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Nation-Building and Ethnic Mobilization
in the Soviet Successor States:
The Case of Moldova

Jeff Chinn and Steven D. Roper

**NATION-BUILDING AND ETHNIC MOBILIZATION
IN THE SOVIET SUCCESSOR STATES:
THE CASE OF MOLDOVA**

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Nation-Building and Ethnic Mobilization in the Soviet Successor States: The Case of Moldova

Introduction

Until the October 1991 Soviet coup, Moldova¹, previously known as Bessarabia and the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, had never known independence, having been part of Russia, the Soviet Union or Romania for almost its entire history. Like most modern political entities, the Soviet successor state of Moldova has a multi-ethnic population. The conflicting perspectives and demands of the different ethnic groups provide the basis for today's conflict.

Moldova's post-Soviet development merits close analysis for a number of reasons: 1) the process of political and ethnic mobilization by the Moldovans aimed at creating an independent nation-state on a territory that had never been self-governing, 2) the reactive nationalism on the part of the minority populations that has resulted from the titular group's growing self-assertiveness, 3) the perceptions and potential intervention of external actors, each concerned with the position of its ethnic diaspora in the new political and social order, and 4) the varying strategies proposed and attempted to manage the resulting ethnic conflict.

This analysis will initially address the perspectives of the different actors in contemporary Moldova in the context of this territory's attempt to build a nation-state and to manage inherent differences within a developing political process. It specifically focuses upon the situation of the Russian minority in Moldova. This minority warrants study not only for its own sake, but also because it resembles Russian minorities in many of the other former Soviet republics. With 25 million ethnic Russians living outside the borders of the Russian Federation, the successor states' indigenous leaderships must find means to incorporate the Russian minorities in the new political entities that they are trying to create. To do otherwise risks internal conflict among the ethnic groups or external conflict with Moscow. The accommodative approach being taken by the Moldovan leadership toward the Russians and other minorities has enjoyed a modicum of success with the right-bank minorities joining the

¹On May 23, 1991, the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic renamed itself the Republic of Moldova, removing the "Soviet Socialist" designation and using the Romanian form of the name. The capital, known as Kishinev under Soviet rule, now uses the Romanian Chisinau. This paper will use *Moldova* and *Chisinau* except when the previous forms are found in direct quotations.

nation-building process; left-bank Russians, however, continue to pursue territorial independence.

Moldova provides a case study of a political leadership seeking a positive balance between the demands of the titular population and the rights of significant minority groups. At first, the mobilization of the Moldovan population led to a reactive nationalism on the part of the minorities that threatened not only the development of democratic institutions but also the existence of the new state. The Moldovan leaders then made efforts to accommodate the minority populations--Russian, Ukrainian and Gagauz--living in the new republic. Their success in incorporating minorities into a multi-ethnic government provides some support for the contention that accommodative rather than exclusionary policies might contribute to building multi-ethnic and potentially democratic political structures.

Nation-building can only progress in an environment in which differing ethnic points-of-view can be contained within legitimate political processes. Approaches to contain ethnic violence centered on the Dniester's left bank--cultural autonomy, territorial autonomy, and outside intervention--illustrate some of the available tools to manage ethnic conflict not only in Moldova but also in the other successor states.

Moldova: Neither a Nation nor a State

Today's independent post-Soviet successor state neither restores a previously autonomous state (like the Baltics) nor satisfies a long-suppressed nationalist aspiration (like Ukraine):

the Moldavians . . . can only be considered Romanians; they share exactly the same language, practise the same faith and have the same history. At every conceivable opportunity (in the 1870s, in 1918 and in 1941) the inhabitants of Soviet Moldavia freely opted for union with Romania and considered themselves Romanian. Furthermore--and despite persistent Russian or Soviet attempts to prove the contrary--Moldavians never sought nor achieved an independent existence as a state (Moldavia) is a territory without its own, separate nation, a political notion rather than an ethnic reality.²

Historically Moldova, the territory between the Prut and Dniester rivers known as Bessarabia, was caught between the Russian and Ottoman Empires. As a result of the war between Russia and Turkey, this area was ruled by Russian tsars from 1812 until 1918. When the Russian Empire fell, Bessarabia was incorporated into the Romanian state that emerged after World War I. It came under Soviet influence as the result of the Molotov-

²Jonathan Eyal, "Moldavians," *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union*, Graham Smith, ed., London, Longman, 1990, pp. 123-124.

Ribbentrop pact in 1939. Following the Nazi invasion in 1941, Moldova was again re-incorporated into Romania. Only after 1944 did Moldova begin functioning as a Soviet Socialist Republic. The strip of land now known as the left bank was reassigned from Ukraine to Moldova in 1940.

Moldova thus never developed independent state structures. Only since the collapse of the Soviet Union has Moldova begun the process of nation-building. Moldova is not a nation-state in the modern usage of the term.³ Lee Dutter argues that a nation-state has three features: 1) a bounded geographic area, 2) a centralized and institutionalized governmental structure engaged in social, economic and military policies and 3) an ethnically and culturally homogeneous population.⁴ Using this standard, Moldova can be said to have only the first of these features. Moldova could, therefore, be considered a territorial state which is bounded geographically but does not have a centralized governmental structure nor an ethnically or culturally homogeneous population. Dutter described the territorial state as one in which "the *physical* boundary of the regime's authority exceeds the psychological boundary of its legitimacy."⁵

John Herz argues that an important characteristic of the nation-state is sovereignty over its territory. He contends that applying force to rule one's own territory does not constitute sovereignty.⁶ Thus, the Chisinau government does not possess territorial sovereignty because it must send forces into its own territory, the Dniester area. The question confronting the Chisinau government is how can it extend its sovereignty--and establish its legitimacy--throughout its geographic boundaries?

³Mostafa Rejai and Cynthia H. Enloe, "Nation-States and StateNations," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.13, 1969, pp. 140-158; Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Its Alternatives*, New York, Knopf, 1969; Cornelia Navari, "The Origins of the Nation-State," in *The Nation-State: The Formation of Modern Politics*, Leonard Tivey, ed., New York, St. Martin's, 1981.

⁴Lee Dutter, "Theoretical Perspectives on Ethnic Political Behavior in the Soviet Union," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, June, 1990, p. 314.

⁵*Ibid.*, 314.

⁶John H. Herz, *The Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics*, New York, McKay, 1976.

Multi-Ethnicity: The Seeds of Conflict

Romanians, Ukrainians and Russians

Paradoxically, the policy of the Soviet government toward the population of Moldova was parallel to that followed by the tsars. To differentiate the Romanian character of Bessarabia from the developing Romanian state to its west, the tsarist government encouraged non-Romanian ethnic groups to settle in the territory. Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Jews, Bulgarians and Gagauz migrated to the territory with grants of land and exclusions from discriminatory legislation that they faced elsewhere in the Russian empire. These Nineteenth Century policies diluted the Romanian population in Bessarabia, with Romanians being found mostly in the rural areas, and the cities inhabited by non-Romanians. The Romanians, who constituted 80% of the population of Bessarabia in 1812, made up only 56% of the population a century later. The Soviets pursued economic policies after World War II that led to the migration of thousands of Russians and Ukrainians to Moldova, also resulting in the dilution of the indigenous population and the development of large Russian-speaking enclaves in Moldovan urban areas. Moscow's policies toward Moldova, however, were contradictory: on one hand, Moscow encouraged Moldovan nationalism as a means to sever linguistic and cultural ties with Romania; on the other hand, Moscow attempted to limit the development of a national consciousness that might be turned against the Soviet center.⁷

Moldova's borders today differ somewhat from historic Bessarabia. Some additional territory, including land historically populated by Romanians and Ukrainians, is included in present-day Moldova. The contemporary republic has a population of 4,367,000 people [1991], with 2.8 million Moldovans (ethnic Romanians) making up the largest population group (64.5%). Ukrainians are the largest minority, numbering 600,000 (13.8%). Moldova is the only Soviet successor state in which the Ukrainian minority outnumbers the Russian minority (13.0%)⁸ Of the 600,000 Ukrainians in Moldova, approximately 420,000 are rural residents whose ancestors have lived in the same region for centuries. The remainder are urban residents who moved to Moldova after World War II to become part of the labor force to work in newly developing industrial enterprises. The cities of Beltsy (with 157,000 people,

⁷Eyal, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁸For an analysis of the situation of the Ukrainian minority in Moldova, see Bohdan Nahaylo, "Ukraine and Moldova: The View from Kiev," RFE/RL *Research Report*, May 1, 1992, pp. 39-45 [NOTE: The authors wish to acknowledge the importance of the publications of the RFE/RL Research Institute for chronicling the day-to-day developments in Moldova and in the other successor states. With the passage of time, other means will become available to analyze some of this information from other perspectives. For contemporary reporting about the rapidly developing situation in Moldova, the RFE/RL publications have been invaluable].

in the north central area), and Bendery (with 130,000 people, just across the Dniester on the right bank from Tiraspol) are 70% Russian speaking, relatively equally divided between Russians and Ukrainians. Chisinau, the capital, has a population of 754,000, of which 325,272 (49.2%) are Moldovan, 174,577 (26.4%) Russian, and 94,253 (14.3%) Ukrainian.

