Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism

Charles King

Not since the early eighteenth century, when the Moldovan prince Dimitrie Cantemir was the toast of salon society from Berlin to St. Petersburg, has the existence of a Moldovan state been as widely recognized by the international community.[1] Moldova's exit from the Soviet Union on 27 August 1991 and its entry into the United Nations the following year, though, raised the difficult question of the republic's future orientation. Whether Moldova should strengthen links with its former sister republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or move towards reintegration with Romania, the country to which much of its territory belonged before 1940, continues to divide political actors in the republic. While the country's numerous political parties have also taken up a range of other pressing issues such as economic restructuring and constitutional reform, they have been forced to take sides in the ongoing debate between "pro-unification" and "pro-independence" factions within the political and cultural elite.

Moreover, serious questions about the meaning of "Moldovanness" itself have also inevitably come to the fore. For many of Moldova's writers and other intellectuals, Moldovan independence represents the first step towards reunion with the Romanian motherland. For these groups—which I will label "pan-Romanianists"—"Moldovan" should be no more than a regional identity in a reconstituted "Greater Romania." At the other end of the spectrum, powerful political groupings maintain that, while Moldovans are related to Romanians by a shared language and culture, history has "condemned [Moldova] to be a state" and its citizens must not wait for union like "manna from heaven."[2] For the most radical of these groups—known colloquially as the "Moldovanists"—Moldovans should reject the ethnonym "Romanian" altogether and get on with the task of constructing an independent Mol-

Research for this article was funded by grants from the Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission, the Social Science Research Council and St. Antony's College, Oxford. I would like to thank Igor Boţan, Mihai Gribincea, Igor Munteanu and Valeriu Opincă for their invaluable assistance, as well as two anonymous referees for their incisive comments.

1. There is a widespread misconception that "Moldavia" at some stage changed its name to "Moldova." In fact, even though the republic has generally been better known in the west as "Moldavia" (an anglicized version of the Russian name), it has always been known as "Moldova" or "Moldova Sovietică" (Soviet Moldova) by Romanian-speakers. In this article, I use the rather unwieldy term "Moldovan/Romanian" when referring to the official language and titular nationality of Moldova. The literary languages of Chişinău (Kishinev) and Bucharest are easily mutually intelligible but, as I argue below, what the Moldovans call themselves and their language is a political—not a linguistic—question.

2. Lina Dorosh, "Vviazalsia v skhvatku," *Grazhdanskii mir* (8 August 1993): 2.

dovan republic within the CIS. Any talk of pan-Romanian integration, in either a cultural or political sense, is merely using "high ideals" to "cover up personal interests in the territorial break-up of the republic."[3] Since 1990 the existence of secessionist republics in southern and eastern Moldova (Gagauzia and Transnistria) has given a special urgency to the problem of national identity and has placed a question mark over the state's future territorial configuration.

Although the construction of new post-Soviet national identities has become a common feature of political life in the successor states, the salience of identity politics is particularly profound in the Moldovan case.[4] A significant amount of space in major newspapers is taken up by discussions of linguistics, ethnography and medieval history; letters from cultural and professional organizations castigating the Moldovan government for betraying the pan-Romanian ideal are frequent; and Moldovan politicians themselves have presented historical or literary arguments to defend their own conceptions of Moldovanness. Pressing the identity question, though, represents more than political rhetoric. Indeed, given the deep divisions within Moldovan society, with the mass of its pan-Romanianist intelligentsia denying the legitimacy of the state itself, seemingly esoteric disputes about ethnography or linguistics necessarily have genuine political consequences, particularly in the areas of party politics, ethno-territorial conflict and relations with Romania. Whereas writers, artists and scholars are normally seen as guardians of official nationalism, Moldova provides a fascinating case of the gravity of identity politics when the image proffered by politicians diverges sharply from that advocated by intellectuals.

According to popular legend, the name "Moldova" derives from the adventures of Dragoş, a semi-mythical Transylvanian prince who wandered into the lands east of the Carpathian mountains in 1359. When Dragoş's hunting party came upon a wild ox in a mountain stream, his favorite hunting hound, Molda, gave chase to the beast and drowned in the ensuing melee. In memory of the event, Dragoş named the river "Molda" and took the ox's head as his seal; after exploring the area beyond the Carpathians, Dragoş would again remember the hound and give the name "Moldova" to the principality which he es-

3. "Deklaratsiia gruppy narodnykh deputatov Respubliki Moldova," *Nezavisimaia Moldova* (14 August 1993): 1.

4. While defining phrases containing the words "nation" or "identity" is always problematic, I take "national identity" here to signify the complex array of collective proper names, languages, legends, histories and other features accepted as fundamental to the collective self-definition of a given human population within a bounded territory, and "identity politics" to mean the struggles between cultural and political elites over the authenticity of rival versions of national identity (see Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991]).

tablished in the region.[5] From such inauspicious beginnings, the Principality of Moldova emerged in the fifteenth century as one of eastern Europe's major powers. During the reign of the powerful prince Ştefan the Great (1457–1504), Moldova reached the zenith of its political and military might. Stretching from the Carpathian mountains east to the Dnestr River and the Black Sea, Moldova was much coveted by Magyars, Poles, Tatars and Turks alike, and Ştefan spent most of his reign attempting to play off one power against another. Under Ştefan's successors, the principality eventually capitulated to the northward advance of the Ottomans and by 1538 had become a vassal state of the Sublime Porte.

With the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812, which temporarily ended hostilities between the Russian and Ottoman empires, Tsar Alexander I extended Russian control over the eastern half of the Principality of Moldova, the area between the Prut and Dnestr Rivers to which tsarist cartographers gave the name "Bessarabia."[6] In 1859 the western half of Moldova united with the neighboring principality to the southwest, Wallachia, and later took the name "Romania," while Bessarabia was left outside the movement for pan-Romanian union. From the end of the Crimean War to the Congress of Berlin (1856–1878), three districts along the Black Sea were returned to the Romanian principalities but, with the exception of these two decades, all of Bessarabia remained a backward *guberniia* on the western fringe of the Russian Empire.

After the 1905 revolution in St. Petersburg, many Bessarabian intellectuals saw the turmoil in Russia as an opportunity for extending pan-Romanian nationalism to the interfluve. By the time of the February revolution, the numerous political discussion groups and literary circles formed after 1905 had been transformed into the Moldovan National Party, an organization instrumental in the declaration of an independent "Moldovan Republic of Bessarabia" in January 1918. Politics in the briefly independent republic produced the same range of factions which arose in other parts of the empire, from "pan" movements aiming for union with an ethnic homeland, to socialists committed to land reform and political emancipation, to russified elites calling for the return of the tsar. In the end, it was Romania that determined the outcome of this internal political contest. The fall of the tsar presented Romania with the chance to recover the lands lost in 1812 and again in 1878. On the pretext of restoring order along its eastern border, Romanian troops crossed the Prut River and occupied Bessarabia in early 1918, a move welcomed by pan-Romanianists in Chişinău but criticized by groups with little affinity for the Romanian monarchy. Faced with a choice between the bolsheviks and Bucharest, the Bessarabian National Assembly, or *Sfatul Ţării*, voted for union with

5. Dimitrie Cantemir, *Descrierea Moldovei* (Chişinău: Hyperion, 1992), 12–13.

6. The term "Bessarabia" was in fact a misnomer. The Basarab dynasty, from which it derives, had ruled portions of Wallachia, not Moldova, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

the Kingdom of Romania in March 1918 and in December joined several former Austro-Hungarian territories inside the newly enlarged borders of greater Romania.[7]

Bessarabian political leaders, many of whom had been involved in the socialist movement in Russia, hoped to play a progressive role in greater Romania. The euphoria of pan-Romanian union, though, quickly turned sour. The Bessarabians found themselves treated like poor country cousins by their erstwhile brothers in Bucharest, and any talk of sweeping electoral reform fell on deaf ears in the Romanian palace.[8] Bessarabia remained an underdeveloped corner of greater Romania, just as it had been the "Siberia of the West" in the Russian Empire. More significantly, the pan-Romanian enthusiasm in Bucharest was not mirrored in Bessarabian villages, home to 87 percent of Bessarabia's total population and 93 percent of the region's Romanian-speakers.[9] Western visitors noted the continued use of the ethnonym "Moldovan,"[10] and major battles were fought over such reforms as the Latin script, the Gregorian calendar and new shop hours.[11]

