

**BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT UNESCO CHAIR ON THE STUDY OF INTER-  
CULTURAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS EXCHANGES**

**Master “Intercultural Communication”**

**Dissertation Paper**

**THE PRACTICE OF INTERCULTURAL  
RELATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

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**BUCHAREST**

**February 2009**

*To the memory of Grigore Vieru*

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to deliver a description from both theoretic and practical viewpoints of the current status of intercultural relations in the Republic of Moldova. The practical analysis is aimed at the relation between the majority (whose designation – Romanians or Moldovans - is still hesitant) and the Russian minority. Since the aspect of the intercultural is in this case deeply intertwined with that of national identity, I begin with a brief historical overview of the evolution of the Moldovan people in terms of identity. I then concentrate on depicting the particular historical conditions that shaped the status of the Russians on this territory until today; also, how USSR practices and later democratic practices with Moldova as an independent state have left their mark on the intercultural relations. After a concise portrayal of the legal provisions establishing the rights of the minorities, I go on with analyzing one of the thorniest aspects of the intercultural-related legal matters – the linguistic one; following, are examples and concrete depictions which show a clear incongruity between the legal framework and the actual situation. In describing the current practices of intercultural relations, I set forth by identifying the contexts in which the intercultural dialogue is prone to become tensioned. I also tackle the system of cultural values which is at the base of interethnic interactions, as well as the mental images involved in perceiving the other (particularly regarding the majority and the Russian minority). The final part of the paper consists in a sum of observations concerning the intercultural aspects in daily life, at a micro-level of society.

# 1. Preamble

The particularities of intercultural relations in the Republic of Moldova are socially inherent, in the sense that the ethnic belonging of a person is hyped to the point where it comes to determine the life of individuals, their status, their rights and obligations<sup>1</sup>. This leads to the existence of a social price in a person's living, which stands a long way from the optimistic thesis that cultural diversity is a source of richness for society. The instability of the region from a geographical point of view is only one of the premises of this situation. Moldovans are a "border" population not only in the concrete sense of the word.

The Republic's aim to join the European Union should provide a stabilizing and harmonizing incentive for intercultural relations. Yet the social and historical situations in the Republic of Moldova have given the notion of "intercultural" a different load from a normal context. As I will show in what follows, this aspect is deeply rooted in another thorny problem – the absence of a clear-cut national identity. Defining the Moldovan identity is not a straightforward act. This is not due to a faulty construction of the national identity, but more likely to an amalgam of influences, most of the time political, which never actually allowed identity attributes to sediment, and rather settled with inducing a confusing state.

During the last two centuries, Moldovans were the targets of several contradictory and remarkably ambiguous cultural constructs, and some even turned out differently that had been planned by the nation-builders. The political environment left its traces upon the mentality and the ethnic psychology of the people. The above-mentioned period was an epoch of historical voids (swift changes of political regimes, geopolitical uncertainty, leadership instability) with clear effects at the level of social organization, and implicitly on intercultural relations. The lack of clear historical paradigms made the molding of a national identity even more difficult in a territory otherwise not lacking essential ingredients for nationalism. Most of the ex-Soviet states went on to build "nation-states" after the demise of the USSR, placing at the core of this construct the historical, non-Russian nation and promoting its language and culture as markers of national identity; in these states, a positive ethnic identity was an incentive for ethnic tolerance.

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<sup>1</sup> This tendency has been coined in sociology "the syndrome of compelled ethnicity" – see Alina Morozan - *Minoritățile naționale în Republica Moldova: starea și problemele de integrare (analiză politologică)* (*National Minorities in the Republic of Moldova: Status and Integration Issues – a political analysis*), Moldova State University, Chișinău, 2005, p. 93, available at: <http://www.cnaa.acad.md/thesis/3207/>

This wasn't the case with Moldova. Unlike the rest of the ex-Soviet states, the Republic of Moldova is the only case in which a neighboring country, Romania, represents a significant center of gravity, from an ethnic and cultural point of view. On the opposite border, Russia represents a predominantly economic center of gravity. As a geographic contact space between the Romanian and the Slavonic cultures, Moldova is magnetically attracted by both, and this aspect defines and influences the ethnic processes within the country.

Ernest Renan considers that the concept of national identity implies remembering and forgetting the past at the same time. "To forget" is one of the key processes of nationality<sup>2</sup>, since it involves selecting certain historical aspects at the loss of other. A multinational state requires an even more thorough process of selection in order to mold a common identity for its people. "To remember" is on the other hand an essential aspect of man's self identification, and therefore ethnicity can only stem from such a feeling of historical continuity.

As a young state, Moldova has juggled between the capability of maintaining an independent state and the incapacity of producing an independent nation within those borders. The society has constantly been characterized, and especially in the last 30 years, by an intense polarization, and often trying to define terms like "nation" and "national" transformed the discussion into most likely a "deal". While the differences from the Romanians are not few but yet unsure, the incentives to regard oneself as belonging to an independent nation lack the necessary dose of clarity as well.

The Moldovan culture is at this moment a half culture, lying in a blurry definition which includes a second Romanian culture in Eastern Europe, a "fiction of the Russian propaganda"<sup>3</sup>, or a post-Soviet individuality. Hence the concept of intercultural is often intertwined with interests belonging to a different category, especially political.

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<sup>2</sup> Ernest Renan, *What Is a Nation?* (essay), 1882, available at [http://www.cooper.edu/humanities/core/hss3/e\\_renan.html](http://www.cooper.edu/humanities/core/hss3/e_renan.html).

<sup>3</sup> Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia and the Politics of Culture*, Arc Press, Chişinău, 2002, p. 6; original English version available at: <http://books.google.com/books?id=ldBFWtuv8DQC&printsec=frontcover&sig=dSHxph0VYc7hwXW0XczigTGAp3M#PPP1,M1>.

## 2. Explanation of terms

Since the case I shall tackle in this study involves further cultural and historical investigations, a clarification or restatement of the specific terms used below is needed. In analyzing intercultural issues, usually two criteria are favored – language and culture. But a harmonious co-inhabitation of several cultural and linguistic communities actually involves more complex concepts, like the existence of intercultural communication, cultural identity and a unifying cultural policy.

The term “minority” is generally difficult to define in literature, particularly due to the various political interests of the states touched by this problem. The present paper uses this term according to *Recommendation 1201 (1993) of the Council of Europe*, which states that the expression “*national minority*” refers to a group of persons in a state who:

- a. reside on the territory of that state and are citizens thereof;
- b. maintain longstanding, firm and lasting ties with that state;
- c. display distinctive ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic characteristics;
- d. are sufficiently representative, although smaller in number than the rest of the population of that state or of a region of that state;
- e. are motivated by a concern to preserve together that which constitutes their common identity, including their culture, their traditions, their religion or their language.<sup>4</sup>

In order to shed light upon the relations within Republic of Moldova’s communities, I will use the terms that deal with cultural interactions according to the definition traced by Will Kymlicka. In his view, the term “multicultural” is insufficient for any real case today and often carries a political interest behind it. The dispute over the vagueness of this term arises from disagreements over the definition of culture itself. In the narrow sense of the word, culture represents the distinct customs, perspectives or ethos of a group or association. Such groups are cultures. In the wide sense of it, Kymlicka understand culture as synonymous to “people”, or “nation”. In his opinion, all of the Western democracies share a common ‘culture’ - that is, they all share a modern, urban, secular, industrialized civilization, in contrast to the feudal, agricultural, and theocratic world of our ancestors.<sup>5</sup> The notion of culture is therefore regarded as an attribute of the

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<sup>4</sup> *Additional Protocol on the Rights of National Minorities to the European Convention on Human Rights*, Article 1, available at [www.forost.ungarisches-institut.de/pdf/19930201-1.pdf](http://www.forost.ungarisches-institut.de/pdf/19930201-1.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A New Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 18.

nation, shaping “an intergenerational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history”<sup>6</sup>. From this point of view, a state is multicultural if it comprises of groups that have been incorporated into a larger politically-established territory, case in which the state is *multinational*, or if it consists of “loose associations” of people who have immigrated, in which case we speak of a *polyethnic* state. From this derives the attribute of the minorities, that is, whether they are national minorities or ethnic minorities. While national minorities are the result of borders’ modification, ethnic minorities are formed in the aftermath of migration.

An ethnic minority is characterized by some distinctive traits<sup>7</sup>:

- a. an ethnic identity, which is in its turn a complex notion, yet it grounds most importantly on language and religion;
- b. the citizenship of the state;
- c. numerical and political inferiority (with some exceptions nevertheless). The aspect of political inferiority entitles the minority to claim specific rights and legal protection;
- d. the minority’s will to maintain its status as a minority and its identity. This further implies solidarity and self-determination within the community, as well as the free choice of the individuals to acknowledge their belonging to the community.

According to the above definitions, the Republic of Moldova belongs to the category of polyethnic states, since it does not host historical minorities who partook at the construction of the nation. Hence its minorities are *ethnic*. This is in accordance with the opinion of 52 representatives of the Academy of Science in Moldova, who characterized the minorities in the country as ethnic groups, as component parts of a group which detached from the historically-constituted mass and migrated to the historical-ethnic territory of another population<sup>8</sup>, in this case the territory between the Prut and Dniester. Such groups are the Russians, the Ukrainians, the Gagauz, the Bulgarians or the Jews. There are other opinions in the specialized literature which sustain the same thesis.

There have also been attempts to describe a *national minority* in the Republic, the Russophone population<sup>9</sup>, which accounts for all the citizens who know and speak Russian, including some Moldovans, Ukrainians, Gagauz etc. Thus the Republic gains the attribute of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Galina Pogoneț, *Statutul juridic al minorităților etnice în Republica Moldova (Legal Status of Ethnic Minorities in the Republic of Moldova)*, Moldova Academy of Science, Chișinău, 2007, p. 19, available at: <http://www.cnaa.acad.md/thesis/6916/>

<sup>8</sup> *Moldova Suverană*, June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1993, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> The most ardent defender of this idea is A. Lisetskii who, although at first supported the ethnic minorities approach, later devoted ample studies to prove the truthful existence of such a minority, the Russophone one. See Eugen Pătraș, *Minoritățile naționale din Ucraina și Republica Moldova – statutul juridic (National Minorities in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova – Legal Status)*, Alexandru cel Bun Press, Cernăuți, 1999, p. 146.



multinational or multicultural state on quantitative grounds, since it gathers several non-Romanian minorities under the same umbrella and thus opposes a proportion of 22% of the population to the large group of 78% Moldovans/Romanians. Still this linguistically-delimited entity is not legitimate, since knowledge of Russian is not a robust criterion in defining the minorities in Moldova. And declaring a non-Russian person as a Russophone is certainly an act of discrimination towards the respective minority<sup>10</sup>. Trying to forcefully define a community based on linguistic resemblances has been interpreted as a means of confusing, for the final purpose of installing Russian as an official language<sup>11</sup>. It's true that most of the Russian-speakers share the same frustrations following the demise of the USSR. But the only criterion which validates such a stance is the fact that, until the '90s, the Russification process marginalized the languages of the ethnic minorities from education, which was mainly organized in a Russian-language framework – still, it is an artificial criterion, the process itself is not natural, it is an induced and forced linguistic assimilation. The Russophone population could merely be regarded as a linguistic minority, with various ethnic and cultural characteristics within it.

While the historical and cultural factors pertain to the terminology of “ethnic minorities”, the legal norms the Republic adopted in the recent years, particularly *The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* of 1994, show that the legal system favors the “national minorities” designation. In this study, I will use the term “ethnic minority” to refer to populations other than the majority, since I believe it is more appropriate for the situation in the Republic of Moldova. I will particularly focus on the Russian ethnic minority, in their relations with the Romanian-origin population.

A research from the autumn of 2004 (latest available social census) shows that 78% of the total inhabitants of Bessarabia are Moldovan/Romanian (75,8%+2,2%<sup>12</sup>), 8,4% are Ukrainian, 5,9% are Russian, 4,4% are Gagauz, 1,9% Bulgarian, 1% have other nationality and 0,4% did not declare their nationality<sup>13</sup>. Ukrainians inhabit the northern and eastern part of the country. Russian-origin citizens are to be found in the central part of the Republic mostly, but they are dispersed geographically. The Gagauz are to be found in the southern regions of the country, yet they lack a “historical” statute, since their ethnic identity was formed within the state of Moldova. The Bulgarians also inhabit the southern regions, notably the rayon Taraclia.

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<sup>10</sup> The Ukrainians consider themselves as Russophone population without objections, but this choice is rather the result of the strong linguistic assimilation during Soviet times, and of the lack of political mobilization within this group.

<sup>11</sup> see Vitali Catană, *Identități distorsionate în Republica Moldova (Distorted Identities in the Republic of Moldova)*, Contrafort, issue 12, December 2003, available at [www.contrafort.md/2003/110/656.html](http://www.contrafort.md/2003/110/656.html).

<sup>12</sup> This partition is however contested by some voices who claim that the census was manipulated so as to prove the existence of a true Moldovan nation. – See Ilie Ilașcu interview, at <http://www.evenimentul.ro/articol/moldovenii-sint-totuna-cu.html>.

<sup>13</sup> available at

[http://www.statistica.md/public/files/Recensamint/Recensamintul\\_populatiei/vol\\_1/6\\_Nationalitati\\_de\\_baza\\_ro.xls](http://www.statistica.md/public/files/Recensamint/Recensamintul_populatiei/vol_1/6_Nationalitati_de_baza_ro.xls).

A specific aspect of the intercultural relations in Moldova is the special statute of the Russian minority. Their cultural status exceeds the numerical one, from complex historical (and even economic) reasons. A considerable proportion of the other minorities are in many cases bi-ethnic, in the sense that they claim their belonging to the Russian identity as well as to their own. This is particularly true for many Ukrainian and Gagauz representatives. While this bi-ethnic phenomenon has a natural component to it, in view of the ethnic flexibility in a multicultural context<sup>14</sup>, for the Russian minority an opposed process can be noticed, in the sense that they identify themselves with their own group exclusively.

At the core of the intercultural issues in the Republic of Moldova lies the fact that the rebirth of the national identity of all minorities except the Russians took place simultaneously with the rebirth of the identity of the largest ethnic group, the Romanians. Most tensions have revolved around the question whether the majority should or should not regain its historical identity. And, therefore, the naissance of the state as a sovereign and independent republic implied (and still implies) several ethnic traumas.

The word describing the ethnic belonging of the majority is at the heart of disputes in many circles even nowadays. The term “Moldovan” has at least three semantic loads, depending on the context in which it is used – geographically, it is used to define the inhabitants of a region of the Greater Romania, and this acceptance is common both in Romania and the Republic of Moldova; ethnically, it should refer to the Romanian-origin population of the Republic of Moldova, a population which may as well be described using the term “Romanian”, on a complementary basis – yet this sense of the word has been so much politicized and used in identity-manufacturing projects, that it has never acquired a truthful sociologic and historical content and its use today is in close ties with a deformed identity; and last, politically, the term “Moldovan” should refer to any citizen of the Republic of Moldova, no matter their ethnic origin, but it is still a frail and seldom used acceptance. In this paper, I will use the term Moldovan when it does not bear a political content meant to induce confusion regarding an ethnic identity, and when it is a true attempt to refer to an identity not fostered in the detriment of others. In the rest of the situations, I will refer to the majority as Romanians or Romanian-origin population, lest researches or legal norms provide a different designation. Regarding the language of this group, I will refer to it as “Romanian language”, and only in the context of quoting literature or linguistic laws, I will use the name of “Moldovan language” promoted by these.

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<sup>14</sup> Although in this case, the phenomenon surpasses simple conviviality, having more profound roots in the history and in the cultural policy of the USSR.

