

# How to Make a ‘Nation’

## Reflections on Moldovan Nation-Building Policies during the Soviet Union (1944–1989)

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*“We have created Moldova,  
now we need to create the  
Moldovans.”*

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### Introduction

ACCORDING TO the specialists on ethnicity and nationalism, a range of factors like nostalgia for past life-styles, imperial driving myths, and language fissures create shifting ethnic identities.<sup>1</sup> This seems to be the argument in the case of the Republic of Moldova, once a Romanian land, annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812 and re-annexed by the Soviet Union after the Second World War. Despite the contentions of the Romanian government that the Moldovans are Romanians and their language a Romanian dialect, the Soviets forged a distinct national identity for the Moldovans,<sup>2</sup> declaring them a separate nation and granting them union republic status.

Even if after the fall of the Soviet Union many people expected the (re)-

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union of Romania with Moldova, following the German model of unification, the Republic of Moldova insisted on stressing its own identity. Apparently, the present identity policies and attitudes in Moldova indicate that the Soviet government's fifty-year program to convince the Moldovans of their separate national identity has borne fruit.

The idea of the present paper starts from a pragmatic reality: according to the results of the 2004 census in the Republic of Moldova, 2,564,849 or 75.8% of the population declared themselves Moldovans, while only 73,276 or 2.2% Romanians.<sup>3</sup> This reality is a result of the long-lasting process of the Moldovan ethnic definition and it would be superficial to take such data for granted, since it could be reversed in the case of a change in the political landscape in Moldova. In dealing with this data we should have in mind that from the very beginning of their "distinct" identity in 1812, the Moldovans faced four stages of state/imperial nation-building, and each of these patterns left a particular legacy on the physiognomy of Moldovan identity.

The period of the Russian Empire (1812–1918) brought the Moldovans for the first time together into a separate community, distinct from the rest of Romanians. Even though the Tsarist state/imperial policies were not as consistent as Soviet ones in cultivating Moldovan distinctiveness, the very ignorant existence of the Moldovans within the imperial structure stimulated a sense of "we are first Moldovans and then Romanians." During the period of Greater Romania (1918–1940), the Moldovans (or the Bessarabians, a term preferred by the Romanian authorities and as a whole by the Romanians in treating the population of this territory) were exposed to the great process of Romanianization as a part of the Romanian state-building policies meant to integrate the Romanians from all the newly acquired provinces into single Romanian nation. The policy of Romanianization, though in many respects successful in reviving among the Moldovans a sense of Romanian identity, proved anyway to be a moment of "comparison" with the other Romanians, especially those appointed to run the province after the war. Since Bessarabia faced in the interwar period a critical situation both because of the uncertainty of its international status as part of Greater Romania<sup>4</sup> and of the bad quality of the Romanian administration,<sup>5</sup> the sense of distinctiveness from the Romanians increased among the Moldovans. To make things worse, the Soviet Union took advantage of the critical situation of Bessarabia during the interwar period in order to emphasize the separation between the Moldovans and the Romanians.

The third stage of Moldovan nation-building—during the Soviet period (1944–1989)<sup>6</sup>—was the most important both in terms of consistency and in terms of its long-lasting effects on post-communist Moldova. The Soviet Union had in fact created a territorial Moldovan nation, with its own state apparatuses

and ruling elites. Or, even though without enjoying real sovereignty or the right to full political expression, the Moldovan SSR had in many aspects the attributes of any sovereign state elsewhere in the world.

In this sense, it was only the demise of the Soviet Union that allowed the Moldovans to enjoy real sovereignty and the right to full political expression, and to proceed into the fourth stage of state/nation-building. After achieving independence in 1991, the national elites proceeded with the consolidation of the Moldovan political and national identity by resorting to the old principle “we have created Moldova, now we need to create the Moldovans.”

## What Was the Soviet Moldovenism?

**T**HE PRESENT paper seeks to analyze the Moldovan nation-building policies during the Soviet period. For almost 50 years, Moldova was a part of the Soviet Union, the first state in history to be formed of ethnic political units and which confronted the rise of nationalisms by systematically promoting the national consciousness of its nationalities and by creating for many of them the institutional forms specific to nation-states.<sup>7</sup> The logic and the content of the Soviet nation-building policy were pointed out elsewhere and it is widely accepted that it was mainly focused on four attributes of the national bodies: creation of national territories; linguistic indigenization; creation and promotion of native elites; and the support of national culture.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of the similarities in the implementation of the nationalities policy across the Soviet state, we should admit that there was a sizable difference between the policy of indigenization pursued during the interwar period toward the non-Russian nationalities and the postwar one, in the newly acquired territories of the Baltic States, Western Ukraine, Byelorussia, and the newly created Moldovan SSR. Since all these territories had known previously either independence or other forms of state/nation-building which strengthened their sense of identity, they confronted an opposing force in the Soviet policy on nationalities. In their case, from the very beginning it was all about destroying rather than constructing, as had largely been the case in the Soviet republics during the 1920s, after which the stages of their indigenization was focused on their “sovereignty” rather than on identity modeling.

The case of the Moldovan SSR was different from the western Soviet pattern, as Soviet Affirmative Action aimed to create here a nation whose sense of identity had barely existed before, except in the sense of regionalism within the Russian Empire or the Greater Romania, to which the territory had previously belonged. At this point, the case of Moldova was more similar to that of the republics of Central Asia at the beginning of the policy of indigenization in the

1920s<sup>9</sup> and it was distinct from the other republics of the western part of the Soviet Union, which had a strong sense of identity. In other words, the ingredients of the policy of indigenization, like the creation of the national territory, linguistic indigenization, the creation of the elites and of national culture, mentioned by the specialists in Soviet nation-building policies, were promoted in Soviet Moldova in order to stress the “Moldovan” origin and its distinctiveness from the Romanian one.

In this case, according to George Schopflin’s pattern,<sup>10</sup> the Baltic states, for instance, are seen as traditional societies which, despite the Soviet experience, preserved what they could from the past but changed in unperceived ways as well during the Soviet period, while Moldova was a society brought into being by the Soviet Union and which owes to the Soviet nation-building policy its physical creation, political status and even ethnic identity. Here, Soviet social engineering had gone so far as to create by fiat a language and an ethnic group to justify the eponymous polity and defend it against possible claims by Romania, to which it had belonged between the wars. Adapting Terry Martin’s assertion, the Soviet Union inherited a confused Moldovan ethnicity and tried to transform it into a nation-state.<sup>11</sup>

Since Soviet Era boundaries are the main foundation on which the newly independent Moldova had to build its new political and nation identity, an analysis of the effect of the Soviet policy of nationalities in the Moldovan SSR would be very helpful in understanding the current realities in the Republic of Moldova.