The 560,000 Russians constitute the third largest population group, with 36% living on the left bank and 64% on the right bank. The Dniester area (left bank), where today's conflict is concentrated, is home to approximately 200,000 Russians, most of whom are post-war migrants. As Irina Livezeanu points out, the minorities are viewed as an extension of Soviet--specifically Stalinist--policies.⁹

As in the Baltic States, Sovietization in Moldova was accompanied by mass deportations and a major influx mainly of Russians but of other Slavs as well. The Russian population of the republic grew from 6% of the total in 1940 to 10.2% in 1959 . . . and in 1989 stood at 13%. According to the 1989 census, 48% of the Russians living in Moldova and 33% of the Ukrainians were born outside the borders of the republic. The Russians, the majority of whom settled in the urban centers, became a colonial elite in Moldova . . . with Russified Ukrainians assuming the role of their junior partners.¹⁰

According to William Crowther, not only did the Russian migration after World War II change the population statistics, it also impacted both the occupational and educational balance among the ethnic groups. Russians and Russian-speakers moved to the cities, took the more technical jobs and filled many of the places in educational institutions. A large number of such opportunities existed for the Russian migrants because many intellectuals moved from Bessarabia to Romania at the end of World War II or were removed from the territory during the Stalinist purges in 1940-1941 and the immediate post-war period. Thus, the Russian ethnic group and its culture dominated urban, technical and educational life.¹¹

After years of substantial Russian-speaking migration resulting from the development of heavy industry during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, Moldova, like other successor states, is currently experiencing a reverse migration process resulting in a re-indigenization of the

⁹Irina Livezeanu, "The Internationalization of Ethnic Politics in ex-Soviet Moldavia." Paper presented to the American Association of Slavic Studies Conference, Miami, November, 1991, p. 9.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹¹William Crowther, "The Politics of Ethno-National Mobilization: Nationalism and Reform in Soviet Moldavia," *The Russian Review*, April, 1991, pp. 185-6.

population. In spite of the leadership's efforts to champion a multi-ethnic society in which the cultural traditions of all of the peoples are fostered and respected, emigration data for 1991 show an outflow of 64,000 people from the republic. Of this number, 18,000 were Jews, 15,000 were Russians, 11,000 were Ukrainians, and 14,000 were Moldovans. Many went to Israel, Western Europe and the United States.¹²

A portion of this emigration is the result of the conflict on the left bank. Reports from Ukraine indicate that more than 5000 refugees from Moldova have fled to the Odessa region. Ukraine has tried to seal its border with Moldova to reduce both arms shipments and refugee flows. Ukraine has been particularly concerned about Russian intervention in the Dniester situation and the movement of Russian Cossacks crossing the border to fight for the Dniester Russians against Chisinau.

The Gagauz Minority

Another large population group, the Gagauz, while not indigenous to Moldova, has inhabited the southern part of the territory from the early part of the Eighteenth Century when they received substantial gifts of land from the tsars. They are Turkic-speaking Orthodox Christians who migrated to the southern part of Bessarabia to escape Turkish rule during the Russian-Ottoman war of 1806-1812. The Gagauz speak a language that is viewed as a dialect of Ottoman Turkish. Historians are divided on whether the Gagauz are descendants of Bulgarians whose language was Turkified, or Turkic tribes who were Christianized.¹³

The 1989 Soviet census reports that 153,000 of the USSR's 197,000 Gagauz live in Moldova. An additional 27,000 Gagauz live in the neighboring Odessa Oblast of Ukraine. Almost all of Moldova's Gagauz live in five southern regions. Gagauz constitute 64% of the population of Komrat and Ciadar-Lunga, 37% of Vulcanesti, 30% of Basarabasca, and 27% of Taraclia. These five regions make up the territory of the "Gagauz republic" that is seeking autonomy. These regions comprise 10% of Moldova's territory, with a population of approximately 300,000. However, even in the area in which they are concentrated, the Gagauz are a minority.

The town of Komrat (population 30,000) is the administrative center of the Gagauz region. The Gagauz are largely agricultural, working the fertile lands that their ancestors received from the tsars, now mostly collective farms. Moldovan villages in the Gagauz region have

¹²RFE/RL *Research Report*, March 13, 1992, p. 75.

¹³Vladimir Socor, "Gagauz in Moldavia Demand Separate Republic," *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, Sept. 7, 1990, p. 8.

poorer land, and the Moldovans living in these regions typically are laborers on state farms.¹⁴

National (Ethnic) Mobilization: Toward Independence

Language

One of the first steps in mobilizing the indigenous population of Moldova was the passage of legislation in 1989 making Moldovan (Romanian) the state language in place of Russian and returning to Latin script for the transcription of the language after having used the Cyrillic. When the Soviet Union annexed Romanian territories in 1940 and re-occupied them in 1944, the Latin alphabet which had been used in Moldova to write the Romanian language was immediately changed to the Cyrillic. With the 1989 language law, signs were replaced and russified names were changed to their previous designations. While this process proceeded rapidly and smoothly in the Moldovan-dominated lands in the west, it became a primary point of controversy in the Russian areas on the left bank of the Dniester and in the Gagauz regions.

Like in the Baltic Republics, Moldova's initial moves for local autonomy under the Soviet umbrella soon resulted in calls for complete independence. Moldovans first formed groups in support of restructuring. These organizations quickly seized the opportunity provided by Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* to open the door for the development of the nationalist movement in Moldova. Indeed, the 1989 Supreme Soviet debate on the language law brought Gorbachev himself into the local confrontation as he lobbied for maintaining Russian as the state language; at the same time, this debate propelled Mircea Snegur, then Chairman of the Moldovan Supreme Soviet Presidium, into the limelight for publicly opposing Gorbachev's position. The results of forty years of Soviet policy had prepared the ground for the independence movement:

industrialization and urbanization . . . worked to further the formation of Moldavian national consciousness--by educating and bringing overwhelmingly rural Moldavians to more politically charged urban centers--and at the same time increased the Moldavians' frustration with the subordinate place their nationality continued to hold within their own republic, in institutions of higher education, in the party and state bureaucracy, and in Russified cities.¹⁵

The language issue became the first and most important point of contention, on the one hand

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p 9.

¹⁵Irina Livezeanu, "Moldavia, 1970-1990: Nationalism and Internationalism Then and Now," *Armenian Review*, Summer/Autumn, 1990, p. 155.

mobilizing the Moldovans and making them more cohesive and on the other initiating and strengthening the Russian backlash. As a cultural issue, it also initially provided a safer avenue than an outright move for political independence. Under both tsarist and Soviet policies, Russian was the language of the educated class in the cities and of inter-ethnic communication. Moldovan (or, if one prefers, Romanian) had been "contaminated" by many Russian words and expressions and was used by the peasantry.

The extent to which Russian was the language of the cities is illustrated in a recent article by Mikhail Guboglo. Just under half of the population of Moldovan urban areas, including Chisinau, was Moldovan in 1989. Of this group, 10.8% claimed Russian as their native language and an additional 70.6% claimed to speak Russian fluently. In contrast, only 11% of the Russians in the capital of Chisinau claimed competence in Moldovan.¹⁶

Making Moldovan the state language and changing from the Cyrillic to the Latin script were the key issues of the national movement in 1988 and 1989. The question of alphabet is symbolic and used by the Moldovans to provide an example of Russian cultural dominance. Interestingly, symbolism and history are sometimes not congruent:

It is hard for Moldavian nationalists then and now to remember that the Cyrillic alphabet was not initially imposed on Romanians by an alien imperialist government. The Cyrillic script was used in Romanian until the middle of the nineteenth century. While linguistically it might make more sense to write Romanian with Latin letters, the logic of Latinity did not make itself felt until the 1840s. The first language of the Orthodox church, the princely courts, and high culture in the two principalities had been Old Church Slavonic since the tenth century. For its historic value the Cyrillic alphabet even had supporters among some Moldavian nationalists. In spite of the present importance of the Latin alphabet in Moldavia, there was historically no *necessary* contradiction between patriotism and a lack of enmity for the Slavonic and Cyrillic influence on Romanian/Moldavian.¹⁷

Nonetheless, nationalists insisted that Moldovan become the state language as well as the vehicle for inter-ethnic communication, that the Latin alphabet be adopted and that the identity of Moldovan and Romanian be acknowledged. Prior to the adoption of the language law, Russian was not the official state language. Rather, it was used as the language for inter-ethnic communication and education and was considered to convey a higher status than Moldovan. More importantly, affirmation of the view that Moldovan was a different language from Romanian and best understood by using the Cyrillic script was "a litmus test

¹⁶Mikhail Guboglo, "Demography and Language in the Capitals of the Union Republics," *Journal of Soviet Nationalities*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Winter, 1990-1991.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 157.

of one's acceptance of the legitimacy of Soviet rule."¹⁸

The russification of the educational system was at the root of the status distinction. In Chisinau, with Moldovans making up 42% of the population, only 18 of 149 kindergartens were Moldovan. No Moldovan schools existed in Tiraspol for a Moldovan population of 25,000. In addition, all of the instruction in higher education was in Russian.¹⁹ Because the educational system was conducted almost entirely in Russian, fluency was required to gain access to the most highly skilled jobs.

