

The Union of Bessarabia with Romania in the Cultural Propaganda System of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (1960–1970)

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The Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic was transformed into a real laboratory for the formulation and testing of the most primitive theories and conceptions about the history of the “Moldovan people.”

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THE MATTER of Bessarabia, brought back to Romania through the vote cast by the Country Council on 27 March 1918, was, together with the matter of the Romanian gold, the main subject in the dispute with Moscow, which marked the Soviet-Romanian relations for the entire interwar period. In the communist propaganda, the event translated into an accusation against the authorities in Bucharest, and became a means of pressuring and blackmailing the same authorities, which were considered to be “aggressors,” “occupants,” “invaders.” That is why Soviet Russia thought that the loss of Bessarabia was only temporary, caused by a moment of military weakness and an unfavorable international situation, and that it would act to regain this territory at a favorable moment by means of force. Against this background, all means would be used: military, propagandistic, and diplomatic. Those tricks of the Bolshevik propaganda would find their reflection in the ultimatum

of the Soviet government addressed to the Romanian government on 26 June 1940, which led to the re-annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviet Union.

During the first two postwar decades, the communist leadership in Bucharest, actually incorporated in the Soviet bloc in political, military, economic, and ideological terms, and obedient to the Kremlin, did not contest Bessarabia's annexation by the Soviet Union. The politruk Mihail Roller and other communist cultural activists like him became engaged in the process of rewriting Romania's history, and appreciated the crucial events in Bessarabia's tragic destiny as being favorable to Moscow. As such, the 1812 tsarist annexation was qualified as "liberation and joining," the union of 27 March 1918 as "occupation by the bourgeois-landlord Romania," while the Soviet re-annexation of 28 June 1940 was seen as "an equitable, peaceful solution to the Bessarabian problem."

Given the fact that, until the mid-1960s, the communist regime in Bucharest did not dispute Bessarabia's inclusion, the Soviet propaganda and historiography did not approach the problems of 1918. Still, "the matter of Bessarabia" was a constant source of tension between Moscow and Bucharest, which remained unchanged during the interwar period and even after the instauration of the communist regime in Romania. Geopolitically, Bessarabia occupied a unique position among the other territories recently re-annexed by the Soviet Union. Mostly composed of territories that were taken from Romania in 1940, the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) was the only soviet republic that could still be targeted by foreign irredentism. The signing of the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, through which the pro-Soviet regime in Bucharest accepted the incorporation of Bessarabia in the eastern empire, could not bring peace to the new master.

Not only did the problem of the Moldovans' identity, culturally connected to a national state on the other side of their border, remain on the agenda, but the relations with Romania, despite its position as a socialist state after 1947, were also affected by the Bessarabian issue, a situation which replicated in the Soviet context an older confrontation between the Kingdom of Romania and the Russian Empire.¹

The "Bessarabian issue" and, implicitly, the significance of and interest for the year 1918 became topical again because of the evolution of the international situation and of the increasing interest of Western scholars in those matters which were generally favorable to the approach and message promoted by the Bucharest authorities.² The increasingly trenchant approaches to the "Bessarabian matter" by the Romanian leaders and, upon their recommendations, by the Romanian historians, were classified by the Soviets as "territorial claims." As the Dutch historian Wim P. van Meurs well noted, "the return to the Bessarabian matter in the writing of history in 1964 coincided with the formulation of

implicit political claims over this lost territory, as part of the escalation of the Soviet-Romanian conflict” and reflected “the general nationalistic tendency in the writing of the Romanian history.”³

The “declaration of independence” of the Bucharest authorities in April 1964, the promotion of an autonomous path in domestic and foreign policy, as well as the few published works of the Marxist-Leninist classicists, among which *Marx despre români* (Marx on the Romanians), had an irreversible impact not only on the rewriting of history in Romania, but also on the Soviet-Romanian relations generally. In this context,

*the Soviet-Romanian dispute, together with other sensitive problems, would be dominated, especially in the 1960s and the 1970s, by the Bessarabian issue, which triggered a true competition. The simple fact that the “territorial problem” had appeared on the agenda of the Soviet-Romanian bilateral relations was already a sign of the unacceptance by the Bucharest authorities of the vassal status imposed to Romania by the USSR after 1944; the approach to this matter from the perspective of the historical truth, in opposition with the point of view adopted by the Kremlin, had, against the general background of those relations, the effect of an explosion, demolishing the framework of the previous “brotherhood.”*⁴