Bessarabia remained a point of contention between Bucharest and Moscow after 1918 since its incorporation into Romania was never fully recognized by either the western powers or the bolsheviks. Following a breakdown in Romanian-Soviet negotiations on the Bessarabian issue in 1924, the Soviets established a "Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic" (MASSR) on the eastern bank of the Dnestr River inside Ukraine. The MASSR served as a bridgehead of Soviet influence in the interfluve. According to Soviet propagandists, the de jure western border of the MASSR (and therefore of the Soviet Union) lay along the Prut River, thus including all of "occupied Bessarabia" in the autonomous republic. The existence of the MASSR was proffered by the Soviets as evidence of the fact that, far from being part of a single pan-Romanian nation, Moldovans and Romanians actually formed two wholly separate ethnic groups speaking separate east-Rom-

7. Several classic Romanian-language studies of the period up to 1918 have recently been republished. See Alexandru Boldur, *Istoria Basarabiei* (Bucharest: Victor Frunză, 1992); Ion Nistor, *Istoria Basarabiei* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991); Ştefan Ciobanu, *Cultura românească în Basarabia sub stăpînirea rusă* (Chişinău: Editura Enciclopedică "Gheorghe Asachi", 1992); idem, *Unirea Basarabiei* (Chişinău: Universitas, 1993).

8. See Stelian Stoian, "Viaţa politică din Basarabia în perioada de autonomie provizorie," *Revistă de istorie a Moldovei* 2 (1992): 49–55.

9. Sabin Manuila, *Studiu etnografic asupra populaţiei României* (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Central de Statistică, 1940), 54, 56.

10. Em. de Martonne, *What I Have Seen in Bessarabia* (Paris: Imprimerie des Arts et des Sports, 1919), 10; Charles Upson Clark, *Bessarabia: Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927), 82; Henry Baerlein, *Bessarabia and Beyond* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1935), 171–72.

11. Clark, *Bessarabia* (1927), 287–90. The Romanian principalities adopted the Latin script in the mid-nineteenth century but the Cyrillic alphabet was retained (and even preferred to the Latin) by Moldovans in Russian-held Bessarabia (see Irina Livezeanu, "Moldavia, 1917–1990: Nationalism and Internationalism Then and Now," *Armenian Review* 43, no. 2–3 [1990]: 153–93).

ance languages. At most, however, Moldovans/Romanians accounted for less than a third of the MASSR's population.[12]

The signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1939 allowed the Soviet Union to increase pressure on Romania for the return of Bessarabia without fear of German interference. In June 1940 the Soviet Union forcibly annexed Bessarabia and merged portions of the interfluve with part of the existing MASSR, the strip of land east of the Dnestr known today as "Transnistria" (Romanian) or "Pridnestrov'e" (Russian). In the new Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), Soviet policy concentrated on creating barriers between the Moldovans and the Romanians west of the Prut River. Famines and forced deportations in the 1940s, the "voluntary" relocation of Moldovan families in the 1950s and 1960s, and the in-migration of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians altered the demographic landscape and literally made the former Bessarabia more "Soviet" than Romanian. The Cyrillic script was re-introduced in 1941, historians discovered age-old links between the Moldovans and the other nations of the USSR, and linguists stressed the fundamental differences between the two major east-Romance languages, Moldovan and Romanian—views rejected by scholars outside the USSR.[13]

The issue of a separate Moldovan language provided the central weapon in the arsenal of Moldovan "informal groups" which emerged in summer 1988. The Soviets had long seen linguistic criteria as fundamental to national identity and, so long as the notion of a separate Moldovan language could be maintained, the idea of a non-Romanian, Moldovan nation remained a viable proposition. Moldova's writers, artists, historians and linguists—concentrated in the republic's main informal organization, the Popular Front of Moldova—began to argue for the rejection of the Cyrillic script in favor of the Latin script, the official recognition of the unity of the Romanian and Moldovan languages, and the declaration of Romanian as the state language of the MSSR. Following the lead of the Baltic republics and Tajikistan, on 31 August 1989 the Moldovan Supreme Soviet adopted three new language laws which declared Moldovan the state language of the republic, "used in political, economic, social and cultural life and [functioning] on the basis of the Latin script." The laws met almost all the demands of the Popular Front, although the only overt reference to

12. *Vsesoiuznyi perepys liudnosti 1926 roku* (Moscow: Vydannia TsSU Soiuzu RSR, 1929), 11:30.

13. On Moldovan demographic change and cultural policy during this period, see Irina Livezeanu, "Urbanization in a Low Key and Linguistic Change in Soviet Moldavia, Part 1," *Soviet Studies* 33, no. 3 (1981): 327–51; idem, "Urbanization in a Low Key and Linguistic Change in Soviet Moldavia, Part 2," *Soviet Studies* 33, no. 4 (1981): 573–92; Charles E. King, "Soviet Policy in the Annexed East European Borderlands: The Case of Moldova" in Sven Holtsmark, Odd Arne Westad and Iver Neumann, eds., *The Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 63–93; Wim van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question in Communist Historiography* (Boulder: East European Monographs, forthcoming).

the unity of the Moldovan and Romanian languages was the rather convoluted admission that the authorities "[took] account of the really-existing Moldo-Romanian linguistic identity."[14]

The new language laws were the first stage in the demise of the Moldovan Communist Party and the first step on Moldova's path out of the Soviet Union. By adopting the laws in the face of official communist party opposition, the Moldovan Supreme Soviet asserted its power as a genuine legislative body, thus challenging its previous role as a rubber stamp for communist-party directives. The chair, Mircea Snegur, continued to pilot other significant legislation through the Moldovan Supreme Soviet. By the end of 1990, Moldova had declared its sovereignty within the Soviet Union and had adopted the Romanian tricolor, emblazoned with the ox-head seal of Dragoş and Ştefan the Great, as its state flag. In August 1991 the government affirmed its commitment to independence, first by refusing to sign the proposed treaty on union and then by issuing an unequivocal condemnation of the putschists in Moscow. A week after the failed coup, the Moldovan parliament declared the creation of "a sovereign and independent state, free to decide the present and future of the Fatherland without any interference from abroad,"[15] and Mircea Snegur became the first popularly elected president of independent Moldova at the end of the year.

In the late 1980s, the language question initially represented an issue on which intellectuals and some members of the Moldovan political elite could agree. Eager to assert their power against the Soviet center, as well as against the russified local communist party leadership, ethnic Moldovan/Romanian political figures formed a united front with ethnic Moldovan/Romanian intellectuals.[16] Their mutual interests were clear: Moldova's writers, artists and historians hoped to engender a rebirth of Moldovan (read: Romanian) national culture, a goal towards which many had been working since the 1970s, while the local political elites hoped to use the national movement as a way of extracting greater concessions from the center and of ousting the Brezhnevite leadership of the Moldovan Communist Party. Semion Grossu, the local party first secretary, had been in office since 1980 and had the distinction of being the last republican first secretary to be appointed under Brezhnev and the last to be replaced under Gorbachev. His personal style and lack of diplomacy in dealing with the Popular Front were a continual source of embarrassment to Snegur, Nicolae Ţîu, Andrei Sangheli and other younger members of the Moldovan

14. *Actele legislative ale R.S.S. Moldoveneşti cu privire la decretarea limbii moldoveneşti limbă de stat şi revenirea ei la grafia latină* (Chişinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1990), 3, 5.

15. "Declaraţia de independenţă a Republicii Moldova," *România Liberă* (28 August 1991): 8.

16. On the national movement, see Jonathan Eyal, "Moldavians" in Graham Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (New York: Longman, 1990), 123–41; William Crowther, "The Politics of Ethno-National Mobilization: Nationalism and Reform in Soviet Moldavia," *Russian Review* 50 (April 1991): 183–202.

