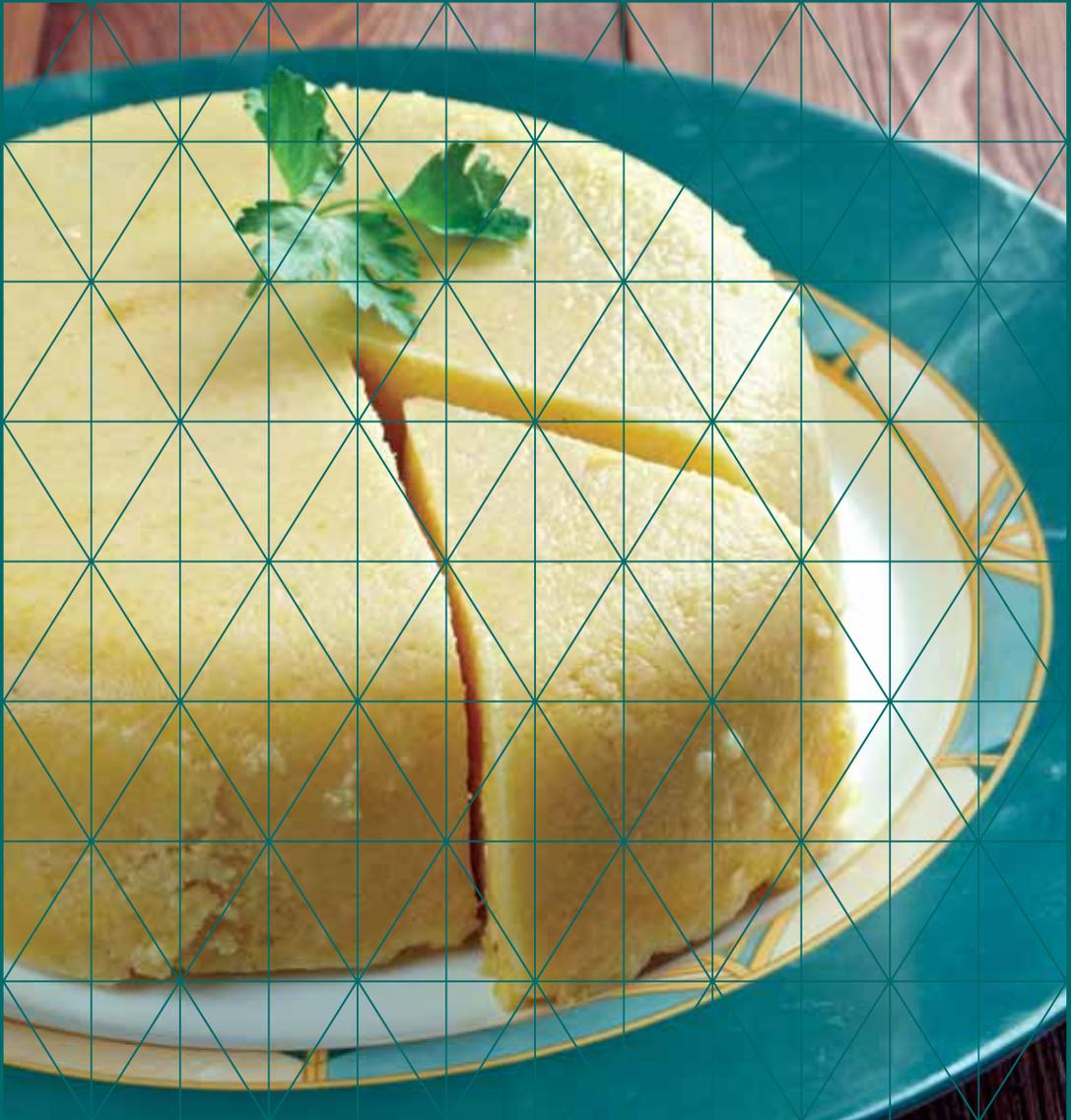


53

OSW STUDIES

OSW



IN THE SHADOW OF HISTORY

ROMANIAN-MOLDOVAN RELATIONS

Kamil Całus

OSW STUDIES

NUMBER 53
WARSAW
SEPTEMBER 2015

IN THE SHADOW OF HISTORY

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OSW |

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES

OŚRODEK STUDIÓW WSCHODNICH im. Marka Karpia

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CONTENT EDITORS

Adam Eberhardt, Wojciech Konończuk

EDITOR

Katarzyna Kazimierska

CO-OPERATION

Halina Kowalczyk, Anna Łabuszewska

TRANSLATION

Jim Todd

GRAPHIC DESIGN

PARA-BUCH

PHOTOGRAPH ON COVER

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DTP

GroupMedia

MAPS AND FIGURES

Wojciech Mańkowski

PUBLISHER

Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia

Centre for Eastern Studies

ul. Koszykowa 6a, Warsaw, Poland

Phone + 48 /22/ 525 80 00

Fax: + 48 /22/ 525 80 40

osw.waw.pl

ISBN 978-83-62936-65-6

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THESES

- Over the last quarter-century, relations between Chişinău and Bucharest have oscillated between very close cooperation and open hostility. At any given time, their nature has depended both on the short-term political interests of Romania and Moldova, as well as on who currently holds power in Chişinău and Bucharest. From the perspective of Moldova, whose pro-European government started to undertake real action on European integration in 2009, Romania has become an important partner for facilitating contacts with the West, as well as being a source of support. For this reason, the Moldovan government is interested in maintaining the best possible relations with its western neighbour, and in suppressing and minimising any tensions between them. If pro-Russian groups take power in Moldova, this would very likely lead to the unthawing of the countries' currently suppressed problems, and a serious deterioration in the relationship, because these forces will emphasise the individuality of the Moldovan people and stoke anti-Romanian sentiments.
- Romania and Moldova have developed very strong ties, mainly resulting from their many years of common history (including joint statehood), language, and cultural heritage. On the one hand this closeness fosters bilateral relations, but on the other hand it also places them under a serious burden. This is because Moldovan statehood and identity has somehow been constructed in opposition to the statehood and identity of Romania. A large part of the population (particularly the Russian-speaking minority) fears closer cooperation with Bucharest, seeing this as threatening a loss of independence and possible unification with Moldova's western neighbour. The resulting problems affect all areas of bilateral relations, political, military, and (to a lesser extent) economic. This makes it harder to find solutions to the problems which are most important from Moldova's perspective, such as the signing of a 'basic and border' treaty with Romania.
- For years Romania has declared that Moldova is a priority of its foreign policy. Besides its traditional goals, consolidating its position within the EU and NATO and its partnership with the US, Romania is trying to make Moldova one of the main focuses of its international activity. The primary objective of Romanian policy towards Moldova is to reinforce the latter's position within the system of Western institutions and its international links. At the same time, Romania is trying to prevent any attempt at deepening Moldovan integration in the structures backed by Russia, primarily

the Eurasian Economic Union. Bucharest is seeking to achieve these goals not only on the political and diplomatic levels, but also by increasing its economic ties with Moldova. In Chişinău's opinion, Bucharest's actions are also focused on supporting the processes of 're-Romanianising' Moldova, which should be seen as an element of building Romanian 'soft power'. Despite Bucharest's consistent permanent political objectives, however, Romania has not displayed any coherent strategy towards Moldova, and its policy towards Moldova has been very much a function of domestic, not foreign policy. Bucharest's political objectives are often subordinated to rivalry among Romanian political parties.

- Although Romania has played a generally positive role in drawing Moldova towards Western structures and has been effective in its actions, its effectiveness in other areas of bilateral cooperation remains negligible. The technical support Bucharest has given is less than necessary, and infrastructure projects have been seriously delayed, as a result of problems in coordinating actions among the relevant ministries, among other issues. This has led to a very wide gap between the very wide-ranging and frequent declarations of support for Moldova issuing from Bucharest and the actual results.
- From Chişinău's perspective, Romania is a vital counterweight to Russian influence. The Moldovan groups which came to power in 2009, preaching the idea of European integration and reducing Russian influence, naturally turned to Bucharest, seeing it as an agent and advocate for Chişinău in the EU. For the same reason the Communists, who held power in 2001-2009, decided to take a moderately pro-Romanian turn after a significant deterioration in relations with Russia in 2003. Cooperation with Romania offers Moldova the prospect of reducing not only its political but also its economic and energy dependence on Russia. Bucharest's possibilities are limited: the Romanian market is not able to replace the Russian market, and the projects for energy cooperation, despite being promoted for many years, have so far only had a symbolic effect. Bucharest is also often seen on the international stage as a representative of Moldova's interests in international organisations, as well as a source of financial aid and the know-how necessary for the implementation of reforms. At the same time, the Romanian question is one of the major keystones of internal policy in Moldova, and individual Moldovan groups regularly exploit it for their own political interests, which in turn influences the state of the country's relations with Bucharest.

- The rhetoric of unification used by senior Romanian politicians (including the former President Traian Băsescu, and to a lesser extent Prime Minister Victor Ponta) provide propaganda fuel for those political forces in Moldova and elsewhere (especially Russia) which oppose the process of Chişinău's moves towards the West. The proclamation of pro-unification slogans places the ruling pro-European coalition in Moldova in a difficult situation, by strengthening the arguments of the opposition parties (including the Socialist Party of Igor Dodon, and the Communists), whose politicians have long insisted to the public that the project of European integration is calculated to bring about the 'Romanianisation' of Moldova, depriving it of independence and forcing it into NATO by the back door. Moscow has also used the declarations flowing from Bucharest as an argument against Romania and the EU becoming involved in Moldova. Moscow also argues that unification would imply the enlargement of NATO, which would consequently pose a threat to Russian interests. The narrative of unification also raises tensions among Moldova's ethnic minorities (primarily in the Gagauz Autonomy, which is traditionally antipathetic towards Romanians), and makes the relationship with the authorities of the breakaway Transnistria more difficult.
- The idea of Moldovan-Romanian unification in the foreseeable future is unrealistic, for political, economic, and social reasons. The main political forces in Moldova, regardless of their pro-Western or pro-Russian sympathies, are not interested in giving up independence in the name of creating a common state. Moldovan politicians realise that linking the two countries in a unitary model would deprive them of their positions and future career prospects, and would also jeopardise their political and business interests. The vast majority of Moldovan society also opposes the idea, with particular resistance coming from among the Russian-speaking minority and the separatist area of Transnistria. Contrary to their political declarations, the ruling elites in Bucharest are also not interested in the real unification of Romania and Moldova. Their unionist narrative is predominantly propaganda, aimed for domestic consumption, and is intended primarily to mobilise voters and emphasise their own patriotism. In addition, the cost of such a project would exceed Romania's financial capacity. Another considerable obstacle is also the clear opposition of the relevant international actors, primarily Russia and (informally) the EU.

INTRODUCTION

Romania's interest in Moldova is mainly based on historical and cultural factors. In the eyes of most Romanians, Moldovans are compatriots who were forcibly separated from the motherland, firstly in 1812 when Bessarabia was incorporated into the Russian Empire, then in 1940, when after more than twenty years as part of Romania, those lands were incorporated into the USSR by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact¹. Moldova's territories are seen in Romania as historical Romanian land. This sentiment is also reflected in the policy of Bucharest. Officially, relations with Chişinău are considered as special, and representatives of the Romanian political class outdo each other in their declarations of assistance and support for their eastern neighbour, referring to a shared national, cultural and linguistic community. In practice, however, Romanian policy towards Moldova (and by extension the two countries' political relations) is most often shaped, not by sentiment, but by a political pragmatism resulting from the desire to win the support of the Romanian electorate, among other factors.

Meanwhile, for Moldova, Romania is not only a culturally and historically close neighbour, but also the most important point of reference in the ongoing debate about Moldovan identity over the last quarter-century. Moldova's approach to Romania and the Romanian cultural heritage defines the political and ideological dividing lines within it much more clearly than the approach to economic or social questions.

All of this means that in order to understand the complexity of Moldovan-Romanian relations, it is necessary first of all to be familiar with the historical context which largely shapes the current relationship between the two countries. This is essential to understanding most elements of contemporary Romanian-Moldovan discourse, including the Moldovan dispute over its identity, and the separatism problem within Moldova. The first chapter of this work is dedicated to presenting the historical conditions, the turbulent political relations between Chişinău and Bucharest in the more than two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the ensuing discussion of the problems of bilateral relations.

¹ On the attitude of Romanians towards Moldovans and Moldova, see Republica Moldova în conştiinţa publică românească at <http://www.fundatia.ro/sites/default/files/Studiu%20Moldova.pdf> and Studiu privind starea socială și identitatea națională în România, at http://www.rgnpress.ro/rgn_12/images/stories/2012/08/11-sondaj_CRSS.pdf

Subsequent chapters present the contemporary significance of Moldova for Bucharest and Romania's role in Chişinău's politics, including the objectives and instruments of the policies each pursues towards the other. This section also discusses the current state of Romanian-Moldovan relations in individual fields such as economy, culture and defence.

The sixth chapter concerns the concept of the reunification of Moldova and Romania which regularly arises in public debate in both countries (and also beyond their borders). In this section, this idea, the (im)probability of its implementation, and its role in Moldovan, Romanian and Russian politics is subjected to extensive evaluation.

This text closes with an attempt to outline the future of Romanian-Moldovan relations in the foreseeable future.

I. ROMANIAN-MOLDOVAN RELATIONS IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

1. Historical background

The area of today's Moldova (with the exception of the Transnistrian territories, situated on the left bank of the Dniester) is part of the historical area known as Bessarabia, which from the second half of the fourteenth century until 1812 was part of the Principality of Moldavia (Principatul Moldovei), one of the two historical Romanian states (along with Wallachia). In 1812, these lands, along with the whole of Bessarabia (including Bugeac, Hotim and the surrounding areas, as well as today's right-bank Moldova) were incorporated into the Russian Empire. As a result, the people living in them were isolated from the nation- and state-building processes taking place in the rest of the Principality of Moldavia and Wallachia, which were unified in 1881 to form the Kingdom of Romania². This had a huge impact on the identity of the residents of Bessarabia. At the same time, the Russian authorities introduced a programme of intensive Russification to the newly annexed areas. In 1826 they prohibited the use of the Romanian language in local administration, church liturgy and education. They displaced the indigenous populations and encouraged representatives of other ethnic groups to settle in the territories of Bessarabia³. As a result, there was a mass influx into the cities of Slavic, Jewish, German and Armenian populations, and it is these groups that came to make up the majority of the region's intellectual and economic elite. The process of Russification facilitated a state of affairs where up to 95% of the ethnic Moldovan community consisted of illiterate peasants. As a result of Russia's actions, the percentage of the population declaring themselves as Moldovans in Bessarabia fell from 86% in 1817 to 56% in 1897⁴.

² The process of unifying the Romanian state, in fact, lasted more than twenty years. In 1859 there was the so-called 'Small Unification' (Rom. Mica Unire), the formal merger into a single state of the Principality of Moldavia (without Bessarabia) and Wallachia. From 1862 the newly created state was named Romania, while the Kingdom of Romania only came into being in 1881.

³ On the history of Bessarabia after joining the Russian Empire, see among others C. King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, Stanford 2000; Ș. Ciobanu, *Bessarabia. Populația. Istoria. Cultura*, București-Chișinău, 1992; A. Gil, *Bessarabia. Wschodnia Mołdawia jako gubernia Cesarstwa Rosyjskiego (1812-1918)* [Bessarabia. Eastern Moldova as a gubernia of the Russian Empire (1812-1918)], in *Spotkania polsko-mołdawskie [Polish-Moldovan encounters]*, ed. M. Kosienkowski, Lublin 2013.

⁴ I. Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei. Editie și studio bio-bibliografic de Stelian Neagoe*, Bucharest 1991.

In 1918, the areas of Bessarabia, Transylvania, the Banat and Bukovina were annexed to Romania. This event was called 'the Great Unification' (Marea Unire), and in the historical memory of the Romanians it initiated a golden age in the history of the country, called the period of 'Great Romania', which lasted until World War II.

Bucharest quite quickly took action to promote Romanian identity among the inhabitants of the newly unified provinces, but did not have either the financial resources or sufficient numbers of trained educational and administrative personnel to succeed in doing so⁵. As a result, attempts to 'Romanianise' Moldova more often stoked tensions among the minorities living there (especially the Slavic, and to a lesser extent the Gagauz populations) than produced any real results⁶. The resistance from the population was so large that from 1918 to 1928 Bucharest was forced to maintain a 'state of siege' in Moldova, which included restrictions on civil rights, expanding the competence of the police, and increasing the Romanian military presence in the new province⁷.