Until the middle of 1965, Moscow preferred not to aggravate the relations with Romania and initially did not counteract the so-called “slandorous” actions of the Romanian politicians and historians. What the Soviet authorities seemed to fear the most were local nationalism and the writings of the Romanian exiles from the West.⁵

Given the fact that for the Soviet propaganda there was an intensification of the activity of the so-called “bourgeois falsifiers” of the history and culture of the “Moldovan people,” there was a need to strengthen their separate existence, to justify the two “liberations,” and to counteract the “local nationalism” which impinged upon the “centuries-old friendship” with the great Russian people.

For almost two decades (1964–1980), the anti-Romanian propaganda and ideological campaigns, initiated by the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), were orchestrated in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic by the CC of the Communist Party of Moldova (CPM), led by first secretary Ivan Ivanovich Bodiul. As second secretary (1959–1961) and then first secretary of the CC of the CPM, he promoted an ample campaign meant to distort the scientific truth about the Romanian language and the national history.⁶

During the so-called “blessed decade,” which coincided with the peak period of the tensions in the Soviet-Romanian relations, the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic was transformed not only into a polygon for the most disastrous

economic experiments, but also into a real laboratory for the formulation and testing of the most primitive theories and conceptions about the history of the “Moldovan people.”

Bodiul’s historiographic interventions, which became mandatory once the “historiographic war” between the two sides broke out, were a replica of the political actions of the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) and of the “revisionist” historical publications released in Romania. I. Bodiul’s interference in historical science intensified as the Soviet-Romanian dissensions amplified and deepened on various matters, especially on the issue of Bessarabia. One may actually see a direct connection between the status of the Soviet-Romanian relations and the content of the historiographic discourse of the Moldovan leader.

Therefore, as of 1965, the speeches of the party’s first secretary on various ideological, political, and educational matters, delivered during consultations, plenary meetings, conferences, congresses of the Communist Party, always contained a synthesis of the territory’s and republic’s history from the ancient times to the present.⁷ That “short compendium-like history of Moldova” focused mostly on the following main coordinates: the centuries-long friendship; the premises and the progressive act of Bessarabia “joining” Russia; the triumph of the Soviet power; the dastardly invasion of Bessarabia by the “bourgeois-landlord” Romania, and the establishment of an occupation regime; the ceaseless fight of the Moldovan people for their union with their mother country, namely, the Soviet Union; the equitable settlement of the Bessarabian issue and the reunification of the Moldovan people in a Soviet socialist state; the selfless help granted by the Russian people to the Moldovan one “during all historical eras”; the tremendous economic and cultural development of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic in the years of socialist construction.

Conclusive in that context is the report presented during a large-scale republican consultation of party activists, held on 22–23 December 1965, summoned as part of the campaigns meant to blame the “local nationalists” and the “incendiary” speeches delivered during the Moldovan writers’ congress that had recently ended, and where I. Bodiul manifestly and officially expressed his interest in the republic’s history, which, up until that moment, had only been accidentally and briefly mentioned in his speeches.⁸ In the report presented before the audience, he succinctly presented the history of the territory “since time immemorial,” stating the “founding myths” of Soviet propaganda and historiography.⁹

Bodiul admitted that “also, our science has not properly studied the period of Bessarabia’s occupation through violence. Under the pretext of ‘not stirring up the past,’ scientists don’t usually examine in depth the economic, social and cultural status quo of the people under the invader’s occupation; their heroic fight to unite with the motherland—the Soviet Union” (it is worth remarking that,

at that moment, there was no mention as to who the ‘invaders’ were). Consequently, one may notice that “the deficiencies of historical science, as well as the errors in the political activity among workers are being used by our ideological enemies, who are doing their best to distort Bessarabia’s past.”¹⁰

The disputes between Romanians and Soviets on the “Bessarabian issue” increased in the following years.¹¹ In this context, the year 1967 represented one of the most eloquent examples of the impact of the relations between the two countries, which reached their lowest point in the cultural and propagandistic historiography and policy of the MSSR. For the USSR, 1967 was marked by the preparations for the celebration of the 50-year jubilee of the Bolshevik revolution, while for the republic’s leaders this was an ordinary occasion to “convince” their own people and the international public opinion of the so-called grandiose “accomplishments” obtained during the years of Soviet rule.