Politburo. Even as late as August 1989, when the writing was on the wall for the notion of Moldovan-Romanian linguistic separateness, Grossu still maintained that the two were wholly separate languages and that the Latin script was inappropriate for representing spoken Moldovan. For more sagacious party personnel such as Snegur, Grossu provided a handy foil. Compared with the unreconstructed first secretary, virtually any member of the Moldovan Politburo could portray himself as a pragmatist committed to the renewal of Moldovan/Romanian national culture within a refashioned Soviet Union.

Once the language laws had been passed, fault lines began to develop within the Moldovan national movement. For many ethnic Moldovan/Romanian intellectuals, the adoption of the language laws represented a historical affirmation of the "true identity" of Moldova's ethnic majority. In the words of the Popular Front, "[T]he historic name of our people, which we have carried for centuries—a right to which chronicles and manuscripts, historical documents from the modern and contemporary periods, and the classics of marxism-leninism testify—[is] ROMANIAN and the name of our language THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE."[17] At its second congress in June 1990, the Popular Front declared itself in opposition to the government, which the Front claimed was moving too slowly on pulling Moldova out of the USSR, and openly called for union with Romania. For the Front's leadership, adopting such a position was an acid test: once anti-communism and national integration were declared the ultimate goals of the organization, it would be easy to separate committed pan-Romanianists from fellow-travelers.[18] At its third congress in February 1992, the Front transformed itself from a "mass movement" into a political party (the Christian Democrat Popular Front) and included an overt commitment to Moldovan-Romanian union in its statutes: "The natural evolution in the last few years of the movement for national liberation could only culminate in embracing of the ideal of national unity and the restitution of the Unitary Romanian State.... The Christian Democratic Popular Front maintains its status as a national, unionist movement, whose major objective is the reintegration of the Unitary Romanian State."[19] So as not to add legitimacy to the existence of a separate Moldovan state, the refashioned Front even rejected the name "Republic of Moldova" in favor of "Bessarabia."

While the radicalization of the Popular Front accomplished the goal of forcing Moldovan politicians to speak out for or against union with Romania, it also seriously weakened the numerical strength of the organization itself. The vast network of local groups which allowed it to organize so effectively in 1989 quickly diminished once union

17. "Documentul final al Marii Adunării Naţionale," *Literatură şi Artă* (31 August 1989): 2.

18. Iurie Roşca, chair of the Executive Committee of the Christian Democratic Popular Front of Moldova, interview with the author (Chişinău, 15 April 1993).

19. *Programul Frontului Popular Creştin Democrat* (Chişinău, 1992), 8.

with Romania was revealed as the Front's ultimate aim.[20] Moreover, with the defection of the Front's members and parliamentary deputies to other newly created political parties, as well as the departure of its president and other prominent leaders to Romania,[21] the organization split into two separate groups: the existing Christian Democratic Popular Front and the Congress of the Intelligentsia, formed in April 1993. Counting some of the Front's most well respected former leaders among its membership, the Congress represents the less radical face of unionism in Moldova: while still committed to closer relations with Romania, the Congress aims to temper its unionism with calls for "national reconciliation" and, for the time being, the continued existence of an independent Moldovan state. Its statutes mention only "gradual economic and spiritual integration with Romania" rather than the immediate political union supported by the Front.[22]

Another result of the Front's militancy was a corresponding radicalization among those groups supporting Moldovan independence. Chief among these groups has been the Agrarian Democratic Party (formed in November 1991), the leader of the largest faction in both the Soviet and post-Soviet parliaments. The Agrarians, composed largely of members of the former agricultural *nomenklatura*, have repeatedly stressed that Moldova should become neither "a province nor a *guberniia* of another country."[23] The most radical of the Agrarians, the faction centered around the newspaper *Viaţa Satului* (life of the village), as well as their allies in the fellow-traveler Republican Party, have even gone so far as to reject the ethnonym and glottonym "Romanian" altogether, maintaining a version of the former Soviet view that Moldovans are ethnically separate from Romanians west of the Prut River. Such affirmations are clearly in the interest of the Agrarians in general: holding the most powerful posts in Moldova's largely agrarian economy, these collective farm presidents, agro-industrial managers and heads of local government understand that moving too close to Romania could jeopardize their positions of power.[24] Moreover, since Moldova's agricultural and other trade links are still oriented

20. Vladimir Socor, "Why Moldova Does Not Seek Reunification with Romania," *RFE/RL Research Report* (31 January 1992): 30. While the Front was able to attract hundreds of thousands of Moldovans to its "Grand National Assembly" in August 1989, only a few hundred supporters turned out for similar rallies in summer 1993.

21. The Front's president, Mircea Druc, even stood in the Romanian presidential elections of September 1992, running on the single-plank platform of Moldovan-Romanian union. He received only 2.75% of the vote, coming last in the field of six candidates.

22. "Statutul Congresului Intelectualităţii," *Literatură şi Artă* (8 April 1993): 2.

23. Svetlana Gamova, "Parlament Moldovy na grani samorospuska," *Izvestiia* (29 January 1993): 2.

24. 32% of Agrarian deputies in the current parliament are heads of collective farms or agro-industrial enterprises. Another 28% are former ministers (including Prime Minister Andrei Sangheli), high-ranking members of the former parliament or heads of local government. The parliamentary chair (Petru Lucinschi) and both deputy chairs (Dumitru Moţpan and Nicolae Andronic) are also Agrarian Democrats.

chiefly towards the former Soviet republics, the Agrarians have not been eager to break essential ties by rushing into the arms of the Romanians.[25]

The weakening of support for the Popular Front both in parliament and in the Moldovan countryside notwithstanding, the pan-Romanianists were able in 1993 to muster one last show of strength on the issue of Moldovan membership in the CIS. By the middle of the year, the parliament had still not ratified the 1991 Alma Ata declaration, and Moscow increased pressure on the republic to make a firm decision on membership or face punitive trade restrictions. When CIS membership was finally placed on the parliament's agenda, it sparked the most significant confrontation between pan-Romanianists and pro-independence forces since the declaration of independence. As Romania moved closer towards membership in the Council of Europe in summer 1993, many Moldovan parliamentarians began to see the vote on ratifying CIS membership as a choice between "West" and "East," between orienting Moldova's future development towards Romania and Europe or towards Russia and the former Soviet republics. As the pan-Romanianists in the parliament argued, ratifying the Alma Ata accords would "legitimize the expansionist policy of Russia in this region, undermine the movement for national rebirth [and] wound our national dignity.[26]

Despite the endorsement of CIS membership by President Snegur, the vote failed by the slimmest of margins. Of the more than 300 registered deputies, 162 voted in favor of membership and 22 against, only a few votes short of the simple majority of all registered parliamentarians required for passage. In the event, only 188 deputies actually took part in the voting, since almost all the representatives from the separatist region of Transnistria habitually boycott the parliamentary sessions, and some 90 unionist deputies (led by the Front, the Congress of the Intelligentsia and their parliamentary allies) walked out in protest over voting procedure.[27] The defection of some Agrarians to the anti-CIS camp, swayed by unionist warnings that history would judge harshly those who voted for the continued division of the Romanian nation, also contributed to the motion's failure. While the vote represented a significant success for the pan-Romanianists, it was also their swan song. Moldova's exit from the CIS illustrated the immense power wielded by the pan-Romanianist minority bloc in parliament, a renamed version of the Supreme Soviet elected in 1990, and accelerated the movement to create a scaled-down, post-Soviet assem-

25. All of Moldova's gas and crude oil supply, 98% of its petrol, 68% of its diesel and 36% of its coal come from Russia alone. In 1992, the former Soviet republics took 75% of its exports and provided 78% of its imports ("Ekonomicheskii soiuz: 'pro' i 'contra'," *Nezavisimaia Moldova* [7 August 1993]: 2; V. Rotar, "Parlament sdelal vse, chto mog?" *Nezavisimaia Moldova* [24 August 1993]: 1).

26. "Sovmestnaia deklaratsiia," *Nezavisimaia Moldova* (5 August 1993): 1.