### 3. A history of the Moldovan identity

#### 3.1. Moldova from 1812 to 1918

From a historic point of view, Moldova has caused more debates regarding the identity of its people than its territory. As Charles King states, “not only were forty separate languages represented in Bessarabia by the end of the nineteenth century, but the identity of the region’s largest ethnic group, normally called *Moldovans* or *Bessarabian Romanians*, also remained in some doubt.”<sup>15</sup>

It is somewhat improper to refer to a Moldovan nation prior to the year 1812, when, from a Russian interpretation, the territory situated between the Prut and the Dniester began to be regarded distinctively. This geographical entity was hitherto referred to by the Russians as *Bessarabia*, a meaning it has kept until today. Until 1812, “Moldovan” was just another term to refer to Romanian inhabitants evolving in the region known as Moldova, and it was mainly the historian’s preference that led to the use of one term or another. Although the ethnic mixture of the population modified incessantly until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian annexation of 1812 is the first event that introduced cultural differences. In a short interval, the population grew and so did the ethnic groups in its composition. Waves of Bulgarian, Turc, Gagauz and German migrations, encouraged by the Russian Empire by granting privileged status, slowly transformed the region into a pronounced multiethnic one, and so it would remain up to the present. Most foreign elements arrived here in the interval 1812-1824. In 1854, Russian became the official language of the region, and the Moldovan language was hitherto forbidden in schools and public affairs.

Bessarabian Romanians themselves became at this time preoccupied with their identity, since the general trend of the new system was that of the Russification, carried out especially by the Church and the administration. Although the Bessarabian Romanians were still the predominant population (even the later censuses, after the migratory waves, prove that), their culture was gradually narrowed down to a rural, unpolished meaning. The main cities became melting pots. While the ties with the population beyond the Prut were not denied even by the Russian apparatus, any zest for nationalism was nevertheless controlled and restrained. However, it is difficult to

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<sup>15</sup> Charles King, *quoted works*, p. 12.

assess the ethnic tableau at this time, since the first complete report on ethnic groups appeared in 1897.<sup>16</sup>

When Romania gained its independence from the Ottomans in 1878, a centrifugal force emerged in the Russian Bessarabia, defining the three main orientations that would resist in one form or another and in a more or less visible shape until today – the pro-Romanian wing, the rightists who were loyal to the Russian empire, and a more moderate group in the middle, tackling a pure Bessarabian nationalism. Apart from the radical groups, the turn of the century found the population somewhat reluctant to embark upon a nationalistic path.

### 3.2. The period between the two World Wars

**a. The Romanian approach.** In 1918, in a tempered mood, Bessarabia reunited with Romania. But the identity problems would not succumb here. The mixed culture of the region and several internal difficulties Romania was undergoing at that time were reasons that greatly diminished Moldova's enthusiasm, from a cultural point of view. The failure to persuade the Russian Empire to recognize and guarantee Romania's new borders that included Bessarabia was a source of continuous instability. Bessarabia became at the same time a motif and an unfortunate product of a dispute both at international and internal level. While its legal international status clang on Romania's movements within the international system of alliances, it was also a matter of the political credibility that Romania managed to display outside its borders. Confusing political goals and the hesitant position of the Romanian King Charles the Second were two situations that sealed Bessarabia's fate, when reaching an agreement with the Russian Empire seemed imminent.<sup>17</sup>

Due to rough and uncivilized administrative practices, the Romanians seemed more like invaders in the eyes of the masses in Bessarabia during the time of their ruling. Also, the new Romanian administration was not very attentive to the fact that Bessarabia was one of the Kingdom's most ethnically diverse regions, where Romanians themselves had little visibility. The

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<sup>16</sup> Alina Moroza, *quoted works*, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> During his years as a Foreign Affairs Minister, Nicolae Titulescu made Romanian-Russian diplomatic relations a priority in order to bring the problem of Bessarabia to a closure. Yet his means sometimes differed from King Carol the Second's views. It was such a misfortunate context that led to Titulescu's dismissal, when, as it is claimed, the Romanian diplomacy managed to obtain an unofficial recognition of the new borders from the Russian side. After Titulescu's dismissal, the two states distanced again. (Florea Tiberian, *Bessarabia 1940. Proofs of a betrayal*, available at <http://www.romfest.org/rost/oct2005/basarabia.shtml>).

Russians were pigeonholed as “Bolsheviks in disguise”<sup>18</sup> and hence were submitted to a cultural treatment of intolerance, although this attitude became more relaxed towards the ‘40s. The Romanian cultural campaign, aiming a specific political target (to anchor Bessarabia in Greater Romania), ranged from failures to significant achievements, such as 99% of the population having learnt to speak Romanian.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, at a micro-level, a distance was being maintained and, socially, Bessarabia was only a periphery all along those years. Having missed those landmark events that shaped the destiny of Romania, the Bessarabians lacked the propellers to adhere to Romanian identity. It was especially true for the rural population, who, as timeless as they were, had suffered no other change of paradigm since the annexation of 1812 by Russia. And the Romanian approach only fuelled this reluctance.

**b. The Russian approach.** The Russian campaign continued to function in the meantime, facing several changes of tactics, and culminating with the ambitious project of creating an autonomous Soviet republic beyond the Dniester, in 1924 – the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR). The MASSR was given many antagonistic arguments to exist by the Soviet politics, but it was in essence a cultural laboratory, an artificial ethnic construct meant to lure Bessarabia, as a border region, away from the larger Romanian state that tried to encompass it. It would serve as a buffer against Romanian influences on Bessarabians, just like Romania had a similar purpose concerning the Russian influences. The cultural politics in MASSR were strictly controlled and planned and it had become an instrument of external politics of the new state. It is at this moment that the Soviet Union began using nationalistic claims in its approach.

In a nutshell, what the newly-shaped politics tried to state was that most of the Bessarabians constituted a separate ethno-national group from the Romanians, with a different language, history and even different biological traits, and that “their incorporation into a unitary Romanian state had usurped their right to national self-determination”<sup>20</sup>. This marked the beginning of a slow process which would deform linguistics, ethnology and anthropology and turn them into first-line political instruments. Arguments that were not so strong from the Romanian side were interpreted and twisted by the Soviets in their favour; the Romanians on the other hand blamed the Moldovans for having lost their Romanian identity to the Russian oppression. The Moldovan identity at this stage never surpassed the status of an undefined, blurry concept, passed on from one line to another.

In the years prior to the Second World War, the official Soviet policy suffered again changes of tactics – the “difference” approach was abolished, denied thoroughly and then embraced again

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<sup>18</sup> Charles King, *quoted works*, p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Charles King, *quoted works*, p. 56.

from another perspective. These enterprises, however incoherently carried out, left their traces on the Bessarabian population.

The first tasks this experiment addressed were to establish a precise Bessarabian identity and to formalize the characteristic cultural elements, especially the language. The MASSR would slowly be transformed into an authentic Moldovan state, by educating the peasants (who made up the vast majority of the Moldovan population in MASSR) and by lifting them to political ranks. The peasants were therefore the nucleus of this new cultural construct. Yet this target was twofold, as the illiteracy and the great religiousness of the peasants were obstacles for the “literate” process of Moldovenization. The practical difficulties of implementing the Moldovan culture were realized towards the ‘30s, and, as the new decade began, so did the general opinion towards the masterminds of the experiment change. The cultural elites so far responsible for the process of Moldovenization were hitherto regarded as enemies of the Soviet state and their incompetence generally disapproved of.

In 1932, a resolution was given to use the Latin alphabet throughout MASSR and the Moldovan peasant was no longer a symbol of culture. This new approach had yet more vicious aspirations behind it – making use of the political chaos in Romania, the Soviet power mimed closeness to the Romanian culture in order to secure even more of this state, should the proper context appear. It was a means to establish political ties in the region west to the Dniester and to increase the Soviet activity there. This “Latinization” campaign was soon initiated with fresh forces, yet in time it would encounter the same obstacles as the previous campaign. Nevertheless, it did contribute to a spread of Romanian language throughout all the administrative sectors, since the newly imposed language only differed from Romanian language by name. In 1938, just as sudden, the project was put an end to abruptly and the perspective completely shifted. Overnight, Romanian words became polluting elements. The Cyrillic alphabet was readopted. Yet this new stance differed from the Moldovenization experiment radically as well. Moldovan elements were considered just as contaminating as Romanian ones.

### **3.3. The Second World War and after**

Through a falsely motivated ultimatum, the Soviet troops occupied Bessarabia in June 1940, and in the havoc caused by the annexation to the USSR, many people were deported and some minorities, especially the Jews, persecuted. The atrocities went on even as Romania regained this

lost territory, all the way to the Dniester. Yet the Soviet army made its way again in this region and Romania had to withdraw in 1944. The peace treaty in 1947 would establish the Soviet border on the Prut. Romania had permanently lost Bessarabia. This is the period when the term “Moldova“ gained a new significance, in the sense that it also became a political term (not only a geographical one, assigned to this historical region), equivalent to the newly established Soviet Socialist Republic. As a symbol of this new political orientation, the Russian alphabet was reestablished. Bessarabia underwent some strategic administrative changes under Soviet control, meant to discourage any further Romanian attempts. However, having joined the Communist umbrella with the USSR, it was unlikely that Romania would have, at least in theory, pretensions over this land. It was only in the '60s that Romania would attempt to take political and cultural distance from the Soviet Union.

Until the '50, the Soviet administration imposed rough measures in the regions where the Moldovan population was concentrated, i.e. the rural parts. Many people were deported, first in an enforced manner, then in a “voluntary” one, and others died from the famine caused by the requisition of the crops. Most of the Moldovans' life revolved around agriculture, while the industry, a significant part of the towns' population and the political functions were most often under Soviet control, as the indigenous population was not so much trusted. The MSSR (Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic) thus developed as a marginal region of the USSR.

These measures led to a decrease, in time, of the multiethnic characteristic of the population, with different causes. The Jews, mostly, and also the Bulgarians and the Germans decreased significantly in the aftermath of the Second World War. The Soviet control colonized Slavic components for the domains that fuelled the country's development, which led to a process of accelerated Sovietization. The basis for this had already been laid in the MASSR, this being also the origin of the cultural and political elites of MSSR. The economic and the transportation system were easily reintegrated in the Russian one, since the Romanian occupation had not managed to impose another definitive organization. The new Slavic population (Ukrainian and Russian, mostly workers) had no problems integrating in this already Russified background. Charles King also remarks that in Bessarabia “there was no strong national sentiment”<sup>21</sup>, therefore the Sovietization had less obstacles.

Nevertheless, the Sovietization was now a more coherent and stable process than the MASSR had witnessed. There were no more reforms and no more changes of direction, and the guiding line had remained since the beginning the same - to induce the idea that the Moldovans are a different people from the Romanians, in a more tacit manner, since the Moldovans had already been

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<sup>21</sup> Charles King, *quoted works*, p. 102.

absorbed in the Soviet Union. Paradoxically, one of the effects of this policy was the spreading of the Romanian language at all levels of society, even though in disguise, as “Moldovan language” and with a Cyrillic alphabet. They were mainly the same language, even scientists in academic circles admitted to this, and this process of convergence intensified in the ‘60s. In Moldova, there were linguists who had been specially trained to promote this language and its correct use throughout the public institutions. Their task gradually became ironic - although they were obliged to present it as a different language from Romanian, the theoretical differences were actually fewer and fewer, as this campaign of correcting the language gained weight.

On the other hand, this new and subtler cultural policy tried to tackle and interpret history in a manner that would serve its purpose. Soviet researchers were given the task to formulate the history of the Moldovans in such a way that their different ethnical origins were obvious. Therefore they searched every aspect of the history, in the same documents and sources that the Romanians had at hand, and stressed those circumstances where the path of the Moldovans separated from that of the Romanians. Any hint pointing at a difference was hailed as a great discovery. It was a research that based itself on faults in the international sources or on twists of language. Thus, different conclusions were reached in a project where the two sides used the same data. As this enterprise went on, it became more and more artificial from the Moldovan behalf. At a general level, this “war of words” had little consequences on the political life, although it helped maintain the problem of Bessarabia in focus. Other countries started taking sides, a fact that mirrored their adherence or resistance to the Soviet regime. But again, with no political results. This situation forced the Soviet researchers to come up with even more elaborated and twisted explanations.

At a social level, this continuous molding of the history had impact on the population. It was not the fact that these newly constructed conclusions were assimilated, but that they led to a state of confusion, of uncertainty, whose effect in the long run was not allowing an identity anchoring to take place. It was only in the ‘70s when some concerns appeared at Western academic level that the cultural venture of the Soviets was a threat for the national identity of the Bessarabian Romanians. The international criticisms were a strong blow for the Soviet target. Often lacking the necessary instruments to reply adequately, the researchers’ political purpose came to light and their intent to keep the process going led to more and more desperate arguments and actions. Their manufactured nation slowly began to lose its theoretical basis. Charles King goes as far as to name this an “assisted suicide”<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Charles King, *quoted works*, p. 118.



### 3.4. The '90s

It was the conclusion of a 1988 Congress that implicitly admitted that Moldovan identity was a serious issue. Soon afterwards, several unofficial organizations were established aiming to obtain clear answers and resolutions on identity claims. The problem of the language was the first disputed. The organization demanded the party to investigate the introduction of Moldovan language as the official language and to admit the unity with the Romanian language. Another demand was that the Cyrillic alphabet be replaced with the Latin one, since the use of the first led to a distorted use of the native language and slowly destroyed the cultural identity of the state's largest mass. The pressure effected by these organizations, and later on, their protesting, persuaded the ruling party to investigate these claims more thoroughly and to revision its own stance. This is also when historical matters hitherto avoided began to be publicly discussed. The ruling party embarked unknowingly on a slope that led to the loss of credibility.

The linguistic matters mobilized a great deal of the country's native population, who had for the first time the opportunity to voice their opinions. On the other hand, these matters induced a negative tension in the relation with the minorities, who considered Russian their basis and felt they were losing their power. This framework became a pretext to bring about more complex inter-ethnic issues, each population fighting for their own cause.

All these events that managed to defy the Soviet standards of organization gradually built up to a context where cultural change became imminent. The change was triggered by three laws, passed on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1989, which declared Moldovan as the official language of the republic, and sought to extend the use at all levels of official affairs and to introduce the use of the Latin alphabet. Implicitly, the identity with the Romanian language was reckoned.<sup>23</sup> In the next couple of years, Moldova would witness an authentic national mobilization, at several levels of society, culminating with the declaration of independence on August 27<sup>th</sup> 1991.

There was much written in an attempt to explain the motivation of the '90s mobilization. Approaches vary from a warm and reborn Romanian patriotism, a rediscovery of the true Romanian identity, to cynical means of accomplishing a merely political endeavor. To the true wish of national awakening manifested by some, others attributed a false political connotation. It was said that, when the moment was so favorable to re-embrace the original culture, hitherto oppressed by Soviet cultural politics, the Moldovans actually denied their identity and sought shelter under the

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<sup>23</sup> The ensemble of these three laws contains in the introduction a brief mention of the truly existing Moldovan-Romanian linguistic identity.

Romanian identity. Or that after decades of Soviet slavery, they affirmed their entitled sovereignty over imperial interests. Or that it was a mere “cultural fever” and their nationalism was a tool, a weapon used by certain elites to obtain political goals.<sup>24</sup> The truth is the Moldovans were still at that time a nation divided over their common identity. And the process of national rebirth was marked by the population’s desire to define an identity of its own:

*“Even the national liberation movement was generated by the identity crisis. The Bessarabian Romanians did not go to battle like the Estonians or Latvians for national sovereignty, but for national identity. We didn’t condemn Communism as a system, but as an instrument of the identity perversions we were subjected to. We didn’t carry out structural reforms, but discussed about who we are.”<sup>25</sup>*

Only in the recent years people have tried to understand the twisted events of the ‘90s. One Romanian journalist recently noted:

*“After 1989, [...] I had been so proud for the pro-Romanian manifestations in Chişinău, so jubilant that history had not turned to dust or ashes. It was there, unharmed, in the crowd that had gathered in the central square of Moldova’s capital, displaying the Romanian flag on their chests. What followed was terrible. Filth, on both sides of the Prut river. Disinformation, demagoguery, lies. Puppeteers had taken over the stage of the Unification. Including television and press, where the estranged “sister” had become a Communist latifundium, and the re-found “brothers” duplicitous individuals, double-dealing between Romania and Russia. [...] With a dramatized and pitiable patriotism. Of course, I felt like something was wrong in this picture. That this is an exaggeration, like always, a negative one, but it was promoted with such insistence that it had become convincing.”<sup>26</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> Andrei Panici, *Romanian Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova*, “The Global Review of Ethnopolitics”, vol. 2, no. 2, January 2003, American University in Bulgaria, available at [dev.eurac.edu:8085/mugs2/do/blob.pdf?type=pdf&serial=1047909431571](http://dev.eurac.edu:8085/mugs2/do/blob.pdf?type=pdf&serial=1047909431571).