Meanwhile, in 1924 the Soviet authorities created the Moldavian Autonomous *Okrug* (district) within the Ukrainian SSR, formed by combining the territory of today's Transnistria and the lands east of it, up to the city of Bălți. In a few months this was renamed the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR). This area had never been part of the Romanian state, and only about 30% of the population there spoke Romanian⁸. In this area, a new Moldovan national identity was developed under the auspices of Moscow - 'Moldovenism' - as an alternative to the Romanian identity. It stated that the Moldovans were a nation separate from the Romanians, who used a different language (Moldovan)

⁵ Another problem was the quality of personnel sent to Bessarabia by the authorities in Bucharest. It often happened that officials were sent to the newly annexed province as a kind of punishment.

⁶ During Romanian rule over Bessarabia there were three major uprisings against the government in Bucharest. The first took place near Hotim in 1919, and the second (in the same year) in Tighina (Rus. Bender). The third occurred (most likely at the inspiration of Moscow) in 1924 in Bugeac. All these incidents were suppressed relatively quickly by the Romanian army.

⁷ See for more detail S. Suveica, *Basarabia în primul deceniu interbelic (1918-1928): Modernizare prin reforme*; G. Cojocaru, *Integrarea Basarabiei în cadrul României (1918-1923)*, Bucharest 1997; E. Enciu, *Basarabia în anii 1918-1940: Evoluție demografică și economică*, Chișinău 1998, and also partly in J. Solak, *Mołdawia. Republika na trzy pęknięta [Moldova. A republic broken into three]*, Toruń 2009.

⁸ C. Pantea, *The Ethno-Demographic Evolution of Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, Codrul Cosminului*, 2008, vol. 14, p. 170.

written in the Cyrillic and not the Romanian Latin alphabet, and the Moldovan state was claimed to have descended in a straight line from the fourteenth-century Principality of Moldavia, and was its direct successor state. According to adherents of Moldovenism, the Moldovans living in the lands on the right bank of the Prut succumbed to full Romanianisation after the establishment of the Kingdom of Romania, and only the residents of Bessarabia retained their identity. They also emphasised that the Moldovan nation, as opposed to the Romanian, was formed on a multi-ethnic territory, inhabited to a large extent by Slavic peoples, thanks to which it was blessed with an innate tolerance for multiculturalism and multilingualism⁹.

In 1940, under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the whole of Bessarabia (and thus also the territory of modern Moldova) and northern Bukovina were annexed to the USSR. The MASSR was abolished, and in its place the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) was established, joining Transnistria to a substantial part of the Romanian territories annexed¹⁰. In 1941, thanks to its alliance with the Third Reich, Romania managed to regain its lost territory, as well as taking more land east of the southern Bug river from the Ukrainian SSR. Over the next three years, under the regime of General Ion Antonescu, Romania exterminated about 200,000 Romanian and Bessarabian Jews and Roma in the area between the Dniester and the Southern Bug (known as the Transnistria Governorate [Ro. Guvernământul Transnistriei]).

In 1944, as a result of the Red Army's counteroffensive, the area was returned to the USSR. The Soviet authorities embarked on policies of large-scale de-Romanianisation and Moldavianisation of the MSSR. The relatively few pro-Romanian activists who remained in the republic after the annexation were sent to the Soviet Union or shot. This was also the fate of the landowners, clergy and any of the intelligentsia associated with Romania. In the period from 1940 to 1941 alone, more than 30,000 people were deported or arrested, and another 50,000-55,000 were sent to forced labour throughout the USSR¹¹. After the Soviet army re-occupied Bessarabia, the repression continued. From 1944 until 1951 about 40,000 people (about 1.5% of all Bessarabia's inhabitants) were deported (mainly to

⁹ For more on the history of the MASSR and the emergence of the idea of 'Moldovenism', see E. Negru, *Politica etnoculturală în RASS Moldovenească*, Chişinău 2003.

¹⁰ The inclusion of part of the territories of the MASSR into the new republic legitimised the existence of the Moldavian SSR, and meant that the existing Soviet political elite of the MASSR could be used to build the new union republic.

¹¹ A. Moraru, *Istoria Romanilor. Basarabi şi Transnistria*, Chişinău 1995, p. 337.

Central Asia) as part of the process of de-kulakisation, for political or religious reasons. Another tool for breaking social resistance was the great famine that struck the MSSR in 1946-7, which claimed between 150,000 and 200,000 victims (about 6-7% of the population)¹². In this way, Moldova underwent deep Sovietisation within the space of just a few years¹³. The process of imposing a new identity was aided by the bilingualism of the urban centres constituting the heart of the country's intellectual and economic life, which had continued since the imperial period, together with the very low cultural self-awareness of the rural population. The small underground opposition was marginal, and was unable to withstand the decisive actions of the Soviet authorities. It was not until the late 1980s, as a result of the changes taking place within the USSR, that a revival of the Romanian national idea began in the MSSR.

The complex historical past of the current territory of Moldova still shapes the similarly complex relationship between the inhabitants of Romania and Moldova. Romanians perceive the vast majority of ethnic Moldovans as members of the Romanian people, and see Moldovan identity as merely a kind of Romanian regional identity (like the identities of Wallachia or Transylvania). There is also a common conviction that the present Moldovan Republic has a Romanian character deriving from the historical past. In a survey conducted in June 2012 by the Centrul Român de Studii și Strategii, almost 70% of the Romanians surveyed felt that the residents of Bessarabia are primarily 'Romanians', while 85% felt that this area is Romanian land¹⁴.

On the other hand, the attitude of Moldovans towards Romanians is ambivalent, ranging from unconditional sympathy to an antipathy sometimes bordering on hatred. Many ethnic Moldovans (which, according to the 2004 census, 76% of the population believe themselves to be, while only 2-3% consider themselves Romanians) acknowledge the cultural, historical and linguistic ties between their country and Romania, but only some of them directly identify with the Romanian element¹⁵. Members of this group are usually favourably or neutrally

¹² A. Țăranu, *Голод в Молдове (1946-1947). Сборник документов*. Chișinău 1993, p. 10.

¹³ For more about the period of Stalinist repression and the Sovietisation of the MSSR, see V. Stavila, *De la Basarabia romaneasca la Basarabia sovietica, 1939-1945*, Chișinău 2000; and E. Șișcanu, *Basarabia sub regimul bolșevic (1940-1952)*, Bucharest 1998.

¹⁴ http://www.rgnpress.ro/rgn_12/images/stories/2012/08/11-sondaj_CRSS.pdf

¹⁵ In a study conducted in October 2009 among residents of Moldova (omitting Transnistria), respondents were asked to indicate the degree of similarity between Moldovan and Romanian identity on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant that the two were identical, and 5 that

inclined towards Romania¹⁶. A specific group of Moldovan residents (both Moldovans who see themselves as a nation separate from the Romanians, and the ethnic minorities), because of the education they received in the Soviet period, sees Romania as a historical occupying power, which twice (in 1918, and then in alliance with Hitler in 1941) annexed Bessarabia unlawfully and attempted to 'Romanianise' its inhabitants by force. It is mostly the representatives of this group who see Romania as a threat to the sovereignty of the Moldovan state.

2. The Bessarabian question in Communist Romania

In the early years of Communist Romania, the Bessarabian question was not raised in public space, and constituted a kind of taboo. Both the annexation of Bessarabia by the Russian Empire in 1812, and in particular the re-annexation by the USSR of these areas of Romania in 1940, remained forbidden subjects for political reasons¹⁷, even though the subject remained alive in the collective memory of the Romanian people. However, the taboos began to be broken in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This was part of the programme initiated by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the then leader of Romania, of Bucharest's limited emancipation from the Soviet Union. After Nicolae Ceauşescu came to power in 1967, interest in the Bessarabian question in Romania increased. Bucharest began to consider the Kremlin's policy towards the Moldavian SSR with increasing interest. Romanian diplomats accredited in Moscow were ordered to monitor and analyse Soviet officials' speeches for references to Bessarabia and Bukovina. The Romanian Securitate secret service also received similar instructions. At the same time, the outdated radio and television transmitter located in Iaşi was modernised so that its broadcasts could cover the entire territory of the Moldovan SSR. Then, it began broadcasting radio and television programmes which emphasised the common historical and cultural ties between the Romanians on both banks of the Prut. These transmissions were directed equally to the citizens of Soviet Moldova and the Romanians, who were thus reminded of Romania's rights to historical Bessarabia. In the 1960s censorship of publications justifying the Soviet claim to these areas also began.

Moldovan was completely different from Romanian. Almost 26% chose a rating of '1' or '2', while 47% indicated '5' or '4'. <http://www.interlic.md/download/988/>

¹⁶ Nevertheless, identifying oneself as a Bessarabian Romanian does not necessarily mean (and often does not mean) one has any sympathy for the Romanian state.

¹⁷ It was awkward for the Romanian Communist Party to criticise the Soviet Union over the annexation of Bessarabia, not only for political reasons, but also because even in the 1920s, the party had officially supported the idea of ceding these lands to the USSR.

At the same time the Bessarabian question was raised more and more boldly in Romanian science. Scientists started not only to talk and write openly about the annexation of Bessarabia by the USSR, but they even called this event ‘an act of Soviet imperialism’ or ‘Soviet occupation’ directly¹⁸. The Romanian character of the lands beyond the Prut began to be openly emphasised, and their history was also included in studies of the history of Romania.

The subject of the illegality of the annexation and Romania’s rights to Bessarabia was also raised at the political level. During the party congress in 1965, Ceaușescu discussed a letter written by Friedrich Engels in 1888 in which he criticised the occupation of Bessarabia by the Russian Empire in 1812. A year later, also during the party congress, Ceaușescu publicly condemned the Romanian Communist Party’s support (declared in the 1920s) for the annexation of Bessarabia.

The successive leaders of Communist Romania appealed to the Bessarabian question not as the result of genuine resentment, or of any real desire to draw Chișinău and Bucharest closer together. Rather, this was an instrument of internal policy, and to a limited extent, also of foreign policy towards the Soviet Union. Raising the subject of Bessarabia was a way of highlighting the country’s independence from Soviet influence and building up political and social support inside the country. In addition, it intensified nationalist sentiments within the country, consolidated society, and distracted the public’s attention from Romania’s gradually deteriorating economic situation. To a limited extent, it was also an instrument for putting pressure on the Soviet Union, which Bucharest used whenever relations with Moscow deteriorated¹⁹. Active propaganda activities or political gestures by Romania in relation to the inhabitants of the MSSR could also provoke unrest among the pro-Romanian part of the population of these areas. To avoid such situations, the Soviet authorities were sometimes willing to make small concessions to Bucharest.

¹⁸ M. Musat and I. Ardeleanu, who published the book *Viata politica în Romania 1918–1921 in Bucharest* in 1976, not only used the term ‘Soviet occupation’ in the context of the annexation of Bessarabia, but also explicitly stated that it had occurred “as a result of the Soviet-Fascist pact of 1939”.

¹⁹ The tendency to raise the Moldovan issue to consolidate Romanian society, demonstrating Romania’s international independence and building public support for the ruling elite, did not end with the end of Communism in Romania, and indeed still occurs (possibly even more strongly than in the past) in modern times, which will be discussed later in this text.

3. Romanian-Moldovan relations after 1991

In the late eighties and early nineties, the wave of *perestroika* led to increasingly frequent and numerous demonstrations in the MSSR, organised by the Moldovan Popular Front (FPM). This movement, established in 1989, was a conglomeration of reformist, democratic and anti-Communist organisations from across the republic (initially Transnistria and Gagauzia were represented as well), wherein the dominant role was played by representatives of the pro-Romanian Moldovan intelligentsia: writers, professors and journalists. Its activists called for the Romanian national and cultural revival of the indigenous people of Moldova. On 27 August 1989, in the central square of Chişinău, the FPM organised a rally of about 300,000 people, which was later named the Grand National Assembly (Marea Adunare Naţională)²⁰. As a result, on 31 August 1989 the authorities adopted a law requiring the use of the Latin script when writing the Moldovan language. Hitherto the language, which from the linguistic point of view is the same as Romanian, had been written entirely in Cyrillic. In the first partially free elections to the local parliament in 1990, the FPM managed to form a coalition together with some of the reform-minded Communists and take power.

Grassroots community initiatives linking both banks of the Prut border took on more and more momentum. History was made by the so-called Bridge of Flowers, which was organised on 6 May 1990²¹. For a few hours, the requirement for Romanians to have a passport and visa to travel to the MSSR was suspended. Around a million inhabitants of Romania crossed over the eight border bridges linking the two countries, bringing flowers with them and throwing them into the river²². On 23 June 1990 Moldova declared its sovereignty, and on 27 August 1991, the parliament in Chişinău adopted a declaration of independence, which Romania acknowledged on the same day.

The festival of the Romanian national revival in Moldova was met by firm opposition from representatives of the Russian-speaking minorities living in

²⁰ The square where the event took place is now called Piaţa Marii Adunări Naţionale (the Square of the Grand National Assembly).

²¹ On the renaissance of Moldovan-Romanian relations after 1990, see J. Pieńkowski, *Dlaczego Rumunia zawsze będzie kochać Mołdawię?* [Why will Romania always love Moldova?], in *Spotkania Polsko-Mołdawskie* [Polish-Moldovan encounters], ed. M. Kosienkowski, Lublin 2013, p. 157.

²² A second such event, this time for Moldovan citizens, took place on 16 June 1991.

Moldova, who feared marginalisation (due to their ignorance of the Romanian language) as well as a possible merger with neighbouring Romania. This resistance took on particular intensity in the Gagauzia and Transnistria regions, which have predominantly Russian-speaking populations. On 19 August 1990 Gagauzia, in the south of the country, renounced its allegiance to Chişinău, while Transnistria did the same on 2 September 1990. These regions declared themselves to be Soviet republics belonging to the USSR and independent of Moldova. The secession of both regions, particularly Transnistria which is highly-industrialised and lies on strategic trade and communication routes, provoked a reaction from Chişinău. In March 1992, full-blown armed hostilities (preceded by minor skirmishes) began between Moldovan forces and Transnistrian volunteers, supported by Russian troops stationed in the region. The subsequent five-month struggle, which claimed the lives of at least 650 people on both sides, represented a defeat for the government forces. On 18 July 1992 a ceasefire was declared, and on 21 July in Moscow, the Moldovan President Mircea Snegur signed an agreement with Boris Yeltsin ending the conflict²³. Thus, Chişinău effectively lost all control over the territories situated on the left bank of the Dniester, as well as the right-bank town of Bender (in Romanian, Tighina).

After 1992 the Moldovan public's pro-Romanian enthusiasm began to wane quickly, as evidenced by the early parliamentary elections held in February 1994. The Popular Front won only 7.5% of the vote, and the Agrarian Democratic Party, opposed to the idea of unification and favouring Moldovanisation, took control of parliament, winning 43% of the votes. After the formation of the new government, relations with Romania began to cool. A key event was the organisation, at the request of President Mircea Snegur, of a referendum on 6 March 1994 in which the citizens could comment on their desire to preserve the independence of the newly created Moldovan Republic (and thus declare indirectly whether they favoured possible unification with Romania)²⁴. At that

²³ A wide-ranging and objective description of the origins of Transnistrian and Gagauz separatism, and of the battles themselves, can be found in J. Solak, *Mołdawia. Republika na trzy pęknięcia. Historyczno-społeczny, militarny i geopolityczny wymiar „zamrożonego konfliktu” o Naddniestrze* [Moldova. A republic broken into three. The historical and social, military and geopolitical dimensions of the 'frozen conflict' over Transnistria], Torun 2010.

²⁴ The referendum question was: 'Do you want the Republic of Moldova to develop as an independent and unitary country, within the borders established on the day of the Declaration of Independence (23 June 1990); to promote a policy of neutrality; and maintain mutually beneficial economic relations with all countries of the world and guarantee its citizens equal rights, in accordance with the norms of international law?'

time, independence was supported by almost 98% of the citizens of Moldova²⁵. The new government's next steps were dictated by the mandate they had thus obtained, which laid the foundations for the building of an independent state. In July 1994, a constitution was adopted in which Moldovan and not Romanian was designated as the state's written language. A year later a new national anthem was adopted, abandoning the Romanian national anthem which had been used since 1991²⁶. The problem of Gagauzia was also resolved; it was given the status of an autonomy within Moldova, and was at the same time guaranteed the right to declare independence if Chişinău ever decided to unite with Romania. This was a clear signal that the Moldovan authorities were not considering any such step. Bucharest did not hide its disappointment at Chişinău's actions, but did not take any visible action to influence Moldova's position regarding Romania.

The situation changed again in 1997-1998, when Petru Lucinschi became president, and the Agrarian Democratic Party was replaced by a coalition of three pro-Western parties, which took the name of the Alliance for a Democratic and Prosperous Moldova²⁷. Romanian-Moldovan relations were revived. The pro-Western course declared by the new government in Chişinău received clear support from Bucharest. Numerous bilateral meetings at all political levels resulted in 17 bilateral agreements being signed. April 2000 saw the initialling of a treaty on partnership and cooperation (known as the basic and border treaty), which had been negotiated over for almost seven years²⁸; both parties unequivocally declared a special, privileged status for their bilateral relations, resulting from their historical past and their linguistic and cultural community. The agreement stated that the partnership between Chişinău and Bucharest must be built on

²⁵ This result was due to several factors. The key reason for the high support for independence was the end just a few months earlier of the conflict with Transnistria and the continuing tension in relations between Chişinău and Gagauzia. The residents of Moldova realised that moving towards unification with Romania could lead to the outbreak of another conflict. Another no less important reason was disappointment in the attitude of Bucharest which, despite enormous interest in the idea of unification in the early nineties, did not take any further steps to bring it about.

