

THE PROBLEM OF UNIFICATION BETWEEN ROMANIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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ABSTRACT

How did the significance of unification evolved during Communism, what importance does such an ideal hold today and is it possible to undertake such an action considering the wider geopolitical scene?

Having in mind the above questions, this thesis aims to analyze the significance of the unification ideal through the use of discourse analysis of various sources including: political leaders, documents and events that took place during and after Communism.

We must take into consideration the various issues that hinder the unification between Romania and Moldova, these issues are both internal and external, the former addresses the separatist conflicts that threaten the security and borders of the Republic of Moldova which is affected by an identity issue as the region was subject to intense Russification whose effects are felt to this day as society is divided between the ones seeking to unite with Romania and the others who want to continue to exist as an independent state, but most importantly is the external influence of Russia, Turkey and the EU in the country which affect the conflict in Transnistria and Gagauzia.

Keywords: Romania, unification, Moldova, Transnistria, Gagauzia, separatism, geopolitics, development, identity, history.

INTRODUCTION

Despite being a small country between two giant geopolitical players, the Republic of Moldova faces challenges both internally and externally, its territorial integrity is threatened due to the frozen conflict with Transnistria which can ignite at any moment and furthermore the self-proclaimed independent region of Gagauzia is another issue which shows Moldova's lack of control over its own territory.

The main aim of this thesis is to assess the significance of the ideal for unification between Romania and Moldova and how this ideal changed during Communism and until today, as well as to provide the necessary knowledge over the main problems Moldova is facing, and how these hinder the process of unification and integration of the country into the European Union.

The first chapter offers an introduction into Moldova's history starting with the Great union of 1918, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact which separated Moldova from Romania in 1940, how the Soviet

Union installed a false historical, cultural, linguistic identity whose effects are still felt in today Moldova and furthermore the fall of the USSR in 1991, an event which brought independence for Moldova which started to follow a democratic path despite inside and outside influences threatening the stability of the country. Due to Moldova's geographical location, the country finds itself between two opposing geopolitical entities, West represented by European Union and East represented by Russia, each trying to attract Moldova into their sphere of influence. These issues are discussed in chapter two along with the problems concerning Transnistria, Gagauzia and the unification with Romania which is yet to occur due to unfavorable external factors as well as internal factors represented by the identity confusion; however the complex geopolitical scene created after the fall of the Soviet Union poses greater danger for the existence of the Republic of Moldova as Russia's approach is to destabilize and fragment the former soviet republics in the hope of gaining the territories lost in 1991

with the fall of USSR and as well as to maintain a buffer zone against the West, for this reason it needs to consolidate its influence in the region (Jimenez, 2018, pp. 403-404).

Germany's reunification model is perhaps one of the most identic to the case of Moldova and Romania; chapter three offers an analysis of the reunification that took place between East and West Germany following the fall of the Berlin Wall and how we can apply the German model, but not without considering the unique elements that this potential union between Romania and Moldova entails, to our cause (Unger, 2015, pp. 2-5).

During Soviet occupation of Bassarabia in 1945 and until 1991 the region was subject to intense propaganda and identity manipulation which succeeded to some degree by limiting the use of Romanian language and force the Moldovans into developing a new, fabricated identity by creating the moldovan language along with a separate historical identity in order to separate the region from Romania, however such an act led to the creation of Româanism or Pan-Româanism which is a nationalistic movement aiming to support the unification of the two countries and fight against the promoters of Moldovanism who support an independent Moldova and seek closer relations with Russia (Groza, et al., 2018, pp. 5-6).

The fifth chapter presents the discourse analysis on the significance of the unification during and after the Communist by analyzing various sources from both Romania and Moldova's side in order to measure the likelihood of a potential unification which is dependent on the internal situation from both countries as well as external, geopolitical factors.

The last chapter takes into consideration the developments undergone in the Republic of Moldova as well as the challenges that the country is facing in achieving its policies and progress on its democratic course with the aim to fully integrate into the European Union and hopefully unite with Romania but in order to achieve unification the issues concerning migration, especially of skilled workers and students who obtain scholarship in Romania or citizenship and remittances which support the Moldovan economy but at the same time the country's exports are diminishing which could lead to economic crisis in the long term, however the migration and remittances are side effects of larger problems concerning corruption and poverty coupled with inequality thus the Republic of Moldova's government must implement policies for development and limit the effects of corruption (Marandici, 2008, pp. 1-3).

1. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The Republic of Moldova is a country in Eastern Europe and it covers an area of 33.850 square kilometers, which were and are subject to different and powerful political entities whose actions influence the country's future.

After the end of the First World War, the new geopolitical situation allowed for the creation of Greater Romania by unifying all historical regions, thus almost overnight the country that has formed become the second largest country in East-Center Europe yet the presence of different ethnicities especially in areas where Romanians were numerically inferior were potential locations for revolts thus the inter-war period saw the stabilization of the country and maintaining the status-quo as top priorities (Mitrasca, 2002, p. 9).

The unification with Bassarabia in 1918 is partly due to national uprisings in the Russian Empire, which can be classified in two phases: The first phase starts with demand for national rights all over the Russian Empire which at that time offered limited autonomy coupled with an intense Russification process; the second phase is characterized by separatism from the Empire which failed to positively respond to the demand of the occupied regions which started to call for unification or self-governance.

In the case of Bassarabia, the national movement was ignited by the Moldovan National Party founded on 20 March 1917 and led by Vasile Stroescu¹. Communication with Moldovans and propaganda was made possible through press, especially the Moldovan Word newspaper. Firstly the demands were for social, economic and political rights but later they demanded autonomy, self-governance, use of moldovan language and the right to practice own customs. Soon enough, the first to oppose Bassarabia's autonomy was the Ukrainian Republic, created in June 1917, which was against the inclusion of the Hotin² and Ackerman³ districts into Bassarabia (Mitrasca, 2002, pp. 31-33).

¹ Vasile Stroescu was born, on 11 November 1845- died 13 April 1926, in the village of Trinca, county of Hotin, many schools and churches were built as a result of his philanthropic and patriotic actions, he supported the foundation, and became the chairman of, the National Moldovan Party (Mold Street, 2019).

² Former county incorporated during the interwar period into Greater Romania, today it is part of Ukraine and known as Khotyn.

³ Today the location is known as Belgorod Dnestrovskiy in Ukraine and White Citadel (Cetatea Albă) in Romanian (Memoria, 2013).

After the unification with Romania, the Russian civil servants were one of the groups who were against the unification because they would lose their privileges and jobs and considering that many spoke only Russian it would be impossible for them to integrate in the new environment, not to mention the looming threat of communism in Russia which was at war with the White Army⁴; another category were the landowners whose lands were nationalized and thus demanded compensation from Romania. At first, the Romanian government did not interfere in the administration of Bessarabia, yet the situation changed in October 1918, with the dire economic situation in the region and the ongoing civil unrest in Russia, the first movement was to abolish the zemstvo system⁵ and dismiss all Russian ethnics who did not swore loyalty to Romania. The integration of Bessarabia into Romania was a step by step process that saw its success on June 1925, when the "Law of Administrative Unification" was voted by the Romanian Parliament (Mitrasca, 2002, p. 41).

In June 1940, Bessarabia was annexed by URSS as due to the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was created; yet between 1940 and 1944 the region has seen three successive shifts in political regimes:

- On June 1940, when the Soviet Union annexed Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina;
- On June 1941, the Romanian army in alliance with the Germans recovered the lost territories;
- August 1944, the Soviet army took over the capital of Bessarabia and forced the Romanian and German armies to retreat (Negura, 2014, pp. 46-50).

Following the annexation of Moldova by the URSS in 1940 and the creation of Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), a process of nationalization and confiscation of private property took place along with the agricultural land where 578 kolkhozy⁶ were established in rural areas between 1944 and 1948, reaching its peak in 1949 where the total number of collectivized farms rose to 925 and by the year 1950

the collectivization process was completed (Brezianu & Spânu, 2010, p. 63).

Throughout the Soviet occupation, propaganda claimed that Russia and Moldova had old relations based on two medieval rulers (Stephan the Great and Dimitrie Cantemir) who requested unification with the Tsarist Empire; the source of this propaganda lays on false interpretations of documents in which Moldavians asked for help in fighting the Ottomans (Gasu, 2015, p. 351).

