NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY IN TRANSNISTRIA

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The conflict over Transnistria is both a community conflict over territory and sovereignty and a conflict in international relations between Moldova on the one hand, and Russia on the other. This article provides an overview of this conflict and then proceeds to discuss the gradual consolidation of a distinct ethno-national identity in Transnistria following the armed conflict of 1992, albeit relying on 'collective memories' fermented in previous times. It relies on data obtained through qualitative in-depth interviews with 35 students at Tiraspol University. These interviews show that Transnistrian identity has acquired distinct boundaries vis-à-vis Moldovan identity, especially among young people. This complicates reintegration within a federal model.

Introduction

While in June 1990 Soviet Moldavia (the former Moldovan SSR) declared sovereignty, its eastern region, with its predominantly Slav population, seceded from Moldova, remaining loyal to the USSR. The new language policy[1] and Soviet Moldavia's transformation into a sovereign state have been considered the main reasons for the secession of the country's eastern region. It was fed by 'fear' that if Moldova became independent, it would reunite with Romania as a result of common linguistic and historical roots. The difference in the history of the two former Moldovan SSR regions resulted in the emergence of extremely different and contradictory feelings towards the national emancipation movement of 1989. In response to Moldova's Declaration of Sovereignty on 2 September 1990, Tiraspol[2] hosted the second extraordinary Congress of Deputies representing different communities living on the left bank of the Nistru River. This Congress established the new 'Transnistrian Republic' within the Soviet Union. Shortly thereafter, an armed conflict broke out in spring 1992, ending with a ceasefire agreement in June of that year. Even if separated from the Republic of Moldova, the so-called Transnistrian Republic officially belongs to Moldova, and is not recognized as an independent entity by the international community. Today, Transnistrian leaders control over 12% of the eastern territory[3] of the Republic of Moldova, including the most heavily industrialized areas.

Discussions about a resolution to the Transnistrian conflict began in 1993. The Transnistrian side proposed a confederate model made up of Moldova and Transnistria, which would be two equally independent states, whereas Moldova offered Transnistria special status within the Republic of Moldova instead. Neither of the proposals was approved. The Transnistrian suggestion was opposed because it violated Moldova's

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territorial integrity, while Transnistrian leaders rejected the Republic of Moldova's offer of 'special status' (Vahl & Emerson, 2004). Despite the fact that more than a decade has past since the end of the military confrontation, the conflict has not yet been resolved. The impasse reached in the search for a solution of the Transnistrian conflict has transformed it into a 'frozen' one. Meanwhile, the Transnistrian region has consolidated its 'statehood'. The historical arguments that Transnistria had never been a Romanian territory in conjunction with the creation of the Moldovan Autonomous SSR in 1924 were the main line of reasoning adopted by the Tiraspol leaders in order to reinforce their position and power, and to make sense of their strategy of creating 'the Transnistrian people'. However, it has been argued that the de facto division of Moldova into two separate entities has created a 'Transnistrian identity' (Suhan & Cojocaru, 2002; Troebst, 2004). Consequently, the rise of local nationalism and loyalty to the Transnistrian regime may become a psychological barrier with regard to territorial reintegration into Moldova. The situation gets more intricate, because of the new generation that has been educated in the spirit of 'Transnistrization' and is not aware of any other reality than that of the existence of a 'Transnistrian state', even if it is not recognized internationally (Nantoi, 2002). The aim of this article, focusing on identity[4] and survey results,[5] is to discuss the potential psychological difficulties impeding the reintegration of the divided country. In the current literature, the Transnistrian conflict is usually treated as a political one, driven by the political and economic interests of the elite of the secessionist Transnistrian territory. More recently, scholars have been focused on the socio-psychological and ideological factors that have influenced the confrontation between the two banks on the Nistru River. Even if the conflict is characterized by an ethnic component,[6] the secessionist movement in Tiraspol does not have an ethnic background. The absence of overt conflict prior to 1989 distinguishes the Transnistrian case from other post-Soviet conflicts (O'Loughin et al., 1998). A particular identity is not the driving force behind the outbreak of the conflict. Neither did the term Transnistria or Transnistrian people exist before the conflict (Sofransky, 2002). Rather than discussing the causes of the conflict, I examine the psychological factors that currently amplify inter-group tensions. The emergence of a new 'Transnistrian' identity constitutes an increasingly significant barrier to the resolution of the conflict in the sense of reintegration.

