case, certain problems emerge. The conformity of the Soviet Union with various definitions or characteristics of an empire depends much on the analyzed period of the Soviet history. As Terry Martin mentioned, the Soviet Union was a highly-centralized state in terms of legislation and the presupposed “core” and “periphery” were treated on the same basis. From the point of view of Soviet nationality policies there were differences between Russians and non-Russians, but unlike other empires *korenizatsiia* presupposed preferential treatment of the “minorities.”<sup>26</sup>

At the same time one cannot fully discard the concept *empire* in its relation to the Soviet case. Terry Martin has proposed the subjective, in contrast to objective characteristics, approach that presupposes the analysis of the evolution of the perception of the Soviet Union as an empire by its population and leadership.<sup>27</sup> Even though I agree that this approach might be more productive in some sense, within the limits of my thesis it can hardly provide the necessary insights.

At the same time one aspect of the above-mentioned imperial characteristics is important for the thesis and for the analysis. As Terry Martin himself has mentioned, the scholarly usage of the term *empire* should not depart too far from the ordinary language

---

<sup>25</sup> Dominic C.B. Lieven, *Empire: the Russian Empire and its Rivals* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), xi.

<sup>26</sup> Martin, *The Soviet Union as Empire*, 98-99. Andreas Kappeler still draws the line between *korenizatsiia* and Russian Imperial pre-national (in the period before the Russification) policies on the basis of the appointment of non-Russians in local government in both cases, Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: a Multiethnic History* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2001), 374. But this view overlooks the differences in logic, goals and extent between the cases.

<sup>27</sup> Martin, *The Soviet Union as Empire*, 102; Ronald Grigor Suny, *Empire Strikes Out*.

usage.<sup>28</sup> In the ordinary usage empires are almost inextricably associated with expansionism or at least expansionist aspirations. The adjective “imperialistic” became almost a synonym of “expansionist.” It can be considered a myth, though. Not only empires but also their supposed alternatives, nation-states, eagerly engaged in expansionist campaigns. A close to the topic example is Romania, which mostly by military means doubled its territory as the result of the World War I. Some historians proposed even to give up the division between empires and nation-states and substitute them with a more general category of modern state.<sup>29</sup> At the same time certain differences between imperial and national expansionisms can be identified. National expansionism is usually limited by the imagined boundaries of the national (cultural) space, which is determined by the imagined ethnic and/or linguistic borders. It can also be labeled as the irredentist expansionism. Imperial expansionism in turn is limited not by the symbolic boundaries but by the military and control capacity of the imperial state in its relation to other polities. Nevertheless, nation-states also tended to expand beyond the symbolic national boundaries when they had the necessary capacities.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, in terms of expansionism the Soviet Union drifted between these two types of expansionist aspirations throughout the interwar period. Just after the Revolution the world internationalist ideology stimulated the attempts to conquer Romania and Poland in order to support the social revolutions in Hungary and Germany respectively.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, quite soon the Soviet leaders gave up such ambitious aspirations, and eventually the formula “socialism in one country” became predominant. Despite a more

---

<sup>28</sup> Martin, *The Soviet Union as Empire*, 99.

<sup>29</sup> Nick Baron, “ ‘Empire’ and ‘Nation’ as Categories of Spatial Politics and Historical Study: Methodological Notes for the *Ab Imperio* Roundtable,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2002).

<sup>30</sup> The extreme cases of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy demonstrate how a racial nation-oriented ideology could easily merge with the imperialistic ideas of world expansion.

<sup>31</sup> Yet, the term expansionism cannot be unequivocally applied to the early Soviet foreign policy. Definitely Bolsheviks desired to support the revolutionary movements in Europe. But it was not clear, whether Bolsheviks wanted to politically subordinated the European revolutions to the Soviet center.

isolationist claims the Soviet Union did not fully discarded its expansionist aspirations, but they were already more limited. Basically, the expansionism of the 1920s-1930s resembled more an irredentist type. In this case the territories populated by the “brethren” of the Soviet borderland nationalities on the other side of the border were targeted.

Due to the ambiguity of the term *empire* I will not use it extensively in my thesis. Nevertheless, the Soviet throughout the interwar period growing self-perception of empire justifies the use of the term in the title and, when necessary, in the text. In the process of the “rehabilitation” of Russians in the mid-1930s the Soviet authorities revived some of the Russian Imperial symbolic elements. In the context of my thesis and the study of nationality policies in the borderlands the expansionist connotations of the term *empire* are also invoked. At the same time due to the ambiguous, vague character of the term I prefer to put it into the quotation marks. It is also to suggest that, even though the plans on the Bessarabian recession were part of the official discourse, it is incorrect in the analysis to subordinate the nationality policies in the border areas (e.g. Moldovan ASSR) only to the expansionist goals of the Soviet Union.

### *Soviet federalism*

“The belief that the socialist state required a centralized administration was common to both wings of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, as indeed it was to European Marxism in general.”<sup>32</sup> As the result, one of the major criticisms of the Bolsheviks from the side of, for instance, anarchists, was the Marxist and, consequently, Bolshevik preoccupation with the state and its centralizing administrating functions.<sup>33</sup> In the cited sentence Richard Pipes, who is working mostly within the totalitarian approach, simplified

---

<sup>32</sup> Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, 242.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Jan Wacław Machajski, “Excerpts from the ‘Intellectual Worker’ (1904-1905)” in V.F. Claveton (ed), *The Making of Society: an Outline of Sociology* (New York: The Modern Library, 1937).

to some extent the situation within the Russian Social-Democratic camp, homogenizing its members and neglecting the existing debates. Nevertheless, in the citation he rightly captured the general tendency. Therefore, the eventual federal structure of the Soviet Union might seem surprising and unexpected. Indeed, historians still debate the question of the origins, purposes and structures of the Soviet federalism. For the purposes of the thesis these issues are crucial from several points of view. First, federalist system of the Soviet Union intertwined with the national question. Second, it was also crucial for the center-local relations. Third, since I am dealing with the Moldovan ASSR, the issues of the establishment of the Republic, its borders and relations with central and Ukrainian authorities would occupy significant place in the thesis.

Bolsheviks developed the idea of the territorial autonomy in their debate on the national question with Austro-Marxists and the Bund. Stalin, who upon Lenin's request wrote in 1913 his famous "Marxism and the National Question", considered territoriality one of the essential features of a nation.<sup>34</sup> Even though, as Erik van Ree demonstrated, Stalin shared with Austro-Marxists certain common philosophical and sociological views on the nation<sup>35</sup>, in terms of the practical instruments he and Lenin categorically refused the Austro-Marxist model of non-territorial cultural autonomy. Interestingly enough, before the World War I both Lenin and Stalin made certain distinctions between territorial autonomy and federation, considering the former a positive phenomenon and the latter a negative one. Nevertheless, the essence and logic behind such distinction is not clear; as it is not clear, why after the war the two concepts merged, basically without any significant discussion.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> I.V. Stalin, *Sochineniia, Tom 2, 1907-1913* [Works, Vol. 2, 1907-1913] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury), 294-297.

<sup>35</sup> Erik van Ree, "Stalin and the National Question," *Revolutionary Russia* 7 (1994): 226-227.

<sup>36</sup> Jeremy Smith, "The Origins of Soviet National Autonomy," *Revolutionary Russia* 10 (1997): 63.

The first years after the Bolshevik accession to power witnessed a process of the heated debates on the national question and, accordingly, on the administrative-territorial structure of the state.<sup>37</sup> Eventually these debates resulted in the establishment of the USSR in 1922, official launch of the *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) in 1923 and the Soviet Constitution of 1924, which reinforced these arrangements. *Korenizatsiia*, which presupposed preferential treatment of non-Russian nationalities, necessitated also the creation of a separate territorial unit for each nationality.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the issue of the territorial structure of the Bolshevik state and the establishment of the national administrative units became a subject of major debates even before the official launch of *korenizatsiia*.

The crucial issue in the debate was the relations between the RSFSR and other Bolshevik republics. Stalin, who was the Commissar of Nationalities<sup>39</sup> at the moment and a major expert, along with Lenin, on the national question, proposed the so-called “autonomization plan”. The project presupposed the incorporation of the independent republics into the RSFSR on the basis of the autonomy, like some other already established within RSFSR autonomous republics. Lenin opposed this plan and proposed the model of the voluntary union of the formally independent republics. This struggle between Lenin and Stalin on the issue of territorial structure of the Soviet Union became one of the core elements of Moshe Lewin’s famous thesis of “Lenin’s last struggle” against the Stalin’s

---

<sup>37</sup> Collection of the opinions in V.A. Gornyi et al (ed), *Natsional’nyi Vopros na Perekriostke Mnenii, 20-e Gody: Dokumenty i Materialy* [National Question at the Crossroad of Opinions, 1920s: Documents and Materials] (Moscow: Nauka, 1992).

<sup>38</sup> I will mention major works on *korenizatsiia* in chapter 4, where I will elaborate a bit more extensively on the Soviet nationality policies in 1920s. In addition, various policies, periods and logic of *korenizatsiia* will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

<sup>39</sup> For the discussion of Stalin’s activity on the position of the Commissar of Nationalities, see Jeremy Smith, “Stalin as Commissar for Nationalities Affairs, 1918-1922,” in ed. Sarah Davies and James Harris, *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 45-62; a more detailed account but with probably too strong emphasis on Stalin’s desire to establish personal control, Stephen Blank, *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917-1924* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994).

centralizing aspirations and great power chauvinism.<sup>40</sup> In Terry Martin's opinion the difference was not in the views on the rights of Soviet nationalities, which were similar. The crucial issue was the position of the RSFSR in the structure of the Soviet Union. Eventually the solution was caught in between the two opposing views: the Republics joined the Soviet Union on formally independent basis, but at the same time the RSFSR did not become a republic as any other, since it lacked its separate republican government, like other republics. The governmental bodies of the RSFSR overlapped with the all-Union ones. Therefore Terry Martin called the RSFSR an "awkward republic."<sup>41</sup>

Recently there were attempts to reassess the Lenin-Stalin debate, mostly asserting that the differences on Lenin's and Stalin's views were not so radical. Jeremy Smith concluded that in general Lenin agreed with Stalin on the necessity of centralization but he was also anxious about the external image of the "autonomization plan", fearing that the latter would be considered a return to Russian Imperial practices in the sphere of the national question.<sup>42</sup> At the same time Erik van Ree turned Moshe Lewin's argument upside down, asserting that in early 1920s Lenin had even more centralizing views than Stalin. Therefore, proposing the "autonomization plan" Stalin was sure to get Lenin's support. Nevertheless, that was the actual reality, struggles foremost with Ukrainians and Georgians, that forced Lenin to reconsider his position in a more confederative direction.<sup>43</sup>

Despite different views of the contemporary scholars on the debate on "autonomization" and federation, several common points are important for our thesis. First,

---

<sup>40</sup> Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (New York: Pantheon, 1968).

<sup>41</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 394-397; Idem, "The Russification of the RSFSR," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 39 (1998): 99-102.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *The Origins of Soviet National Autonomy*, 80.

<sup>43</sup> Erik van Ree, " 'Lenin's Last Struggle' Revisited," *Revolutionary Russia* 14 (2001): 100-113. Criticizing Moshe Lewin, the historians should also take into account the author's agenda, who was trying to some extent to redeem Socialism (embodied in Lenin) from the Stalinist imprint.

the rights of the nationalities in the cultural and national spheres were not discussed, they were taken for granted. Second, the accession of the Soviet republics to the Soviet Union presupposed that the former were taking up the principles of the *korenizatsiia* and more importantly the idea of the territorial units for their respective minorities. The minorities within the non-Russian Soviet republics could claim the territorial status just like the majorities in the national republics within the Soviet Union. Third, even though creating the federative state, both Stalin and Lenin were convinced that there would be a centralizing political force. That force was the Bolshevik party. The unified party should have counterbalanced certain administrative territorial division. The role of the party as a centralizing force was a distinctive feature of the Soviet federalism. That situation led some of the scholars to the conclusion that “Soviet federalism provided a legitimizing cover for rule over the borderlands by Moscow.”<sup>44</sup> But this was an exaggeration. First, the roots of the Soviet federalism were not simply a mask – as it was to some extent demonstrated earlier, they were much more complex. Second, at least in the 1920s the party hardly represented a unified homogenous political actor. There were many debates both on central and local levels. Therefore the balance of the center-local relations in the Soviet nationality policy is a relevant issue that will be discussed below.

Another important issue of the Soviet federalism that should be discussed is the problem of the separation of powers between the all-Union and Republican authorities. All the spheres in the Soviet governmental processes were divided between the Commissariats (roughly the synonym of Ministries). At the same time there were three types of the Commissariats: all-Union (the decisions were obligatory on all the Soviet territory), mixed (the decisions were carried out after the negotiation between local and central Commissariats) and local (the decisions were a full prerogative of the local authorities,

---

<sup>44</sup> Grey Hodnett, “The Debate over Soviet Federalism,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 18 (1967): 459-460.

though sometimes under the central control). I will not discuss here to which group related each Commissariat (it varied in different temporal and republican cases), but I will just point out the spheres that were more subordinated either to central or local authorities. The spheres of the foreign policy, economic planning, and trade were almost exclusively under the supervision of the Moscow authorities. At the same time local authorities enjoyed broad autonomy in the fields of cultural, educational and *korenizatsiia* policies. The analysis of the fiscal policies in the interwar Soviet Union (revenues and expenditures) demonstrate that on the legal level one can hardly discern any tendency in the direction of either centralization or decentralization.<sup>45</sup> The centralization in the interwar period was carried out not on the federal and administrative level but rather within the party apparatus.

#### *Korenizatsiia viewed from the local perspective*

As I have mentioned above, the sphere of national, cultural and educational development was mostly the prerogative of the local authorities. Even though Bolsheviks had no intent to foster the all-around, full-fledged nation-building, their rhetoric left significant space for interpretations by the local political leaders and intellectuals. In many cases they were acting like nation-builders in non-socialist countries: establishing linguistic and literary canons, studying and constructing national culture, etc. Therefore, a significant part of local participants of the *korenizatsiia* perceived the policy as nation-building, though with Marxist-Leninist flavor. This was especially the case of the local Commissariats of Enlightenment, scientific institutions, writers' and intellectuals' unions. active participation in the Soviet politics of the nation-oriented intellectuals and politicians was one of the consequences and at the same time causes of the *korenizatsiia*'s shift to more nationalistic practice. Many of them had noticed and welcomed the Bolshevik concessions to

---

<sup>45</sup> Donna Bahry, *Outside Moscow: Power, Politics, and Budgetary Policy in the Soviet Republics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 51-59.

nationalities and by their participation additionally reinforced the nationalistic dimension of local *korenizatsiia*. An illustrative example of such an intellectual is Mykhailo Hrushevsky, one of the creators of the Ukrainian national history and the Chairman of the Ukrainian Central Rada in 1917-1918, who returned to Soviet Ukraine in 1924 and continued his work on the distinctiveness of the Ukrainian history in the new environment.<sup>46</sup> Francine Hirsch similarly had convincingly demonstrated how the alliance of the Bolsheviks with the Russian Imperial ethnographers and geographers emerged. The latter played leading roles in the processes of the study, categorization and creation of national cultures.<sup>47</sup>

In the 1920s Moscow did not have enough resources to fully control local affairs. Indeed, as David Shearer has demonstrated, until the mid-1930s the Soviet police was understaffed and underfunded, therefore the control of the Soviet authorities and the collecting of the information was limited in its extent, especially on the periphery.<sup>48</sup> At the same time Stephen Kotkin has shown in his seminal book *Magnetic Mountain* the misunderstandings and reinterpretations in the center-local relations even in such a crucial endeavor as the construction of Magnitogorsk.<sup>49</sup> Similar was the situation in the field of the Soviet nationality policies, especially in the smaller administrative units. The precise directions of local nation-building were to a large extent the product of local leaders who

---

<sup>46</sup> For the thorough account of Mykhailo Hrushevsky's life and work in the Soviet Union, Serhii Plokhyy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005): 21-62. *Smena Vekh* (Changing Signposts) was the movement that provided the ideological basis for the alliance of the Russian Imperialists with the Bolsheviks, Geoffrey Hosking, *Rulers and Victims: the Russians in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 80-89; Hilde Hardeman, *Coming to Terms with the Soviet Regime: the "Changing Signposts" Movement among Russian Émigrés in the Early 1920s* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> David Shearer, "Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD during the 1930s." *Cahiers du monde russe* 42 (2001): 509-511, 518-519.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1995).

were framing any of the chosen directions in the terms appealing to the central authorities. Yet, Moscow had enough power and resources to influence the general directions of the local nationality policies. The Shumsky affair in the Ukrainian SSR in 1926-1927 had demonstrated the limits of the local strive for nation-building. Alexander Shumsky attacked Lazar Kaganovich and his associates for the slow pace of the Ukrainianization and personally Kaganovich for his Jewish origins, demanding his substitution by a Ukrainian. Stalin's response demonstrated that Moscow was not willing to support full-fledged nation-building and *korenizatsiia*, as viewed from the center, was much more limited in its purposes.<sup>50</sup>

Here when I speak of nation-building I am referring to the perspective of local actors. By local actors I mostly mean local party and government leadership and intellectuals, especially those that were actively participating in the creation of the socialist national cultures. In general all the directions of *korenizatsiia* had significance for the nation-building, but I limit the notion to the linguistic policies, creation of national culture, history and elites. The issues of territorialization of nationalities and the formation of governing institutions of the administrative units would be covered by the term "state-building."

---

<sup>50</sup> For the account of Shumsky affair see James E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918-1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 86-119.

## *Soviet nationalities and transborder ethnic politics in the interwar period*

Three aspects were crucial for the Soviet nationality policies in the borderlands<sup>51</sup> during the interwar years. First, the eventual state borders of the Soviet Union, which came as the result of the First World War and the Civil War, shrank in comparison with the prewar Imperial Russian territories. Bolsheviks were reluctant to recognize the losses and in the case of Bessarabia even the Soviet official maps were depicting the state border on the river Prut and not on Dniester, as it was in reality. Second, the state borders were cutting through the ethnically, linguistically and culturally similar groups, which nevertheless preserves certain connections with their brethren on the other side of the border. Third, initially Bolsheviks perceived the October Revolution only as the first phase of the World Revolution. Yet, that conviction did not presuppose the passivity of the Bolsheviks; on the contrary it stimulated their pressure on the borderland and even more remote areas. Even after the turn to the doctrine of “socialism in one country” in mid-1920s, the first two factors accompanied by significantly altered ideas of the World Revolution were adding a specific foreign dimension to the Soviet nationality policies in the borderlands.

Local affairs in the borderlands could be used for the pressure on the international level and reinforce the territorial claims and state position in the diplomatic sphere. Soviet nationality policies could be instrumentalized to attract the cultural brethren of the border populations. In Timothy Snyder’s words: “The Soviet Union could transform domestic national question into the weapons in international affairs.”<sup>52</sup> The logic behind this

---

<sup>51</sup> By borderlands I do not mean any peripheral or subjugated character of the region and its population within the Soviet structure. This conclusion also comes up from the discussion of Soviet federalism and center-local relations in previous subchapters. Moreover, quite often the developments in the borderlands forced Moscow to implement certain decisions and not only the other way round. The word is used mostly in the geographic sense as an area close to the state border. In most cases these areas were populated by non-Russian nationalities.

<sup>52</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War: a Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005): 39.

conviction was that the preferential treatment of the Soviet nationalities would delegitimize the neighboring “capitalist” states and foster there the socialist revolutions.

Following Ukrainian Bolsheviks, Terry Martin labeled the Soviet tendency to exploit transborder ethnic ties as the “Piedmont Principle”. At the same time he emphasized that the Piedmont Principle was two-sided. Just as Soviets could mobilize ethnic ties to promote their foreign claims, so could the neighboring states respond with similar policies.<sup>53</sup> In this respect Timothy Snyder provided an insightful account of the attempts of Pilsudski’s Poland to attract the Soviet Ukrainian population. From Stalin’s point of view that resulted in suspicion and the “obsession with vulnerability of Soviet frontiers to Soviet intervention.”<sup>54</sup> Probably this conviction was the heritage of the Russo-Polish war.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the interwar period the war fears concentrated primarily on the Soviet-Polish border.<sup>56</sup>

The paradox of the Soviet nationality policies, which attempted to promote local cultures and at the same time was highly suspicious of nationalism, was especially evident in the borderlands. It can be argued that the result of the conflict between the desire to promote socialist development in the neighboring countries and the fear of foreign incursion

---

<sup>53</sup> For both dimensions see Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 274-282, 312-316. It is important also to stress Terry Martin’s opinion on the primacy of local *korenizatsiia* in comparison with the Piedmont Principle: “The Piedmont principle was not the primary justification of either *korenizatsiia* or the formation of national territories – disarming and preventing the growth of nationalism within the Soviet Union was the main goal – but it was an important factor strengthening the leadership’s commitment to *korenizatsiia* in all of its border regions.” *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Alfred Rieber, “Stalin as Foreign Policy-Maker: Avoiding War, 1927-1953,” in ed. Sarah Davies and James Harris, *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 141; *Idem.*, “Struggle Over the Borderlands,” in ed. S. Frederick Starr, *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1994): 68. At the same time the transborder ethnic ties were not the only reason for the suspicion of the borderlands, for other reasons see Andrea Chandler, *Institutions of Isolation: Border Controls in the Soviet Union and its Successor States, 1917-1993* (Montreal ; Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998): 4-9.

<sup>55</sup> Rieber, *Stalin as Foreign Policy-Maker*, 141.

<sup>56</sup> On the impact of Soviet fear of Polish offense see, Matthew D. Pauly, “Soviet Polonophobia and the Formulation of Nationalities Policy in the Ukrainian SSR, 1927-1934,” in ed. David L. Ransel and Bozena Shallcross, *Polish Encounters, Russian Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005): 172-188.

was determined by various factors in each case. In general, the direction of the promotion of the Soviet nationality policies was predominant in the 1920s. The precise embodiment of the policies was the result of the balance of interests of local interests in their relation to central authorities. In the 1930s the war scare came to the foreground and this was mostly the tendency radiating from Moscow.<sup>57</sup>

### *Two models of the Piedmont Principle*

The Soviet propaganda was targeted not only at the minority groups but even at the majority nationalities in the adjoining states. In this light I propose to discern two models of the Piedmont Principle. One was targeting the majority and the other minority in the neighboring states. For convenience I think that we can label them as the *majority-oriented* and *minority-oriented* Piedmont Principles. Each model presupposed certain specificities in terms of purposes, directions and actual policies in the sphere of *korenizatsiia*.

In case of the majority-oriented use of the Piedmont principle the main field of propaganda was ideological and only to a lesser extent national. Soviet authorities instrumentalized the support and promotion of the nationalities here to demonstrate the toleration of the national peculiarities. But the purpose of the national administrative units was to demonstrate the predominance of the socialist system in contrast to the capitalist one. For instance, the main purpose of the Marchlevsk Polish Autonomous Region in the Ukrainian SSR was to build the Polish communism in miniature.<sup>58</sup> For instance, similar functions had the Dzerzhinskii Polish Autonomous Region in the Belarusian SSR and the

---

<sup>57</sup> For the account of the war scares, see Anna Di Biagio, "Moscow, the Comintern and the War Scare," in ed. Silvio Pons and Andrea Romano, *Russia in the Age of Wars, 1914-1945* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2000): 83-102; Andrea Romano, "Permanent War Scare: Mobilization, Militarization and the Peasant War," in ed. Silvio Pons and Andrea Romano, *Russia in the Age of Wars, 1914-1945* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2000): 103-120.

<sup>58</sup> For the account of the history of Polish Autonomous Region see Kate Brown, *A Biography of no Place: from Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Pulin German Autonomous Region in the Ukrainian SSR. As the latter case demonstrates, in the majority-oriented cases the targeted population did not necessarily have to live in the neighboring state. Interestingly, the majority-oriented cases attracted much less attention and finances from the authorities than the minority-oriented cases. In addition, usually the majority-oriented cases were determined to a greater degree by foreign policy goals than by internal Soviet developments; in minority-oriented – it was usually vice versa.

In minority-oriented cases the preferential treatment of the Soviet nationalities was contrasted to the realities of these minorities in the neighboring nation-states. Frequently the national dimension of the Soviet propaganda overshadowed even the social and economic dimensions. As a result this factor was reinforcing the nationalistic tendencies in the Soviet borderlands. In light of the Piedmont Principle the main goal was a creation of the socialist national culture that would be an attractive alternative to the neighboring minorities in contrast to their “oppressed” reality. For instance, in the Ukrainian SSR there were attempts to create the socialist national culture that could attract the Ukrainian population in Poland. The presupposed future goals were the incorporation of these territories into the respective already existing Soviet republics. In the majority-oriented cases the future projects in case of the successful “export of the revolution” were rather vague, but it did not necessarily presupposed the incorporation into the Soviet Union.