After the Second World War, Moldova's administrative borders were redrawn and Northern Bucovina along with the shore to the Black Sea were attributed to Soviet Ukraine by the USSR. Along with the modifications to Moldova's borders, deportations of 35.796 persons to the distant wastelands of USSR took place under the code name "Iug" in 1949; under the direct supervision of Leonid Brezhnev⁷, appointed by Stalin as secretary-general of the Moldavian Communist Party Central Committee, more deportation were conducted in 1951 under the code name "Sever" following a wave of Russification and imposing Russian as first language, leading to a transformation of the native Moldavian population who became bilingual (Brezianu & Spânu, 2010, p. 64).

In 1989, "Glasul" the first periodical in Latin alphabet, printed in Latvia by Moldavian intellectuals and smuggled into Soviet Moldova contributed to the reestablishment of the Romanian language written in Latin characters as the official state language (Brezianu & Spânu, 2010, pp. 44, 66).

The most important historical turning point was the year 1991, which brought a colossal change in the Soviet Union as its former occupied territories declared one after another their independence leading to the collapse of the Soviet bloc; this was possible due to the events of the year 1989 when revolutions broke out in Central and East Europe, ending the reign of communism and the beginning of democracy. Moldova along with other socialist republics that were integrated into the Soviet bloc gained independence however this were not possible without two key policies: Perestroika and Glasnost formulated by Mikhail Gorbachev⁸ (Negura, 2014, pp. 92-93).

⁷ Leonid Ilich Brezhnev (1906-1982) was a Russian politician who was sent in 1950 to Moldavia in order to Sovietize the Romanian population in the occupied territory (Tikkanen, 2007).

⁸ Glasnost aim was to make information transparent and expose corrupt officials while Perestroika represented a social transformation and a new political thinking whose aim was to bring the USSR out of its internal and external crisis (Dzirkals, 1990, p. 7).

⁴ The White Army was a counter-revolutionary force against the Bolshevik Red Army during the Russian Civil War (1917-1822), the White Army was formed from diverse groups of different social position with little cooperation between them thus anyone who opposed the Bolsheviks was called White, a color which was associated with the Romanov monarchy (Llewellyn & Thompson, 2019).

⁵ The Zemstvo system was a local form of government which functioned until 1917 when the Bolsheviks replaced it with the Workers and Peasants system (Gronsky, 1923, pp. 552-553).

⁶ Kolkhoz or Kolkhozy were collective farms during the Soviet Union, which activated on state owned land worked by peasants who were paid based on their individual output (Chauhan, 2014).

The fall of the Soviet Union would create the ideal geopolitical context for the unification of Moldova with Romania, however the Popular Front which argued for unification was overshadowed by a group of politicians led by Mircea Snegur who reignited the idea of Moldovan nation and with the questionable referendum of 1994 the ideal of unification is brought to an end (Meurs, 2015, p. 197).

An important role in the democratic movement in Soviet Moldova was the “Alexe Mateevici” Cenacle led by A. Șalaru⁹, whose first meeting took place on January 15, 1988 and in the following year many political rallies and demonstrations were organised in order to reignite the national consciousness of the Moldovan citizens. In 1990 the democratic election of the first Parliament posed a challenge for the monopoly of the Communist Party in Moldova as the country was leaning toward democracy especially with the formation of: parliament, government, national radio-television and the national news agency „Moldpress” and the declaration of sovereignty on 23 June 1990 (Negura, 2014, p. 94).

The year 1991 brought independence for Moldova whose name changed from Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic to the Republic of Moldova with Mircea Snegur as its president. In the following year fights erupt between Moldavian security forces and Slavic separatists aided by Russia; a ceasefire was signed in Limanskoe together with an agreement by Moldova to let Russian peacemaking forces station, to this day, in the area of Transnistria (Brezianu & Spânu, 2010, p. 45).