<sup>25</sup> Oleg Serebrian, *Basarabia: geopolitica unei identităţi în derivă (Bessarabia: Geopolitics of a Country Adrift)*, Cartier Press, 2001, Chişinău, pp. 141-142.

<sup>26</sup> Sânziana Pop, *Basarabia, altfel decât o ştiţi (Bessarabia, Different Than You Know It)*, Formula As, 2008, issue 835.

Misunderstandings at the heart of what seemed to be a sound group fighting for a common goal, as well as phobias connected to these misunderstandings, contributed to a rapid and strong ethnic division of the citizens. The attempt to build the new state as a nation-state, whose core would be the native population, its language and culture, triggered a strong opposition from the national minorities. The expected perils of ethnic segregation encouraged protests in the East and South, protests motivated by fear of the increased Romanian nationalism of some groups, which materialized in separation from the country. The Republic of Gagauzia and The Dniester Moldovan Republic were declared.<sup>27</sup> The ruptures within society propagated to and from the level of the political elite. However, these allegations were without support. The source of the ethnic conflicts was the inheritance of the Communist regime itself.

Supported by international institutions, the country hurriedly adopted a strategy of cultural reanimation of its communities in order to appease them. A State Department for National Relations was established in 1991, as a link between Chişinău and the main cultural organizations of the discontented groups. In the Gagauz territory, for example, increased attention was paid to the revival of the traditional celebrations and the Gagauz culture, with impressive cultural reactions. Finally, the Constitution of July 27<sup>th</sup> 1994 established special autonomous status for communities on the left bank of the Dniester and for the South of the Republic. This was followed by another law regulating the special legal status of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauz Yeri.<sup>28</sup> Yet analysts noticed that this situation was not an incentive for healthy multiculturalism, but a form of self-containment and linguistic and cultural isolation, since the Gagauz language and culture were put behind in favor of maintaining the status of Russian language and neglecting Romanian in this province.<sup>29</sup>

The evolution of the National Rebirth Movement collided, in time, with unjustified obstacles and even reactions deemed to be extremely radical. Even its followers divided into more directions which are still valid today. From a political point of view, there was a right-wing pro-Romanian group, with support from intellectuals and people who believed in and had a lot to gain from the '90s reforms, another group with no party ideology, but with a strong lust for power, generally

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<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the two ethnic groups involved were very different in the evolution of their claims and the background of declaring independence. Unlike the Transnistrians, the Gagauz authorities had not intended a complete separation from the Moldovan state.

<sup>28</sup> The law concerning the special legal status of Gagauz-Yeri granted collective rights on ethnic terms. At an international level, this created a precedent. The law was based on the artificial rise of status of minority to that of "less numerous population", assertion which was far from the concrete situation. Thus 3% of the total population gained control on 10% of the territory, a fact which could fuel interethnic tensions at some point. It is a statute the Council of Europe did not recognize, and nor did the international law.

<sup>29</sup> Elena Oteanu, *Politica lingvistică și construcția statală în Republica Moldova (Linguistic Politics and State Construction in the Republic of Moldova)*, p. 49, available at [www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/62/ro/varianta21.07.2003%20Elena%20Oteanu.doc](http://www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/62/ro/varianta21.07.2003%20Elena%20Oteanu.doc).

composed of believers in the Moldovan identity, and a left-wing group formed by discontented representatives of the ethnic minorities, but also of the majority, protesting against the cultural and economic reforms which, in their view, had led the country on a negative path<sup>30</sup>. Ethnically and sociologically, there were those who saluted the reforms of the '90s as a national rebirth and as a comeback to the Romanian origin (a considerable part of the Romanian-origin population), the Russian-origin and part of the Russophone population, as a distinct group who cling on to the former prestige of being part of the great Russian empire, thus perceiving their identity as belonging to a greater one, and those who interpreted the '90s as a turning point in the contouring of a new independent nation and generally favored one's free choice of identity (the rest of the minorities, generally less Russified, and some Romanian-origin citizens)<sup>31</sup>. Concerning the future of the country, there were the unionists, who considered and still consider that the Republic is part of a greater Romanian political entity, the national-optimists, who believed in a distinct identity of the new-born state, and the skeptics, unwilling to support the unity and integrity of the territory, due to the inner conflicts, poverty, economic decline, or political corruption.<sup>32</sup>

But the greatest merit of this National Rebirth Movement was ensuring the irreversibility of the political processes<sup>33</sup> that led Moldova on the path to democracy, while the former Soviet Union was seeking for ways to re-enhance its influence in the area.

### 3.5. The Search of a Unifying Idea

The events of the '90s modified the power equilibrium within the ethnic groups – now the Romanian-origin population, no longer a peripheral economic and cultural nationality, became a majority in an independent state, with another third of the population formed of ethnic minorities.

The process of seeking a unifying idea for the society was something deemed necessary by the authorities immediately after the declaration of independence. It based itself on the need of a national identity, and subsequently, on the confirmation that there were indeed issues to be addressed at intercultural level. While the identity issue became more and more entangled and

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<sup>30</sup> Charles King, *quoted works*, p. 167.

<sup>31</sup> It is a large classification, whose component members were not constant in time.

<sup>32</sup> *Ethnobarometer – Republic of Moldova*, October 24<sup>th</sup> 2005, available at <http://www.ipp.md/biblioteca.php?l=ro&idc=36>.

<sup>33</sup> Igor Boțan, *Armonizarea relațiilor inter-etnice – sfidări și oportunități (Harmonization of the Interethnic Relations – Challenges and Opportunities)*, March 2002, p. 23, available at [www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/36/ro/Minoritati%20Botan.doc](http://www.ipp.md/public/biblioteca/36/ro/Minoritati%20Botan.doc).

complex, a number of unpredicted problems between the majority and the minorities began to appear. The lack of common social adherence to a certain goal or attitude transformed the unifying idea search into a very troublesome, and later failed, project.

At first, in 1993 and 1994, this idea was promoted as the construction of an independent national state, which should be an endeavor for all its citizens. Still, as Igor Boțan shows, the stability of the state had been accomplished and ensured thanks to the international political context.<sup>34</sup> Internal political disputes and other pressing affairs transformed this idea into an outdated one in a few years. Parties themselves abandoned the idea of a “national state”, emphasizing that of a multiethnic state, where interethnic peace was desirable. International observers also appreciated the government for having managed to create a civic state, and not solely an ethnic-based nation-state, like the neighboring ex-Soviet countries.

From the 1994 elections on, great capital began to be invested in the idea of a distinct Moldovan nation. By adopting a true Moldovan nationalism, built upon the ideas of Bessarabia as an independent state, and of an independent Moldovan language, the government hoped for supporters particularly in the rural areas. Nevertheless, social studies in the recent years prove that, irrelevant of their ethnic origin, citizens assumed in time the distinct identity of a Moldovan state, as a newly-born political entity, and, with it, the interest towards defining the status of the Moldovan citizen.<sup>35</sup> The state is perceived as a young, unconsolidated country, with a hesitant foreign politics, with an uncounted national identity, with corruption and instability at the level of authority. Being the citizen of such a state is often regarded with pride.<sup>36</sup> A true argument of the Moldovenization thesis was, though pale and promoted for the sake of it, the comprehensive politics of the Moldovan state, the presence of an interethnic background which endowed the individual with specific traits, uncommon to other populations like the neighboring Romanians.

While the Moldovan national identity had pertinent arguments to it, the idea of a Moldovan language was and continues to be a deformation of reality. This decision was not based on actual needs at the level of public society; it was rather a political and geopolitical act, meant to strengthen the relationship with Russia. Proponents of this idea were also among the Communist-supporters. A series of articles in the local press in the first half of the ‘90s kept the linguistic issue in the public attention, and thus prepared the ground for later prospects of reconsolidating the status of the Russian language.<sup>37</sup> Deemed a “naïve mistake”, or a “scientific fraud”<sup>38</sup>, the Moldovan language

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<sup>34</sup> Igor Boțan, *quoted works*, p. 46. He also argues that the people’s will to support this idea was demonstrated with the results of a manipulated research.

<sup>35</sup> This idea of Moldovan is different than the one promoted during Soviet times.

<sup>36</sup> *Ethnobarometer – Republic of Moldova*, October 24<sup>th</sup> 2005, available at <http://www.ipp.md/biblioteca.php?l=ro&idc=36>.

<sup>37</sup> Igor Boțan, *quoted works*, p. 50.

<sup>38</sup> Eugen Coșeriu, in *Universitatea*, available at <http://www.usm.md/ziar/?cat=35>

was a political construct and only contributed to the further confusion regarding the identity of the population. It was the problem of the language that caused a deep scission within the political and intellectual elite of the country, with one group insisting that the word “Moldovan” expresses only a regional identity of the Greater Romania, and another group supporting the “Moldovan” language as an attribute of an independent state, which nevertheless has historical ties with Romania. This scission was even to be found inside the Russian minority, with the culturally aware individuals showing less respect for the Moldovan language construct. According to the 2004 research, 16,5% of the population declared Romanian as their native language, while 60% Moldovan language.<sup>39</sup> The fundamental international linguistic organisms have not recognized the existence of a Moldovan language.

Around the year 2000, the dispute Romanians versus Moldovans became less intense. Negotiations became less ardent in favor of allowing each citizen to make the choice for himself (self-determination). From now on, this paradigm only concentrated on signaling similarities or differences between the two identity conceptions.

In 1999, another strategy was chosen – to use the idea of European integration as a means to mobilize the whole society. In 2001 and 2002, both the Government and the opposition agreed on the adoption of some legal provisions on the development of the Republic, stipulating the final goal of joining the EU. During and after the elections of 2001, Vladimir Voronin also tackled the necessity of adopting a unifying idea, which, in his view, should have a compulsory ethnic component.

It is significant to note that all proposals regarding the unifying idea were made in the context of electoral campaigns or proximal elections.<sup>40</sup> Anchored to this only aim of gaining proponents, the political parties never formed stable and strong roots and twisted the same subjects in directions that seemed appealing to the masses. And, despite the formal fluctuations, the unifying idea is in all cases reducible to intercultural grounds, in the sense that addressing interethnic relations was regarded as a priority in each situation.

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<sup>39</sup> These data are to be verified by the next research, since the Council of Europe contested the results of this research, arguing that the questions revolving around the term “Moldovan” and “Romanian” had been biased and incorrectly formulated.

<sup>40</sup> Igor Boțan, *quoted works*, p. 47

## **4. The evolution of the Russian minority in the multiethnic framework of Moldova; phases of the intercultural processes**

The Russian community on Bessarabia's territory, usually referred to as a whole, certainly deserves a deeper approach, since the tag "Russian" actually comprises of several diverse identities. There are, on one hand, the indigenous Russians, and, on the other hand, the colonized Russians or those who migrated from nearby areas (Transnistria included).

After the demise of the USSR, the Russian population on the Moldovan territory, hitherto representing an "imperial" population, bound by its origin to a superior social status, found itself in the position of a minority, as a result of the Moldovan declaration of independence. Most of these individuals never managed to transcend the feeling of belonging to the "great Russian people". One of the fundamental problems of the Republic of Moldova was to ensure an equitable functioning of the historical nation's language along with the Russian language, the language spoken by most of the non-indigenous individuals. Yet this process also involved participation from the minorities, who were expected to show their willingness to integrate and study the national language. A breach appeared here, and it was not due to the difficulty of learning a non-Slavic language, but to a trait which is one of the core characteristics of the Russian population. While 60% of the Moldovans agree that their language is a trademark of their national identity and serves as a symbol of solidarity<sup>41</sup> (and so do the past and the history, yet the respondents are fewer), the Russian conscience identifies itself with completely different symbols – symbols of power and of a grandiose state. These components, which make up a "majority complex", as it has been called, are also present in the populations who were assimilated by the Sovietization. This is why a rigorous intercultural approach of the Russian (and other Sovietized) population in Moldova should focus not only on the language, which is regarded merely as an instrument by these individuals, but also on other elements which resonate and signify much more for the Russian-origin identity.

It is often claimed that the Slavic elements infiltrated in this geographic region ever since early centuries, yet it is also true that, due to their intermittence and rare occurrences, they were soon assimilated by indigenous culture. Only in the later centuries of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, mostly due to political circumstances, they became so strong as to form nuclei of their own. Russian-origin population began to migrate to Bessarabia on a systematic basis at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with

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<sup>41</sup> Research of March 1991, apud Elena Oteanu, *quoted works*, p. 3.

more significant waves in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Russians fled their Empire to escape religious persecutions. Starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the records show, the Russian population becomes the second predominant minority after the Ukrainian one on Bessarabian territory. Following the annexation of 1812, the migrations gained a colonizing effect, and their planning was made according to the needs of the Russian administration, which at the time was facing an internal land crisis. This is why most of the migratory population was formed of peasants. These stimulated migrations are usually divided into three periods: 1. 1812-1824; 2. 1825-1835; 3. mid '30s – 1850.

The colonization politics of the Russian Empire focused not only on attracting Russian and Ukrainian peasants to the borders of the Empire, but also transdanubian colonists.<sup>42</sup> These colonists began to settle in Bessarabia since 1769, and waves of Bulgarians, Gagauz, German and French continued to come at the turn of the century. Usually the authorities recorded their newly created villages, and this is how we can determine that their migrations ceased after 1831. Their intent to cross the Danube and settle somewhere in the Russian Empire can be explained, on one hand, by trying to escape the Ottoman oppression, and, on the other, by trying to obtain certain privileges and a certain protection promised by the Russian authorities to all new-comers. This latter incentive attracted especially the French, German and the Swiss. Apart from the fore-mentioned populations, who settled mostly in the northern and southern part of the Bessarabian territory, other migrating populations included Armenians, Jews, Greeks and Gypsies, who generally preferred to settle in towns. This is how the ethnic component slowly gained a colorful characteristic, which had a major impact in the long run.

The following table shows the evolution of the ethnic structure in Bessarabia's crucial historical moments, with very few fluctuations within the borders of the same geographical territory:

<b>Year</b>	<b>1918</b>	<b>1941</b>	<b>1959</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>2004*</b>
<b>Ethnic group</b>					
<b>Moldovan/Romanian</b>	56,2%	68,8%	65,4%	64,5%	78%
<b>Ukrainian</b>	23,3%	11,1%	14,6%	13,8%	8,4%
<b>Russian</b>		6,7%	10,2%	13,0%	5,9%
<b>Jewish</b>	5,7%	n/a	3,2%	1,5%	n/a

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<sup>42</sup> Alina Moroza, *quoted works*, p. 54.



<b>Bulgarian</b>	5,7%	7,5%	2,1%	2,0%	1,9%
<b>Gagauz</b>	3,5%	4,9%	3,3%	3,5%	4,4%
<b>Other nationalities</b>	5,6%	n/a	1,2%	1,7%	1,0%

\*2004 data does not include the Eastern rayons and Bender

Sources: Charles King, *quoted works*, page 99;

Alina Moroza, *quoted works*, page 57-61;

Galina Pogoneț, *quoted works*, page 158

While in the USSR, the MSSR was one of the five Soviet republics with the smallest proportion of Russians (along with Lithuania, Estonia, Tajikistan, The Turkmen Republic and Armenia).<sup>43</sup> Yet other figures are also amazing - in 1989, data regarding the individuals who declared Russian as their native language places Moldova among the most Russified nations in the Soviet Union<sup>44</sup>, surpassed only by Ukraine and Belarus. Apart from the linguistic assimilation, there were also high levels of mixed marriages.

The urban population of Moldova witnessed an outstanding increase after World War II, higher than the medium rates of the Soviet Union. The country faced a process of continuous urbanization, with medium towns becoming cities, and with small towns turning into medium towns<sup>45</sup>. There was a great afflux of population to these urban centers, some migrating from other Soviet republics, and others from rural areas. While the majority of the native population still practiced an agricultural life in the countryside, the first generations started moving in the urban centers. These people kept their language and slowly constituted an ethnic group that differentiated from the Transnistrian population who dominated the administration and the political sector. The effect of this was a progressive Moldovenization of the urban areas, which allowed a conservation of the traditional linguistic habits of the Moldovans, and therefore the rural areas were never disconnected in their evolution from the rural areas. This contradicted the Soviet standards regarding the process of urbanization and also helped maintain cultural solidarity within the same ethnic group, since the cities presented a competitive environment. This process had significant impact in the 1980s, when the percentage of the native Romanian-speakers increased in the cities, although most of them were learning Russian as second language.