In light of the above-described models the Moldovan case stands out as an interesting object for the analysis. Interestingly enough, the Moldovan ASSR can be to some extent related to both models. During the interwar period there existed opposing, though sometimes mutually incorporating, projects that more or less corresponded to both models. The ambiguous views of the Bolsheviks (on various levels) on the identity of the Romanian-speaking population in the Moldovan ASSR and Bessarabia resulted in quite different projects for local *korenizatsiia* and its foreign policy implications. I will discuss these

projects in more detail in the following chapters but in brief the majority-oriented project for the Moldovan ASSR presupposed the radical Romanization of the republican population in order to create a Piedmont for the whole Romania. The minority-oriented project made the distinction between the Romanian-speaking population of Bessarabia and the Moldovan ASSR and the rest of Romania identifying them as Moldovans and thus attributing them the minority status in the Greater Romania context. For this project the development of the separate Moldovan socialist culture was essential. Both projects presupposed the active intervention of the authorities in the field of the nationality policies. The ambiguous position of the Moldovan ASSR in relation to the above-described models adds more theoretical interest in the study of the Soviet nationality policies in the region.

## Nation-Building on the Left Bank of the Dniester before 1924

The historical studies scarcely cover the nation-building on the territory of Moldovan ASSR before 1924. At the same time it is necessary to elucidate the developments of this period in order to understand better the degree of change in 1924 and the heritage which the government of MASSR encountered after its establishment.

### *Bessarabian SSR – the prototype of the Moldovan ASSR?*

In 1919-1921 the left bank of the Dniester was the battlefield of the Russian Civil War. Red and White Armies, interventionist forces, Petliura's army, different bands most notably Mahno's Revolutionary Insurrection Army of Ukraine were all active during the period in the region. Despite the chaotic and constantly changing circumstances the case of the Bessarabian SSR deserves some attention in this chapter.

In mid-April 1919 the divisions of Red Army forcing out Petliura and interventional armies reached the left bank of the Dniester. The successful advancement of the Red Army gave grounds for the consideration of possible occupation Bessarabia, where at this moment Romanian and French armies were stationed. Therefore local Bolshevik leadership started up the active work in that direction. Approximately on April 28, 1919 two decisions were adopted. First of all, according to the directions of Christian Rakovsky the Bessarabian Sovnarkom chaired by I.N. Krivorukov, one of the leading revolutionaries of Bessarabia, was organized. The Sovnarkom should have formed the government of the liberated Bessarabia. According to the telephoned telegram sent to the Sovnarkom of the Ukrainian SSR the Bessarabian Sovnarkom should have proclaimed the Soviet power and issued a manifest when the first settlement on the right bank of the Dniester had been occupied.<sup>59</sup> As

---

<sup>59</sup> *Kommunisticheskoe Podpol'e Bessarabii. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov v 2-h Tomah, 1918-1940* [Bessarabian Communist Underground. Collection of Documents and Materials in Two Volumes] (Chişinău: 1987-88), vol. 1, 71-72.

it eventually turned out, the manifest was made public before the occupation of any Bessarabian settlement by the Red Army.

In the beginning of May 1919 the temporary Bessarabian Sovnarkom by means of the manifest proclaimed the creation of the Bessarabian Soviet Socialist Republic as a part of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic.<sup>60</sup> In the manifest and in multiple other decrees the Bessarabian Sovnarkom was framing the future legislation of the Bessarabian SSR, which was not significantly different from other early Bolshevik lawmaking: the requisition of the land and its redistribution among the peasants, nationalization of any industrial and financial units, the emancipation of workers and peasants, and the full autonomy of nationalities of Bessarabia in their respective national-cultural management. In reality the Bessarabian Sovnarkom never really controlled any sizable land (the only exception can be the short-term occupation of Bendery after a military incursion on May 27, 1919) either on left or right bank of the Dniester. The Sovnarkom itself initially being created in Odessa stationed in Tiraspol in a railway car in order to be quickly evacuated in case of the advancement of the enemy armies, which happened in the end of August 1919 and led to the dissolution of the Bessarabian Sovnarkom. In general much more real power in the Bessarabian affair possessed two other political structures: the Bessarabian obkom of the RKP(b), which mostly united the underground revolutionary groups of Bessarabia, and the Bessarabian Red Army, which was also established on April 28, 1919<sup>61</sup> and consisted from the Bessarabian émigrés as well as local population of the left bank of the Dniester.<sup>62</sup> The short analysis of the activity of the latter one demonstrates some significant directions of the Bolshevik policy in the region.

---

<sup>60</sup> *Kommunisticheskoe Podpol'e*, 82.

<sup>61</sup> *Kommunisticheskoe Podpol'e*, 73.

<sup>62</sup> On the participation of the local population on the left bank of Dniester, see *Kommunisticheskoe Podpol'e*, 88.

The activity of the Bessarabian divisions of the Red Army were carefully orchestrated by then President and the Chairman of the Sovnarkom of the Revolutionary Ukraine.<sup>63</sup> In fact that was already the second offensive of the revolutionary forces on Bessarabia inspired by C. Rakovsky.<sup>64</sup> The first occurred during his leadership in Rumcherod in the beginning of the 1918. Rakovsky by means of the Bessarabian army supported by the local Bolsheviks sought to revolutionize Bessarabia and consequently provoke the social upheaval in Romania as a whole. These developments in his reasoning could pave the way to the realization of Rakovsky's long-cherished dream of the Communist Balkan Federation.<sup>65</sup> One more consideration came into play. The Revolution of Béla Kun in Hungary and its subsequent war with Romania necessitated the involvement of Soviet army in order to support the World Revolution. The idea of the World Socialist Revolution played at this moment significant role, since among the Bolsheviks the general agreement was that the Russian Revolution would not survive without the successive Revolutions in Western countries. Exactly at the moment of the establishment of the Bessarabian Army the Romanian troops passed to the offensive on the Romanian-Hungarian front.<sup>66</sup> While Bolshevik military operations were rather unsuccessful, they still led to the withdrawal of some of the Romanian divisions from the Hungarian front and their

---

<sup>63</sup> On the role of C. Rakovsky in the military and diplomatic attack on Romania in 1919, see Stelian Tănase (ed) *Racovski: Dosar Secret* [Racovsky: Secret File] (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 113-117.

<sup>64</sup> On the activity of Rakovsky in the region before his transfer to diplomatic work in 1923, see Gus Fagan (ed), *Christian Racovsky: Selected Writings on the Opposition in the USSR, 1923-1930* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980), 22-34; Stelian Tănase, *Clienții lu' Tanti Varvara: Istorie Clandestine* [Auntie Varvara's Clients: Clandestine Stories] (București: Humanitas, 2008), 22-29; Pavel Moraru, *Serviciile Secrete și Basarabia: Dicționar, 1918-1991* [Secret Services and Bessarabia: Dictionary, 1918-1991] (București: Editura Militară, 2008), 221-225.

<sup>65</sup> C. Rakovsky was one of the founding members and the First Secretary of the Central Bureau of the Revolutionary Balkan Social Democratic Labor Federation, established in 1915.

<sup>66</sup> On Racovsky's understanding of the Hungarian implications of the Soviet offensive in Bessarabia see *Bessarabiia na Perekrestke Evropeiskoi Diplomatii: Dokumenty i Materialy* [Bessarabia on the Crossroads of European Diplomacy: Documents and Materials] (Moscow: Indrik, 1996), 267-268.

redeployment to Bessarabia. In any case that did not save Béla Kun's regime. Actively organizing the Soviet attack on Romania C. Rakovsky fell under Lenin's criticism for the prematurity of such move. Lenin believed that it was much more important to secure the industrially rich Donbass area forcing out the counterrevolutionary forces. Nevertheless, these practical considerations did not prevent Lenin from sending a telegram to Béla Kun on the beginning of the Red Army's military campaign in Bessarabia.<sup>67</sup>

How can we assess the experience of the Bessarabian SSR? Even though the case of the Bessarabian SSR fell to a significant extent into oblivion in the historiography, nevertheless, a small debate between the Soviet (and as a consequence some of the Transnistrian) and Romanian historians exists. The Soviet historians tended to portray the Bessarabian SSR as the first example of the Moldovan Soviet statehood<sup>68</sup>, though there still existed certain ambiguities due to the provisional character of the temporary Bessarabian Sovnarkom. The Romanian historians rejected this conclusion emphasizing that the Bessarabian SSR was just a cover for the Bolshevik expansionist plans.<sup>69</sup> At the same time rejecting idea of the continuity of the state-building the Romanian historians implicitly still draw their own continuity in terms of the expansionist character of both the Bessarabian SSR and the Moldovan ASSR. Thus, the difference was in lifespan not in essence. Yet, that conclusion oversimplifies the issue, neglecting the differences of the contexts, in which both Republics emerged. The Bessarabian SSR was part of the campaign, initiated first of all by Racovsky, of the export of Revolution through Romania to Central and South-Eastern

---

<sup>67</sup> *Kommunisticheskoe Podpol'e*, 89

<sup>68</sup> A.M. Lazarev, *Moldavskaia Sovetskaia Gosudarstvennost' i Bessarabskii Vopros* [Moldovan Soviet Statehood and the Bessarabian Question] (Kishinev: Cartea Moldovenească, 1974), 558-559; Afteniuk, *Leninskaia Natsional'naia Politika*, 200-201.

<sup>69</sup> Ludmila Rotari, *Mișcarea Subversivă din Basarabia în Anii 1918-1924* [Subversive Movement in Bessarabia in 1918-1924] (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 124-126; Mihail Bruhis, *Rusia, România și Basarabia. 1812, 1918, 1924, 1940* [Russia, Romania and Bessarabia] (Chișinău: Editura Universitas, 1992), 211.

Europe. In the subsequent chapters I will demonstrate, how similar initial considerations eventually, in the process of the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR, gradually gave way to more internally determined processes. In 1924 the idea of the World Revolution had much less weight than in 1919.

At the same time, the events of the 1919 were a certain formative experience for Bessarabian Bolsheviks (many of whom later occupied major posts in the government of the MASSR) as well as local population of the left bank of the Dniester. Probably for the first time in history the population of future MASSR encountered more or less massive propaganda campaign stressing their ethnic proximity to the Bessarabian population as well as the necessity of the liberation of Bessarabia from Romanian capitalists and landlords. In addition, the Bessarabian Sovnarkom established the first local newspaper, targeting the Bessarabian issue, under the name “*Krasnaia Bessarabiia*” (Red Bessarabia). Later the Society of the Bessarabians in the Soviet Union would use this name for their own newspaper.

#### *Future leadership of the Moldovan ASSR in the Bessarabian revolutionary underground*

Bessarabian revolutionary underground has quite rich historiography. Yet, the studies are usually influenced significantly by the political agenda of the authors. Both opposing views to a significant extent reflect the rhetoric and argumentation of the Soviet/Moldovan and Romanian authorities during the interwar period.<sup>70</sup> The Soviet historians tried to create a heroic, romantic of the Bessarabian underground, which came up from all the groups of the Bessarabian population and embodied the revolt of the toiling

---

<sup>70</sup> For example, debate on Tatar-bunary uprising in 1924, Gh. Tatarescu, *Internaționala a III-a și Basarabia* [The Third International and Bessarabia] (București: 1925); the Soviet view, A. Badulescu, *Vosstanie v Tatar-bunare* [Tatar-bunary Uprising] (Moscow: 1925).

masses.<sup>71</sup> The Romanian historians on the contrary took pains to demonstrate that Bolshevism was an alien ideology for the Romanians, which the Soviet authorities imported.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the Soviet government supported the revolutionary communist activity in Bessarabia, but it would be incorrect to consider it simply imported by Bolshevik agents. The Soviet propaganda fell on the fertile ground of grievances, which emerged as the result of the poor Romanian administration in Bessarabia accompanied by repressions and oppression.<sup>73</sup> Romanian authorities were especially concerned with the numerous minority groups, who became the most likely candidates for the accusations of “Bolshevism.” As a consequence, the minority groups, foremost Jews<sup>74</sup>, suffered from direct political oppression, which in turn pushed them increasingly into the revolutionary activities. Yet, it would be incorrect to consider the communist underground in Bessarabia exclusively as an endeavor of the minority groups.

For the purposes of the thesis the Bessarabian revolutionary underground is important, since a significant part of the party leadership in the Moldovan ASSR came from the Bessarabian underground. It can be argued that the experience of the Revolutionary underground in Romania influenced their later views on the nation-building policies in the

---

<sup>71</sup> Ia. Kopanskii, *Neustrashimye Boicy* [Fearless Fighters] (Kishinev: 1977); the most detailed and comprehensive Soviet study of the Bessarabian underground, A.S. Esaulenco (ed), *Bor'ba Trudeashchihsia Bessarabii za Svoio Osvobojdenie i Vossoedinenie s Sovetskoi Rodinoi (1918-1940 gg.)* [The Struggle of the Bessarabian Toilers for their Liberation and Reunification with the Soviet Fatherland] (Kishinev 1970).

<sup>72</sup> Pavel Moraru, *La Hotarul Românesc al Europei: din Istoria Siguranței Generale în Basarabia, 1918-1940* [On the Romanian Border of Europe: From the History of General Siguranța in Bessarabia, 1918-1940] (București: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2008). Pavel Moraru inserts the idea of Bolshevik import into his quite anti-Semitic, even neo-Fascist argument.

<sup>73</sup> For the account of the poor Romanian administration in Bessarabia see Rebecca Haynes, “Historical introduction,” in Rebecca Haynes (ed), *Moldova, Bessarabia, Transnistria* (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 2003), 103-110; Mariana Hausleitner, *Deutsche und Juden in Bessarabien, 1814-1941 : zur Minderheitenpolitik Russlands und Grossrumäniens* (München: IKGS Verlag, 2005), 98-112.

<sup>74</sup> On the participation of Jews in the Bessarabian revolutionary underground, Michael Bruchis, *Nations-Nationalities-People: a Study of the Nationalities Policy of the Communist Party in Soviet Moldavia* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1984), 141-197.

Moldovan ASSR. Many Bessarabian émigrés were forming their militantly anti-Romanian attitudes already in that period encountering the Romanian oppression. Yet, not all of the Bessarabian émigrés, future leaders of the Moldovan ASSR, spent the time before 1924 in the Bessarabian underground. In this respect it is illuminating to compare the pre-1924 experience of two major figures in MASSR in the 1920s: Grigorii Staryi<sup>75</sup> and Iosif Badeev.<sup>76</sup> Badeev up to 1924 was the active participant of the communist underground movement in Bessarabia being subject of constant oppression by Romanian authorities. Only in 1924 he secretly crossed the river to settle in MASSR. In contrast to Badeev, Staryi, though also starting as an active revolutionary, after 1919 was a rare visitor in Bessarabia, despite the fact that he was first elected as the head of the Bessarabian underground. Most of time before 1924 he spent in the Soviet Union either studying at the Communist University of Ya. M. Sverdlov or participating in the work of the Odessan gubkom of the KP(b)U. Staryi was still participating in the activity of the Bessarabian underground, but he was definitely not on the frontline and did not experience personally the Romanian harsh policies towards the Bessarabian communists. Therefore, it can be argued that these different experiences of two MASSR leaders to some extent explain the differences in their respective positions on nation-building in the Moldovan ASSR: the radical anti-Romanian stance of the Moldovanizer Badeev and much more tolerant and opened towards the Romanian influence view of the “latinizator” Staryi.

---

<sup>75</sup> Grigorii Staryi (real name - Borisov) was the Chairman of the MASSR's Revkom in 1924-1925, TsIK MASSR in 1925-1926, Sovnarkom MASSR in 1926-1928 and later 1932-1937; he was the leader of so-called “rumynizators” (Romanizer) in MASSR. Yet, as I will demonstrate later “Romanizer” is not an accurate enough term to describe Staryi's views.

<sup>76</sup> Iosif Badeev (real name – either Suslik or Vanshtein) was the First Secretary of the Moldovan obkom of KP(b)U (1924-1928) and the leader of the “samobytniks” (indigenizers or Moldovanizers).

### *Soviet nationality policies and Ukrainianiization on the left bank of the Dniester before 1924*

By 1921 the Red Army had definitely pressed out from the Dniester region both local counterrevolutionaries as well as foreign interventionist. The period of War Communism ended and it was time for peaceful socialist building and reconstruction. However as it turned out the postwar socialist reconstruction encountered multiple obstacles. The situation on the left bank of the Dniester was not so peaceful. Major obstacle in the socialist building was banditry. The reports from the region constantly cited the examples of different groups operating on the border of the Ukrainian SSR and undermining many local projects.<sup>77</sup> Quite often Soviet authorities accused Romania of organizing and infiltrating of the bands to the Soviet territory.<sup>78</sup> Most notable activity concentrated in the region of Balta, forcing local authorities to order the creation of the Special Combrigades that consisted of the members of the party and sought to establish order in the region.<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, banditry was not the main factor undermining the cultural construction in the Dniester region: lack of both material and human resources, indifference of the local population<sup>80</sup> contributed much more to the failure of the policies. The situation was complicated by the lack of clear central directives on the issue of nationality policies both in Ukraine in general and towards its national minorities specifically. Up to April 1923, when on the XII Congress of TsK RKP(b) the definite turn against Great Russian chauvinism and towards the *natsionalizatsiia-korenizatsiia* of non-Russian nationalities was articulated, the

---

<sup>77</sup> For the example of such report *Sovetskoe Stroitel'stvo v Levoberejnyh Raionah Moldavii, 1921-24. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov* [Soviet Building on the Left Bank of Dniester, 1921-24. Collection of Documents and Materials] (Chişinău: Stiinta, 1977), 78.

<sup>78</sup> *Sovetskoe Stroitel'stvo*, 165

<sup>79</sup> *Sovetskoe Stroitel'stvo*, 68

<sup>80</sup> *Sovetskoe Stroitel'stvo*, 52

national question in the Soviet Union remained heavily discussed topic.<sup>81</sup> Consequently the clear-cut strategy was absent. What was left, were quite ambiguous notions of the “right of the nations for self-determination” and “respect and support of national cultures.” This vagueness left significant space for the interpretation. Not surprisingly given the extent of other undertaken tasks in the beginning the Ukrainian authorities restricted themselves to some very basic nation-building policies such as the use of native language at certain levels of education and the creation of the national soviets. At the same time due to the lack of the resources and certain reluctance on the side of local authorities and population these policies were scarcely implemented. Still I will point out some of the initiatives articulated or implemented on the local level in the region under study.

Authorities paid significant attention to the education of the *natsmen* (national minorities) in their native languages. At the same time it focused exclusively on the first years of education. On the November 11, 1920 the meeting of the Moldovan teachers of the Tiraspol region emphasized the necessity of the propaganda and education in native language due to the “prejudices of the Moldovan population against the social reforms.” Afterwards an explanation followed according to which the study exclusively in Moldovan language was restricted only to two first years, when the focus in on reading and writing abilities. In subsequent years Russian language as a subject was introduced, while the study of general subjects should have been carried out in Russian due to the lack of Moldovan-speaking cadres.<sup>82</sup> Half a year later the secretary of the Moldovan section of education in

---

<sup>81</sup> For the early Soviet debates on nationality problem, see Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Helene Carrere D'Encausse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917-1930* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1992), 99-138.

<sup>82</sup> *Kul'tura Moldavii za Gody Sovetskoi Vlasti. Sbornik Dokumentov v 4-h Tomah* [The Culture of Moldova during the Years of Soviet Power. Collection of Documents in 4 Volumes] (Chişinău: 1975-1976) vol. 2 p. 18. It is interesting that the meeting decided to use Latin script for Moldovan language that subsequently led to the publishing of a small number of ABC books in Latin script, *Ibid*, 21. It is difficult to establish the reasons of such decision basing on surviving sources, especially taking into consideration its limited effect.

Tiraspol region had noted that in 54 Moldovan schools in the region only few Moldovan-speaking teachers were available; therefore the education in Moldovan was possible only in several schools.<sup>83</sup> These facts are quite telling and depict the general situation in the Moldovanization before 1924. To some extent that reflects also the situation in the field of Ukrainianization, even though the latter was much more explicitly proclaimed in the legislative acts and directives.

In general the Ukrainianization of the region is reflected much more explicitly in the documents of the region. For example, already in spring 1920 Ukrainian language and even history appeared as the subjects as school, though only in last two classes. Since at that time few pupils had passed through the whole cycle of education, the impact of that decision was already limited in its formulation.<sup>84</sup> Documents also demonstrate the relative success of Ukrainianization in comparison with Moldovanization. Such specific issues as Ukrainian theatrical performances<sup>85</sup> or the reconstruction of the monument of Taras Shevchenko in the village Tashlyk on May 1, 1922<sup>86</sup> are mentioned. At the same time similar reports on the lack of local initiative and Ukrainian-speaking specialist were frequently sent.<sup>87</sup>

The decision of the XII Congress of the RKP(b) had dramatically accelerated the pace of Ukrainianization. The central Ukrainian authorities issued abundance of decrees in an attempt to deepen and broaden Ukrainianization process. Therefore the nation-building policies of KP(b)U between April 1923 and April 1925 are often referred to as

---

<sup>83</sup> *Kul'tura Moldavii*, vol.2, 20.

<sup>84</sup> *Kul'tura Moldavii*, vol.2, 9.

<sup>85</sup> *Kul'tura Moldavii*, vol.1, 49.

<sup>86</sup> *Sovetskoe Stroitel'stvo*, 206. It is important to notice that village Tashlyk was predominantly Moldovan. In 1923 from 33 members of the local village soviet 28 were Moldovans. Nevertheless that did not prevent local authorities and population from the reconstruction of the monument of the Ukrainian poet. That fact demonstrates both the lack of the developed national conscience and the intertwining character of the Ukrainianization and Moldovanization at this period.

<sup>87</sup> For instance *Kul'tura Moldavii*, vol.2, 22.

“Ukrainianization by decree,” emphasizing the tremendous activity of the bureaucratic apparatus and largely indifferent attitude to its implementation on the local level.<sup>88</sup>

In general, the nation-building on the left bank of the Dniester before 1924 had produced ambiguous results. Due to the lack of resources it failed to nationalize the population, moreover different nation-building projects were creating peculiar mixes of policies. In these circumstances the prerevolutionary predominance of Russian culture was preserved. At the same time during this period the first attempts for strict ethno-national categorization of population were carried out. Statistical data on the national composition of the villages, towns, soviets became very popular in the reports. People were asked to define their national identification that presupposed their specific treatment in the sphere of cultural and nation-building policies. The theory, though, turned out to be irreconcilable with the actual practices and capacities of the state apparatus. The vigorous Ukrainianization campaign starting in April 1923, though still remaining on the level of declarations and bureaucratic paper production, posed the question of Moldovan population more sharply. If it was going to be used in the struggle with Romania for Bessarabia, it should have been done as soon as possible. Otherwise, taking into consideration weak national identity of the Moldovans in the region and their historically Slavic-influenced character, the full-scale Ukrainianization campaign in Ukrainian SSR could have also led to the radical Ukrainianization of the Moldovan population.

---

<sup>88</sup> For the account of Ukrainianization see Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 75-124; James E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918-1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 86-119.

## The Establishment of the Moldovan ASSR and First State-Building Steps

### *The Memorandum on the Necessity of Creation of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic*

In the first half of the 1920s there were two major groups that were debating and advocating the Moldovan-Bessarabian issue in the Soviet Union. One consisted of Bessarabian émigrés to the Soviet Union, another – of the Romanian émigrés. These groups often conflicted; sometimes more rarely found common grounds. One common point was the assertion that Bessarabia should have been revolutionized, at the same time the opinions on the purpose of that process differed. While for the Bessarabians this was already an end in itself and potential subsequent revolution in Romania in general was desirable but not essential, for the Romanians the sole goal was the all-Romanian socialist revolution and Bessarabia was just a trigger.<sup>89</sup> The views also differed on the future of Bessarabia. The majority of Bessarabians anticipated the separation of the region from Romania and the creation of autonomous political unit within the Soviet Union. Romanian communists envisaged the future of Bessarabia as a part of the Socialist Romania.

In April 1921 in Moscow the “First All-Russian Conference of the Communist Romanians and Bessarabians” took place. It coincided with the Third Congress of the Comintern. The main goal of the Conference was to unite Bessarabian and Romanian émigrés in their common party work. The Conference itself was mostly the initiative of the Moscow-based Romanian communists led by Ion Dicescu-Dik<sup>90</sup>. Eventually the Conference turned out to be an attempt of the Romanian communists to assert their predominance in the

---

<sup>89</sup> It is important to note that the above-mentioned division demonstrates more tendencies than clear-cut categories. Among Romanian émigrés were communists with more small-scale goals, as well as some Bessarabians had more large-scale ambitions.