On 13 February 1967 already, during the ordinary plenary session of the CC of CPM, I. Bodiul presented the report “On the Preparations for the Semi-centenary of the Great October Social Revolution and on the Duties of the Republic’s Party Organization,” which, beyond its mobilizing spirit, also contained a party interpretation of the role of this “momentous” event in the destinies of the “Moldovan people,” featured in an ample section at the very beginning of the report, suggestively entitled: “Some Remarks on the Revolutionary Movement in Moldova, the Workers’ Fight for the Soviet Power and for the Defense of its Achievements.”

It is worth mentioning that, for the first time in the disputes of 1965–1967, the public speeches delivered by I. Bodiul and other party dignitaries made clear reference to the Kingdom of Romania allegedly “occupying” Bessarabia in 1918. The Moldovan leader was worried that “now, in the West, new attempts have been made to deny the separation of Bessarabia from the Soviet Russia; there seems to be a tendency to prove that this territory was not occupied, but rather annexed to bourgeois-landlord Romania, supposedly according to the people’s will.”¹²

Shortly after, taking the floor during the annual assembly of the Social Sciences Department of the Academy of Sciences of the MSSR on 9 March 1967, the first secretary of the CC of the CPM outlined the fact that the “hardships” and the “delays” in the research carried out in the field of social sciences in the MSSR were determined by the “special relations that started being established among the Soviet countries.”¹³ “Our scientists,” I. Bodiul explained, “counted on normal rapports between the Soviet Union and Romania. That is why little attention was given to some problems of the past, which are of great importance to clarify our state’s relations with Romania . . .” Then he mentioned: “We did not clarify political events. . . . And this actually worked against us . . . In the given situation

we found ourselves unprepared. We do not have a series of extremely important scientific works, based on which we could have carried out propaganda on the international arena, too . . . All around the world, allegations about Bessarabia have reached unprecedented levels. When these allegations started, we were not well prepared to carry out the counterpropaganda.”¹⁴

In this context and in order to challenge the legality of Bessarabia’s union with Romania, “the myth of the Soviet Power’s triumph” and that of “the formation of the Moldovan bourgeois nation” were devised ad hoc.

Firstly, for the communist propaganda, and implicitly for the Soviet historiography, it was of utmost importance that the illegality of the Act of Union of 27 March 1918 be “demonstrated.” Copying the jargon and clichés of Bolshevik diplomacy, the Soviet historiography would claim Bessarabia because, at the moment of its “theft” by the bourgeois-landlord Romania, it was a Soviet territory where the socialist revolution had triumphed; the Country Council was a counterrevolutionary, unrepresentative body, and was not authorized to decide the fate of the population on that territory; the “occupants” set up a “colonial,” “bloody” regime; as a consequence, the people rose against the “invaders” to set this territory free and to reunite it with the Land of the Soviets.

The value of the political and propagandistic idea that Bessarabia belonged to tsarist Russia and then to Soviet Russia, before “the instauration of the Soviet Power,” was obvious. It reinforced the alleged legitimacy of the Soviet regime as acceptable from the ideological point of view and was also a reference to the 1812 tsarist annexation as a liberation from the Turkish yoke.

With a view to legitimize the preservation of Bessarabia, first in Soviet Russia and then in the USSR, “the myth of the Great October Socialist Revolution” was transposed in the territory as the “triumph of the socialist revolution and of the socialist power in Moldova.” The “October Revolution” represented, according to I. Bodiul, an epochal event, which crowned the “positive” consequences of Moldova’s annexation by Russia; this event led to the social and national emancipation of the “Moldovan people.” Always united throughout history by the “centuries-long friendship” with the great Russian people, the Moldovan people now had its path open towards a bright future, the communism it sought to achieve alongside the other peoples of the multinational Motherland.¹⁵