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<sup>43</sup> Alina Moroza, *quoted works*, p. 59.

<sup>44</sup> Charles King, *quoted works*, p. 118.

<sup>45</sup> The urbanization and industrialization however also served subtly for the nation-building scope of the Soviets, since, with this backdrop, national identity began to be associated with modernity and progress.

After 1959, the growing rate of the Russian population was not so large compared to other Soviet states (in 1989, their proportion reached 13% of the total), but they settled in such manner that they made up almost a quarter of the urban population<sup>46</sup>, or even small majorities in the largest cities. Living stable lives, they became a usual and constant trait of the Moldovan urban landscape, especially in the capital.

The Soviet state's policy regarding the cultural development of the partaking populations actually consisted in promoting the culture of the predominant Soviet population, while the cultures of the smaller groups were left aside. The ethnic or national minorities were not given any proper conditions for the study of their mother languages, and that is why they had to comply with studying Russian, which came to be considered as a more prestigious language. The denationalizing effect of the Soviet regime led to an increased interethnic misbalance in the satellite-territories after the collapse of the Union. The effects of the Russification process were a real tendency across the entire territory of the USSR. The data collected during the 1989 census in Bessarabia plus the Transnistrian region can confirm that the minorities had been subjected to a process of loss of identity and Russification – the most affected were the Jews, of which 73% admitted to using Russian as their mother language, followed by the Germans (66,6%), the Polish (60,6%), the Belarusians (55,7%) and the Ukrainians (37%). For these, the Russification process and the mentality that Russians are dominant made the return to the original, historic identity very difficult. At the other end, the most culturally-resistant minorities were the Gagauz (7,4%), the Bessarabian Romanians/Moldovans (4,3%) and the Gypsies (3,5%).<sup>47</sup> Otherwise, the separation between these ethnic minorities and the Moldovans persisted.

It was only in 1988 that interethnic relations would gain attention. At the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of Moldova, the ethnic problem was one of the most debated issues. Participants agreed that “*Moldova, in addition to the representatives of the indigenous nationality, is inhabited by tens of thousands of Bulgarians, Gagauz, Germans and Gypsies who are a long way from living in a cohesive and friendly family*”<sup>48</sup>. It became obvious that intercultural aspects were a thorny problem in Moldova, and ethnic minorities had never been addressed properly in the sense of integration or harmonization.

In the context that led to national mobilization, interethnic relations made their way on the agenda of those pursuing identity claims. But the resulting events motivated the minorities in a negative sense, since the increasing pro-Romanian intentions and manifestations were considered a

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<sup>46</sup> And also a quarter of the overall Transnistrian population.

<sup>47</sup> Eugen Pătraș, *quoted works*, p. 144.

<sup>48</sup> *Sotsialisticheskaia Moldavia*, January 12th 1988, pp. 12-13.

threat to the very cultural basis of the numerically-inferior groups, particularly the Slavs and the Gagauz, whose interactions revolved around Russian language. Nevertheless, this framework allowed for the complex debating of intercultural issues and encouraged the ethnic groups to affirm their needs. In the summer of 1989, while the Bessarabian Romanians were putting the basis of their unified front, so were the Slavs and the Gagauz. The Slavic population established Yedinstvo, which united the minority population and other opponents of cultural reforms. Yedinstvo was largely militant and requested equal status for the Moldovan and Russian languages. The three laws of 1989 that instituted Moldovan language as official language contained a special clause which ensured the necessary conditions for the proper use of Russian as an inter-ethnic communication language.

Political, economic and cultural domination of the Russian minority hitherto made the establishment of an optimum legislative framework a very difficult and argued venture.<sup>49</sup> Talks on basic normative acts often amplified the already existing disagreements. Though the Republic was fast in ratifying the most relevant human rights laws, there was a considerate delay in the adoption of legal norms regarding the minorities, a negative element seldom balanced by the rapid resolution of some sensitive interethnic problems, like the Gagauz one, although the latter have been excessively politized.

In the first years after the declaration of independence, Russians were still the most visible ethnic group, although not the most numerous one. The citizenship law, thus devised to grant citizenship to all those who were permanent residents of this territory at that moment, was especially favorable for the Russian ethnic group, most of it constituted due to recent-decade migrations. The historical background and post-Soviet relations with Russia kept Russians in Moldova in the limelight. Their formal leaders also devised a strategy to forge a particular cultural identity. Russians still enjoyed a favored position, since the infrastructure and the mass-media systems, as remnants of the Soviet era, were difficult to change.

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<sup>49</sup> This fact was formally admitted in a *Parliament's Decision* of 1992, describing the special situation in Moldova as an "effect of the imperial assimilation politics, applied throughout the years". – "Decision of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova no. 1039-XII, regarding the legal status of the persons belonging to ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, in the context of the armed conflict in the rayons on the left bank of the Dniester", May 26<sup>th</sup> 1992, available at [www.iatp.md/ladom/downloads/M13.doc](http://www.iatp.md/ladom/downloads/M13.doc).

## 5. Legal regulations of intercultural aspects in the Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova established the rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens beginning with the legal provisions it adopted following the Declaration of Independence. The fundamental law takes notice of the state's multiethnic character. It affirms itself legally as a community historically founded on more peoples, who make up a whole. The Constitution of the Republic does not contain in its text the term "national minority" and the only manner in which it tackles this matter is contained in the following excerpt: "the state is founded on the unity of the people of the Republic of Moldova, which is the common and undividable homeland of all its citizens". Also, within the same article, the state is obliged to recognize and guarantee the right of all its citizens to keeping, developing and expressing their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity.<sup>50</sup>

Although the Republic of Moldova displays significant developments in what concerns the protection of human rights (several laws have been modified or issued in that sense), the usual citizen is unacquainted with a coherent and clear view of these normative acts. And although the rights of the minorities have been drawn according to the above-mentioned framework (as it is stated in the first article of the "*Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*", which Moldova ratified), this identity is not necessarily desirable. The rights of the minorities imply more specific approaches – more detailed and concrete guarantees regarding the status of these individuals within society and the preservation of their identity, their social obligations, and the harmonization of their interests with the national ones. However, these rights must not surpass the framework of equality and equal treatment established by law. They must not be a source of privileges, nor of discrimination.<sup>51</sup>

The Moldovan laws stipulate that the ethnic minorities enjoy specific rights, and I will refer to them in a nutshell, and detail only those referring to Russians:

1. the right to use the mother-tongue, which is essential for maintaining the identity of the minority. This is stipulated by the state's Constitution. However, there is another law

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<sup>50</sup> *The Constitution of the Republic of Moldova*, article 10, available at <http://www.presedinte.md/const.php?p.=8100&lang=rom#8100>.

<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Law no. 382-XV, dated July 19<sup>th</sup> 2001, regarding the rights of the individuals belonging to national minorities and the legal status of their organizations, has been characterized as granting rights excessively, in the detriment of the majority, which causes a very pronounced positive discrimination.

which regulates in detail the use of Russian as an inter-ethnic communication language (and a “real” bilingual backdrop is thus ensured), as well as Russian translation at all levels of public administration. It has been commented that this law indirectly places Russian as the second state language of the Republic, since it further stipulates that the state ensures the publishing of all national-interest information in both the state language and Russian; that topographic/commercial names or other visible information of general interest may be indicated both in the state language and in Russian where necessity dictates it, and that the state guarantees the possibility of Russian communication, be it verbal or written, within public institutions.<sup>52</sup> There is a further point to add here. The concept of inter-ethnic communication language attributed to Russian is very blurry in practice, since the inter-ethnic communication itself is underdeveloped, although its role in the nation’s integration is undeniable. This problem will be tackled in a separate chapter.

2. the right to education in the mother-tongue, which derives naturally from the above-mentioned right to linguistic identity. Beginning with 1990, there has been a tendency to adequate the language of education to the ethnical structure of the population in that certain area. However, implementing education languages other than Russian has proven a slow process. Data from the Ministry of Education show that Moldovan/Romanian and Russian prevail as education languages. In the school year 2002-2003, out of 1499 primary and secondary education institutions, 1116 were Romanian/Moldovan-based, accounting for 78% of the total pupil population, 276 were Russian-based, with 21,8% of the total number of pupils studying in them, and only 93 belonged to other languages (only 0,06% of the pupil population studied in Ukrainian teaching institutions)<sup>53</sup>, which certainly does not comply with the ethnic structure of the overall population. Bulgarians benefit from a university and a pedagogical institution in Taraclia, and from a middle school in the capital.
3. the right to actively participate in the political, social, economic and cultural sectors of public life. This law introduced no restriction to the formation of associations on ethnic basis.
4. the right to use the mother-tongue in justice

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<sup>52</sup> *Legea cu privire la funcționarea limbilor vorbite pe teritoriul RSS Moldovenești nr.3465-XI (Law Regarding the Functioning of the Spoken Languages on the Territory of the MSSR)*, September 1<sup>st</sup> 1989, articles 3, 9, 11, 13, available at [http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/Legea\\_cu\\_privire\\_la\\_func%C5%A3ionarea\\_limbilor\\_vorbite\\_pe\\_teritoriul\\_RSS\\_Moldovene%C5%9Fti](http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/Legea_cu_privire_la_func%C5%A3ionarea_limbilor_vorbite_pe_teritoriul_RSS_Moldovene%C5%9Fti).

<sup>53</sup> Galina Pogoneț, *quoted works*, pp. 125-126.

5. the right to practise one's religion
6. the right to preserve the cultural heritage
7. the access to mass-media, that is, the right of any citizen to form mass-media – the actual situation confirms this freedom completely, since more than half of all publications are in minorities' languages<sup>54</sup>.

Apart from these, there is also a thorough law regulating the situation of the Russian minority in particular, Law 760-XV, approved in December 2001, following the *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation*, signed in the same year. This law further strengthens Moldova's commitment to protect the identity of its Russian-origin citizens and to ensure, in the virtue of the Russian language's importance, the necessary conditions for Russian-based education, in conformity with the national laws.

In order to promote and develop the state policy in the intercultural relations field, a *Bureau for Interethnic Relations* has been founded, whose attributions are to represent the interests of the Republic's ethnic minorities in the state and administration apparatus.

The general opinion is that the Republic of Moldova has achieved significant performances in what concerns the minorities' rights and that the legal framework in this field is satisfactory and corresponds to international standards. In fact, it is one of the few ex-Soviet states that managed to create real conditions and to outline concrete measures for the cultural development of its partaking ethnic groups. That is why the actions to be taken at the moment are not the further introduction of legal provisions, but the concrete strengthening and promotion of the already existing ones, since the ethnic minorities aren't even fully aware of their rights. Some implemented provisions aren't even respected, but the reasons for this extend to larger ones, like the absence of solid civil values and political conscience in the citizens. Experts claim that, apart from the harmonizing legal framework, a *normative consensus* of the citizens - which would alter and level the different perceptions of the different ethnic groups - should be fostered, keeping in mind that, in any situation, the ethnic diversity of the country is susceptible to generate tensions. Cultural and linguistic rights should therefore be doubled by a preoccupation for fostering the values of tolerance, integration and conviviality. A study conducted by Galina Pogoneț among a group of responders with an adequate ethnic structure pointed out that, in the population's view, the obstacles faced by a better dialogue with the minorities are the fact that the laws aren't entirely observed, that the people's mentality should change or that the minorities do not sufficiently know

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<sup>54</sup> Of which Russian publications hold a significant proportion.

the state language.<sup>55</sup> Also, 48,6% of those questioned believe that the minorities' contribution to social development is of medium level, 45,7% deem it insignificant and only 5,7% consider the contribution significant.<sup>56</sup>

Although a spirit of tolerance and the premises of intercultural dialogue exist, tensions persist. One significant source here is the government's policy regarding the official language, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

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<sup>55</sup> Galina Pogoneț, *quoted works*, p. 133.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 134.

## **6. Language aspects in intercultural relations; the status of the Russian language**

According to the data of the latest available researches in the Republic of Moldova, except Transnistria (fall 2004), 75,2% of the population stated they usually speak Romanian/Moldovan, 16% speak Russian, 3,8% speak Ukrainian, 3,1% Gagauz, 1,1% Bulgarian and 0,4% other languages. The same research shows that only 5,9% of the population is of Russian origin, yet there are also some representatives of other minorities who usually address themselves in Russian – every second Ukrainian, every third Bulgarian, and every fourth Gagauz. The proportion of Moldovans/Romanians who generally speak in Russian is 5%.<sup>57</sup> These data may seem sheer, but a recent event like that of November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008, when a hundred young protesters demanded the state to officialize the Russian language, arguing that Russians are discriminated and that half of the population of the Republic actually speaks Russian, brings immediately to mind that there is a deeper problem underlying linguistic issues.

### **6.1. Historical status of the Russian language**

Like all post-Soviet states, and, largely, like all post-colonial states, the Republic of Moldova witnesses a psycho-linguistic battle between the “imperial” language and the native language, with frequent incongruous results, and intercultural relations are driven and influenced by this ever-present correlation. The Republic of Moldova was the first post-Soviet state to embrace the use of the Latin alphabet for the official language, as a recognition of the Latin origin of this language and its identity with the Romanian language. Yet the linguistic identity of the overall population proved a contradictory matter.

When towards the end of the ‘80s, linguistic problems came to attention, the specialist opinion was to promote a national bilingual framework, with Russian gaining more proportion, in the sense that it needed to be equally promoted with Romanian/Moldovan language, since Russian was the official interethnic communication language. Nevertheless, in practice this meant that

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<sup>57</sup> apud Raisa Lozinschi, *Rusa oficializată?: Doar 16 la sută din populația R. Moldova vorbește, de obicei, în limba rusă (Russian Official Language? Only 16% of the population in the Republic of Moldova usually speaks Russian)*, Jurnal de Chișinău (Chișinău Journal), November 5<sup>th</sup> 2008, available at <http://www.jurnal.md/article/9606/>.



Russian would come to dominate. Access to Romanian scientific literature or to Romanian sources of information was blocked. This was in accordance to the Soviet linguistic politics throughout USSR, which, while promoting a multilateral bilingual framework, stated that its goal was the tendency of the non-Russian population to use Russian language.<sup>58</sup> This is how a unilateral bilingual backdrop emerged; it is proven by the figures - only 3% of the Russian population throughout the USSR knew the language of another co-inhabitant population.

## 6.2. The influence of Russian on the native language

The use of Russian language in administration and science caused the insufficient development or the Russification of the national terminology. When addressing in these fields, the speakers, whilst using the national language, employ Russian terms – this is called volapük jargon<sup>59</sup> and is common to most ex-Soviet republics. In time, the indigenous language altered, some of the terms were compensated by the imperial language's terms, the syntax simplified and some syntactic norms became deformed.

In the years of the national movement, the fact that many Moldovans spoke Romanian erroneously was not considered an alarming sign. But despite the measures instituted at that time to radically improve the status of the Romanian language, despite all the legal regulations and the somewhat noticeable acts of culturalization, the situation still maintains today. As a result of the firm influence of Russian, the structure of the native language altered indefinitely. This manifested itself in two ways – first, the alteration of the syntax, which molded on the Russian syntax, and second, the replacement of some terms (the jargon mentioned above).<sup>60</sup> These processes are present in Moldovans with much and little education altogether. Their language consists in a mixture of Romanian and Russian-origin terms (Russianisms), cast in a Russian structure<sup>61</sup>, with frequent

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<sup>58</sup> Vitali Catană goes as far as to state that the imperial authorities used Russian as a weapon of “linguistic terrorism” against Romanian (using an expression by Patrice Higonnet). – apud Vitali Catană, *quoted works*

<sup>59</sup> Elena Oteanu, *quoted works*, p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> Brief examples of Russian-origin phrases would include references to time (“jumătate la șapte”), salutations (“Cum viața?”, “Cum la voi lucrurile?”), holiday greetings (“Să vă fie de bine cu Nașterea Domnului!”, “Anul Nou cu tine!”, “Cu sărbătoarea!”); Romanian words used with their Russian meaning: “cobor la prima *oprire*” - meaning “stație”, “liftul *nu lucrează*” – meaning “nu funcționează”, “praf de spălat” – meaning “detergent”, “a *realiza* marfa” – meaning “a vinde”, “torente din anul I”, meaning “seriile”; Russian words used in Romanian speech (Russianisms): “rozov”, “davaï”, “nu ți daios!”, “kaneșna” etc.