²⁶ Moldova's new national anthem was a poem called 'Limba noastră' (Our language), written by Alexander Mateevici, a Bessarabian Romanian. The poem is written in the Romanian language, but the actual name of the language is never mentioned in its content.

²⁷ The development of Moldovan-Romanian relations over the last two decades has also been broadly described in O. Milevschi, *Romania: From Brotherly Affection with Moldova to Disillusionment and Pragmatism*, in *Moldova: Arena of International Influences*, ed. M. Kosienkowski, W. Schreiber, Plymouth: Lexington Books, p. 159.

²⁸ The negotiations lasted so long mainly because of a lack of agreement between the parties on the final forms for recording the historical and cultural foundations of bilateral relations (including the recognition of a Moldovan nation, as distinct from the Romanian).

mutual support for their efforts aimed at integration into European structures, and based on the involvement of Romania in the active support of all actions taken by Moldova to preserve its unity and integrity as a state. One result of the development of the countries' mutual relations was the creation of two Euroregions, 'Lower Danube' and 'Upper Prut' (in 1998 and 2000 respectively).

However, this positive period in bilateral relations ended relatively quickly. The rise to power of the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) in April 2001 marked the beginning of another radical change in relations between Chişinău and Bucharest. The PCRM went to the polls proclaiming an idea of 'Moldovenism' derived from the Soviet era. The promotion of this idea guaranteed the Communists support, not only from the many pro-independence or Sovietised Moldovans, who had had the Soviet version of history instilled into them at school, but also the Russian-speaking minorities living in Moldova (Russians, Ukrainians, Gagauz, Bulgarians). This happened for two reasons. Firstly, Moldovenism legitimised the Moldovan state's right to independence and deemed groundless any discussions about the possibility of unifying Moldova and Romania, which the Russian-speaking residents of the country and the anti-Romanian ethnic Moldovans feared. This idea also created the concept of a Moldovan nation, the existence of which Romania had traditionally denied, considering all ethnic Moldovans as just members of the Romanian people. Secondly, Moldovenism presented Moldova as a country which had long been multi-ethnic, multilingual, tolerant towards other religions and open to all minorities. In this perspective, the Communists contrasted Moldovenism with Romanian nationalism, which from their perspective was chauvinist and intolerant. At the same time the Communists openly promoted rapprochement with Russia (including eventual accession to the Union State of Belarus and Russia), and closer cooperation with the countries of the former Soviet Union.

The Communists' ideological attitude was perceived very coolly in Romania from the beginning. Moldovenism stands in contradiction with the Romanian national idea, and has traditionally been profoundly criticised as a product of Soviet national-historical engineering, designed to justify Russia's claim to the territory of present-day Moldova. Rapprochement with Russia and the declared limiting of Chişinău's cooperation with the EU also conflicted with Bucharest's interests. After the parliamentary elections of 26 November 2000 returned the Social Democratic Party (PSD) to power, Romania remained strongly pro-Western in its orientation, putting integration with NATO and the EU at the heart of its foreign policy – in stark contrast to Moldova's turn eastwards. The two countries' differences in views on questions of identity and their geopolitical

courses posed a very real danger of exacerbating tensions. For pragmatic reasons, the Communists managed to avoid raising sensitive issues in bilateral relations during their first few months of rule²⁹, but in July 2001 Chişinău's adoption of new regulations elevating the status of the Russian language provoked the first conflicts.

In the following months, bilateral relations were also affected by the matter of the operation in Moldova of the Bessarabian Metropolitanate³⁰, which is subject to the Bucharest patriarchy; as well as the problem of the Treaty on Partnership and Cooperation, whose signing (despite having been initialled in 2000) Romania consistently refused. Over the next months, Chişinău and Bucharest repeatedly blamed each other, which led to a freeze in bilateral relations.

The situation changed in November 2003, together with Chişinău's withdrawal from the agreement with Transnistria which Moscow had forced upon it (the so-called Kozak memorandum³¹), as a result of which Moldovan-Russian relations deteriorated dramatically. Deprived of Russian political and financial support, the PCRM was forced to make a pro-Western turn, at least at the level of its public rhetoric. The government in Chişinău also began to try and improve relations with Romania. From the Communists' perspective, their pro-Western turn in the situation of losing Moscow's support was particularly important in the context

²⁹ During President Vladimir Voronin's first official visit to Bucharest in May 2001, he announced a "new pragmatic approach" to Romanian-Moldovan relations. The declaration was met with a warm welcome from the President of Romania Ion Iliescu, who said: "We would like to leave aside political and ideological differences and maintain a pragmatic approach to relations between Moldova and Romania, which will not deteriorate in the future." (*Evoluția politicii externe a republicii Moldova (1998-2008)*, <http://www.fes-moldova.org/media/publications/2010/Evoluția%20politicii%20externe%20a%20Republicii%20Moldova%20%281998-2008%29.pdf>, p. 15.) After his return to Chişinău, Voronin publicly stressed the priority of Moldova's relations with Romania, and boasted that he had succeeded in establishing friendly relations with President Iliescu.

³⁰ For more see Chapter II.3, in the section devoted to the problem of the Bessarabian Metropolitan in Moldova.

³¹ The Kozak Memorandum of 2003 provided for the solution of the Transnistria problem through the creation of an 'asymmetric federation' of Moldova and Transnistria. The realisation of this scenario maximised the influence of Transnistria in federal government policies, and minimised the impact of the federal authorities on Transnistria, while maintaining the presence of Russian troops in the region as a guarantor of the agreement. This solution would have changed the political system in Moldova in favour of the pro-Russian forces. President Voronin initially expressed interest in implementing the memorandum. At the last moment, however, he withdrew from signing the agreement, which was interpreted as a serious affront in the Kremlin, and very negatively affected the Russian authorities' confidence in the Moldovan Communists.

of the parliamentary elections planned for 2005. The pro-Russian slogans with which the party had won power in 2001 were no longer effective, and the change in its geopolitical orientation opened up an opportunity to gain Western support. Both the Communists, who in the new situation were counting on improved relations with Romania, and Bucharest, which saw a chance in the deterioration of Moldovan-Russian relations for a new opening in its ties with Chişinău, began clear efforts to tone down the hostile rhetoric.

Moldova's new policy bore fruit in 2004, when (in large part thanks to support from Bucharest) Chişinău was granted observer status in the South-Eastern Europe Cooperation Process (SEEC) ³². With Romania's help, Chişinău also managed to sign a Pact on Stability and Security with Russia, Ukraine, Romania, the OSCE, the US and the EU. Moldovan cooperation intensified further in connection with its 2005 parliamentary elections, where the PCRM's main subject was European integration. The President of Romania, Traian Băsescu, newly elected that year, openly supported both the pro-European aspirations of Chişinău as well as President Vladimir Voronin himself.

However, Romanian-Moldovan relations began to deteriorate once again in 2006. One key to the renewed dispute was Romania's desire to increase the role it was playing in the process of Moldova's European integration, as well as the still unresolved problem of the basic and border treaty. The turning point and catalyst for the negative change in bilateral relations was the offer President Băsescu made to Moldova in 2006; he proposed to Chişinău that Moldova should unite with Romania before its entry into the EU, and become a member of the Community with it in 2007. Although from the beginning the Romanian President's idea had no chance of being implemented, and was a rhetorical trick rather than a call for real action, it still provoked a strong reaction from the Moldovan government. In response to Bucharest's proposal, Voronin promptly answered that Moldova would never, even after joining the EU, opt for unification with Romania ³³.

These two statements launched a second series of mutual accusations in five years, which in turn has led to the subsequent prolonged crisis in relations between Bucharest and Chişinău. Tensions reached their peak after the

³² The South-East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) was launched in Sofia in 1996. It aims to strengthen security in the region, develop economic relations and promote democracy.

³³ <http://www.9am.ro/stiri-revista-presei/Politica/38114/Presedintele-Voronin-respinge-unirea-cu-Romania.html>

parliamentary elections in April 2009, when President Voronin openly accused Romania of inspiring and co-organising the riots which took place in Chişinău after the announcement of the voting results³⁴. The Romanian Ambassador Filip Teodorescu was declared *persona non grata* and forced to leave Moldova within 24 hours. At the same time the authorities in Chişinău decided to introduce visa requirements for Romanians, and temporarily closed the border. The movement of trains between the two countries was significantly reduced (officially for technical reasons). These tensions lasted a relatively short time. Due to the lack of consensus in Moldova's parliament on choosing a candidate for president, early parliamentary elections were held in July 2009. As a result, a coalition of four pro-European parties came to power, and this government has opened a new chapter in Romanian-Moldovan relations.

Bilateral relations intensified notably almost immediately after the formation of the pro-European government in Chişinău. Bucharest decided to take advantage of the new government's EU aspirations, and take over as the main advocate of Moldova's European integration process. On the one hand, it would provide a platform for cooperation and allow the building of friendly bilateral relations, and on the other Romania would thus bolster its own position within the EU. In January 2010, at the initiative of Bucharest and with the participation of France, a so-called Group of Friends of Moldova was founded. Romanian politicians also began to speak out in Moldova's interests in the European Parliament. At the same time there has been a clear revival of political contacts. Representatives of the Romanian government arrived in Chişinău almost every month. The climate was also made more conducive by the rise to Moldova's presidency of Mihai Ghimpu, the leader of the Liberal Party and a confirmed 'Romanophile', in August 2009. In addition, in April 2010, Presidents Băsescu and Ghimpu signed a declaration on strategic cooperation in which Bucharest undertook to help Moldova in its efforts on the road to European integration³⁵. Romania has also committed to providing Moldova with an EU *acquis communautaire* translated into Romanian, which made talks on signing an Association Agreement with the EU much easier over the following years. Attempts were also begun at resolving the problems in bilateral relations which had dated back many years. In 2010 a 'border regime' treaty was signed; this was a compromise, but in the

³⁴ Many of the protesters, who numbered tens of thousands, gathered at the seat of government and the parliament building, carried Romanian flags and shouted pro-European and pro-Romanian slogans. At one point, several demonstrators also managed to hoist the Romanian flag on the top of the president's official building.

³⁵ <http://www.mfa.gov.md/img/docs/0001739.pdf>

long run it proved unsatisfactory to Chişinău (as it lacked precise definitions of a historical and cultural nature), addressing the failure to agree on a basic and border treaty³⁶. In the same year, the two countries also signed an agreement on small border traffic, and decided to open two Romanian consulates (in Bălţi and Cahul), which Romania had been trying unsuccessfully to achieve for years. Another important gesture was the decision to start removing the barbed wire and fortifications on the Moldovan side of the border area that had been left over from the Soviet Union.

From the perspective of Chişinău, which has worked for European integration since 2009, Romania has become an important partner in facilitating contacts with the West, as well as being a source of technical assistance (in matters of integration) and the necessary know-how. For this reason, the Moldovan government is interested in silencing and minimising any tensions with its western neighbour. This does not mean, however, that the causes for these tensions have been eliminated.

³⁶ <http://www.mae.ro/en/node/5879>

II. FACTORS AFFECTING BILATERAL RELATIONS

1. The question of identity and language

The question of identity is perhaps the most sensitive issue in the bilateral relations between Moldova and Romania, and continually influences the relationship between the two countries.

According to the 2004 census, 76% of the population of Moldova declared they were ethnic Moldovans, while only about 2-3%³⁷ consider themselves to be Romanians³⁸. To a greater or lesser extent, they recognise the historical, cultural, and genetic relationships of their nation with Romania, but nevertheless they emphasise that they constitute a separate national group which has its own history and culture distinct from Romania's. This view is primarily the result of the long process of Moldavianisation conducted by the Soviet authorities during the MSSR period, as well as the exclusion of the people living on the territory of modern Moldova from the nation-shaping processes of the modern Romanian nation which had been taking place since the mid-nineteenth century. Neither the government in Bucharest nor the Romanian scientific community believe in the existence of a separate Moldovan nationality; they are of the opinion that Moldova is 'the second Romanian state' inhabited principally by Romanians, and they consider the very concept of a 'Moldovan nation' to be nothing more than the result of the ethnic engineering conducted by the USSR. Romania also opposes the concept of a 'Moldovan language', distinct from the Romanian, in the Moldovan legal system (primarily the constitution).

This difference of views between Bucharest and Chişinău on the problem of a separate national identity for the Moldovans causes systematic problems in bilateral relations. One example of this is the freezing of relations between Chişinău and Bucharest in 2001. On 19 July that year, the Parliament of Moldova adopted a law 'On the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and the legal status of their organisations', which gave special importance to the Russian language. Under the new law, Russian became a *de facto* privileged

³⁷ These figures should be treated with caution. There are many reasons to believe that the census results were manipulated according to the demands of the ruling Communist Party, which wanted to show the overwhelming predominance of the Moldovan identity over the Romanian. It must therefore be assumed that the number of people declaring themselves as 'Romanians' is actually higher, although unlikely to exceed 10%.

³⁸ Another census was held in 2014, but its results have still not been published.

language, almost equal in status to the Moldovan language. All acts of national importance were to be published in both Moldovan and Russian, and citizens were given the right to approach state institutions and receive replies from them in Russian. Romania responded aggressively, not only to the rise in the role of the Russian language in Moldova as highlighting the eastern turn of Chişinău's policy, but also on the official use of the term 'Moldovan language' in the act. Even during the discussion on the form of the new document, President Iliescu publicly acknowledged that the claim that Moldovan was supposedly distinct from Romanian was an instrument for 'denationalising' the Romanians living in Moldova. At the same time Adrian Năstase, the Romanian Prime Minister, expressed his concerns at the Moldovan parliament's decisions. Both speeches ended the period of 'pragmatism' in relations between Chişinău and Bucharest which had been observed since the Communists came to power in April 2001, and initiated an intensive exchange of mutual accusations. Just two days after the president and prime minister's declarations, the speaker of the Moldovan parliament said that Romanians constituted a national minority in Moldova, just like the Russians or Ukrainians. This statement was received in Bucharest as a serious affront. The deterioration of relations was also influenced by a freeze in the dialogue on the basic and border treaty. As early as September Năstase had stated that although relations between Moldova and Romania still retained their special character, he stressed at the same time that they had undergone "some changes" since the PCRM came to power in Chişinău. Once again he stressed Romania's tough stance regarding the naming of the language. He also made his planned visit to the Moldovan capital that October conditional on progress being made in implementing the economic projects which had been agreed on earlier.

Due to Bucharest's refusal to recognise Moldovans as a separate nation, it has systematically denied their right to register a Moldovan minority in Romania³⁹. Censuses held in Romania also do not take the existence of a separate Moldovan nationality into account, and treat all Moldovans living in the country as Romanians, even if they have Moldovan citizenship. Moldovan minorities living beyond the borders of Romania, for example in Ukraine, are also unrecognised by Bucharest (despite the fact that Ukraine recognises the existence of separate

³⁹ This position sometimes meets with peculiar reactions from the Moldovan authorities. One example is Vladimir Voronin's statement in February 2007 in which he stated that because Bucharest does not recognise the existence of the Moldovan nationality, about 10 million Moldovans living in Romania cannot obtain the status of a national minority. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2007/02/070224_voronin_moldoveni.shtml

Romanian and Moldovan minorities on its territory). On the other hand, Moldova recognises the existence of a Romanian minority on its territory, which has met with a negative reaction from Bucharest.

The identity problem largely lost its importance in shaping Romanian-Moldovan relations after the pro-European Alliance for European Integration coalition came to power in 2009. The leaders of two of the three parties forming the coalition at that time (the Liberal-Democratic Party and the Liberal Party⁴⁰) declared the proximity, or even the identity, of the peoples of Romania and Moldova, as well as officially admitting that they speak Romanian⁴¹. In addition, in 2013 the Constitutional Court's judgement that the Declaration of Independence, which states that Romanian is Moldova's official language, took priority over the Constitution, according to which the language is Moldovan⁴². At the same time, 60% of Moldovans still use the term 'Moldovan language' to describe the state language, while 37% believe that its correct name is 'the Romanian language'⁴³.