## Historical Boundaries—Soviet Boundaries

**T**HE SOVIET understanding of nationhood was firmly based on the Stalinist linkage between nationality, its territory, and its indigenous political elite. It is a well known fact that following Stalin’s own definition of a nation, Soviet authorities promoted an idea of a nation as associated to a territory. The major ethnic groups were assigned their officially recognized territories and organized into an elaborate administrative hierarchy of ethnic stratification, in which the fifteen Soviet republics represented the highest rank of statehood accessible to a Soviet nationality.<sup>12</sup>

Even though experts in Soviet nationalities assert that the Piedmont principle was not a major Soviet motivation in the policies of nation-building, they admit that in a single exceptional case—of the Moldovan Autonomous SSR—this principle was the main reason for the creation of a Soviet republic.<sup>13</sup>

Since the Soviet Union never recognized the annexation of Bessarabia to Romania, the Soviets put great pressure on the Romanian authorities by the organization, training, and financing of subversive agents in Bessarabia. This pres-

sure included the creation of the Moldovan ASSR within the Ukrainian SSR in 1924, in what V. Zatonsky called “our own Moldovan Piedmont.”<sup>14</sup> Despite the small size and the dubious Moldovan ethnic character,<sup>15</sup> the newly created republic received the status of an autonomous republic because of the future political perspectives of Moldova, i.e. the eventual annexation of Bessarabia. For the same reason, despite the protest of the Romanian communists, in the Moldovan ASSR began the forging of a distinct Moldovan literary language and the cultivation of a separate Moldovan national identity.<sup>16</sup>

The Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic was created by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on August 2, 1940, allegedly at the initiative of the majority of working people of the region.<sup>17</sup> Roughly speaking, the creation of the Moldovan SSR was the result of a merger between historical Bessarabia and the Moldovan ASSR, but not in their entirety.

As usual, the Soviets did not follow any ethnic, historic or cultural logic in the creation of the new republic, but only strategic considerations. As a result, three counties of historical Bessarabia (Cetatea Albă/Akkerman, Belgorod Dnestrovsky, Ismail/Izmayil and Hotin/Khotin), were annexed to the Ukrainian SSR in exchange for parts of the Moldovan ASSR.<sup>18</sup> Beside the idea of destroying of the compactness of the historical integrity of Bessarabia, the Soviet official strategies sought to secure the Soviet Union’s access to the Danube River (through a reliable Slavic republic) and made the Moldovan SSR a landlocked entity. Obvious in that policy was the pressure of Ukrainian communist officials, both in terms of the Soviet ultimatum concerning Bessarabia<sup>19</sup> and of the Piedmont Principle.<sup>20</sup> The fact remains that with the new borders, the disputed territory between the Dniester and the Pruth, Bessarabia, ceased to be a single unit precisely because it was expected that this would complicate any future attempt to have the area returned to Romania. In long lasting terms, the unification of these two distinct entities (known as Bessarabia and Transnistria, or the “left bank” and the “right bank” of the Dniester River), which had never existed before in any sense as a common entity, was fateful for the further evolution both of the Moldovan SSR and the Republic of Moldova. Economically and demographically speaking, Soviet Moldova gradually developed as two republics in one: a largely rural, agricultural and indigenous Moldovan one, and a more urban, Slavic, and generally immigrant population in Transnistria working in a Soviet-style heavy industry.<sup>21</sup> Most of the Moldovan industry operated as an appendix of the great Soviet enterprises or was located outside Bessarabia in Transnistria, which was producing 1/3 of the Moldovan industrial output. Besides the inherent distortion of the ethnic balance in the Moldovan SSR, that peculiar Soviet policy generated the long-lasting premises of future Transnistrian separation. In terms of the elite, the Soviet Union never trusted the Moldovans from Bessarabia and generally relied on officials from Transnistria both during 1940–1941 and

after 1944. As a result, we see the predominance of elements from Transnistria in politics and culture up to the beginning of the 1980s. This dominance strengthened the sense of Moldovenism based on the blurred sense of identity of the Transnistrians<sup>22</sup> and the promotion of their policy of the Moldovan language in 1940–1941 and the 1950s.

Regarding the creation of the Moldovan SSR, the first manifestation of “Moldovan” patriotism from the local communist elites was attested in February 1946, when the secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova N. Coval and N. Salagor and the Head of the Supreme Soviet of the Moldovan SSR, F. Brovko, sent Stalin a letter against the annexation of the three counties to Ukrainian SSR, invoking historical, economic, linguistic and cultural arguments. The demand remained on paper, however.<sup>23</sup>

There is evidence that among the Moldovan elites existed at that moment an idea of the creation of an unified Soviet state of the Moldovans including the territories of historical Moldova up to the Carpathians and including Bukovina with Cernăuți (Chernowitz), i.e parts of Romania and the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>24</sup> The idea of a “Greater Moldova” was meant to legitimize Bessarabia’s annexation from Romania and justify the use of the symbolic markers of “Moldovan Soviet primordialism,” also shared by Romania. Ironically, the idea of a “Greater Moldova” reappeared after the Republic of Moldova achieved independence, but this time it was pushed ahead by Chișinău in order to prevent any possible Romanian claims towards the Romanian character of the country.

Nevertheless, the most important fact is that the Soviet Union created for the Moldovans, as Ronald G. Suny has argued for other Soviet republics, a territorial nation with its own state apparatus and ruling elite which had the symbols of any sovereign state, with a national flag and seal, but without any real sovereignty or the right to full political expression.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, the “imagined community” of the Moldovans gained physical and political meaning for the first time.

## Language Policies

**I**NDIGENIZATION, ENCOURAGED by Lenin and supported by Stalin, and never officially rejected until the end of the Soviet Union, contributed to the consolidation of Soviet nationalities in three important ways: by supporting native languages, by creating a national intelligentsia and a political elite, and by formally institutionalizing ethnicity in the state apparatus.

