POLITICA NAȚIONALISMULUI: INFLUENȚA POLITICII SOVIEȚICE ȘI A MIȘCĂRILOR NAȚIONALISTE ASUPRA IDENTĂȚII NAȚIONALE ÎN MOLDOVA

THE POLITICS OF NATIONALISM: THE INFLUENCE OF SOVIET POLICY AND NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS ON NATIONAL IDENTITY IN MOLDOVA

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Rezumat: *Înainte de a fi anexată la Uniunea Sovietică în 1940, Republica Moldova a fost unită cu România. Între anii 1940 și 1991, când Moldova și-a câștigat independența față de decăzută Uniunea Sovietică, politica lingvistică și migrațională sovietică a influențat poporul moldovenesc și, împreună cu ascensiunea naționalismului, au contribuit la formarea unei identități naționale distincte moldovenești. În 1991, după proclamarea independenței, nu era clar dacă Moldova va privi istoria sa recentă și se va uni cu România. Influența mișcărilor subnaționaliste, amenințarea militară rusă și pretențiile de iredentism românesc au influențat decizia Moldovei de a rămâne independentă de România. Analizând literatura existentă, acest articol subliniază mai întâi rolul politicii sovietice în crearea statului moldovenesc. Apoi, articol evidențiază modul în care naționalismul a întărit identitatea moldovenească și cum mișcările subnaționaliste au amenințat suveranitatea Republicii Moldova. În final, acest articol examinează relațiile româno-moldovenești de la prăbușirea Uniunii Sovietice și analizează probabilitatea unei unificări a Moldovei și României în viitor.*

Cuvinte cheie: *Republica Moldova, Uniunea Sovietică, România, identitatea națională, mișcare naționalistă, politica sovietică, unificare, independență*

Abstract: *Prior to being annexed into the Soviet Union in 1940, Moldova had been united with Romania. Between the years of 1940 and 1991, when Moldova gained independence from the fallen Soviet Union, Soviet linguistic and migration policy*

influenced the Moldovan people and, coupled with the rise of nationalism, succeeded in creating a distinct Moldovan national identity. In 1991, after independence, it was unclear whether Moldova would look to its recent history and unite with Romania. The influence of sub-nationalist movements, a Russian military threat, and claims of Romanian irredentism all influenced Moldova's decision to remain independent from Romania. Analyzing existing literature, this article first outlines Soviet policy's role in the creation of the Moldovan state. This article then highlights how nationalism strengthened the Moldovan identity, and how sub-nationalist movements threatened Moldovan sovereignty. Lastly, this article explores Romanian-Moldovan relations since the fall of the Soviet Union and analyzes the likelihood that Moldova and Romania will unite in the future.

Keywords: *Republic of Moldova, Soviet Union, Romania, national identity, nationalist movement, soviet policy, unification, idependence.*

1. Introduction

Moldova first became an independent country in 1991. Prior to being annexed into the Soviet Union in 1940, modern-day Moldova had been united with Romania, and many Moldovan people considered themselves to be Romanian. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Moldova chose to remain independent from Romania. That begs the question, how was a new country created in the span of 50 years? The answer: Soviet policy from 1945-1990 and the rise of nationalist movements across Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s in the Soviet Union and across Eastern Europe combined to create a separate Moldovan national identity and Moldovan state. The Soviet Union's migration and language policy also encouraged Moldovan nationalism. While it arose as a result of Soviet Policy, this nationalism did not engender support for Soviet Policy or the actions of the Soviet Union. Instead, it followed other nationalist movements across Soviet socialist republics in fostering an anti-USSR movement, contributing to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this paper, I argue that Soviet policy created a Moldovan identity, which, combined with the nationalist movements in the 1980s and 1990s, resulted in Moldovans wishing to remain independent from Romania after 1990, even while they recognized their shared history with Romania. This argument is a new contribution to existing literature because previous claims focus on only Soviet policy or only nationalism as the causes of Moldovan independence; this article views them as factors which together contributed to the creation and fortification of the Moldovan national identity, such that Moldova has remained an independent nation.

2. The degree of investigation of the problem currently, and purpose of research

Research on the creation of the Moldovan national identity is split. Some scholars believe that Moldova's decision to remain independent is a result of Soviet policy distinguishing the Moldovan and Romanian people, while others believe it is due to separate lingual identities and language policy, both during the Soviet Union and since Moldova's independence. Still others believe it is a result of the rise of nationalism in Eastern European, particularly after the nationalist movements in the 1980s and 1990s. In existing literature, scholars have focused on these factors individually. This author argues that it is necessary to view all of these as cofactors that together helped create the Moldovan national identity. The purpose of this research is to explain how the creation of the Moldovan national identity influenced Moldova to remain independent, rather than unite with Romania, after the fall of the Soviet Union. Additionally, the research seeks to explain why this national identity prevailed over desires for unification from within the governments and populations of both Moldova and Romania in the initial years following Moldova's independence.