As the momentum gathered to change from Russian to Moldovan, so did the fear on the part of the Russian-speaking population. The Popular Front organized rallies and collected over a million signatures in support of the language legislation. Russians felt threatened by the Moldovan movement. Other ethnic groups living in Moldova feared that they would have to learn two languages--Russian and Moldovan--in addition to their native language.²⁰ On the right bank, in spite of the statements by political leaders to the contrary, a strong anti-Russian sentiment was evident:

Moldavia's politicians are moving as fast as they can to divest themselves of all things Russian. The old Bessarabian part of Moldavia is fast becoming a *de facto* little Romania and Russian-speakers, the "uninvited guests" as officials call them, are being shown the door. Virtually all non-Romanian-speakers will have to pass language tests by 1995 or lose their jobs. In several firms, testing has already begun. Skilled Russians, Ukrainians and others are leaving.²¹

The 1989 language law, though ultimately containing a compromise making both Moldovan and Russian languages of inter-ethnic communication, provided the catalyst for the independence movements on the left bank and the Gagauz territory in the south. Crowther appropriately labels these independence movements "reactive nationalism."

Threatened by efforts of the majority ethnic group to destabilize the status quo in its own favor, members of the other minorities themselves entered into an independent political movement in order to increase the cost to the state of concessions to the Moldavians. The minorities also appealed to the

¹⁸Crowther, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

¹⁹Dan Ionescu, "Soviet Moldavia: The State Language Issue," *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, June 2, 1989.

²⁰Livezeanu, "Moldavia, 1917-1990," *op. cit.*, p. 179.

²¹ "The Bessarabians," *The Economist*, April 6, 1991, p. 49.

national-level political leaders [Moscow] either (1) to defend the status quo, (2) to guarantee that any concessions to the Moldavian majority do not damage the position of minorities in the republic, or (3) if all else fails, to permit the other minorities to detach themselves from the present political unit and form a political entity of their own, one that would be directly responsible to the national-level government.²²

The Break with Moscow

What began as a protest in 1989 developed into a revolt in 1990 and into a mature break-away movement in 1991. Russian and Ukrainian workers went on strike after the passage of the language law, crippling many of the large industrial enterprises. The *Edinstvo* organization on the right bank and the Union of Work Collectives on the left bank were primary organizers of the strikes. By 1991, the Chisinau government had lost control of the left bank. The Gagauz SSR proclaimed its independence on August 19, 1991, and the Dniester SSR followed on September 2, 1991. Conflict commenced from that point, with both break-away territories forming military units.

Both sides had stressed the ideological rather than the ethnic aspects of the conflict in 1989 and 1990. The left bank leaders, taking an "internationalist" position to counter Moldovan nationalism, criticized the Moldovan steps to destroy both socialism and the union. Likewise, Chisinau attacked the left bank leaders for their opposition to the reforms of Gorbachev and their wanting to maintain the old political and economic systems. In fact, the Moldovan leadership maintained this position for a rather long time, trying to further the perception that the dispute was over issues other than ethnicity. In so doing, it took great pains to adopt policies in support of minority rights and ethnic harmony.

Moscow at first ignored the events in Moldova, then sided with the breakaway territories. Gorbachev himself became involved in attempts at negotiation, proposing three-party discussions involving the left-bank Russians, the Gagauz and the government in Chisinau. Because this structure provided de-facto recognition of the independence of the left-bank territory, the Moldovans declined to participate.

Power shifted in February and March 1990 from the Communists to the Popular Front, a largely Moldovan-dominated coalition headed by Mircea Snegur. He was first elected Chairman of the Moldovan Supreme Soviet, then to the presidency after the Supreme Soviet created the post. The government was replaced with Popular Front supporters in May 1990 with the selection of Mircea Druc as prime minister. By summer 1990, the reformers, mostly ethnic Moldovans, were firmly in control of the republican governing structures, and the non-Moldovans, mostly Russian with some Ukrainian and Gagauz support, found themselves in opposition.

²²Crowther, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

On June 23, 1990, the Moldovan Supreme Soviet adopted a declaration of sovereignty, as far-reaching as any adopted to that point by the former union republics, which declared that Moldovan law superseded Soviet law on its territory. In negotiating a new union treaty, Moldova took the position that any association should be among fifteen equal and sovereign republics without a center. At the same time, Moldova suspended the Soviet military draft on its territory. By this time, Moldovan leaders cared little about Moscow's potential reaction:

Gorbachev's pressures on Moldavia during the autumn months of 1990, his failure to discharge the role of "constitutional guarantor" of the republic's territorial integrity, and Moscow's exploitation of inter-ethnic tensions in Moldavia seem to have wiped out what still remained of Gorbachev's popularity with the native majority in the republic It forced the Moldavian parliament and government to conclude that the republic's safety and integrity were at risk within the USSR, strengthening their determination to resist any Union treaty Finally, it unwittingly boosted the political authority of the Moldavian Popular Front and of intransigent opinion groups determined to pursue full independence for Moldavia.²³

In December 1990 the Moldovans called a Grand National Assembly in Chisinau and 800,000 took to the streets. This action was in response to Moscow's pressure and was used by Chisinau as a vehicle to communicate popular sentiment to Moscow. Between the December rally and the vote in March on the new union treaty, the Moldovan Supreme Council met to decide its position on the all-union referendum and its terms for further association with the center. This February 1991 session of the Supreme Soviet resulted in a series of votes rejecting the holding of the all-union referendum on Moldovan territory and endorsing an association of sovereign states with no central power--sometimes labeled the "fifteen plus zero" confederation. Russian deputies from the left bank boycotted the Supreme Soviet session, weakening those who supported the continuation of the union. Some of the Gagauz deputies ended their boycott and voted in favor of holding the referendum. Right-bank Russians, some non-Moldovan Communist deputies, and a small number of Moldovan Communists supported the new union treaty. Ethnic and ideological cleavages were becoming more closely aligned.

The boycott against the referendum on the union was successful, with perhaps 5% of the ethnic Moldovan population participating. The participation on the left bank and Gagauz areas was very high, but lower than expected among the non-Moldovans living on the right bank. The reason for the low turnout among the Russians, Ukrainians, and other non-Moldavians on the right bank can be attributed to several events. The military actions in the Baltic shocked even the local Russian inhabitants. Secondly, some right-bank Russian and Ukrainian organizations supported an independent Moldavia and thus undercut the Communist Party's organizational monopoly. And thirdly, the Popular Front took a very

²³Vladimir Socor, "Gorbachev and Moldavia," *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, Dec. 21, 1990, p. 14.

accommodative position on both language and citizenship toward the non-indigenous peoples.²⁴ The left bank and Gagauz support for union was very high; however, as became clear in a series of opinion polls, the Russian population on the right bank was divided. Some Russians (like in the Baltic) were beginning to see the advantage of casting their lot with the Moldovan majority in opposing Moscow and seeking independence.