27. "Parlament razoshelsia s SNG," *Nezavisimaia Moldova* (7 August 1993): 1.

bly. The parliamentary presidium ignored the non-ratification vote, approved Moldova's signing the CIS treaty on economic union and scheduled new parliamentary elections for 27 February.

In the campaign leading up to the elections, several electoral alliances attempted to play down the identity issue and to focus the electorate's attention on the bread-and-butter problems of privatization, land redistribution and constitutional reform. In particular, three major reformist groups—the Social Democratic Party, the Democratic Labor Party and the Party of Reform—called on voters on all sides of the identity question to find common ground on the issue of Moldova's worsening economy.[28] However, the campaign's seminal political event, a special congress funded by the Moldovan government, ensured that national identity would remain the centerpiece of the campaign. The congress "Our Home—the Republic of Moldova" was held in Chişinău on 5 February under the aegis of the Moldovan Civic Alliance, an umbrella organization consisting of those forces most opposed to the ideals of pan-Romanianism.[29] Speeches by Moldovan writer Ion Druţă and Agrarian Democratic leader Dumitru Moţpan abjured the notion of union with Romania and underscored the need for consolidating Moldovan independence and territorial integrity.[30]

A carefully worded address by President Snegur, however, received the most attention and marked an important shift in the president's treatment of Moldovan national identity. In the past, Snegur had been careful to distance himself from the "Moldovanism" of the most radical Agrarian Democrats, a view of Moldovan-Romanian separateness which contained uncomfortable echoes of the Soviet policy discredited in 1989. While denying the possibility of political union, Snegur previously spoke approvingly of the Romanian heritage of the Moldovan state and the need for closer cultural and economic integration with Bucharest. In his "Our Home" speech, though, the president's views were unequivocal. Snegur denounced pan-Romanianism as "betrayal" and accused Moldova's writers and historians of doubting "the legitimacy and historical foundation of our right to be a state, to call ourselves the Moldovan people." In no uncertain terms, he stressed the existence of a distinct Moldovan *ethnos* as the foundation of the Moldovan state and, in the style of former first secretary Grossu, hedged his bets on the question of a separate Moldovan language:

> There has been a lot of commotion about the language spoken by Moldovans in the Republic of Moldova. Of course, we have the same

28. See the parties' programs in *Moldova Suverană* (5 February 1994): 1–4, and *Respublika* 4 (1994): 4–5.

29. The organization has no connections with the Romanian group of the same name and has even been officially denounced by the latter ("Spor ni o chem," *Nezavisimaia Moldova* [30 October 1993]: 1).

30. "Sântem [sic] poate la cea mai hotărâtoare răscruce din istoria neamului nostru," *Pămînt şi Oameni* (12 February 1994): 1, 3; Elena Shatokhina, "Drutse i 'Gazprom'—za Snegura," *Moskovskie Novosti* (13–20 February 1994): A10.

> language as our brothers in Romania. But by the same token one cannot deny that there are certain nuances [to the Moldovan language] . . . [I]n my opinion as an average speaker of this language, we cannot deny that our brother or our sister speaks a little bit differently from the way we do. The acceptance of this difference was characteristic throughout history and I do not know why we are doing all we can to forget it now. . . .

The printed version of the speech included extensive footnotes referencing well known Romanian historical and literary works in which the term "Moldovan" was used to describe the ethnic majority of the Prut-Dnestr region. In a marked departure from his previous views, Snegur also pointed to the Moldovan republic of 1917–1918 as the logical precursor of the Republic of Moldova:

> [I]n 1917, as a result of the collapse of the tsarist empire, the formation a Moldovan Democratic Republic was declared on 2 December, and on 24 January 1918 the independent Moldovan Republic was proclaimed. Hence, what happened at the end of August 1991, after the putsch in the former Soviet empire, that is, the decision of . . . parliament to proclaim Moldova an independent and sovereign state, can and should be considered the satisfaction of the people's unaltered desires to continue the tradition of the Moldovans as a nation-state. . . .[31]

Not surprisingly, the speech was immediately condemned by prominent Moldovan intellectuals—representatives of the Writers' Union, the Institute of Linguistics, the Institute of History, the State University and other institutions—as an affront to the true identity of the republic's ethnic majority and as an attempt to further "an invention of the communist regime" by erecting a "barrier to authentic Romanian culture."[32] The historians, in particular, were outraged at Snegur's use of historical documents to perpetuate the division of the Romanian nation. An open letter to the president signed by 43 leading scholars argued that:

> the glottonym "Moldovan language" can have no confirmation whatsoever. It is true that the same thing can be said about the "Moldovan state," and we would like to believe that this is the reason that you decided to convince us that we are Moldovans. There was no need to do such a thing. We know very well that we are Moldovans, . . . just as the Italians are Milanese, Venetians, Piedmontese. . . .
>
> Thus, it is not difficult to understand that the name "Moldovan" signifies not a people [*popor*] as such, but merely a part of the Romanian nation [*neamului românesc*]. It comes from the topographic name Moldova and is, therefore, essentially geographic, not ethnic, just like the names of Romanians living in other parts of the national

31. Mircea Snegur, "Republica Moldova este ţara tuturor cetăţenilor săi," *Pămînt şi Oameni* (12 February 1994): 3.

32. "O invenţie a regimului comunist," *Moldova Suverană* (12 February 1994): 3; "Să respectăm adevărul ştiinţific şi istoric," *Plus-Minus* (February 1994): 8.

> territory. In other words, being Moldovans by virtue of the region where we were born, as an integral part of the Romanian people we are at the same time Romanians, whether we like it or not.[33]

Snegur's embracing the "Moldovanist" conception of national identity surely aided the Agrarian Democrats in the February 1994 elections. The Front's loss of support after 1990 had already indicated that pan-Romanianist ideals enjoyed little support and Snegur's adopting a more anti-unionist rhetoric during the campaign helped seal the Front's political fate. The Agrarians emerged with over 43 percent of the popular vote and an absolute majority of seats in the new 104-member parliament, while the pan-Romanianists—divided between the Front and the more pragmatic Congress of the Intelligentsia—won collectively only 20 seats. An even more significant outcome was the emergence of a local ultraconservative alliance which rejects the main ideals of both the pan-Romanianist and Moldovanist camps and calls for, among other things, the use of Russian as the republic's official language. Composed of the Socialist Party (the most direct heir of the former Communist Party of Moldova) and the Edinstvo-Unitatea Movement (the successor to the perestroika-era Interfront), the alliance garnered 22 percent of the popular vote, making it the second largest voting bloc (with 28 seats) after the Agrarian Democrats.[34] None of the other nine parties and electoral alliances was able to pass the four percent threshold for parliamentary membership.[35]

The reason for the government's recent change of tack on the identity question is clear. By embracing an indigenous Moldovan nationalism as the basis for the Moldovan republic, resurrecting not only the memory of the briefly independent Bessarabian republic but also the notion of an independent Moldovan language, Snegur has attempted to portray himself and his government as the guarantors of Moldovan independence and territorial integrity. It is a theme which plays well in the countryside. Two-thirds of all ethnic Moldovans/Romanians live in the villages, where they account for over 80 percent of the total rural population.[36] Surveys carried out by William Crowther have shown that less than 10 percent of the ethnic Moldovan/Romanian population supported union with Romania in the short or long term and, when given a choice between the ethnic tags "Romanian" and

33. "Pericolul aservirii politice a veşnicelor adevăruri," *Plus-Minus* (February 1994): 8.

34. "Okonchatel'nye itogi Parlamentskikh vyborov," *Moldova Suverană Daidzhest* (18 March 1994): 1.

35. The post-Soviet electoral law stipulated that the entire Moldovan republic be considered a single, multi-member electoral district with deputies elected in a closed party-list system. Therefore, since candidates are not tied to any definite regional constituency, the government argues that the separatist regions are represented in the new parliament even though few people from those areas actually participated in the voting.

36. *Republica Moldova* (Chişinău: Universitas, 1992), 16.