From all of the criteria used by Stalin in his classical definition on the nation,<sup>26</sup> the question of language was a crucial one both in terms of Affirmative Action and of the Soviet ideology as a whole. In the first sense, as Stalin said “a minor-

ity is discontented not because there is no national union but because it does not have the right to use its native language. Allow it to use its native language and the discontent will disappear by itself.”<sup>27</sup> Secondly, he expressly suggested that the native language would help Soviet ideology to be better understood among the non-Russian nationalities, while native elites, by being close to the native population’s lifestyle and customs, would help the Soviet rule seem indigenous and not a Russian imperial authority, imposed from outside.<sup>28</sup>

The forging of the Moldovan language started after the creation of the Moldovan ASSR, and it was the primary issue addressed by the local elites of the newly created republic.<sup>29</sup> Despite the existence of a Moldovan dialect (close to the Moldovan regional language variation in Romania) in Bessarabia both during the Russian empire and Greater Romania, it was for the first time that these differences served political purposes. The logic of Moldovan language engineering within the Moldovan ASSR fell under the general meaning of the Piedmont Principle, i.e. the use of trans-border ethnic ties to influence the policy of Romania. At the same time, taking into consideration the policy followed by the Soviet Union after the annexation of Bessarabia, it also had far-reaching aims in the design of a Moldovan identity. After the creation of the Moldovan SSR in 1940 and especially after 1944, the modeling of the Soviet Moldovan language laid heavily on the language experiments developed during the existence of the Moldovan Autonomous Republic.

That the creation of the Moldovan language was the most important of the ingredients used in shaping the Moldovans as such became clear soon after the establishment of the Moldovan SSR in 1940. For instance, between July and December 1940, 138 books were published in 1.5 million copies, among which 1.2 million in the “Moldovan” language. From June 1940 till June 1941, in the Moldovan SSR, 56 newspapers and 3 magazines existed which were published in 205,000 copies.<sup>30</sup> All these publications used a Russified dialect of the Moldovan language, developed during the existence of the Moldovan ASSR, in order to make the Soviet ideology accessible to the Moldovans, among whom literacy was very low.<sup>31</sup> During that period, the Soviet authorities still continued to use the Latin alphabet. The switch to the Cyrillic was planned for the summer of 1941, but it was made impossible by the outbreak of the war.<sup>32</sup>

Because of the briefness of the 1940–1941 period, Soviet nation builders were not able to implement the decisive measures of Soviet Affirmative Action, i.e. the consolidation of the “Moldovan” nation, distinct from the Romanian one. But the harsh Soviet policies regarding language, the elites, and the cultural policies anticipated, and in many aspects facilitated, the “construction” of a Moldovan identity inside the Soviet Union after the Second World War.

In this sense, the language policy in the Moldovan SSR from 1944 until 1989 was distinct from that promoted in the Moldovan ASSR from 1924 until 1940, and contrasted mostly with the language policy pursued by the Soviet Union among its western nationalities. From this point of view, its aim was three-pronged: indigenization in the sense of Affirmative Action, in the ideological sense as a means of indoctrinating Moldovans to communist values, and most importantly, a way to secure a distinct Moldovan identity against any possible claims from Romania.

Indeed the creation of the new identity was built around the idea of a distinct language, based mostly on the Moldovan dialect and excluding the literary norms of the Romanian language. After the Second World War, the Latin alphabet was forbidden in Moldova and was replaced by the Cyrillic, which was considered more appropriate to the language of the Moldovans. In this sense Soviet ideology insisted on the idea that the transition to the Cyrillic alphabet did not involve the subordination to Russian culture but was the most acceptable and rational form for the development of national culture, an act of “friendship toward the Russian people and a proof of the internationalist unity of the Soviet people.”<sup>33</sup>

After Stalin’s death there was a rehabilitation of the Romanian language in the Moldovan SSR,<sup>34</sup> and after long debates in the mid-1950s the officials of the Moldovan Communist Party were convinced that it was imperious to renounce to some archaic and even grotesque norms of the “Moldovan” language imposed from Transnistria during the Stalinist period. In the end, the new norms of Moldovan grammar adopted in 1957 generally coincided with the norms of the Romanian language.<sup>35</sup> Also, some of the remarkable personalities of Romanian culture and literature previously considered as being a part of the “Moldovan bourgeois nation” were partially rehabilitated.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, many works by the classics of Romanian literature were published, excluding the word “Romanian” and replacing some Romanian words with some Moldovan regionalisms or archaisms.<sup>37</sup>

The rehabilitation of the “Romanian” character of the Moldovan language in 1950 considerably changed the policy of the language and its status. By imposing on the Moldovan language a literary standard compatible with the Romanian one, the “Transnistrian” dialect was rejected as a literary norm for the Moldovan language, and so was the impact of Transnistrian intellectuals on language policy. At the same time, it was an indirect admission of the compatibility between the Moldovan and Romanian languages, a fact declared openly by Emilian Bukov at the Congress of Writers in Bucharest in 1956, when he said that the Moldovan and the Romanian literary languages were one and the same.<sup>38</sup> This period was



a good opportunity for the survival of pro-Romanian feelings through the Soviet era: the young representatives of that period were the elites that initiated the language revival in the late 1980s. Beginning with the rehabilitation, the partial reprinting of the classics of Romanian literature and the introduction of this heritage in school curricula avoided the peril of the imminent demise of the Romanian language in the Moldovan SSR.<sup>39</sup>

Symptomatic for the times to come after independence, the emergence of a so-called “Moldovan” trend, both in political and cultural terms, whose reason to be was to fight against those who “reject the existence of the Moldovan language and identity,” was on the rise.<sup>40</sup> After the Stalinist period these elements were preferred in positions of power in the political and cultural hierarchy of the Moldovan SSR, and they promoted the policy of language and culture up to the beginning of Perestroika.

A split appeared then within the elite of Moldova: the Moldovan Soviet officials against the intellectuals and the “Moldovan” intellectual elite against the newly-emerged “Romanian” one. In final terms, this dichotomy survived the moment of the language mobilization of 1989–1990, but reappeared under a new form in independent Moldova as part of the same Moldovan/Romanian confrontation.

## Forging the Soviet Moldovan Elites

**T**HE CREATION of the native elites and their promotion into positions of leadership in the party, government, economic and/or educational establishments was an indispensable element of indigenization and, as in the case of language, the forging of the Moldovan elite started in the Moldovan ASSR. Even though the indigenization of the apparatus was never a genuine success in the Moldovan ASSR,<sup>41</sup> its pursuit was very useful for the Soviet nation-builders in the aftermath of the formation of the Moldovan SSR. The Moldovan elements from Transnistria, alongside with the Russian officials appointed from Moscow, were the main element of the party apparatus that promoted Soviet nationality policies in the Moldovan SSR. As a whole, these elements enjoyed an almost caste-like dominance over public life in Moldova in the Soviet period, reinforced by the low level of education within the Moldovan population, the dominance of Russian and Russified cadres in most major institutions, and the near-universal use of Russian as the language of official business in the republic.<sup>42</sup>