<sup>90</sup> Ion Dicescu-Dik (1893-1938) – Romanian communist émigré. Dik was one of the most active figures in the Moldovan/Bessarabian affair. He advocated the necessity of the radical Romanianization in the Moldovan ASSR. In the Soviet Union he worked as a Lecturer at the KUNMZ and KUTV.

Bessarabian affairs and in the Romanian-Bessarabian Bureau of the Moscow Committee of RKP(b). They succeeded in that attempt, forming the Central Bureau almost exclusively of the non-Bessarabian Romanians. At the same time such approach alienated Bessarabians, and later in the process of the creation of the Moldovan ASSR the personal grievances reinforced the differences in the political and national outlooks. Thus, in a way ostracized from the high politics in Moscow, the majority of Bessarabians returned either to the South-Eastern regions of the Ukrainian SSR to continue their work in the local party committees or to the Bessarabian underground. As a result, a certain division of labor emerged: Romanians communists, stationed in Moscow, engaged in large-scale Comintern issues, while Bessarabians mostly concentrated on local problems on the both banks of the Dniester.<sup>91</sup> Later this division would play in the hands of Bessarabians, when Ukrainian authorities would prefer to entrust them the political organization of the Moldovan ASSR.

The “Memorandum on the Necessity of the Creation of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic” (February 4, 1924) was largely the product of the Romanian émigré communists<sup>92</sup>, though the idea was in the air. In the recollections the Marshal of the Soviet Union S.M. Budennyi recalled that already in 1923 G.I. Kotovskii and M.V. Frunze discussed with him in his apartment the establishment of the Republic on the left bank of the Dniester.<sup>93</sup> After the opening of the archives historians have reconstructed more or less carefully the events that followed from the appearance of the Memorandum to the

---

<sup>91</sup> Oleg Galushchenko, *Bor'ba mejdu Rumynizatorami i Samobytnikami v Moldavskoi ASSR (20-e gody)* [The Struggle between Romanizers and Indigenizers in the Moldovan ASSR (1920s)] <http://www.iatp.md/articles/borba.htm> (Retrieved on June 6, 2010).

<sup>92</sup> The text of the Memorandum can be found in Argentina Gribincea, Mihai Gribincea and Ion Şişcanu (ed), *Politica de Moldovenizare in R.A.S.S. Moldoveneasca: Culegere de Documente si Materiale* [The Policy of Moldovanization in the Moldovan ASSR: Collection of Documents and Materials] (Chişinău: Civitas, 2004), 28-32.

<sup>93</sup> *Obrazovanie Moldavskoi SSR*, 44-45.

establishment of the Moldovan ASSR and have drawn some important connections.<sup>94</sup> In the existing historiography the discussion of the Memorandum usually confines itself to the statement of its expansionist character, embodied in the idea of the expansion of the Socialist Revolution.<sup>95</sup> At the same time a more careful look on the members of the initiative group<sup>96</sup> provides some hints on the possible explanation of the expansionist character of the document. The list consisted almost exclusively of the Moscow-based Romanian émigrés and Romanian communists actively involved in the Comintern affairs. It is revealing, indeed, that no major Bessarabian leader, such as Staryi, Badeev, Grinshtein, who were later on the leading position in MASSR, signed the document. The Memorandum envisaged Moldovan SSR's crucial role in revolutionizing of Bessarabia and consequently Romania with possible implications for the Balkan Peninsula and Central Europe. The document mentioned only as secondary the role of the Moldovan republic for the enhancement of the economic and cultural level of the population.<sup>97</sup> As it became clearer from later discussions (in more detail in the next chapter) the Romanian émigrés, foremost I. Dik, considered the revolution in Romania to be the main purpose of the Moldovan SSR. Hence, that goal subordinated and determined the envisaged strategy of the nation-building in the Republic. Dik believed that a total Romanization should have been carried out on the

---

<sup>94</sup> Oleg Galușcenko, "Crearea Republicii Sovietice Socialiste Moldovenești (R.A.S.S.M.)" [The Creation of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic] *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, no. 3-4 (1997); Gheorghe E. Cojocaru, "Studiul," [Study] in Gheorghe E. Cojocaru (ed), *Cominternul și Originele "Moldovenismului"* [Comintern and the Origins of "Moldovenism"] (Chișinău: Civitas, 2009); *O Istorie a Regiunii Transnistrene: Din Cele mai Vechi Timpuri până în Prezent* [A History of the Transnistrian Region: From the Ancient Times to the Present Day] (Chișinău: Civitas, 2007), 265-266.

<sup>95</sup> For example, Anton Moraru, "Destinul unui Document," [The Fate of a Document] *Cugetul*, no 5-6 (1992): 53-54; Ioan Popa, Luiza Popa, *Românii, Basarabia și Transnistria* [Romanians, Bessarabia and Transnistria] (București: Editura Fundația Europeană Titulescu, 2009), 53.

<sup>96</sup> The name "Initiative Group" is sometimes used to designate the group of Romanian Communist émigrés, who on February 4, 1924 issued the first Memorandum, that launched the process of the creation of the Moldovan ASSR.

<sup>97</sup> *Politica de Moldovenizare*, 30.

left bank of the Dniester, and in that case the future republic would perform two functions: training of the skilled revolutionaries for the subversive activities all over Romania and propaganda once again targeting Romania in general. Taking into consideration this intent and agenda one should ask the question: why did then Romanian émigrés propose to create a Moldovan and not a Romanian SSR?

One possible answer to that question points to the necessity to gain the support of G.I. Kotovskii and M.V. Frunze, two influential army leaders in the Civil War. The support of the latter was crucial due to his influence both in Ukrainian SSR and Bolshevik leadership in general. At the same time Kotovskii played more the role of the big shot in the Memorandum, adding to it by his name more weight. Since both Kotovskii and Frunze were of Bessarabian mixed origin and in addition had unpleasant memories of the encounters with the Romanian authorities during and after the Civil War, they could have felt certain uneasiness with the Romanianizing project of Dik and his colleagues. But the problem was even more complex than just the personal opinion of two or more influential Bolsheviks. Most likely, Romanian émigrés were taking into the consideration that the project of the Romanian SSR could have been rejected by the local population of Transnistria, thus undermining the entire endeavor. The mostly illiterate rural Romanian-speaking population had no or quite weak sense of national identity. As contemporary foreign travelers emphasized, even in Romanian Bessarabia the local population identified itself either by reference to their locality or as Moldovans, which was more a traditional regional designation, usually without strong national and political implications.<sup>98</sup> Significantly Slavicized Romanian-speaking population of Transnistria was largely unfamiliar with

---

<sup>98</sup> Charles Upson Clark, *Bessarabia: Russia and Romania on the Black Sea* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927), [http://depts.washington.edu/cartah/text\\_archive/clark/meta\\_pag.shtml](http://depts.washington.edu/cartah/text_archive/clark/meta_pag.shtml) (Retrieved on June 6, 2010).

Dik's<sup>99</sup> ideas of their ethnic and linguistic proximity and even identity to the Romanians. While the name Moldovans was generally known and acceptable for the majority of the population, the usage of the term Romanians, accompanied by the radical rapid Romanianization, most likely could have been perceived as an imposition and even lead to the grievances of the local population. That would have buried the entire revolutionary endeavor, therefore the "initiative group" chose less provocative designation "Moldovan".

Both possible outlined considerations behind the choice in favor of "Moldovan" underscore a certain degree of ambiguity of the views on the identity of the Transnistrian population even among the most radical Romanizers, such as Dik. Later this choice would prove costly for Dik in his struggle with the Moldovanizers. Dik's equation of Moldovans and Romanians was not that evident to Moscow and Kharkiv<sup>100</sup> authorities, especially when strong opposing voices also existed in the party.

The Memorandum and the subsequent establishment pose several additional questions, which should be addressed. Why the initial intent of the "initiative group" to create a full-fledged republic was substituted in constitutional arrangement by the autonomous republic in the Ukrainian SSR? Why Romanian "initiative group" was almost totally deprived of the right to participate in the life of the republic starting already with the preparatory phase for its establishment? At the same time I. Dik was already drawing the composition of the Moldovan Sovnarkom putting himself on the position of the First Secretary of the Moldovan party regional committee. Why the initial intent to romanianize the republic was substituted by the Moldovanization policies?

---

<sup>99</sup> I use the reference to I. Dik, as the most active and important member of the radical Romanizers. At the same time other Romanian émigrés shared similar views, so the references to Dik in the text should not be taken exclusively as his personal ideas.

<sup>100</sup> The capital of the Ukrainian SSR before 1934.

Historians have explicitly or implicitly addressed some of these questions. Yet, few explanations exist. The classical interpretation of the Romanian historiography suggests that from the beginning the main intent of the Soviet authorities was to deromanianize and assimilate the Romanian-speaking population of Transnistria.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, the Moldovan project was fabricated. Other historians emphasize or add to this explanation the role of the Soviet Ukrainian authorities.<sup>102</sup> They portray the Ukrainian authorities as the vigorous opponents of the Moldovan SSR and unitarian nationalists.<sup>103</sup> In my opinion, the emphasis on the significant role of the Ukrainian authorities in the Moldovan affairs in 1924 is correct. Yet, as I will demonstrate, the attitude of the Ukrainian authorities was more complex, than simple opposition. Moreover, some of the decisions, which historians present as the examples of the Ukrainian nationalism, should be explained from a different point of view. But first, I will outline an explanation, why the Ukrainian authorities acquired such a decisive role in the Moldovan affairs. This endeavor is important also, since historians, who pointed to the role of the Ukrainian factor, at the same time consider that Moscow in a totalitarian manner (that is total control for the historians concerned) controlled all the policies in the Soviet Union. How then was it possible that Kharkiv possessed such a decisive voice in the Moldovan endeavor? As next subchapter will demonstrate, there could have been hardly any talk about the total control in the case under study.

### *Ukrainian problem in the Soviet Union and the question of the Moldovan ASSR*

Ukrainian SSR always occupied specific position in the Soviet Union. It was the richest republic in the USSR except RSFSR. Moreover, it was probably the only Soviet

---

<sup>101</sup> For example, Cojocaru, *Studiul* (I use the reference to differentiate between the quite lengthy Cojocaru's study and the documents published in his book); Negru, *Politica Etnoculturala in R.A.S.S. Moldoveneasca*.

<sup>102</sup> Galușcenko, *Crearea Republicii Sovietice Socialiste Moldovenești*; Cojocaru, *Studiul*, 18-19; O *Istorie a Regiunii Transnistrene*, 266.

<sup>103</sup> Cojocaru, *Studiul*, 18-19; O *Istorie a Regiunii Transnistrene*, 266.

Republic potentially capable of the independent existence. At the same time it was “infected” by strong nationalist feelings. Civil War gave Bolsheviks many important lessons on that issue. That specific position of the Ukrainian SSR led to the ambiguous attitude of Moscow Bolsheviks to it. On the one hand the Ukrainian nationalism should have been suppressed to prevent the possible uprising and secession of the Ukrainian SSR. On the other hand the logic of the Affirmative Action Empire necessitated the promotion of the Ukrainian national culture and Ukrainization. Thus, Bolsheviks encountered a problematic dilemma: being very suspicious – more than in any other part of the Soviet Union – of the local nationalism, Bolsheviks were themselves promoting its certain aspects. Nowhere in the Soviet Union were the mechanisms of the Affirmative Action Empire tested so tensely. Here, it would be useful to point to one of the existing opinions on the creation of the Moldovan ASSR that Moscow Bolsheviks created the Moldovan ASSR in order to struggle with the Ukrainian nationalism.<sup>104</sup> This interpretation is misleading, since its adherents misinterpret the Soviet context in the mid-1920s. Within the framework of *korenizatsiia* Bolsheviks carried out the struggle against local nationalism by positive and not negative means. This would be later demonstrated during the previously-mentioned Shumskii affair (1926) in the Ukrainian SSR. Even though all the instigators of that campaign were eventually criticized and ostracized, the Stalin’s response to it presupposed the acceleration of the Ukrainianization.<sup>105</sup>

The campaign for the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR coincided with specific period in the Soviet-Ukrainian relations. Exactly at that period Ukrainian SSR and RSFSR articulated mutual border claims. In April 1924 Ukrainian SSR ceded to the RSFSR predominantly Russian industrial region on its South-East border due to the economic

---

<sup>104</sup> Iulian Frunțașu, *O Istorie Etnopolitică a Basarabiei, 1812-2002* [An Ethnopolitical History of Bessarabia, 1812-2002] (București, Chișinău: Cartier, 2002), 159.

<sup>105</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 212-228.

considerations. At the same time Ukrainian government pressed on ethno-national grounds for the acquisition of the RSFSR's territories already on its North-East border. After all the Soviet authorities ceded half of the claimed territory to the Ukrainian SSR but the process of negotiation was very long and still left Ukrainians unsatisfied, since they received only part.<sup>106</sup>

Exactly in these circumstances the “initiative group” was claiming another part of the Ukrainian land for its propaganda and revolutionary project. Not surprisingly it encountered little sympathy in the Ukrainian government. The perspective of losing one more region even less economically developed could have hardly given rise to enthusiasm. At the same time it would be a simplification to consider certain opposition to the Moldovan project in the Ukrainian party only nationalist aspirations. Neither in the Ukrainian nor in Russian sections of party there was a uniform perception of the project. For example, the Narkomindel at this moment G.V. Chicherin considered the project inopportune, since it could strengthen Romanian nationalism and irredentism.<sup>107</sup> For the Ukrainian opponents several considerations determined and reinforced their stance. First, indeed can be labeled “nationalist”, but it should be emphasized that it was hardly a cultural nationalism. In the 1920s Soviet Union the right of any nationality for the development of its national culture could hardly be questioned. Yet, what characterized the Ukrainian opponents was the unwillingness to delegate significant authority to the new Republican authorities in such a sensitive region (especially due to the Bessarabian issue), as the Ukrainian-Romanian border. As the result, even a Soviet historian had to recognize that there was much more centralization in the relations between Ukrainian SSR and Moldovan ASSR than between

---

<sup>106</sup> On the Ukrainian-RSFSR border disputes see Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 274-282; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 155-160.

<sup>107</sup> Cited in Galușcenko, *Crearea Republicii Sovietice Socialiste Moldovenești*, 67.

RSFSR and its respective autonomous republics.<sup>108</sup> The border position of the future Republic was another issue of concern. There was a strong fear – Chicherin to some extent also shared it – that in the Moldovan ASSR the Romanian nationalism would prevail and eventually the Republic would break away from the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>109</sup> Even in less radical scenarios small and weak Moldovan Republic could have been a convenient gate for the foreign influences and infiltrations into the Ukrainian SSR and the Soviet Union. In addition, it was evident from the beginning that the population of the Moldovan ASSR would be ethnically mixed. Therefore, for some of the Ukrainian authorities the future fate of the Ukrainian population in the new Republic was a sensitive issue.

Due to all the above-mentioned considerations among the Ukrainian leadership there was a quite strong group that opposed to the establishment of the Moldovan Republic, especially in a full-fledged form. At the same time the Moscow Bolsheviks were reluctant to press the issue passing the Ukrainian authorities. Already detaching part of the territory of the Ukrainian SSR they were afraid that another loss of territory would lead to the strengthening of the Ukrainian nationalist feelings. That excluded the option of the full-fledged Moldovan republic. Mihail Frunze, who was both part of the Ukrainian government and Moscow authorities, understood the existing balances of power quite well. Therefore, being the first to react to the initiative he sent to the TsK RKP(b) and TsK KP(b)U his verdict: “I am personally – for [the initiative], so that Moldovan republic be included in the

---

<sup>108</sup> A.V. Surilov (ed), *Gosudarstvenno-pravovye Akty Moldavskoi SSR (1924-1941 gg.)* [Legal State Documents of the Moldovan SSR] (Kishinev: Cartea Moldovenească, 1963), 9.

<sup>109</sup> On October 11, 1924, a day before the MASSR was officially established the Chairman of the Ukrainian Sovnarkom V. Ya. Chubar' was giving the speech in which he was explaining the reasons for the establishment of the republic. In the speech he clearly made a reference to the discontent on the issue among the Ukrainian authorities asserting that MASSR was not a secessionist project. Thus he was trying to weaken the position of the anti-Moldovan groups, *Alcătuirea Republicii Autonome Sovietice Socialiste Moldovenești: Darea de Seamă Ștenografică a Sessiei a 3-a a VUȚIK-ului, 8-12 Octombrie 1924* [The Establishment of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic: The Stenographic Report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session of VUTsIK, October 8-12, 1924] (Harkiv: 1924), 9-12.

Ukrainian SSR.”<sup>110</sup> Supporting the option of the autonomous republic and consequently in a way self-withdrawing itself from the issue, the Moscow Bolsheviks were making the Moldovan republic to a significant extent an internal affair of the Ukrainian SSR. It was almost *carte blanche* for the Ukrainian authorities on behalf of Moscow.

### *Counting Moldovans – Drawing borders*

After the initial phase of internal party discussions in Kharkiv and Moscow, in which Mihail Frunze played major role, the Ukrainian authorities took first steps in the creation of the Moldovan ASSR. On March 6, 1924, the Odessan section of the KP(b)U resolved the creation of the Moldovan section of KP(b)U.<sup>111</sup> Just on the next day already the Politburo of KP(b)U issued a decree that “considered reasonable from the political point of view to delimitate an Autonomous Moldovan region as part of the Ukrainian SSR.”<sup>112</sup> These two decisions officially launched the organizational process of the Moldovan autonomy. In addition, on May 1, 1924 the first issue of the newspaper *Plugarul Roșu* (Red Ploughman), Moldovan party section’s official gazette, appeared. Yet, many issues remained unclear and, first of all, the number of the Moldovan population in the region and, consequently, the borders of the future autonomy. Already on 18 April 1924, the Ukrainian Politburo considered the decision to establish Moldovan SSR unreasonable due to the lack of ethnographic and territorial data.<sup>113</sup> In the historiography this decision is considered to be

---

<sup>110</sup> *Obrazovanie Moldavskoi SSR*, 45. Frunze was opting that option maybe even despite his own will to see a separate Moldovan SSR.

<sup>111</sup> *Nachalo Bol'shogo Puti. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov k 40-letiiu Obrazovaniia Moldavskoi SSR i Sozdaniia Kompartii Moldavii* [The Beginning of the Long Road. The Collection of Documents and Materials to the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Establishment of the Moldovan SSR and the Creation of the Communist Party of Moldova] (Kishinev: 1964), 33.

<sup>112</sup> Cited in Repida, *Obrazovanie Moldavskoi ASSR*, 91.

<sup>113</sup> Cited in Oleg Galushchenko, *Naselenie Moldavskoi ASSR (1924-1940 gg.)* [Population of the Moldovan ASSR] (Kishinev: Tipografiia Akademii Nauk, 2001), 7-8.

the demonstration of the Ukrainian nationalism and anti-Moldovanism.<sup>114</sup> Most likely, this decision, indeed, reflected to some extent the existence of the anti-Moldovan attitudes in the Ukrainian leadership. Yet, other subsequent Ukrainian decisions demonstrate that this decree did not presuppose the rejection of the idea of the Moldovan autonomy, but only its postponement before the necessary data would be collected. On 29 April 1924, the Ukrainian authorities in Odessa ordered the enhancement of the national-cultural work among the Moldovan population.<sup>115</sup> At the same time the central Ukrainian authorities organized special commission for the collection of ethno-territorial data, which underscored the fact that they considered the question of the Moldovan autonomy opened. At the same time G.I. Kotovskii, who with his cavalry corps stationed at that moment in Transnistria, voluntarily started his own inquiry and calculations. In July 1924 the report of Territorial Commission reached VUTsIK. The results differed dramatically. While Kotovskii's commission found 283 398 Moldovans, the Ukrainian commission reported only the number of 170 451.<sup>116</sup> Even Kotovskii's figures were far from 500.000-800.000 mentioned in the Memorandum from October 12, 1924. Basing upon these discrepancies and ambiguities the Ukrainian authorities reinforced previous decision to postpone the creation of the Moldovan territorial unit.

At this moment the Moscow authorities intervened. On 25 July 1924, Mihail Frunze sent to I. Stalin a note, in which he described the decision of the Ukrainian authorities erroneous.<sup>117</sup> Four days later the Politburo of RKP(b) decided that it was necessary to create a Moldovan Autonomous republic and suggested the TsK of KP(b)U to issue the

---

<sup>114</sup> Cojocar, *Studiul*, 17, 22.

<sup>115</sup> *Obrazovanie Moldavskoi SSR*, 51-52.

<sup>116</sup> *Kul'tura Moldavii*, 71-75.

<sup>117</sup> Cited in *Istoria Partidului Comunist al Moldovei: Studii* [The History of Moldovan Communist Party: Studies] (Chişinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1982), 144-146.

necessary directives.<sup>118</sup> There can be several considerations that would explain the insistence of the Moscow authorities. First, the Ukrainian authorities were discussing the Moldovan issue in several opposing voices. Second, the Moldovan ASSR was crucial for the pressure on Romania, especially after the just failed negotiations in Vienna. Third, due to the borderland position of the future Republic and significant international attention the Soviet authorities could not simply give up the intent to create a Moldovan Republic, when it was already officially voiced and a number of meetings occurred in support of the endeavor. The abandonment of the Moldovan project would make a laughingstock out of the Soviet government in the eyes of the foreign government and give a strong discursive argument for the Romanian diplomats. The decision from July 29, 1924, was roughly the last time, when the Moscow authorities decisively intervened in the process of the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR.

Nevertheless, the problem of the borders and the ethnic composition of the future Moldovan ASSR still remained one of the crucial issues before and after the establishment of the republic. Only in 1926 the all-Soviet census took place and provided the authorities with more or less precise data on the population of the Republic. Before this the authorities possessed only some quite rough numbers, which resulted in certain awkward situations. At the moment of the establishment the Moldovan ASSR occupied a narrow strip of land along the River Dniester. This gave the possibility to create almost the highest possible share of the Moldovan population. On the Third Session of the VUTsIK, on October 11 1924, the Chair of the Ukrainian Sovnarkom V.Ia. Chubar' proclaimed that Moldovans constituted 58% of the 400.000 inhabitants of the established on the next day Republic.<sup>119</sup> As the later census in 1926 demonstrated, Chubar' miscalculated significantly both the share and the

---

<sup>118</sup> *Nachalo Bol'shogo Puti*, 33.

<sup>119</sup> *Alcătuirea Republicii Autonome Sovietice*, 9-10.

total number of the Moldovans in the Republic. According to the census, Moldovans comprised 30.1% out of 572.338 inhabitants of the Moldovan ASSR, Ukrainians – 48.6%, Russians – 8.56%, Jews – 8.5% etc.<sup>120</sup> Thus, Moldovans were neither a majority, nor even the most sizeable group in the Republic.<sup>121</sup> The situation could have been slightly less dramatic, but the territorial revisions, which were taking place from 1924 to 1926<sup>122</sup> reduced already not impressive share of the Moldovans.

Major territorial expansion of the Moldovan ASSR occurred in less than two months after the establishment of the Republic. On November 26, 1924, VUTsIK and Ukrainian Sovnarkom abolished the Balta region and transferred the town Balta and part of the former region to the Moldovan ASSR.<sup>123</sup> Balta became the capital of the Moldovan ASSR. The proclaimed reasons were economic: remoteness of the region from its new center (Pervomaisk) after the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR.<sup>124</sup> Yet, the fact that the town became the capital of the Republic demonstrates that there were other additional considerations that necessitated such redrawing of the borders. There were three candidates for the status of the temporary capital.<sup>125</sup> Tiraspol was the most logical choice judging from the size and the share of the Moldovan population in the town and its surroundings. Birzula

---

<sup>120</sup> Galushchenko, *Naselenie Moldavskoi ASSR*, 10, 13.

<sup>121</sup> That situation created a discursive paradox in the usage of the term *natsmen* in MASSR. Though politically Ukrainians should have been a national minority in MASSR, in numerical dimension they were not. Therefore local authorities were always carefully avoiding the attribution of the term national minority towards the Ukrainians.

<sup>122</sup> For a thorough detailed description of the administrative-territorial changes in the Moldovan ASSR, see K. Stratievskii, "Izmeneniia v Administrativno-Territorial'nom Delenii i v Sostave Naseleniia Moldavskoi ASSR (1924-1940 gg.)," [The Changes in the Administrative Division and Population in the Moldovan ASSR] *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, no 2 (1995): 24-37.

<sup>123</sup> *Nachalo Bol'shogo Puti*, 79.

<sup>124</sup> *Darea de Samă a Congresului Întii al Sfaturilor din RSSA Moldovenească de Deputați, Muncitori, Țărani și Ostași Roși (19-23 Aprilie 1925)* [The Report of the First Congress of Soviets of Deputies, Toilers, Peasants and Red Soldiers from Moldovan ASSR] (Balta: n/a), 21.