The Moldovan nationalists became the target of attacks in all the historiographic speeches made by Bodiul. They were called and labelled “traitors” and “mortal enemies of the Moldovan people.” They were responsible for all evil, for national hatred, for the tendency to maintain the old regime, etc. At a certain point, the fight against nationalists was considered one of the fundamental traits of the revolutionary movement in the territory at that time. As such, in his opinion:

one of the particularities of the revolutionary movement in Bessarabia in the period between the February Revolution and the Great October Revolution was the active fight of laborers against the Moldovan bourgeois nationalists, who were doing everything in their power to maintain and strengthen the bourgeois-landlord order, therefore setting the Moldovan people against their fraternal people in revolutionary Russia. With a view to their class-related purposes, the bourgeois nationalists created the Country Council, a counterrevolutionary organization . . . In those days, the powerful people's movement for social freedoms swept away the bourgeois nationalists. Their attempts to hinder by any means the victory of the socialist revolution in our land proved to be in vain.¹⁶

Their purpose was to discredit the Country Council and to prove that the people opposed the act of 27 March 1918.

However, when the leader in Kishinev got involved in the dispute on historical matters with his bourgeois “opponents” and the Romanian authorities and historians, although there was “proof” that the Bolshevik revolution had scored victories on that territory, the Soviet Moldovan historiography had not formulated a unanimous opinion on the date when the Soviet Power had been established.¹⁷ Consequently, an extremely important topic in I. Bodiul’s speeches, which emerged in the context of the Soviet-Romanian dissensions on the “Bessarabian issue,” was not only that of “the triumph and establishment of the Soviet Power in Moldova,” but also of the date when this event had taken place.

Beyond this purely “scientific” aspect, which had no value in terms of historical truth, establishing the chronological limits of that event had, first of all, a political and ideological connotation in the case of the MSSR. The communist propaganda was also partly interested in the scenario according to which “Bessarabia’s conquest” by the Kingdom of Romania had been a first act of external “aggression” against a territory of Soviet Russia, where the power of “workers and peasants” had already been set up. This could also justify the “liberation” of 1940 as “a triumph of historical truth” and as “restoration of justice.” Furthermore, “the Moldovan people” was offered a Soviet holiday, which was meant to place them alongside the other peoples of the Soviet Union—firstly, alongside the Russian people—who had carried out the Great October Revolution.¹⁸

The historians’ debates on the date when the “Soviet Power triumphed” in Moldova lasted for more than a decade, with no results. The event was first mentioned in a party document which had quite an impact of the Soviet-Romanian relations, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. The Decision of the CC of the CPM “On the Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Soviet Power in Moldova,” adopted at the beginning of December 1967, although there was no historical document allowing for this conclusion, explic-

itly stated: “On 14 January 1918 (1 January according to the old calendar), the entire state power on the territory of Moldova passed over to the Soviets. The counterrevolutionary forces were crushed and immobilized. This date entered in the history of the Moldovan people as the day of the victory of the socialist revolution in the territory, a revolution that ended slavery, oppression, cruel exploitation, ignorance, the absence of rights, and which made way for the creation of a new life.” Consequently, the CC of the CPM decided: “to mark, on 14 January 1968, the 50-year jubilee of the establishment of the Soviet Power in Moldova as one of the most important historical events in the life of the Moldovan people.”¹⁹ The communist project of “celebrating” the triumph of the Soviet Power in the territory, as well as the propaganda campaign accompanying it, were included in the denationalization strategy aimed at the Romanians living east of the Prut River.

The date finally became official on 14 January 1968, when a solemn gathering of all representatives of the republic took place in Kishinev. The event was part of the series of measures dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the victory of the Bolshevik revolution in Moldova and to the “triumphal march of the Soviet Power,” also intended to counteract the measures carried out by the leaders in Bucharest. In his introductory speech, I. Bodiul strongly stated that the socialist revolution had allegedly triumphed in a fierce battle against the counterrevolution and against the Moldovan nationalists, who had sought to remain in power, mentioning that: “Using the revolutionary situation created in Russia, sweeping away the bourgeois nationalists and other reactionaries from their path, the workers and peasants of Moldova, allied with the revolutionary soldiers, under the leadership of the Bolshevik, established the Soviet Power on the entire territory on 14 January 1918. Today, the happy Moldovan people cheerfully and solemnly marks the 50-year jubilee of this date, which has entered in history as the day when the socialist revolution triumphed in Moldova.”²⁰

The need for a propagandistic motivation of the allegation that the Kingdom of Romania had occupied Bessarabia also came from the fact that, referring to the events of 1917–1918, when talking about the territory located between the Prut and the Dniester rivers, I. Bodiul exclusively used the toponym “Moldova,” which, in his mind, should have meant that the inhabitants of that territory were Moldovans and were different from the Romanian people. However, it is well known that even the concept of “Moldovan people” as a separate nation, distinct from the Romanian one, was merely a tsarist invention.