<sup>61</sup> See Ion Țurcanu, *A vorbi rusește în limba română (To Speak Russian in Romanian)*, Sud-Est, issue 3, 2005, available at [http://www.sud-est.md/numere/20050930/article\\_18/](http://www.sud-est.md/numere/20050930/article_18/).

Russian-origin phonetic traits as well. The speaker unconsciously consigns the words with a foreign form. This leads to a different perception of one's own language by the Moldovans. And from here, to a different perception of one's identity. This is why, for the Romanian-origin population, language is a distorting element in defining identity.

Ion Țurcanu refers to this kind of speech as “syntactic and semantic aphasia”<sup>62</sup>, which denotes an inability to organize words according to a well-established system within a sentence and to assign words with their correct sense. The sentence thus becomes confusing or unreasonable. The great linguist Silviu Berejan also remarked the degradation of the oral speech in Moldova, due to the high afflux of Russian-origin terms, even noting that some samples of language are ridiculous and provoke laughter.<sup>63</sup> This hybrid talking has different levels of assimilation and/or perception in Moldova.

First, there is a category of speakers who aren't even aware of mixing Romanian speech with Russian terms, and they consider naturally that all the vocabulary they use is Romanian. These are mostly people with medium education, living in the rural areas. The Russian words they use are generally terms belonging to a specialized language connected to their jobs. There are a lot of city dwellers on the other hand who use the same specialized, technical language in Russian due to their education in Russian language, not having the knowledge of the same Romanian word; they are aware of using a foreign word. Another category is made of speakers who use Russian terms simply because Romanian language lacks words or expressions with such meaning. This happens often with jokes, colloquial addressing, humor-filled situations. Russian language is much more developed in this aspect of the vocabulary than Romanian, as a result of the cheerfulness of Russian people. Last, there is a group of speakers aware that they use wrongly the language and are continuously seeking to correct their mistakes. These are most often people who come in contact with Romanians and feel a complex of inferiority concerning the language they speak. Some linguistically-aware speakers continue to use the language mistakenly on purpose, because it helps them to socially integrate better within their groups.

There is also a difference in speech noticeable between rural and urban inhabitants. Having come into contact with Russian more often throughout the recent decades of history, the language of the urban population has developed some phonetic characteristics which are not present in the rural speakers. For example, the pronunciation of the consonants “L” or “T” often takes the soft phonetic shape of Russian language in urban speakers, irrelevant of using Romanian or Russian words. This trait is very rare in rural speakers.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>63</sup> see *Vorbirea orală în Republica Moldova este în continuă degradare (Oral Speech in the Republic of Moldova Keeps Degrading)*, in *Moldova noastră*, August 30<sup>th</sup> 2005, available at <http://mdn.md/index.php?view=viewarticle&articleid=1592>.

### 6.3. The legal linguistic framework

The rights and obligations regarding the use of languages on the territory of a multinational state are either accounted for by a *territorial principle* or by a *personal principle*. While the first stipulates the use of the language according to a certain territory, the second one applies the norms to a group of persons belonging to a certain community and is usually expressed in the freedom of choice. The Moldovan legislation regarding the languages, particularly *The Law Regarding the Functioning of Languages on the Territory of the Republic of Moldova*, issued in 1989, is biased in applying these principles. It seemed at the moment of its appearance that its contradictions were in fact a compromise meant to appease inter-ethnic clashes. Nevertheless, its true effect in time was to aggravate the identity crisis of the native Moldovan population.

According to this law, the citizen is granted the freedom of choice regarding the language of communication, be it Moldovan<sup>64</sup> or Russian, with the official organs, which means that the personal principle applies here. However, the use of the other minority languages seems to fall under the territorial principle, since in those areas where the Gagauz, the Ukrainians, the Bulgarians etc. are predominant, the population can benefit from services in their native languages or other appropriate language. Both situations are regulated by article 6 of the above-mentioned law. The same stance also applies in official contexts, as article 9 stipulates that in the case of state organs and organizations, institutions or companies, the language of use is Moldovan while Russian translation is ensured; yet in those areas where ethnic minorities are predominant, the language of use may also be another “acceptable language”. Russian language has therefore a special yet ambiguous statute according to this law. In view of maintaining a “real” Russian-national and national-Russian bilingual framework, Russian language is not excluded from the official areas, although Moldovan is instituted and promoted as the legitimate language in the economic, social, political and cultural fields. Further examples of a biased regulation for the use of the Russian language include the demand for all workers in official fields dealing with citizen dialogue to know Russian language (article 7) and the guarantee of studying Russian language in schools and educational institutions, on an equal basis with Moldovan (article 21).

A truthful barometer of the statute of languages in the Republic in the lawmaker’s view can be found in those articles which specify the “visibility” of the languages, i.e. place names, street posters etc. It is considered that such forms of language use have a great impact on the reader or passer-by, and individuals are very sensitive to them. They are perceived as direct markers of a

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<sup>64</sup> Actually Romanian, but this is the term I shall use in this section due to the fact that it is also the legal term.

language's power in the Republic of Moldova. According to article 24, toponyms have only one accepted form, which is neither translated nor adapted (therefore the law here has a tendency towards monolingualism), yet in the areas where it is needed, the name can be written in Russian and Gagauz also (article 28). In street posters and banners, Moldovan language is compulsory and must always occupy the place with most visibility. In the areas inhabited by the Gagauz, the law specifies special conditions, in the sense that the place names may keep their Gagauz origin and street banners may also use Gagauz language exclusively. In practice however, there are very few instances when the language of a public poster is other than Moldovan or Russian. There are also situations when the information is presented exclusively in Russian or in Moldovan.

In order to ensure a coherent application of the regulations regarding the language, an institution was created at the beginning of the '90s – the *State Department for Ensuring the Functioning of Spoken Languages on the Territory of the Republic of Moldova*, whose main goal is to create the optimum conditions for citizens to adopt the Moldovan language. Also, along with the possibility given to the ethnic minorities to study the official language and to integrate in the social life of the Republic, they are also guaranteed the lawfully and unbroken functioning of the other languages spoken throughout the territory. This Department was later commissioned to a larger structure, the *Department for Inter-Ethnic Relations*, which seeks to ensure the right to an ethnic identity and to strengthen the civil society.<sup>65</sup> It works hand in hand with the *National Policy Conception of the Republic of Moldova*, issued in December 2003, one of the key-documents in the field of intercultural relations, since it has been drawn up around the goal of integrating and fortifying the multicultural and multilingual population of the Republic, through harmonious orchestration of the various ethnic interests with the national one, while trying to maintain and enrich all aspects of Moldovan culture.<sup>66</sup>

#### **6.4. The actual linguistic situation**

Still, the legal framework, clear-cut as it may be, has seldom proven troublesome. Deformed situations were permitted to happen, when, for instance, some representatives of the Gagauz requested on behalf of all the ethnic minorities that the Russian language be transformed in the

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<sup>65</sup> <http://www.bri.gov.md/oDepartamentru/ArhiveNews/Comments/Report2003.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> *The National Policy Conception* is available at [www.parlament.md/download/laws/ro/546-XV-19.12.2003.doc](http://www.parlament.md/download/laws/ro/546-XV-19.12.2003.doc).

official language. It was not a legitimate request, since, first of all, Russian language is not an element of the Gagauz identity. Yet their demand was an attempt to maintain a historical status now threatened by the imagined perils of Romanian's supremacy in the state. It shed light on the fact that the legal linguistic framework was not appealing and could leave room for interpretation. The fact that the Russian language is legally granted a special functioning regime, while the Russian minority is not the most numerous one, leads to an unjustified hierarchy of the languages of the minorities, and in some areas it even perpetuates the goals of the Russification masterminds. To further exemplify, the statute devised for the Russian language, as a "language of interethnic communication", is a notion unknown in international norms in relation to the existence of an official language.<sup>67</sup> The legal literature never once explains what this concept is supposed to mean. It was voiced that designating the language of a minority as a language of interethnic communication is a form of discrimination towards the majority and the rest of the ethnic minorities. This means that protecting the rights of a minority led to the disfavoring of other, which contravenes the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, ratified by Moldova. Also, critics of the *National Policy Conception* argue that this strategic program waits too much for a miracle from the multiethnic and multilingual proposed frameworks and that it exaggeratedly encourages minority ambitions at the cost of the majority, when it should just promote a peaceful and harmonious milieu of multicultural tolerance.<sup>68</sup>

There is an inconsistency in what concerns the legal provision and their application in practice. Actually one can notice a plethora of legislative acts meant to contour a favorable backdrop for intercultural relations in all aspects, yet the practical situation is far from the prescribed one. For example, two thirds of the students in the universities of the Republic carry out their studies in the official language, while 31% of them in Russian language. The latter category has diminished chances of integrating in the professional life upon graduation. This contradicts the state's conception according to which all citizens are given the correct premises for multicultural integration and equal opportunities to access the professional field<sup>69</sup>. There is still a general reluctance from the Russian population to learn the official language, and therefore their cultural integration in the common goals of the country is burdened. It is only one of the situations where multicultural purposes are met with goals of separation by some ethnic representatives with political power.

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<sup>67</sup> The notion of "communication language" is a valid one, signifying a person's right to identity and to choose the language in which he/she communicates. The only other country where "language of interethnic communication" is a legal notion is Kyrgyzstan, referring to Russian, but here Russian is also the official language.

<sup>68</sup> Ion Țurcanu, *quoted works*.

<sup>69</sup> *Conception on the Development of Education in Republic of Moldova (Concepția dezvoltării învățământului din Republica Moldova)*, Monitorul Oficial, no. 7, 1995.

Moreover, in 2002, among the populations of other ethnic minority than Russian and Ukrainian, 46% considered themselves in good knowledge of Moldovan language, 10% in good knowledge of Romanian language, while not less than 98% of them affirmed they speak a good Russian.<sup>70</sup> According to the same research, other foreign languages like French or English are known by less than 15% of the population of a certain ethnic group<sup>71</sup>, which leads to the conclusion that the policy regarding the study of foreign languages in schools tends to be swallowed up by a hierarchy of Romanian/Moldovan, Russian and maybe Gagauz, with little attention paid to other foreign languages. The situation in some schools of the Gagauz, Bulgarian or Ukrainian minorities, where the language of study is not the official language, but the language of another minority, is beyond doubt paradoxical. In such instances, the state language is only the third language studied by these minorities, after the Russian language and their native language. And the Framework-Convention mentioned earlier clearly stipulates that the use of a language of study cannot alter in any way the learning or teaching in the official language.

## 6.5. Linguistic representation in the mass-media

In mass-media, researches prove a high level of adherence to foreign sources of information. In 2001, the foreign mass-media outnumbered 7 times the national ones<sup>72</sup> (and the situation is nowadays similar, since very few national audio-visual sources have emerged in the meantime). Russian continues to be a dominant language in this area. Out of the three television channels with national coverage, the Romanian national television was suspended. The two left are the Moldovan Television, airing programs in Romanian but also in the languages of the minorities (daily Russian news bulletin, weekly Gagauz program), and Prime TV (former ORT), a Russian language channel, which also has the highest audience and enjoys the greatest trust from people. Researches show that citizens also consider this latter channel as their primary source of information of European interest. Apart from these, there are TV channels available locally or through cable operators, but the proportion of linguistic coverage is even. While foreign channels used to be translated in Russian,

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<sup>70</sup> *Barometer of the Public Opinion in Moldova (Barometrul opiniei publice din Moldova)*, March 2002, The Institute for Public Policy, p. 29, available at <http://www.ipp.md/print.php?l=ro&pl=ba&id=15>.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>72</sup> Mihai Hachi, *Modul de trai al populației Republicii Moldova (Lifestyle of the Population in the Republic of Moldova)*, Academy of Economic Studies, Chișinău, 2004, p. 147, available at [www.cnaa.acad.md/files/theses/2004/1741/mihai\\_hachi\\_thesis.pdf](http://www.cnaa.acad.md/files/theses/2004/1741/mihai_hachi_thesis.pdf).

mostly, today this situation has changed, with Romanian translation available also (for example, Eurosport has both Romanian and Russian translation).

The situation of the press is highly dependent on spheres of influence, and this should be interpreted in the light of the great dose of political interests present at the level of the interethnic. Although a great part of the printed press declares itself as independent, actually the affiliation to a political party has a high rate. At the level of the year 2002, of the total number of publication 40% were owned by the state, 30% by political parties, and the rest had private owners, which is often a synonym to being controlled by political parties as well. Independent papers are usually forced to charge a higher price in order to survive financially, and hence they are less accessible for those with modest incomes. Romanian language independent newspapers have had a hard time gaining audience without the support of some political party. Only two papers in this category have managed to make their enterprise sustainable through advertising – *Jurnal de Chişinău* and *Timpul*. Party-affiliated newspapers (*Komunistul*, *Flux total*) benefit from a greater circulation, since the political parties provide the necessary funds. They are particularly popular in the northern, eastern and southern rayons, and this popularity can be correlated with the political preferences expressed by the population. Nevertheless, the urban segment is by far the most active one in mass-media consumption. The Russian language newspapers usually have larger circulation and attract more advertising space. Daily ads and real estate ads are by and large written in Russian, irrelevant whether the paper is Romanian or Russian. Although the representation in the news press is equally shared between Romanian and Russian, with the existence of bilingual editions as well (*Moldova suverană* and *Nezavisimaia Moldova*), or with Russian versions of Romanian newspapers, the number of Russian paper readers is larger. Also, the Russian magazine offer outnumbers the Romanian one in circulation, but also as a variety of topics.

Mass-media is a very important factor in shaping the civic and national conscience of the population. A research of 2004<sup>73</sup> showed that foreign mass-media have a great influence on the citizens: 62% of the urban interviewees and 52% of the rural ones stated they watch the Russian channel ORT (now Prime TV) on a daily basis. Only 22% of the urban inhabitants and 33% of the rural ones acknowledged the same thing about the Romanian national television channel (which in the meantime stopped airing). 45% of the urban radio listeners and 22% of the rural ones prefer Russian channels daily, while only 17%, and respectively 15%, listen to Romanian radio channels. The reason why Russian mass-media attract such a great audience is less explainable through an attraction for this language and culture, and more through a greater quality, in general, of the Russian audio-visual offer. Russian television channels have more interesting programs, shows and

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<sup>73</sup> Mihai Hachi, *quoted works*, p. 148.

films than Romanian ones and manage to create an aura of glitter around them. The Moldovan national channel on the other hand has a very poor, sometimes dull presentation. Russian channels are also easier to introduce from the point of view of bureaucracy (this has always been the policy of Moscow). Nevertheless, this popularity also suggests that the informational content of the Russian channels has the largest influence on the mentality and behavior of people in society.

Another area where Russian-language prevails in a similar way is the cinema. All cinemas in Chişinău, and throughout the country as well, play only films doubled in Russian. There are no Romanian subtitles. The only occasions when Romanian-subtitled films can be watched are around specialized film festivals, or releases of Romanian films. The reason for Russian supremacy in cinemas is an economic one - the more efficient distribution channel with Moscow origin. Films are brought in quicker, a few days distance from their international release date. The distribution chain is very efficient, with few impediments and more acceptable costs. Therefore, it is not a cultural decision, but rather a pragmatic one. There haven't been any situations of protests from the audience regarding the language.

A further point remains to add here. The informational behavior of the citizens can be traced out in the electoral preference. Mainly, the population in the center part of the country, with greater access to independent and alternative sources of information has been more prone to vote democratic values than the rest of the Republic. Since the situation of the population seems to be that of unilateral information or misinformation, mass-media could constitute a real threat for a free society. Several European organizations have signaled the necessity to develop the actual state of the mass-media towards transparency and other democratic principles, since these means are a very significant moral guide of social conviviality and also a factor of interethnic integrity. Some analysts pointed out that, in the context of unilateral mass-media preferences, the ethnic groups identify themselves with the mentality and the problems of people living in other states, and thus cannot develop a proper feeling of citizenship and of national identity. In the long run, this molding of mentality to an external pattern may lead to ethnic tensions within society.