The article begins with a historical background of the Republic of Moldova, reviews methodological aspects of the survey carried out with young residents from Transnistria, and subsequently presents the results.

Territory and Psychology: Two Historical Parallels—Bessarabia and Transnistria

In order to understand the social roots behind the conflict, a useful point of departure is the psycho-historical perspective concerning the most important events triggering the social tension in this territory. Since its declaration of independence, the Republic of Moldova has been confronted with the same inter-ethnic problems that other former Soviet republics are facing, but Moldova's history places it in a unique situation. The history of Moldova is one of constant change and contestation of territory, identities and loyalties (Greame, 2005). At the outset, it should be mentioned that the Republic of Moldova is an artificial state (Nantoi, 2002) that only emerged as an independent entity in 1991. The Republic of Moldova is the successor of the Moldovan SSR, established in 1940,

after the Soviet Union's seize of Bessarabia.[7] The Moldovan SSR included Bessarabia and a narrow strip[8] of the former Moldovan Autonomous SSR (contemporary Transnistria).

Historically, these two parts of the former Moldovan SSR, Bessarabia and Transnistria, have differing histories up to the 1940s. Under the 1792 Peace Treaty between Russia and Turkey, the Ottoman Empire agreed to cede control of the territories between the Nistru and Bug Rivers to the Russian Empire. Despite the fact that until 1792 the Romanian-speaking population constituted the majority in this territory, their number considerably decreased as a result of large-scale Russian and Ukrainian immigration, and because of pro-Slav policies (Serebrean, 2001). In 1812, the Russian Empire annexed the eastern part of the Moldovan Principality, the region historically known as Bessarabia, located between the Nistru and Prut Rivers. The western region became part of Romania, which was established in 1859 following the unification of Wallachia and the Moldova Principalities. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, Bessarabia declared independence and in 1918 Bessarabian officials voted for unification with Romania. During the interwar period, Bessarabia remained part of the Romanian Kingdom. In October 1924, the territories of contemporary Transnistria, as well as some areas of the Ukrainian SSR became the Moldovan Autonomous SSR (the MASSR) with the capital Balta, and, from 1929 on, Tiraspol. The MASSR was part of the Ukrainian SSR and occupied a territory of over 8,500 square kilometres. Naming this autonomous republic 'Moldovan' was nonsense, because neither the territory of contemporary Transnistria nor the lands lying to its east had any relation to the area called 'Moldova' (Asarov, 2005). Also, this was irrelevant from the ethnic point of view, because Moldovans made up approximately 30% of the population. Rather than to support the development of the Moldovan ethnos, the creation of the MASSR was used as an argument by the Soviet leadership to annex Bessarabia (Skvortsova, 2002), which at that time belonged to the Romanian Kingdom.

On 2 August 1940, after the annexation of Bessarabia, the MSSR was proclaimed as a Soviet republic within the USSR. The MSSR borders were determined by Hitler and Stalin in the secret protocols of the Molotov−Ribbenthrop Pact on 23 August 1939 (Nantoi, 2002). After the signing of the pact, the Soviet Union increased pressure on Romania to return Bessarabia. In order to justify the policy of territorial expansion and the creation of the MSSR, the Soviet authorities pursued the rigid policy of de-nationalization, seeking to establish the 'Moldovan socialist nation'. Soviet propaganda promulgated the idea of a 'Moldovan people' with a 'Moldovan' language and culture, distinct from the Romanian one. During the Second World War, Bessarabia was reunited with the Romanian Kingdom until 1944, when it was re-annexed by the Soviet Union. After 1945, during the Soviet period, the Transnistria region became the centre of heavy industries and a military industrial complex, while western Moldova was developed as a centre of agriculture (Greame, 2005). During the Soviet era the opposition between 'we, the Transnistrian Moldovans' and 'they, the Bessarabian Moldovans' evolved. In an interview given by Eugeniu Doga, the renowned composer and resident of this region, he stated: 'Soviet propaganda had always implied that Bessarabians are capitalists, indolent people who speak another language. This ideology was well indoctrinated in the psychology of Transnistrian people and came to resemble enmity toward the Bessarabians Moldovans' (Druta, 1992). The difference between Transnistrian and Bessarabian Moldovans was emphasized through unofficial policies of the Communist Party. Transnistria was the area from which the majority of elites from Soviet Moldova were recruited. The 'left-bankers' were considered more loyal to the Soviet regime and more politically reliable than their