Despite the identity issue's temporary disappearance from the agenda of Moldovan-Romanian relations, it must be stated that the discussion on the form of the Moldovan identity and its relationship with the Romanian identity is constantly present in Moldovan domestic politics, even under the current ruling coalition. Despite its pro-European orientation, the Democratic Party (PDM), the second-largest party in the coalition, supports the 'Moldovanist' idea, emphasising the Moldovans' linguistic and cultural distinctiveness and the special role of the Russian language in the history of Moldova, and also defends the rights of the country's Russian-speaking inhabitants. There is no doubt that Romania will remain the essential point of reference in the constantly ongoing process of Moldova forming a stable identity for itself.

⁴⁰ The ruling coalition in Moldova collapsed as a result of the political crisis which began in January 2013. In May 2013 a new government was appointed, including the two parties which had formed the previous coalition (the Moldovan Liberal Democratic Party and the Democratic Party), as well as the Liberal Party of Reformers, made up of some Liberal Party members. This party had the same attitude to the issue of identity in Moldova as the Liberal Party.

⁴¹ <http://unimedia.info/stiri/premierul-leanca-si-presedintele-timofti--la-unison-denumirea-limbii-de-stat-trebuie-modificata-68185.html>

⁴² See Kamil Całus, *Moldawski Sąd Konstytucyjny uznał język rumuński za państwowy* [Moldova's Constitutional Court designates Romanian as the state language], *OSW Analizy*, 11 December 2013: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2013-12-11/moldawski-sad-konstytucyjny-uznal-jezyk-rumunski-za-panstwow>

⁴³ <http://unimedia.info/stiri/romana-sau-moldoveneasca-ce-spun-sondajele-75541.html>

2. The problem of granting Romanian citizenship

The Romanian policy facilitating Romanian citizenship for Moldovans is probably one of the strongest tools for building Romania's 'soft power' in Moldova since that country became independent.

In 1991, the parliament in Bucharest adopted new regulations on the acquisition of Romanian citizenship. These stated that former nationals of that country who had lost their citizenship against their will would have the opportunity to regain it, without having to surrender their citizenship or moving to Romania. This law was directed particularly at the inhabitants of those territories which belonged to Romania before 1940, i.e. Moldova (without Transnistria), as well as northern Bukovina and Bugeac, which are currently located within Ukraine. The right to acquire citizenship under the Law also applies to the descendants of these people. From the perspective of the Romanian government, this act was intended to fix the 'historic injustice' that was the forced deprivation by the USSR of Romanian citizenship from the residents of Bessarabia. However, in the 1990s Romanian citizenship did not enjoy great popularity among Moldovans, as in practice the Romanian passport did not bring any tangible benefits with it. Besides having some sentimental value for the small part of the population of Moldova who see it as their homeland, Romania was not inviting in economic terms. As a result, only about 100,000 people had applied for Romanian citizenship by the end of the decade⁴⁴.

Interest in the Romanian passport increased dramatically after the EU's abolition in 2001 of visa requirements for Romanian citizens to travel in the Schengen area. In just six months, the Romanian authorities received almost 19,000 applications from residents of Moldova for the restoration of citizenship. Very soon, the Romanian authorities were forced to tighten up the rules, both due to insufficient administrative resources to process the applications, as well as in the light of criticism of Bucharest from the EU. Among other measures, the Romanian authorities began to require that documents be submitted to the Ministry of Justice in Bucharest, and not at any consular branch as had hitherto been the case. In addition, new citizens would not be able to benefit from privileges such as the right to travel visa-free to the Schengen area for a period of four years. The new regulations almost completely stopped the applications

⁴⁴ A. Cioroianu, *Reacquiring the Romanian Citizenship*, Bucharest 2012, p. 360.

to restore citizenship⁴⁵. The situation changed again after amendments to the law on citizenship introduced by the parliament in 2007-2008. Bureaucratic procedures were improved, and a new institution in the state administration was created responsible for processing applications for citizenship, the National Administration for Citizenship, which accelerated the process of naturalisation. At the same time, Romania's accession to the EU in 2007 significantly increased its own attractiveness⁴⁶. The procedures for issuing citizenship were further relaxed in reaction to the anti-Communist demonstrations which took place in Chişinău after the parliamentary elections in April 2009⁴⁷. As a result, by 2013 the number of Moldovans with Romanian passports had risen to about 400,000-500,000⁴⁸.

The issue of granting Romanian citizenship must be considered in the context of the official relations between Bucharest and Chişinău. The provisions concerning allowing Moldovan citizens to acquire Romanian citizenship under a simplified procedure in the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s did not arouse much reaction from the authorities in Chişinău, primarily due to the relatively small scale of this phenomenon, and the countries' correct bilateral relations at that time. However, the situation changed after the modifications and amendments made to the law on citizenship in 2007. The office of President Vladimir Voronin in Chişinău called Bucharest's policy a threat to Moldovan statehood⁴⁹, and in October 2007 the Communist-dominated parliament passed a law banning public office holders from holding any other citizenship than Moldovan. Chişinău's criticism of Romanian citizenship policies dried up relatively quickly, however, as it had no support from the electorate. The possibility of obtaining a Romanian passport, especially after Romania joined the EU, met with interest from a significant part of Moldovan society (according to Traian Băsescu, over a million Moldovans applied for the restoration of citizenship⁵⁰).

⁴⁵ The number of Moldovans who were granted Romanian citizenship in the years 2001-2007 amounted to barely 3000.

⁴⁶ Undoubtedly, interest in Romanian citizenship was raised by the introduction on 1 November 2006 of visa requirements for citizens of Moldova.

⁴⁷ <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-5598907-guvernul-simplifica-procedurile-obtinere-cetateniei-romane-moldovenii-pot-obtine-cetatenia-daca-strabunic-roman.htm>

⁴⁸ This number comes from a study conducted by the Soros Foundation in 2013. <http://www.fundatia.ro/o-politic%C4%83-ce-cap%C4%83t%C4%83-viziune-redob%C3%A2ndireacet%C4%83%C8%9Benei-rom%C3%A2ne-o>

⁴⁹ http://www.realitatea.net/voronin-acuza-romania-ca-pune-in-pericol-statalitatea-republicii-moldova_110217.html

⁵⁰ http://www.realitatea.net/un-sfert-de-milion-de-moldoveni-au-primit-cetatenia-romana_935694.html

After the Alliance for European Integration coalition came to power in 2009, the issue of citizenship completely disappeared from the catalogue of bilateral problems. Prime Minister Vlad Filat officially declared that both from a legal perspective, as well as in his personal opinion, Moldovans have the right to have multiple citizenships⁵¹. The possibility of Moldovans obtaining Romanian passports is a method for the government in Chişinău to alleviate social tensions by increasing the mobility of its citizens, which is particularly important for migrant workers. It also allows an increase in cash flow to the Moldovan economy through an increase in remittances from people working abroad.

The question of granting citizenship to Moldovan citizens should also be seen as a very effective instrument for ensuring political popularity in Romania itself. Promoting the liberalisation of the law on citizenship is one way for Romanian politicians to position themselves as patriots who care about the fate of compatriots abroad, a stance which traditionally wins the sympathy of the electorate and ensures a rise in political popularity. At the same time, this approach does not generate any visible costs to the Romanian state, as the new citizens do not usually settle in Romania, nor do they seek work there, which could lead to growing resentment among the Romanian population. In addition, the new citizens are also willing to vote for policies promoting an easier process of gaining citizenship. It seems likely that one of the reasons why Traian Băsescu insisted on modifying the legislation in 2007 was the hope of obtaining additional votes from naturalised Moldovans. In the presidential elections in 2009 Băsescu won the second round by a very small margin (71,000); the overwhelming majority of voters abroad – and thus, largely Moldovans with Romanian passports – supported his candidacy.

Considering this large group of Moldovans with Romanian passports, Romanian politicians have made a habit of including Moldova in their election campaigns over the last few years. In 2012, before the referendum to dismiss Traian Băsescu from the post of President of Romania, he paid an official visit to Chişinău, the real purpose of which was to mobilise the local electorate. During the elections to the Parliament of Romania in 2012, Eugen Tomac, a candidate from the list of the Democratic Liberal Party, also opened his electoral campaign in Chişinău; after winning and taking his seat as a deputy, he opened the first parliamentary office of a Romanian deputy in the Moldovan capital in 2013.

⁵¹ Vlad Filat made this declaration in an interview with Kamil Gałus and Piotr Oleksy, 'We are not afraid of the future', published in the quarterly *Nowa Europa Wschodnia* [New Eastern Europe] No. 5 (XIII) 2010.

Although the EU lifted the visa requirement for those Moldovan citizens who hold biometric passports (for travel for up to three months) in April 2014, this did not noticeably reduce Moldovans' interest in the possibility of receiving Romanian citizenship. Visa-free travel does not offer the possibility of obtaining legal employment in the EU, which the Romanian passport does allow⁵².

3. The problem of the Bessarabian Metropolitanate

Since the first years of Moldovan independence, the issue of the status and position of the Bessarabian Metropolitanate, which operates in Moldova and is subordinate to the Romanian Orthodox Church, has posed a problem to the authorities in Chişinău which, over time, clearly began to affect Moldovan-Romanian relations as well.

Historically, the Orthodox Church in what is now Moldova was systematically subordinated to the Moscow Patriarchate when these areas were joined to the Russian Empire in 1812. By mid-century the Moldavian Orthodox Church had in principle undergone total Russification. The situation was changed when the current areas of Moldova (without Transnistria) joined Romania in 1918, as a result of which the Moldavian Arch-Eparch was incorporated into the Romanian Orthodox Church. This state continued until the return of these areas to Moscow's control. After the annexation of the territory of today's Moldova in 1940, the Soviet authorities took extensive measures to eliminate the influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and forced the faithful to come under the jurisdiction of Moscow. The Bessarabian Metropolitanate was relegated to the level of an eparchy and incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church. The new unit was led by Ieronim Zaharov, a Russian priest nominated by Moscow. The assets of the former Bessarabian Metropolitanate were nationalised, destroyed or transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church. Orthodox priests from the Romanian Church were exiled or murdered. As a result, in just a few years the Soviet authorities managed to take full control of the remaining Moldovan church structures.

In the wake of Gorbachev's thaw, the Russian Orthodox Church recovering its freedom of action proceeded to renew its influence in Moldova. As early as September 1990, two months after Moldova's declaration of its sovereignty, the

⁵² See Marta Jaroszewicz, Kamil Całus, *Moldova: a year after the introduction of the visa-free regime*, *OSW Analyses*, 6 May 2015: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-05-06/moldova-a-year-after-introduction-visa-free-regime>

Russian Patriarch Aleksei II created the new diocese of Bălți during his visit to Chișinău, and appointed the Moldovan Petru Păduraru its bishop. In January 1991, the Holy Synod in Moscow decided to establish a Metropolitanate of Chișinău and All-Moldova (hereinafter abbreviated as the Moldovan Metropolitanate). The pro-Romanian Moldovan Popular Front then ruling in Chișinău disapproved of the Russian Orthodox Church's increasing influence, but apart from suspending the official registration of the new Metropolitanate, it did little to limit the Church's activity. The situation changed in September 1992 when Bishop Petru was officially suspended for his pro-Romanian convictions, and announced the creation of the Autonomous Bessarabian Metropolitanate with a group of priests. He also asked the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Teoctist I, to incorporate the self-proclaimed Metropolitanate into the Romanian Church with the rank of diocese. On 19 December 1992, without consulting Moscow, Teoctist decided to restore the Orthodox Bessarabian Metropolitanate in the Republic of Moldova. The interim management of the Metropolitanate, until the election of a metropolitan of the Romanian Episcopal Church, was entrusted to Bishop Petru of Bălți.

The creation of an Orthodox Church in Moldova subordinate to the Romanian Patriarchate was very well received in Romania, but the strengthening Moldovan elite increasingly openly supported the Chișinău Metropolitanate, subordinate to Moscow. As a result, although in 1993 the authorities in Chișinău finally registered the Metropolitanate of Chișinău and All-Moldova (established in 1991), each successive attempt to register the Bessarabian Metropolitanate was turned down. This conduct by the Moldovan authorities was primarily politically motivated. Chișinău wished to avoid a deterioration of its relations with Russia, and more importantly, to ensure the support of the Moldovan electorate, 86% of whom belong to the Moldovan Metropolitanate⁵³. In addition, formal recognition of the Bessarabian Metropolitanate would have enabled the latter to request the restitution of property seized after Bessarabia's annexation to the Soviet Union, which the Moldovan Metropolitanate also intended to do. The authorities in Chișinău feared that a clash between both Orthodox Churches for influence and wealth could provoke sectarian tensions, which it wanted to avoid at all costs, especially in the context of the already significant ethnic tensions within the republic.

⁵³ Source: <http://photos.state.gov/libraries/moldova/106281/PDF-RU/2011-IRF-RU.pdf>
The Moldovan Metropolitanate is much larger than the Bessarabian. It includes some 1300 parishes, compared to the figure of just over 100 parishes subordinated to the latter. Data on Patriarch Kirill's declaration in 2013: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/news/63936.htm>

Despite the entanglement of the Patriarchates of Moscow and Bucharest in conflict over the official registration of the Bessarabian Metropolitanate throughout the 1990s, this problem effectively remained an internal Moldovan matter, and did not directly affect the relationship between Chişinau and Bucharest.

The situation changed radically after the PCRM came to power. After a short period of maintaining good relations with Romania, its politicians began to exploit the problem of the Bessarabian Metropolitanate in order to shape its policy towards Bucharest. On 2 October 2001 Ion Morei, the Moldovan Minister of Justice, while appearing before the European Court of Human Rights in a case concerning the official registration in Moldova of the Bessarabian Metropolitanate Orthodox Church, described its activities and its support by Bucharest as a manifestation of Romania's "expansionist policy" and "an attempt to influence the internal affairs of the sovereign and independent Republic of Moldova through the use of pro-Romanian forces inside the country"⁵⁴. In response, Prime Minister Năstase called on Voronin to dismiss Morei, but this request was rejected. At the same time Năstase announced that as long as Chişinau failed to reply formally to Morei's speech, bilateral relations would "have to remain subject to redefinition"⁵⁵. Chişinau said that the minister's statement had been personal in nature, and refused to make the official apology demanded by Bucharest. Năstase finally announced that despite the situation Romania wanted to maintain its 'technical cooperation' with Moldova.

Despite Chişinau recognising the Bessarabian Metropolitanate and officially registering it in 2002, the question continues to cause problems in bilateral relations. The conflict between the Metropolitanates once again took on a political character in 2007, when the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church decided to create three new eparchies in right-bank Moldova and Transnistria. This received an angry response from both the Chişinau Metropolitanate and the Moscow Patriarchate, and within a short time the Moldovan authorities also joined in the conflict. President Voronin stated that the Romanian Orthodox Church's actions are part of the constant aggression Bucharest was carrying out against Moldova; he made another similar declaration in December 2007⁵⁶. As a result of the escalation of the dispute, Chişinau expelled two Romanian diplomats

⁵⁴ L. Turcescu, L. Stan, Church-state conflict in Moldova: the Bessarabian Metropolitanate, in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36 (2003), p. 460.

⁵⁵ Conflict between Bucharest and Chisinau shows no sign of letting off..., <http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/rferl/2001/01-10-09.rferl.html>

⁵⁶ <http://www.europalibera.org/archive/news/20071209/445/445.html?id=1450870>

and demanded that the four priests of the Bessarabian Metropolitanate leave the country. The dispute ended with the Patriarchate of Bucharest withdrawing from its decision to open the new eparchies, and a radical deterioration of relations between Moldova and Romania.

Since the coalition of pro-European parties came to power in 2009, the conflict between the Metropolitanates no longer has a political dimension and has not affected bilateral relations. It should be assumed that if pro-Russian forces and anti-Romanian forces take power again, this issue will once more become an instrument in relations between Bucharest and Chişinău.

4. The issue of the basic and border treaty

Although negotiations have been ongoing since the early 1990s, Romania has consistently refused to sign a basic document with Moldova governing the two countries' bilateral relations (namely the Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation, or the basic and border treaty)⁵⁷. Moldova has called for Romania to adopt this document, as doing so would constitute a formal recognition of the Moldovan-Romanian border. Meanwhile, the failure to sign it introduces an element of uncertainty to bilateral relations, hampers the implementation of reciprocal agreements, and gives a very strong propaganda argument to anti-Romanian political forces in Moldova. Bucharest's lack of political will to sign such a document allows these groups to argue, with some justification, that the real objective of Romanian policy is in fact to absorb Moldova. As a result, this also increases social tensions inside the country, because the lack of a border treaty enhances the fears among the Russian-speaking minority and the pro-independence section of Moldovan society of a possible merger with Romania.

The authorities in Bucharest are not interested in signing a treaty with Chişinău primarily out of fear of the reaction of their own electorate. For a large part of Romanian society, such a step would be seen as a symbolic sealing of the loss of the Moldovan lands, and the formal abandonment of any hope for the reunification of the two countries. In addition, the vast majority of Romanian politicians have stressed that signing such a document would be a symbolic acknowledgment of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. At the same time, they argue that such a treaty is unnecessary because Romania recognised the border with the USSR

⁵⁷ Bucharest and Chişinău were closest to reaching an agreement in 2000, when the Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation was initialled. However, this document has never been signed by the parties.

in 1947, under the Treaty of Paris, and signed the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975, which is committed to the territorial integrity of the other European states.