AFTER BESSARABIA’S union with Romania in 1918—an act that was never recognized by Soviet Russia—and the setting up of the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) (an autonomous republic

of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) in 1924 on the left shore of the Dniester River, the Bolshevik regime started reusing the tsarist arguments about the existence of a “Moldovan nation.” I. Bodiul would later take up some elements from the Comintern, Stalinist arsenal and “develop” these outdated arguments, sometimes by simply restating or rewriting them.

Although “chronologically, in the MASSR, the formulation of the concept of ‘Moldovan nation’ was initiated in March 1967, roughly one year and a half after the 3rd Congress of the Writers’ Association in October 1965, where the Moldovans’ Russification policies were contested and the necessity to return to the Latin alphabet was debated, and almost two years after the 1965 campaign against Romania, the West and China,²¹ the first secretary in Kishinev ventured to approach the matter as early as at the middle of March 1966. On 18 March 1966, in the secret informative note—one of the many such documents regularly sent to Moscow—addressed by the CC of the CPM to the CC of the CPSU, he reported that “the press and the bourgeois radio propaganda are increasingly denying the legality of the existence of the Moldovan SSR, of the Moldovan nature and culture, stating that the territory between the Prut and the Dniester rivers is part of the Romanian state, that the Soviets allegedly relocate the indigenous population to the eastern regions and populate Bessarabia with Russians, and other anti-Soviet nationalistic fabrications.”²²

Similarly, on 1 July 1966, for the very first time there were direct mentions about the tendencies to revise and falsify the most important theses on the historical past and present of the Moldovan people by the party and community organizations in Romania; categorical statements according to which all Moldovans were Romanians were published, to which some protested and stated the opposite:

It is well known that as a result of Bessarabia’s annexation by Russia and of the development of capitalist relations, the Moldovan nation started being formed in the territory, a process that was initiated here long before that on the Romanian territory, where it started only 47 years ago. By virtue of these facts, the Moldovan nation and the Romanian one were developing separately, on distinct territories, under different conditions. The Moldovan nation was formed under Russia’s influence, while Romania developed under the influence of Western countries, mostly of France. Based on those two directions of national development, profound differences appeared between the traditions, culture, languages and aspirations of these two peoples.

Even more so, as the next part shows, “even the formation of the Moldovan socialist nation was concluded long before the start of the formation of the Romanian socialist nation.”²³

At the same time, on 10 December 1966, after having informed the CC of the CPSU on the measures undertaken for the implementation of the Decision of the CC of the CPSU on the research and ideological use of the historical past of the Moldovan people, of its centuries-old relations with the great Russian people, he was forced, however, to admit that: “For the scholars in the republic, this is an immense and difficult aspect. In order to carry out this task, it is necessary to give assistance in the study and formulation of scientific conceptions on the birth and formation of the Moldovan people, the historical factors that influenced their development and the closeness to the great Russian people.”²⁴

In a different context, in his attempt to fundament the concept of the existence of the two eastern Latin nations and to separate the Bessarabian Romanians from the rest of the Romanian nation, I. Bodiul tried to make a distinction not only between “Wallachians” and “Moldavians,” but also between the Moldovans who had been split into two after 1812. Taking up the historical and ethnical argument introduced by the pan-Slavists about the Moldovan people in order to justify the creation of the “Moldovan nation,” he underlined and tended to emphasize the alleged differences which had supposedly appeared with the Bessarabian Moldovans during their century of union with Russia: “By 1812, the vassal Moldovan state already had a long history. The borders established in 1812 divided Moldova in two parts; after that, they went on their separate ways. Bessarabia developed within Russia and, 100 years after, by the time the Great Socialist October Revolution took place, the other part of Moldova had distanced itself so much that no comparison could have been made any longer as to their level of social development, except for the similarities in terms of language, customs and original folk traditions.”²⁵