counterparts from the former 'bourgeois' Bessarabia (van Meurs, 1994). Many economic or political elites were Russians from the eastern part of Soviet Moldavia, or in many cases even from outside the MSSR (Hill, 1977). Although Moldovans constituted the major ethnic group in the territory, they were underrepresented in leading positions in industry, administration, party and army (Troebst, 2004).

The historical events that have had a major impact upon the region located in the eastern part of the contemporary Republic of Moldova since 1792—when the region was annexed to the Russian Empire—greatly contributed and influenced the collective memory[9] of the population living in this region. The difference in historical heritage and the pasts of the two MSSR regions, as well as the diversified ethnical structure of the local population, determined the emergence of diametrically opposite sentiments towards the events after 1985. In 1989, when the National Movement in historical Bessarabia began claiming recognition of the Romanian language and pushing for closer ties with Romania, the population in the eastern region of the republic had difficulties embracing Romanian identity within such a short period of time.[10] But at the same time, the number of those who accepted the idea that the residents should speak the official language of the state was increasing daily.[11] When the armed conflict broke out, the Transnistrian population was intimidated and had been manipulated by 'linguistic discrimination'.

Given the fact that Transnistrian Moldovans[12] lived in the Russian Empire from 1792, and later in the former Soviet Union, they have a multifaceted representation of their homeland (Birsan, 1993). The Transnistrians' frame of reference was the Soviet Union as an entity and not only the Moldovan SSR (Troebst, 2003). Moreover, while the Bessarabian Moldovans serving in the Romanian army crossed the Nistru River to fight in the name of 'Romanian unification' in 1941–44, the Transnistrian Moldovans viewed this as an act of occupation (Serebrean, 2001). This period reinforced fear and suspicion in the Transnistrian memory and continues to do so to this day (Waters, 2001). Local authorities exploit and maintain those memories; the term 'Romanian' is often associated with the words 'invader', 'enemy' and 'fascist' in the speeches of Transnistrian leaders. While the Soviet army is depicted as the 'liberator' in public speeches, the Romanian army is considered an 'occupying' force. A parallel between the Second World War ('Great Patriotic War') and the armed confrontation in 1992 is being continuously drawn, referring to 'a Moldovan/ Romanian national-fascist aggression against Transnistrian people'.[13] Moreover, prior to the military conflict, the Transnistrian mass media promoted a negative image of Romania, calling it 'the Empire of the Evil' and 'the Country of Anarchy'.[14] A series of 'communication stratagems'[15] was used in order to deliberately fuel an image of evil ('dangers of the union with Romania', 'the negative image of Romania', 'the image of an aggressive Moldova', etc.). The stigma of the 'Romanian whip' ('we still remember what a Romanian whip means')[16] was used as one of the stratagems in order to trigger the memories about the period when the region was under Romanian administration (Suhan & Cojocaru, 2002). The local mass media psychologically exploited the population's fears and emotions, spreading the rumour that Moldova would soon be a part of Romania.[17]

During the armed confrontation the Nistru River also became a psychological frontier between the two parts of Moldova. The population of both sides of Nistru was divided into two groups, which treated each other with suspicion. One of the most puzzling phenomena was that Moldovans[18] who had previously lived peacefully[19] with one another suddenly turned against each other. In the course of the past few years the idea of 'two banks' has been broadly exploited. The 'distinct characteristics' of the

residents of the left bank of the Nistru River is based on the 'identities' fabricated under the Stalin project of de-nationalization and 'Russification', which also included large-scale expulsions, deportations and ethnic cleansing. The project of *nation engineering* had always pursued the idea and the opposition between 'we' and 'them'. Recent studies of inter-group relations show that the social categorization 'we' versus 'they' is sufficient to trigger prejudice and discrimination, sometimes even without any valid antagonism between local social groups (Tajfel, 1981).