## **6.6. Russian-prevailing fields**

In the capital city, a great deal of the economic enterprises, organizations and institutions (many of them with great influence) use Russian as their current language on an exclusive basis, which means that all those who interact with these entities may be forced, unwillingly, to speak



Russian. This fact is indirectly visible in advertising street banners, where Russian slogans are palpable behind rudimentary Romanian translations<sup>74</sup>, or in the Russian language press, where advertisements are more predominant than in the Romanian language press. Also, economic entrepreneurs prefer to buy advertising space in Russian language publications.

The status of the Russian language throughout society gained weight in the recent years. According to a Gallup Poll, the proportion of Moldovans who consider that Russian should be studied by children increased from 27% in 2006 to 39% in 2007.<sup>75</sup> The 2002 attempt to introduce mandatory Russian language classes in primary schools led many intellectuals to stating that this is a most unsolicited act which erodes the ethnic conscience of the native population, although a proper dialogue with the Russian community is very desirable. Intense public protests prevented the Government from adopting this decision. This was one of the most notable attempts of officializing Russian language.

Another research from October 2007 shows that 61% of the interviewees have a positive attitude towards Moscow's support of Russian language in Moldova.<sup>76</sup> An explanation for the growing interest in Russian is the fact that it is progressively a necessity in daily life, especially in the cities and in the economic fields.<sup>77</sup> The Moldovan economic elite is mostly Russified. Another factor are the intensified cultural exchanges with Moscow, doubled by the disappearance of some Romanian mass-media, notably the Romanian national television channel, whose license to air at national level was withdrawn in 2007. It was commented that this was a political decision meant to eliminate the sole supplier of 100% Romanian information in the Republic.

Another example of a situation where the status of the Russian language is overstated is that of mixed marriages within which one of the persons is Russian-speaking. The children resulted from these marriages are not always bilingual, as one should expect, but in several cases they are only taught Russian and go on to embark upon Russian education at school. In such families, the Russian-speaking persons (especially if the mother is Russophone) still manifest their complex of superiority and impose their language on the other members. This could be interpreted as reminiscence from a social micro-level policy of the USSR, when Russian women were

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<sup>74</sup> Examples of such slogans are: “*Adună-ți mașina ta!*” – with reference to creating your own car out of pieces; “*Dacă cafea, atunci...*” – an unacceptable mistake in Romanian; “*Ne-am deschis.*” – an improper expression for the inauguration of a shop; or “*Confirmă-ți statusul!*” – a slogan for LCD TVs, persuading people to show off their wealth. These examples are hilarious, almost ridiculous, from the point of view of language authenticity.

<sup>75</sup> apud Stela Popa, *Influența limbii ruse descrește în plan mondial dar crește în Republica Moldova!* (*The Influence of Russian Is Decreasing at a Global Level but Is Increasing in the Republic of Moldova!*), Botoșani and Dorohoi Journal, August 8<sup>th</sup> 2007, available at <http://www.jurnalulbtd.ro/articol-Influenta-limbii-ruse-descreste-in-plan-mondial-dar-creste-in-Republica-Moldova-16-1549.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>77</sup> It is significant to note in this context that the quality of Russian learning has decreased compared to the period prior to the '90s. Generally, those who were taught Russian after the '90s speak this language more poorly than those who were taught before.

instruments of assimilation and Russification throughout the Soviet republics and their “task” was to raise their children in a Russian culture environment.<sup>78</sup> Mixed marriages, where one of the members had Russian origin, enjoyed a great support in the times of the Union<sup>79</sup>, since, ultimately, no matter the other ethnic origin, the children would be Russian too. In 2006, mixed marriages accounted for 28,8% of the total number of marriages in the Republic<sup>80</sup>, with more accentuated tendencies in the urban environment than in the rural one. The Russian men and women displayed the largest proportion of mixed marriages, with approximately two thirds of them having married with a person of a different ethnic belonging. It is the family’s choice whether the child follows Romanian or Russian education, but the tendency is now towards bilingual raising, since this is deemed a necessity in today’s society. On the other hand, children from mixed families learning at Romanian schools have been described as more aware of their identity, more self-assured, and thus generally above the average of the class. This is because Russian culture manages to imprint a larger respect and interest for education than the confused Moldovan culture.

## 6.7. Conclusions on the status of the official language versus Russian

The status of the official language still remains today a political argument or a means in the election campaign, or a factor to introduce tension within society. For example, the *Moldovan-Romanian Dictionary* of 2003, arranged by Vasile Stati, a work which forcefully and absurdly tries to tear apart the identity of the Romanian and Moldovan language, is reminiscent of the ridiculous attempts of manufacturing a nation’s culture during the Sovietization period. Saluted as a “lie”, an “aberration”, a “certificate of stupidity”, a “treachery of common sense”, a “monstrosity”<sup>81</sup>, this dictionary is regarded even by the Academy of Sciences in Moldova, which never contributed to it, as an “absurdity, serving political purposes”<sup>82</sup>. Such instances of political linguistic manipulation

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<sup>78</sup> Nicolae Dabija, *Rusoaicele – 2 (Russian Women – part 2)*, *Moldova Suverană*, issue 183, 2008, available at [http://www.moldova-suverana.md/index.php?subaction=showcomments&id=1226581179&archive=1226924387&start\\_from=&ucat=7&](http://www.moldova-suverana.md/index.php?subaction=showcomments&id=1226581179&archive=1226924387&start_from=&ucat=7&).

<sup>79</sup> For example, in the Soviet Republic of Moldova, mixed marriages had reached a quota of 30% from the total number of marriages. In the urban areas, one in two marriages was interethnic. It was the highest percentage throughout the USSR. (*same source as above*).

<sup>80</sup> [http://www.statistica.md/public/files/serii\\_de\\_timp/populatie/miscarea\\_naturala/2.2.15.xls](http://www.statistica.md/public/files/serii_de_timp/populatie/miscarea_naturala/2.2.15.xls).

<sup>81</sup> various authors, *Un monument al minciunii și al urii – “Dicționarul moldovenesc-românesc” al lui Vasile Stati (A Monument of Lie and Hate – “The Moldovan-Romanian Dictionary” of Vasile Stati)*, *Contrafort*, issue 7-8/2003, available at <http://www.contrafort.md/2003/105-106/570.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Ion Bărbuță, member of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Moldova, at [http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limba\\_moldoveneasc%C4%83](http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limba_moldoveneasc%C4%83).

are even to be found at smaller levels of society – in the summer of 2008, people who were crossing the border from Moldova to Romania, through the customs of Leușeni/Albița, were given forms to fill out, written in Ukrainian or Russian, and the officers repeatedly refused to supply Romanian forms.<sup>83</sup> Or, last year in Chișinău, license plates beginning with the letter “K” were spotted (the standard letter is “C”, from the city’s name).<sup>84</sup> While the Ministry for Informational Development declared these numbers were introduced at some drivers’ request, this situation not only implies that the city name has unknowingly changed, or that the alphabet has changed (K is a rather uncommon letter for the Latin alphabet and there are no place names in Moldova beginning with K), but also that the Russian name of the city – Kishinev – is being used (this would contravene the language legislation, which does not allow the use of other names but the Romanian-origin ones).

These examples may seem at first irrelevant for the status of intercultural dialogue, yet the truth is that these gradual movements fuelled by the ambiguous national policy and the interest of some partakers have impeded the dialogue with the ethnic minorities by dividing the society into groups with antagonistic purposes. A clearly-established official language, with no contradictions within the law and no room for interpretation regarding the use of the minority languages would obviously offer a more considerable support for the social integration policies.

The state has not managed to thoroughly implement its desired goals regarding the official language. The status of the official language is uncertain and ambiguous at the moment, and by far it is not fulfilling the proper functions of an official language. There are still domains where it is tacitly rejected or avoided. This happens especially in the areas where the administrative organs cannot control sufficiently the correct linguistic implementations.

Knowledge of the official language throughout society is an incentive for social cohesion and provides citizens with equal treatment in the face of the law. Therefore, the cultural rights of the minorities are not yet fully exercised due to the lack of Romanian knowledge. Reasons for this vary, although the proper conditions for its study do exist. Mainly, there are still certain groups with no interest in studying the official language and they exercise a negative pressure for stable and positive intercultural relations. These groups maintain Russian language, informally, at a level which by far surpasses the status established by the law. The state’s intervention in regulating the linguistic matter should be more enforcing at the practical level.

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<sup>83</sup> Declaration of a witness, <http://tudorcojocari.wordpress.com/2008/08/07/declaratii-in-rusa-si-ucraineana-de-completat-la-vama-rm-romania/>.

<sup>84</sup> See <http://www.protv.md/stiri/social/in-loc-de-chisinau-kisinev.html>.

## 7. Practical aspects of intercultural relations

The general opinion in the Moldovan society is that the country has a levelheaded policy regarding the ethnic groups, resonating with the international standards and without causing havoc. But in the view of some, the implementation of all these norms leaves a lot to be desired. There has been little concern towards stimulating a proper interethnic dialogue or collaboration. Judging from the three complex factors I mentioned in “Explanation of terms” that should define intercultural relations in a state – intercultural communication, cultural identity and unifying cultural policy – the Republic seems an empty shell. Although, except the '92 Gagauz crisis, there have been no significant interethnic tensions and they are unlikely to appear nowadays, although the interethnic relations in daily life are generally harmonious, cordial, based on mutual respect and understanding, intercultural dialogue is in several instances minimum, cultural identity is fragmented into more leading directions, and a cultural policy is still in its primal form, since no common goals have been traced out for the majority and the minorities. There have been little attempts to even the North and South, for example, areas with different ethnic distribution and with differences at several levels. The ethnic groups on the territory of the Republic are more closed than open, with little exchange between them.

According to a research carried out throughout the year 2005, no specific trend can be assessed regarding the evolution of the intercultural relations, although the general trend is that of improvement. The Moldovans display the largest proportion of interviewees who believe that the relations with the ethnic minorities have improved throughout the past 15 years, except the relations with the Russian, which more respondents believe have either stagnated or degraded. The reciprocal stance is valid too, but, although there are many Russian interviewees reluctant to believe in the progress of Russian-Moldovan dialogue in the past 15 years, they are outnumbered by those who believe in a development of these relations. According to the same research, the Moldovans exhibit the smallest amount of trust in the other ethnic groups, and also maintain the greatest social distance from them. While only 36% of the Moldovans trust the Russians, and only 42% of them trust the Romanians, the Russians trust the Moldovans in a proportion of 71% and the Romanians in a proportion of 52%. The study concludes, as an alarm signal, that the evolution of the whole

society is blocked because of the so different perceptions of the daily life, and that the civic identity is poorly defined, a clue of the absence of a well-forged national identity in this given territory<sup>85</sup>.

An issue to address for the progress of the intercultural framework should indeed be the existence of common political values. But the Moldovan civil society lacks a political culture<sup>86</sup>, since several researches from the *Barometer of Public Opinion* shed light on an undecided population, more willing to adhere to a mono-party political situation (like during the Communist regime) than to identify the party able to lead the country on a beneficent path. The ethnic tensions which separate the usual citizens are usually the result of the tensions existent at the level of political parties. In Moldovan politics, being pro-Russian is often synonymous to being anti-Romanian, a polarization which has most harmful effects on a healthy national policy. An example for the absence of a firm political mind in the common individual is that the political vote is still cast nowadays on geopolitical reasons mostly. Voters are likely to judge not from the point of view of the social orientation of the party, or the agenda of the respective party, but from the point of view of the geopolitical orientation of that party. The dichotomy European Union – Russia thus becomes the sole decision factor for the free and democratic vote.

## **7.1. Factors which burden the intercultural dialogue**

One factor which could induce intercultural tension is a broader perception that some legal elements and situations advantage one minority at the cost of others. This opinion varies with each ethnic group and the laws themselves are not completely accountable for its existence; rather, it is a deeply-rooted phenomenon which Igor Boțan calls “ethnic selfishness”<sup>87</sup>. In the years following the independence, the leaders of ethnic communities, be they minority or majority, promoted exclusively the interests of that respective group. At the core of this phenomenon lie two different and interconnected perceptions, common to the ex-Soviet states: first, the belief that the minorities were the most oppressed and discriminated under the old regime, and special measures should be taken to avoid future similar situations; and second, a perception very characteristic to the minorities’ elites that the minority in general is a victim of historic injustice (in this case

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<sup>85</sup> *Ethnobarometer – Republic of Moldova*, October 24<sup>th</sup> 2005, available at <http://www.ipp.md/biblioteca.php?l=ro&idc=36>.

<sup>86</sup> The concept of “civil society” itself is very vague in the Moldovan society.

<sup>87</sup> Igor Boțan, *quoted works*, p. 12.

assimilation and Russification) which should be presently corrected by granting a special status. After the disintegration of the Union, those groups that gained the new status of minority were particularly those groups which hitherto constituted either the majority, or the group with most influence or power. The common opinion was that the minorities were engaged in a fight aiming for more rights, while the majority had to prove it did not threaten these rights.

To point out the concrete situation in Moldova, the minorities are prone to believe that the Moldovans are advantaged since they are more numerous, theirs is the official language and they have gained access to important political and administrative functions after the national movement of the '90s, thus replacing representatives of other ethnic groups. Similarly, some voices of the minorities would regard with suspicion Romanian support in the cultural field. Beginning with the '90s, such a situation has been interpreted more than once as a threat for a well-established status, as a means to deviate national interests to Romanian ones.

On the other hand, Moldovans themselves think they are disadvantaged in face of other ethnic groups, particularly the Russians (and some other Russian-speaking citizens). One reason is the legal framework which, when consulted, displays a positive discrimination in the favor of the Russian-speaking individuals (as discussed in a previous chapter). Developments in the recent years, with Russian gaining more proportion generally, work to illustrate this stance. Another reason stems from the fact that before the '90s, the Russians and some of the Ukrainians were indeed more advantaged, as they enjoyed higher living standards, generally in the urban areas, enjoyed better jobs, usually in the industry, and also had more access to official and administrative functions. This situation perpetuated today in the economic field, where Russians and Ukrainians still own the major businesses and, hence, there is a tendency to support Russian throughout the economic sector in Moldova.

Last but not least, minorities like the Gagauz and the Bulgarians are thought to be disadvantaged, mostly due to economic factors – they are concentrated in the poorer regions of the South, with high proportions of them living in rural areas. Some believe that the Gypsies are disadvantaged too, because of the lack of social integration and the absence of official initiative in this direction.

The positions above are not visible in the daily life conviviality and generally one ethnic group understands the attitude of another ethnic group with which it shares a territory. This tacit acceptance is mostly noticeable in the rural areas.

However, the positions of the ethnic groups often become antagonistic on political issues<sup>88</sup>. Political debates produced at times such an impact on the intercultural environment, that the situation was compared to a civil war.<sup>89</sup> The themes which could generate contrasting opinions in an intercultural dialogue are:<sup>90</sup>

1. the history of the Moldovan state and the national identity – these are closely related to issues of language, of state configuration and foreign policy options. The discussion regarding the identity is still a very tangible debate, more like a vicious circle, leading to more and more controversy. Basically<sup>91</sup> the Romanian-origin group, now referred to as Moldovans, affiliates itself to the idea that the Romanian identity was lost while under the Russian occupation and now it should be regained. During the ‘90s, their attempt to assume a Romanian cultural identity met the opposition of the minorities but also of some fellows-alike, who feared a political identification with Romania. This led to a loss of equilibrium and credibility within the group, which came to be divided into several identity-seeking directions. Therefore, though this group represents the majority, it is at the same time the most fragile group from the point of view of the identity. On the other hand, the minorities are prone to believing in the path of a distinct Moldovan nation, who began to affirm itself particularly after the ‘90s. They cling on to this stance because they feel it offers them the most protection as ethnic groups. For some, it is a means of maintaining the status of the Russian culture. There are Ukrainians and Russians who already call themselves Moldovans (of Ukrainian or Russian origin) and they resent the possibility of the majority nearing Romania, because this would lead to the loss of their own identity. Discussions on these matters never led to a clear result and their future is somber as well. A persistent and rather recent example of discussions on identity matters is the cultural change planned at the beginning of 2002 by some representatives in the Government - the replacement of the “History of Romanians” classes in schools with “History of Moldova”, a measure deemed by many as another of the many attempts to deform the national identity. Although the Government went on with passing this decision, it had to withdraw it subsequently, due to prolonged protesting. Since 2006, history classes are held under the name “Integrated History”, still raising disputes

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<sup>88</sup> These are not political issues in the true sense of the word, but issues which, under the circumstances in the Republic of Moldova, gained a significant political weight.