"Moldovan," some 87 percent of Moldovan/Romanian-language speakers chose the latter.[37] Similarly, a government-sponsored "sociological survey" (*La sfat cu poporul*) carried out a week after the elections, although both scientifically and legally suspect,[38] seemed to yield a clear pro-independence result, with over 90 percent of participants voting "Yes" to an independent republic within its present borders.[39]

Just as in the late 1980s, when he was able to stake out a position between the radical pan-Romanianists and the intransigent communist party first secretary, Snegur has now attempted to steer his way between the remnants of the Front and the newly empowered Socialist-Edinstvo bloc. With the former pulling Moldova towards Bucharest and the latter towards Moscow, an indigenous "Moldovanism" seems the only recourse for a government committed to maintaining its own independence. For Snegur in particular, cultivating an indigenous Moldovan nationalism will yield favorable results in the next presidential elections, when his most likely opponent will be the present parliamentary speaker, Petru Lucinschi; both Snegur and Lucinschi were born in Moldova, but the latter spent much of his political career outside the republic and will thus be vulnerable to attacks from the "native son" incumbent. The "Moldovanist" conception of national identity, however, places the president in a double-bind: not only does it further alienate the pan-Romanianist intelligentsia, who now promise to keep the contentious issue of national identity at the forefront of political discourse, but it also threatens to undermine the non-ethnic, civic basis for statehood which is essential to avoiding further inter-ethnic conflict.

For the past four years, Snegur and other top Moldovan officials have worked to stress the civic, multi-ethnic character of the Moldovan state as a way of allaying the fears of the minority populations that the ultimate end of Moldovan independence is union with Romania. More than one third of Moldova's population is made up of non-Moldovan/Romanian minorities, and substantial numbers of Slavs (Ukrainians, Russians and Bulgarians) and Gagauzi (Orthodox Christian Turks) are concentrated in eastern and southern Moldova.[40] Since 1989, Chişinău

37. William Crowther, "The Politics of Ethnic Confrontation in Moldova" (paper presented at Woodrow Wilson Center conference on "High Conflict/Low Conflict: Six Case Studies", Washington, DC, 28–30 June 1993).

38. *La sfat cu poporul* was neither a referendum nor a public opinion survey. The question as formulated made it difficult to give a clear affirmative/negative answer and, since it contained several sub-questions within a single sentence, it was impossible to determine which portion of the general question the respondent might be answering ("Apropo," *Dnevnoi ekspress* [22 February 1994]: 2).

39. "Poporul şi-a spus cuvîntul," *Moldova Suverană* (12 March 1994): 1.

40. According to the 1989 census, Moldova's total population was 64.5% Moldovan/Romanian, 13.8% Ukrainian, 13.0% Russian, 3.5% Gagauz and 2.0% Bulgarian, with the remainder accounted for by Jews, Gypsies and other nationalities. In the five *raions* east of the Dnestr River (Transnistria) Moldovans/Romanians account for a plurality of the population (40%), with the remainder composed largely of Ukrainians, Russians and Bulgarians. In the five southernmost *raions* (Gagauzia), ethnic Gagauzi

has been involved in a cold, and at times hot, war with two separatist republics proclaimed in 1990, in the south (the Republic of Gagauzia) and on the eastern bank of the Dnestr River (the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic).

The Gagauzi and Transnistrians were initially concerned that the pan-Romanian euphoria which swept the republic during the second half of 1989 would lead to their forced "romanianization" and a quick union of Moldova and Romania. The new language laws were of particular concern. In 1989, less than 4 percent of non-native Moldovan/Romanian-speakers considered Moldovan/Romanian their second language, while nearly 60 percent of Moldova's population considered Russian a native or second language.[41] However, despite the calls to make both Moldovan/Romanian and Russian official languages, Russian was given the less exalted status of "language of communication among nations" and "language of communication among the nations of the Soviet Union."[42] The use of the same phrase (*limbă de comunicare între naţiuni/iazyk mezhnatsional'nogo obshcheniia*) in both contexts made the law ambiguous: with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, it was not clear whether Russian would still have an official position within Moldova as a "language of inter-ethnic communication" or merely as a language to be used in foreign relations with the other successor states. More importantly, the language laws set out definite time limits for learning Moldovan/Romanian and elaborated an ambitious plan for mandatory testing of virtually every Moldovan citizen—from government ministers to shop assistants—by 1996.

In 1989 and 1990 the government of Prime Minister Mircea Druc, the leader of the Popular Front, did little to assuage the fears of the separatists. The Druc government had been appointed by President Snegur in deference to the power of the Popular Front, and Druc used his position in the overwhelmingly ethnic-Moldovan/Romanian government to appeal to volunteers to take up arms in defence of Moldovan territorial integrity. An all-out war with the Transnistrians in the first half of 1992, as well as periodic skirmishes with the Gagauzi, created a climate of mistrust among the various sides in the conflict and led to significant human and material losses. Since that time, however, the Moldovan leadership has worked to appease the Gagauzi and Transnistrians by stressing the non-ethnic, citizenship-based nature of the Moldovan state. Druc's successors, especially the current prime minister, Andrei Sangheli, have presided over governments which more broadly reflect the republic's multi ethnic character. Indeed, when the Sangheli government was formed in summer and autumn 1992, special

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form the largest group (47% of the population), followed by Moldovans/Romanians and Bulgarians.

41. *Economia Naţională a Republicii Moldova, 1991* (Chişinău: Departamentul de Stat pentru Statistică, 1992), 78–79.

42. *Actele legislative* (1990), 6.

portfolios were reserved for ministers from the separatist regions, although the Transnistrians declined to accept the offer. The Front's fall from grace after Druc's dismissal in 1991 was accelerated with the replacement of the ministers for defense and state security in July 1992 for their overzealous handling of the Transnistrian crisis. The last avowed pan-Romanianist in high office fell in January 1993 with the forced resignation of the speaker of the Moldovan parliament, Alexandru Moşanu, and several of his colleagues in the presidium.

The composition of Moldova's top political leadership thus experienced a sea change: whereas pan-Romanian unionists were able to ride the wave of national liberation to assume some of the top posts in government and parliament after 1989, their ineptitude in handling inter-ethnic discord led to their replacement by former communists whom they had denounced as "Romanophobes" and mere fellow-travelers in the national movement. By the middle of 1993 the posts of president, prime minister, foreign minister and parliamentary speaker were all held by former Politburo members. Most spectacularly, Moşanu's replacement as parliamentary chair was Petru Lucinschi, the penultimate first secretary of the Moldovan Communist Party, whose political come-back led to his being christened "the Moldovan Brazauskas."[43]

The new Moldovan leadership, particularly the Snegur-Sangheli-Lucinschi triumvirate, has sought to establish a dialogue with the separatists. Informal meetings are regularly held with Igor' Smirnov, Aleksandr Karaman and Grigore Marakutsa (the Transnistrian president, vice-president and Supreme Soviet chair, respectively). Chişinău's confrontational rhetoric, including repeatedly bringing legal action against Smirnov, has ceased, and Snegur has accepted the notion that Transnistria should have a special legal status within Moldova. Indeed, on the basis of the accord signed between Snegur and Boris Yeltsin in July 1992, which established a joint Russian-Moldovan-Transnistrian peace-keeping force along the Dnestr River, the president has worked to hammer out a comprehensive settlement on local autonomy for the east-bank region. A set of "Basic Principles" proposed by the Moldovan government would recognize the special "historical, social and cultural characteristics" of the current "Transnistrian Moldovan Republic." The five east-bank *raions* and the city of Tiraspol' would be defined as the "Transnistrian Self-Administered Territory" (*Pridnestrovskaia samoupravliaemaia territoriia*), with power over budgetary decisions, minimum wage levels, taxation, export/import licenses, foreign economic relations, health care and social services, police forces and other fields. Significantly, the language laws adopted in 1989, the source of much of the discontent among Moldova's ethnic minorities, would not be applied in Transnistria until 2005. The Transnistrians' counter-proposal, however, rejects anything short of a loose Moldovan confeder-

43. Vitalii Portnikov, "'Moldavskii Gorbachev' okazyvaetsia 'moldavskim Brazauskasom,'" *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (6 February 1993): 1.

ation, with few powers reserved for the central authorities.[44] The Transnistrian Supreme Soviet has already passed its own citizenship law, established customs posts along the Dnestr River, and introduced its own local currency (the Suvorov).[45]

Moreover, the Russian Federation has strongly supported the Transnistrians in their battles with Chişinău and has viewed the conflict as a result of Moldova's sense of revanchism towards its ethnic Russian population. More than over a quarter of Moldova's 562,000 ethnic Russians live in Transnistria and the results of the last Russian elections seem to indicate that their grievances will now receive an even more sympathetic hearing in Moscow.