Determining precisely the extent to which the non-Moldovans on both sides of the Dniester shared the Moldovans' position on the break with Moscow is difficult. Opinion polling in Moldova is a recent phenomenon, so one cannot trace shifting favorable/unfavorable ratings of political parties or positions over time. The Moldovan National Institute of Sociology did conduct a series of polls, using representative samples, from June 1991 to February 1992 that give some insight into public opinion during this particularly momentous period. When asked about political parties, the respondents indicated that support was quite splintered, with only the Popular Front getting the support of over 15%, and even that support declined to 12% in the late 1991 and early 1992 polls. The Communist Party had 3-8% support in 1991 prior to the coup (before the Party was suspended), and Intermovement's "Edinstvo" support varied around 5%. These figures, however, do "not adequately reflect the real extent of support for communist organizations among Moldova's nonnative population, since the surveys did not include the Joint Council of Work Collectives [OSTK], the dominant political force in the Dniester regions's Russified cities." These same surveys reported a "good performance" rating varying around 67% for President Snegur in three time periods, with about a 25% "poor performance" rating. The surveys also asked "To which country should Moldova draw closest?" Only 21% of the respondents named the USSR, while 62% selected various western countries, with the largest number naming Italy (15%). In June 1991, "58% of the respondents wanted Moldova to become independent from the Soviet Union." That number climbed to 79% at the time of the coup. According to the Institute of Sociology, which conducted the polls, "the evidence that support for independence extended beyond the 65% share of ethnic Moldovans in the republic's population [was] instrumental in precipitating the decision of the republican leadership to proclaim Moldova's independence from the USSR on 27 August 1991."²⁵

The Communist Party, which was associated with the unpopular period of Soviet rule and economic and political stagnation, maintained solid support only in the Dniester and Gagauz areas. As the Popular Front was taking the leadership role in the Supreme Soviet, the Moldovan Communist Party was becoming isolated because of its inability to adapt rapidly to the changing popular mood.

²⁴Vladimir Socor, "Moldavia Resists Pressure and Boycotts Union Referendum," RFE/RL Research Institute, *Report on the USSR*, March 29, 1991, p. 11.

²⁵Vladimir Socor, "Opinion Polling in Moldova," RFE/RL *Research Report*, March 22, 1992, pp. 60-1.

The main wing of the Party, both pro-Gorbachev and reformist, supported the indigenous people's demands for recognition and autonomy; by so doing, it acted against the interests of the Russian minority, who made up a disproportionately large share of its membership. Not surprisingly, the Party supported Gorbachev in the call for a new union treaty, in effect siding with *Edinstvo* and the hard-line conservatives. This position put the Party out of tune with the developing sentiment of the ethnic Moldovans. This wing of the Party, in spite of its being radically reformist when compared to previous eras, was rapidly left behind as the majority adopted a pro-independence, anti-center and anti-communist perspective.

At the same time the Party alienated the traditional communists who found the reforms to be too threatening and wanted to maintain connections to the conservative political and military leaders critical of Gorbachev. The conservative wing of the party, with its followers in the all-union industries and russified cities, found the positions taken by the reformist leadership of the Party in Chisinau unsupportable. Gorbachev and his reforms were as threatening to the conservative left-bank leaders as the ethnic revival taking place on the right bank. The left bank, perhaps to as great a degree as any in the former Soviet Union, was interested in maintaining the traditional communist structures more characteristic of former administrations. Its conservative Russians believed that the Moldovan reformers were "‘dismantling the Socialist system’ in the republic, ‘Romanianizing’ Moldavia, systematically violating the human and national rights of non-Moldavians, and undermining the state interests of the USSR."²⁶

The Coup

The coup of August 1991 only cemented the divisions between the right- and left-bank forces. Early on the first day of the coup, Moldovan leaders came out publicly against the usurpation of power by the Emergency Committee and the military. Not only did President Snegur and other leaders state that the Emergency Committee's decrees had no validity on Moldovan territory, but they also called upon the population to take to the streets to protect public buildings and communication facilities. Recalling the spring events in the Baltic, the leadership mobilized popular support to block troops that might try to take control of the city. People from throughout the republic barricaded entrances to Chisinau. Blocked by human walls on the nights of August 19 and 20, the military columns never used force to push past the unarmed civilians. With the collapse of the coup, the troops returned to their bases.

Russians on the right bank avoided the confrontation and waited to see what would happen; the left-bank Russians and the Gagauz quickly sided with the coup leaders. In the self-proclaimed Dniester SSR, city and enterprise leaders cabled their support and obedience to the Emergency Committee. The Dniester Supreme Soviet:

²⁶Vladimir Socor, "The Moldavian Communists: From Ruling to Opposition Party," RFE/RL Research Institute, *Report on the USSR*, April 5, 1991, p. 17.

saluted "the reintroduction of proper order and discipline in all areas of political and social life" and urged the USSR Supreme Soviet to "endorse the emergency measures" of the Emergency Committee. The Joint Council of Work Collectives cabled the Emergency Committee and Gennadii Yanaev its "full and all-around support," declaring itself "ready to carry out any tasks" in connection with the state of emergency.²⁷

Unlike the Baltic situation, where the collapse of the coup provided the opportunity for the pro-independence and anti-communist political leaders to remove Moscow's supporters from both enterprise and political leadership, the coup emphasized the extent to which Chisinau had already lost control over the left bank. The left-bank Party organization kept control of its property, financial assets and media. Although the Moldovan leaders at first arrested some left-bank separatists, they were forced by strikes and blockades to release them.

The Party and left-bank leaders argued that groups on the right bank--by being pro-Moldovan--opposed the interests of the Russian-speaking population (Russian, Ukrainian, and Gagauz). While the dispute can be seen as ideological, with right-bank reformers being opposed by left-bank hardliners, it was characterized as ethnic by the Dniester and Gagauz republics in spite of the Moldovan leaders' efforts to respect the cultural autonomy of the Russian-speaking population. As hostilities continued throughout Spring 1992, President Snegur downplayed the ethnic nature of the conflict, arguing on March 5 that both the Dniester leaders and Moscow "are deliberately portraying the conflict as interethnic . . . in an attempt to disguise the military-communist nature of the phantom 'Dniester republic' and to win support from the national-patriotic forces of Russia." Snegur argued that "the full observance of Moldova's territorial integrity and indivisibility" was required to resolve the conflict.²⁸

Immediately after the coup, Moldova declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Fifty-two of the 130 non-Moldovan deputies voted in favor of independence. Six of the twelve Gagauz deputies were in favor. The declaration acknowledged Moldova's intent to adhere to the documents of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) "guaranteeing the exercise of social and cultural rights and political freedoms . . . including those of national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities"²⁹ and underscored the different positions of the left- and right-bank Russians.

²⁷Vladimir Socor, "Moldavia Defies Soviet Coup, Removes Vestiges of Communism," RFE/RL Research Institute, *Report on the USSR*, Sept. 20, 1991, p. 21.

²⁸RFE/RL *Research Report*, March 20, 1992, p. 69.

²⁹Vladimir Socor, "Moldavia Proclaims Independence, Commences Secession from USSR," RFE/RL Research Institute, *Report on the USSR*, October 18, 1991, pp. 19-20.

Snegur attempted to convince the non-indigenous people that the new regime would reverse the Soviet policy of cultural dominance with which all the non-Russian republics had become familiar by "giving urgent priority to resolving ethnic grievances, establishing a system of guarantees for the observance of human rights, and developing the facilities for the cultural and linguistic expression of the ethnic communities."³⁰ Rather than replacing russification with romanization, Chisinau promised that local languages and customs would be respected and that schools would be provided to accommodate the non-Moldovans' desire for education in their own language. This approach held some attraction for the Bulgarians and the Ukrainians, who were particularly offended by the previous russification. On March 26, 1992, Chisinau city authorities announced that they would open five Ukrainian-language kindergartens for the 1992-1993 school year, as well as a Ukrainian-Russian high school. These would be the first Ukrainian schools in Moldova since the 1960s when russification was in high gear.

In a move to show his commitment to a multi-ethnic rather than a Romanian state, Snegur announced on February 24, 1992, that all residents of Moldova would be offered citizenship. Residents in Moldova would have until June 4 to accept or reject the offer.³¹ This inclusive approach to citizenship was in sharp contrast to the debate taking place in Latvia and Estonia. The Moldovan decree on citizenship made no mention of exceptions for military personnel, Party and Komsomol officials, or recent migrants, provisions typical of laws in other successor states.

Reactive Nationalism: The Push for Autonomy

The Left Bank

The left bank of the Dniester River (the eastern bank, designated "left" in relation to the flow of the Dniester river, which empties into the Black Sea to the southeast) has been the most troublesome area for Chisinau. The Dniester population of 601,000 is 40.1% Moldovan, 28.3% Ukrainian and 25.5% Russian. The term "Russian-speaking" is often used to refer to the Russians and the Ukrainians together and, to some extent, the Gagauz. Few schools or cultural facilities were available to the Ukrainians or Gagauz in their own language, resulting in the minority populations' becoming russified.