According to I. Bodiul, the Moldovan-Romanian separation took place in the 19th century, when, after 1812, a part of the “Moldovan people” developed under different, beneficial conditions and, as a consequence, the process of setting up the “Moldovan bourgeois nation” was concluded at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. The specific characteristics of the “Moldovan nation” would become stronger in the second half of the 19th century, when, following the union of the Principalities, a part of the “Moldovan people” would be integrated in the modern Romanian state, and the Bessarabian “Moldovans” no longer shared the historical and cultural experiences of the united Romanian nation. Under those circumstances, I. Bodiul contended that the “Moldovan people, who had never been part of Romania for more than one hundred years, developed within the Russian state under the influence of the pan-Russian economy, culture and progressive social-political thinking.”²⁶ Consequently, according to this logic, the political and geographical border between the two nations was set on the Prut River. Consequently, one should conclude that Romania

had no historical right over Bessarabia, as Romania became a state only in 1859, when Bessarabia had already been a part of Russia for 47 years.

Along these very coordinates, which are contrary to the historical truth, as cultural and linguistic specificities are elevated to the rank of defining national characteristics, the fundamental “features” and characteristics of the “Moldovan bourgeois nation” were established and defined. As such, following the territorial separation from the Principality of Moldavia in 1812 and after the formation of the modern Romanian state in 1859, Bessarabia remained the only successor of its statehood, while the population on this territory remained the successor of the Moldovan people-ethnos, thus determining the territory and the ethnic basis for the future “nation.”

After the delineation of the territory and of the ethnic basis of the future “nation,” Bodiul continued by enumerating the “positive consequences” that followed, which were indispensable to the formation of a nation, such as the demographic increase, the accelerated social-economic development, the influence of the advanced Russian culture, the integration into the Russian revolutionary movement, and the formation of class awareness, etc., which had to prove not only the “progressive” importance of Bessarabia’s annexation by Russia, but, at the same time, the favorable premises that allowed the Moldovans to organize themselves into a distinct “bourgeois nation.” As such, according to Bodiul’s allegations, the Moldovan nation had already been formed by the time Bessarabia was annexed by Romania; consequently, Bessarabia was taken away, and the union took place against its people’s will. Those ideas also underpinned the thesis about “the ceaseless battle of the Moldovan people to protect the achievements of the Socialist Revolution and to fight their occupants throughout the entire Romanian domination.”

In devising those premises, I. Bodiul departed from the Marxist-Leninist theory, which examined the formation of the bourgeois nation from the point of view of the causal relation with the rise of capitalism. He identified the time and the territory for the formation of this nation, alongside its distinctive characteristics. Once the nation was seen as the outcome of rising capitalism, according to his point of view, “the Moldovan bourgeois nation” was formed after Bessarabia’s “annexation” by Russia, in 1812, in the context of the emergence and accelerated development of capitalist relations, based only on the “Moldovan people” from Bessarabia. As such, “following the development of capitalism in Bessarabia, a stable community of Moldovan people started to form, and towards the beginning of the 20th century the Moldovan bourgeois nation was set up inside the multinational Russian Empire.”²⁷

A different approach and interpretation in Bodiul’s speeches refer to the events related to Bessarabia’s union with Romania on 27 March 1918. For the

communist propaganda, Bessarabia's union with Romania was undoubtedly a conspiracy of jointly coordinated, internal and external "reactionary and aggressive" actions. Under those circumstances, in describing the grandiose act carried out by the Bessarabian Romanians, the harshest terms were used, such as "theft," "occupation," "rupture," etc. The speeches referring to this matter were structured taking into account the following coordinates: who had carried it out (the Entente, the Moldovan nationalists, the Kingdom of Romania, or all those forces together); from whom it was stolen (from Soviet Russia, as a Soviet territory where the socialist revolution had triumphed); what had been the attitude of the population, and, first of all, of the Moldovans (obviously "hostile," characterized by multiple actions and ample movements against the occupants, who had annihilated their revolutionary achievements).