3. Methods applied

This research article discusses why Moldovan national identity developed separately from Romanian national identity, and how this national identity became distinct enough for Moldova to have remained independent from Romania. This article uses Anthony Smith's 1991 model of national identity, defined as "a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members," (Smith, 1991, p.14).

This article uses Charles King's argument that language policy was instrumental in creating a distinct Moldovan national identity, along with Soren Bollerup's analysis of nationalist movements in Eastern Europe, to inform the argument that both Soviet policy and nationalism were instrumental in the creation of the Moldovan national identity (King, 1994; Bollerup & Christensen, 1997). Looking at both broader political science analyses of nationalism in Eastern Europe, as well as historical analyses of Moldova and its national identity allows the article to see to what extent Moldova follows the pattern of nationalism in Eastern Europe, and what factors are unique to Moldova. This provides an understanding as to why Moldova has remained an independent state despite initial attempts to unite the two countries.

4. Results obtained and discussions

Soviet Policy beginning in 1945 was established with the goal of creating a unique Moldovan national, linguistic, and cultural identity. Prior to 1945, Moldovans and Romanians were historically considered one people, and shared a language, culture, religion, and history (Mitrasca, 2002, p.27). The Soviet Union implemented migration and linguistic policy to change that (King, 2000). Migration policy, whereby ethnic Russians were encouraged to migrate to Soviet socialist republics, resulted in the cultural and linguistic Russification of Moldovans and encouraged allegiance to the USSR (Cusco, 2017, p.13). Linguistic policy further distinguished Moldovans from Romanians. Soviet policy established the official minority language of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic as Moldovan, and not Romanian, in 1938 (Dyer, 1996, p.82). Soviet policy also made the Cyrillic alphabet the official alphabet in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) in 1938 (Dyer, 1996, p.82). This calculated measure further separated Moldovan from Romanian, which was at that time written in Latin script. The Moldovan Cyrillic alphabet remained in use until 1989, when the MSSR succeeded in lobbying the Soviet Union to pass language reforms, one of which included the return to using the Latin alphabet (Zabarah, 2011, p.73). These policies together resulted in the creation of a distinct Moldovan national identity which did not exist before 1945.

Economic hardship, and political and cultural oppression led to the rise of nationalist movements across the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc in the 1980s and 1990s (Smith, 1991). USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev's reformative policies created more space for citizens to share their nationalist sentiment with others, and to speak out against the hardships and oppression they were facing, which served to fuel the already growing nationalist movements (Bollerup & Christensen, 1997, p.55). Though they had been united earlier that century, in the 1980s Moldova and Romania had contradictory nationalist movements; Moldova's nationalist movement emphasized the distinct Moldovan identity, while Romania's pan-Romanian movement sparked the beginning of the campaign to unify Moldova and Romania (Zabarah, 2011, p.64-71). Additionally, due to their sizable threat to Moldovan unity, sub-nationalist movements within Moldova held a strong influence over the course Moldova took after independence, and these nationalist groups still hold sway over Moldovan foreign policy today.

The sub-nationalist movement of the Slavs in the Dnestr, the southeastern

region of Moldova, heavily influenced the future of Moldova primarily because of the Slavs' ties to Russia, which posed a threat to Moldovan sovereignty (Zabarah, 2011, p.146). As ethnic Russians are of Slavic origin, the Slavs in the Dnestr viewed themselves as more similar to Slavs in the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic than to ethnic Romanians and Moldovans, who were of Roman descent (Zabarah, 2011, p.147). When the Soviet Union began to collapse, the Slavs in the Dnestr region of Moldova wanted to remain part of the Soviet Union, and barring that, they sought to unite with Russia. When Moldova seceded from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Slavs rebelled, and sought Russian military support (Dunlop, 1993, p.608). Russia's support of the Dnestiran Slavs led to a protracted military conflict between the newly emancipated Moldovan government and the Slavs in the Dnestr, backed by Russian forces (Dunlop, 1993, p.608). During this conflict, Romania was the only government to support Moldova, and even sent military troops and ammunition to Moldova to aid in its battle with Transnistria (Arbatov, 1997, p.178). While a ceasefire was established on July 21st, 1992, the conflict has never been fully resolved; it remains a frozen conflict, even today (King, 1994, p.353). The Moldovan government eventually created an agreement with the Slavs in the Dnestr, whereby Transnistria did not unite with Russia, but remained a part of Moldova. However, Transnistria was granted an autonomous status within Moldova, and Russia retains a small military force there (Dunlop, 1993, p.611). The threat of having a foreign military force within the borders of Moldova, so close to its capital, continues to menace Moldovan unity, and sovereignty, today.