In 1989 the Transnistrians' grievances were almost exclusively associated with the language laws and the threat of union with Romania. As unionists were progressively purged from the Moldovan government and the Snegur leadership softened its bargaining position, the Transnistrians' demands changed substantially. What began as a movement to prevent romanianization now seems to have become a movement to prevent democratization. Few of the social and political changes implemented throughout the former USSR have reached Transnistria, and the republic still retains all of the old Soviet laws, symbols and holidays, including a ban on writing Moldovan/Romanian in the Latin script. The east-bank region has also become a haven and a symbol for those groups disillusioned with the transition period in Russia. The Transnistrian minister of state security and deputy ministers of security and internal affairs are all former OMON officers wanted on criminal charges in Latvia and Estonia, and Transnistrian irregulars were dispatched to Moscow to participate in the defense of the White House in October 1993. The Moldovans hoped that the October events would illustrate to the Russians the readiness of the Transnistrians to bite the hand that feeds, but Moscow was quick to eschew any linkage between the soldiers fighting in Moscow and the Russian Federation's firm support for Transnistrian self-determination.[46] The situation is complicated by the presence of the Russian 14th army, former Soviet troops still stationed in Tiraspol', the Transnistrian capital. Little progress has been made in Moldovan-Russian talks on their withdrawal and the army's outspoken commander, Major-General Aleksandr Lebed', has taken an active part in Transnistrian political life. He routinely condemns the Moldovans for ethnic chauvinism and the Transnistrians for corruption, and has suggested that the "Pinochet precedent" might provide a solution to the Mol-

44. See the Addenda to "Report of the CSCE Human Dimension Mission to the Republic of Moldova (January 30–February 4, 1993)" (CSCE, 1993), 31–37.

45. The "Suvorov" is a Russian ruble of 1961–1992 issue with a special stamp bearing the image of the famous field-marshal. New Russian rubles are also in circulation but the Moldovan *leu* (introduced in November 1993) is not considered legal tender ("'Valuta' tiraspoleană," *Moldova Suverană* [20 January 1994]: 1; "Nemilost' k moldavskomu leiu," *Nezavisimaia Moldova* [24 November 1993]: 2).

46. RFE/RL Daily Report (8 October 1993).

dovan-Transnistrian crisis.[47] It is illustrative of the power wielded by the 14th army's commander that Transnistrian residents often queue outside his office to bring to his attention such issues as rent hikes, unpaid pensions and other domestic problems; in 1992, in fact, Lebed' was voted Transnistria's "Man of the Year."[48] Although the CSCE has endorsed Moldova's plan for recognizing Transnistria's special status as an incentive for Russia to withdraw the 14th army,[49] Moscow is reluctant to forfeit the strategic asset provided by the army's presence in the region, especially in view of its ongoing dispute with Ukraine.[50]

The Snegur leadership has made a great deal more progress in dealing with the Gagauzi. A parliamentary commission on Gagauz affairs was formed in March 1993 and a draft law on local autonomy submitted in May. The draft designated the region populated by compact Gagauz settlements as a special administrative district, *Gagauz Eri* (literally "the Gagauz place"), with wide-ranging cultural and administrative autonomy and the right to self-determination were Moldova to "forfeit its state sovereignty" (i.e., by uniting with Romania). In return, the Gagauzi were expected to preserve the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and to respect Chişinău as the republic's ultimate political authority. A counter-proposal put forward by the Gagauz Supreme Soviet, based in the city of Comrat, insisted on the creation of a Moldovan confederation consisting of Gagauzia, Transnistria and a truncated Republic of Moldova.[51] Gagauzia would be a fully sovereign state governed by a directly elected president and parliament, the *Başkan* and the *Yusek Topluş*, while Gagauz, Moldovan/Romanian, Russian and Bulgarian would all be considered equal state languages.[52] Chişinău's draft failed to win support in the pre-1994 Moldovan parliament but the new assembly has placed a re-examination of the proposed law on its agenda.

Relations between Chişinău and Comrat began to improve significantly in early 1994. Stepan Topal, the president of Gagauzia, ap-

47. Tat'iana Tsyba, "Esli Vaniu shlepnut, eto nevosstanovimo," *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (27 April 1993). Lebed' is strongly supportive of the 14th army's presence in Transnistria but he has shown no affinity for the Transnistrian leadership itself. See Charles King, "Moldova and the New Bessarabian Questions," *The World Today* (July 1993), 135–39.

48. Branimir Radev, Bulgarian Chargé d'Affaires in Moldova, interview with the author (Chişinău, 26 April 1993); RFE/RL Daily Report (9 September 1993).

49. "Doklad No. 13 missii SBSE v Moldove," *Makler-Telegraf* (3 February 1994): 1; 3–5.

50. For detailed treatments of the Transnistrian crisis and the 14th army's role, see Michael Orr, "14th Army and the Crisis in Moldova," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (June 1992): 247–50; Pål Kolstø and Andrei Edemsky with Natalya Kalashnikova, "The Dniester Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism," *Europe-Asia Studies* 45, no. 6 (1993): 973–1000.

51. Alexandru Burlaca, "Găgăuzia şi Transnistria au propus crearea unei 'Confederaţii moldoveneşti'," *Republica* (6 April 1993): 6.

52. Aleksandr Tago, "Komrat—za federativnoe ustroistvo Moldovy," *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (17 February 1993): 3; "Komrat: proekt zakona o funktsionirovanii iazykov," *Nezavisimaia Moldova* (5 August 1993): 1.

plauded Snegur's speech to the "Our Home" congress, the Comrat Supreme Soviet allowed polling stations for the parliamentary elections and *La sfat cu poporul* to open inside Gagauzia, and the Gagauz leadership universally praised the electoral results.[53] The Gagauz Section of the Moldovan Academy of Sciences has been instrumental in developing a Latin alphabet for written Gagauz and in elaborating a program for improving the standard of living of the 136,000 ethnic Gagauzi living in southern Moldova.[54] Reforms such as the opening of Gagauz sections in the Moldovan Pedagogical Institute, the establishment of a special Gagauz University in Comrat and the introduction of native-language education in Gagauz villages have served to mollify the most radical members of the Gagauz Supreme Soviet. Aid from Turkey and Bulgaria has also been channeled to the Gagauz and Bulgarian populations of southern Moldova, particularly to the university in Comrat, in an attempt to convince the minorities that, even in a non-federal Moldova, their cultural rights will be respected.[55] While the improved atmosphere is partly due to the more conciliatory tone coming from Chişinău, the Gagauz government itself has in large part made a virtue out of a necessity. The Gagauzi do not have access to the arms caches available to the Transnistrians (via the 14th army), they live in the poorest region of Moldova and thus do not threaten the state with the loss of most of its industry and energy links (as do the separatists in Transnistria), they still rely on Chişinău to subsidize the local budget, and they have proved unable to establish effective control over the five *raions* designated as the Gagauz republic. Indeed, ethnic Gagauzi form majorities in only two of the *raions*, and local Moldovan and Bulgarian populations have given little support to the Gagauz leadership. As well, the general lawlessness which prevails in Moldova's "wild south" has proved beyond the capacity of any force, Moldovan or Gagauz, to control.

Snegur has thus been relatively successful in his attempts to alleviate the fears caused by the Front's pan-Romanianist zeal in 1989–1990. An important element of his strategy has been to underscore the multi-ethnic nature of the Moldovan state. The citizenship law adopted in 1991 is among the most liberal in the former Soviet Union and

53. "O biudzhete, vyborakh i drugom," *Komratskie vesti* (19 February 1994): 1; G. Golia, "Veriu v razum novykh politikov," *Kishinevskie novosti* (19 March 1994): 1–2. The Gagauzi held their own "sociological survey" parallel to *La sfat cu poporul*. More than 85% of participants supported a separate Gagauz "national territory" within an independent Moldova (Val Butnaru, "Agrarienii vor avea de plătit nişte poliţe preelectorale," *Observatorul de Chişinău* [22 March 1994]: 3).