In his reports, I. Bodiul never missed the chance of overtly manifesting—in the harshest and most negative terms—his anti-Romanian attitude. In the report presented during the previously mentioned ordinary Plenary meeting of the CC of the CPM, on 13 February 1967, he stated: "The fault for the fact that, after the triumph of the Great October Revolution, only a part of the Moldovan people started making socialist changes in their economy and culture belongs to the foreign invaders who occupied Bessarabia. At the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918, the Moldovan land was the first victim of the military intervention in the Land of the Soviets. The Kingdom of Romania, supported by the Western imperialist states, helped by the leaders of the counterrevolutionary organization known as the Country Council, started occupying Bessarabia."²⁸

In another article where this topic was discussed, I. Bodiul made the following remarks:

However, the allied counterrevolutionary forces, taking advantage of the difficulties facing the young Soviet Republic and having secured the support of the international reactionary elements, waged a fierce battle against the revolutionary working class, and disrupted the peasants' movement. Unable to prevent the triumph of the socialist revolution in the territory through their own forces, the leaders of the Country Council started seeking external support and found it in the Romanian boyars who were simply waiting for the right moment to take over and expand their possessions towards the east . . . The imperialist seizure of Bessarabia at the beginning of 1918 marked the start of the international reactionary march against the first workers' and peasants' state in the world. Through deceit and brutal force, Bessarabia was annexed by the bourgeois-landlord Romania.²⁹

As such, in what the high party dignitary said one can identify several political and propagandistic objectives. Firstly, with the purpose of proving the "illegal-

ity” of the act of 27 March 1918 and of dramatizing the situation even more, he used invented “arguments” according to which Bessarabia supposedly suffered the “first act of violence” from the outside and was the “first victim” torn off by world imperialism from the young republic of soviets, therefore emphasizing once more that this territory belonged to Soviet Russia. Secondly, he argued that “the theft of Bessarabia” was a concerted action of the domestic and foreign counterrevolution and was based on the actions of the Moldovan bourgeois nationalists, of other local reactionary elements, and on the intervention of the Romanian army, which supposedly benefitted from the support and collaboration of the Entente imperialists. Furthermore, he also doubted and contested the authority of the Country Council, the only representative political body democratically elected and recognized by all the social and political organizations in the territory, therefore expressing the will of the majority of the Bessarabian society. This body was described as negatively as possible, as “illegal,” “unrepresentative,” “reactionary,” “bourgeois-nationalist,” and, consequently, not authorized to vote on Bessarabia’s union with Romania.

Such aberrant nonsense invented by the Soviet propaganda, as well as other statements of this kind, would characterize the first secretary’s entire historiographic discourse on Romanian Bessarabia. Consequently, the absolute majority of Moldovan historians, serving the communist regime, would be made part of the implementation of the official policy in the field of history.

Most of the tendencies manifest in the evolution of the Soviet Moldovan historiography in the 1970s and 1980s can be traced back to Ivan Bodiul’s so-called “programmatic” historiographic sketches, reports, and speeches. Under those circumstances, the “favorable” treatment of the “Bessarabian issue,” as a reflection of the Soviet-Romanian dissensions, became one of the main functions of the official historiography.

IN CONCLUSION, as a result of the recurrence of the “Bessarabian issue” on the bilateral relations agenda, the political and ideological activity in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic intensified. It was strongly supported by a new historiographic approach involving the rewriting and falsification of the entire history of the “Moldovan people.” Never before had historical science been used so much to serve the official interests in combatting the Romanian identity, in educating the population of the republic in the spirit of Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism, of the friendship between the peoples of the USSR.



Notes

1. See Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture (Studies of Nationalities)* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999); Romanian translation: *Moldovenii, România, Rusia și politica culturală* (Kishinev: Arc, 2002), 96.
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Abstract

The Union of Bessarabia with Romania in the Cultural Propaganda System of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (1960–1970)

The article is dedicated to the ideological myths created by the new regime set up after 1940–1944 in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), meant to justify the domination over the tsarist and then Soviet territory between the Prut and the Dniester rivers. The communist propaganda was concerned with outlining a scenario under which “Bessarabia’s invasion” by the Kingdom of Romania had allegedly been a first act of foreign “aggression” against a territory of Soviet Russia, where the power of the “workers and peasants” had already taken hold. Therefore, the “liberation” of 1940 was a “triumph of historical truth” and “a restoration of righteousness.” Also, the “Moldovan people” were offered a celebration of Soviet origin designed to integrate them alongside the other peoples of the Soviet Union, and first and foremost alongside the Russian people, the artisans of the “Great October.”

Keywords

ideology, revolution, historiography, occupation, regime, the Bessarabian problem, falsification