Just like the Slavs in the Dnestr, the Gagauz, an ethnic minority in the southwestern Gagauzia region of Moldova, had a similar sub-nationalist movement which continues to affect Moldovan unity today. Yet the case of the Gagauz differs greatly from that of the Slavs for several reasons. Firstly, the Gagauz did not seek to secede from Moldova, but sought greater autonomy within Moldova (Zabarah, 2011, p.143). They did so primarily out of a desire to promote their culture and language, and protect themselves, as they represented only 3.5% of the population of Moldova, yet roughly 50% of the people in Gagauzia (Zabarah, 2011, p.143). While Gagauz claims for autonomy were initially met with backlash from the new Moldovan government in Chisinau, in 1994, following three years of civil unrest, Moldova granted Gaguazia relative autonomy within the state of Moldova with the "Law on the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia" (Zabarah, 2011, p.147). It is often cited as an example of a

successful resolution of ethnic conflict in Eastern Europe. As the conflict in Gagauzia remained mostly peaceful, it posed a different kind of threat to Moldovan unity than the nationalist movement-turned-violent conflict in Transnistria. Whereas Russian-backed Transnistria threatened external military force, the Gagauzian conflict threatened internal division.

After independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, it was unclear whether Moldova would seek to unite with Romania or stay independent. There was widespread support for unification in Romania, with the majority of the population supporting unification. In Moldova, however, the Slavic and Gagauzian minorities heavily opposed unification; both groups feared the erosion of their autonomy and their rights should Moldova unite with Romania. In greater Moldova, while some intellectuals supported unification, citing shared history and language, the majority of the population opposed unification on the grounds of cultural and linguistic differences. In fact, more than 70% of Moldovans saw themselves as a distinct people and viewed a proposed unification as a violation of their newly achieved, and hard-earned, sovereignty (Dunlop, 616). While both the Romanian and Moldovan governments appeared to be in favor of pan-Romanian nationalism and in support of unification immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, by 2000, unification talks had ceased (Girnet, 2016, p.299). The Romanian and Moldovan governments held unification talks again after 2009, but they have not resulted in any concrete steps towards unification (Gasca, 2009). This is in part due to pushback by the Moldovan government on the basis that the Romanian government's reasons for supporting unification were not rooted in history, but instead in irredentism (King, 1994).

4. Conclusions
The independent state of Moldova would not have existed had it not been for the influence of Soviet policy and nationalist movements during the years of 1945-1990. Moldovans went from being ethnically, linguistically, and culturally analogous to Romanians, to considering themselves distinct enough to warrant remaining an independent country. While small unionist groups still exist within Moldova today, the majority of the Moldovan population opposes unification with Romania. A brief uptick in visible support for unification in 2009 via popular protests, marches, and rallies did not translate into support for unification at the voting booths; by 2014, visible unionist sentiment began to decline (Gasca, 2009). However, as support for unification has waned, support for EU integration

has risen.

Pro-EU politicians, such as current president Maia Sandu, have been on the rise in Moldova since 2014, reflecting an uptick in popular support for increased relations with the European Union. Furthermore, support for EU integration has increased substantially since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Moldova applied for EU membership in March 2022 – and received EU candidate status that June – and many Moldovans are looking to EU membership as a way to guard against the threat Russia poses to Moldovan sovereignty and security (Wagner, 2022).

Yet, EU integration poses additional challenges to Moldovan independence. Russia has a history of violently opposing its neighbors' attempts to approach the EU; Russia initially invaded Ukraine in 2013 shortly after then-President Yanukovych signed an association agreement with the European Union (Pifer, 2022). And in February 2023, a Russian plot to overthrow the current pro-EU government in Moldova was revealed (McGrath, 2023). As Moldova proceeds with its candidacy to join the European Union, the government is aware that it needs to proceed with caution. But while Soviet policy may have helped create the Moldovan state, it is Moldovan policy that will decide its future.

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