As in the case of the other western Soviet nationalities, the forging of the native elites was part of the pattern “destroying the old . . . building the new.” At this point, one of the most consistent and harsh Soviet policies of de-nationaliza-

tion was implemented in the territories newly annexed as a result of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact: the elimination of elements considered unreliable by the Soviet leaders both in terms of the Affirmative Action and of the security of the Soviet state on the western borderland. According to the decision of the Soviet officials of June 13–14, 1941, the operations for the “extraction of the anti-Soviet and counterrevolutionary elements” from the newly annexed territories, i.e. Bessarabia, the Baltic States, Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia, were set.<sup>43</sup> Igor Cașu estimates that the total number of people affected by the Soviet policy of deportation, arrests and executions in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina during June 28, 1940–June 22, 1941 amounted to 86,604 persons.<sup>44</sup>

After the Second World War the Soviet Union followed the same policy as in 1940–1941: the suppression of the class enemy, mass famine and starvation,<sup>45</sup> followed by the collectivization campaign strongly struck the native element of the Moldovan SSR, affecting both the elites and the rest of the population.<sup>46</sup>

It is a well-known fact that the ruthless suppression of nationalist and separatist movements was the centerpiece of Soviet nationality policy.<sup>47</sup> In Soviet Moldova this powerful coercive apparatus proved quite successful during 1944–1989 in destroying both real and imaginary ethnic oppositions and suppressing the activities of dissident nationality groups. As a result, excepting some minor movements in favor of the Romanian language, any serious challenge to the Moldovan stance in political perspective was not serious throughout the communist period of Moldova.

As was pointed out elsewhere, after the tumultuous postwar years Moldova’s evolution as a part of the Soviet Union settled down considerably and from this period, in terms of local politics, the history of Moldova as a Soviet republic is largely unremarkable. It became a generally quiet backwater on the periphery of the USSR, and was a popular vacation spot for the members of the Communist Party and state elite. Within the Moldovan Communist Party Russians and Ukrainians dominated, and at the all-union level the Moldovans were the least represented nationality in the entire Soviet Union.<sup>48</sup> In this sense, Moldovan political elites were among the most loyal in the union and manifestations of local nationalism were sparse.

The key positions in cultural policy were also held by officials appointed from Moscow, i.e. Russians, Ukrainians or Moldovans from Transnistria. In January 1947 of the 37 leaders of the cultural institutions, only six were Moldovans from Bessarabia.<sup>49</sup> As a whole the Soviet authorities never trusted the elements of the cultural elite from Bessarabia who “did not escape from the bourgeois ideology and whose creation was influenced by symbolism and formalism.” At the same time, alongside the accusations of Soviet officials, intellectuals from

Bessarabia were accused of affiliation to “Romanian bourgeois” nationalism by Transnistrian intellectuals.<sup>50</sup> Besides the fight for predominance in society, these accusations were used as a signal for Bessarabian intellectuals to be more actively involved in supporting the Soviet regime, or be marginalized.

One of the most important aspects of elite competition was the existence and persistence of the “hole in the middle” in Soviet Moldova, i.e. the native technical and white-collar elite that would secure indigenous control over the republic.<sup>51</sup> The economic rationalization pursued by Soviet officials in Moldova between 1944 and 1989 led to the creation of a divided intelligentsia—a native cultural elite (which was also split between “Moldovans” and “Romanians”) and a Russian or Russian-speaking technical elite.<sup>52</sup> This fact strongly affected the Moldovan sense of the republic as their own and negatively influenced the post-Soviet development of the economy and the problem of identity.

Following David D. Laitin’s formula of peripheral elite-incorporation in the Soviet Union,<sup>53</sup> Soviet Moldova could be considered a “colonial model” where native underlings under Russian surveillance mediate between Russian authorities and Moldovan society. As Laitin says, the colonial model gave higher incentives for ambitious office holders to adopt many aspects of Soviet culture: the motivation to learn Russian was to become “monopoly mediators” standing between Russian rule at the center and Moldovan society at the periphery. By doing so they earned the trust of Soviet officials and advanced to positions of local or regional authority.<sup>54</sup> In Moldova this alternative was available only in the late Brezhnev era, when we see the real indigenization of political elites. Until that moment, preference had been given to the Transnistrians; and as pointed out before, the Soviet elites never trusted the natives of Bessarabia. For instance, out of 15 ethnic Moldovans who had at one time been department heads in the Moldovan Central Committee Secretariat in the 1970s and 1980s, only 5 (33 percent) were born in Bessarabia, where more than 90 percent of the Moldovan population of the republic was concentrated in 1940.<sup>55</sup> The rest were officials originating from the left bank of the Dniester River, a situation that led to the emergence of the well-known saying during the Moldovan SSR: “If somebody wants to be a minister he should be from the other side of the Dniester.”<sup>56</sup>

The shift in this policy occurred in Soviet Moldova by the end of the 1960s, when the Brezhnev regime found it difficult to accept that the Soviet republics were essentially ruled by national “mafias,” centered within the communist parties and state apparatuses, and turned to new personnel outside the dominant party apparatuses. The mandate given to these men was the same as in the rest of the Soviet Union: to end economic and political corruption, to stimulate economic growth, to end ethnic favoritism and contain the more overt expres-

sions of local nationalism, and promote a new governing elite able to carry out the policies of the Communist Party.<sup>57</sup>

Born in the 1940s, this new generation of Moldovan party officials came of age in the 1980s, putting increased pressure on the older generation and the Transnistrians for a greater say in the affairs of the republic. They had come to power largely as a result of the preferential promotion of local Moldovans after the 1960s, when the Communist Party of Moldova attempted to indigenize the party hierarchy. As a result, by 1989 Moldovans were in fact overrepresented in the party leadership relative to their proportion in the entire population.<sup>58</sup> The social profile of these new elites was substantially different from that of the old. These new leaders had worked as rayon officials or collective farm heads or in other positions that necessitated some interaction with the large Moldovan countryside. But at the same time they brought into the halls of power and culture the Moldovan regional identity of the countryside. This new wave of leaders was able not only to survive the breakup of the Soviet Union but also to become the leaders of the new states that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Such leaders were the main architects of the independent Moldova after 1991.<sup>59</sup>

## The Politics of Culture

**O**F THE four elements of indigenization—the creation of national territory, linguistic indigenization, the creation of elites, and the politics of culture—the question of national culture was the most ambiguous but, in light of the long term impact, the most persistent in the post-Soviet period.<sup>60</sup> The ambiguity was first the result of Stalin’s famous definition of national culture as national in form and socialist in content.<sup>61</sup> The controversy, in essence, was over what was national in form and what was socialist in content. Since Soviet policies followed the Stalinist dogmas in the matter of nationalities, the controversy persisted also in the implementation of the politics of culture. As is widely accepted, Soviet nationalities policy was profoundly inconsistent, pushing for “indigenization” and the “flourishing” (*rastsvet*) of national culture while promoting the ideological goals of “stirania” (obliteration of national peculiarities), “sblizhenia” (*rapprochement*), and “sliania” (*merging*). The 1961 CPSU program was explicitly clear in pointing out that in the “all-people’s state” all Soviet nationalities “flourishing” (*rastsvetaiut*), were undergoing the process of “*rapprochement*” (*sblizhenie*) as a step toward their complete “merger” (*slianie*).<sup>62</sup>