<sup>125</sup> Chișinău was considered to be the real (but in fact symbolical) capital of the Moldovan ASSR

(later Kotovsk) was the “economic center of the Republic”<sup>126</sup>, “center of proletariat...vanguard of the Republican development.”<sup>127</sup> In this respect the only advantage of Balta was its relative remoteness from the Romanian border, while Tiraspol and to a lesser extent Birzula were borderline towns. At the same time Balta was predominantly an Ukrainian- and Russian- speaking town, which created significant problems for the Moldovanization campaign. The inclusion of Balta and surrounding areas additionally intensified the conflicts between Moldovanization and Ukrainianization. Throughout the interwar period the necessity to carry out Ukrainianization along with Moldovanization complicated the implementation and significantly limited the effect of the nationality policies, elaborated by the Moldovan leadership. Thus, for example the commission led the practical implementation of *korenizatsiia* in the Moldovan ASSR bore the name “Commission of Ukrainianization and Moldovanization”. Interestingly in the plan for 1927 the local controlling bodies in Balta region should have only been Ukrainianized, while in other regions both Ukrainianize and Moldovanize.<sup>128</sup>

Therefore, when the radical Moldovanizers were becoming increasingly influential in the local leadership (roughly from 1926), the question of the territorial revision emerged. In May 1926 at the Second Moldovan Congress of Soviets the speakers mentioned that there was certain ambiguity and lack of clarity in terms of the Moldovan borders.<sup>129</sup> Later in September the Moldovanizers, particularly P. Chior-Ianachi, were much more explicit

---

<sup>126</sup> Badeev’s speech at the First Moldovan Party Conference, AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 1, d. 15, f. 7. Badeev also added that the center of economic management should be moved to Birzula, since Balta was an inappropriate economic center.

<sup>127</sup> Staryi’s speech at the *Darea de Samă a Congresului Întii al Sfaturilor din RSSA Moldovenească de Deputați, Muncitori, Țărani și Ostași Roși*, 13.

<sup>128</sup> *Politica de Moldovenizare*, 49.

<sup>129</sup> *Darea de Samă Stenografică a S’Ezduului al Doilea al Sfaturilor de Deputați, Muncitori, Țărani și Ostași Roși din RASSM (9-14 Mai 1926)* [The Stenographic Report of the Second Congress of Soviets of Deputies, Toilers, Peasants and Red Soldiers from Moldovan ASSR] (Balta: 1926), 16-17.

calling the Balta region an “eyesore” and a “blind that encloses us from the Moldovan masses.”<sup>130</sup> In 1927 at the Fourth Moldovan Party Conference Chior-Ianachi stated that because of Balta the Ukrainianization and Moldovanization were two equivalent issues. Therefore, Balta should be returned to Ukraine, in order to make Moldovanization a primary object and pursue it at full pace.<sup>131</sup> The Moldovanizers did not manage to convince Ukrainian authorities and their opponents in the Republic to give up the Balta region in order to make the republic more Moldovan. Still under their pressure the capital in 1929 moved to Tiraspol.

### *Building the Moldovan Regional Committee of KP(b)U*

Along with the creation of the Moldovan ASSR another important process took place – the establishment and the building of the Moldovan section of the Ukrainian Communist party. The role of the local party and Komsomol in the organization of the Republic and nation-building process was crucial. It was the center of propaganda, circulation and discussion of the directives and decrees. The Moldovan Committee of the party should have brought the idea of the Moldovan ASSR and Soviet nationality policies to the masses on the left bank of the Dniester. It should have prepared the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR by the collection of factual material on the future parts of the republic, active nation-building propaganda among the local population. In fact the creation and name of the national divisions of party was in itself a powerful symbol of nation-building. Therefore specific attention throughout the interwar period was paid to the involvement of the Moldovan population in the party and Komsomol structure. The Moldovanization of the party apparatus was one of the major objectives of the Soviet nationality policies in the region. That presupposed the learning of the Moldovan language by the acting party

---

<sup>130</sup> AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 1, d. 516, f. 44

<sup>131</sup> *Politica de Moldovenizare*, 72.

members and the increasing involvement of the Moldovans into the party. The latter part was quite successful. By the end of the Five-Year Plan Moldovans accounted for over 25% of local party section, while in 1925 the number was only 6%.<sup>132</sup>

When the Ukrainian authorities established the Moldovan party section, they faced the problem of the forming of the leadership of the newly created unit. It had two options: either to rely on the “initiative group” of the Romanian communists, who by their memorandum triggered the whole affair, or to choose the Bessarabian émigrés who were already for quite long period of time working in Ukraine in the local party committees. In the next chapter I will give certain explanations, why in the mid-1920s’ Soviet context the Bolshevik authorities preferred the Moldovanizing project of the Bessarabians to the Romanizing project of the Romanian Communists. In this subchapter I would like to demonstrate some consideration that might explain the choice in favor of Bessarabians as local party leadership.

The Ukrainian authorities played major role in the choice of the leading group for the Moldovan section of the party. They rejected and even isolated the Romanian “initiative” group for several reasons, even though it could have possibly had more potential and influence to carry out a successful state-building project.<sup>133</sup> First, its plan for the total Romanianization of the region was unsuitable for the Ukrainian authorities, since it was already in spring 1924 clear that future republic would contain sizable Ukrainian population. Second and more importantly, Ukrainian officials were afraid to lose control over the politics in the region. The Ukrainian authorities did not have leverage over the Romanian communists. The latter worked mostly through the channels of Comintern and appealed directly to the Moscow authorities. Moreover, their ambitions and projects to create in the

---

<sup>132</sup> King, *Moldovans*, 73.

<sup>133</sup> In addition, it could have solved the constant interwar problem of the lack of Moldovan-speaking specialists, turning to a richer Romanian resource base.

region kind of semi-military training camp demonstrated that Romanian Communists would hardly accept the strict control of the Ukrainian authorities. From Ukrainian viewpoint the influence of the Romanian émigrés in Moscow also played not in their favor. The Ukrainians were reluctant to give part of their territory under the control of the Romanian communists, who could frequently address to the Moscow authorities neglecting Kharkiv. Third, the Romanian communists made a tactical mistake, not understanding the above-described Soviet-Ukrainian balance of power in relation to the Moldovan issue. Dissatisfied with the course of events and preference for the Bessarabian émigrés in 1924, the Romanian communists, particularly Dik, sent their critical notes foremost to the Moscow authorities. At the same time the Moscow authorities preferred not to intervene in the Ukrainian work on the Moldovan ASSR, unless some vital cases were touched upon. Therefore, the Moscow authorities tended to forward Dik's notes and memorandums for resolutions to the Ukrainian authorities. Not surprisingly, Ukrainian authorities rejected Dik's criticism, since one of two objects of critique were Ukrainian authorities themselves.<sup>134</sup>

In light of these considerations local Bessarabians seemed to suit much more. They were themselves quite suspicious of the Romanian influence. Therefore, the Ukrainian authorities felt more secure for their border areas than in the case of the Romanian émigrés. Bessarabians already worked for some time in the local committees of the Ukrainian party. Hence, they were more familiar to the Ukrainian authorities, since they made part of the Ukrainian party system. In turn, knowing the Ukrainian party balances from the inside the Bessarabian émigrés knew whom and how to address, when the issue of the Moldovan ASSR emerged. At the same time the Bessarabian group had few connections in the Soviet top party management. Hence they could hardly make use of these connections in order to press some issue directly in Moscow without the Ukrainian consent. On the contrary the

---

<sup>134</sup> E.g., Dik's report (January 8, 1925), which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

Bessarabian émigrés had to rely on the Kharkiv in their debate with the Romanian communists, since the Ukrainian authorities had enough political weight, which Bessarabians lacked, to repulse Dik's attacks.

Thus, the choice in favor of the Bessarabian émigrés was some kind of the deal between them and the Ukrainian authorities. Bessarabian assumed the local party leadership and got the support of the Ukrainian authorities in their struggle with the Romanian group. The Ukrainian authorities, in their turn, got the guarantees that the future developments in the Moldovan ASSR would be under their control. This control acquired legal status in the Moldovan Constitution, where even such usually autonomous local Commissariats as the Commissariat of Enlightenment was subject to strict control by the Ukrainian authorities.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, even the choice in favor of Bessarabians did not resolve all the issues concerned with nation-building in the Moldovan ASSR, since among the Bessarabians almost diametrically opposite views existed.

### *The myths of the Moldovan ASSR*

The story of the creation of the Moldovan ASSR is a story of a contested affair. Various forces both inside (groups within the Soviet and Ukrainian leadership) and outside the country (foremost, Romanian authorities and intellectuals) questioned the necessity of the creation of the Moldovan ASSR. In addition, the population of the Moldovan ASSR was not universally enthusiastic. The non-Moldovan groups expressed even resentment, while Moldovans initially did not actively engage into the process of the establishment of the Republic. Therefore, the local and Soviet/Ukrainian authorities brought several myths into play in order to legitimize the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR and its subsequent existence. In this small subchapter I will only outline the main myths of MASSR, since they

---

<sup>135</sup> "Konstituciia AMSSR" [Constitution of MASSR] in Surilov (ed), *Gosudarstvenno-pravovye Akty Moldavskoi SSR*, 38.

influenced significantly the nationality policies in the region and were a permanent point of reference for the local authorities and population.

The reference to the subjugated position of Bessarabia in Greater Romania became the constant discursive figure before and after the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR. The “initiative group” already used it in the Memorandum from February 4, 1924 but more importantly for the local legitimization of the Moldovan ASSR the local authorities introduced it into the propaganda. Almost all the speeches, articles, meetings in one way or another referred to the “Bessarabian brothers”. Across the thesis there will be several examples of such references. That discourse fell on rather fertile ground, since the wave of emigration from Bessarabia to the opposite bank of the Dniester stably supplied local population with new examples of atrocities. The images of suffering Bessarabia and the heroic resistance of its population occupied crucial place in local newspapers, political and literary publications. The newspaper *Krasnaia Bessarabiia* (Red Bessarabia) published in Moscow by Bessarabian émigrés made the symbolic reference to Bessarabia already in its title. The issue of the Romanian Bessarabia formed the central narrative of the writer D. Milev, who was considered the most talented locally bred literator in the Moldovan ASSR.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, after the Tatar-bunary uprising Henri Barbusse propagated the image of Bessarabian sufferings on the international scale.<sup>137</sup>

In order to legitimize the creation of the Moldovan ASSR the myth of Lenin was actively used. Definitely the references to Lenin were a common practice, especially in the field of nationality policies, which was often referred to as “Leninist nationality policy”. Nevertheless, in the case of Moldovan ASSR that practice gained specific impetus in the

---

<sup>136</sup> A collection of Milev’s works, D. Milev, *Opere* [Works] (Chişinău: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1958).

<sup>137</sup> Henri Barbusse, *Palachi: Belyi Terror na Balkanah* [The Butchers: White Terror in the Balkans] (Moscow: 1927). Original French name of the book: *Les Bourreaux*.

form of “timely” Lenin’s death in the beginning of 1924, when the whole project started. In light of his death and specific Lenin’s attitude to the nationality question, the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR was portrayed as the realization of deceased leader’s behest and even kind of testament. As one of the local party officials slightly clumsily put it: “The Moldovan SSR will be a luxuriant wreath of roses on the grave of comrade Lenin.”<sup>138</sup> As Nina Tumarkin mentioned: “Lenin’s name – like his body, his portrait, and his writings – continued to emanate power after his death.”<sup>139</sup>

In the discourse of the Moldovan ASSR Moldovans were constantly referred to as the most backward nationality.<sup>140</sup> Special attention in that respect Moldovan authorities devoted to Moldovan women, who were considered to be the most backward part of the society.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, many decrees and policies specifically addressed the issue of the growth of the Moldovan women’s cultural level and their participation in socialist building. The Moldovan backwardness constantly featured in the local publications and the speeches of the party officials. Despite the insulting potential of such definition, the Soviet local officials reversed it to demonstrate the benefits of the Soviet power. First of all, the party officials used the reference to backwardness to legitimize the creation of the Moldovan ASSR itself. Since Moldovans were the most backward nation, the only possibility to preserve their national culture and at the same time disarm local nationalism was to be found in the creation of a separate administrative-territorial unit. In addition, emphasizing the Moldovan backwardness, local officials were trying to create contrast and stress more

---

<sup>138</sup> *Obrazovanie Moldavskoi SSR*, 90.

<sup>139</sup> Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!: the Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 152.

<sup>140</sup> For instance, see *Darea de Samă a Congresului Întii al Sfaturilor din RSSA Moldovenească de Deputați, Muncitori, Țărani și Ostași Roși*, 7; *Politica de Moldovenizare*, 66-67.

<sup>141</sup> *Politica de Moldovenizare*, 79.

explicitly any successes of the nation-building in the republic. And, of course, local officials readily used the “backwardness” explanation to excuse their own failures.

The “backwardness myth” allows us partly to explain the peculiar phenomenon that can be called “economical nation-building”.<sup>142</sup> The logic of *korenizatsiia* presupposed the strong emphasis on the creation of industry in the non-Russian territories. That should have raised the level of culture of local population, create labor class and therefore draw the non-Russian population closer to the Bolshevik ideas. Nevertheless, that was not the case in Moldovan ASSR.<sup>143</sup> From its very beginning the “economical nation-building” emphasized the inherently agricultural character of the region. It was not only a rhetorical structure but had real effect on the policies in MASSR. Few significant industrial objects were built in MASSR in the interwar period – several power plants and light industries were constructed. In the 1920s local party meetings discussed the necessity of the relocation of the resources from the technical schools to the agricultural ones, since the former were serving only the needs of the national minorities (first of all, Russian, Jews and Germans), while only the latter could provide proper education for the Moldovans.<sup>144</sup> Publications on economic geography of the region also underlined the inherently agricultural character of the region.<sup>145</sup> In the 1930s after the first five-year plan such approach was attacked for being

---

<sup>142</sup> A proper term can be also “nationalization of economy,” but due to its ambiguous meaning (especially in the Soviet context) and reference to economical, rather than nation-building sphere, I prefer to use the above-mentioned term.

<sup>143</sup> It was not specific to the Moldovan ASSR but in general to the border areas. Already in 1923 a decision envisaged the removal of all the industry from the border areas of Ukraine as a security measure to prepare for the event of war, Chandler, *Institutions of Isolation*, 57.

<sup>144</sup> *Kul'tura Moldavii* vol. 2 59. Additionally the agricultural disciplines were introduced in the educational curriculum of ordinary schools, *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>145</sup> For example, Efodiev's book stated that Moldova was an agricultural region and portrayed the prospects for industries only in form of the processing agricultural goods, I. Efodiev, *Geografia Moldovei* [Geography of Moldova] (Balta: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1929).

anti-socialist<sup>146</sup>, but in practice no real changes in the industrialization of the region occurred.

The perception of the existence of Moldovans as a nationality separate from Romanians can also be considered a myth of the Moldovan ASSR. The existence of a separate nationality, which requires its own statehood, is part of almost every nation-building project. Yet, in the Moldovan case various groups debated fiercely on the issue of the Moldovan identity. Its recognition was not uniform. Moreover, the settled views could be renegotiated, when the context or balance of power would change. The following chapters will focus to a significant extent on these debates and the explanation of the crucial political choices on this issue.

---

<sup>146</sup> AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 1, d. 2401, f. 42.

## *Korenizatsiia* on the Moldovan Soil: Moldovanization Campaign, 1924-1932

### *Soviet nationality policies in the 1920s*

In 1923 the Twelfth Party Congress officially adopted the strategy that became predominant in the Soviet nationality policies until at least 1932. *Korenizatsiia*<sup>147</sup> (indigenization, nativization) was never officially abandoned but after 1932 it acquired a background position in comparison with other developments, some of which I will discuss in the next chapter. The Soviet nationality policies elaborated in the early 1920s were designed as a temporary concession required due to the adaptation of Marxism to Russian Imperial realities. The Bolshevik Revolution succeeded in Marxist terms in the backward country which lacked mature bourgeois society and the proletariat. The situation was even worse in non-Russian parts of the former Romanov Empire. In order to fit the historical development into the Marxist phased scheme and thus legitimize the October Revolution the Bolshevik leadership proclaimed the February Revolution as the bourgeois Revolution. Even though skipping the bourgeois historical stage in less than one year on the symbolical level, Lenin and other Bolsheviks were convinced that on the socio-economical and political level the bourgeois development could not be passed so easily and quickly. The Civil War reinforced that conviction. Since nationalism was a necessary, though temporary, part of the bourgeois development and the predominant majority of the peoples of the former Russian Empire did not pass that stage or were in its beginning, the Bolsheviks had to come to terms with nationalism on their road to socialism. On the abstract level the Soviet nationality policies in the interwar period, especially in the 1920s, were similar to other Bolshevik deviations from classical Marxism, such as NEP (New Economic Policy) union (*smychka*) of workers and peasants.

---

<sup>147</sup> Stalin preferred and used during his lifetime the name "*natsionalizatsiia*".

The First World War and to a larger extent the Civil War demonstrated to Bolsheviks the strength of nationalism and its ability to attract the representatives even of such presumably loyal to Marxism groups as workers. During the years of the Civil War strategic and tactical considerations turned the Bolsheviks to the national movements. Strategically this policy fitted the Bolshevik negation of imperialism (in their case Russian); therefore the national movements could be perceived as the struggle against the imperial oppression. Tactically the Bolsheviks required as many allies as possible to defeat the internal counter-revolutionaries and foreign intervention. Hence, they reconciled with nation-oriented Marxists such as Ukrainian *Borotbists* and even the Bund, some of whom later joined the Bolshevik Party.<sup>148</sup>

Since the national factor was so persistent and for the peoples of the Soviet Union the national stage was inescapable, the Bolsheviks should have found the solution to the national question. They came up with the strategy, according to which the Bolshevik Party would assume the leadership over the national development of the Soviet nationalities. It would promote the national cultures and Soviet nationalities, thus disarming the “real” nationalists and depriving their ideology of the appeal among the Soviet population.<sup>149</sup> At the same time that strategy targeted Great Russian chauvinism, since only non-Russians benefited from the Bolshevik promotion of nationalities. Putting the strategy in a larger context Stephen Kotkin argued that the Soviet Union elaborated it in contrast to the Imperial

---

<sup>148</sup> Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 110-125.

<sup>149</sup> Some major works on the Soviet nationality policies, on which I base this subchapter, include, Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*; in a more concise form Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism,” in. Ronald Grigor Suny, Terry Martin, *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 67-90; Terry Martin borrows his argument to a significant extent from Yuri Slezkine, “The Soviet Union as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53 (1994): 414–52; similar argument from the perspective of the political science, Rogers Brubaker, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account,” *Theory and Society* 23 (1994): 47-78.

Russia continental empire, British and French maritime empires and the American unitary approach.<sup>150</sup>

Ronald Grigor Suny distinguishes three main directions of *korenizatsiia*: support of native language and culture, creation of national intelligentsia and political elite and formal institutionalization of ethnicity in the state apparatus.<sup>151</sup> To this the territorialization of nationalities in the national units of different levels (republics, autonomous republics, districts etc) should be added, which was not a formal part of the 1923 resolution, but was a common practice already in the first years after the Civil War.

At the same time the initial goal of *korenizatsiia* was not to create full-fledged nations. The idea behind the policies was to disarm nationalism and make communism more accessible and closer to non-Russians by dressing it in national form. Therefore it would be misleading to discuss nation-building in the Soviet Union during the 1920s from the perspective of the center. The Bolshevik leadership in Moscow had no intend to reinforce nationalism nor was there a goal to forge some kind of common Soviet nation, as it would be the case in the second half of 1930's and especially after the Great Patriotic War.<sup>152</sup>

### *From Moldovan language to Moldovan nationality*

In the case of the Moldovan ASSR the issue of the main direction of *korenizatsiia* was centered on two main issues: the existence of the Moldovan nation and of the Moldovan language as different from the Romanian. In the previous chapter I have demonstrated the ambiguities of the process of the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR and local party section. In this chapter I will focus on the debates and directions of the *korenizatsiia*

---

<sup>150</sup> Stephen Kotkin, "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2 (2001): 151-152.

<sup>151</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 102.

<sup>152</sup> On the use of the myth of the Great Patriotic War for the development of common Soviet consciousness see Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: the Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

(roughly nation-building) process in the Republic in the period from 1924 to 1932, which is usually referred to in historiography as the period of Moldovanization.<sup>153</sup> An important dimension would be an analysis of the Piedmont Principle, the link between local nationality policies and foreign policy goals, in this period.

There were several major actors in the discussion and implementation of local nationality policies. Further on I will discuss some of the positions in more detail. Here I would like simply to present some general description. One of the major debates was between the Romanian Communist émigrés, mostly based in Moscow, and the Bessarabian and local (Soviet Moldovan) Communists. The Romanian Communists usually made no distinction between Moldovans and Romanians, and considered them the same people, at least from the ethnographical point of view. Local Bessarabian émigrés and Communists made a much deeper distinction, usually claiming the separate existence of the Moldovan nation and language.

The issue first came up even before the establishment of the Republic, in the process of its organization. The debate emerged within the Organizational Committee under the Odessan Party Gubkom, which was established in order to carry out the preparatory works for the creation of the Moldovan ASSR. The Committee consisted of three party officials, G.I. Staryi, I.I. Badeev and A. Grinstein. All three came out of the Bessarabian Communist underground and would play major roles in the political and cultural life of the Moldovan ASSR in the period of Moldovanization. Yet, they had conflicting views on the directions of

---

<sup>153</sup> In the numerous studies written within the tradition of the Romanian national historiography Moldovanization is frequently described as “deromanianization” (deromanizare) or “denationalization” (e.g. Nicolae Movileanu, “Din Istoria Transnistriei (1924-1940) (I),” [From the History of Transnistria] *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, no 1 (1993): 63). In my opinion this view is erroneous and usually quite politicized from several points of view. First, it ensues from the primordial views on the local population treating them as full-fledged conscious Romanians, which is highly debatable. Second, the label is used to demonstrate the artificiality and thus underscore the predominance of the Soviet expansionist logic. Third, the history of the Moldovan ASSR is usually treated isolated from the all-Union context, which significantly narrows down the possibilities of the complex interpretations.

Soviet nationality policies in the region. On August 22, 1924 at the second session of the Committee the views of Staryi concerning language issues clashed with the respective views of Badeev and Grinstein. The conflict was not solved within the committee and the participants decided to submit the description of both views in written form to the TsK of the KP(b)U.<sup>154</sup> These reports contain the views and argumentation of both sides.

G.I. Staryi, who would later be considered one of the leading figures of the “Romanizers” (rumynizatory), stated from the beginning that the scientific linguistic connection between Romanian and Moldovan was not his concern and he was much more interested in practical issues. From the practical point of view he believed that the peasant from Transnistria and Bessarabia understood quite well his counterpart from Iași, historical capital of the Moldavian Principality, but he had problems with 75-90% of literary Romanian. At the same time in his opinion the “language of the Bessarabian and Transnistrian Moldovans” was “so poor that in pure Moldovan, without the borrowing from other languages, one can hardly give even the most primitive political speech.”<sup>155</sup> Therefore, unwilling to spend excessive resources on the creation of almost completely new language, he proposed basing language policies on the Romanian canon and Latin script, which were the closest to and most suitable for the Transnistrian peasants. To this argument he added the vision of the future unification of Transnistria and Bessarabia, in which the latter was already being Romanianized by the Bucharest authorities, and the potential problem of the re-education of one of the regions.<sup>156</sup>

In turn I.I. Badeev used the same 75-90% of the literary Romanian, not understood by the “Moldovans from Bessarabia and Transnistria”, to underscore the distinction between Romanian and Moldovan. In his opinion Moldovan, having also Romanic origins, differed

---

<sup>154</sup> AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 5, d. 5, f. 2.

<sup>155</sup> AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 5, d. 5, f. 6.

<sup>156</sup> AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 5, d. 5, f. 6-7.

from Romanian like Russian from Ukrainian or Belarusian. The language policy should have been based upon the local dialect, which had also incorporated many Slavic words. There was no need to artificially impose Romanian, in turn filled with borrowings from French and Latin. Badeev had also tied the question of language to the question of the existence of the Moldovan nationality: “we can only choose Romanianization of Moldovan, if we adopt the point of view, according to which Moldovans do not exist as a separate nationality, but exist only a single Romanian people...”<sup>157</sup> On August 27, 1924 A. Grinstein, the third member of the Committee and also the advocate of Moldovanization, made his point of view public in a local party newspaper. He did not engage in a detailed argumentation, as his two colleagues did, but he publicly stated that Moldovan and Romanian were separate languages, as were the two peoples.<sup>158</sup> Interestingly, in this internal debate the argument from the point of view of the Bessarabian recession was rarely invoked and usually served as secondary to the perception of the local linguistic and national realities on the left bank of the Dniester.