The independence and fall of Communism in Moldova in 1991, brought a transition from a totalitarian regime to democracy that was accompanied by chaos due to spontaneous liberalization and democratization leading to an overflow of information that was in contrast with the monolithic ideology on which the Moldavian society was built and where information was manipulated and tightly controlled. Having found itself in a new environment, Moldavia was in a vulnerable position to the various influences from outside the country and in order to stabilize its democratic system it had to develop and strengthen its institutions; one of the first steps taken in this regard is “the Decree on State Power,” which aimed to stop the

influences of the Soviet Union in the activity of the government, business sector and education system; other important reforms were taken which further strengthened the democratic transition in Moldavia: The Declaration of sovereignty, the transition to the Market Economy and the Moldova’s Declaration of Independence culminating with the Parliamentary elections on 27th February 1994 and the adoption of a new constitution on 29th July 1994 (Vaduva & Thomas, 2015, pp. 84-85).

National Identity was another factor that influenced the transition toward democracy, however Moldavia’s national identity suffered changes during the Soviet period as a result Moldavia’s society is divided into three main groups:

- Be part of Russia and hope for the return of USSR;
- Be part of Romania through unification;
- Maintain the current status-quo of Moldova as an independent country (Vaduva & Thomas, 2015, p. 86).

Political pluralism did not have an impact after Moldova’s independence as the Parliament was formed by 27% (94 out of 380 seats) by supporters of Popular Front while the rest were members of the Communist Party, yet the vote for the country’s independence was driven by two events:

1. The failed coup in Moscow, known also as the August putsch which aimed to remove Gorbachev due to his policies;
2. The fall of communism in East Europe along with the USSR, leading to the independence of former soviet republics.

The emergence of democratic pluralism led to freedom of speech and the appearance of newspapers and magazines edited in Romanian and Russian, foreign TV channels from Romania and Russia leading to dissemination of information that was not available during the communist reign (Negură, 2016, pp. 543-546).

Since the declaration of independence, Moldova’s relations with Romania have improved this led to cultural projects which aimed to preserve and enhance the identity and similarity between the two countries; trade between Romania and Moldova grew since the year 2000 and surpassed the country’s trade with Russia in 2014; another characteristic of the two countries close relationship is the intergovernmental agreement to allow students from Moldova into Romanian universities, however a large part of the

⁹ Anatol Șalaru is a Romanian politician from the Republic of Moldova and the founder of a liberal and national forum called “Alexei Mateevici” whose aim was to bring into consideration the importance of freedom and national consciousness for the Moldavian citizens (Partidul Unitatii Nationale, 2019).

Moldavian students chose to remain in Romania after they finish their studies leading to brain-drain in Moldova (Negură, 2016, p. 547).

The year 2001 marked a win for the communist party in the parliamentary elections who appoint Vladimir Voronin as head of state thus effectively plunging the country back into Communism following worsening relations with Romania and West, Voronin used his influence to control the parliament and the government, appoint loyal politicians into key positions as well as undermine the rule of law which became fully subservient to the communist leader, following by control over media sources culminating with the restructuration of Moldova's counties into 11 raions who were dependent on Chisinau and finally Voronin took advantage of the lack of any opposition and sought the creation of a business empire that would serve him and his allies until April 2009 when the Communist party lost the parliamentary elections and because it did not gain absolute majority and the constitution forbade a third mandate as president, Voronin appointed Zinaida Greceanii, yet the scheme failed, the parliament was dissolved and elections were conducted in July 2009 which resulted in the win for a pro-European coalition called Alliance for European Integration.

The rise to power of the pro-European coalition ignited hope that the country would follow a democratic path and a process of reconstruction would follow, yet human nature never changes, the new leaders were more interested in using the system created by Voronin for their own ends and thus created an agreement among themselves which divided influence and share of key positions, among the coalition leaders two figures stand out: Vlad Filat, prime minister of Moldova from 2009-2013 and leader of Liberal Democratic Party and Vlad Plahotniuc, deputy leader of the Democratic Party for appearances and mastermind who controlled the party from behind the scenes. The period that followed saw no major improvement for Moldova beside the apparent friendly relations with EU whom the coalition sought to please and also the leaders preoccupation with maintaining public appearances as Moldova was under political unrest since it could not elect the president because the coalition did not had majority and the possibility of elections would undermine their rule yet this changed in 2012 when Nicolae Timofti was elected president, effectively igniting the war between Plahotniuc and Filat which culminated with the one

billion fraud, an event that plunged Moldova into a crisis whose apparent end was met when Plahotniuc, in 2015, using his influence voided Filat's immunity and had him accused of corruption and involvement in the fraud, since then Plahotniuc's influence lingers like a shadow over Moldova (Calus, 2016, pp. 23-26).