54. Gavril Gaidargi, Adjunct Director of Moldovan Institute of National Minorities, interview with the author (Chişinău, 8 April 1993).

55. Turkey has shown a particular interest in the Gagauz problem as part of its effort to establish ties with the Turkic populations of the former USSR. Two books on the Gagauzi, a rarity outside the former USSR, were recently published in Ankara: Harun Güngör and Mustafa Argunşah, *Gagauz Türkleri: tarih, dil, folklor ve halk edebiyatı* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1991); idem, *Gagauzlar: dünden bugüne* (Ankara: Elektronik İletişim Ajansi, 1993).

some of the first acts of the new post-Soviet parliament were to suspend the Moldovan/Romanian-language examinations mandated by the 1989 language law and to affirm Moldova's membership in the CIS. There is, however, an uneasy relationship between the civic conception of Moldovanness offered to the separatists and the ethnic image which Snegur stresses in his battles with the pan-Romanianists. Certainly, promoting different images to each audience has illustrated the government's skill at adapting the political message to fit the political milieu. But domestic confrontations with the pan-Romanianists have forced Snegur to dwell on a topic which he would rather leave to one side, that is, the ethnicity of the Moldovans themselves and their position as the "most legitimate" inhabitants of the Prut-Dnestr region. Relations with Romania, which views the pan-Romanianist intellectuals as its logical allies in Chişinău, have complicated the situation by pushing the Snegur government even closer towards defending a separate Moldovan ethnicity as the basis for the Moldovan state.

Across the political spectrum in Romania, irredentism is a necessary plank in every party's platform. Groups as radically different as the "nationalist bloc" in parliament, the Iron Guard-inspired Movement for Romania and the liberal umbrella organization Democratic Convention, have called for the reintegration of the former Romanian lands which now form part of Ukraine and Moldova; some commentators in Romania have even invoked what might be called the "Kosovo complex," that is, the idea that a particular piece of territory within the historical homeland is mystically linked with the collective well-being of the *ethnos*.[56] For many Romanians, the return of "the sacred land" (*sfîntul pămînt*) of Bessarabia—with its connections to Ştefan the Great and the national poet, Mihai Eminescu—is essential to eradicating the consequences of World War II and the legacy of communism.

Romanian president Ion Iliescu and the ruling Party of Social Democracy of Romania (PSDR, the former Democratic National Salvation Front) have normally been extremely cautious in their relations with the Moldovans. However, since the September 1992 parliamentary elections, the PSDR has not controlled enough parliamentary seats to force through its programs without the help of the powerful nationalist bloc, composed of three parties officially committed to Romanian-Moldovan union. The nationalists—the Greater Romania Party, the Party of Romanian National Unity and the Socialist Labor Party—are generally more concerned about Hungarian and Jewish "conspiracies" than about the resurrection of greater Romania, but the need for Iliescu periodically to repay them for their support leaves him little room to maneuver in relations with Moldova. Indeed, the appointment of extre-

56. Such views were particularly prevalent in the Romanian press during the Transnistrian war of 1992. See for example Tudor Artenie, "Sînt mai buni şi mai chinuiţi ca noi," *România Liberă* (4–5 April 1992): 1; Victor Bârsan, *Masacrul inocenţilor: războiul din Moldova, 1 martie–29 iulie 1992* (Bucharest: Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române, 1993).

mists to various positions in the Romanian Ministry of Culture in mid-1993 and the continuing controversy surrounding the formation of a coalition government have illustrated the PSDR's indebtedness to such groups.[57]

After the failure of the CIS ratification, Romania was quick to congratulate Moldova on the vote. Iliescu described the motion's failure as a vote "for the development and strengthening of independence . . . in the natural framework of the European space, with which [Moldova] is linked not only by historical relations with Romania, but also by current aspirations for emancipation."[58] He also offered the Moldovans a significant aid package to pay for outstanding fuel debts to the Russian Federation. A range of official connections exists between the governments in Chişinău and Bucharest, including high-level working groups on bilateral relations, and Romania is Moldova's largest trading partner outside the CIS. The Moldovans, however, miss no opportunity to underscore the existence of two separate states. As Petru Lucinschi warned during his visit to Romania in June 1993, the fact that Romania and Moldova have "a shared thousand-year history, a single language [and] a shared culture" should not lead on to "unrealistic and abstract questions" of union. Lucinschi also used the ethnonym "Moldovan" to describe the republic's titular nationality, a formulation which infuriated many of his listeners in Romania.[59] Likewise, in an address to the United Nations by the then Moldovan foreign minister, Nicolae Ţîu, references to Romania were conspicuously absent and Ţîu used the bulk of his speech to attack the Russian Federation and its support for the Transnistrians.[60] Such an omission was of particular significance in the setting of the UN General Assembly: in order to avoid the appearance of territorial pretensions on Romania's "Moldova" region (the western half of the old Principality of Moldova), the delegate from Chişinău officially represents "The Republic of Moldova" and, according to the alphabetical seating arrangement, happens to sit next to the representative of Romania.[61]

Most spectacularly, Snegur's speech to the "Our Home" congress in February 1994 and the subsequent survey *La sfat cu poporul* prompted a range of vitriolic condemnations from Bucharest. The president of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies issued an official declaration denouncing the "anti-Romanian policy" being carried out by Snegur,[62] while the Democratic Party of Romania (the former National Salvation

57. See Michael Shafir, "Romanian Prime Minister Announces Cabinet Changes," *RFE/RL Research Report* (24 September 1993): 17–22; Dan Ionescu and Michael Shafir, "Romanian Government Reorganized," *RFE/RL Research Report* (1 April 1994): 14–19.

58. "Deklaratsiia prezidenta Rumynii," *Nezavisimaia Moldova* (14 August 1993): 1.

59. "Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Parlamenta Respubliki Moldova," *Nezavisimaia Moldova* (14 July 1993): 1–2.

60. "Vystuplenie ministra inostrannykh del Respubliki Moldova," *Nezavisimaia Moldova* (13 October 1993): 1; 3. Ţîu has since been named ambassador to Washington.

61. I thank Jonathan Eyal for drawing this fact to my attention.

62. "Declaraţii de o gravitate extremă," *Moldova Suverană* (16 February 1994): 3.

Front) condemned the speeches by Snegur and Moţpan as "lacking culture, made for purely electoral reasons, contrary to the truths of history and, as a result, contrary to the interests of the Romanians [living] between the Prut and the Dnestr."[63] Similar statements were forthcoming from other Romanian parties and government bodies—including the foreign ministry's proclamation that "only history" could decide Moldova's fate—and Moldovan political figures such as Moţpan and prime minister Sangheli were quick to rebuke the Romanians for insulting the Moldovan people and attacking the legitimacy of Moldovan statehood.[64]

The Romanians' patronizing attitude has, since early 1994, pushed the Moldovan leadership into adopting a stronger line on Moldovan identity. Indeed, one of the reasons for Snegur's outspoken condemnation of the pan-Romanianists in the run-up to the February elections was surely an attempt to stake out his position vis-à-vis Bucharest. His "Our Home" speech, in fact, contained a direct appeal to his Romanian listeners: "Our Moldovan people no longer wish to be a bargaining chip or the victim of someone else. They no longer wish to hear how [someone else] claims their country as its own territory. . . , as if it had no genuine owners. . . ."[65] Standing up to the Romanians, and to the pan-Romanianists in Chişinău, is essential to Snegur's own political future and no doubt aided the Agrarians at the polls. To a great degree, both Moldovan and Romanian politicians are merely responding to the vox populi: as the last elections and "sociological survey" indicated, Moldovan politicians are to some degree judged on their ability to articulate a strong Moldovanist, pro-independence line, while politicians in Bucharest are similarly obliged to advocate the reintegration of the lands lost in 1940.