The second ambiguity was the idea of culture as such in Stalin's perception. In this sense, it has been frequently pointed out that the best translation to Stalin's "national culture" (national'naia kul'tura) would be "national identity."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, as proved by experience, the promotion of Soviet nationalities policy in the "national culture" meant the aggressive promotion of the national identity together with the dismantling of distinct national beliefs and social practices. In other words, the Soviet policy systematically promoted the distinct national identities not only by providing them with national territories crafted by national elites which used the native languages, but also by aggressively promoting the symbols of national identity: national folklore, museums, dressing, cuisine, costumes, the national theatre and opera, poets, historical events and literature.<sup>64</sup>

The system indeed permitted the Soviet elites to promote "primordialism," but at the same time it severely limited their mobilization into direct confrontations with Soviet power. Or, primordialism in the Soviet context could be promoted by allowing nationalities to use their "own" languages, just as long as they did not make political demands on the basis of nationality on the central state.<sup>65</sup>

What Tom Nairn calls a "reservation culture"—an ethnolinguistic culture without political nationalism—was the only accepted "healthy" nationhood<sup>66</sup> that had also been established in Soviet Moldova. Yet, Soviet Moldovan primordialism was not promoted to prevent in any way the emergence of Moldovan political nationalism, but rather to justify it and to defend it against possible claims from Romania. The Soviet regime retained full power to decide what were permissibly "patriotic" expressions of Moldovenism and what was perniciously nationalist, and the boundary between the two shifted constantly.

The mission of monitoring what was permissibly "patriotic" expression and what was pernicious nationalism amid the intensification of the national manifestations in the Moldovan SSR in the 1950s was given to Ivan I. Bodiul, first secretary of the Moldovan Communist Party from 1961 to 1980.<sup>67</sup>

Ivan I. Bodiul became a typical exponent of "mankurtization,"<sup>68</sup> known elsewhere in the non-Russians republics; the period of his rule is widely associated with the institutionalization of Soviet Moldovenism both in the political and in the cultural sense.<sup>69</sup> Moldovan nationalism was especially sustained by the Soviet officials in the context of the changing landscape of Soviet-Romanian relationship in the 1960s, when Romania reopened the problem of Bessarabia, which had been taboo before. Seeking to combat the influence of the broadcasting of Romanian radio and television transmissions the Moldovan SSR, Bodiul informed the Soviet officials of his intention to celebrate in 1966 some historical personalities and events in order to emphasize the ties of the Moldovan people with Russia.<sup>70</sup> The Moldovan political and intellectual elites were among the most reliable also because they drew their legitimacy from the Soviet nation-builders.

Even though the existence of the Moldovan nation was unquestionable for the Soviet officials, the Moldovan Soviet intellectuals were in charge of devising reliable arguments supporting this idea. History was one of the most important instruments in modeling the Moldovan identity. The teaching of the history of the Moldovans started in the Moldovan SSR in the late 1950s, but only in 1967 did the Central Committee of the Moldovan Communist Party issue a decision concerning the problems of the history of Moldovan SSR, expressing the idea of the inconsistency of the old theoretical approaches concerning the existence of the Moldovan nation, especially in confronting the challenge of Romanian and Western scholars. In this sense, historians were requested to clarify both in terms of chronology and theory the concepts of “Moldovan bourgeois nation” and “Socialist Moldovan Nation.”<sup>71</sup> And it is worth stressing here that the idea of the creation of the “Moldovan bourgeois nation” was hard to justify as a step to the “Socialist Moldovan Nation,” since its emergence generally overlapped with the common ethnogenesis of the Romanians.

Mainly during the Bodiul period, Artem M. Lazarev published the well-known work *Moldavskaia Sovetskaia Gosudarstvennost' i Bessarabskii Vopros* (The Soviet Moldovan statehood and the Bessarabian question) which was considered the cornerstone of Soviet Moldovan identity and used until nowadays in the justification of the existence of the Moldovan nation.<sup>72</sup> Also during this time, some scholars tried to justify the existence of an independent Moldovan nation by constructing a racial distinction between the Moldovan and the Romanians.<sup>73</sup>

Moldovan Soviet officials also attempted to ground Soviet Moldovenism into various sets of invented Moldovan national elements. During that period were promoted the local forms of “official Moldovan nationalism” through celebrations of sanctioned traditions and acceptable heroes of the past. Certain figures from this reconstructed Moldovan history were incorporated into the official narrative, and others were excluded. The case of Stephen the Great is the most illustrative. Stephen the Great—the emblematic hero of the Romanian people—was accepted as a symbol during the Soviet period because he symbolized Moldovan identity and complied with the Soviet Moldovan “primordialism” cultivated by the Soviet authorities. Ironically, after independence the Moldovan nation-builders also used the image of the Stephen the Great as a symbol of Moldovan independent statehood and identity.<sup>74</sup> Soviet authorities accepted many other Romanian symbols in order to justify the existence of the Moldovan people from the Middle Ages. Today, some of these are still in use by Moldovan officials.

Yet, the shift in identity was not only a result of the politics of culture as part of the soft policy of Soviet Affirmative Action, but also the result of the hard line of Soviet modernization policy. The collectivization of agriculture, resisted

by hundreds of thousands of peasants, devastated the traditionally patriarchal village leadership in Soviet Moldova. Simultaneously, rapid forced industrialization resulted in social and geographical mobility that further disrupted traditional patterns of authority and cultural practices. All these led to rapid urbanization, increased migration, and continued assimilation of the ethnic Moldovans.