An additional problem hampering the signing of the two documents is the previously discussed issue of language and identity. The Moldovan authorities, particularly during Communist rule, pushed for such a treaty to include provisions on the distinct difference of the Moldovan language, highlighting the existence of an independent Moldovan nation. The version of the treaty proposed by the Communists also presented a different narration of the history of the Moldovan lands from that of Romania. The Moldovan position met strong opposition from Bucharest, making it impossible to hold constructive dialogue aimed at working out a compromise agreement. The situation has not changed even since the rise to power in 2009 of pro-European forces, which were much more favourable to Romania and more willing to make concessions to it. Chişinău did agree to separate the issue of local border traffic from the basic and border treaty, and as early as 13 November 2009 Bucharest signed an agreement on this matter. A year later, on 8 November 2010, the parties signed a treaty concerning the border regime, which defined the issues concerning the management and control of the Moldovan-Romanian border, and also defined the framework for cooperation between the two countries' border services. Both documents are of a purely technical nature, however, and cannot be seen as the equivalent of a full border treaty. Moreover, Bucharest only agreed to the signing relatively reluctantly, primarily in order to accelerate Romania's joining the Schengen area. Despite signing the document, it has not yet been ratified by the Romanian Parliament⁵⁸.

It seems that the government in Bucharest will not decide to sign the basic and border treaty with Moldova in the foreseeable future, for fear of being criticised by the political opposition and its own electorate. Chişinău's pressure to solve this problem is too weak, just like the pressure from the Western partners. There is no doubt that the absence of such an agreement will still remain a pretext for anti-European and anti-Romanian propaganda from Moldova's pro-Russian circles, and for Russia itself.

⁵⁸ <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1714504.html>

III. THE OBJECTIVES AND TOOLS OF ROMANIAN POLICY TOWARDS MOLDOVA

Romania's policy objectives towards Moldova remain constant, regardless of the changes in the ruling elites in Bucharest and Chişinău, or of the mutual relations between the two countries.

The primary objective of Romanian policy towards Moldova since the latter gained independence is to anchor Chişinău in the system of Western institutions and international associations. To achieve this goal, regardless of the state of bilateral relations at any given time, Bucharest has repeatedly acted as Moldova's advocate in its efforts to join the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the WTO. Bucharest has been a strong supporter of Moldova joining the European Union, hence its unequivocal support for all the prior stages of Moldova's move towards the EU, including joining the CETA and the Central European Initiative. Romania also supported Moldova signing the Association Agreement as soon as it could, as well as the agreement on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) which is part of the AA; and has often lobbied for Moldova's inclusion in EU regional cooperation formats such as the Danube Strategy. Romania was the main initiator and founder in 2009 of the so-called Group of Friends of Moldova (a.k.a. the Group for the European Action of Moldova) in the EU.

At the same time, Romania is trying to prevent any attempts to deepen Moldovan integration with the structures promoted by Russia. Moldova's ratification in 1994 of the Bielavezha Accords and the CIS Statute (and therefore its formal agreement to join this organisation) met with a negative reaction from Bucharest. Romania has also denounced the idea of Moldova joining the Customs Union. Although Bucharest officially supports Moldova's territorial integrity, in practice the possible reunification of Moldova and Transnistria does not lie in Romania's interest. Such a move could in fact lead to an increase in Russian influence in the country, and would undoubtedly alter its social structure and increase the role of the Russian-speaking population in the politics of Chişinău⁵⁹. This would undoubtedly affect relations between Moldova and Romania. To achieve its objective, Bucharest has been working not only on the political and diplomatic levels, but is also seeking to increase economic ties between Romania

⁵⁹ As President of Romania, Traian Băsescu spoke on the secession of Transnistria for the sake of Moldova's European integration in April 2015: <http://www.pan.md/news/Besescu-Moldova-doljna-otkazatisya-ot-Pridnestroviya/54851>

and Moldova. This is intended both to increase Romania's importance as a trading partner for Moldova, and to develop the transport and energy infrastructure between the two countries.

Bucharest's actions towards Chişinău are also focused on supporting the processes of 're-Romanianising' Moldova, which should be seen as part of a move to build up Romanian soft power. Romania has funded 6000 scholarships for Moldovan students and pupils; it provides literature in Romanian to Moldova's libraries, and supplies school with history textbooks (written by Romanian historians, which also allows it to promote the Romanian national idea). In addition, the financing of scholarships allows Bucharest to attract the most talented Moldovan students, who either remain in Romania or (less frequently) return to Moldova, where they form a pro-Romanian political, administrative and business caste. Romania also allocates funds for development assistance to Moldova, which should also be included in Romania's instruments of soft power. The largest such instrument was the non-refundable aid programme launched in 2010 at the initiative of the President of Romania Traian Băsescu, which amounted to €100 million⁶⁰.

The subject of Moldova is a useful tool to bolster the position of Romanian politicians. The issue of (political, economic and social) aid for Moldova has for years been one of the arenas of dispute between the long-time President of Romania Traian Băsescu and Prime Minister Victor Ponta. Both politicians have striven to outdo each other in their achievements in this field over the past few years⁶¹. The Romanian presidential elections in November 2014 were an important factor in mobilising Victor Ponta to increase his involvement in Moldovan matters.

Despite the existence of permanent policy objectives towards Chişinău, the lack of a viable long-term strategy for Romania's conduct towards Moldova in the political, economic, and security spheres is noteworthy. The previously discussed actions Romania has undertaken are often short-term in nature (and some remain purely declarative), and do not constitute a strategically coherent

⁶⁰ It should be noted, however, that despite these high-sounding declarations, as of now (i.e. after four years of operation) only about €40 million of the promised €100 million has been paid. The main reason for the delays is the failure to develop the technical side of implementing the non-repayable loan, as well as administrative failures on the part of Romania.

⁶¹ For example, see <http://www.psd.ro/media/stiri/victor-ponta-pentru-republica-moldova-eu-am-facut-traian-basescu-doar-a-spus/>

whole. Moreover, even though the country is officially a priority in Bucharest's foreign policy, it should be noted that the group of experts who could support the Government in developing such a strategy is still relatively small.

IV. ROMANIA'S ROLE IN THE POLITICS OF CHIȘINAU

Moldova's policy towards Romania has both an external dimension, focused on the development of bilateral relations *per se*, as well as an internal dimension, connected with the political struggle inside the country. In this case, the role of Romania in Moldovan politics is – in contrast to the Romanian objectives towards Moldova – much more variable, and depends on which forces currently hold power in Chișinău.

In the context of foreign policy as seen by Chișinău, Romania is a crucial counterweight to Russian influence. Examples of this include the pro-Romanian turn which the Moldovan communists took after the dramatic deterioration in relations between Moldova and Russia in 2003. Naturally the groups pursuing European integration, which took power in 2009 and thus had to work to reduce Russian influence, also turned towards Bucharest, seeing it as an agent and advocate for Chișinău in the EU. Moreover, Romania offers Moldova the prospect of reducing not only its political, but also its economic and energy dependence on Russia. Bucharest is also often seen as a representative of Moldovan interests in international organisations, and as source of the financial aid and know-how necessary to conduct reforms.

The Romanian question is the keystone of domestic policy in Moldova, and is regularly used by individual Moldovan groups in playing off their political interests. During their time in office in 2001-2009, the Communists willingly accused their political opponents of wanting to merge Moldova with Romania, cooperating with the Romanian authorities, or having their activities financed by Romania. This not only reduced support for their political opponents, but also stirred up anti-Romanian phobia in society. Additionally, this anti-Romanianism fuelled by the fear of unification was an element in consolidating the country's inhabitants and calming domestic political and ethnic differences. It was useful from the point of view of the Communists, who could easily present themselves as the only real political force which was defending the country's independence and resisting those right-wing groupings whose victory (from the perspective of the electorate which opposed reunification with Romania) would have run the risk of Moldova being absorbed by its western neighbour.

The pro-European parties also draw upon the Romanian factor for their internal political purposes⁶². From the perspective of the largest coalition party, the

⁶² In 2010-14 power was held in Chișinău by a pro-European coalition of three parties, the PLDM, PDM and PL. After the elections of 30 November 2014 a pro-European minority coa-

PLDM, and the Liberal Party,, Romania is a factor which weakens the identity model offered by the Communist Party and strengthens the Romanian elements of Moldovan identity, which in turn limits Russian influence (in socio-cultural terms). The Moldovan Democratic Party, though it is officially ‘Moldovenist’ and opposes the increasing influence of Romanian culture in Moldova, has been willing to undertake political cooperation with the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSD) led by Prime Minister Victor Ponta. In September 2014, the leaders of both parties signed an agreement on cooperation in Bucharest, which provided for mutual support during the election campaigns for the presidency in Romania and the parliament in Moldova respectively⁶³. At the same time, Ponta was openly supported in his run for president by the then Prime Minister of Moldova Iurie Leanca, as was Klaus Iohannis by Vlad Filat, the leader of the PLDM, in cooperation with the National Liberals (PNL) group in which the current Romanian president has his political roots.

The actions of leading Romanian politicians supply propaganda fuel for those political forces in Moldova and elsewhere (especially Russia) which oppose the pro-European factions and the process of Chişinău’s move westward. This mainly concerns the statements coming from Bucharest (and especially former President Băseşcu) concerning the possible unification of Moldova and Romania⁶⁴. This kind of rhetoric from the Romanian government puts the ruling pro-European coalition in Moldova in a difficult situation, as it reinforces the arguments of the opposition parties (including Igor Dodon’s Socialist Party and the PCRM), whose politicians have long insisted to public opinion that the European integration project is aimed at the ‘Romanianisation’ of Moldova, depriving it of its independence, and bringing it into NATO by the back door.

Moscow also uses this as an argument against Romanian and EU involvement in Moldova, and in portraying a unification scenario which would entail the enlargement of NATO and a threat to Russian interests. Declarations concerning unification have also raised tensions among Moldova’s minorities, primarily the Gagauz Autonomy, and exacerbated relations with the separatist authorities

lition was created, including only the PLDM and PDM. See Kamil Caşus, Moldova has a minority coalition, *OSW Analyses*, 28 January 2015: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-01-28/moldova-has-a-minority-coalition>

⁶³ The PDM helped the PSD run a campaign in Moldova targeted at Moldovans with Romanian citizenship.

⁶⁴ These types of statements were made regularly by Bucharest during Băseşcu’s time in office. More details in Chapter V.

in Transnistria, whose residents have traditionally been afraid of ‘Romanian expansionism’⁶⁵. Also, the formula repeated by Romanian politicians (Băsescu, Ponta and others), according to which union is conditional on the will of the Moldovan people, has not been positively received by some of the elites in Chişinau, because from their perspective Moldova would be deprived of its subjectivity and turned into a ‘seasonal state’.

However, it seems that with the coming to power of Klaus Iohannis as the new president of Romania, Bucharest’s rhetoric in relation to Moldova will become more cautious, which should weaken the anti-European opposition’s arguments, and reduce the risk of social tensions caused by the anti-Romanian mood of part of the Moldovan public.

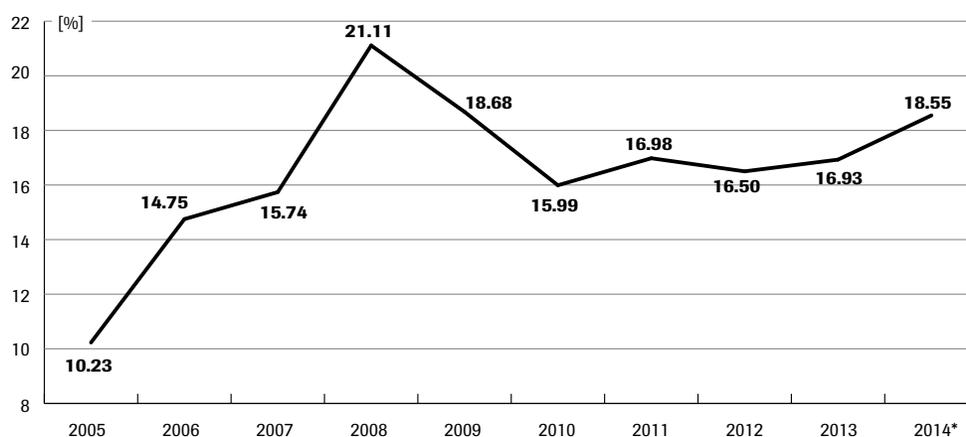
⁶⁵ More details in Chapter V.

V. THE STATE OF ROMANIAN-MOLDOVAN SECTORIAL COOPERATION

1. Economic and energy cooperation

Since the late 1990s Romania has been an important trade partner for and investor in Moldova, and its role in the Moldovan economy is growing steadily. The only exception to this rule came in the years of 2009 and 2010, but the deterioration of trade relations at that time (see Figure 1) was due to external factors, primarily the global financial crisis. Whereas in 2005 Moldova exported goods to Romania with a total value of US\$111.6 million, this figure had almost quadrupled to US\$434 million in 2014, accounting for over 18.5% of total Moldovan exports. In the same period, imports from Romania rose almost three times from US\$257.3 million in 2005 to US\$803 million in 2014, representing 15% of total Moldovan imports⁶⁶. Both of these indicators ranked Romania first among Moldova's key trading partners in 2014. Previously, Russia had occupied this place for many years, but as a result of the embargo imposed by Moscow on alcoholic products and the majority of Moldovan fruit production (in September 2013 and July 2014 respectively), Russia has lost its former position in its trade with Moldova.

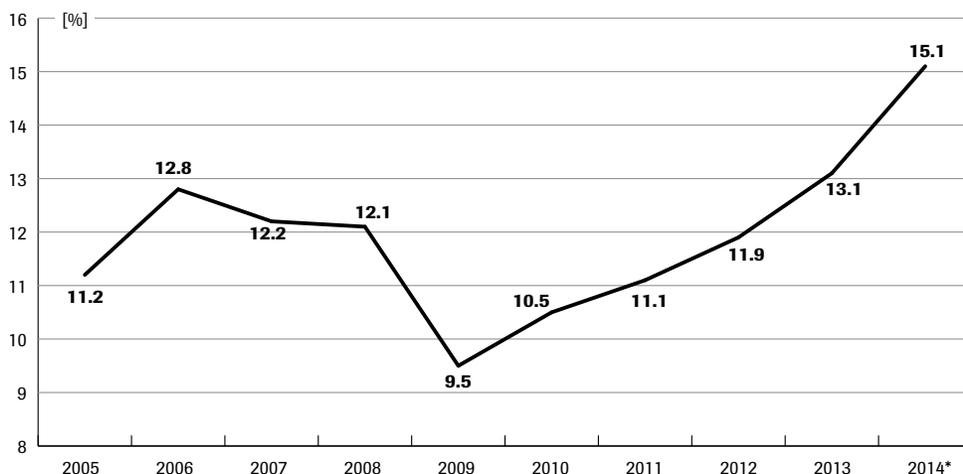
Figure 1. Moldovan exports to Romania (as a percentage of total exports) in the years 2005-2014



Sources: The National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, the National Institute of Statistics of Romania, UN Comtrade and the WTO

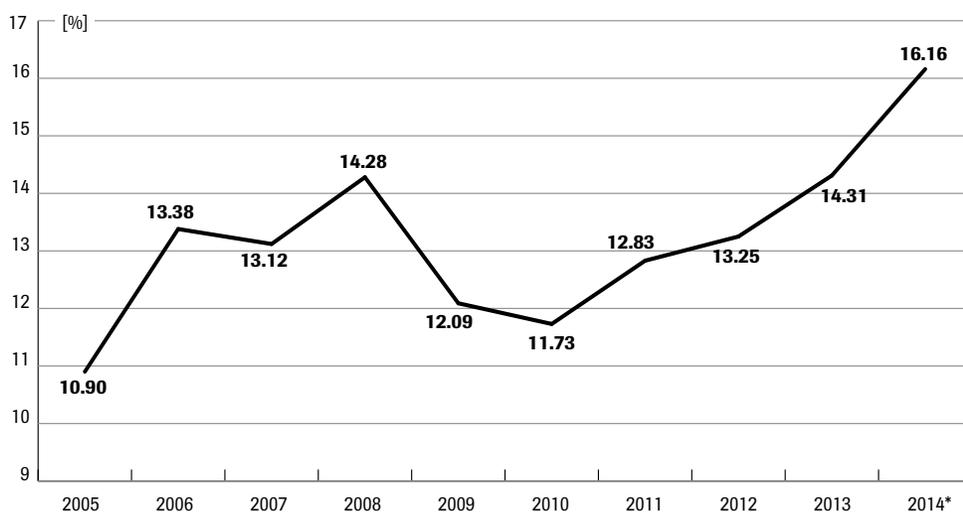
⁶⁶ Data from the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova (NBS).