Eventually the Ukrainian authorities made the choice in favor of the Moldovanizers’ point of view. There were several considerations for this choice. First, in the eyes of the Ukrainian authorities Staryi’s point of view was compromised by the position of the Romanian Communist émigrés. On September 22, 1924 a group of Romanian Communists (led by I. Dicescu-Dik), trying to contribute to and seize the initiative in the debate, issued a memorandum. In the document they advocated radical and total Romanianization and Latinization of the future Republic in order to promote the Soviet system in the whole of Romania.<sup>159</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Ukrainian authorities, who got the

---

<sup>157</sup> AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 5, d. 5, f. 5.

<sup>158</sup> Gheorghe E. Cojocaru (ed), *Cominternul și Originele “Moldovenismului”* [Comintern and the Origins of “Moldovenism”] (Chișinău: Civitas, 2009), 155.

<sup>159</sup> *Cominternul și Originele “Moldovenismului”* , 161-165.

decisive voice in almost all the Moldovan matters in this period, were quite suspicious of the Romanian émigrés radical projects, therefore marginalizing them. In this case we can argue that the radical émigrés' Romanianizing project created a negative attitude among Ukrainian authorities towards Staryi's more balanced and moderate views. It can also be argued that the radical and uncompromising stance of the Romanian "initiative group" had, in turn, radicalized the view of the Ukrainian authorities and local Moldovan party officials in favor of the Moldovanizing project.

More importantly, though, the choice in favor of Moldovanization can be explained in the all-Union context, specifically in the context of *korenizatsiia*. The project of Moldovanization fit the logic of *korenizatsiia* much better, while the Romanianizing arguments were inappropriate in the context of Soviet nationality policies. First, the orientation towards the needs and culture of local Transnistrian population was much more in line with the initial purpose of *korenizatsiia*, which was supposed to bring local non-Russian populations closer to Bolshevik ideas. Second, the argument from the point of view of the underdevelopment and poverty of the Moldovan language/culture was inappropriate and unconvincing in the context of *korenizatsiia*. At this time the Soviet authorities were creating and developing the languages and cultures of the peoples of the Russian Far North. From the Marxist-Bolshevik point of view these peoples stood at much lower level of social development than the "most backward nationality" – Moldovans. Most of them did not have any written culture at all. Therefore, the argument of the backwardness of the Moldovan culture could hardly scare away the Soviet officials and convince them of the need of the Romanian borrowings. Third, the idea of the forceful imposition of Romanian culture was alien to the rhetoric of *korenizatsiia*. Even the most Romanian-oriented participant of the discussion, I. Dicescu-Dik, believed that the Romanian-speaking population of Transnistria should have been Romanianized, since it was significantly Slavicized and was basically not

Romanian enough. At the same time one of the purposes of *korenizatsiia* was to struggle with Great Russian Imperial chauvinism. In the circumstances, when the identity of the Transnistrian population was not clear and strong claims in favor of Moldovanization were voiced, the Soviet authorities preferred not to substitute the Russian Imperial influence with the Romanian one. In this respect it should be mentioned that Soviet authorities and the Comintern perceived Greater Romania as a “multinational imperialist state.”<sup>160</sup> Therefore, the idea of the imposition of “imperial” and, moreover, “feudal-bourgeois” culture could have hardly been convincing for the Soviet, especially Ukrainian authorities. All the above-mentioned considerations contributed to the eventual choice in favor of the Moldovanization project.

On September 27, 1924 several days before the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR, on the Fourth Session of the Odessan Gubkom the representative of the TsK of the KP(b)U and the Government of the Ukrainian SSR V.P. Zatonkii voiced the official position of the Ukrainian authorities in the debate. In his speech he named the process of the establishment of the Republic as the “movement for the revival of the Moldovan nation”, which among other nations lived under the oppression of Royal Romania.<sup>161</sup> In this talk Zatonkii clearly sided with the Moldovanizers, rejecting almost any possible equation of “Moldovan” and “Romanian.”

---

<sup>160</sup> Already in 1921 the Balkan Communist Conference defined Romania as a multinational, oppressive state, *Natsional'nyi Vopros na Balkanah cherez Prizmu Mirovoi Revoliucii, chast' 1* [National Question in the Balkans through the Lenses of World Revolution, part 1] (Moscow: URSS, 2000), 15. In 1923 the Romanian Communists themselves accepted the Comintern's “multinational, imperialist” definition of the country. Nevertheless, this definition remained a recurring issue in the party debates. Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: a Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003), 53.

<sup>161</sup> *Nachalo Bol'shogo Puti*, 44-45.

*“There was a certain misunderstanding ... that the Moldovan Republic was created only for the annexation of Bessarabia”*

Even though in terms of *korenizatsiia* the issue was solved in favor of Moldovanizers, due to the borderland position of the Republic and the unsolved Bessarabian question, the problem of the foreign implications of local nationality policies remained a crucial topic of debate. Since this issue had international significance it drew a certain response from the Comintern and Moscow authorities. Yet, since the Piedmont Principle was inextricably linked with *korenizatsiia*, the main actors in the debate remained the same. It should be noted here that one of the main rationales behind the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR, mentioned in the Initiative Memorandum, was the export of the Socialist Revolution through Bessarabia and Romania to the Balkans and Central Europe. For the purposes of the thesis the issue of the foreign implications of the local *korenizatsiia* is interesting from the perspective of the two models (majority-oriented and minority-oriented) of the Piedmont Principle elaborated in the end of the first chapter. In the case of the Moldovan ASSR the model of the Piedmont Principle depended much on the issue of the relations between the “Moldovan” and “Romanian”.

As mentioned above, in the debate on the direction of nationality policies, carried out within the Organizational Committee of the Republic, the issue of foreign implications of local policies occupied rather a secondary role. Even though authors made certain references to the Bessarabian question, they did not regard it as the decisive factor in the choice of the *korenizatsiia* strategy. Moreover, in the debate one can hardly find any traces of the reference to the all-Romanian, Balkan or European Revolution. The issue of the foreign implications of the Moldovan ASSR was raised again by the Romanian Communists, specifically by I. Dicescu-Dik.

Already in the above-mentioned memorandum of the Romanian Communists from September 22, 1924 it was mentioned that the main purpose of the future Moldovan ASSR

should be the external propaganda, more specifically the “agitation in the proletarian-peasant masses from the whole Romania.”<sup>162</sup> Later on December 6, 1924 in the article of a student of the Romanian section of KUNMZ G.Al. Florian, which was most likely written under Dik’s supervision, who was the Professor at the University, it is reiterated that we organized “an outpost for the offensive against Romania.”<sup>163</sup> In both documents the authors emphasized that the main purpose of the Moldovan ASSR should be the export of the Revolution and from this point of view the orientation towards Romania, as a whole, is needed.

At the same time the local Moldovan and Ukrainian Communists led quite different discourse. In the process of the creation of the Moldovan ASSR one of the founding myths and constant references was the subjugated position of Bessarabia within the Soviet Union. This was common discourse for various local demonstrations<sup>164</sup> and the Third session (October 8-12, 1924) of the VUTsIK, where the Moldovan ASSR was officially established.<sup>165</sup> The references to the revolutionary situation in the all-Romanian context were lacking and that represented striking contrast to the projects of the Romanian Communist émigrés.

On January 8, 1925 I. Dicescu-Dik launched his last attack, sending a memorandum (in 40 copies) to all the major Soviet political figures entitled, “On Culture-Building in Soviet Moldova. Against Russifying Deviation under the Soviet Flag.” This was also Dik’s most comprehensive document in the “Moldovanization vs. Romanianization debate”, but its main argument centered on the foreign dimension of the Moldovan ASSR. He stated that

---

<sup>162</sup> *Cominternul și Originele “Moldovenismului”*, 163.

<sup>163</sup> AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 1, d. 177, f. 2.

<sup>164</sup> *Obrazovanie Moldavskoi SSR*, 58-64.

<sup>165</sup> *Alcătuirea Republicii Autonome Sovietice Socialiste Moldovenești: Darea de Seamă Stenografică a Sesiiei a 3-a a VUȚIK-ului, 8-12 Octombrie 1924* [The Establishment of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic: The Stenographic Report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session of VUTsIK, October 8-12, 1924] (Harkiv: 1924).

the Moldovan ASSR had “huge international importance or, to be modest, more international than internal.”<sup>166</sup> He proceeded to the argument that Moldovans and Romanians were the same people. Based on these two points Dik criticized the Moldovan authorities of the newly established Republic for focusing too much on the internal issues and limiting themselves only to Bessarabia on the international level, neglecting the considerations of worldwide revolutionary movement. Therefore, he proposed abandoning the separation of Moldovans from Romanians and Bessarabia from the rest of Romania. “We want to continue our struggle with Romania not along the lines of the struggle of two nationalities, but along the lines of the struggle of two political systems.”<sup>167</sup> From this stance and Dik’s view on the subordinated position of the nationality policy emerged his directions for *korenizatsiia*: “We have to take the Romanian culture and sovietize it.”<sup>168</sup>

Moldovan Communists had to respond. In his response I. Badeev, at this time the secretary of the Moldovan regional party committee, reiterated his views on the distinctions between the Moldovans and Romanians, arguing from the point of view of the existence of the national-revolutionary movement among the Bessarabian population against Romanian authorities. In his view the local Moldovan population was categorically against Romanianization. Badeev accused Dik of scholastic exercises and “Great Romanian Imperial Chauvinism.”<sup>169</sup> At the end of the response Badeev asked the TsK of KP(b)U to pronounce decisively in favor of one of the points of view, in order to stop the constant debates that undermined the government of the Republic. The KP(b)U reaffirmed its support of the Moldovanization project, as it was before the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR. This decision was more important from another point of view: it clearly targeted the

---

<sup>166</sup> *Cominternul și Originele “Moldovenismului”* , 215.

<sup>167</sup> *Cominternul și Originele “Moldovenismului”* , 220.

<sup>168</sup> *Cominternul și Originele “Moldovenismului”* , 227.

<sup>169</sup> *TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Natsional’nyi Vopros. Kniga 1. 1918-1933 gg.* [TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) and the National Question. Book 1. 1918-1933] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005): 263-264.

external dimension of the *korenizatsiia* in the Moldovan ASSR exclusively toward Bessarabia and not Romania.<sup>170</sup> Even after this decision I. Dicescu-Dik continued to press his views in the party circles, but officially the party orientation towards Moldovanization was not questioned until 1931/1932, when the Latinization campaign was launched.

From the point of view of the two models of the Piedmont Principle the views of the two sides in the debate on the external dimension of the *korenizatsiia* in the Moldovan ASSR roughly fit them. In Dik's final attack he basically drew the ideal type of the majority-oriented Piedmont Principle, claiming that the population of the Republic was nationally the same as the majority population in the neighboring state and advocating the necessity of the political and ideological but not national struggle.<sup>171</sup> The predominance of the external over the internal dimension was explicit. At the same time the Moldovanization project of Badeev and Grinstein was closer to the minority-oriented type, since Moldovans were separated from the Romanians and thus became a minority within Greater Romania. In an ideal type minority-oriented project the internal dimension prevails over the external (e.g. Ukrainian SSR and the Ukrainian minority in interwar Poland). Yet, the Moldovan leadership was quite ambiguous on this balance, since unlike in the Ukrainian or Belarusian case the majority of the nationality lived outside the territory of the Republic<sup>172</sup> in the neighboring state. Therefore, in the beginning they were frequently inclined to emphasize the importance of the Bessarabian dimension. Nevertheless, after a short period of high

---

<sup>170</sup> Roughly at the same time major figure in the Romanian and Ukrainian affairs Christian Racovski, at this moment the Deputy of the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, reinforced this position: "The new Moldovan Republic should serve exclusively as the springboard for the work in Bessarabia." *TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Natsional'nyi Vopros*, 267.

<sup>171</sup> In this project the position of the Moldovan ASSR in the relation to Romania should have been the same as the position of later established Polish regions in the Ukrainian and Belarusian SSRs in their relation to Poland.

<sup>172</sup> Officially (de jure) in the documents and on the maps Bessarabia was considered to be part of the Moldovan ASSR, though occupied by Romania. Here and elsewhere in the text, unless otherwise specified, by the territory of the Moldovan ASSR, I mean the de facto territory of the Republic or, from the Soviet point of view, Soviet-controlled part of the Moldovan ASSR.

enthusiasm and ambitions the attitude changed. At the second Conference of the Moldovan section of the party (November 1925) Badeev stated: “There was a certain misunderstanding ... that the Moldovan Republic was created only for the annexation of Bessarabia. The slogan ‘Return Bessarabia’ should be widespread on our territory, but we cannot carry out our work under this slogan now. This defect, this mistake, we have quickly noticed and ... assigned primary importance to the practical questions of the economic and cultural development of the Moldovan Republic.”<sup>173</sup> In this statement an explicit turn towards the internal issues is visible. That is not to say, though, that the Bessarabian question disappeared completely from the life of the Moldovan ASSR. The issue was frequently discussed by the party and governmental officials, it was part of the official and unofficial discourse in the documents and newspapers, numerous pamphlets were published about the Bessarabian question<sup>174</sup>, etc. Yet, this discourse was not predominant and the Bessarabian references were not decisive for the directions of the local policies, specifically in the national sphere.

In the previous subchapter I tried to demonstrate the factors that favored the choice of the Moldovanization as the main strategy of *korenizatsiia* in the Moldovan ASSR. Since the type of the Piedmont Principle and the direction of the Soviet nationality policy in the Moldovan case were inextricably intertwined, the same factors can explain to a large extent the choice of the minority-oriented stance for the external dimension of the Moldovan

---

<sup>173</sup> AOSPRM f. 49, inv. 1, d. 77, f. 49-50.

<sup>174</sup> To mention several pamphlets, with which I have worked, Badulescu, *Vosstanie v Tatar-Bunare*; V. Dembo and S. Timov, *Vosstanie Bessarabskikh Krest'ian protiv Rumynskikh Pomeshchikov* [The Revolt of the Bessarabian Peasant against the Romanian Landowners] (Moscow: 1925); *10 Let Krovavoi Okkupacii* [10 Years of Bloody Occupation] (Obshchestvo Bessarabcev, 1928); often in the pamphlets the solution of the national question in Bessarabia was contrasted to the Moldovan ASSR, V. Holostenco, *3 Goda Natsional'nogo Stroitel'stva v AMSSR i 10 Let Natsional'nogo Ugneteniiia v Bessarabii* [3 Years of the Nation-Building in the Moldovan ASSR and 10 Years of the National Oppression in Bessarabia] (Balta, 1928); L. Pecionaia, *Doua Lagere – Doua Politici. Dispri Zidirea Naționalo-Culturnicî în RASSM și Starea 'n Basarabia Ocupati* [Two Camps – Two Policies. On the National-Cultural Building in the Moldovan ASSR and the Situation in the Occupied Bessarabia] (Tiraspol, 1931).

*korenizatsiia*. After it was decided on the Party level that Moldovans form a separate nationality from Romanians, Dik's majority-oriented project<sup>175</sup> had few chances for approval. At the same time several more important factors should be mentioned, which favored the predominance of the local internal developments over the external considerations in the decision- and policy- making processes of the Moldovan ASSR. These factors undermined the externally-oriented project of the Romanian Communists and initially similar attitudes, though limited by the borders of Bessarabia, of the Moldovan Communists. First, in 1924 Stalin came up with the idea of "Socialism in one country", which was elaborated in detail by Bukharin. From this time on Socialism could have been built in the Soviet Union without the indispensable success of World Revolution. Accordingly, the considerations based upon the idea of the export of the Revolution officially lost their previous weight. Second, the creation of the Moldovan Republic and the local policies were carried out under the aegis of the "Leninist nationality policy", that is, *korenizatsiia*. The latter, even having also an external dimension, was first of all an internal policy. Therefore, the idea of *korenizatsiia* was gradually gaining predominance in the face of the external dimension. This trend was reinforced by some of the Ukrainian officials deeply involved in the Moldovan ASSR. One of the most interesting personalities was Mykola Skrypnyk, the Narkompros of the Ukrainian SSR and an emblematic figure of Ukrainianization. He believed that each compact nationality even within the already established non-Russian territorial units had the right for its own small administrative unit. This was the logic of *korenizatsiia* for Skrypnyk and he perceived and advocated the creation of the Moldovan ASSR on various Party levels as foremost a case of *korenizatsiia* and not an expansionist propaganda project. The third consideration that should be taken

---

<sup>175</sup> There were also some practical considerations for the orientation only towards the recession of Bessarabia, since the Bolsheviks could in a way claim the legal rights on Bessarabia according to the Racovski-Averescu agreement (February 1918), according to which the Romanian government undertook the obligations to march off Bessarabia. For the text of agreement see, Andrei Popovici, *The Political Status of Bessarabia* (Washington: 1931), 245-250.

into account was the weakness, flexibility and uncertainty of the identity of the local Romanian-speaking population. These circumstances undermined the Romanian Communist project. But the local Moldovan party officials soon understood that before exporting the Moldovan socialist national culture it should be first created and built within the republican borders.

### *Creating Moldovan socialist national culture*

After the choice in favor of the Moldovanization strategy for the *korenizatsiia* in the Moldovan ASSR the question of the practical implementation of the strategy arose. In the previous subchapter I have already discussed some of the major directions of the Moldovan *korenizatsiia*, specifically in regard to the Moldovanization of the Party and governmental apparatus. Therefore, in this subchapter I will briefly discuss those directions and policies of the *korenizatsiia* that were related to the creation and development of the Moldovan socialist national culture.

The major institution that undertook the task of the systematization, cataloging and creation of the Moldovan culture was the Moldovan Scientific Committee (MSC). Within the walls of this institution the most radical ideas of the Moldovanizing trend were voiced and often cherished.<sup>176</sup> Later almost all the participants would fall into the category of “bourgeois nationalists.” The Committee was established in 1926, two years after the creation of the Moldovan ASSR. The delay was most likely explained by the lack of required specialists and the fact that the decisive shift toward internally-oriented cultural building occurred only by the end of 1925. Initially the MSC had only a linguistic section. Only later the Moldovan authorities added ethnographic, literary, historical and other sections. This underscores the fact that the linguistic issue was crucial for the

---

<sup>176</sup> At a certain moment some radical Moldovanizers (or “samobytniks” [~autochtonists] as they were often referred to) went as far as to claim the biological differences between Moldavians and Romanians, proposing to carry out serological and physiognomic researches, AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 1, d. 2225, f. 16-17.

Moldovanization.<sup>177</sup> By this time the Moldovan authorities had failed to proceed from the statement of the distinctiveness of the Moldovan and Romanian languages to the documentary evidence, either in form of the linguistic study or school textbooks. The grammar manual compiled in haste by the Narkompros G. Buciușcanu was hardly different from the Romanian ones except for the Cyrillic script.<sup>178</sup> At the same time the lack of proper study materials reinforced the position of the Romanizers, who claimed that there was neither time nor resources to invent a new language, when the Romanian canon could be used. The campaign for the distinctively Moldovan language was launched in December 1926 by two articles in the local party newspaper: P. Chior's "On the Road of Moldovanization" and L. Madan's "Moldovan Orthography".<sup>179</sup> The common argument of both articles was the idea that the Moldovan language should be based upon democratic premises, that is, derived from the spoken language of the Moldovans on both banks of the Dniester. This presupposes the struggle with the excessive import of the Romanian and Russian words, and their substitution with the words and radicals from the colloquial speech of Moldovans. It is important to emphasize that this debate added and eventually implemented a new dimension in the linguistic issue of the Moldovan ASSR. While previously the main "linguistic enemy" of the Moldovan language was Romanian, in the work of the MSC the purification of the language from the excessive usage of Russian borrowings acquired roughly the same importance. This attitude was the product of *korenizatsiia*, within which the struggle with Great Russian chauvinism was carried out.<sup>180</sup>

---

<sup>177</sup> For a careful and insightful account of the Moldovan language construction in 1920s, see Charles King, "The Ambivalence of Authenticity, or How the Moldovan Language was Made," *Slavic Review* 58 (1999): 117-142.

<sup>178</sup> G. Buciușcanu. *Gramatica Limbii Moldovenești* [Grammar of the Moldovan Language] (Balta: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1925).

<sup>179</sup> Both articles can be found in, *Politica de Moldovenizare*, 53-58.

<sup>180</sup> Therefore, it is incorrect to consider, like many historians do, Moldovanization a Russifying and assimilating ideology. As it becomes evident from the work of the MSC its members struggled both with Russian and Romanian influences. Most of the invented words were not necessarily based upon the Slavic borrowings, mostly these words were carved out from the local dialects.

In 1929 Leonid Madan published his “Moldovan Grammar”, which became the main reference in the linguistic sphere until the shift to Latinization in 1932.<sup>181</sup> In the prefaces to the book P. Chior, the Chair of the MSC and the Moldovan Narkompros, and the author himself reiterated the above-mentioned arguments. In a pamphlet published at the same time P. Chior underlined that in its work MSC threw away “rumynisms” (Romanian words) and “dead slavinisms” (Slavic words).<sup>182</sup> Madan emphasized also that the grammar was elaborated in close cooperation with the Moldovan masses, especially the teachers’ staff.<sup>183</sup>

Since in the framework of Moldovanization Romanians and Moldovans were considered different nationalities, the Moldovan authorities in their cultural and nation-building work could not refer to the Romanian literary heritage. At the same time local Moldovanizers had to acknowledge the lack of a distinctive Moldovan literary canon. Therefore, they actively supported the development of the artistic movement in the region helping and promoting writers, musicians and theatrical groups. In 1928 in the collaboration with the MSC the Union of the Moldovan writers “Octombrie” (October) was established, which was expected to launch the mass “production” of the Moldovan literary works. Yet, most of the products came already in the Latinization period (e.g. first Moldovan play by S. Lehtëir in 1933). Therefore, ironically in the period of Moldovanization the manual and reading book (materials for the literacy campaigns) hardly contained any Moldovan literary works or at least the works, initially published in Romanian or Moldovan. For example, the reading book from 1928 contained short biographies and literary pieces of Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko, but none of the local or Romanian authors.<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>181</sup> L.A. Madan, *Gramatica Limbii Moldovenești* [Moldovan Grammar] (Tiraspol: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1929).

<sup>182</sup> P.I. Chior. *Dispri Orfografia Lingii Moldovinești* [On the Moldovan Orthography] (Birezula: 1929): 6.

<sup>183</sup> Madan, *Gramatica Limbii Moldovenești*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>184</sup> L.A. Madan (ed). *La Lunini. Carti di Lucru și Cetiri pentru Grupa a IV-a* [To the Light. Book for Work and Reading for the 4<sup>th</sup> Group] (Balta: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1928): 226-229, 257-258.

The education (mostly primary) was of principle importance in general for Soviet cultural building. It was also a crucial factor for Moldovanization. The period demonstrates the radical rise of the number of Moldovan schools as well as general activity in the struggle against illiteracy. The emergence of the Moldovan schools became one of the main arguments in the propaganda of the success of Moldovan nationality policies. At the same time the proclaimed study of the Moldovan language in schools encountered many obstacles due to the lack of specialists. Therefore special attention was paid to enrollment of the Moldovans to the Pedagogical Tehnikum and later Pedagogical Institute.

As in education, local authorities made significant efforts to switch bureaucratic paperwork to Moldovan. Central Moldovan authorities were expected to conduct the internal affairs and the correspondence with local power in Moldovan, but little was achieved in that field. Central authorities were situated in the predominantly Russian-speaking towns. In addition, many local soviets were in fact not Moldovan and according to the Constitution and legislation of MASSR they had the right to address central government also in Ukrainian and Russian.

Despite all the energy put into the Moldovanizing campaign its success was rather limited. Some of its consequences as for example in the artistic sphere, became visible only in the 1930s. To some extent it can be explained by the lack of material and human resources. At the same time the necessity to carry out Ukrainization parallel to the Moldovanization was dispersing the concentration and even those scarce available resources. More importantly the Moldovanization campaign had quite short life span. In 1932 the Soviet authorities launched Latinization campaign, which, in turn, lasted even less.

## To Latinization and Back, 1932-1940

### *The rehabilitation of Russians and the competing nation-building projects*

The usage of the notion “nation-building” in the Moldovan case becomes more problematic for the analysis of the developments in the 1930s. In 1932-1933 Stalin reassessed the policies of *korenizatsiia*. Even though it was not officially abolished, its support was much more limited. The opinions of historians differ on the issue of the rationale behind this decision. David Brandenberger argues that the threat of war and foreign intervention accompanied by the failure of *korenizatsiia* to provide the necessary degree of social cohesion of the Soviet society forced Stalin to turn to Russians and become more suspicious to other nationalities.<sup>185</sup> Terry Martin puts the change in the general context of the Soviet development at that period, signified by the end of the First Five-Year Plan, “revolution from above” and turn to much more restrict policies.<sup>186</sup> E. A. Rees emphasizes the role of the centralization of the Soviet political system for the changes in the nationality policies.<sup>187</sup>

For the purposes of the thesis the rationale behind the change is less important than its essence and consequences. The main transformation concerned the status of Russians and Russian culture in the Soviet Union. After almost ten years of oblivion Russians reemerged as the main political player, the center of aspirations and cohesion. After 1923 the logic of the “Affirmative Action Empire” and the anti-imperialistic aspirations of some leading Bolsheviks resulted in the downplaying of Russian presence in official rhetoric and

---

<sup>185</sup> David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>186</sup> Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 271.