During the armed conflict, the Transnistrians perceived Bessarabians as 'nationalists, occupants, enemies', while at the same time, Bessarabians portrayed Transnistrians as 'Romanian-phobes and mancurtzs'.[20]

Methodology

In this article I refer to some results from the 'Collective Memory and Identities Construction' research projects, presenting the qualitative analysis of the data regarding the young generation's perspectives on history, conflict and the 'Transnistrian people' notion. A questionnaire containing open questions was presented to 35 people (aged 20−25) from Tiraspol University. The assumption was that they had not lived in Soviet Moldavia, but were well aware of the reality of the 'Transnistrian state'. The objective was to examine how identity is constructed in response to social changes.

It is worth mentioning that carrying out surveys in Transnistria represents a challenge. The governing elite in contemporary Transnistria tends to be authoritarian (Nantoi, 2002; Troebst, 2004), suppressing the manifestation of opposition and depriving the population of access to alternative sources of information. At the first stage, we carried out 15 semi-structured interviews with local residents. The topics of discussion were the *military conflict of 1992*, *the special status of Transnistria*, *the possible federalization of the Republic of Moldova* and *Transnistrian identity*. When we asked local residents to participate in an interview, 10 individuals refused. It was not easy to get people to talk openly in the discussions. The majority are tired of this state of uncertainty about the future. As a self-protective mechanism to protect them from fear and despair, the notion that 'I am like others' has developed.

The survey with students was carried out at Tiraspol University in February 2002. The questionnaire comprised open questions and dealt with the *representation of the Transnistrian identity* (whether differences between left- and right-bank residents exists and what those are, their opinion about Transnistrian people), the *representation of history* (who has the right to Transnistria, to whom this area belongs historically), and the *representation of military conflict* (what the solution should be, who is to be blame for the outbreak of the conflict, what the motives were that led left-bank residents to become involved in fighting with right-bank residents).

The research is characterized by its explorative nature, which is why it has certain limits in the pursuit of a generalization of the conclusions. The limits concern the relatively small number of participants, the majority of them being Russian speakers and inhabitants of Tiraspol city. Thus, we cannot determine exactly what the opinion of the other localities' inhabitants is and, moreover, we cannot make assumptions about the view of other ethnic groups on the matter.

In the following sections, the results of the students' opinions about conflict, history and identity are discussed in more depth.

Representation of History

As part of the territory of the Soviet Union, Transnistria could not partake in the unification of all Romanian provinces in 1918. Therefore, the local residents have no associations in their collective memory linked to the events of 1918. Unlike the Bessarabian Moldovans, they had not experienced the historical precedent of Romanian unification. The period 1941−44 under Romanian administration was not sufficient to reinforce the development of a Romanian national consciousness (Serebrean, 2001). Moreover, under the Soviet regime much effort was made to discourage cultural exchange with Romania and to eliminate references to the existence of a common cultural heritage. Thus, under the influence of collective imagery, when Romanian was proclaimed the state language in 1989 and closer ties with Romania were established, the population from the left bank of Nistru had difficulty embracing Romanian identity within such a short period.

In April 1990, several cities in Transnistria refused to raise the new Moldovan flag. The tricoloured flag[21] was categorically rejected, because for them the red Soviet flag with the hammer and sickle was a symbol of great achievements (Skvortsova, 2002). Instead of the historical precedent of Romanian unification experienced by the Bessarabian Moldovans, Transnistrians experienced a great number of events associated with the history of the Russian Empire. Despite the fact that tsarist Russia had annexed this territory, it is still viewed as either Russian or Ukrainian territory.

For some of the people interviewed, the history of this territory begins in 1792. 'I know that General Suvorov[22] discovered Transnistria and this is it', a student claimed. The arguments refer to the fact that:

> Transnistria has never been part of Bessarabia—it was only from 1940, after MSSR was established—but until then the territory belonged to Russia or Ukraine. (Student, aged 20)

> Historically, these lands belonged to the Russian Empire, but now the people who live there have the right to these areas. (Student, aged 23)

Alluding to specific historical and cultural features of the region, they justify the secessionist actions. Even when Bessarabia and Bucovina were united with Romania, the region located on the left back of Nistru 'had never been Romanian' and 'does not historically belong to Moldova', so that '[inhabitants from the left bank] are different from those of the right bank'. This is the argument for justifying 'the right of the Transnistrian people to search for their self-determination'.