<sup>89</sup> On January 17<sup>th</sup> 2002, the writer Ion Druță wrote an open letter to the president stating that “politically, the Republic of Moldova is in a continuous and undeclared civil war”. The circumstances were those of prolonged protests concerning issues of national identity, history and language.

<sup>90</sup> Some of the themes here were pointed out by Igor Boțan, *quoted works* .

<sup>91</sup> This classification is a large one, for the sake of this study, and it eludes other pertinent, but less frequent views.

regarding the anti-nationalist and xenophobic content of the manuals, or the fact that they promote the same Moldovan-Romanian differentiation thesis sustained by the Soviets. The accusations of a mystified history, more faithful to the Russian stance than to the exact historical truth, fuel prolonged discussions in society, at several levels, polarizing the partakers.

2. themes regarding the languages – I will not insist here, since I already tackled this in a previous chapter. Generally, the discussion revolves around the introduction of mandatory Russian classes in schools, around discriminatory laws or treatments concerning the languages, Russian language especially, around the disfavoring of one group or another on language terms
3. the orientation of the country at international level - this is one of the most scorching debates, with visible effects and reactions throughout society, and it is even more so due to the expected elections of this year.<sup>92</sup> Most citizens support a pro-European stance, with the final goal of Moldova joining the EU<sup>93</sup>, but the ethnic minorities prefer a foreign policy steered towards Russia. The *Barometer of Public Opinion* noticed on more occasions that the Russian minority supports Russia's view irrelevant of the subject. And an official antagonistic positioning in the relation Russia-Moldova polarizes the society in Russians versus Moldovans. An example is the recent war in Georgia, which divided the citizens into two groups: the Russian minority and a fraction of the rest of the population supported Russia's actions, while a part of the Romanian-origin population defended Georgia's stance. There is a great connection here with the mass-media – while the first category is prone to obtaining information from Russian-based mass-media, the latter category is generally the same category which prefers foreign sources of information.
4. the political organization of the country – while the Romanian-origin population promotes either a reunion with Romania, or a conservation of the current configuration, the Russians and other Russian-speaking representatives fear Moldova's bonding with Romania and sustain the formula of the federal state with Transnistria. In order to reconcile the unity of the various communities, many adjoined the federalism proposal as a viable solution for the Republic. Still, the ethnic geography of the country is

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<sup>92</sup> For the 2009 elections, external influence is very active in the Republic. It is not only an object of internal political transactions or even manipulations, but also an independent subject which can shape and modify the power relations between the internal political actors. Some parties even use international objections as a form of attacking their adversaries and obtaining advantages on their own behalf.

<sup>93</sup> 72% of the interviewees were in favor of Moldova joining the EU, according to the *Barometer* of April 2008 (available at [http://www.ipp.md/files/Barometru/2008/bop\\_apr\\_2008\\_prezentare1.ppt](http://www.ipp.md/files/Barometru/2008/bop_apr_2008_prezentare1.ppt)).

However, there is a confusion among the pro-Europeans in what concerns the path that can lead the country to such a goal. There are citizens who believe that closer relations with Russia will help their country join the EU.



heterogeneous and complex; apart from the Bulgarian – and Gagauz-populated territories, there is no situation where a certain language corresponds to a certain territory. And historical examples of federations and countries with bilingual or multilingual systems prove that a territorial linguistic separation is the basis for such a venture, since the *personality principle* alone cannot sustain it.<sup>94</sup> Even in a more compact region like Gagauz Yeri the legal provisions served no truly intercultural purpose, since the establishing of the three official languages only contributed to maintaining the superiority of Russian, in administration and education altogether. And so is the case with Transnistria, where the self-proclaimed three official languages (Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan) only served propagandistic purposes, and the actual linguistic situation is a very eloquent example of perpetuating the MSSR. There are many who argue in this sense that the Kozak project of federalization will increase the influence of Russian in the public sphere<sup>95</sup> and it would lead in time to an increasing Russian control in Moldova and even to the loss of the Moldovan state.

5. the Transnistrian conflict – although the citizens are not interested followers of its evolution and proved they can even settle with political ambiguity, it is a matter which, when brought into discussion, polarizes the Moldovans and the Russians, and therefore it is used as an advantage in the election campaign. Depending on the ethnic group, the conflict may turn out to have completely different causes and resolutions. The Russian community sticks to an ethnic explanation of the conflict, arguing that the Moldovans are intolerant and insensitive to linguistic and territorial claims and that the separation was an act of defending minority rights. Reality actually contradicts their stance. The true source of the claims, the conflict and the subsequent events is in the discontent of the political Transnistrian elites, whose well-established positions in the social and political hierarchy lost their significance along with the new rise of Bessarabian politicians, in the context of the national movement. Also, the leaders of the Russian community are unable to propose a solution for Transnistria which would take into account the whole of the country; separatism is a definitive state for them. Moldovans insist on a political dimension of the conflict, with considerable Russian implication in tensioning the situation, and propose that Transnistria reunites with the state.

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<sup>94</sup> The case of Belgium, Canada or Switzerland, where a monolingual territorial structure is doubled by a multilingual institutional framework, and where linguistic diversity has become a part of the national identity. History also proves that a symmetric functioning of two languages, on an equal basis, within the same borders, is not a viable structure, unless they are geographically delimited.

<sup>95</sup> Ion Țurcanu, *quoted works*.

6. the church – historically, although the Bessarabian church was tied to Bucharest during Romanian leadership, it had been connected to Moscow for a much longer time. The existence of two Metropolitan Churches, that of Bessarabia (under the canonical jurisdiction of the Romanian Patriarchy), and that of Moldova (under Russian jurisdiction) is an issue pertaining to social tension and instability, when the Church should be an essential factor in shaping the national identity. This administrative partition could be prone to inducing an ethnic separation as well, despite the fact that religiousness is a deeply-rooted trait for almost the entire population. Although the literature lacks studies on the ethnic-religious phenomenon in the independent Moldova, it is natural that supporters of the Church of Bessarabia belong to the same group which supports the cause of the Romanian-origin population. And, since the Church is a sensitive matter for the ethnic representatives, adherence to a particular Church was used in several cases for political purposes. For example, after the reactivation in 1992 of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, the Popular Christian-Democratic Party, whose vice-president was one of the key supporters of reactivation, gained more political weight, managing to attract the followers of this Church. Currently, the position of both churches contains a significant dose of state intervention, and therefore the clerical life is rather politicized. There is a great deal of state control in the Metropolitan Church of Moldova, and so this church has a larger domination in the territory. The Russian-origin orthodoxy that this church promotes is mostly traceable in the rural areas, where often the whole ensemble of religious practices belongs to a Russian framework.

Those accomplishments and future expectations which do not seem to upset any participants in an intercultural dialogue are large economic and social themes, usually referring to the well-being of the country. For example, corruption in some state organs as well as developments in the process of democratization are subjects upon which all citizens are expected to agree. Although the policy of the state towards the minorities is a risk factor for the intercultural backdrop, there are also some examples of the state's intervention in interethnic relations which have been saluted with enthusiasm by all sides, like the status granted to Gagauz Yeri, or the legal support for Ukrainian schools and for a Ukrainian paper. Apart from other official regulations, these have been carried out without bringing prejudice or discrimination to the rest of the ethnic groups. Moreover, conforming the legislation to European or international standards has always been supported by all groups.

There is a further point to add here. The multiethnic character of the USSR and the tentacles of its national policy have left as inheritance a high potential for "ethnicization", that is the reduction of any social conflict to an ethnic one. The appearance of a slight tension, of a different

nature than ethnic, within a community like the Gagauz one, saluted and recognized by all ethnic groups, is susceptible to be interpreted as an ethnic one and to polarize the society according to ethnic criteria. For example, political disputes between the central authorities and the Gagauz authority in January 2002, concerning the use of some financial funds, immediately triggered an ethnic interpretation, very much like the stance adopted during the Transnistrian conflict by some ethnic minorities, who saw in this the refusal of Chişinău to recognize certain social freedoms. Another example at a micro-level of society is an event of the recent years in Bălţi, when a pro-Romanian political party (PL) was trying to win supporters and soon this activity triggered a fight between the party's representatives and some Russians. However, in many of the cases above, it is hard to separate the political interference from the actual ethnic conflict. Ethnicity becomes a molding material for the political elite and it's the ethnic uncertainty and flexibility that allows such situations. This is, again, an effect of "the syndrome of compelled ethnicity" I mentioned in the introductory chapter. The historical manipulation of the ethnic by the political has thus led to a twisted effect once democracy installed. Now ethnic problems are reanimated for political purposes. The political press has it on its daily agenda to give ethnic contours to non-ethnic issues. On the other hand, the civil society has begun to intuit in the recent years a manipulation from a higher tribune.

## **7.2. Intercultural stereotypes and perceptions in the Moldovan/Romanian - Russian relation**

Historically, the Soviet ideology cultivated for decades the stereotype of the Soviet man, with a less developed ethnic conscience, and who recognized implicitly the superiority of the Russian culture over his own culture, and the role of the Russian language in the communication with the other ethnic groups. For the Bessarabians who acknowledged this doctrine, its effect became apparent during the contact with a Russian-origin person, a situation in which the Bessarabian person suffered a true complex of ethnic inferiority. To shed away this complex, some Bessarabians gave up their ethnic belonging and cultivated Russian inside their families, arguing that their mother tongue would never actually manage to supply them the social success of a Russian-origin person. The stereotype of the "Moldovan" who differs from the "Romanian" was thus prepared a good terrain. In the long term, it proved as a stable and irrelinquishable ethnic construct, since it still holds firmly today.

Yet, an ethnic complex of the sort I described in the latter paragraph is apparent throughout this population which designates itself with the name “Moldovan”<sup>96</sup>. It stems from the uncertain identity that has been molded to and fro within society, from political ambitions, in the past two decades. Depictions of the ethnic stereotypes suggest that the all ethnic groups except the Moldovans enjoy the respect for their cultures and traditions. The Moldovan group is not associated with the idea of cultural power, or even that of cultural integrity, and hence it appears as a less respected group from outside depictions. As I will describe below, the social paradigm and the civic conscience of the people are still imbued with deformed clichés acquired prior to the installing of democracy.

The Moldovan individuals usually regard the concept of citizenship in the Republic of Moldova as a vague one. Their identity, as described from within the group, is confused and hesitant, testifying the lack of a common political and historical conscience, the effect of the influences that shaped indefinitely and irrationally their ethnic belonging. On the other hand, the minorities are more prone to characterize the status of being a citizen in the Republic of Moldova with optimistic terms, sometimes even with pride. While preserving and cultivating tradition is an act which characterizes all the ethnic groups, for the Moldovans and the Russians this correlation is perceived as a weaker one. It is important to note these aspects because they also influence the perception from outside the group.

Moldovans are usually regarded by the other minorities as peaceful, cheerful, calm, common sense individuals, yet prone to passivity. They are perceived as a disoriented group from the point of view of identity, but also undecided and inactive on most identity issues. They are generally associated with a less dynamic way of life, prone to medium education and a rural environment, to agricultural works, although their true depiction as an ethnic group would cover all social and intellectual categories. They are also characterized by a rough, unpolished grasp of the language. Being Moldovan is synonymous to speaking a poor Romanian. They are also perceived as easily impressed by Eastern-origin products, much more than Western-origin ones. Though they are deemed by many as the rightful rulers of the country, the perception of them as a less competitive, disorganized, sometimes even gullible group, is a major draw-back. From this point of view, they are seen as “milking cows”; also, they are expected to be surpassed by members of other ethnic origin. They are sometimes the target of ironical jokes.

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<sup>96</sup> In this section, the term Moldovan refers to those Bessarabian Romanian individuals who consider they have a Moldovan nationality above all. The term Romanian will refer to the Romanian ethnic group, but also to those considering they have a Romanian nationality above all.

The outside perception of the Russian community is largely dictated by the fact that they are associated with a greater culture.<sup>97</sup> However, this triggers different levels of interpretation – while for some, Russians are dignified, daring, sociable and very hearty persons, usually associated with prestige, dynamism and development, with prosperity and freedom, prone to an urban lifestyle and to high-class jobs, for other categories Russians seem arrogant individuals, frustrated by losing their privileged status of the past, culturally unaware, lacking intercultural empathy, not willing to learn other languages, prone to conflicts and to inducing tension, still clinging on to their imperialist behavior. Along with the Moldovans, they are considered a ruling ethnic group, and they are also associated with economic success, although their way of negotiating is usually unpredictable and gluttonous. They have a natural born tendency towards competition. Their mentality is generally perceived as being defensive and dominant at the same time, since at present they are foreigners in a country they used to rule. In conflicts, they usually reply aggressively<sup>98</sup> and are not willing to compromise. They are deemed more educated than the Moldovans. The Russian elite is usually deemed more powerful than the Moldovan one, and even the Romanian one. There is a common confusion regarding this ethnic group, since the masses sometimes have the tendency to associate the label “Russian” with all Russian-speaking individuals, irrelevant of their ethnic origin. Thus, even Ukrainians or Gagauz are sometimes considered Russians and are attributed the stereotypes described above.

Romanians are generally regarded as civilized and educated persons, as people with a very solid identity and historical background, prone to preserving tradition, but also open to development, especially as promoters of European values. They are firm nationalists, devoted to their identity. They are associated with the idea of culture. They are also appreciated for their clean vocabulary and good grasp of the language. On the other hand, minorities have a tendency to take distance from Romanians and describe them as harmful people, willing to banish the Russian population from the country and to unite Bessarabia with Romania at any cost.<sup>99</sup> In their view, Romanians are less tolerant than the Moldovans, radical in their behavior and claims, even willing to embrace lies in reaching a goal. There is a difference of perception between the Romanians in Romania and those living in Moldova – the latter are not anchored in this identity and are considered pitiable in their attempt of proving their origins.

Common stereotypes provide for the moment material for only a few lines, since the personality traits Moldovans/Romanians and Russians admit they have in common are hospitality and a certain *joie de vivre*. Researches add to these traits reciprocal help, which is a common

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<sup>97</sup> This is the only group in the Republic associated with a greater culture on a constant and perennial basis by all other groups.

<sup>98</sup> A trait they recognize themselves.

<sup>99</sup> Ukrainians in particular have this negative opinion towards Romanians.

characteristic inside each ethnic group, and tolerance. All groups have a tendency towards tolerance and towards annihilating aggressiveness. While Moldovans perceive themselves as a more distanced community, Russians deem they are a warm group. All ethnic groups are oriented towards openness, future and change, yet at different levels – Russians and Gagauz are the most open to change. Russians and Bulgarians are also risk-taking individuals. While Moldovans, Ukrainians and Gagauz display submissive traits, Russians and Bulgarians are more oriented towards independence of will. Russians in particular are very oriented to individualistic values.

### **7.3. Elites and symbols significant for intercultural relations**

On a close inspection of the values that contour the identity, one can notice than in the Republic of Moldova there aren't any symbols of culture common to all individuals, which is a predictable fact in the context of the lack of a normative consensus, a solid identity, a unifying political idea. For the values that exist, their influence stretches as far as the group which promotes them. Generally, one group has respect for another group's value, yet this behavior varies from one case to another.