Figure 2. Moldovan imports from Romania (as a percentage of total exports) in the years 2005-2014



Sources: The National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, the National Institute of Statistics of Romania, UN Comtrade and the WTO

Figure 3. Trade between Moldova and Romania (as a percentage of Moldova's total trade) in the years 2005 to 2014

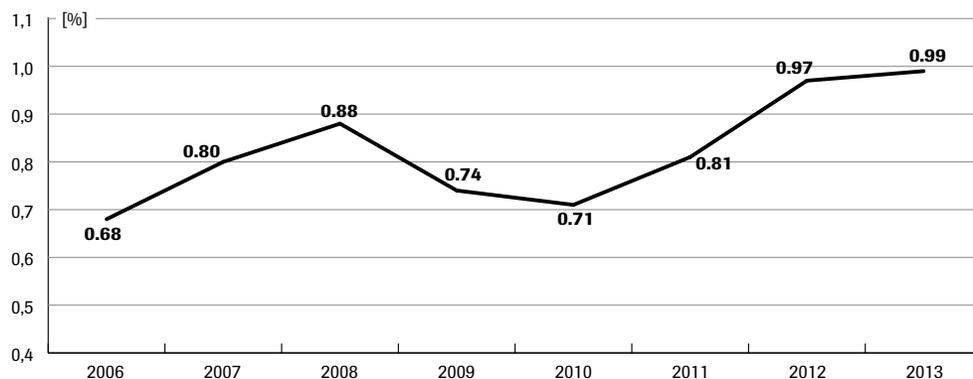


Sources: The National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, the National Institute of Statistics of Romania, UN Comtrade and the WTO

Moldova's importance for Romanian trade is negligible, which is mainly due to the small size of the Moldovan market and its limited absorption capacity. As a result, the trade turnover between the two countries does not exceed 1% of Romania's total foreign trade volume (see Figure 2). Romania primarily sells fuel to Moldova (especially gasoline and diesel), which represents more than half

of its exports to that country⁶⁷. The rest of Romania's exports include chemical and metal products. Meanwhile Moldova primarily sells Romania cables and insulated electric conductors (about 35% of total exports) as well as vegetable products and sugar.

Figure 4. Moldova's share in Romanian trade (as a percentage of Romania's total trade)



Sources: The National Institute of Statistics of Romania, UN Comtrade and the WTO

Romania is currently the sixth largest major investor in Moldova, accounting for 7% of the total funds invested in this country⁶⁸. The most important Romanian companies operating on the Moldovan market include the fuel giants Rompetrol and Petrom, the Banca Comercială Română (BCR), the media companies Jurnal Trust Media and Media Pro, the building company Construct-Arabesque, European Drinks (food industry), and Romstal (sanitary fittings, heating systems). In May 2014 the company Dedeman, the main seller of building materials in Romania, also announced its entry onto the Moldovan market, as well as investments of €30 million⁶⁹. Romanian investors are primarily attracted to Moldova by its workforce, which is cheaper than in Romania, its knowledge of Romanian and Russian, and its usually high qualifications. Despite the Russian trade restrictions introduced in 2014, Moldova is still a member of the CIS's free trade zone, which ensures Romanian investors access to the wider post-Soviet

⁶⁷ In 2013, Romania exported fuel worth US\$393 million to Moldova. Data from the National Bank of Moldova.

⁶⁸ It should be noted that in 2013 the total volume of Romanian investments in Moldova fell by 22%, although this is considered to be a temporary phenomenon resulting from the deterioration of the economic situation in Romania. For more, see http://www.ukrinform.ua/rus/news/ruminskie_investitsii_v_moldovu_sokratilis_na_22_1593553

⁶⁹ <http://vesti.md/?mod=news&id=29214>

market. Another motivation for Romanian companies is the tax incentives Moldova offers to foreign investors, and the tax rates, which are generally lower than Romania's. One specific way of investing Romanian capital in Moldova has been the creation of Moldovan-Romanian companies, a trend which is growing dynamically. In 2009 about 650 such companies had been registered, and as many as 1200 by the beginning of 2013.

Since the 1990s Romania has been trying to boost its role as a provider of energy resources to Moldova. The country is a major supplier of gasoline and diesel oil to Moldova (in 2013 Moldova covered 72.4% and 60.5% respectively of its demand for these fuels with imports from Romania)⁷⁰. Attempts are also being made to enable the delivery of Romanian natural gas to Moldova. On 27 August 2014, the operation of an interconnector between the Romanian city of Iași and Ungheni in Moldova was inaugurated. This connection will ultimately allow the transmission of about 1.5 bcm of gas annually, which would meet right-bank Moldova's current needs (about 1 bcm annually) with room to spare. Currently, however, the interconnector can only use about 5% of the bandwidth, due to the lack of a connection with Chișinău (which is the main gas customer in right-bank Moldova), as well as the inefficient compression and transportation infrastructure on the Romanian side. Moldova's Economics Minister Andrian Candu declared in September 2014 that the pipeline would reach full transmission capacity by 2016, but this seems unlikely⁷¹. Despite these technical limitations, Moldova signed a contract for gas supplies from Romania in December 2014. According to the agreement, the gas from this source will be about US\$65 cheaper than Russian gas (whose 2014 price amounts to about US\$330). Work is continuing on upgrading the power transmission buses between Moldova and Romania (via Iași-Ungheni-Strășeni and Vulcănești-Isaccea), whose completion will allow electricity imports from Romania, and allow Moldova to diversify its supplies more widely than at present. According to announcements by senior representatives of the two countries, energy transmission could start in 2015⁷². Currently Moldova 'imports'

⁷⁰ Data from the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova.

⁷¹ <http://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/v-2016-godu-kishinev-poluchit-gaz-iz-rumynii>
For more on the interconnector issues and Moldova's energy problems, see see Kamil Cașus, 'The Iasi-Ungheni pipeline: a means of achieving energy independence from Russia? Moldova's attempts at gas supply diversification', *OSW Analyses*, 11 October 2015: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2013-10-11/iasi-ungheni-pipeline-a-means-achieving-energy-independence>

⁷² <http://ava.md/economics/o23204-s-2015-goda-moldova-smozhet-importirovat-elektroenergiq-iz-ruminii.html>

electricity from the Moldovan GRES power plant located in Transnistria, and the Ukrainian company DTEK Power Trade⁷³.

Romanian companies are also involved in infrastructure projects in Moldova. The company Electroputere VFU has signed a contract to modernise the Moldovan rail company's passenger trains (diesel multiple units). In 2010, CertSIGN won the tender to introduce tachographs for the international road transportation system to Moldova, and in 2011 PA&CO International signed a contract with the government to renovate the Bălți-Sărăteni road section (a year later, the same company also won a tender to construct another section). The possibility of either modernising the current or constructing a new railway line (to European standards) between Iași and Ungheni, as well as building bridges over the Prut and a highway connecting the two countries, has also been discussed for many years, although without tangible results. However, apart from political declarations and memoranda, no real work on these projects has started so far.

It should be noted that although economic cooperation at the level of private operators is rising rapidly and relatively easily, large strategic economic projects involving the governments in Bucharest and Chișinău regularly run into difficulties. This is true of both energy projects, whose implementation by the originally planned dates has been greatly delayed, and infrastructure projects. The above-mentioned contract to modernise the railway trains ended in scandal. Of the planned 15 trains only four were renovated, while none of them remained operational for more than a few weeks. The companies renovating the roads were accused of corruption during the tender phase, and numerous projects discussed at the intergovernmental level never emerged from the planning stage. The main reasons for these omissions were the inefficiency of the administrative bodies in Moldova and Romania, a lack of funding, and the often unfavourable political climates due to changes of government in Chișinău.

One particular form of economic cooperation is the development aid donated by Romania in 2007 in connection with its entry into the European Union. Since the beginning Moldova has been the main recipient of that aid from Bucharest, and receives approximately a third of all Romanian aid. The amount of this aid is relatively small; the prediction for 2015 is for the implementation of projects with a total value of about €800,000⁷⁴.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ <http://independent.md/mae-al-romaniei-aloca-circa-35-din-bugetul-de-asistenta-pentru-dezvoltare-pe-2015-republicii-moldova/#.VNjLP7M5Dcu>

2. Security co-operation

Despite the fact that since 1991 the two countries have adopted several reciprocal agreements on security (including an agreement on cooperation in the military sphere [1992], an agreement on cooperation in civil defence during peacetime [1994] and an agreement on cooperation in military transport [1997]), the real co-operation in this field *de facto* began after the Alliance for European Integration came to power in 2009. During the rule of the pro-European coalition, Chişinău and Bucharest signed a comprehensive agreement on military cooperation and an agreement on police cooperation and border protection, among others. The implementation of these agreements faces serious problems, however, mainly due to the sluggishness of the Romanian legislative authorities. Nevertheless, there has been a noticeable rise in cooperation in the field of security.

The first unofficial draft comprehensive agreement on military cooperation (replacing the document signed in 1992) appeared in 2010⁷⁵, although a new agreement on cooperation in the military field was eventually signed on 20 April 2012. This document covers a very wide range of bilateral cooperation in areas such as defence policy (including joint defence planning), intelligence, logistics, training, military research, airspace control, sharing military testing grounds, and joint participation in peacekeeping missions carried out under the aegis of the UN, the OSCE and the EU⁷⁶. Among the forms of cooperation, the bill lists mutual consultations and visits (including conferences), joint exercises and military training, exchanges of human resources and documentation, as well as constant contact between both countries' military structures responsible for crisis response. The agreement also envisages the creation of a Joint Military Commission (Comisia militară mixtă) which would meet annually; this body's main task is to analyse the state of the two countries' cooperation and determine the agenda for the next year, which should make optimum use of the opportunities arising from the agreement's existence⁷⁷. This document also specifies

⁷⁵ <http://moldnews.md/rus/news/31838>

⁷⁶ <http://www.lege-online.ro/lr-LEGE-75%20-2013-%28146795%29.html> The list of areas for cooperation between Moldova and Romania listed in the document is very long, and has 27 items, including such specific examples as military history. Moreover, the deal does not finalise the list of those areas, stating that "the parties may cooperate in other areas not listed in this document".

⁷⁷ Both anti-Romanian forces within Moldova, especially the PCRM and Transnistria, and Russia have argued that the agreement violates Moldova's neutral status. They have regularly tried to present the Joint Military Commission as a kind of central joint force command headquarters, rather than a consultative body.

a number of technical issues relating to principles of organisation, particularly the financing of joint exercises, training, etc. Additionally in the military field, on 2 December 2013 the two countries signed an agreement on the mutual protection of confidential military information and on cooperation in the field of military education. These agreements were intended in practice to develop the provisions of the agreement 'On cooperation in the military field'. Under these, about 100 Moldovan soldiers go to Romania every year for training⁷⁸.

Despite declarations from both Chişinău and Bucharest, Romanian-Moldovan cooperation in the security field has so far been very limited. Apart from limited activities of an educational nature, instances of joint military exercises or technical support, for example, have been relatively rare. Importantly, Romania does not have a realistic strategy for guaranteeing the safety of Moldova, and moreover it has not even taken any concrete steps to create or implement such a strategy⁷⁹. Bucharest is trying to interest NATO in the problem of Moldova's security, and also sees the Alliance a guarantor of its security. At the same time, despite the small scale of their cooperation in reality, it is Romania (next to the US) which remains Chişinău's main partner in the military dimension. In addition to security cooperation in the military field, Romania also provides Chişinău with ongoing support for finding a political solution to the Transnistrian conflict.

3. Cultural and educational cooperation

Cooperation in the broadly understood area of culture is most sensitive to changes in the political mood between the two countries. Despite this, Romania has been able to take some actions in that area, regardless of political issues. A key element of this cooperation is the scholarship programme which Bucharest has run and funded since the early nineties, through which about 2500 Moldovan citizens study at Romanian universities every year. Since 2009 this number has more than doubled⁸⁰. Romania also regularly sponsors the purchase of books

⁷⁸ <http://www.army.md/?lng=2&action=show&cat=124&obj=2359>

⁷⁹ The two main documents adopted by the parliament in Bucharest on security issues, the National Defence Strategy and the National Security Strategy of Romania, relate to Moldova in very general terms. The legislature declares therein its desire to extend the area of 'stability and security' eastwards, and expresses interest in the problem of Transnistrian separatism and concern at the illegal presence of foreign (Russian) troops on the territory of Moldova. Compare <http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/SSNR/SSNR.pdf> and <http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/SNAp/SNAp.pdf>

⁸⁰ For the year 2014/2015, the Romanian side committed itself to fund 6000 scholarships, including 2800 for undergraduate students, 1500 for high school students, and 125 scholarships for doctoral students. <http://ava.md/society/025812-ruminiya-predostavit-moldove-5-tisy>

for libraries, and in October 2014 it provided Moldova with 100 minibuses for schools cost-free. Bucharest also actively supports inter-university cooperation.

In 2010, a Romanian Cultural Institute was launched in Chişinău, whose mission includes organising exhibitions, conferences, concerts, financing scholarship programs, language courses, etc. It also helps promote Moldovan artists and creators in Romania, which from the Institute's perspective is seen as an element of supporting Romanian culture (Moldovan artists are considered part of the Romanian cultural space).

Romania's particular importance for culture in Moldova was highlighted in a report funded from the EU budget entitled *Preparatory activities. Culture in the EU's external relations*, in which Romania was designated as a country of key importance for Moldova's cultural relations⁸¹.

Romania is also present in Moldova's media space. Since 1999, the basic cable networks in major cities have offered the private Romanian PRO TV channel. After a break of some years (caused by the political conflict between Bucharest and Moldova's ruling Communists), rebroadcasting of the first channel of Romanian public television TVR resumed in 2010. In addition, in 2014 the parties agreed to broadcast both TVR and Moldova1 respectively on the Moldovan and Romanian cable operators. The Romanian channel Antena 1 is also locally rebroadcast. A Moldovan version of the Romanian daily newspaper *Adevarul* (the second largest newspaper in Moldova) is available on the press market, as are various weeklies and monthlies commonly published in Romania⁸².

Romania's actions in Moldova in the field of culture and education should be seen as relatively effective. They meet the public interest, and are received positively in most cases. Romanian activities in the cultural dimension are basically directed only to the Romanian-speaking population, or more broadly speaking, to ethnic Moldovans⁸³. As a result, they improve Romania's image among this part of the population, although they often deepen the distrust felt by the

[ach-stipendii.html](#) and <http://aif.md/rumyniya-velichila-kolichestvo-stipendij-dlya-moldavskix-studentov/>

⁸¹ <http://cultureinexternalrelations.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Moldova-country-report.pdf>

⁸² It is worth noting that the availability of Romanian media in Moldova is significantly less than that of Russian media.

⁸³ The exception to this rule, which could be a harbinger of changes in Romanian policy in this area, was the launch in June 2015 of the Romanian Information Centre at the University

Russian-speaking population. This problem also applies to Romanian media in Moldova, which (with a few exceptions in the case of the press) only operate in the Romanian language, without reaching the Russian-speaking minorities. The result is that the Russian media are the main carriers of popular culture in Moldova, reaching a wider audience and exerting greater influence on that section of the population's attitudes and opinions than Romanian media. Romania's lack of interest in Moldova's minorities in the cultural and educational dimension is primarily due to the fear of being accused of trying to 'Romanianise' the Russian-speaking inhabitants of the country, as well as for ideological reasons. This is why Romanians mainly believe cooperation with ethnic Moldovans, who are closer to them, to be more reasonable.

of Comrat, at Romania's initiative and funded by Bucharest. See <http://gagauzia.md/news-view.php?l=ru&idc=390&id=5849>

VI. THE IDEA OF UNIFYING MOLDOVA WITH ROMANIA

1. The revival of the idea of unification

The trend towards the unification of Moldova and Romania took on a mass character at the end of the eighties. Proponents of unification, called Unionists (from the Romanian *Unirea*, union) preached the need to revise the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, on the basis of which the Soviet Union annexed Bessarabia in 1940, as well as the return of the historically Romanian lands of Moldova to the motherland. The catalyst for these processes was, on the one hand, the weakness and subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union, which opened up the theoretical possibility of a revision of borders. On the other hand, there was a rise in pro-Romanian sentiments within Moldova itself, which was manifested in the increasing political significance of the Moldovan Popular Front in Moldova (among other things). A major role in the development of these trends was also played by the emergence of genuine party-political competition in Romania itself, as the result of the overthrow of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Pro-unification slogans were proclaimed by many new Romanian groups, because these enjoyed considerable popularity among the electorate.