Representation of the Military Conflict

Transnistrian leaders always emphasized that after the military conflict, Transnistria had the right to be an independent entity. In the Transnistrian mass media, the military confrontation of 1992 is presented as a 'sacred war against the genocide by nationalistic Moldovans'.[23] The armed conflict is still viewed as a valid justification for separatism, and in collective memory it is 'a war for truth, justice and independence'. When examining the results of the survey with students from Tiraspol University more closely, it becomes evident that the new generation's perception of the conflict coincides with the accounts proliferated in the Transnistrian media.

> People protected their houses from the assaults of the illegitimate People's Front. (Student, aged 20)

> The Moldavian and Romanian soldiers attacked us; it was self-defence. (Student, aged 20)

> Many houses were destroyed and many people died. Romanian and Moldovan aggressors were atrocious to the extent unheard of even during World War II. (Student, aged 20)

> They [inhabitants of the right bank] challenged us to fight for our rights. (Student, aged 20)

> We fought in a just war. (Student, aged 21)

This 'war for independence' generated mixed feelings of pride and fear about the future of the homeland, as well as the affiliation with the so-called Transnistrian Republic:

> Moldova was the one that wanted to smother and repress us. We want our people and our opinion to be respected. (Student, aged 20)

> We feared that we would be forced to surrender, but now I am proud of my people and my republic, of the patriotic sentiment and love I have toward my native town. The desire to defend our interests and not to surrender to Moldova instigated the Transnistrian people to fight. (Student, aged 20)

The outbreak of conflict caused general confusion and misunderstanding, which are still felt very strongly. The past events and memories of the 1992 military standoff are akin to a mixture of negative emotions in which fear, desperation, hatred, pain, sadness, a sense of betrayal, distrust and confusion intermingle (Cojocaru & Suhan, 2003).

Representation of Identity

There are two approaches in social psychology which explain the mechanisms of inter-group conflicts (Azzi, 1997). According to the first, the conflict is determined by rational motives and material interests. The second perspective describes the emotional and symbolic needs expressed by means of loyalty and identification. The cognitive mechanism of the *social categorization* allows an individual to structure his or her social experience by classifying him/herself and others in different and distinct categories. According to social identity theory, any individual organizes the social reality, including him/herself and others, in separate and significant categories, so that the formation of social identity becomes a result of categorized perceptions, the result of the growing awareness of belonging to a category (Tajfel, 1981). In this order of ideas, Searle-White (2001) describes the need to categorize the world around us and illustrates the tendency to view other groups as less important than our own. There is a tendency to believe positive things about our in-group and negative things about the out-group (Howard & Rothbart, 1980). Stereotypes, writes Searle-White, magnify differences and intensify conflict, and furthermore provide fodder for propaganda campaigns. When people categorize themselves into groups, some phenomena, such as in-group favouritism, out-group devaluation, the spreading of rumours and acts of violence against others can evolve.

The importance of group identification has been a topic of many social-psychological research projects. The reality of the distinction between groups is often less significant than perception. If a group believes that it is very different from another group then that is enough to develop a cognitive resource to make this perception seem like a 'reality'. Psychologists suggest that simply being classified as belonging in a group may be enough to produce conflict.

For such an ethnical heterogeneous space as Transnistria, a superordinate identity is a high priority. There are evident signs of a new nation building. National identities are chosen, not genetically implanted, and they are subject to change (Haas, 1986). Opinion pools and election results point to the fact that a relative majority of inhabitants have adopted the view that they form a new Transnistrian *demos* with the potential to turn into an *ethos* (Skvortsova, 2002; Troebst, 2004).

According to the questionnaires, some respondents believe that 'the separation in two republics is simply banal' and 'there are no differences between the Transnistrian people and Moldovan people', because 'every time we live together and these lands were named Moldova, the inhabitants are also Moldovans'. Moreover, 'the Transnistrian people don't have historical roots'.