Like elsewhere in the Soviet Union, a new working class drafted from the peasantry appeared in towns and at new factory sites, without industrial skills, ignorant of labor traditions and organizations, and subject to the elite of Russian managers and technicians.<sup>75</sup>

In 1989 the Moldovans made up 46.3% of the urban population (as compared to 15.2% in 1897, according to the last Russian census).<sup>76</sup> As Irina Livezeanu asserts, in the Moldovan SSR urbanization resulted neither in radical Russianization nor in radical Moldovanization. Instead, there seems to be a stable equilibrium between the two languages, with more people becoming bilingual, especially in the cities and towns.<sup>77</sup> But it is also true that the flow of the native population to the urban area changed it in essence and made the cities and towns more “local,” i.e. more Moldovan. As Ion Drutza said, “townspeople originating from the countryside kept in (the city) their stride, speech, custom, the entire color of their native land . . . The country has quite transformed old Kishinev.”<sup>78</sup>

At the same time the Moldovans continued to dominate the rural world, representing 78.2% of the rural population in 1970 and 80.3% in 1989.<sup>79</sup> Based on the Soviet censuses, we can assert that the linguistic assimilation of the Moldovans was not so important and that the rural population, as in the Tsarist period, maintained its parochialism with some trends toward unassimilated bilingualism.<sup>80</sup> The percentage of unassimilated bilinguals and assimilated bilinguals was higher in the urban area, but the Moldovans never achieved a massive phenomenon of complete assimilation. In 1970, 97.7% percent of Moldovans declared the Moldovan language their native tongue and 33.9% declared Russian their second language; in 1979, 96.5% and 46.2%, respectively; in 1989, 95.4% and 53.3%.<sup>81</sup>

Like elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the acquisition of Russian as a second language was almost entirely a matter of economic and practical consideration, with the ethnic significance of this language step playing only a minor role.<sup>82</sup> In this sense, the Russian language played in the Moldovan SSR up to 1989 the role of lingua franca among the nationalities of the republic and served as an instrument of communication outside.

At the same time, we witness a deep compliance of the native population to Soviet Moldovan identity, which can be explained by several factors. First of all, submission was part of the cooperation with Soviet authorities after 1944,

but the Moldovans did not show an anti-Romanian attitude or a strong Romanian identity. Rather, they displayed an attitude of prudence and conformity to the circumstances of the time. Taking into consideration the evasive attitude showed by the Moldovans on the question of identity during Tsarist rule and during Greater Romania, this conformity was not unexpected during the Soviet period and in present-day Moldova as well.

Second, this compliance was a result of living in a society in which the language of power, of higher education and of public communication was Russian, but also the result of a coexistence with a powerful and numerous Russian-speaking minority, dominant in terms of status and privileges.

Third, Soviet Affirmative Action with its policy of anti-Romanism, the Cyrillic alphabet and the isolation of the Moldovans from Romania led to the deformation and the marginalization of the native language. The Moldovans were speaking (and still speak) a primitive Romanian language, imbued with excessive words from the Russian and Soviet vocabularies, and often preferred Russian words when they had difficulties in finding Romanian equivalents.<sup>83</sup> As a result, many Moldovans pretended that this primitive native language was the Moldovan language, distinct from the Romanian language, and they still pretend that this is the case in the Republic of Moldova today.

In the end, it was the result of the Soviet nation builders' policy to promote the positive image of Moldovan nationality that became stereotypical throughout the Soviet Union: the "blooming and resplendent land," the "flourishing orchard," "Moldovan hospitality," "Kagor" wine and "Belyi Aist" cognac, the men from the national dance group "Joc" dressed in national costumes and dancing "Moldoveneasca" (the Moldovan dance).

The sense of being part of a Great Power and enjoying a higher standard of living in contrast to the situation in communist Romania created a sense of superiority among the Moldovans toward Romanians and accentuated their distinctiveness. All these were stressed in contrast to the negative stereotypes toward Romania, especially in speculating Bessarabia's difficulty during the interwar period to create a negative perception of the Romanians with the Moldovans. No wonder that after national revival in the context of the Soviet Union's collapse, these negative stereotypes were reactivated as a result of the personal contacts between Moldovans and Romanians, but also supported by the creators of the independent Moldova in terms of statehood and identity.

The arguments pointed out above overlapped within the myth that the Soviet period, especially the years of Brezhnev's stagnation, was the only real "golden age" of Moldovan history, when they knew relative economic prosperity, stability and security, and that a positive image of Moldovans was never achieved before.



In the post-Communist period this myth perpetuated itself not only by strengthened the commitment to the Moldovan identity but also in terms of the political choice for the unreformed Communist Party in government.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

**A**S IT has been pointed out elsewhere, the most obvious consequence of an empire in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the physical and political division of a large multiethnic, multilinguistic conglomerate of cores and peripheries into a multitude of smaller countries aspiring to become national states. These national states bring to their development different aspects of their imperial legacy depending on where they were located in the empire. The elite reached power through different routes, with different programs and different appeals to various constituencies. They inherited imperial institutions of varying strength and efficiency, uneven levels of economic development and industrialization, and a political culture that evolved over decades.<sup>85</sup>

These arguments could generally be accepted for the Soviet realities. Yet, the legacy of the Soviet Union is a special one in the way it influenced the post-Soviet evolution of the republics that emerged from the Soviet state. Nation-making in the Soviet Union occurred within a unique context: a state that had set out to overcome nationalism and the differences between nations had in fact created a set of institutions and initiated processes that fostered the development of conscious, secular, politically mobilizable nationalities. As a result, at the moment of its disintegration, the Soviet Union brought into being fifteen states that claimed to be nation-states and were engaged in the process of nation-building.

Having secured sovereignty following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Moldova is now also embarking upon nation-building. In judging the present complex realities in Moldova around the question of identity, we should bear in mind that Moldova's sense of imagined community and the nature and form of its post-1991 nation-building is bound up with its place, real and imagined, within the Soviet Union. In fact, Moldova was a society brought into being by the Soviet Union, and it owes to Soviet Affirmative Action its physical creation, political status and even ethnic identity, as well as the Soviet era forms that are the main foundation on which independent Moldova has to build its new political and national identity. But the ingredients of that Soviet nation-building policy—the creation of national territory, linguistic indigenization, the forging of elites and of national culture—that was promoted in Soviet Moldova are different than in the rest of the former Soviet Union. The case of the Moldovan

SSR was an exception in the sense that Soviet Affirmative Action aimed to create there a nation whose sense of nationhood had barely existed before, not in order to stress “Moldovan” primordialism, but rather its distinctiveness from the Romanian one.

In other words, the sense of the Moldovan “imagined community” gained physical and political meaning for the first time during the Soviet Union, in order to justify the eponymous polity and defend it against possible claims by Romania, to which it had belonged between the wars.

The emergence of the new Moldovan state after the fall of the Soviet Union created the conditions for turning a vague sense of Moldovan nationality into a conscious Moldovan nationalism. In this sense, the idea of “Moldovenism” as distinct from “Romanianism” is constructed and reconstructed to serve the new statehood purposes and to take advantage of new opportunities both for the elite and the population. Even though current identity policies and attitudes in Moldova apparently indicate that the Soviet government’s fifty-year program to convince the Moldovans of their separate national identity from that of the Romanians has borne fruit, Moldovan national identity is far from being a finished product of history, still remaining in the process of being built and rebuilt.