<sup>187</sup> E.A. Rees, “The Changing Nature of Centre-Local Relations in the USSR, 1928-36,” in ed. E.A. Rees, *Centre-local relations in the Stalinist state 1928-1941* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

ambiguity of their status in the Soviet nationality policies.<sup>188</sup> Russians were the only nationality deprived of their own national administrative unit. RSFSR was mostly a territory, which remained when all other national territories were carved out.<sup>189</sup> Russians had significant problems getting to the administrative positions in the national units, though being among the most educated they still often occupied major posts. Paradoxically, they had to develop the institutions that would produce local national cadres to substitute them in the administrative positions.

In the 1930s Stalin considered no more “Great Russian Chauvinism” the Greatest Danger. Russians were elevated to the status of “First among Equals”. Moreover, Soviet authorities made the first steps in the promotion of the new project – an over-arching Soviet identity based upon the reconsidered traditional Russian values and language, but still recognizing local peculiarities. Soviet authorities resurrected Russian traditional literary and historical heroes and attributed them characteristics required in the new Soviet reality.<sup>190</sup> It is important to emphasize that the Russian national heroes were not just revived but were filled with completely different Soviet contents. Therefore, it is misleading to discuss the reemergence of the Russian nationalism in the traditional pre-revolutionary sense, since, for instance, such perspective overlooks the mass terror of the 1930s conducted among others also against Russians.<sup>191</sup>

Since *korenizatsiia* was not abolished, the reemergence of Russo-centric rhetoric resulted in a conflict between two nation-building, all-Soviet and local, projects. The

---

<sup>188</sup> For a concise account of the Russians’ position in the Soviet Union in 1920s see Geoffrey Hosking, *Rulers and Victims: the Russians in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006): 70-80.

<sup>189</sup> On the ambiguous position of the RSFSR in the Soviet Union see Terry Martin, “The Russification of the RSFSR,” *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 39 (1998): 99-105.

<sup>190</sup> Kevin M.F. Platt and David Brandenberger (ed.), *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

<sup>191</sup> Veljko Vujacic, “Stalinism and Russian Nationalism: A Reconceptualization,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 23 (2007): 178.

balance was in each case different depending on local specificities of each national unit. The rehabilitation of Russians turned out specifically influential in the russified regions. That was the case in Moldovan ASSR. Sizable Russian minority and the russified character of the region led to significant breakdowns in the process of Latinization. Moreover, in the case of the Moldovan ASSR three nation-building projects intersected: Latinized Moldovan, Ukrainian and Russian-oriented Soviet. In fact the paperwork and publishing at that period more and more turned to Russian and Ukrainian languages. Russian literary culture acquired a much more visible place along with Ukrainian and Moldovan. Moldovan theater was presenting the performances of the Russian classics before any Moldovan or at least Romanian play.

The general shift in the Soviet nationality policies favored also the break with radical Moldovanization campaigns of the late 1920s. It is important to emphasize that the turn to Latinization occurred slightly earlier than the official change in the all-Union nationality policies, but the general mood existed already from the early 1930s. Beginning with the early 1930s the Soviet authorities considered inappropriate the radical experimentation in the sphere of nationality policies (creation of languages, national symbols, rather open debates on the nationality issues etc), characteristic to *korenizatsiia* at its height. Therefore, the experiments of the MSC, especially in the linguistic sphere, became the object of strict control.<sup>192</sup> In 1931 P. Chior left for the studies to Moscow and Ivan Ocinschi was appointed as the new head of the MSC. Eventually, Ocinschi would carry out a massive attack on the work of the MSC before his appointment.<sup>193</sup>

---

<sup>192</sup> In 1930-1931 the party discourse mentioned the "chauvinist tendencies" in the MSC, *Materialurile Șerșetării Organizației Partinești din Moldova* [The Materials of Inspection of the Moldvan Party Organization] (Tiraspol: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1930), 33-34.

<sup>193</sup> King, *Moldovans*, 80-81.

## *Latinization as an expansionist project: Historiographical views*

Taking into consideration the suppression of radical Moldovanizers the switch to Latin script on February 2, 1932 can hardly be considered totally unexpected.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, already in 1929 a commission on Moldovanization and Latinization was created in the Moldovan ASSR, but its main objective was to assess the perspectives of the Latinization in the Republic and not to implement it. Even the attitude of the leading Moldovanizers was ambiguous and not, as it might have been expected, negative. The usage of the Cyrillic script was an objective, visible distinctive feature that, in turn, underscored the thesis of the distinctiveness of the Moldovan language from the Romanian. At the same time the Moldovanizers themselves claimed that Cyrillic script was not really convenient for the Moldovan language (though mentioning that Latin was also not fully compatible) and considered the option of Latin script.<sup>195</sup> This evidence suggests that the Latinization of the Moldovan language did not come completely out of the clear blue sky. Yet, taking into consideration the previous developments the change was quite abrupt and not thoroughly planned.

There are few existing explanations of the turn to the Latinization in the Moldovan ASSR in 1932. One of the first emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the opening of the archives. In the KGB interrogation (1956) one of the former high officials in the Moldovan ASSR testified that the turn to Latinization was carried out under the direct order of Stalin, who summoned some of the Ukrainian and Moldovan authorities to Moscow. Romanian national historiography gladly cited this evidence, since it fitted the arbitrary totalitarian paradigm cherished by many historians in the field.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, by this

---

<sup>194</sup> Popa, *Românii, Basarabia și Transnistria* 75; King, *Moldovans*, 81.

<sup>195</sup> Chior. *Dispri Orfografia Lingii Moldovinești*, 6-7.

<sup>196</sup> For example, Nicolae Movileanu, "Din Istoria Transnistriei (1924-1940) (II)," [From the History of Transnistria] *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, no 2 (1993): 70; Idem, "Problema Limbii

moment the centralization of the Soviet party system could have created the framework, in which Stalin could give direct order over the heads of the other local politicians. Yet, this evidence was based more on rumor than on the documentary evidence. In addition and more importantly, we should understand the context and rationale, which led to the change. From this perspective it is less important, who exactly gave the order.

There are two other explanations in the historiography. The first presupposes that the Latinization campaign in the Moldovan ASSR was part of the all-Soviet Latinization campaign<sup>197</sup> that started from the mid-1920s.<sup>198</sup> Yet, this argument does not explain, why exactly in 1932 the change occurred. As I will demonstrate in the subsequent subchapters, Latinization in the Moldovan ASSR resulted not only in the change of the used script but also significant reorientation of the linguistic and literary canon. In the Moldovan circumstances the question of the script had also additional significance, since it was part of the Romanian/Moldovan debate. Additional evidence demonstrating that this was not simply a technical change is the fact that previous Moldovanization campaign was proclaimed to be the result of the local nationalists' activities.

Another proposed explanation bases on the assumption of the Moldovan ASSR as part of the Soviet expansionist project. The Moldovanization campaign, creating new language and culture, estranged the Moldovan ASSR from Bessarabia, where Romanianization was carried out. Therefore, the Moldovan ASSR could not play already

---

Naționale și a Grafiei Latine în R.A.S.S. Moldovenească," [The Problem of National Language and Latin Script in the Moldovan ASSR] *Cugetul*, no 2 (2001): 29.

<sup>197</sup> On Soviet Latinization campaign see Michael G. Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953* (Berlin ; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), 121-142.

<sup>198</sup> Argentina Ciocanu-Gribincea and Mihai Gribincea, "Politica de Moldovenizarea în R.A.S.S. Moldovenească," [Politics of Moldovanization in the Moldovan ASSR] *Cugetul*, no 4 (2000): 24; Popa, *Românii, Basarabia și Transnistria*, 75. For a more sophisticated version of this argument that emphasizes the Soviet perception of Moldovans as a "backward" nationality with similarities to Soviet East, see Andrei Cusco, "Between Revolutionary Utopia and State Pragmatism: the Moldavian ASSR as a Controversial 'Soviet Piedmont'," *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics* 4 (2004): 19-22.

the role of the “magnet”, as it should have been. This situation necessitated the turn to more Romanian-oriented policies in order to maintain the appeal of the Moldovan ASSR for the whole Romania and to “hasten the day when Soviet power would include not only occupied Bessarabia, but the Romanian lands west of the Prut River as well.”<sup>199</sup> This explanation being predominant in the historiography yet becomes shaky, when put in the all-Union context.

In 1932 the Soviet Union was much less militant than it is required for the above-mentioned argument. The doctrine of “socialism in one country” was predominant and the idea of the “export of the Revolution” was to a large extent given up. Under the influence of the multiple problems emerging during the First Five Year Plan the Soviet leadership felt much insecure. Therefore, the Soviet diplomats at this moment were quite willingly participating in the negotiations of various non-aggression pacts with the neighboring and distant states. The normalization and stabilization of the Soviet diplomatic relations with the capitalist countries became the main agenda of the Soviet officials.<sup>200</sup> The Narkomindel Maxim Litvinov actively pushed for the disarmament agreements contrary to the French security system, which intended to create the network of the mutual guarantees between the states.<sup>201</sup> Even such institution as Comintern, whose initial purpose was to spread the

---

<sup>199</sup>King, *Moldovans*, 82; Negru, *Politica Etnoculturala in R.A.S.S. Moldoveneasca*, 36-37; Elena Negru, “Introducerea și Interzicerea Grafiei Latine in R.A.S.S.M.” [Introduction and Prohibition of the Latin Script in MASSR] *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, no. 3-4 (1999): 35-36; Gheorghe Negru, *Politica Etnoligvistică in R.S.S. Moldovenească* [Ethnolinguistic Policy in the Moldovan SSR] (Chișinău: Prut International, 2000), 19.

<sup>200</sup> In light of the Soviet attempts to normalize the relations with Romania Dennis Deletant proposed an explanation of the Latinization as a token of goodwill from the Soviet side, Dennis Deletant, “Language Policy and Linguistic Trends in the Republic of Moldavia, 1924-1992,” in Donald L. Dyer (ed) *Studies in Moldovan: the History, Culture, Language and Contemporary Politics of the People of Moldova* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1996), 58. Yet, there are no traces, that the Soviet diplomats used the shift to Latinization in order to soften the position of the Romanian diplomacy.

<sup>201</sup> Hugh D. Phillips, *Between the Revolution and the West: a Political Biography of Maxim M. Litvinov* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

socialist revolution, at this moment considered its main goal the defense of the “cradle of the Revolution”, that is the Soviet Union, against the threat of “imperialist attack.”<sup>202</sup>

The situation in the Romanian-Soviet relations was similar. When despite the Averescu-Racovsky agreement Romanian army did not withdraw from Bessarabia, the Bolsheviks broke off all the diplomatic relations with Romania. Moreover, the Soviet diplomacy considered that the USSR was at war with Romania. At all the subsequent diplomatic conferences and meetings the Soviet diplomats were explicitly aggressive on the Bessarabian issue, assigning to it primary importance in the Soviet-Romanian relations. Yet, already during the signature of the Litvinov protocol (application of Briand-Kellogg pact) the Soviet authorities were much less insistent upon the Bessarabian issue, though making reservations and leaving the question open.<sup>203</sup> The issue came to the surface once again in 1931-1932, during the attempts to conclude the non-aggression agreements between the Soviet Union and neighboring states, including Romania. While with other states the Soviet diplomats reached the agreement comparatively easily, in the Romanian case the negotiations failed due to the Bessarabian question. Yet, as the evidence suggests, the Soviet diplomacy, particularly Litvinov, was ready to “silence” the Bessarabian issue in order to reach the sought agreement. It was the mention of the terms “integrity” and “inviolability” of the territory in the Romanian drafts of the agreement that provoked the reiteration of the

---

<sup>202</sup> Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: a History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1996), 95-97.

<sup>203</sup> Octavian Țăcu, *Problema Basarabiei și Relațiile Sovieto-Române în Perioada Interbelică* [The Bessarabian Problem and the Soviet-Romanian Relations in the Interwar Period] (Chișinău: Prut International, 2004), 121; Lilia Pădureac, *Relațiile Româno-Sovietice (1917-1934)* [Soviet-Romanian Relations] (Chișinău: Prut International, 2003), 73. Both authors, having strong pro-Romanian and anti-Soviet bias, underscore the Soviet emphasis on the Bessarabian question. Therefore they underestimate (though mentioning it) the major shift of the Soviet accents to the more or less normal diplomatic relations with Romania contrary to previous primacy of the territorial litigation in the discourse. For a more balanced account, see Dov B. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers, 1933-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 23-25.

Soviet position on Bessarabia.<sup>204</sup> Despite the failure in 1933 the issue was resolved by the signature by both sides of the “Convention for the Definition of Aggression” in London. The parties interpreted the signature in a slightly different manner, but the general agreement was that for the time being the Bessarabian question would not be the permanent focus point of the Soviet-Romanian relations<sup>205</sup> (which it still implicitly was).

All the above-described tendencies, that demonstrate a much more defensive stance of the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, suggest that the explanation of the Latinization in the MASSR as the revolutionary expansionist project either for Bessarabia or Romania is misleading. I would like to propose an alternative explanation that is based upon the phenomenon that is implicitly present in the previous several pages, that is the Soviet war scare.

#### *The Soviet war scare and the shift to Latinization*

The Soviet war scare that became especially visible in the course of the First Five Year Plan had quite diverse roots: Leninist theory, problems in the diplomatic relations with the European countries, the rise of the ultra-right movements in Europe, Japanese occupation of Manchuria, internal struggles and breakdowns during the rapid industrialization etc. The Soviet war scare, which was based upon the assumption of the

---

<sup>204</sup> Walter M. Bacon Jr., *Behind Closed Doors: Secret Papers on the Failure of Romanian-Soviet Negotiations, 1931-1932* (Stanford, Cal.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1979), 40, 44, 66-70.

<sup>205</sup> See for the analysis of the agreement and the perception of both sides, Marcel Mitrasca, *Moldova: a Romanian Province under Russian Rule: Diplomatic History from the Archives of the Great Powers* (New York: Agora Publishing, 2002), 129-131. Later the Politburo decision from June 1, 1934 considered it possible to “silence the moot issues” for the sake of the successful re-establishment of the diplomatic relation, O.N. Ken and A.I. Rupasov (ed), *Politburo TsK VKP(b) i Otnosheniia SSSR s Zapadnymi Sosednimi Gosudarstvami* [Politburo TsK VKP(b) and the Relations of USSR with Western Neighboring Countries] (Sankt-Peterburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2000), 443. In fact, already in 1924 Litvinov was ready to recognize the Romanian sovereignty over Bessarabia, but he encountered strong opposition from other Soviet leaders, Robert R. King, *A History of the Romanian Communist Party* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1980), 28.

inevitability of the warfare between capitalism and socialism, determined to some extent the turn to a more defensive strategy of the foreign policy (disarmament, non-aggression pacts, normalization of diplomatic relations etc). In a significant part of Western historiography the Soviet war scare is considered to be a sham that Stalin instrumentalized in order to defeat the opposition in the party and Comintern<sup>206</sup> and/or mobilize the population for the forced industrialization.<sup>207</sup> This conclusion is based upon the example of the “classic” war scare in 1926-1927. Yet, even in this case some historians detect sincere concern and fear of the “Western plans to redraw the map of Eastern Europe.”<sup>208</sup> Not by chance in 1927 the Soviet government launched the construction of the heavy defense line along the Western border of the country.<sup>209</sup> In the circumstances, when all the resources were allocated for the industrialization and collectivization, it would be surprising that the Soviet government invested millions of rubles in a “sham.” Some of the 1930 correspondence between Stalin and Molotov demonstrate certain sincere belief in the inevitability of the capitalist intervention as well as the willingness to instrumentalize the fear of intervention in the internal party struggles.<sup>210</sup>

As Andrea Romano has pointed out, the “Soviet leaders tended to be aware that any external attack risked leading to collapse in a situation where the foundations of the state had already been so severely shaken.”<sup>211</sup> This holds true for the war scare in 1926-1927, but

---

<sup>206</sup> Di Biagio, *Moscow, the Comintern and the War Scare*.

<sup>207</sup> Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: the Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: Norton, 1990).

<sup>208</sup> John P. Sontag, “The Soviet War Scare of 1926-27,” *Russian Review* 34 (1975): 67; see also Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 216-224.

<sup>209</sup> Neil Short, *The Stalin and Molotov Lines: Soviet Western Defences 1928-1941* (Osprey Publishing, 2008), 8-10.

<sup>210</sup> For instance, Lars T. Lih et al (ed), *Stalin’s Letters to Molotov, 1925-1936* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 208-209.

<sup>211</sup> Romano, *Permanent War Scare*, 104.

it is even more applicable for the explanation of the “hidden war scare” in the early 1930s. Exactly at this moment the Soviet leaders encountered fierce resistance of the population especially to the collectivization campaign.<sup>212</sup> Particularly, in the Western border areas the resistance of the population reinforced the perception of the vulnerability of the Soviet state and the fear of foreign intervention. Matthew D. Pauly and Timothy Snyder have demonstrated, how the suspicion of the Polish influence and fear of intervention to a significant extent influenced the directions of the nationality policies in the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>213</sup> Yet, in the Ukrainian case these factors were not totally decisive for the major changes of the nationality policies in 1932-1933. At the same time, in my opinion, in the case of the turn to Latinization in the Moldovan ASSR the role of the Soviet war scare was crucial.

In the early 1930s in addition to the usual publications on the Bessarabian question, which focused on the cruelty of the Romanian occupation, heroic struggle of local revolutionaries, successes of the Moldovan ASSR etc, emerge another type of discourse. These publications were printed in Moscow and most likely in a moderate form reflected some of the internal, possibly informal discussions within the party leadership. The new discourse focused not specifically on Bessarabia but on the Romania in general and its plans for the war against the Soviet Union. The authors emphasized that Romania was a “purely imperialistic state”<sup>214</sup> and had its own specific “imperialist aspirations.”<sup>215</sup> Both for the Soviet leaders and later historiography the role of Poland<sup>216</sup> and the backing from France

---

<sup>212</sup> Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 205-233.

<sup>213</sup> Pauly, *Soviet Polonophobia*; Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War*,

<sup>214</sup> S. Timov, *Rumyniia* [Romania] (Moscow-Leningrad, 1931), 6.

<sup>215</sup> Timov, *op. cit.* 9; A. Tataru, *Bessarabiia pod Piatoi Rumynskih Okkupantov* [Bessarabia under the Heel of Romanian Occupants] (Moscow: Politizdat), 28.

<sup>216</sup> Poland was also a major initiator of the network of pacts of the countries neighboring the Soviet Union, so called *Cordon Sanitaire*. For the evolution of such pact in the Polish-

and England was crucial for the emergence of the Soviet war scare. Therefore, the authors used emphasis on the Romanian autonomous imperialist interests to demonstrate that despite the improvement in the relations with some major capitalist countries (France, Poland etc) the danger of the Romanian intervention was high. The grave economic crisis was reinforcing Romanian imperial aspirations.<sup>217</sup> The presumed militarization of the economy (development of war industry) and large scale armament projects was a major evidence of Romanian war-preparation.<sup>218</sup> In the imagined Romanian plan of the intervention Bessarabia occupied central place as the territory neighboring the Soviet Union. Therefore – the argument continued – the Romanian authorities intensified the terror and Romanianization campaigns in Bessarabia.<sup>219</sup> The Legionary movement was perceived as one of the instruments of this trend.<sup>220</sup> The last argument is crucial. Contrary to the previous discourse, according to which the occupation and Romanianization of Bessarabia only estranged the local population and drew it closer to the Soviet Moldovan project, within the new argumentation Romanianization could be more or less successful, at least for the creation of solid basis for the military intervention.

The consequences of the forced collectivization were another source of the Soviet fear of Romanian intervention. Like in Ukraine, in the Moldovan ASSR forced collectivization resulted in dramatic developments. In 1931-1932 grave hunger was reigning in the Moldovan countryside. As the result, beginning with fall 1931 local population frequently crossed the Dniester in order to immigrate to Romania. The Moldovan hunger

---

Romanian case, see Florin Anghel, *Construirea Sitemului "Cordon Sanitaire": Relații Româno-Polone, 1919-1926* [The Building Up of the "Cordon Sanitaire" System: Romanian-Polish Relations, 1919-1926] (Cetatea de Scaun, 2008).

<sup>217</sup> Tataru, , *op. cit.* 3.

<sup>218</sup> Timov, , *op. cit.* 21-23; Tataru, , *op. cit.* 29-30.

<sup>219</sup> Tataru, , *op. cit.* 31.

<sup>220</sup> Timov, , *op. cit.* 52-62.

became already an international problem and the information quickly reached Kharkiv and Moscow.<sup>221</sup> Romanian newspapers called the Moldovan crisis a “Soviet genocide”. The problem of the emigration and rebellious attitudes among the Moldovan peasants became one of the central topics of party discussions.<sup>222</sup> The socio-political erosion in such a sensitive region as the Romanian border was extremely sensitive both for local and foreign authorities.

In this context of the Soviet war scare the critique, voiced against Moldovanizers, with the turn to Latinization can be reassessed. The new Moldovan authorities, as well as Soviet and Ukrainian ones, criticized Moldovanizers for creating the language and culture, which were absolutely alien and incomprehensible for the Transnistrian and Bessarabian population. Basically this was the critique that pointed to the inability of the Moldovanizers and their “inventions” to fulfill one of the main tasks of the Soviet nationality policies – to make the Bolshevik message closer and more understandable to the non-Russian masses. In this light I would argue that the turn to Latinization in the Moldovan ASSR was a Soviet defensive decision, carried out in the context of the war scare. The perception of the incomprehensibility of the linguistic canon, created by Moldovanizers, gave the Soviet authorities an explanation of the two above-mentioned phenomena.<sup>223</sup> From this perspective the emigration and the erosion in the border areas occurred due to the linguistic incomprehensibility of the Soviet message of collectivization policies to the local population. At the same time in Bessarabia due to similar linguistic considerations the effect of the Soviet propaganda was limited. Therefore, the Bessarabian population became

---

<sup>221</sup> K.V. Stratievskii, *Golod 1932-1933 gg. v Moldavskoi ASSR* [The Hunger of 1932-1933 in the Moldovan ASSR] (Kishinev: 2001), 31.

<sup>222</sup> Stratievskii, *Golod 1932-1933 gg. v Moldavskoi ASSR*, 33-37.

<sup>223</sup> This was not the only (and probably not the most important) explanation. But this possible explanation resulted in the major changes in the direction of local nation-building. Therefore, I focus on it.

increasingly Romanianized. The party documents pointed out that the Bessarabian population was increasingly drawn closer to the Romanian linguistic canon.<sup>224</sup> The Soviet leadership believed that their message and policies were by definition more appealing to toilers and peasants. Therefore, the appeal of the bourgeois-capitalist practices and projects could be explained either by the improper form of the message (foremost, language) or the influence of the counter-revolutionary, “alien” elements.

Within the framework of Soviet war scare and two outlined perceptions suggest the following explanation of the turn to Latinization. Soviet authorities initiated the turn to Latinization in order to consolidate their power in the border area (Moldovan ASSR) and reinstate the strength of the Soviet propaganda in Bessarabia, proposing an alternative (to Moldovanizers) linguistically comprehensible project. In the former case the restoration of the contact between the Soviet authorities and local population should have prevented further weakening of the border area.<sup>225</sup> In the latter case the renewed Soviet propaganda should have undermined the process of the forced Romanianization and, as a consequence, the presumed plans for the intervention, since Bessarabia would have remained a very shaky springboard for the military campaign. Both considerations were largely defensive in essence and emerged within the context of war scare. Just before the turn to Latinization, in 1931, in the Japanese occupation of Manchuria the Soviets saw the embodiment of their worst nightmares, the war against the capitalist coalition. This reinforced the Soviet war scare and their attempts to assure the safety of the borders by the diplomatic negotiations in 1931-1932.<sup>226</sup>

---

<sup>224</sup> AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 1, d. 2071, f. 20; *Politica de Moldovenizare*, 149.

<sup>225</sup> Therefore, the propagation of the Romanian atrocities in Bessarabia was one of the main party directives in the struggle with the emigration of the Transnistrian population, Stratievskii, *Golod 1932-1933 gg. v Moldavskoi ASSR*, 76.