However, it seems that the Transnistrian regime has succeeded in instilling loyalty and feelings of belonging among the population. For most of the respondents, Transnistria is 'a multinational republic, regardless if it is not recognized', because 'the existence of a state that has all the attributes of a state cannot be contested' and 'if Transnistria exists, there is a reason for the existence of Transnistrian people', too. 'Not the national reason', wrote a student, 'was the cause of Transnistria's separation, but like those who live in America are Americans, those living in Moldova are Moldovans, and consequently those living in Transnistria are Transnistrians'. While Moldovans from Bessarabia are still searching for their identity and facing an identity crisis on the left bank of the Nistru, a new identity is evolving on the eastern side of the republic.

Troebst (2003) mentions that the process of 'Transnistrization' is still in progress and shapes the worldview of this territory's inhabitants. This was also the opinion of some respondents: 'we do not perceive Nistru as a psychological barrier, but for our children this border will exist', according to one of the students, and it is apparent that 'many inhabitants of Transnistria perceive themselves as Transnistrians, because they were born and live here', claimed another. Political propaganda from the left bank succeeded in instilling a sense of loyalty and belonging to the 'republic', especially among the young generation. This new generation of citizens of the so-called Transnistrian Republic, which has nothing in common with the Republic of Moldova, will probably be the first to oppose the reintegration of the divided country and will insist on independence for Transnistria.[24]

Federalization: a Solution or a Source of Inter-group Tension?

Although it is not recognized internationally, the Transnistrian Republic has reached its de facto goal of statehood, according to Wim van Meurs (2002), in being a successful failed state. Even before the federalism project developed, the idea of a regional layout had existed as a political project (Safonov, 2002). Now, the collective perception is that it has gradually come to denote a reality, particularly after the talks and discussions about Moldova's federalization became more regular. The plan to transform Moldova into a federal state was first initiated as a solution by the Transnistrian side and was supported

for the following reasons: Transnistria has never been part of the Moldovan Principality; it was a territory of the Russian Empire in the period 1792–1924, of Ukraine from 1924 to 1940, and, during the period from 1941 to 1944 when the territory was under Romanian administration, this was considered equivalent to an occupation.

With regard to federalization or Moldova's territorial reintegration, it is necessary to discuss a number of important issues. Is it possible to establish harmonious reintegration and coexistence? Are the residents able to overcome their memory of the conflict? Would those who consider themselves citizens of a 'patriotic' and 'heroic' Transnistria ever view themselves as citizens of the 'nationalist-fascist Moldova?' When such feelings are still so strong, can they become loyal 'citizens' of Moldova? Would the 1940 territorial scenario repeat itself or would this be a permanent cause of threat and tension? How would inter-group relations between the inhabitants from the left and the right banks evolve in the future? In this respect a large research study including inhabitants from both sides of the Nistru River could provide clearer answers.

In international law, secession is perceived as being part of the problem and not of the solution (Troebst, 2004). Ulrich Schneckener (2001) recently came up with a formula of recession for conflict resolution (Troebst, 2004). Referring to the Transnistrian conflict, as I argued above, the perception of the military conflict is of 'a war for truth, justice and independence' and a sense of secession. When federalization or even other territorial reintegration projects are discussed, certain psychological aspects including mentality, the myth of independence, as well as the gradual process of 'Transnistrization' must be taken into account. 'If people from Transnistria wanted a state, that's it; they should have it', stated a student, while another wrote that 'we should find a compromise and live together in a unique state'. The question as to how many actually voice which opinion remains open to speculation.

NOTES

1. At the end of the 1980s, a newly formed generation of Moldovan intellectuals started claiming language and national rights. On 31 August 1989 the Supreme Soviet of Moldova passed a new language law. Under the law, the Moldovan language was proclaimed the country's official language based on the Latin alphabet and it thus acknowledged the unity of the Moldovan and Romanian languages. The Russian language became the language of inter-ethnic communication. In a number of cases—particularly in the eastern part of Moldova—the non-Romanian speakers viewed this amendment as a discriminatory policy against them.

2. A city in Moldova situated on the left bank of the Nistru River. Today, Tiraspol is the capital of the self-proclaimed Transnistrian Moldovan Republic.

3. With a population of 651,000 (according to the Statistics Department data, Jan. 2001) and an area of 4163 square kilometres.