The Russian population is made up of relatively recent arrivals resulting from the industrialization of the 1960s and 1970s. Until the last two decades, Moldovans made up the absolute majority on the left bank. All-union industries, many military in nature, and large Red Army bases drew Russian-speaking migrants to the towns and cities of the left bank. The Dniester leader, Igor Smirnov, claims that 30% of Moldovan industry and 98.5% of

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 16, citing *Moldova Surverana*, Sept. 11, 1991.

³¹RFE/RL *Research Report*, March 6, 1992, p. 73.

energy production is on the left bank of the Dniester.³²

The rural areas of the left bank remain predominantly Moldovan, though a number of Ukrainian villages exist in this region. Ukraine is quick to point out that the left bank belonged to it prior to 1940, and that both Moldovans and Ukrainians outnumber Russians in this area. Tiraspol is the administrative center of the five administrative regions making up the left bank. Tiraspol is 41% Russian, 33% Ukrainian, and 17% Moldovan.

Since 1990, two groups have provided the primary representation for the people of Russian nationality: Intermovement's *Edinstvo* and the United Work Collectives (OTSK). *Edinstvo* represented the Communist Party apparatus primarily on the right bank on the Dniester, including the Party functionaries in Chisinau. The support for the United Work Collectives is concentrated in the working-class Russian population on the left bank.

Throughout the first half of 1992, left bank military personnel and communist leaders expanded their control of the Moldovan villages on the left bank and increasingly made inroads to the Russian cities on the right bank. Moldovans described the phenomenon as a "creeping putsch" which became more violent and bloody as time progressed. The Dniester loyalists, often organized into paramilitary units by the army and supported by the enterprises, took over administrative buildings and police stations in the rural areas and replaced the indigenous Moldovans with Russians. The local officials and police at first offered almost no resistance on the orders of the Chisinau government to avoid confrontation and bloodshed. Finally, after months of incidents on the left bank and various forays across the Dniester to the right bank, the Moldovan leadership concluded that its patience and appeasement had not been successful. President Snegur on March 29, 1992, declared a state of emergency and called on separatists in the Dniester "to surrender their arms and acknowledge the authority of the Moldovan government."³³

The failure of the previous year's coup and the imprisonment of its leaders did not result in moderation of the position taken by left-bank Russians. Unlike the situation in the Baltics where the titular leaders were able either to neutralize or remove pro-Moscow Russian leaders in the days following the coup, the Dniester leadership stayed in place and even strengthened its extremist position. In fact, several deputies from the Russian Federation remarked that "[the Dniester leaders'] political views and slogans in general are even more right-wing than those of the State Committee for the State of Emergency."³⁴

³² *The Economist*, April 6, 1991, p. 50.

³³ RFE/RL *Research Report*, April 10, 1992, p. 63.

³⁴ Vladimir Socor, "Creeping Putsch in Eastern Moldova," RFE/RL *Research Report*, Jan. 17, 1992, p. 9.

Russia's Fourteenth Army

A source of continuing tension between Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and the CIS involves the status of the Fourteenth Army headquartered in Tiraspol, the left-bank city that serves as the "capital" of the Dniester republic. From the beginning of the Dniester independence movement, these forces, the largest former Red Army unit in Moldova, have provided at least tacit support to the Dniester separatists. During the end of 1991 and the first part of 1992, this support became overt as the Fourteenth Army supplied equipment and personnel in support of the so-called "creeping putsch." The former commander of the Fourteenth Army, Lieutenant General Gennadii Yakolev, on December 3, 1991, accepted appointment as chief of defense and security for the Dniester republic "with a mandate to place the Fourteenth Army and its equipment and bases under the authority of the 'Dniester republic' as of January 1992."³⁵ The situation of the Fourteenth Army underscores the Russian Republic's and the CIS military's interests in a separatist Dniester region:

The transfer of jurisdiction over the Fourteenth Army meets manifold convergent interests: that of the "Dniester republic" in acquiring an army of its own; that of local military personnel in securing continued employment and residence there; and that of at least some circles in both Moscow and the military theater and district commands in maintaining a troop presence on the Dniester.³⁶

The CIS military, including its commander-in-chief, Marshal Evgenii Shaposhnikov, displayed little concern that the Fourteenth Army had aligned itself with the break-away Dniester republic. A Russian army in a Russian-dominated area located on the western border of Ukraine and the eastern border of Moldova provides strategic advantages to the CIS and Russian leadership:

The conflict . . . has a dual nature: it is both a civil and an interstate conflict . . . [Moscow's] proposals . . . to support civil and regional peace in return for influence in political and security matters, would seem to confirm the interpretation that the Dniester conflict and the actions of the Fourteenth Army have their roots in considerations far transcending the issue of interethnic relations in Moldova. While feeding to a limited degree on ethnic issues, the conflict can be traced directly to Moscow's interest in maintaining a political and military foothold in a strategic area noncontiguous to the present Russian state but one that leading circles apparently continue to regard as part of

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁶*Ibid.*

Russia's sphere of influence, or even as a Russian enclave.³⁷

On April 1, 1992, the Fourteenth Army was placed under Russian control by a decree signed by Boris Yeltsin. Removing the army from CIS command and placing it directly under the control of the Russian Republic increased fears that Moscow might intervene directly in the escalating conflict on the left bank. At the same time, Russian Republic Foreign Minister Kozyrev "warned that Russia might resort to 'forcible methods' to protect the rights of ethnic Russians living in other parts of the CIS." This statement was not unlike his earlier comments on the interest of the Russian Republic in the Russian minority in the Baltic states. In Chisinau, Kozyrev suggested a four-power (Moldova, Ukraine, Romania and Russia) guarantee for the territorial integrity of Moldova with the suggestion that the Dniester area be granted the right of self-determination should the status of Moldova change, meaning its possible future unification with Romania. The other parties to the talks expressed little interest.³⁸

On April 8, the Russian Congress of Peoples's Deputies discussed a plan to increase Russian influence in the Dniester by using volunteers from the Fourteenth Army to keep the sides separated. Needless to say, neither the Moldovan nor Ukrainian leadership viewed the Fourteenth Army as a neutral force. Moldova, Ukraine and Romania proposed the possibility of Ukrainian forces' playing the peace-keeping role. Snegur criticized the Russian Parliament's suggestions as "intrusion in the domestic affairs of sovereign states" that "fans anti-Russian sentiment, setting other peoples, including the Moldovan people, against the Russian empire."³⁹

The dispute continued to intensify, threatening to expand to a Moldovan-Russian Republic controversy with the possibility of Romanian involvement. Moldovans claimed that the Fourteenth Army, under direct Russian control, openly aided the separatists. Snegur hinted that the Romanian army might become involved should the conflict continue. On May 25, President Snegur declared that the "Moldovan parliament has to choose between two decisions--either stop military activities in the Dniester region . . . or declare a state of war on Russia."⁴⁰

³⁷Vladimir Socor, "Russia's Fourteenth Army and the Insurgency in Eastern Moldova," RFE/RL *Research Report*, September 11, 1992, p. 48.

³⁸Suzanne Crow, "Russia's Relations with Members of the Commonwealth," RFE/RL *Research Report*, May 8, 1992, p. 10.

³⁹RFE/RL *Research Report*, April 17, 1992, p. 67.

⁴⁰Justin Burke, "Moldova Calls on Russia to End Aid to Separatists," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 27, 1992, p. 3.

In late June, 1992, elements of the Fourteenth Army, reportedly numbering 5000, crossed to the right bank of the Dniester and became involved in fighting around Bendery, forcing the Moldovan troops from the city. Reportedly, "the order for the Fourteenth Army to engage was given by the high command in Moscow, though the aim was to make a show of force rather than to wage war."⁴¹ At the same time, the Russian central command appointed Major General Aleksandr Ledbed, a supporter of Yeltsin during the coup, as the new head of the Fourteenth Army. Ledbed called the Dniester Republic "a small part of Russia" and the right-bank city of Bendery "an inalienable party of the Dniester republic."⁴²

Ledbed's argument misses the most important reason for the Russian Republic's interest in the Dniester region. With an army on the Dniester, Russia is able to maintain an important strategic position vis-a-vis Ukraine and the Balkans:

the land grab appears to have been designed from the outset to limit the territorial loss to the Soviet Union or to its successor should Moldova fully consummate the secession and to secure the Dniester area for continued forward basing of forces of the USSR or its successor at the gateway to the Balkan countries and in the rear of an independent Ukraine. Carving a new jurisdiction out of Moldova to host those troops would ensure their continued deployment irrespective of Moldova's future decisions on the troops' status.⁴³

In early July, Snegur and Yeltsin met to try to reach some agreement on the conflict which had killed 425 people between March and June. The two leaders agreed to a cease-fire and the need to divide the opposing forces. The CIS Summit on July 6 then proposed a joint force of Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Romanian and Bulgarian troops to monitor the cease fire, provided that Moldova would make a formal request and pay for the troops. On July 7 the Moldovan parliament voted overwhelmingly to make such a request.⁴⁴

Belarus, Romania and Bulgaria declined to participate in the CIS plan, and Moldova withdrew its request for peacekeeping troops, calling instead on the CSCE to intervene. At the same time, the Russian Supreme Soviet was calling on the Russian army to intervene to disarm the combatants, an option of no interest to the Moldovans. Russian Vice President Rutskoi was sent to Moldova to negotiate autonomy for the left bank, but the Moldovans were not interested in his proposals, asking "whether Moldova was expected to grant

⁴¹RFE/RL *Research Report*, July 10, 1992, p. 64.