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## Notes

1. J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith, *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10.
2. I preferred the term “Moldovan” rather than “Moldavian,” because “Moldovan” was the name written in the Soviet passport for the native population of the Moldovan SSR.
3. [http://www.statistica.md/recensamint/Locul\\_nasterii.xls](http://www.statistica.md/recensamint/Locul_nasterii.xls); these data exclude the territory of Transnistria which is outside the control of the Republic of Moldova.

4. For details on the interdependence between the international aspects of the Bessarabian problem and the process of its integration within Greater Romania see Octavian Țicu, *Problema Basarabiei și relațiile sovieto-române în perioada interbelică, 1919–1939* (Chișinău: Prut Internațional, 2004).
5. See Charles King, *The Moldovans* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), but also Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).
6. In fact, the Soviet nation-building toward the Moldovans started in 1924 with the creation of the Moldovan ASSR, and continued in 1940–1941 with the creation of the Moldovan SSR.
7. On Soviet nation-building policy see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001); Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), and Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 2 (Summer 1994): 414–452.
8. Terry Martin considers that the Affirmative Action Empire is the term that best distinguishes the Soviet Union from others alternative bodies, including the empires; see *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 2–18.
9. On the Soviet policies to create nations from scratch in Central Asia, see Shrin Akiner, “Melting Pot, Salad Bowl—Cauldron? Manipulation and Mobilization of Ethnic and Religious Identities in Central Asia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20, 2 (1997): 362–98; Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).
10. *Developments in East European Politics* (London: Macmillan Press, 1993), 28–30.
11. Martin, 447.
12. 53 peoples of the Soviet Union had an administrative unit named after them: 15 Soviet Socialist Republics, 20 Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics, 8 Autonomous Oblasti, 10 Autonomous Okrug. Walker Connor, “Soviet Policies Toward the non-Russian Peoples in Theoretic and Historic Perspective,” in Alexander J. Motyl, ed., *The Post-Soviet Nations: Perspectives on the Demise of the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 33–35.
13. Martin, 9, 274.
14. *Ibid.*, 274.
15. The Moldovans represented 31.6 percent of the Moldovan ASSR while the Ukrainians were 49.6 percent. *Vsesoiuznaia Perepisi Naselenia* (1926), vol. 4 (Moscow: Gosstatizdat, 1928), 24.
16. On the policy of the Moldovan language and identity in the Moldovan ASSR see King, 36–62.
17. A.V. Repida, *Formarea RSS Moldovenești* (Chișinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1977), 246–247. The Moldovan delegation to the Seventh Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR was composed of six Moldovans, seven Russians and one Jew. Leonid Bulat, ed., *Basarabia 1940* (Chișinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1991), 174.

18. Only six of the total of thirteen rayons of the Moldovan ASSR were annexed to the Moldovan SSR, *Sed'maja Sessija Verhovnogo Soveta SSSR. 1–7 avgusta 1940: Stenograficeskii otcet* (Moscow, 1940), 183.
19. By the terms of the June 26, 1940 Soviet ultimatum, Bessarabia was also claimed from Romania on the basis of the Ukrainian majority of the province. *Pactul Molotov–Ribbentrop și consecințele sale pentru Basarabia* (Chișinău: Universitas, 1992), 17–18.
20. N. S. Khrushchev proposed to the Central Committee of the CPUS that the new Moldovan Soviet Republic should be created by the unification of the “Moldovan population only” and not of the territory of Bessarabia and the Moldovan ASSR; see *Aspects des relations russo-roumaines: Retrospectives et orientations* (Paris: Minard, 1967), 163; A. M. Lazarev, *Moldavskaiia Sovetskaia Gosudarstvennost' i Bessarabskii Vopros* (Chișinău: Cartea Moldovenească), 524.
21. King, p. 100.
22. The Transnistrians were not part of Romania, except for the short period of the Second World War, from 1941 to 1944.
23. *Pactul Molotov–Ribbentrop și consecințele sale pentru Basarabia*, 113–116.
24. Igor Cașu presents in this sense a document from the Moldovan archives concerning “The reunification of the all Moldovan people within the Moldovan unitary Soviet state” drawn up by V. M. Senkevici, the director of the Institute of Research of Moldavian SSR; see Igor Cașu, “Politica națională” în *Moldova Sovietică, 1944–1989* (Chișinău: Cartdidact, 2000), 51–52.
25. Suny, 111–112.
26. “A nation is a historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.” I. V. Stalin, *Marksizim i natsional'nyi vopros* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1950), 51.
27. *Ibid.*, 163.
28. *Ibid.*, 62.
29. King, 64.
30. *Istoria Respubliki Moldova* (Chișinău: Tipografia Academiei de Științe, 1997), 216.
31. Cașu, 36.
32. Michael Bruchis, *Nations, Nationalities, Peoples: A Study of the Nationalities Policy of Communist Party in Soviet Moldavia* (Boulder, Co.: East European Monographs, 1984), 61–62.
33. Cașu, 46.
34. Especially after C. Tagliavini statement at the International Conference of Linguistics in Florence in 1956 that the only difference between Moldovan and the Romanian language was the Cyrillic alphabet, see Michael Bruhis, *One Step Back, Two Steps Forward: On the Language Policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the National Republics* (Boulder, Co.: East European Monographs, 1982), 126.
35. Cașu, 55.