The unionist idea was particularly strong in Moldova during the period of winning independence from the USSR. After the coalition of the Moldovan Popular Front and the pro-reformist Communists came to power in 1990, active measures were launched in Chișinău which favoured the effective unification of the two countries. Moldova's declaration of independence, adopted on 27 August 1991, openly condemned the separation of Bessarabia from Romania and recognised Romanian, and not Moldovan, as the official language⁸⁴. This document thus created a legal basis for the possible reunification of Moldova with Romania, which both the then government in Chișinău⁸⁵ and the public mood favoured. The Romanian flag and national anthem were declared as official state symbols of Moldova. The idea of unification also rapidly gained support in Romania itself. Bucharest did recognise the independence of Moldova, but its declaration implicitly assumed that independence was merely a transitional step on the road to reunification with Romania. Visa restrictions for Moldovans were

⁸⁴ The Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova, <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=313228>

⁸⁵ During his first official visit to Romania in February 1991, the Moldovan President Mircea Snegur stressed the ethnic unity of the residents of both countries, speaking of "Romanians on both sides of the Prut".

lifted relatively quickly, and a simplified border traffic regime was introduced. Bucharest also organised assistance in the form of books and textbooks in the Romanian language for schools and libraries in Moldova.

Apart from these *de facto* symbolic actions, however, the Romanian authorities failed to undertake any real efforts to support the unification being promoted by groups in both countries. This was related primarily to the radically deteriorating economic situation in Romania, as well as the political instability after the fall of Ceauşescu. These factors forced Bucharest to focus primarily on its domestic situation. The situation was complicated by the rising tensions between Chişinău and the self-proclaimed authorities in Gagauzia and Transnistria, which on 19 August and 2 September 1990 respectively declared their independence from the rest of the republic. In addition, the armed conflict between Moldova and the breakaway Transnistria which took place in 1992 clearly weakened the position and image of Romania in Moldova. Although Bucharest was trying to help the Moldovans in their fight against the separatists, its help was far from sufficient, and disappointed Moldova's pro-Romanian circles. Transnistria's victory, supported by the authorities in Moscow, was a kind of demonstration of force by Russia, which after a short period of weakness resulting from the collapse of the USSR began to regain its influence in Moldova. At the same time, Unionist sentiment in Romania and Moldova began to drop off visibly.

Despite the support of large parts of Romanian political circles, then-president Iliescu never spoke out clearly in favour of the unification of the two countries, as he was aware of the problems, both economic and political, which would have resulted from it (the fact of the stationing of Russian troops in Transnistria played no small part in these considerations). The Romanian authorities *de facto* acknowledged the existence of two separate Romanian states and, basically abandoning the idea of a unification along German lines, adopted a strategy of gradual re-integration by creating a common economic and cultural space, as well as a process of slow political integration⁸⁶.

In Chişinău in 1994, the pro-unification forces left power. The new parliament took a number of actions aimed at consolidating Moldovan statehood and dropping Unionist rhetoric. A Constitution was adopted according to which the official language in the republic was Moldovan, the flag was modified to distinguish it from Romania's, and the national anthem was changed. The so-called

⁸⁶ Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives, p. 203.

independence referendum⁸⁷ also confirmed the mood of most people in the country. At first, Bucharest denounced the referendum's organisation, recognising its results only as a 'survey', but at the end of the year, President Iliescu said in a speech that "today Romania recognises Moldova as an independent country, but maybe one day, some joyous day, we will become witnesses to the full cultural, historical and territorial reunification of this land with us. On the other hand, if there can be two German states, why cannot two Romanias exist?"⁸⁸. This declaration significantly weakened the role of pro-unification discourse in Romanian politics over the next few years.

2. The current discourse on unification

Over the following ten years, Bucharest's foreign policy was primarily focused on strengthening Romania as much as possible within Western structures. The priority in this process, known as the 'return to Europe', became integration with NATO and the EU, whereas relations with Moldova, and in particular the issue of the possible merger of the two countries became a secondary or even a tertiary problem. Romanian politicians are mostly aware that raising revisionist ideas of the Unirea would in fact be perceived in the West as an unambiguously negative step, and would form an obstacle to the aforementioned plans for bringing Romania closer to the West.

The gradual resumption of unification issues in the public debate in Romania started in 2004 when Traian Băsescu assumed the office of President. In his first months in office, his efforts to intensify relations with Chişinău caused the tactical pro-Western turn which President Voronin made at the start of 2004, in connection with the failure of the Kozak Memorandum and the loss of Moscow's support. The subject of unification began increasingly to occupy the public space. Moldovan and Romanian newspapers published articles and analyses devoted to the technical issues, the scenarios and the costs linked to possible unification; they also conducted numerous polls on the matter. This discourse was elevated to a whole new level on 1 July 2006, when Băsescu offered Chişinău the chance for Moldova to join Romania before the latter's entry to the EU. Although the ruling Moldovan Communists firmly rejected the Romanian president's proposal, it still led to increased interest in the subject of unification

⁸⁷ The vote did not meet the formal requirements for a referendum (among other matters, it was held just a week after the parliamentary elections, and not after the legally required interval of 90 days), and so it was officially called a sociological survey.

⁸⁸ *Managing Conflict ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

in both countries. Another impetus which intensified the discourse on unification in Moldova was President Băsescu's declaration on 27 November 2013 (on the eve of Moldova's initialling the Association Agreement with the EU) on Romanian television; he announced that unification with Moldova was Romania's third strategic objective⁸⁹ (after joining NATO and the EU).

Băsescu's rhetoric led to a marked increase in the importance of the unification discourse in Romanian politics, and increased public interest in the subject. Romanian voters have come to expect clear statements from their leaders regarding Bucharest's policy towards Moldova. As a result, in recent years, every major Romanian politician has been *de facto* forced to invoke the idea of Unirea in their rhetoric, which is particularly noticeable in pre-election periods. In a sense, Victor Ponta, Romania's prime minister and the favourite to win the presidential elections in Romania in 2014, made the issue of unification the cornerstone of his election campaign. Ponta entered the election as 'the president who will unite us', and in his election program stated that "Romania needs a new Grand Unification". Although he stressed at the same time that he was referring to the unity of all Romanians, who had been divided as a result of ten years of President Băsescu, it was clear that his rhetoric referred to a possible future unification of Romania and Moldova. The pressure from the electorate during these elections was so high that even Klaus Iohannis, who had not previously referred to Moldovan issues in any way⁹⁰, declared in a pre-election interview that "without the votes of the inhabitants of Bessarabia, no Romanian president can ever fully be president". He also stressed that "if Moldovans want unification, then no-one will stop them"⁹¹. However, after Iohannis won the elections in December 2014, there was a clear muting of the pro-unionist accents.

Moldova's unification discourse clearly lost its importance after the referendum of 1994, and remained so until 2001, playing a marginal role in public debate within the country until the rise to power of the PCRM and President Vladimir Voronin. Its importance increased when the Communists took power, as they

⁸⁹ http://stiri.tvr.ro/traian-basescu-la-tvr--urmatorul-proiect-pentru-romania-trebuie-sa-fie-vrem-sa-ne-intregim-tara-_37653.html

⁹⁰ In November 2014 Iohannis admitted publicly that he had never visited Chişinău or Chernivtsi. This statement was met with public criticism, and intensified a wave of allegations that Iohannis was uninterested in the question of Bessarabia. <http://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2014/11/11/iohannis-a-declarat-ca-nu-a-fost-niciodata-la-cernauti-sila-Chişinău-21-12-21>

⁹¹ <http://ziarulnational.md/exclusiv-klaus-iohannis-fara-votul-basarabenilor-niciun-presedinte-al-romaniei-nu-ar-fi-un-presedinte-implinit/>

had built their political support on firm resistance to Romania's alleged efforts to absorb Moldova. The party's political interest lay in making their electorate fearful of the Romanians. As a result, the issue of unification was present for the next eight years in the public space, albeit at different levels of intensity⁹², and was consistently presented in a negative light. The Communists found it easy to exploit allegations of pro-unionism in discrediting the pro-European opposition parties and the pro-Romanian groupings in the eyes of the electorate. The situation changed after the parliamentary elections in 2009, when the pro-European groups that established the Alliance for European Integration (AIE) coalition removed the PCRM from power. These groups see Romania as their country's main advocate in the process of European integration and thus, for purely pragmatic reasons, they sought from the beginning to rebuild bilateral relations with Romania to the best possible extent. The historical-identity conflicts which characterised the rule of the PCRM were silenced. Chişinău has also given up pushing for a solution to these issues, as they could adversely affect the two countries' mutual relations, including on the issue of the border treaty. At the same time, the declared Romanophile Mihail Ghimpu, the head of the pro-Romanian Liberal Party, took over as acting President after the Communist Vladimir Voronin. As the coalition had hoped, this resulted in an increase in Bucharest's goodwill in relation to Chişinău. This also revived the hopes of those (then marginal) political and social movements (see below) which favoured the unification of Romania and Moldova. The new government did not support them in any way, and (in contrast to the Communists) maintained a neutral attitude towards their activities and slogans. Talk of unification was fuelled from two sources: the pro-unification groups, and the opposition sounding the alarm against it. However, despite opening up and extending the discussion about unification in tandem with the new coalition's rise to power, this problem never became a major focus for the Moldovan public.

3. Political parties on the problem of unification

In Moldova at present, none of the major political formations officially supports the idea of unifying the two countries. The leftist and centre-left groupings, i.e. the PCRM under Vladimir Voronin, the Party of Socialists led by Igor Dodon, and the Democratic Party of Marian Lupu, pro-European but 'Moldovenist' in its rhetoric, all unequivocally oppose the potential merger of the two states

⁹² As discussed, Romanian-Moldovan relations between 2004 and 2006 proceeded relatively well. Controversial topics such as the issue of unification were not raised in Moldova during that time.

and object very strongly when Bucharest raises the matter. These parties also view the activities of unification movements in Moldova very negatively⁹³. This is understandable, as all these parties appeal to an electorate which declares its attachment to a Moldovan identity separate from the Romanian (i.e. 'Moldovenism'), as well as the Russian-speaking minorities. Both these groups of voters are naturally opposed to the possible joining of Moldova to Romania. The largest pro-European grouping, the Liberal Democrats (PLDM) led by former Prime Minister Vlad Filat, strive every day to avoid unequivocal declarations concerning their attitude towards Unirea, in order not to discourage their pro-Romanian voters. However they do react (although in a more moderate way than the aforementioned groups) in situations where Bucharest's pro-unification rhetoric becomes too insistent and starts to threaten a rise in tensions within the country. The Prime Minister of Moldova, the PLDM's Iurie Leanca, reacted to President Băseșcu's declaration in November 2013 that unification with Moldova was Romania's third strategic objective (after joining NATO and the EU) by calling it "counterproductive", and said that it "only creates artificial problems" and was a "divisive" move⁹⁴. He also stressed that "a pro-European course does not mean a loss of sovereignty". Reactions like this are aimed at fending off arguments, from the opposition and Russia, accusing the pro-European factions in Moldova of attempting reunification with Romania under the pretext of European integration. Even the most pro-Romanian group currently involved in mainstream Moldovan politics, the Liberal Party (PL) led by Mihai Ghimpu, has refrained from calling for unification⁹⁵, even though it unambiguously denies the existence of a Moldovan nation separate from the Romanians, and highlights the cultural unity of 'the Romanians on both sides of the Prut'.

Political groups which clearly favour Moldova joining Romania are extremely marginal, and their total support does not exceed 1% of the votes. The main pro-unification grouping currently operating in Moldova is the National-Liberal Party, led by Vitalie Pavlicenco. This party won less than 0.5% of the vote in the last elections.

⁹³ The Party of Socialists is one of several groups which have demanded the formal banning of unionist movements in Moldova. <http://ria.ru/world/20150518/1065201919.html>

⁹⁴ <http://www.mediafax.ro/externe/leanca-declaratiile-de-unire-ale-lui-basescu-ne-scind-eaza-societatea-si-ne-au-creat-deja-probleme-11814527>

⁹⁵ When asked about his attitude to union in an interview in March 2010, Mihail Ghimpu, as acting president of Moldova, replied evasively: "There are problems that can be solved by time and by the public. If people want unification, neither Ghimpu nor Voronin, neither Putin nor Clinton will stop them." Source: <http://www.europalibera.org/content/article/1970942.html>

In Romania, the mainstream political parties approach the issue of unification with a certain distance, although due to the factors mentioned above they cannot and do not want to distance themselves unequivocally from the idea. The main force on the Romanian political scene, the Social-Democratic Party (PSD) of Victor Ponta, adopts the traditional rhetoric, according to which the practical unification of the two countries will take place when Moldova becomes a member of the European Union, because this will lead to the abolition of borders, full freedom to travel, live and work, and deep economic integration. As demonstrated by the example of the last presidential election, such rhetoric has undergone a certain revision under pressure from political demands. As already mentioned, during the election campaign Ponta ambiguously alluded to the idea of the Great Unification of 1918. The second major political group in Romania, the National Liberal Party (PNL), has in a certain sense rejected the idea of unifying Moldova and Romania (although it has not said so explicitly). According to the party's official position, it "supports the sovereignty, true independence and territorial integrity of Moldova, and looks forward to bilateral relations based on the principles of partnership and common identity". In addition, Romania should support Moldova in its "aspirations to strengthen its statehood", in the party's opinion⁹⁶. On the other hand, some statements by high-ranking politicians in the party (including its leader Crin Antonescu) are not so clear, and refer to the possible union of the two countries⁹⁷.

The main political party in Romania which openly supports the idea of unification with Moldova remains the nationalist Greater Romania Party (PRM), led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor. Over the years, however, this grouping has been consistently losing the political support of the electorate. In 2000 and 2004 it had its share of success (earning 19.48% and 12.92% of the vote respectively), but now can only rely on the votes of about 2% of the electorate, and since 2008 it has had no representatives in parliament. Pro-unionist slogans are also used by the Popular Movement Party (PMP) created in 2013, which is primarily made up of supporters of the former President Traian Băsescu; however, support for this party does not exceed 5%. At the same time, none of the political parties openly advocating union with Moldova has proposed even a general plan for achieving this goal.

⁹⁶ <http://www.pnl.ro/subpagina/capitolul-12-rela-iile-externe-i-afacerile-europene>

⁹⁷ The leader of the PNL, Crin Antonescu, stated on 30 November 2013 that the union is "a national aspiration sought by both banks of the Prut" and that personally he "was obviously in favour of it". http://adevarul.ro/news/politica/antonescu-despre-unirea-republica-moldova-aspiratie-nationala-ambele-parti-prutului-1_52998806c7b855ff56576fbo/index.html

4. The public and Unirea

The levels of support for reunifying the two countries among Romanians are very high, at about 70%. However, this figure falls off dramatically when respondents are informed about the high financial costs of Moldova's possible annexation. Unification at any price is demanded by only about 17% of Romanians⁹⁸. Despite such high support for Unirea, Romanians pay very little attention to the current situation in Moldova and to Moldovans themselves. Reports on their eastern neighbour appear relatively rarely in the Romanian media, and knowledge of the social and political situation in this country is mostly rudimentary and full of stereotypes⁹⁹. According to a study conducted by the Soros Foundation in 2011, up to 90% of Romanians had never visited Moldova, 68.4% did not have any contacts with Moldovan citizens, and only 4.5% of respondents said that they had friendly contacts¹⁰⁰. Up to 70% of respondents stated that they had not seen a single item of information (TV reports, posters, etc.) about Moldova over the last year, and up to 82% believe that they know little or very little about Moldova¹⁰¹. It can be assumed that the situation has improved slightly since that poll, thanks to the activities of movements such as Acțiunea 2012, or the general rise in interest in the region caused on the one hand by the ongoing process of Moldova's European integration, and on the other hand due to the Ukrainian crisis. However, it does not seem that any such change will be significant.

⁹⁸ See Kamil Cașu, Tomasz Dąbrowski, The president of Romania supports unification with Moldova, *OSW Analyses*, 4 December 2013: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-12-04/president-romania-supports-unification-moldova>, and <http://www.hot-news.ro/stiri-esential-16104519-sondaj-ires-trei-sferturi-dintre-romani-declara-acord-unirea-romaniei-republica-moldova.htm>

⁹⁹ Generally Romanians see Moldovans as their 'poorer brethren', which often leads to chauvinistic behaviour. In January 2014 a Romanian journalist, Radu Banciu, said on a radio programme he was hosting that "Moldova is exactly like a Romanian gypsy standing with his hand out on the Champs Elysees. That's what a Moldovan is: a gypsy or a peasant, who has been begging from Romania ever since I've known them." Banciu also said during the broadcast that female Moldovan students coming to Romania funded by scholarships from Bucharest are "whores who get pregnant straight away during the first year." Source: <http://www.gandul.info/magazin/radu-banciu-pus-la-punct-de-o-studenta-dupa-ce-i-a-jignit-pe-toti-moldovenii-sunt-o-curva-dar-nu-am-ramas-gravida-in-primul-semesteru-11910998>

¹⁰⁰ Republica Moldova în conștiința publică românească, <http://www.fundatia.ro/republica-moldova-%C3%AEn-con%C8%99tiin%C8%9B-public%C4%83-rom%C3%A2neasc%C4%83>

¹⁰¹ The level of Romanians' ignorance about the major political issues in Moldova is evidenced by the fact that up to 74% of respondents could not give a correct answer to the question 'What is Transnistria?'