The Moldovan system of values is built around renowned historical leaders, before any Russian occupation took over the territory – Voivode Bogdan, Alexander the Good, Stephen the Great, Dimitrie Cantemir, and also around great writers like Mihai Eminescu or Vasile Alecsandri. However, one can notice a selection in judging the works of these authors, since the nationalistic creations are usually not taken into account. Contemporary illustrious Moldovans are not so easy to name, and actually the Moldovan elite is considered to be very fragile, almost inexistent, with few intellectuals defending and promoting the Moldovan identity. One example is Ion Druță, a “writer of the people” as he is usually deemed, and who has been very active in the recent years in supporting the idea of a Moldovan people. Moldovans take pride in celebrating *Independence Day* (August 27<sup>th</sup>) and *Language Day* (August 31<sup>st</sup>). It is important to notice that the Moldovans in the Republic of Moldova have the same system of values and symbols like those from the Moldovan region of Romania (values which are common to Romanians in the Republic too).

Russians too cling on to great historical figures, like Vladimir, Peter the Great, Alexander Suvorov, but also to great artistic figures, like Dostoyevsky, Chekhov and Pushkin. Yet they mostly associate themselves with present day TV or music icons, with the presence of capital, of mass-media empires, of celebrity glamour or of the 14<sup>th</sup> Guards Army (in Transnistria). A fraction of the

Russians identify themselves with the concept of a great Russian empire and manifest nostalgia for the USSR. One of the significant celebrations for the Russians in Moldova is February 23<sup>rd</sup>, *The Day of the Defender of the Motherland*.

Romanians put forward the same historical leaders like the Moldovans, with great devotion for Stephen the Great, and figures of culture, like Mihai Eminescu, Mircea Eliade, Lucian Blaga, Tudor Arghezi, without being selective about their works. On the contrary, they would emphasize the nationalistic aspects of writers like Eminescu or Grigore Vieru. The present elite is a strong point of this group, since it is composed of more individuals with great merits, who contributed efficiently to cultural acts, like Mihai Cimpoi, Grigore Vieru, Nicolae Dabija, Ion Hadârcă, and their activity in this field is the most vigorous compared to the rest of the ethnic groups. Romanians put great value on celebrations like December 1<sup>st</sup> – Great Unification of Romania, March 27<sup>th</sup> – Unification of Bessarabia with Romania, but also August 27<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> like Moldovans do, with the mention that these two latter days hold a rather different significance for Romanians, since they take pride in the involvement in the national movement and the independence of Moldova. The Romanians consider rightfully that it was their group that liberated Moldova from the USSR. The Romanian elite states as its goal the national awakening of Moldovans, and the unification with Romania.

It is a common perception among all ethnic groups that the structures most able to change the course of intercultural relations are generally structures with political power, and their influence is not necessary seen as a positive one, depending on the ethnic group chosen as reference. Each group favors parties or individuals whose activity is perceived as having results on the well-being of the interethnic background. Also, the mass-media is a decisive factor in defining the system of values for each ethnic group and in shaping the interethnic stereotypes.

#### **7.4. A daily life approach of the intercultural in the urban and rural environment**

In what follows, I will concentrate on depicting the habitual lifestyle of individuals from the point of view of intercultural contacts, of what motivates them, of the decisions taken in this context. The geographic space will be the organizing element of the social phenomena, since I will depict the situation first in the urban environment, and then in the rural environment. The basic difference is that, while the rural population is more homogenous structurally, and therefore the

intercultural relations here bear a pattern, a specific behavior and a rhythm, the urban population is very diverse from the point of view of social roles in intercultural relations, rather impossible to categorize, and hence I will tackle this population in a descriptive and inexhaustive analysis. The accent will be placed on the Moldovan/Romanian-Russian interactions.

The urban community is based on the concept of individuality in intercultural relations. The modernization and other processes have led to the weakening of family ties, of the adherence to tradition or to a strong social community. The heterogeneous structure of the population following migrations led to a downfall of the traditional lifestyle and its replacement by a sometimes improper one. The closer contact of the native population with other ethnic groups in the intercultural process favored the assimilation of new lifestyle elements, which were then disseminated to the peripheral regions. As an effect of the Russian ambition of industrialization, the main cities in the Republic owe a great deal in their advance to the foreign population, which now constitutes the minorities. Russians are still a rather numerous ethnic minority in several cities (compared to rural areas), but they have not integrated in the indigenous cultural environment. Their mentality and cultural paradigms have suffered little change throughout the years since their infusion in the Moldovan urban landscape. Russians urban communities are still highly connected to a Russian cultural and informational framework. The city itself (Chişinău and Bălţi notably) bases a large proportion of its financial, economic, trade and even media flows on Russian activities.

The young and educated urban generation, formed of individuals who did not witness the USSR, forms a distinct category from the rest of society. Both Romanians/Moldovans and Russians manifest a clear identification with one's own group. They display a high rate of tolerance<sup>100</sup>, but also respect and curiosity towards the individuality and the originality of *the other*. Social distance has a low quotient at this level, which determines a closer intercultural interaction. At the level of these groups, respect triggers a fading of the cultural stereotypes, and also an intertwining of the cultural values. Researches among the young people of Chişinău have shown that there is almost an identity between the self-perception of the Moldovans/Romanians and the way they are perceived by the Russian groups they interact with, which suggests a very positive context for intercultural relations<sup>101</sup>. Cultural values tend to become symbols of one's own identity, not of one's belonging to a group. For example, a Romanian/Moldovan group may have developed a jargon of witty Russian words and phrases in order to refer positively to certain situations. This language pertains

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<sup>100</sup> Though lower in the case of the Russian group than the Moldovan/Romanian one.

<sup>101</sup> Lucia Gaşper, *Particularităţile psihologice ale identităţii etnice la adolescenţi (Psychological Aspects of Teenagers' Ethnic Identity)*, Chişinău, 2008, p. 114, available at: [http://www.cnaa.acad.md/files/theses/2008/7904/lucia\\_gasper\\_thesis.pdf](http://www.cnaa.acad.md/files/theses/2008/7904/lucia_gasper_thesis.pdf).



to the group's identity, and works solely inside the group. It doesn't have ethnic connotations. It draws its sources either from sheer Russian language, or from Russian cultural works (especially cinema).

A common scene in Chişinău and Bălţi (in Bălţi more than half of the population is Russophone) is when two people engaged in a dialogue speak each a different language – Romanian and Russian. This happens most often around trading activities (a great part of the shop sellers are Russian), but also among common citizens, or among children on a playground. Though in the past (around the '90s) this type of dialogue would lead to increasing frustrations on one side (or on both sides), even ending the discussion abruptly, today this sort of situation is perceived by both sides as a natural one, and the discussion carries on without any of the sides engaging in the other's language.<sup>102</sup> The bilingual background of the city's life ensures that both speakers understand the language of the other, without needing to compromise and resort to a monolingual discussion. Russians of an older age are generally the most tolerant and socially open in these circumstances.

Moldovan/Romanian teenagers or young people tend to accept Russians like neighbors; backwards, Russian young people tend to accept Moldovans/Romanians like colleagues. While a Russian can easily integrate within a Moldovan/Romanian young group, the reverse situation is rarely met. The presence of a Romanian/Moldovan in a Russian group generates an atmosphere of discomfort and reserve. This may indicate a mechanism of cultural protection, generated by the Russians' belief in one's distinctiveness/superiority. Even in casual gatherings with Romanian friends, Russians tend to be more elitist. While the level of acceptance is hence diminished, Russians communities display on the other hand the lowest social distance from all other groups, since the rest of the communities seek more or less directly to approach the Russian ones. Political, identity and nationality issues are rarely brought up into discussion during the contact of Romanian/Moldovan and Russian groups. It is a tacit agreement that such subjects are not worthy of being brought up, for the sake of the group's cohesion.

Rural localities where the percentage of Russians is calculable over a couple of percents are very scarce throughout Moldova. The number of minorities in rural communities intensifies with the closeness to the borders. Villages in the South are characterized by variable proportions of Gagauz and Bulgarians, while villages in the North are populated by communities of Ukrainians. Generally, the tendency in rural communities is to designate all Russian speakers as Russians. Irrelevant of their ethnic origin, Russians in rural communities are more pragmatic and more

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<sup>102</sup> Although the Romanian-speaker is more likely to switch to using Russian, than the reverse.

adapted to local habits.

The rural environment of the Republic distinguishes itself through a pronounced tendency towards conserving traditions at the level of each ethnic group.<sup>103</sup> This is intertwined with another aspect, the fact that rural communities grant a lesser extent to the aspect of separation and differentiation in intercultural contact. This is due to the social organization of the rural communities, based on collective values, but also on strong social bonds and strong family traditions. Traditions ensure the passing on of the social experience resulted from collectivism, adjust community relations and generate positive feelings for the intercultural context. This is especially emphasized in the austere social and economic conditions visible in many rural regions at the time being. Though it is less modernized, the rural population is more prone to intercultural cooperation than the urban population. Intercultural barriers and stereotypes work only in the imaginary of the individuals and thus have a smaller palpable and concrete effect in daily life. These specific traits are visible in first generation urban population as well.

Intercultural relations in the rural environment are to a great extent harmonious. This is due to the population's mentality towards appreciating the person, the human being, and not the system he/she represents. Stereotypes and prejudices are just as valid in the rural population as they are for the rest of the population, but they are imperceptible in practice. For example, although the people of an older age are aware and even witnessed the denigration of the community's church by the Russian occupation, and the harsh times of the kolkhozy, they do not voice out accusations at fellow-villagers of Russian adherence. The peasant makes a clear dissociation between the person and the politics in his interactions, and since the only element which can spoil intercultural communication in Moldova is the political one, the rural environment is very clean of tensions or conflicts. A ubiquitous feeling of brotherhood and belonging is cultivated, with roots in historical times, when foreign elements infiltrated in these parts (Russian occupation, and even before that). Therefore, as long as political views aren't expressed, the climate is peaceful and cooperative. This even stands true for Transnistrian villages, where Russians and Moldovans have cordial relations, irrelevant of the political conflict this region is involved in. Another significant point is that, due to their stability in time, rural communities have gradually built a local identity, which functions within that certain territory and is often disconnected from the trend of the regional or national identity.

Cheerfulness is a very frequent trait of the rural population. Not only do Moldovans perceive themselves as cheerful people, but they also assign this trait to the Russians and Ukrainians in their

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<sup>103</sup> According to a 2007 statistical research, 58,7% of the total population in the Republic is rural. – *National Bureau of Statistics*, <http://www.statistica.md/pageview.php?l=ro&idc=334&id=2338>. This indicates a rather high level of preserving traditions.

community – this is a proof that social gatherings and celebrations bring everyone together. The end of the day often sees the Moldovan and the Russian standing at the same table and sharing a drink. However, Moldovans are more reserved about perceiving Romanians as cheerful people.

An element in the rural life which belongs most often to the Russian culture is the church. A large proportion of the village churches are under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Church of Moldova, which means that the whole religious ritual is held in the Russian tradition. This also implies that the Julian calendar is being used, since the Russian Orthodox Church refused to accept the Revised Julian Calendar. While Romanians celebrate Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup>, Russian-style churches celebrate it on January 7<sup>th</sup>. During USSR, the use of this calendar became preeminent, so that some people would not even conceive about celebrating Christmas on a different date. Since the revival of the bond with Romania, and the reactivation of the Romanian Orthodox Church on the territory of Moldova, people with Romanian conscience have realigned their celebrations to Romanian Orthodox practices. But because religious rituals in villages with the church belonging to the Russian church cannot be officially changed, the common practice in many villages nowadays is to celebrate both holidays two times. The priest holds the sermon on both occasions. People choose to be more active around the celebration which has more meaning to them. Children do not let two occasions to carol from door to door slip by. Romanian carols are usually heard on December 24<sup>th</sup>, while Russian ones on January 7<sup>th</sup>. All in all, the celebration according to Romanian or Russian practices holds little relevance for rural inhabitants, since their religiousness is generally connected to the mere presence of a church, be it any church. Christmas date is unlikely to raise disputes or protests in rural regions, like it would do, for instance, in urban areas, where the celebration of a Christmas (i.e. the actual date) sometimes becomes a differentiating ethnic trait. Urban inhabitants would sometimes make use of the date of the Christmas day to stress their own identity and would not engage in traditional acts around the other occasion. In Chişinău for example, the double celebration of Christmas is an occasion for political schemes involving the City Hall versus the Presidency, which exceed by their mischievous nature the humane attribute of the celebration. This is another clear example of how the intercultural aspect is engulfed by other aspects, of a different kind. Rural celebrating of Christmas, on the other hand, is an example of how the intercultural can melt into a greater human feeling.

## 8. Conclusions

A community's paradigm can be modeled through education, cultural politics, elite institutions and other forms of state intervention, by cultural and political entrepreneurs whose task is to give a unified and standardized shape to the vast network of cultural connections that tie the individuals. In the Moldova of the recent 200 years, these processes have been overflowing; they functioned as political weapons at a most sought-for crossroad of the East and the West. Today, one cannot investigate the identity of the peoples of Moldova without encountering a great dose of confusion and arriving to the conclusion that this is in fact a pseudo-state entity.

Since a great deal of the population lacks a solid identity anchor, intercultural processes also bear a deformed trait. A clear-cut identity would endow the individual with a positive representation of his/her own culture as well as the other cultures, which is a basis for ethnic tolerance and intercultural dialogue. In the current economic and social context, in the nearness of the European Union and its values, the shaping of the ethnic identity in the Republic of Moldova should be a dynamic process; so should the construction of a nation be – a self-replenishing process.

Yet in the Republic of Moldova, the hesitation of some to refer to themselves as “Romanians” and “Moldovans” is indicative of the fact that so far identity has been a concept imposed aggressively on the citizen, when a multicultural society should be based on the individual's free choice under the auspices of tolerance and openness. The individual is after all the main value of the contemporary society. Moreover, the lack of a clear national identity doesn't yet manage to stimulate the efforts of the minorities to adapt to the majority's values and thus integrate them in a mutually beneficent dialogue. And the legal framework, though well intended and cleanly drawn up, stands like an ideal stance on society, whilst it is distanced from the actual situation. Its practical implementation leaves a lot to be desired.

The main factors which erode the good practice of intercultural relations, as identified throughout this paper – the lack of a unifying idea which should coagulate the population, the uncertain and ambiguous role of the official language, the problematic territorial integration – indicative of geopolitical ambitions at higher levels, the reluctance of some ethnic groups to interact at a more dynamic level, the syndrome of compelled ethnicity – are all, more or less, identifiable as political levers. The intercultural is so much imbued with political aspects, that sometimes it becomes difficult to draw a line of separation between the two. But this is the situation as seen from

the perspective of a democratic state, of something the Republic of Moldova is eager to become. The truth is that it has yet to work on formulating a national consolidating idea.

The problem still remains a thorny one, because the process of adaptation to the new historical realities is a prolonged one, which must take place carefully, so as not to trigger interethnic conflicts. The minorities should be embraced with dignity and with understanding, so that they attune themselves to the language and the respect of the majority, but at the same time, the proper conditions must be fulfilled for them to conserve their traditions. The main goal in seeking a solution for the intercultural issues in the Republic of Moldova is to develop a durable structure which would satisfy the individual and collective rights of the minorities without bringing prejudice to the rights of the majority, a structure which aims integration as a finality.

A strong organism which can communicate the idea that a “Moldovan” is in fact an umbrella-identity for all its participants, irrelevant of their ethnic origin, is more than a necessity at this moment, it is an imperative. Though it is far from becoming reality, this seems to be the only turn for a country with the historical and ethnic landscape like Moldova.

On the other hand, if one regards the situation at a micro-level, the country has –and even demonstrates - great potential for intercultural relations. For the time being in Moldova, the positive aspects of intercultural relations are triggered not by a correct and solid conscience of belonging to a certain ethnic group, but by the actual belonging to a group, in the sense of experiencing and sharing that group’s behavior. Ethnic tensions at the beginning of the ‘90s were soon absorbed in the face of the austere economic and social conditions experienced by all citizens. Though it was unfortunate, this was the all-tempering factor. Negative stereotypes and prejudices do exist, frustrations and accusations of discrimination do exist, the reluctance to be the first who takes interest in *the other* does exist, yet they all fade away when one’s daily life implies interaction with neighbors, schoolmates, business partners, shop sellers, even friends of a different ethnic origin. This is valid for the least socially open ethnic groups in Moldova as well. The mere conviviality has taught and continues to teach people aspects more important for the intercultural matter, than the state, with its official levers, does.

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