4. The analysis is based on psychological fieldwork, particularly on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tujfel & Turner, 1979) and its theoretical extension Social Categorization Theory (Turner, 1981), as well as psychological explanations of nationalism (Vamik & Volcan, 1988; Searle-White, 2001).

5. The 'Collective Memory and Identity Construction in Transnistria' research project, launched in 2002 with financial support from the Institute for Public Policies in Chisinau.

6. For a detailed analysis of literature concerning the causes of the Transnistrian conflict, see Troebst (2004).

7. Bessarabia is usually understood to be the territory enclosed by two large rivers flowing into the Black Sea, namely the Nistru and the Prut.

8. The territory stretches over 200 kilometres along the left bank of the Nistru River. Only the five districts of the former Moldovan Autonomous SSR were included in the new republic, the other eight remaining in the Ukrainian SSR.

9. According to the theory of social frames (Halbwachs, 1994), memory is not solely a 'preservation of the past' but is also its 'reconstruction'; memory is a receptacle of 'fragments and images' that are collective representations formed or triggered in conditions of actuality.

10. This movement was active in almost all localities of Bessarabia, but did not have a similar resonance in the eastern part, the left bank of the Nistru (Nantoi, 2002).

11. 'I remember when the language law was proclaimed, many Russians asked us to speak with them in Romanian, what is the correct pronunciation, but everything changed in a few days: they threw the dictionaries out and still have not learned Romanian' (interview with a 53-year-old school director from Tiraspol).

12. In this context, *Moldovan* means a citizen of the Moldova Republic; the *Transnistrian Moldovan* and *Bessarabian Moldovan* categories are used for territorial distinction to explain the issue.

13. For example, the president's speech to mark the 55th Anniversary of the Victory in World War II. Available at: http://olvia.idkned.com/cmir.html

14. For instance, the article by Platitzin (1992).

15. Slama-Cazacu (2000) describes the communicative stratagem as a 'strategy based on manipulations, treachery and deception'.

16. V. Alexeev, 'Nezajivayushceya rana', published in *Dnestrovskaya Pravda*, 24 Jan. 1992, p. 2.

17. 'Panic of a union with Romania prevailed; fear that we would no longer speak Russian' (interview with a 55-year-old teacher from the eastern region of Moldova).

18. In this context, citizens of Moldova (inhabitants from both the left and right banks).

19. It should be noted that west of the Nistru the population has coexisted peacefully since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The so-called Bessarabian tolerance, which endured for two centuries, was based on the fact that the local population did not protest and used to humbly accept the imposed rules of inter-ethnic relations and linguistic policy (Nantoi, 2002).

20. Alluding to Cingiz T. Aitmatov's Kazakh legend of the Mancutzs.

21. The state flag of the Republic of Moldova is tricoloured. The colours are arranged vertically in the following order away from the flagpole: blue, yellow and red. It also features the Moldovan coat-of-arms (an eagle holding a shield with the image of an ox) to distinguish it from the Romanian flag that has the same colours. The tricoloured flag was the flag of the Romanian army during the Second World War.

22. Suvorov Aleksandr Vasilievici, prince (1729–1800) and Russian general. He took part in battles against Poles and Turks (1768–74; 1787–91). In the 'Transnistrian Republic' Suvorov is glorified as the liberator of Transnistria from the Ottomans.

23. 'Zaiavlenie ministra inostranih del PMR', *Dnestrovskaya Pravda*, 11 Oct. 2001; 'Silovogo reshenya pridnestrovskogo voprosa niet', *Dnestrovskaya Pravda*, 16 Oct. 2001; 'Otkritoye pisimo jenskogo zabastovocinogo komiteta PMR k grajdanam goroda Benderi', *Dnestrovskaya Pravda*, 30 Oct. 2001.

24.   On 1 June 2005 the International Youth Corporation 'Прорыв' [the breakdown] was founded in Tiraspol. This association opposes the process of territorial reintegration of Transnistria and the Republic of Moldova, advocating independence and international recognition of the Transnistrian Republic instead. 'Pridnestrovskii ''Proriv!''—molodeji Pridnestrovia namerena democratizirovati Bessarabiu'; Available at: http://www.olvia.idknet.com/ol06-06-05.htm

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