There are currently no fully reliable polls on Moldovan support for the idea of unification with Romania¹⁰². According to the available studies, in 2010 union was 'fully' supported by about 10-11% of all the country's inhabitants; another 18-20% of the respondents supported the idea 'to some extent', although it should be stipulated that many Moldovans understood 'significant strengthening' to mean mutual cooperation while maintaining Moldovan statehood. It should be estimated that the real number of supporters of Unirea stands at about 15% (most voters who support unification favour the Liberal Party, whose backing does not exceed 10%).

Union is supported in particular by that part of Moldovan society which declares itself as 'Romanians', a significant portion of the Romanian-speaking intelligentsia, as well as the small portion of those who identify themselves as Moldovans and see union as an opportunity to improve living standards. The unambiguous opponents of unification include the Russian-speaking minorities living in Moldova, including in particular the Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians and Gagauz. The Slavs' resistance is primarily due to their linguistic and cultural alienation from Romania. These minorities fear that they would become second-class citizens in a Romanian state, and that their right to cultivate their own traditions and languages would be greatly reduced. They are also aware of the possible political consequences: the deterioration of relations with Russia and the likely difficulties in travelling to the east. The rather negative image of Romania derived from the Soviet historical school, which stressed that country's fascist past above all, including its participation in the Second World War against the Soviet Union, and the organisation of the Holocaust and the extermination of the Roma population on Transnistrian territory, is also of some significance.

The Gagauz, a Turkish-speaking people numbering about 150,000 who mostly live in areas of the Gagauz Autonomy in south of the country, are a special case here. This people is characterised by its widespread and unusually strong pro-Russian and anti-Romanian attitude. In the collective consciousness of this nationality, the Russians are seen as the Gagauz' defenders against external threats, especially Romania. Bad memories of the Autonomy's period under rule

¹⁰² Doubts have been raised about the conduct of surveys on unification in Moldova. Among the respondents there has almost always been an over-representation of people declaring themselves as Moldovans or Romanians. Sometimes the opinions of important minorities, including the Gagauz, have simply not been taken into account. The way in which the questions were formulated also leaves much to be desired.

from Bucharest in the interwar period, as well as the rule of the fascist regime of Ion Antonescu during World War II, are still very vivid in the memory of the Gagauz. Moreover, Romania is seen as the instigator of the Moldovan-Romanian nationalism of the late eighties, and of the ethnic tensions which resulted from it¹⁰³. Fear of unification with Romania (fuelled further by Băsescu's declaration in November 2013) was one of the main reasons for the organisation in Gagauzia of a referendum in February 2014 (unrecognised by Chişinău) on how integration with Moldova should proceed, in which 98.5% of voters favoured the Russian-sponsored Customs Union¹⁰⁴.

The inhabitants of Transnistria display an extremely negative attitude towards reunification. The region separated from Moldova, among others, for fear of Romanianisation and being absorbed by Romania. Transnistria also accused Bucharest of being involved in the Transnistrian war on the Moldovan side. Since the end of the military phase of the conflict, the inhabitants of Transnistria have remained afraid of a possible Moldovan-Romanian military intervention against Transnistria, calculated by Chişinău to regain control of the territory. The separatist republic's population commonly sees Romania as conducting a consistent policy of aiming to annex Moldova, and having a vested interest in absorbing the highly industrialised region of Transnistria.

Social movements promoting *Unirea* operate more or less formally in both countries. The largest and best-recognised is the Acţiunea 2012 Unionist Platform, directed by George Simon, which includes about 40 non-governmental organisations, both Romanian and Moldovan, and has a significant number of individual members. This organisation was established in 2011, and its name commemorates the 200th anniversary of the detachment in 1812 of Bessarabia from the Principality of Moldavia and its absorption by the Russian Empire. This movement organises regular marches in the streets of Chişinău and Bucharest, called 'Unionist marches'. Traditionally these attract several thousand participants from both countries. It also conducts educational and informational activities in the field of historical and identity questions, both by organising summer schools and courses, as well as by publishing newsletters, printing posters, etc. This organisation is funded by membership fees, tax allowances and direct subsidies.

¹⁰³ For more about the Gagauz question, and the Gagauz' relations with Romania, see Kamil Caľus, Gagauzia: growing separatism in Moldova?, *OSW Analyses*, 10 March 2014: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2014-03-10/gagauzia-growing-separatism-moldova>

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Officially, the platform is not supported (certainly not financially) by any political forces in either Romania or Moldova. Moldova's pro-European elite perceive most of this organisation's activities as a threat to stability in the country. In the light of such allegations, on 13 May 2015 Acțiunea 2012's leader George Simion received a five-year ban on entering the territory of Moldova¹⁰⁵. The movement's activities are supported by Tinerii Moldovei (Youth of Moldova), an organisation advocating the unification of Romania and Moldova, which is made up of 'Moldovans born after the fall of Communism'¹⁰⁶.

5. Prospects for unification

The unification of Romania and Moldova is unlikely in the foreseeable future. Obstacles to this process include economic, social, political, and international issues.

According to available estimates, in the first five years after Romania's putative absorption of Moldova, Bucharest would have to spend a minimum of 30 to 35 billion euros on adapting Moldova's infrastructure, administrative system and legal system in order for it to operate within a single country¹⁰⁷. With Romania's GDP running at US\$189 billion and an annual budget amounting to about US\$70 billion, these costs would have a major impact on the country's economy¹⁰⁸. Furthermore, union would admittedly slightly rise the GDP of the common state (by about €7 billion), but the GDP *per capita* would fall from the current level of US\$9499 to US\$8312.

The economic question is particularly important in the context of public support for integration. The vast majority of Romanians favour unity with Moldova – but not at any price. On the other hand, support for reunification in Moldova has not exceeded 15% since the mid-nineties.

In addition to opposition from ethnic Moldovans, further resistance should also be expected from the Russian-speaking minorities, especially the traditionally anti-Romanian Gagauz. Attempts to unite would probably revive the Gagauz

¹⁰⁵ <http://infoprut.ro/39424-breaking-george-simion-expulzat-de-sis-din-republica-moldova.html>

¹⁰⁶ <http://tinerii.md/cine-suntem-noi>

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.newschannel.ro/stiri/cat-ne-ar-costa-unirea-cu-basarabia/>

¹⁰⁸ Illustration of how big a financial effort it would be for the Romanian state to spend this sum is the problem discussed earlier of Bucharest assigning a sum of €100 million as part of the aid it promised to Moldova in 2009.

separatist movement rooted in the beginning of the nineties, which would probably additionally be supported by Russia. Another socio-political problem is Transnistria. The unification of Moldova with Romania would meet with very strong public resistance in the separatist region, as well as a strong reaction from Russia (as in the case of Gagauzia). So it seems that Moldova could only join Romania without Transnistria, and probably without Gagauzia. Such a scenario would require Chişinău and Bucharest to recognise the independence of those regions, or resolve their issues in other ways (for example by joining them to Ukraine). Both of these scenarios now seem very unlikely.

One of the key obstacles on the road to eventual unification is the opposition of Moldova's ruling elite. Moldovan politicians realise that the two countries merging on a unitary model would deprive them of their positions and future career prospects, as well as jeopardising their political and business interests. It seems very unlikely that Moldovan politicians could win sufficient popularity in a united Romanian state to play as important roles as they do in Moldova. Even assuming that political unity would be achieved through federalisation, thus maintaining the existence of Moldovan legislative and executive bodies, the position of the Moldovan ruling elite would clearly suffer anyway. In addition, due to the relatively low support for the idea of unification among the Moldovan public, it does not seem likely that those groups seeking to achieve it could win any real influence on power in the country, or shape the government's policies.

The ruling elites in Bucharest, contrary to their political declarations, are also uninterested in a real unification of Romania and Moldova. Their unionist narrative is merely propaganda: it is intended for domestic consumption and is primarily used to mobilise voters and emphasise their own patriotism. Proof of this includes the fact that none of the main groups actively support the (official and unofficial) movements to promote union, such as Acţiunea 2012 (except in the short term, for political expediency). Romanian politicians realise that the eventual success of the unification project could be disastrous for the future of the Romanian state, not only because of the economic or political costs, but also the expected rise in tensions among ethnic minorities both in the newly-attached Moldova and in Romania itself. Merging the two countries would derail the idea of the Romanian unitary state advocated by Bucharest, and would raise justified demands for autonomy from the Hungarian minority living in the country, among others¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁹ We could expect that after joining Moldova, like the Gagauz Autonomy, Romania's Hungarians would demand that Bucharest create a similar autonomous administrative unit for them.

The last category of obstacles is that of the international context. The EU's response to any possible actions aimed at unifying the two countries is currently hard to predict, but it can be assumed that these would be rather negative, especially if the unification occurred after Romania entered the Schengen zone. The process would not only be costly from the EU's perspective, but would also jeopardise security within the Community. The EU member states' reaction to a unification scenario can be predicted on the basis of their negative reactions to the Romanian policy of giving passports to Moldovans, and to Traian Băsescu's appeal to unite with Moldova before Romania joined the EU. At the same time, we should also expect objections from Russia (regardless of whether Transnistria would also be joined to Romania), for whom union would alter the strategic situation in the region, in connection with the liquidation of the neutral Moldova and a *de facto* shift of NATO's borders to the east. It seems very likely that Ukraine would also react negatively, as it traditionally perceives Romania as a threat. Kiev may also fear that Romania's recovery of Moldova would set a precedent for further territorial claims, including northern Bukovina and Bugeac, which now belong to Ukraine but were governed by Bucharest in the interwar period.

VII. PROSPECTS FOR BILATERAL RELATIONS

Everything indicates that the relationship between Bucharest and Chişinău will retain its special character. The deep sentimental attachment of the Romanians to the lands of modern Moldova will shape the actions of Romanian politicians who, in the future as now, will raise the Moldovan question to win over more voters. On one hand, then, we should expect Romania to continue firmly supporting Moldova in its European integration process, and to try and retain its role as Chişinău's main advocate in the international arena. On the other hand, the historical conditions will still pose a serious obstacle to the signing of the basic treaty and some other elements of the border and bilateral agreements. Nor does it seem possible that Bucharest can openly distance itself from the idea of Unirea in the foreseeable future, which will probably arouse regular tensions among the Russian-speaking minorities living in Moldova as well as the pro-Russian and anti-Romanian groups, and will also be exploited by Russian propaganda. However at the same time, it also seems quite unlikely that political parties or social movements supporting the union of the two countries in either Romania or Moldova will manage to gain mainstream support and take power in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, both Klaus Iohannis' presidential campaign and his activities since becoming President of Romania in December 2014 indicate that he will focus primarily on fighting corruption in the country and providing diplomatic support to Moldova (also in the context of Chişinău's efforts to obtain candidate status for EU membership), which will act as a reassuring factor and contribute to the development of bilateral relations¹¹⁰.

Relations between the two countries, burdened as they are with enormous historical and cultural baggage, will therefore depend largely on the actions of Romania, as has become traditional; but the main factor influencing them will primarily remain what kind of political forces come to power in Chişinău. If pro-Russian groups gain power, this will likely unfreeze the currently 'frozen' problems, and bring about a serious deterioration in bilateral relations. Indeed, these forces will aggressively emphasise the separateness of Moldovans and inflame anti-Romanian sentiments. However, as long as Moldovan policy is shaped by

¹¹⁰ An example of Iohannis' rhetoric on the issue of unification is his commentary on the demonstration by unionists on 16 May 2015 in Chişinău's central square. The Romanian President said then that supporters of Unirea must realise that the most important issue is currently bringing Moldova into the European Union, which Romania will support. <http://independent.md/iohannis-comenteaza-protestele-din-republica-moldova-pentru-promova-ideea-de-unire-cu-romania/#.VVbLvmqHw>

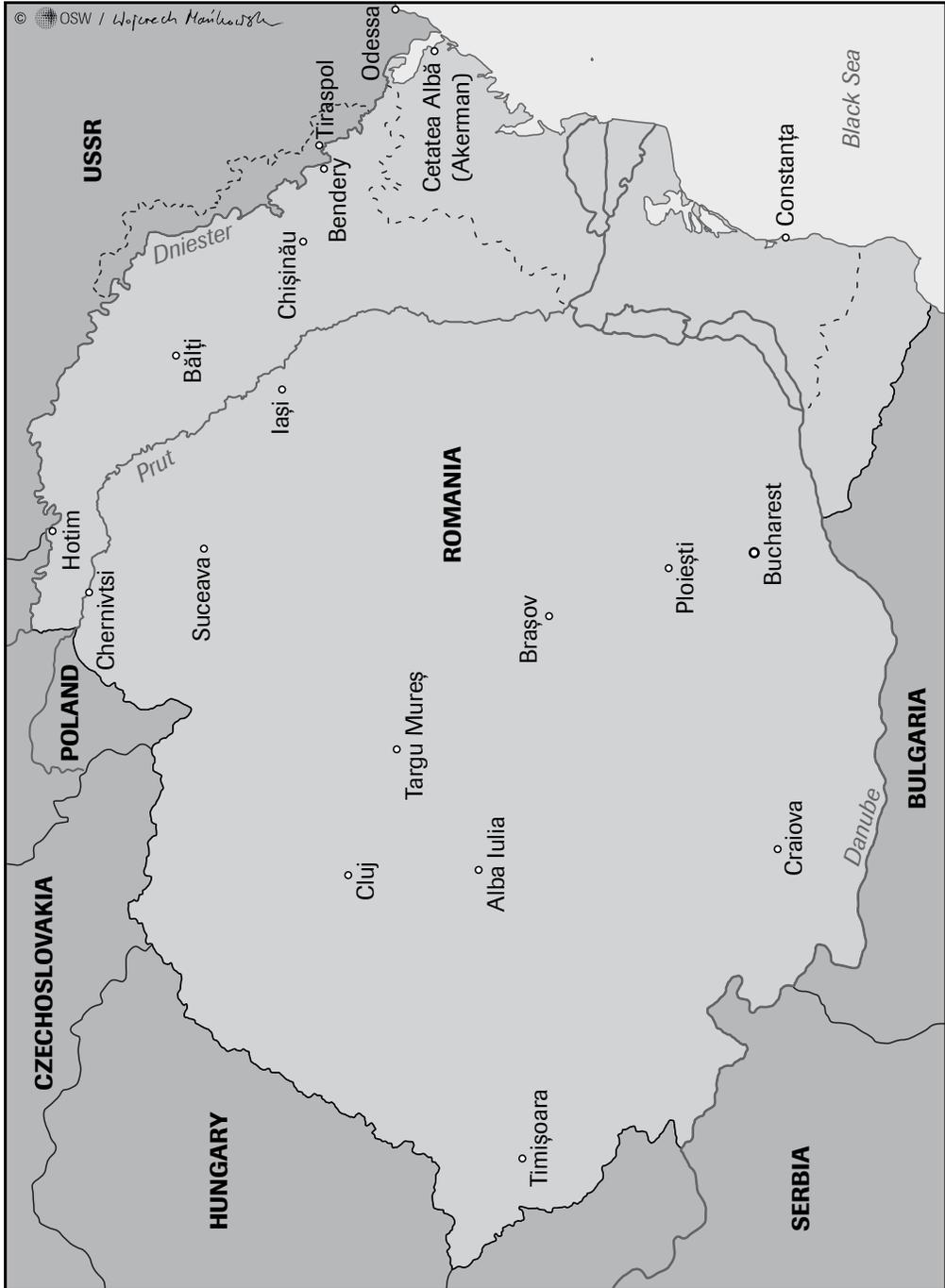
the current pro-European groups, they will probably manage to avoid serious misunderstandings with Bucharest, as that would not be in their interest.

The development of cooperation will also be fostered in subsequent years by the development (which has been noticeable for some time) of the formation and consolidation of a Moldovan identity which affirms its Romanian roots and does not deny the fact of the 'Romanian-ness' of the language in daily use or the common history between the two states. In connection with this, cultural cooperation will continue to develop. Romania's importance for the Moldovan economy will continue to increase, because of rising trade, new investments and the development of distribution systems which can supply Moldova with Romanian gas and electricity. The process of Moldova's European integration will play a very important context in the development of bilateral relations. Undoubtedly, the country's eventual accession to the EU would lead to a significant strengthening of the relationship. In the foreseeable future, however, Moldovan membership of the EU is unlikely.

KAMIL CAŁUS

Work on this text was completed in June 2015

Map 2. Borders of Romania in the 1930s, the so-called 'Great Romania'



Map 3. Contemporary Romania and Moldova