⁴²RFE/RL *Research Report*, July 17, 1992, p. 73.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴RFE/RL *Research Report*, July 17, 1992, p. 74.

autonomy to the 40% of the left bank's population who are Moldovans or to the 25.5% who are Russians.⁴⁵ The situation was further muddled when Russia's Fourteenth Army Commander, General Ledbed, criticized both Yeltsin and Snegur for their agreement, illustrating the military's independence from any chain of command.

On July 21, Snegur and Yeltsin signed a bi-lateral agreement to end the fighting in the Dniester region with the use of Russian troops as peacekeepers. This agreement gave the Dniester the right to decide its own fate if Moldova should join with Romania. Interestingly, this option had been offered to the Dniester leaders by Chisinau as early as January 1991. Moldovan officials had also offered the Dniester leaders positions in a coalition government in exchange for settling the dispute. The Dniester leaders rejected the offers and declined to sign a peace agreement.⁴⁶

In fall 1992 the military conflict de-escalated as a result of the agreement between Yeltsin and Snegur. Russian troops, though hardly a neutral force, separated the parties. During subsequent months, Moldovans continued to voice concern about the role of the Russians and the Dniester political authorities continued to establish state structures on the left bank under the protection of the Russian forces. The joint commission supervising the cease-fire, made up of Russians and Moldovans, provided a venue for the Moldovans to criticize the lack of even-handedness by the peacekeepers; yet the Moldovans hardly exercise equal authority with the Russians in any "joint" activity. For this reason, the Moldovans repeatedly asked for United Nations' or other neutral involvement in monitoring the cease fire to balance the unequal Moldovan-Russian relationship.

The presence of the Fourteenth Army remains a problem. While its strength has dropped from 14,000 at the beginning of 1992, the Fourteenth Army is still the most formidable force in the region. In addition, the military leaders have been taking steps to blur the lines between the *Russian* Fourteenth Army and the *Dniester* guard by transferring soldiers back and forth and moving demobilized soldiers directly from the army to the guard. The Dniester leaders thus claim that the Russian forces are local rather than foreign.⁴⁷

Russian-Moldovan talks on the withdrawal of the Fourteenth Army were initiated in fall 1992 as a result of the cease-fire agreement. The fact that the parties sat down at a table to discuss the issue must be perceived as positive; indeed, the discussions were an implicit acknowledgement that the Russians had troops stationed in foreign territory. Like in the

⁴⁵RFE/RL *Research Report*, July 24, 1992, pp. 73-74.

⁴⁶RFE/RL *Research Report*, July 31, 1992, p. 73.

⁴⁷Vladimir Socor, "Russian Forces in Moldova," RFE/RL *Research Report*, August 28, 1992, pp. 42-43.

Baltics, the Russians want to assure the human rights and security of the Russian population in Moldova and to gain territorial concessions for the Dniester authorities in exchange for troop withdrawals.

Gagauz Autonomy

Because the Gagauz have been heavily russified as a result of Soviet cultural policy, they often side with the Russian-speakers (and typically are considered to be part of that category) in the conflict with Chisinau. Under Soviet rule, the Gagauz were denied education in their own language and opportunities for cultural expression. "Proficiency in the native language . . . deteriorated . . . to the point where survival of the language is endangered There has been no 'Moldavianization' of the Gagauz in Soviet Moldavia. Only 4.4 percent of Moldavia's Gagauz claim to speak fluent Moldavian" ⁴⁸

The Gagauz were outspoken in their opposition to making Moldovan the state language during the 1989 debate, contending that this step would discriminate against the various minority groups in Moldova who have already learned Russian as a second language. For this reason, both the Gagauz and those seeking to establish an independent Dniester Republic have proposed using Russian as the official language of the break-away territories. Like the left bank, Russian is the language of inter-ethnic communication in the Gagauz area.

The Gagauz leadership, including president Stefan Topal, is highly russified. Most of the leaders were members of the Communist Party hierarchy and supported the continuation of Soviet rule. In the March 1991 vote on the Union, the Gagauz voted almost unanimously to stay in the USSR; the Moldovans living in the Gagauz area boycotted the election. Gagauz leaders then supported the coup, making any rapprochement with Chisinau more difficult. Currently, the Gagauz leadership favors a federal approach, with semi-independent Gagauz, Dniester, and Moldovan territories constituting a Moldovan state. The Gagauz, like the Dniester Russians, especially fear the unification of Moldova with Romania, believing that such a step would deny the minorities their identity.

The Moldovans from the beginning supported granting Gagauz cultural autonomy. In fact, the position taken by the Moldovan leadership toward both the Gagauz and the Russian minorities is as supportive of cultural autonomy as that found anywhere in the former Soviet Union:

there remains a considerable reservoir of sympathy among the Moldavian public . . . irrespective of nationality, towards Gagauz social and cultural needs. From its inception, the Moldavian Popular Front supported Gagauz cultural demands, viewing the Gagauz as a natural ally of the Moldavians in resisting Russification and in pressing for agrarian reforms. Moldavians in general tend to regard the Gagauz as having been even more underprivileged

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

than themselves under Soviet rule and readily accept the need for a new dispensation for them.⁴⁹

Chisinau, however, distinguishes between cultural and territorial autonomy. The latter is seen as a threat to the national aspirations of the Moldovan people. The Gagauz might be satisfied with cultural autonomy, though the sense of Gagauz identity that has developed makes achieving an accommodation with the Moldovans more difficult; the Russian aspiration for an independent Dniester republic is proving to be more intractable.

Chisinau's strategy of cultural autonomy, though seemingly genuine and relatively successful with right-bank Russians and Ukrainians, has thus far failed to provide the necessary framework for either Dniester or Gagauz incorporation into a Moldovan nation-state. Rejai and Enloe contend that neither a minority-oriented language nor religious policy can serve as the "integrative cement" of a society. They argue that the most effective integrative policies are political and economic rather than cultural.⁵⁰ To be successful, states must manipulate political and economic integrative elements, though such strategies are more difficult than providing cultural autonomy. Chisinau's attempt to build a multi-ethnic coalition, offering positions in it to both the left bank and the Gagauz, is at least a step in developing such a political framework for incorporation.

External Perspectives

Moldovan-Romanian Relations

Moldova is the only successor state in which the indigenous population can identify with a country outside the former Soviet Union. For this reason, the relationship between Moldova and Romania is an interesting one that is viewed quite differently on the two sides of the Prut. Snegur has repeatedly made clear his lack of interest in union with Romania. To the minority Russians and Gagauz, such a union would reduce their status not only numerically but also politically and culturally. By continuing to emphasize "two Romanian states," Snegur has managed to reduce the potency of this issue.

Despite Soviet efforts to persuade both Moldovans and Romanians that they were different peoples, the cultures, languages, and much of the history are the same on both sides of the Prut River. Even before the coup and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Moldovans had attained enough autonomy to allow them to begin re-latinizing their language and emphasizing their cultural unity with Romanians. While this linkage is important in its own right, it colors the situation in which the Russian minority in Moldova finds itself. The Dniester leadership has been using "romanization" to incite the Russian-speaking minorities.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* p. 12

⁵⁰ Rejai and Enloe, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

Potential reunification with Romania threatens the status of the Russian-speakers. For this reason, talk of reunification in either Bucharest or in Chisinau makes the separatists more adamant.