36. Among others we can mention Mihai Eminescu, Vasile Alecsandri, Ion Creangă, Dimitrie Cantemir, Alexandru Donici etc., who were also part of the Romanian cultural pantheon. Bruhis, *Nations*, 77.
37. Gheorghe Negru, *Politica etnolingvistică în RSS Moldovenească, 1940-1991* (Chișinău: Prut Internațional, 2000), 44.
38. Emilian Bukov was one of the Moldovan writers born in Bessarabia and accepted by the Soviet authorities after 1944. Ion Constantin, *Basarabia sub ocupația sovietică de la Stalin la Gorbaciov* (Bucharest: Fiat Lux, 1994), 64.
39. Cașu, 160.
40. Negru, 39–40.
41. King, 72–73.
42. Mark R. Beissinger, “State Building in the Shadow of an Empire-State: The Soviet Legacy in Post-Soviet Politics,” in K. Dawisha and B. Parrott, *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), 165.
43. According to Valeriu Pasat, on the night of June 13 to 14, 1941 in the Moldovan SSR 18,392 persons were arrested and deported; quoted in Cașu, 31. Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda speak of more than 50,000 persons deported that night from the Baltic States, to a total of 123,000 for the year of Soviet rule: Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion: A History of Nationalities Problem in the USSR* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 88–89.
44. Cașu, 32.
45. 216,000 people died in Soviet Moldova during 1946–1947 as a result of mass starvation. Mihai Gribincea, *Basarabia în primii ani de ocupație sovietică, 1944–1950* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1995), 64.
46. 30,050 persons were deported to Siberia only in the night of July 5–6, 1949. Ion Șișcanu, *Deșănțarea bolșevică în Basarabia* (Chișinău: Adrian, 1994), 100–101.
47. Victor Zaslavsky, “The Soviet Union,” in *After Empire: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires*, eds. K. Barkey and M. von Hagen (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 85.
48. King, 98.
49. Cașu, 47.
50. *Ibid.*, 48.
51. See on this point Terry Martin (p. 179) reflection concerning the “hole in the middle” in the Soviet East.
52. In 1964, of all directors of industrial enterprises in Soviet Moldova, the native Moldovans constituted only 2.3 percent. In the 1980 their number was only 8.6 percent, as compared to 64 percent of native population in the republic. V. Stavilă, “Evoluția componenței naționale a elitei politico-economice a RSSM,” *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, no. 4 (1996): 39.
53. David D. Laitin developed three patterns of peripheral elite-incorporation in the USSR: a most-favored-lord pattern: incorporation on equal terms; integralist model: capable of running their own republic, the higher level of literacy and education; and

- the “colonial” model: mediating between Russian authorities and the native population. David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 59.
54. *Ibid.*, 70–71.
  55. Mark R. Beissinger, “Elites and Ethnic Identities in Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics,” in *The Post-Soviet Nations*, ed. Alexander J. Motyl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 152.
  56. The Romanian version is “Dacă vrei să fii ministru, trebuie să fii de peste Nistru.”
  57. Suny, 120.
  58. King, 135.
  59. Mircea Snegur, the first president of the independent Republic of Moldova, from an agronomist on a collective farm advanced in 1985 to Central Committee secretary; Andrei Sangheli, one of the first prime ministers, worked also as an agronomist on a collective farm and later served as party rayon committee first secretary and a member of the Republican Council of Ministers; Nicolae Țău, foreign minister during Sangheli’s government, was a collective farm director and first secretary of the Chișinău city party committee; Petru Lucinschi, the second president of Moldova, was first secretary of the Moldovan Communist Party (1989–91) and a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
  60. Martin, 182.
  61. Stalin, 158, 194.
  62. Connor, 58.
  63. Martin, 193.
  64. *Ibid.*, 13.
  65. Philip G. Roeder, “Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization,” *World Politics* 43 (1991): 196–232.
  66. Tom Nairn, “Beyond Big Brother,” *New Statesman and Society* 3, 105 (June 15, 1990): 31.
  67. The appointment of I. Bodiul was meant to keep in check the growing cultural nationalism and to satisfy the repeated requests of the Moldovans to have a leader of the own nationality, but at the same time it was part of an all-Union trend promoted during the Khrushchev period.
  68. There is an anecdote whereby, in order to demonstrate the existence of the Moldovan language, in December 1976, during his visit to Nicolae Ceaușescu in Bucharest, Bodiul included in his delegation a Romanian language interpreter. K. H. Rogers, “Moldavian, Romanian and the Question of a National Language,” in *The Tragic Plight of a Border Area: Bessarabia and Bukovina*, ed. M. Manoliu-Manea (Los Angeles: Humboldt University Press, 1983), 167–174.
  69. The first State University in Chișinău was created in 1946, the Institute of Language and Literature was established in 1957, and the Moldovan Academy of Science was created in 1961. All these institutions played an important role in the cultural legitimization of Soviet Moldovenism.
  70. Cașu, p. 64.

71. Gheorghe Negru, "Crearea conceptului 'națiunii burgheze' și 'socialiste' moldovenești în istoriografia sovietică," *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, no. 1–2 (1998): 72–73.
72. Artem M. Lazarev always claimed that he belonged to the Moldovan nation and published in 1995 a very suggestive book in this sense *Ja—Moldavianian* (I am Moldovan) (Tiraspol: Pridnestrovskii Gosudarstvenno-Korporativnyi Universitet, 1995).
73. M. S. Velikanova, *Paleotropologia Prutsko-Dnestrovskogo Mezhdurecia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975).
74. Lucian Boia, *Miturile comunismului românesc* (Bucharest: Editura Universității București, 1995), 159–160.
75. Suny, 107.
76. Irina Livezeanu, "Urbanization in a Low Key and Linguistic Change in Soviet Moldavia," pt. 1, *Soviet Studies* 33, 3 (July 1981): 329.
77. *Ibid.*, 328.
78. *Ibid.*, 337.
79. Cașu, 108; Livezeanu, 334.
80. I relied here on Brian Silver's formula of assimilation: a) Parochialism: knowing only the native language; b) Unassimilated bilingualism: knowing as well the language of the center, but using it in limited domains, and with great difficulty; c) Assimilated bilingualism: relying principally on the central language, but maintaining some facilities in the local language; d) Assimilation: becoming monolingual in the central language. Brian Silver, "Methods of Deriving on Bilingualism from the 1970 Soviet Census," *Soviet Studies* 27 (October 1975): 574–597.
81. Livezeanu, "Urbanization," 329; Cașu, 104–105. In the Russian Empire, 27.8 percent of the entire Bessarabian population could speak Russian.
82. David D. Laitin, "Language Policy and the Language Russification of the Soviet Nationalities," in *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices*, ed. J. Azrael (New York: Praeger, 1978), 282–286.
83. Cașu, 141.
84. Moldova made history during the March 6, 2005 elections, as this was the first time that a state freely elected communist rulers in two consecutive elections.
85. Karen Barkey, "Thinking about Consequences of Empire," in *After Empire: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires*, 104.

**Abstract**

How to Make a 'Nation': Reflections on Moldovan Nation-Building Policies during the Soviet Union (1944–1989)

The study examines the manner in which a nostalgia for past life-styles, imperial driving myths, and language fissures combined to create shifting ethnic identities in the case of the former Soviet Republic of Moldova. The emergence of a distinct Moldovan national identity is seen in historical perspective, the focus resting on the Soviet period, when this identity emerged as the result of deliberate policies, ranging from social to cultural and linguistic ones. The study demonstrates that the sense of the Moldovan “imagined community” gained physical and political meaning for the first time during the Soviet Union, in order to justify the eponymous polity and defend it against possible claims by Romania, to which it had belonged between the wars.

**Keywords**

USSR, Moldova, national identity, nation-building, Soviet cultural policies, Soviet linguistic policies