<sup>226</sup> Jonathan Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930-33: the Impact of Depression* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 83-106.

Thus, the Latinization campaign was to some extent also the exploitation of the Piedmont principle but for more defensive rather than offensive goals. The offensive explanation, in turn, fails when put in the context of the Soviet foreign policy and Comintern directions at this moment. The desire to establish normal diplomatic relations with the neighboring countries urged the Soviet officials to withdraw its active support for the subversive activities in the capitalist countries and, as a consequence, of the potential social revolutions.

*Latinization: break or continuation?*

Was Latinization a radical break with the previous nationality policies in the Moldovan ASSR or was it more or less a continuation of previous practices? There cannot be unequivocal, definite answer to this question. A proper answer to this question presupposes the specification of the precise directions of the nationality policies, in which a break or continuation were visible. In the historiography there is no uniform commonly acceptable name for this period of the history of the Moldovan ASSR. While most scholars prefer to use a more moderate term “Latinization”, others “unquestionably” characterize the policies as “Rumanizing”, emphasizing that the policies were carried out by the group of Romanizers.<sup>227</sup> Neither term is precise enough. The nationality policies in the Moldovan ASSR in 1932-1937 were neither simply a Latinization of the existing linguistic and cultural norms, nor a full-scale Romanianization of the local population. The actual policies lied somewhere in between. The ambiguity of the historians in the assessment of this period underscores the ambiguity of views of the local politicians.

The nationality policies of the period presupposed the reorientation of the linguistic policies towards the Romanian canon. The new linguistic policy did not just Latinize the

---

<sup>227</sup> 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: East European Monographs, 1982), 60.

script of the language, but significantly altered its content and political implications. Therefore, in this respect the new period represented a radical break with the previous directions of *korenizatsiia*. Moreover, contrary to the Moldovanization period, when local political leaders considered Moldovans a nationality without literary heritage, during the 1932-1937 the new leadership increasingly incorporates the Romanian literary canon into the cultural and educational life of the Moldovan ASSR. The theory of “cultural heritage” emerges that opened up the previously banned Romanian culture for the local politicians and intellectuals. The theory presupposed that just like Russian classics were the basis of the Russian Soviet literature, similarly the Romanian classic literature was the “cultural heritage” of the Moldovan literature and culture. Yet, despite the reorientation towards the Romanian linguistic and literary canons the policies the existence of the Moldovans as a nationality remained unquestioned.<sup>228</sup> The symbolical divide between Romanians and Moldovans remained the inevitable part of the official discourse. Accordingly, in the references to Bessarabia the local population played the role of the minority groups in the Greater Romania. In this respect the policies and discourses of the Latinization period to a significant extent continued those of the Moldovanization campaign.<sup>229</sup> Similarly, the officially proclaimed goals of the nationality policies did not significantly alter: the Moldovanization of the party apparatus, the support of the Moldovan and other nationalities’ education, development of the Moldovan national culture (literature, theater etc). At the same time the rehabilitation of both Russian and Romanian discourses seriously complicated the process of the implementation of these policies.

---

<sup>228</sup> This is an additional argument against the expansionist explanation of Latinization, since it supposedly targeted both Bessarabia and Romania.

<sup>229</sup> Therefore I am using the term Latinization for the period from 1932 to 1937, since, in my opinion, the continuation of the Moldovan discourse was more crucial for the local nationality policies and its foreign implications than the break in the reorientation towards Romanian linguistic and literary canon.

Interestingly, for the actual policies carried out in the Moldovan ASSR during the Latinization period it was not decisive whether the offensive or defensive (as suggested in the first part of the chapter) rationale was behind the turn to Latinization. For both explanations the successful development of the Moldovan ASSR should have undermined the Romanian grip on Bessarabia and, as a consequence, support the presupposed Soviet goals. Yet, the fact that the discourse of the separate Moldovan identity remained favors more the explanation furthered in this paper.

As the evidence demonstrate the implications of the turn to Latinization were not really clear for the local political leaders. The return of moderate Romanizer Grigorii Staryi, who together with Badeev due to their permanent conflicts on the identity issue was obliged to leave the MASSR in 1928, for the work in the local government signified the turn to Romanian-oriented policy but the degree of the reorientation was unclear. In these circumstances local intellectuals proposed several competing directions for the nationality policies. The two grammars published in 1932 and 1933 using the Latin script represented two possible options. In addition, these two volumes demonstrate the uncertainty and ambiguity of local leaders in their perception of the Latinization.

The grammar edited by Leonid Madan, one of the architects of the Moldovanization campaign, reflected the acceptance of the new linguistic policy and at the same time negation of other dimensions of the Romanian culture. The examples, which demonstrated the grammar rules, consisted of the official Soviet rhetoric, references to the Moldovan socialist statehood and the state of Bessarabia, and some descriptions of nature and everyday life.<sup>230</sup> A different view appeared in the grammar textbook by A.P. Dîmbul, an

---

<sup>230</sup> L. A. Madan (ed), *Gramatica Limbii Moldovenești: Fonetica, Morfologia și Sintaxa* [Moldovan Grammar: Phonetics, Morphology and Syntax] (Tiraspol: 1932). The incorporation of the references to the Moldovan statehood and Bessarabian question were part of the official discourse and, more importantly, were incorporated into the grammar textbooks, thus creating the basis for phenomenon of "banal nationalism." For the discussion of "banal nationalism" see Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

ardent opponent of the previous Moldovanization campaign. His textbook based upon the examples from the Russian classic canon, Moldovan Soviet literature and “the classic literature from the opposite bank of Nistru.”<sup>231</sup> Alongside Lermontov, Tolstoi, Gogol’ the reader encountered the excerpts from Vasile Alexandri and even Mihai Eminescu. Eventually both textbooks would be considered erroneous in 1934. The party officials would criticize Madan’s volume for primitivism and lack of literary examples, while Dîmbul’s grammar for the references to the national-chauvinist enemies.<sup>232</sup> Even though the references to the Romanian literary culture were no longer under a taboo, still local politicians and intellectuals used such references restraint. This tendency was visible also in the choice of the plays for the performances of the Moldovan National Theater, opened in 1933. The administration of the theater preferred to avoid the massive inclusion of the Romanian plays into the theater’s repertoire.<sup>233</sup> Most likely the described uneasiness towards the Romanian literary culture ensued from the continuation, though in a less radical manner, of the discourse of the separateness of the Moldovan and Romanian nationalities.

### *The aftermath of Great Purges*

The turn from the Latin script back to Cyrillic took place within the framework of the Great Purges and to a significant extent as their result. Already from 1934, after the Kirov murder, a large scale campaigns for the resettlement of some nationalities in the border areas.<sup>234</sup> The increasing suspicion of the borderlands and the perception of their vulnerability to foreign intervention and influence were one of the major reasons for this

---

<sup>231</sup> A.P. Dimbul, *Gramatica, Morfologie: Manual pentru Școala Medie. Anul al 5-lea de Învățămînt* [Grammar, Morphology: Textbook for the Secondary School. The 5<sup>th</sup> Year of Studies] (Tiraspol-Balta: 1933), 2.

<sup>232</sup> AOSPRM, f. 49, inv. 1, d. 2402, f. 41-42.

<sup>233</sup> *Primul Teatru Moldovenesc de Stat* [The First Moldovan State Theater] (Tiraspol: 1934).

<sup>234</sup> In more detail see Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 328-335; P. Polian, *Against Their Will: the History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004), 92-97.

policy. Nevertheless, these campaigns did not yet presuppose the total resettlement of the “suspicious” groups. The suspicious nationalities included Poles, Germans, Finns, thus the nationalities that were majorities in the possible interventionist states. In this respect it could have been quite possible that Moldovans could have also become one of the targets of the resettlement campaigns. Probably it was the ambiguity of the Romanian-Moldovans interrelations and the emphasis on the separateness of the two, which persisted even during the Latinization period that slightly postponed the implementation full-scale political consequences of the Soviet suspicion of the border areas in the region.

As the terror campaigns gathered way in 1936-1937, the border regions attracted specific interest of the NKVD. Koreans became the first nationality fully resettled in the Soviet Union.<sup>235</sup> Moreover, the NKVD campaigns became increasingly targeted on the cleansing of the party leadership from the “suspicious”, “counter-revolutionary” elements, “fascists”, “foreign spies” etc.<sup>236</sup> The NKVD issued roughly a dozen of orders targeting specific regions and nationalities, such as “Polish operation”.<sup>237</sup> Due to the border position, significant number of the Romanian and Bessarabian émigrés<sup>238</sup> in the party apparatus and local factional splits on the identity issue the Moldovan ASSR was basically predestined to become the object of mass purges. Nevertheless, there was no direct NKVD order and

---

<sup>235</sup> Michael Gelb, “An Early Soviet Ethnic Deportation: The Far-Eastern Koreans,” *Russian Review* 54 (1995): 389-412.

<sup>236</sup> For the analysis of the language used by the Soviet authorities to stigmatize their opponents, though with probably too strong emphasis on the religious elements see, Igal Halfin, *Intimate Enemies: Demonizing the Bolshevik Opposition, 1918-1928* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007).

<sup>237</sup> On Polish operation, Nikita Petrov and Arsenii Roginskii, “The ‘Polish Operation’ of the NKVD, 1937-1938,” in Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott (ed), *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 153-172.

<sup>238</sup> NKVD paid specific attention to all the émigrés in the Soviet Union, including Romanian/Bessarabian, J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov (ed), *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1999), 532.

“Romanian operations started as a ‘local initiative’ in the Ukraine in August 1937,”<sup>239</sup> most likely anticipating the Moscow directive. In fact, NKVD eventually issued an official central order on the Romanian issue, but already after the grass-root purges were launched. Comintern was another channel of purges of the Romanian and Bessarabian émigrés.<sup>240</sup>

The result of the Purges for the Moldovan leadership was dramatic. Almost all the leading figures of the political, cultural, scientific, editorial, artistic spheres became “bourgeois nationalists” and “Romanian spies and agents”. The purges targeted not only the leading Latinizers and Romanizers, who stood at the wheel in the Moldovan ASSR at this moment, but also the adherents of the Moldovanization, some of whom managed to stay in the region as the opposition, while other were scattered all across the Soviet Union. Quite often the persons, who were writing denunciations on their colleagues in the party, later themselves became the targets of the purges.

The Purges practically beheaded the Moldovan political class. By the autumn 1937 from nine members of the Politburo of the Moldovan Regional Committee of KP(b)U only one was still acting.<sup>241</sup> The new political leadership of the Moldovan ASSR consisted to a significant extent from the “imported” party officials, mostly from Ukrainian SSR. The turn in February 1938 once again towards the Cyrillic script was most likely a local initiative.<sup>242</sup> Nevertheless, that purging campaign of 1937 against both Latinizers/Romanizers and Moldovanizers gave a clear hint on the views of the Moscow authorities on the question. In

---

<sup>239</sup> Barry McLoughlin, “Mass Operation of the NKVD, 1937-1938: a Survey,” in Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott (ed), *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 123.

<sup>240</sup> For the analysis of the purges in the Comintern see William J. Chase, *Enemies within the Gates? The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>241</sup> Negru, *Politica Etnoculturala in R.A.S.S. Moldoveneasca*, 126.

<sup>242</sup> Discussion of the turn to Cyrillic script and rejection of the Romanian cultural influence, see *Politica de Moldovenizare*, 296-308. See the report sent to Moscow, according to which the return to Cyrillic script conforms the principles of the “Leninist-Stalinist nationality policies,” *Tsk VKP(b) i Natsional'nyi Vopros. Kniga 2. 1933-1945* [Tsk VKP(b) and the National Question. Book 2. 1933-1945] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009), 396-397.

general, in the following two years the new Moldavian leadership continued the policy of the development of the local Moldavian culture, while not rushing into the extremes of either Latinization and pro-Romanianism or local Moldovanization. Roughly this strategy remained predominant in the Moldovan SSR, which emerged as the result of the World War II.

In June 1940, the Soviet Union occupied Bessarabia and the Moldovan authorities at last managed to extend their legislation on the territories that were from the establishment of MASSR claimed to be part of it. Yet, the expected in the 1920s propagandistic and revolutionizing input of the Moldovan ASSR in this expansion was quite limited.

## Conclusion

It is hardly possible in several pages and basing upon the research of only major turning points to draw general conclusions on the interwar nation-building in the Moldovan ASSR. Soviet interwar years were an extremely dense period, which witnessed several major turns in almost every dimension of the social life. Yet, some general axes of the story can be identified and outlined here.

First, the history of the nation-building in the Moldovan ASSR is a story of the changing contexts and balances of power. Each decision on the change of the direction of the nationality policies occurred in its specific context and therefore had specific rationale behind it. To some extent this is the story of the centralization of the political system. Yet, it demonstrates that in the mid-1920s the local authorities possessed significant autonomy in terms of the directions of the nationality policies, the choice of which depended much on the Soviet context of the period.

The idea of Moldovanization campaign emerged not, as it is in most cases perceived, in Moscow or even in Kharkiv, but in the debate between several competing party groups in Transnistria and Romanian émigrés in Moscow. Only due to the opposing competing positions on the local level the debate reached for the resolutions higher party levels. In the context of the Soviet mid-1920s, dominated by *korenizatsiia* in the nationality sphere and “socialism in one country” doctrine, the proposed project of the Moldovanizers was more appealing to the Ukrainian and Moscow authorities, who eventually decided in their favor. It was not, though, that the Romanianizing project was predestined to the rejection, but in the Soviet mid-1920s their rhetoric and arguments were increasingly less convincing for the Bolsheviks in Moscow and Kharkiv. Probably proposed several years earlier the initiative in the Moldovan ASSR would have been in the hands of the Romanian émigrés.

In addition, this debate took place on the background of the specific period of Soviet-Ukrainian relations. As the result, the Ukrainian authorities possessed decisive voice in the sphere of the nationality policies in the Moldovan ASSR and the choice of the leadership of the new Republic. These circumstances diminished even to a greater extent the chances of the Romanian émigrés to assume the party leadership in the Moldovan ASSR. Khrakiv was unwilling to devolve political power and eventually lose the control over the part of Ukrainian territory to the ambitious and radical Romanian communists, who most likely would have neglected the opinion of the Ukrainian authorities. Therefore, also from this point of view Bessarabians occupied a vantage place.

In the early 1930s the circumstances and the context altered significantly. The central authorities could have given the directive for the significant changes in the directions of the nationality policies or change the local political elite, neglecting, for example, the opinion of the Ukrainian authorities. In my opinion, taking the Soviet context in the early 1930s, the turn to Latinization can be explained by an attempt of the central authorities to solidify the power and control (weakened by the Five-Year Plan and radical Moldovanization campaign) over the border area in face of the perceived foreign threat. The linguistic experiments of the Moldovanization campaign made the language incomprehensible both for Bessarabians and the population of the Moldovan ASSR. The Latinization should have made the Soviet message closer to the local population on both sides of the Dniester.

Interestingly, if the defensive explanation of the turn to Latinization is more or less correct, then we can say that this shift was caught between the two tendencies, one of which was basically undermining the other. In the 1930s due to the imagined foreign threat, the Bolshevik authorities perceived the trans-border ethnic ties as one of the possible instruments of foreign intervention and not as the revolutionizing element in the neighboring states. From this perspective the turn to Latinization was an attempt to

undermine the potential foreign intervention but still by the old (1920s) means of the exploitation of the Piedmont Principle in Soviet favor.

Second, the Moldovan ASSR is a story of the intersection of the local nationality policies and foreign policy. My interpretation of the foreign implications of the Moldovan nationality policies demonstrates the increasingly defensive stance of the Soviet Union throughout almost all the period of the existence of the Republic. Therefore, in the eventual recession of Bessarabia the role of the Moldovan ASSR was quite limited. Yet, the foreign dimension of the Moldovan ASSR and the exploitation of the trans-border ethnic ties were a crucial issue and discourse. Despite the significant turns in the nationality policies all the succeeding political elites retained quite similar discourse of the role of the successes of local nationality policies for the recession of Bessarabia.

The debate between the adherents of the radical Romanianization and Moldovanization campaigns was not simply a clash of views on the identity of the Transnistrian and Bessarabian population but also the conflict of the perspectives on the future of the socialist revolution on the international level. The project of the Romanian émigrés presupposed that the socialist revolution should have been by all means exported to other countries, in their case to Romania, and the nationality policies in the Moldovan ASSR should be subordinated to this goal. The project of Moldovanizers downplayed the rhetoric of the World Revolution in favor of the internally determined policies of *korenizatsiia* and its implications for the recession of Bessarabia.

Initially the adherents of Moldovanization also emphasized the importance of the foreign implications of the Moldovan ASSR. This was the predominant discourse and one of the founding myths at the moment of the creation of the Republic. Yet, the foreign dimension in this case was limited only by Bessarabia. Eventually in 1925 the local Moldovan leaders pronounced in favor of the predominance of the internal developments in

comparison with the external implications. In my interpretation even the shift to Latinization was a defensive and not an offensive move. As the result of the growing suspicion of the borderlands, the Great Purges eliminated almost the entire leadership of the Moldovan ASSR.

In terms of the balance between the korenizatsiia and foreign policy goals we can discern three periods. At the moment of the creation of the Moldovan ASSR the foreign policy rhetoric and logic was predominant. Yet, already at this early stage certain reservations, which favored more internally-oriented policies, were made. After 1925 the focus on the internal developments came to the foreground. The Moldovanization campaign had its own internal logic. The turn to Latinization can be viewed as the restoration of the foreign considerations in the Moldovan nationality policy. Yet, the framework of the shift (Soviet war scare) was foremost the result of the internal Soviet developments.

Finally, and crucially, this is a story of ambiguity and uncertainty. The ambiguous perception by the Soviet authorities and the existence of several groups with the opposing views on the identity of the Transnistrian and Bessarabian population make the whole story and particularly two above-mentioned sub-stories specifically interesting.

Ironically, the Romanian émigrés, who were most unambiguous on the identity of the Romanian-speaking population of Bessarabia and Transnistria, considering them simply Romanians, brought the first ambiguity in the debate. Unwilling to provoke the discontent of the local population and such people as Kotovskii and Frunze, in the Memorandum (February 4, 1924) the Romanian communists proposed the creation of the Moldovan and not Romanian Soviet Republic.<sup>243</sup> By this denomination they weakened their own position on the nationality policies in the future Republic. Since the Republic was Moldovan and

---

<sup>243</sup> Romanian communists were not innovators in that sense. In 1917 *Sfatul Țării* also proclaimed the Moldovan Democratic Republic on the territory of Bessarabia.

there were advocates of the separate Moldovan identity, the Soviet authorities interpreted the Romanizing project of Dic and his companions, as an attempt to impose the “imperialist” Romanian culture on the poor Moldovan culture. In the context of the 1920s’ struggle with the Great Russian chauvinism this was hardly acceptable. In addition, at this moment the Soviet authorities were highly suspicious of assimilation.<sup>244</sup>

The ambiguous views of the Soviet authorities were not ungrounded. The Romanian-speaking population of Bessarabia and Transnistria never experienced a full-fledged long-term modern national political project. Therefore, it had quite weak national identity that developed in the highly multicultural environment (Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Gagauz, Bulgarian, Jewish, Polish etc<sup>245</sup>). In addition, for several centuries these territories were a borderland between various political entities. In these circumstances the predominantly rural local population developed quite flexible identities, which mixed the local tradition with the incorporations from other cultures. They based upon on the everyday social life, existing social, economic, political and cultural networks.

Yet, for the Soviet authorities the Moldovan case was not similar to other in the communist view most backward peoples, where the Soviet power was creating the national cultures, elites, languages etc. In the Moldovan case the elite already existed, but the problem was that there were several potential elite factions with almost radically opposing views. Even though choosing in favor of the existence of the separate Moldovan identity in 1924, the Soviet authorities maintained an ambiguous vision of it. The border position of the Republic reinforced the ambiguity, since the identity issue was highly politicized and presupposed international implications. In addition, for the Bolsheviks the Moldovan case

---

<sup>244</sup> Martin, *The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism*, 73, 77.

<sup>245</sup> Moreover, these cultures were usually no less heterogenous themselves.

was ambiguous, since it with difficulty fitted the Soviet nationality theory and practice<sup>246</sup>, which based to a large extent on the national languages. Nevertheless, from the linguistic perspective Moldovans were quite similar to Romanians. Therefore, the strong voices in favor of separate Moldovan nationality reinforced the persisting ambiguity. Beginning with 1924 the existence of the separate Moldovan identity was not questioned on the Republican level. But the content of the Moldovan identity was several times renegotiated. The perceived ambiguity of the identity allowed the authorities to significantly alter the nationality policies without giving up the theory of a separate Moldovan identity. All the subsequent Moldovan authorities could claim the development of the “true” Moldovan culture and its role for Bessarabia.

The existence of a separate Moldovan identity presupposed the minority-oriented type of the Piedmont Principle. Nevertheless, in some practical aspects the Moldovan case was caught somewhere in between the two outlined in the theoretical chapter types. Both during the Moldovanization and Latinization periods certain references to the all-Romanian socialist revolution existed. The ambiguity of the Soviet view on the Moldovan identity found, for instance, its embodiment in the question of the Bessarabian party organization. In such minority-oriented cases as Polish Western Ukraine and Western Belarus special parties were established (KPZU and KPZB) in order to specifically address the needs of the respective minority population. These parties were subordinated both to Polish Communist Party and KP(b)U and KP(b)B. The case of the Bessarabian regional committee of the Romanian Communist Party was specific. On the one hand, it existed practically autonomous from the control of the Romanian Communists. But at the same time it did not

---

<sup>246</sup> Soviet authorities encountered many problems fitting Soviet nationalities into their theoretical and political concepts of “nationality”. In the Moldovan case that problem acquired specific meaning due to the extremely sensitive border position of the MASSR and its role in the Bessarabian question.

acquire the status of full-fledged party, even though such discussion were carried out, as well as the question of its parallel subordination to the KP(b)U.

In the mid-1930s the Soviet authorities already considered that the Piedmont Principle was working against them. The Soviet authorities considered the Soviet nationalities, which were kin to the state-bearing nations in the potential war enemies of the USSR, to be the “fifth columns” of the capitalist interventionists. This was the majority-oriented Piedmont Principle reversed. In 1935-1936 NKVD carried out mass, almost total, resettlement of several border nationalities, such as Poles, Finns, and Germans. As the result, tens of thousands people had to leave their home and move to other less suitable for living places. This was only the beginning, in next several years a significant part of these nationalities would fall victim to Stalinist purges. In this case the ambiguous attitude to the Moldovan identity probably saved the population from similar resettlement campaigns. Since Moldovans were not considered to be Romanians, the Soviet authorities did not perceive them as the “fifth column” of the imperialist Romania. Nevertheless, in the years of Great Purges the ambiguity was already playing against the population of the Moldovan ASSR. The perceived proximity of Moldovans to Romanians made the Purges extremely severe, even though they did not have a total character.

The ambiguity and uncertainty remained to a significant extent after the Great Purges and in the postwar Moldovan SSR. The official rhetoric continued to claim the existence of the separate Moldovan nationality, but the language besides the differences in script was almost identical to Romanian. Moreover, Romanians and Moldovans shared quite similar literary heritage. At the same time the Moldovan SSR partook in the attempts to forge the common Soviet identity, while at the level of everyday life the permanent contacts between various cultures continued. This ambiguity persists in the present-day Republic of Moldova. The questions of identity, language and history are still the hottest topics of the public debate. The question that still remains, though, and is crucial for the future of the

Republic of Moldova, is the following: is this ambiguity (flexibility) of identity a weakness of the Moldovan society or is it a resource that can eventually bear rich fruits?

\* \* \*

The research opens up a number of possibilities and directions for future development of the topic. First, in this thesis only some major turns and decisions were reinterpreted. Careful comprehensive research might elucidate additional aspects of the nation- and state-building in the Moldovan ASSR, probably undermine or support some of the interpretations and conclusions presented in this paper. Second possible direction is to analyze the Soviet-Romanian debate on the local level, on the level of local policies and propaganda, and reciprocal claims. In this paper only the Soviet attempts to attract the Bessarabian population are reflected. Yet, the Romanian authorities also attempted to attract the population of the Moldovan ASSR to the Romanian national project. The Romanian Prime Minister Ion Brătianu welcomed the establishment of the Moldovan ASSR in 1924, as the Soviet recognition of the Romanian presence of the left bank of the Dniester. In turn, Onisifor Ghibu considered the propaganda among the Transnistrian population to be one of the key tasks of ASTRA. Several newspapers, targeting the population of the Moldovan ASSR were established. Third possible development of this paper might focus on the borderland policies of the Soviet Union and the role of the Soviet nationality policies in them. The elements of the typology of the Piedmont Principle proposed in this paper can be quite useful for this project. The case of the Moldovan ASSR can be compared to other cases (Polish autonomous regions, Ukrainian SSR and Belarusian SSR etc) along the Western Soviet border, where the Soviet authorities attempted to attract the population in the neighboring states to the benefits of the socialist development. The comparison can elucidate the specificities of the analyzed cases and/or the common trends of the Soviet treatment of the border areas.