As the Dniester situation escalated, Romania played an increasing role as both a military and diplomatic supporter of the Chisinau government. This role is particularly unsettling to the Russian population on both banks of the Dniester, since it fears that the "two-state" rhetoric of President Snegur will be only temporary. While the Romanian leadership articulates the same "two-state" position, the opposition forces in Romania have been advocating reunification; the Romanian public, however, seems to have little interest in the subject. President Illiescu acknowledges that "pro-unification propaganda in Romania 'has backfired in Moldova, and not just among the Russian-speakers but among the Romanian Moldovans themselves. During the past two years one has witnessed there a movement away from unification The [Moldovan] people's reservations on the issue of unification have grown.'"⁵¹ In contrast to Moldovan feelings, "the Romanian opposition has signaled a willingness to give up the left bank of the Dniester (which was not part of Greater Romania) as the price for regaining the bulk of Moldova for Romania."⁵²

Talk of reunification on either side of the Prut River fuels left-bank separatism. In Moldova itself, those advocating long-term independence today are the majority. The Popular Front, previously a major player in Moldovan politics, has severely hurt its political position by advocating reunification with Romania and now is virtually powerless. The Moldovan Parliament passed a law on May 26, 1992, requiring that any move to join or leave a state would be put to a referendum. To the deputies, this provision puts one more obstacle in the way of those who advocate unification with Romania, because they have confidence that public sentiment is overwhelmingly against it.⁵³

Russia's Domestic and Foreign Policies Intertwined

For two centuries, Russians traveled to the fringes of the Russian and Soviet empires to settle new lands and work in the developing industrial infrastructure. The migrants did not perceive themselves to be going abroad or living in another country; they viewed their country to be bigger than the lands of the Russian Federation. The dissolution of the Soviet Union has changed neither these Russians' psychological connections to the center, nor the center's perception that its responsibilities go beyond the Russian Federation and include the welfare

⁵¹*RFE/RL Research Report*, October 16, 1992, p. 68.

⁵²Vladimir Socor, "Moldovan-Romanian Relations Are Slow to Develop," *RFE/RL Research Report*, June 26, 1992, p. 41.

⁵³*Ibid.*

of the Russians living in the successor states. Russians in the so-called "near abroad," referring to the non-Russian successor states, remain both a domestic and a foreign-policy issue in Moscow. This position is illustrated in an article in *Rossiiskaya gazetta* (June 23, 1992) in which Yeltsin's Presidential Counselor, Sergei Stankevich:

criticized Russian foreign policy for its failure to stand up for the rights of the Russian population in other CIS states. He also accused [Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia] of oppressing their Russian minorities, and threatened the use of force to protect "a thousand-year history [and] legitimate interests" in those former republics. Stankevich called upon the 14th Army stationed in Moldova to defend the Slavic minorities, and he noted that Russia would soon reemerge as a power capable of protecting its people.⁵⁴

Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet's Committee on International Affairs Ambartsumov similarly argued that Russia has a responsibility to the Russian population beyond the Russian Federation. As he stated, "the Dniester area was never part of Moldova . . . if any national-territorial community wants to become part of the Russian Federation, it should not be denied that right."⁵⁵

Russian vice president Rutskoi and some members of the Russian Parliament have taken the more radical position in support of the Russian minorities beyond the Russian Federation. Rutskoi at Yeltsin's request visited the Dniester area on April 5, 1992, and voiced his support for the separatists (after making similar comments in the Crimea).⁵⁶ Yet, believing that Rutskoi's and Yeltsin's views are identical is difficult, since the Dniester president and his followers were among the first to side with the leaders of the coup and remain supporters of the former Soviet system. Even so, Rutskoi's comments that "until Russia guarantees the protection of its citizens wherever they live . . . there will be conflicts on the former territory of the Soviet Union, (and) there will be thousands of refugees"⁵⁷ raise the level of anxiety about Russian intentions in both Moldova and Ukraine and illustrate the tenuous balance of power between the Russian conservatives and moderates.

Moldova thus provides a particularly sensitive, but hardly unique, example of the interplay of

⁵⁴*Post-Soviet/East European Report*, July 1, 1992, p. 4.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶Dan Ionescu, "Romanian Concern over the Conflict in Moldova," RFE/RL *Research Report*, May 1, 1992, p. 49. See also Nahaylo, "Moldovan Conflict Creates New Dilemmas for Ukraine," RFE/RL *Research Report*, May 15, 1992, p. 6.

⁵⁷Nahaylo, *Ibid.*, p. 6.

domestic and foreign policy. Other regions--Crimea, Latvia, or Kazakhstan--illustrate the same issue. Conservative Russian nationalists continue to place events in the context of the former Soviet Union. Russians were the leading people and played dominant roles throughout the territory. That Russians, by virtue of their ethnicity, no longer play this role in the successor states has not been fully integrated in the conservatives' world view. Situations such as Moldova provide opportunities for the conservatives to display the power and control that previously existed or that they might wish to exist in the future.

The more moderate forces no longer think that Russia can impose its will on the former territories and seem to be looking for non-intrusive ways to protect the interests of the Russian minorities. While they express concern with the plight of their fellow Russians, they have little confidence in their ability to manage events in the successor states, especially by force, as was possible under the old regime.

In spite of his statements in support of Russian minorities in the successor states, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev has taken this relatively moderate position. On a tour of the successor states in early April 1992, Kozyrev realized the enormous implications of his previous statements and the way in which the conservatives, still longing for the empire, were using the issue of the Russian minorities as part of a larger political struggle. Those criticizing the Foreign Ministry for neglecting the other CIS members were displaying "pure political rivalry" and were characterized as "the same forces . . . attempting to stage a battle over the question of preserving the Union, this time in the form of the CIS."⁵⁸

In addressing the Congress of People's Deputies, Kozyrev dealt specifically with the Moldovan situation, but had little success in convincing the conservatives, who want Russia to play a more intrusive role within the Commonwealth:

Megaphone diplomacy and heroic poses, by me or by anyone else, lead nowhere, absolutely nowhere. We cannot send a military helicopter for every Russian-speaking boy or girl in a school in Moldova We have to consider the whole balance of interests. We must not provoke Russophobic feelings in Moldova, because 75% of all the Russians and Russian speakers living in Moldova are beyond the Dniester, on the right bank of the Dniester.⁵⁹

Moscow's rhetoric intensified during spring and summer 1992, reflecting both the situation in the Dniester and the conservative challenge to Yeltsin taking place in Moscow which has

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, citing Radio Rossiia, April 18, 1992.

been closely followed both in Moldova and in Romania.⁶⁰ Following the failure of the various conflict resolution strategies, the Russian leadership became even more concerned about the treatment of Russian minorities in Moldova. Ruskoi signaled a change in Russian policy when he announced that “[e]veryone must keep in mind that Russia will not tolerate such treatment [speaking of the Dniester] of Russian-speaking people any longer.”⁶¹

Russian military forces complicate the situation and provide a link with the Crimea. At the CIS summit in Tashkent in May, the Moldovan delegation protested the military support in the form of arms and training that Russia was providing to the Dniester authorities and again urged Russia to withdraw the Fourteenth Army. Snegur vowed: “We will not give up the left bank of the Dniester to anybody,” particularly “not to those who also want to get the Crimea and also create here [on the Dniester] an outpost against Ukraine.”⁶²

Approaches to Conflict Resolution

During the period before Gorbachev, Gail Lapidis argues that intrinsic and systemic factors prevented a resurgence of ethno-nationalism. She cites the overlapping identities and roles of the population, the lack of a homogeneous attitude on the part of the ethnic groups, and ultimately the coercion by Moscow as factors mitigating the rise of ethnicity in the Soviet Union.⁶³ This policy of coercion and republic dependency provided Moscow with an effective mechanism for conflict resolution.⁶⁴ In the present case of Moldova, neither Moscow nor Chisinau can exert the coercion necessary to end the conflict in the Dniester; Moscow no longer has the legitimacy and Chisinau does not possess the army. As a consequence, Moscow and Chisinau have supported various proposals designed to end the ethnic conflict in the Dniester. While numerous strategies have been advanced, none has been effective. This section will examine three conflict resolution strategies to end the ethnic violence in Moldova: 1) cultural autonomy, 2) territorial autonomy and 3) outside guarantors.

⁶⁰Anatolie Gondiu, “Opreste, doamne, mina ucigasului,” *Curierul National*, June 29, 1992, p. 1.

⁶¹Serge Schmemmann, “Yeltsin Plans Peacekeepers to End Fighting in Moldova,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 1992, p. A8.

⁶²RFE/RL *Research Report*, May 29, 1992, p. 61.

⁶³Gail Lapidis, “Ethnonationalism and Political Stability: The Soviet Case,” *World Politics*, Vol. 35, 1984, pp. 375-380.

⁶⁴Paul Goble, “Ethnic Politics in the USSR,” *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 38, 1989.

A fourth strategy, external coercion as had been previously been applied by Moscow, no longer remains a realistic approach.