Both obligations, however, have their price. For the Romanians, the rhetoric of irredentism tarnishes their image abroad and undermines their claim to be a source of stability in southeastern Europe. For the Moldovans, the consequences of stressing the identity issue are potentially even more serious. On the one hand, pan-Romanianist intellectuals in Chişinău and irredentist rumblings coming from Bucharest have forced Snegur and the Agrarians to present a distinct Moldovan identity—based on indigenous linguistic features and the briefly independent Bessarabian republic—as the basis for the contemporary Moldovan state. On the other hand, the threat of territorial separatism coming from the Gagauzi and Transnistrians has compelled Snegur and his associates to stress the concept of Moldovan citizenship—based on an appreciation of the ethnic complexity of the region—as the foundation of Moldovan statehood. While this tension between ethnic and civic conceptions of national identity is certainly not unique to

63. "Contrar adevărului istoric," *Moldova Suverană* (16 February 1994): 3.

64. Associated Press (Bucharest) (7 March 1994); RFE/RL Daily Report (4, 8 and 17 March 1994).

65. Snegur, "Republica Moldova" (1994): 3.

Moldova, the country's history and current political landscape have made the job of negotiating between them particularly difficult.

The February 1994 elections and March "sociological survey" indicated that few Moldovans see themselves as ethnic Romanians and that still fewer have any affinity for the recreation of "Greater Romania." Indeed, the only party to campaign solely on its support for immediate union, the National Christian Party, placed last in the polls with fewer than 6,000 votes nationwide. Intellectuals in Moldova, as well as many observers in the west, have offered a simple explanation for this phenomenon: they see the continued use of the ethnonym "Moldovan" by large sections of the population as evidence of the depth of "denationalization" carried out by the Soviets and perpetuated by their successors. According to the respected literary critic, Ion Ciocanu, the entrenched political interests of the Agrarians are to blame for obscuring the "scientific and historical truth" that Moldovans are in fact Romanians, speak the Romanian language and are the legitimate "native population" (*populaţia băştinaşă*) of Moldova.[66] Were it not for the machinations of the Agrarians, they argue, Moldovans would awake to the Romanianness within them.

The reasons for the failure of pan-Romanianism, though, are surely far more complex. Indeed, the real surprise about Moldovan identity is not the fact that Moldovans have rejected their ostensible Romanianness, but rather the fact that so many western observers, both journalists and scholars, predicted that they would embrace it. Bessarabia's existence inside the Russian Empire during the formative years of Romanian national consciousness, the inglorious legacy of Romanian rule between the wars, official Soviet policy after 1924 and 1940, Romania's unenviable economic situation, continued trade and cultural links with the former Soviet republics, and the patronizing attitude with which Moldovans continue to be treated by Bucharest are all factors which have stengthened an independent Moldovan identity over the pan-Romanianism of Chişinău intellectuals.

As I have tried to show, arguing against the pan-Romanianists' view has provided the current government with considerable political capital. With the ethnic Moldovan/Romanian population, the Snegur government has been able to cast itself as the defender of national sovereignty and an independent Moldovan identity, an image which appeals to the mass of Moldova's peasants. With the Transnistrians and Gagauzi, the government has forged a non-ethnic concept of citizenship as a bulwark against the pan-Romanianist aspirations of the Moldovan/Romanian intelligentsia, a tactic which has helped to reduce tensions between the center and separatist regions.

The government's use of the identity issue in both milieux has had

66. Ion Cioçanu, "Cine nu ştie ceea ce ştie toată lumea?" *Literatură şi Artă* (15 April 1993): 3.

the dangerous side effect of highlighting the tension between ethnic and civic conceptions of Moldovanness and has assured that debates about national identity and Moldovan statehood are key components of the political process. There are several reasons to believe that they will remain so. First, if the Socialist-Edinstvo bloc in the new parliament follows its party program, it will increasingly question Moldova's existence on the fringes of the CIS, pushing the government to join the ruble zone, grant Moscow a permanent military presence in Transnistria and generally backtrack on the reforms initiated since 1989. It is a course to which Snegur, Sangheli and Lucinschi, despite their party backgrounds, have been firmly opposed. The government may thus find an indigenous Moldovan nationalism, of the kind cultivated by the "Our Home" congress, as a handy tool for mobilizing support against the ultraconservative alliance.

Second, as the new parliament considers the draft laws on local autonomy for Gagauzia and Transnistria and begins work on finalizing a new draft constitution, the basis for Moldovan statehood will undoubtedly arise. Whether Moldova is to be defined as a "national" state (and just what that "nation" should be called), the degree of autonomy to be granted to the separatist regions, and the national symbols to be enshrined in the constitution are all questions which invite debate on the fundamentals of Moldovanness. Furthermore, pan-Romanianists in both Chisinău and Bucharest have denied that the Gagauzi should be seen as anything more than visitors in the traditional "Romanian space"; as they see it, granting the Gagauzi the constitutional right to secede in the event of Moldovan-Romanian union is simply placing an ethnic time bomb in the middle of historical greater Romania.[67]

Third, political parties in Romania, particularly the three nationalist groups in parliament, are likely to continue to see irredentism as the sine qua non of domestic political viability. Chişinău will thus be forced to respond to Romanian irredentist rhetoric by strengthening its commitment to an independent Moldovan political and cultural identity.

Finally, political opposition to Snegur's "Moldovanism" was certainly weakened by the February elections, but the pan-Romanianists and their allies have not disappeared as an active political force. In the first place, the old Popular Front spawned a range of other political parties which, while differing in their support for Moldovan-Romanian unification, are nevertheless united in their opposition to the Agrarian-led government and see the identity question as a powerful weapon against it.[68] The Party of Reform and the Democratic Labor Party, though still in their infancy, are a good example. Both have a sizeable

67. This view is most forcefully stated in R. Iuncu, ed., *K voprosu o gagauzskoi avtonomii* (Chişinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1990).

68. For an overview of these groups, see Valeriu Opincă and Igor Gorea, "Stanovlenie mnogopartiinosti v Respublike Moldova," *Grazhdanskii mir* (23 April 1993): 3.

constituency among educated, urbanized ethnic Moldovans/Romanians, many of whom are involved in the growing private sector of the economy. For these groups, Snegur and the former party elite are merely using the notion of an independent Moldovan identity in order to curry favor with the Moldovan peasantry, to cement their positions of power in the republic, and to block economic reforms which would lead to the growth of new non-agricultural elites. As an antidote, ethnic Moldovan/Romanian entrepreneurs and managers of newly privatized enterprises have begun to stress the "Romanianness" of the Moldovan republic, linking up with the committed pan-Romanianists, attacking the Agrarians as holdovers from the communist period and denouncing the Snegur government for perpetuating the myth of two separate east-Romance peoples. Thus, whereas the Front and the Congress of the Intelligentsia are opposed to the government's Moldovanist stance out of devotion to "scientific and historical truth," ethnic Moldovan/Romanian entrepreneurs see it as an impediment to their supplanting the Soviet-era *apparatchiki*. Obviously, the Party of Reform and the Democratic Labor Party remain cool on political union with Romania but emphasizing the essential Romanianness of the Moldovan republic will likely remain a major component of their political strategies.

More importantly, devoted pan-Romanianists currently control such key cultural institutions as the State University in Chişinău, various institutes in the Academy of Sciences and the Writers' Union. A purge of the Soviet-era cultural elite after 1989 brought to power younger, ethnic Moldovan/Romanian academics and cultural bureaucrats dedicated to the pan-Romanian ideals of the Front and the Congress of the Intelligentsia. They travel frequently to Bucharest and Iaşi, have strong links with Romanian intellectuals and, like their unionist forebears in 1918, consider it their task to awake the Romanian spirit in a somnolent peasantry. Looking to the future, this bifurcation between the "creative intelligentsia" and the rest of Moldovan society is the greatest guarantor of the continued salience of identity politics. So long as Moldovan schoolchildren and university students continue to study literary Romanian, to explore the commonalities between both banks of the Prut and to learn of the treachery of Soviet "denationalization" after 1940, the question of national identity will continue to be one of the motors of Moldovan politics.