## Bibliography

### **Primary Sources**

*10 Let Krovavoi Okkupacii* [10 Years of Bloody Occupation] (Obshchestvo Bessarabcev, 1928).

*Alcătuirea Republicii Autonome Sovietice Socialiste Moldovenești: Darea de Seamă Stenografică a Sessiei a 3-a a VUȚIK-ului, 8-12 Octombrie 1924* [The Establishment of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic: The Stenographic Report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session of VUTsIK, October 8-12, 1924] (Harkiv: 1924).

Bacon Jr., Walter M. *Behind Closed Doors: Secret Papers on the Failure of Romanian-Soviet Negotiations, 1931-1932* (Stanford, Cal.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1979).

Badulescu, A. *Vosstanie v Tatar-bunare* [Tatar-bunary Uprising] (Moscow: 1925).

Barbusse, Henri. *Palachi: Belyi Terror na Balkanah* [The Butchers: White Terror in the Balkans] (Moscow: 1927).

*Bessarabiia na Perekrestke Evropeiskoi Diplomatii: Dokumenty i Materialy* [Bessarabia on the Crossroads of European Diplomacy: Documents and Materials] (Moskva: Indrik, 1996).

Buciușcanu, G. *Gramatica Limbii Moldovenești* [Grammar of the Moldovan Language] (Balta: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1925).

Chior, P.I. *Dispri Orfografia Lingii Moldovinești* [On the Moldovan Orthography] (Birzula: 1929).

Clark, Charles Upson, *Bessarabia: Russia and Romania on the Black Sea* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927), [http://depts.washington.edu/cartah/text\\_archive/clark/meta\\_pag.shtml](http://depts.washington.edu/cartah/text_archive/clark/meta_pag.shtml) (Retrieved on June 6, 2010).

Cojocaru, Gheorghe E., ed. *Cominternul și Originele “Moldovenismului”* [Comintern and the Origins of “Moldovenism”] (Chișinău: Civitas, 2009).

*Darea de Samă a Congresului Întii al Sfaturilor din RSSA Moldovenească de Deputați, Muncitori, Țărani și Ostași Roși* (19-23 Aprilie 1925) [The Report of the First Congress of Soviets of Deputies, Toilers, Peasants and Red Soldiers from Moldovan ASSR] (Balta: n/a).

*Darea de Samă Stenografică a S'Ezduului al Doilea al Sfaturilor de Deputați, Muncitori, Țărani și Ostași Roși din RASSM* (9-14 Mai 1926) [The Stenographic Report of the Second Congress of Soviets of Deputies, Toilers, Peasants and Red Soldiers from Moldovan ASSR] (Balta: 1926).

Dembo, V., and Timov, S. *Vosstanie Bessarabskih Krest'ian protiv Rumynskih Pomeschchikov* [The Revolt of the Bessarabian Peasant against the Romanian Landowners] (Moscow: 1925).

Dimbul, A.P. *Gramatica, Morfologie: Manual pentru Școala Medie. Anul al 5-lea de Învățământ* [Grammar, Morphology: Textbook for the Secondary School. The 5<sup>th</sup> Year of Studies] (Tiraspol-Balta: 1933).

Efodiev, I. *Geografia Moldovei* [Geography of Moldova] (Balta: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1929).

Gornyi, V.A. et al, ed. *Natsional'nyi Vopros na Perekriostke Mnenii, 20-e Gody: Dokumenty i Materialy* [National Question at the Crossroad of Opinions, 1920s: Documents and Materials] (Moscow: Nauka, 1992).

Gribincea, Argentina, Gribincea, Mihai, and Șișcanu, Ion, ed. *Politica de Moldovenizare in R.A.S.S. Moldovenească: Culegere de Documente si Materiale* [The Policy of Moldovanization in the Moldovan ASSR: Collection of Documents and Materials] (Chișinău: Civitas, 2004).

Holostenco, V. *3 Goda Natsional'nogo Stroitel'stva v AMSSR i 10 Let Natsional'nogo Ugneteniiia v Bessarabii* [3 Years of the Nation-Building in the Moldovan ASSR and 10 Years of the National Oppression in Bessarabia] (Balta, 1928).

Ken O.N., and Rupasov, A.I., ed. *Politburo TsK VKP(b) i Otnosheniia SSSR s Zapadnymi Sosednimi Gosudarstvami* [Politburo TsK VKP(b) and the Relations of USSR with Western Neighboring Countries] (Sankt-Peterburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2000).

*Kommunisticheskoe Podpol'e Bessarabii. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov v 2-h Tomah, 1918-1940. Tom Pervyi (Mart 1918- August 1922)* [Bessarabian Communist Underground. Collection of Documents and Materials in Two Volumes. Vol. 1 (March 1918-August 1922)] (Chisinau: 1987-88).

*Kul'tura Moldavii za Gody Sovetskoii Vlasti. Sbornik Dokumentov v 4-h Tomah. Tom 1-2* [The Moldovan Culture during the Years of Soviet Power. Collection of Documents in 4 Volumes. Vol. 1-2] (Chisinau: 1975-1976).

Lih, Lars T. et al, ed. *Stalin's Letters to Molotov, 1925-1936* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

Madan, L. A., ed. *Gramatica Limbii Moldovenești: Fonetica, Morfologia și Sintaxa* [Moldovan Grammar: Phonetics, Morphology and Syntax] (Tiraspol: 1932).

Madan, L.A. *Gramatica Limbii Moldovenești* [Moldovan Grammar] (Tiraspol: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1929).

Madan, L.A., ed. *La Lunini. Carti di Lucru și Cetiri pentru Grupa a IV-a* [To the Light. Book for Work and Reading for the 4<sup>th</sup> Group] (Balta: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1928).

*Materialurili Șerșetării Organizației Partiiinești din Moldova* [The Materials of Inspection of the Moldvan Party Organization] (Tiraspol: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1930).

Milev, D. *Opere* [Works] (Chișinău: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1958).

*Nachalo Bol'shogo Puti. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov k 40-letiiu Obrazovaniia Moldavskoi SSR i Sozdaniia Kompartii Moldavii* [The Beginning of the Long Road. The Collection of Documents and Materials to the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Establishment of the Moldovan SSR and the Creation of the Communist Party of Moldova] (Kishinev: 1964).

*Natsional'nyi Vopros na Balkanah cherez Prizmu Mirovoi Revoliucii, chast' I* [National Question in the Balkans through the Lenses of World Revolution, part 1] (Moscow: URSS, 2000).

*Obrazovanie Moldavskoi SSR i Sozdanie Kommunisticheskoi Partii Moldavii: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov* [The Establishment of the Moldavian SSR and the Creation of the Communist Party of Moldavia: Collection of Documents and Materials] (Chisinau: 1984).

Pecionaiia, L. *Doua Lagere – Doua Politici. Dispri Zidirea Naționalo-Culturnicî în RASSM și Starea ‘n Basarabia Ocupatî* [Two Camps – Two Policies. On the National-Cultural Building in the Moldovan ASSR and the Situation in the Occupied Bessarabia] (Tiraspol, 1931).

Popovici, Andrei. *The Political Status of Bessarabia* (Washington: 1931).

*Primul Teatru Moldovenesc de Stat* [The First Moldovan State Theater] (Tiraspol: 1934)

*Sovetskoe Stroitel'stvo v Levoberejnyh Raionah Moldavii, 1921-24. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov* [Soviet Building on the Left Bank of Moldova, 1921-1924. Collection of Documents and Materials] (Chisinau: Stiinta, 1977).

Stalin, I.V. *Sochineniia, Tom 2, 1907-1913* [Works, Vol. 2, 1907-1913] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury).

Surilov, A.V., ed. *Gosudarstvenno-pravovye Akty Moldavskoi SSR (1924-1941 gg.)* [Legal State Documents of the Moldovan SSR] (Kishinev: Cartea Moldovenească, 1963).

Tănase, Stelian, ed. *Racovski: Dosar Secret* [Racovsky: Secret File] (Iași: Polirom, 2008).

Tatarescu, Gh. *Internaționala a III-a și Basarabia* [The Third International and Bessarabia] (București: 1925).

Tataru, A. *Bessarabiia pod Piatoi Rumynskih Okkupantov* [Bessarabia under the Heel of Romanian Occupants] (Moskva: Politizdat).

Timov, S. *Rumyniia* [Romania] (Moskva-Leningrad, 1931).

*TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Natsional'nyi Vopros. Kniga 1. 1918-1933 gg.* [TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) and the National Question. Book 1. 1918-1933] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005).

*TsK VKP(b) i Natsional'nyi Vopros. Kniga 2. 1933-1945* [TsK VKP(b) and the National Question. Book 2. 1933-1945] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009).

## **Secondary Literature**

Afteniuk, S. *Leninskaia Natsional'naia Politika Kommunisticheskoi Partii i Obrazovanie Sovetskoi Gosudarstvennosti Moldavskogo Naroda* [Leninist Nationality Policy of the Communist Party and the Creation of the Statehood of the Moldavian People] (Chisinau: Cartea Moldoveneasca, 1971).

Anghel, Florin. *Construirea Sitemului “Cordon Sanitaire”: Relații Româno-Polone, 1919-1926* [The Building Up of the “Cordon Sanitaire” System: Romanian-Polish Relations, 1919-1926] (Cetatea de Scaun, 2008).

Bahry, Donna. *Outside Moscow: Power, Politics, and Budgetary Policy in the Soviet Republics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

Baron, Nick. “‘Empire’ and ‘Nation’ as Categories of Spacial Politics and Historical Study: Methodological Notes for the Ab Imperio Roundtable.” *Ab Imperio* no. 2 (2002).

Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

- Blank, Stephen. *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917-1924* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994).
- Brandenberger, David. *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- Brown, Kate. *A Biography of no Place: from Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).
- Brubaker, Rogers, and Cooper, Frederick. "Beyond Identity." *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1-47.
- Brubaker, Rogers. "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account." *Theory and Society* 23 (1994): 47-78.
- Bruchis, Michael. *Nations-Nationalities-People: a Study of the Nationalities Policy of the Communist Party in Soviet Moldavia* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1984).
- Bruchis, Michael. *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: East European Monographs, 1982).
- Bruhis, Mihail. *Rusia, România și Basarabia. 1812, 1918, 1924, 1940* [Russia, Romania and Bessarabia] (Chișinău: Editura Universitas, 1992).
- Carrere D'Encausse, Helene. *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917-1930* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1992).
- Chandler, Andrea. *Institutions of Isolation: Border Controls in the Soviet Union and its Successor States, 1917-1993* (Montreal; Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).
- Chase, Willian J. *Enemies within the Gates? The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
- Ciocanu-Gribincea, Argentina, and Gribincea, Mihai. "Politica de Moldovenizarea în R.A.S.S. Moldovenească." [Politics of Moldovanization in the Moldovan ASSR] *Cugetul* no 4 (2000): 18-30.
- Connor, Walker. *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).
- Conquest, Robert . *Nation Killers: the Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (London: Macmillan, 1970).
- Conquest, Robert, ed. *The Last Empire: Nationality and the Soviet Future* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1986).
- Cusco, Andrei. "Between Revolutionary Utopia and State Pragmatism: the Moldavian ASSR as a Controversial 'Soviet Piedmont'." *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics* 4 (2004): 7-27.
- Deletant, Dennis. "Language Policy and Linguistic Trends in the Republic of Moldavia, 1924-1992." In *Studies in Moldovan: the History, Culture, Language and Contemporary Politics of the People of Moldova*, Donald L. Dyer, ed . (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1996): 53-87.

- Di Biagio, Anna. "Moscow, the Comintern and the War Scare." In *Russia in the Age of Wars, 1914-1945*, ed. Silvio Pons and Andrea Romano (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2000): 83-102.
- Dima, Nicholas. *Bessarabia and Bukovina: the Soviet-Romanian Territorial Dispute* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1982).
- Doyle, Michael W. *Empires* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986).
- Esaulenco, A.S., ed. *Bor'ba Trudeashchihsia Bessarabii za Svoio Osvobojudenie i Vossoedinenie s Sovetskoi Rodinoi (1918-1940 gg.)* [The Struggle of the Bessarabian Toilers for their Liberation and Reunification with the Soviet Fatherland] (Kishinev 1970).
- Fagan, Gus, ed. *Christian Racovsky: Selected Writings on the Opposition in the USSR, 1923-1930* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980).
- Fischer-Galati, Stephen. "The Moldavian Soviet Republic in Soviet Domestic and Foreign Policy." In *The Influence of East Europe and the Soviet West on the USSR*, Roman Szporluk, ed. (New York: Praeger, 1975, c1976): 229-250.
- Fruntașu, Iulian. *O Istorie Etnopolitică a Basarabiei, 1812-2002* [An Ethnopolitical History of Bessarabia, 1812-2002] (București, Chișinău: Cartier, 2002).
- Galuşcenko, Oleg. "Crearea Republicii Sovietice Socialiste Moldovenești (R.A.S.S.M.)." [The Creation of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic] *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei* no. 3-4 (1997): 65-82.
- Galushchenko, Oleg. *Bor'ba mejdu Rumynizatorami i Samobytnikami v Moldavskoi ASSR (20-e gody)* [The Struggle between Romanizers and Indigenizers in the Moldovan ASSR (1920s)] <http://www.iatp.md/articles/borba.htm> (Retrieved on June 6, 2010).
- Galushchenko, Oleg. *Naselenie Moldavskoi ASSR (1924-1940 gg.)* [Population of the Moldovan ASSR] (Kishinev: Tipografiia Akademii Nauk, 2001).
- Gelb, Michael. "An Early Soviet Ethnic Deportation: The Far-Eastern Koreans." *Russian Review* 54 (1995): 389-412.
- Getty, J. Arch, and Naumov, Oleg V., ed. *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1999).
- Gregor, A. James. *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009).
- Halfin, Igal. *Intimate Enemies: Demonizing the Bolshevik Opposition, 1918-1928* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007).
- Hardeman, Hilde. *Coming to Terms with the Soviet Regime: the "Changing Signposts" Movement among Russian Émigrés in the Early 1920s* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994).
- Haslam, Jonathan. *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930-33: the Impact of Depression* (London: Macmillan, 1983).
- Hausleitner, Mariana. *Deutsche und Juden in Bessarabien, 1814-1941: zur Minderheitenpolitik Russlands und Grossrumäniens* (München: IKGS Verlag, 2005).

- Haynes, Rebecca. "Historical introduction." In *Moldova, Bessarabia, Transnistria*, ed. Rebecca Haynes (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 2003): 1-142.
- Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).
- Hodnett, Grey. "The Debate over Soviet Federalism." *Europe-Asia Studies* 18 (1967): 458-481.
- Hosking, Geoffrey. *Rulers and Victims: the Russians in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).
- Istoria Partidului Comunist al Moldovei: Studii* [The History of Moldovan Communist Party: Studies] (Chişinău: Cartea Moldovenească: 1982).
- Jacobson, Jon. *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
- Kappeler, Andreas. *The Russian Empire: a Multiethnic History* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2001).
- King, Charles. "The Ambivalence of Authenticity, or How the Moldovan Language was Made." *Slavic Review* 58 (1999): 117-142.
- King, Charles. *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000).
- King, Robert R. *A History of the Romanian Communist Party* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1980)
- Kopanskii, Ia. *Neustrashimye Boicy* [Fearless Fighters] (Kishinev: 1977).
- Kotkin, Stephen. "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2 (2001): 111-164.
- Kotkin, Stephen. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1995).
- Lazarev, A.M. *Moldavskaia Sovetskaia Gosudarstvennost' i Bessarabskii Vopros* [Moldovan Soviet Statehood and the Bessarabian Question] (Kishinev: Cartea Moldovenească, 1974).
- Lewin, Moshe. *Lenin's Last Struggle* (New York: Pantheon, 1968).
- Lieven, Dominic C.B. *Empire: the Russian Empire and its Rivals* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001).
- Lieven, Dominic. "The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as Imperial Polities." *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995): 607-636.
- Lungu, Dov B. *Romania and the Great Powers, 1933-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).
- Mace, James E. *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918-1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

- Machajski, Jan Waclaw. "Excerpts from the 'Intellectual Worker' (1904-1905)." In *The Making of Society: an Outline of Sociology*, ed. V.F. Claveton (New York: The Modern Library, 1937): 427-236.
- Martin, Terry. "An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism." In *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 67-90.
- Martin, Terry. "The Russification of the RSFSR." *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 39 (1998): 99-117.
- Martin, Terry. "The Soviet Union as Empire: Salvaging a Dubious Analytical Category." *Ab Imperio* no.2 (2002): 91-105.
- Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).
- McDermott, Kevin, and Agnew, Jeremy. *The Comintern: a History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1996).
- McLoughlin, Barry. "Mass Operation of the NKVD, 1937-1938: a Survey." In *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union*, ed. Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 118-152.
- Mevius, Martin. "Reappraising Communism and Nationalism." *Nationalities Papers* 37 (2009): 377-400.
- Mevius, Martin. *Agents of Moscow: the Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism, 1941-1953* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004).
- Miller, Alexei, and Rieber, Alfred J. "Introduction: Imperial Rule." In *Imperial Rule*, ed. Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004): 1-6.
- Mitrasca, Marcel. *Moldova: a Romanian Province under Russian Rule: Diplomatic History from the Archives of the Great Powers* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2002).
- Moraru, Anton. "Destinul unui Document." [The Fate of a Document] *Cugetul* no 5-6 (1992): 53-58.
- Moraru, Anton. *Istoria Românilor: Basarabia și Transnistria (1812-1993)* [The History of Romanians: Bessarabia and Transnistria (1812-1993)] (Chisinau: Universal, 1995).
- Moraru, Pavel. *La Hotarul Românesc al Europei: din Istoria Siguranței Generale în Basarabia, 1918-1940* [On the Romanian Border of Europe: From the History of General Siguranța in Bessarabia, 1918-1940] (București: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2008).
- Moraru, Pavel. *Serviciile Secrete și Basarabia: Dicționar, 1918-1991* [Secret Services and Bessarabia: Dictionary, 1918-1991] (București: Editura Militară, 2008).
- Mosse, George L. *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: H. Fertig, 1999).
- Motyl, Alexander J. "Building Bridges and Changing Landmarks: Theory and Concept in the Study of Soviet Nationalities." In *Thinking Theoretically about Soviet Nationalities: History and*

*Comparison in the Study of the USSR*, ed. Alexandr J. Motyl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992): 255-270.

Movileanu, Nicolae. "Din Istoria Transnistriei (1924-1940) (I)." *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei* no 1 (1993): 61-69.

Movileanu, Nicolae. "Din Istoria Transnistriei (1924-1940) (II)." *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei* no 2 (1993): 69-77.

Movileanu, Nicolae. "Problema Limbii Naționale și a Grafiei Latine în R.A.S.S. Moldovenească." [The Problem of National Language and Latin Script in the Moldovan ASSR] *Cugetul* no 2 (2001): 26-31.

Negru, Elena. "Introducerea și Interzicerea Grafiei Latine în R.A.S.S.M." [Introduction and Prohibition of the Latin Script in MASSR] *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei* no. 3-4 (1999): 34-42.

Negru, Elena. *Politica Etnoculturala în R.A.S.S. Moldoveneasca* [Ethnocultural Policy in the Moldavian ASSR] (Chisinau: Prut International, 2003).

Negru, Gheorghe. *Politica Etnoligvistică în R.S.S. Moldovenească* [Ethnolinguistic Policy in the Moldovan SSR] (Chișinău: Prut International, 2000).

Nimni, Ephraim. *Marxism and Nationalism: Theoretical Origins of a Political Crisis* (London: Pluto Press, 1994, c1991).

*O Istorie a Regiunii Transnistrene: Din Cele mai Vechi Timpuri până în Prezent* [A History of the Transnistrian Region: From the Ancient Times to the Present Day] (Chișinău: Civitas, 2007).

Pădureac, Lilia. *Relațiile Româno-Sovietive (1917-1934)* [Soviet-Romanian Relations] (Chisinau: Prut International, 2003).

Pauly, Matthew D. "Soviet Polonophobia and the Formulation of Nationalities Policy in the Ukrainian SSR, 1927-1934." In *Polish Encounters, Russian Identity*, ed. David L. Ransel and Bozena Shallcross (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005): 172-188.

Petrov, Nikita, and Roginskii, Arsenii. "The 'Polish Operation' of the NKVD, 1937-1938." In *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union*, ed. Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 153-172.

Phillips, Hugh D. *Between the Revolution and the West: a political Biography of Maxim M. Litvinov* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

Pipes, Richard. *Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954).

Platt, Kevin M.F., and Brandenberger, David, ed. *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

Plochy, Serhii. *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

Polian, P. *Against Their Will: the History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004).

- Popa, Ioan, and Popa, Luiza. *Românii, Basarabia și Transnistria* [Romanians, Bessarabia and Transnistria] (București: Editura Fundația Europeană Titulescu, 2009).
- Ree, Erik van. “‘Lenin’s Last Struggle’ Revisited.” *Revolutionary Russia* 14 (2001): 85-122.
- Ree, Erik van. “Stalin and the National Question.” *Revolutionary Russia* 7 (1994): 214-238.
- Rees, E.A. “The Changing Nature of Centre-Local Relations in the USSR, 1928-36.” In *Centre-local relations in the Stalinist state 1928-1941*, ed. E.A. Rees (New York: Palgrave, 2002): 9-36.
- Repida, A. *Obrazovanie Moldavskoi ASSR* [The Establishment of the Moldavian ASSR] (Chisinau: Stiinta, 1974).
- Rieber, Alfred. “Stalin as Foreign Policy-Maker: Avoiding War, 1927-1953.” In *Stalin: A New History*, ed. Sarah Davies and James Harris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 140-158.
- Rieber, Alfred. “Struggle Over the Boredlands.” In *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1994): 61-90.
- Romano, Andrea. “Permanent War Scare: Mobilization, Militarization and the Peasant War.” In *Russia in the Age of Wars, 1914-1945*, ed. Silvio Pons and Andrea Romano (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2000): 103-120.
- Rotari, Ludmila. *Mișcarea Subversivă din Basarabia în Anii 1918-1924* [Subversive Movement in Bessarabia in 1918-1924] (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004).
- Shearer, David. “Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD during the 1930s.” *Cahiers du monde russe* 42 (2001): 505-534.
- Short, Neil. *The Stalin and Molotov Lines: Soviet Western Defences 1928-1941* (Osprey Publishing, 2008).
- Slezkine, Yuri. “The Soviet Union as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.” *Slavic Review* 53 (1994): 414-452.
- Smith, Jeremy. “Stalin as Commissar for Nationalities Affairs, 1918-1922.” In *Stalin: A New History*, ed. Sarah Davies and James Harris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 45-62.
- Smith, Jeremy. “The Origins of Soviet National Autonomy.” *Revolutionary Russia* 10 (1997): 62-84.
- Smith, Jeremy. *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
- Smith, Michael G. *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953* (Berlin ; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998).
- Snyder, Timothy. *Sketches from a Secret War: a Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
- Sontag, John P. “The Soviet War Scare of 1926-27.” *Russian Review* 34 (1975): 66-77.

Stratievskii, K. "Izmeneniia v Administrativno-Territorial'nom Delenii i v Sostave Naseleniia Moldavskoi ASSR (1924-1940 gg.)." [The Changes in the Administrative Division and Population in the Moldovan ASSR] *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei* no 2 (1995): 24-37.

Stratievskii, K.V. *Golod 1932-1933 gg. v Moldavskoi ASSR* [The Hunger of 1932-1933 in the Moldovan ASSR] (Kishinev: 2001).

Suny, Ronald Grigor. "The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, "National" Identity, and Theories of Empire." In *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Building in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 23-66.

Suny, Ronald Grigor. *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

Țăcu, Octavian. *Problema Basarabiei și Relațiile Sovieto-Române în Perioada Interbelică* [The Bessarabian Problem and the Soviet-Romanian Relations in the Interwar Period] (Chisinau: Prut International, 2004).

Tănase, Stelian. *Clienții lu' Tanti Varvara: Istoriei Clandestine* [Auntie Varvara's Clients: Clandestine Stories] (București: Humanitas, 2008).

Tismaneanu, Vladimir. *Stalinism for All Seasons: a Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003).

Tucker, Robert C. *Stalin in Power: the Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: Norton, 1990).

Tumarkin, Nina. *Lenin Lives!: the Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 152.

Viola, Lynne. *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Vujacic, Veljko. "Stalinism and Russian Nationalism: A Reconceptualization." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 23 (2007): 156-183.

Weiner, Amir. *Making Sense of War: the Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).