The first strategy attempted was the policy of cultural autonomy that developed from the original plan of the Popular Front before the collapse of the Soviet Union and was carried out by the Chisinau government immediately after independence. This strategy recognized many of the claims of the minority populations and, by supporting their demands for linguistic, religious, and educational self-determination, was intended to placate the minority groups and eliminate the reason for ethnic violence. By granting cultural autonomy, the Chisinau government hoped that the diverse populations would identify with the creation of a multi-ethnic political entity that would become a nation-state.

The concentration of Russians and Ukrainians on the left bank and the Gagauz in the south makes their demands important for the Chisinau government to address, even if these groups are not a majority of the population in these areas. At the same time this concentration makes satisfying cultural demands feasible because the critical mass is present for establishing schools and other facilities. Lee Dutter argues that "if group members are concentrated, then some of the disadvantages of small numbers are attenuated."⁶⁵

After independence, Chisinau immediately took steps to meet the cultural needs of the minorities, always emphasizing that the rebirth of the Moldovan (Romanian) heritage need not threaten the Russians, Gagauz, Ukrainians, Bulgarians or other groups in Moldova. Schools, media, and cultural facilities, financed by the Chisinau government, were developed for the non-Moldovan groups. Yet the left-bank Russians and the Gagauz (who themselves are minorities in the areas in which their populations are most concentrated) are not satisfied with "mere" cultural autonomy and are unwilling to make concessions to the other ethnic groups, and Moldovans in particular, who also inhabit the geographic regions that they claim. In that regard, left-bank Moldovans appealed for help from the international community because of:

'anti-Moldovan incitement by local [Russian-language] media' and discriminatory measures against Moldovans there 'who form over 40% of the population.' The appeal pointed to measures undertaken by the 'Dniester SSR,' including jamming Radio Kishinev broadcasts to the left bank, restricting the use of the Latin script in schools, and replacing 'Moldo-Romanian' with Soviet history on the curriculum of Moldovan Schools.⁶⁶

A second strategy for conflict resolution involves the notion of territorial autonomy. Such an

⁶⁵Dutter, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

⁶⁶RFE/RL *Research Report*, Jan. 10, 1992, p. 62.

approach grants the population concentrated in a particular geographic area control over certain governmental functions, including education, media and police. Various federal arrangements around the world provide examples of this approach, including the relationship of the union republics to the center in the former Soviet Union. This concept is attractive to minority peoples living in larger states whose populations are concentrated in defined areas. While enjoying the benefits of the larger political entity, they can control the day-to-day application of administrative policy that most directly affects their group.

Like all strategies, this one also has its negative implications. First, as the former Soviet situation would illustrate, ethnic identification with territory fosters the desire for total autonomy and independence. Education, culture, language and media, the factors with the greatest influence on day-to-day existence, emphasize the part rather than the whole and ethnic differences rather than the political or economic similarities. Territorial boundaries built on ethnicity thus can become more divisive than integrating.

In Moldova, both the break-away Russians and the break-away Gagauz are themselves minorities in the territory that they claim. Even if they were the majority in an area, what of the other minority populations that reside within it? While the Russians in the Dniester are resisting learning the Romanian language, they seem to have little problem demanding that the Moldovans communicate in Russian or use the Cyrillic alphabet for the Romanian language. This approach seems destined to make the nation-building process more difficult.

The third strategy might be better labeled conflict containment rather than conflict resolution. This model uses third parties, either international organizations or third-party military forces, to separate the combatants. A number of variations of this model have been tried in Moldova in the last year.

In early 1992, the left-bank separatists themselves appealed for United Nations' help, arguing that their rights were being compromised by the "romanizing" policies of the Chisinau government. Ultimately, this appeal proved to be unsuccessful. Like in the former Yugoslavia, the UN has resisted attempts to involve itself directly in ethnic violence. Furthermore, in Moldova the lines of aggression are not clearly defined; the distinction between aggressor and defender is blurred by the conflicting rights of the parties.

In April 1992 Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev advanced a second variation of this approach. He suggested a four-power (Moldova, Ukraine, Romania and Russia) guarantee for the territorial integrity of Moldova with the suggestion that the Dniester area be granted the right of self-determination should the status of Moldova change, meaning its possible future unification with Romania. This proposal drew little interest from the other parties involved.

A similar version was proposed by Yeltsin and Snegur. These two leaders agreed to a cease-fire and the need to divide the opposing forces. The CIS Summit on July 6, 1992, agreed to send a joint force of Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Romanian and Bulgarian troops to monitor the ceasefire, provided that Moldova would make a formal request and that it was willing to pay for the troops. Because of the increasing violence, the Moldovan parliament agreed to the CIS plan. But Belarus, Romania and Bulgaria declined to

participate, and Moldova withdrew its request for peace keepers, calling instead on the CSCE.

The problem confronting Yeltsin is that the use of a multi-national force is unacceptable to many of the countries in the region. President Levon Ter-Petrosyan of Armenia stated that Yeltsin's proposed peace-keeping force is not a proper conflict resolution strategy. "To my regret, I must state that the Commonwealth has no mechanism to resolve inter-ethnic conflicts, and all these statements remain mere words."⁶⁷ During this time, the Russian Supreme Soviet was calling on the Russian Fourteenth Army to intervene and disarm the combatants. Obviously, the Moldovan leadership showed little interest in this option.

None of these strategies has shown much success because of the nature of the underlying process linking the aspirations of different groups to a single political and economic agenda. As Rejai and Enloe note:

There is a subtle irony in this formulation The manipulable, culturally detachable links are the products of modernization. Modernization depends on mobilization of all available resources. Mobilization . . . has frequently depended on the existence of nationalism. In other words, the very instrumental linkages on which the authorities of the new states are wont to rely are those which require nationalism for their production.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The Dniester Russians and other Russian-speakers have legitimate fears of romanization and their place in the new order. Although previously a minority, they had the privileges of empire. In their day-to-day lives, their culture and way-of-life set the standard to which others tried to conform. Clearly, the independence of Moldova threatens this situation both actually and perceptually. That the Chisinau government articulates a policy of cultural autonomy for the minority populations and attempts to support them does not reduce the enormity of the change that the Russians are experiencing. Dismissing the Russian leadership as hard-line communists or conservatives who want to restore the Soviet Union (both of which are true) fails to recognize the reality for the Russians and the Russian-speakers.

A negative reaction to the statements of the Dniester leadership and the activities of the Dniester forces thus misses the point. Sympathies almost inevitably side with the Moldovans' trying to establish an independent and democratic regime, as with the Latvians' and other titular groups' trying to throw off the imperial legacy of the Soviets; yet the issues to which the minority Russians react are genuine, and successful political approaches to allay their

⁶⁷Schmemann, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸Rejai and Enloe, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

fears are hard to find either on the territory of what was the Soviet Union or in other parts of the world.

The problems being experienced with the break-away Dniester and Gagauz republics have captured most of the attention in the sphere of ethnic relations. However, the accommodative policies of the Chisinau government have met some success and favorable reception with the ethnic communities on the right bank. Three-quarters of the Russian population in Moldova lives in the cities and towns on the right bank; likewise, a similar proportion on the Ukrainian population in Moldova inhabits right-bank villages. Focusing on the left bank controversy obscures an important part of the inter-ethnic picture.

The Chisinau government has repeatedly taken steps to assure the minorities that make up some 35% of Moldova's population that cultural autonomy is the centerpiece of the republic's ethnic policy. This stand, together with its position that reunification with Romania is not a policy goal, led many of the Russians, Ukrainians and Bulgarians on the right bank to support Moldovan independence. The 52 of 130 non-Moldovan deputies who voted for independence and the 81% of the registered voters who voted for Snegur for president (ethnic Moldovans make up only 65% of the population) are cited as examples that a major portion of the nonindigenous population is willing to support the new state.⁶⁹ At the same time the accommodative policy might be credited with bringing right-bank Russians and Moldovans together in a multi-ethnic government in Chisinau that stands for independence from both Moscow and Bucharest.

In the short term, the process of nation-building in Moldova will be compromised by these ethnic relationships. Policy makers' options are limited; mobilizing the indigenous population creates its own reactive nationalism among the Russians and other minority groups. It also tempts outside involvement from Moscow, both because the welfare of the Russian diaspora is an issue in the domestic policy dispute between Russian moderates and conservatives, and because it invites the military, no longer under strong civilian control, to involve itself in the local controversy. In spite of its accommodative ethnic policy, the ultimate irony is that the more the Moldovan leadership attempts to institutionalize its own state structures, the greater the potential for its actions to be perceived as romanization and lead to unrest.

⁶⁹Vladimir Socor, "Why Moldova Does Not Seek Reunification with Romania," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Jan. 31, 1992, p. 31.