EU's interests in Moldova and Eastern Europe intensified in the early 21st century, leading to the formation of a zone of peace and prosperity around the EU called European Neighborhood Policy developed in 2004 with the aim to create action plans in order to solve specific country problems; in the case of Moldova the most important areas are: rule of law, judicial reform, poverty reduction, economic reform, border management, etc. (Kuchler, 2008, p. 83).

One of the issues that affect the Republic of Moldova is the problem of Transnistria, despite being a frozen conflict in a small zone, it poses a huge issue if armed conflict were to start between the two opposing forces due to the vast amount of Russian military equipment stored in Transnistrian bases which are being trafficked to aid civil wars and international conflicts and considering how old the equipment is, it poses a high risk for an explosion that could have severe effects on the environment and immediate population. Another problem is Moldova's dependence on Russian energy which limit the country's economic and political options and any undesired development results in threats and coercion from Russia, (Kuchler, 2008, pp. 91-92) as was the case in the year 2006 when Russia cut the gas supply to Moldova forcing the government to accept the new price imposed by Russia (CountryWatch, 2016, p. 20).

2. GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS: MOLDOVA BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

In order to understand the implications of a possible union between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, we need to look at the geopolitical implications and what effects such an action would instigate in the region.

Even since its independence, the Republic of Moldova found itself between two huge geopolitical players, East and West, forcing the country to choose between two different positions where each side tries to absorb Moldavia into their sphere of influence. However, due to the issue with Transnistria and the looming threat of Russia, any movement in the region entered into a stalemate state forcing Moldavia to

keep friendly relations with its neighbors and make progress toward integrating into the European Union, a movement that is dependent on the internal power shift within the country (Ciurea, 2010, pp. 3-4).

The 1990's brought two separatist movements for fear that Bassarabia might unite with Romania, in the south, a strongly Russified Gagauz declared its independence on 19 August 1990 following Transnistria, in the east, on 2 September 1990, the two conflicts have followed different paths yet they pose significant danger for the existence and borders of the Republic of Moldova, especially the Transnistrian conflict due to the presence of Russian troops.

The Gagauz conflict, in the south, could turn into a dangerous ethnic conflict that would likely trigger the involvement of Turkey beside Russia, however the issue was brought to an end on 23 December 1994, with the "Law on the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia" which brought recognition of the Gagauz Republic by the Republic of Moldova thus ending a conflict that would had the potential to evolve into a worse case. The settlement of the Gagauz conflict brought huge approvals from the international community, for Gagauzia it brought the right to follow its own path and as for the Republic of Moldova it meant solving one of the two conflicts that would threaten the country's existence (Patlis, 2019, p. 6).

On the other hand the Transnistrian conflict is a whole different case, the conflict evolved into an armed conflict that is yet to see its end. The many proposals for conflict settlement were all refused or were too unequal to be implemented especially that Transnistria considers Gagauzia as a failed attempt at gaining full autonomy unlike the separatist region of Transnistria which has its own postal code, ID and license plates, currency and political institution all of which are not recognized by the international community.

As a result of tearing themselves away from the Republic of Moldova, the two separatist regions face isolation and thus seek external support in order to maintain and improve their identity, this support comes from Russia which has a tremendous amount of influence in both separatist regions despite that Gagauzia has an alternative in Turkey whose influence is growing in the region (Patlis, 2019, p. 7).

The first initiative regarding the approach between EU and Republic of Moldova is the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed on 28 November 1994 which provided assistance from the

EU for supporting Moldova's democratic and market reforms with the final aim to incorporate Republic of Moldova into the European Union (Wrobel, 2004, pp. 60-61).

The year 1999 marked a pro-EU turn in the policy of Moldova as Ion Sturza's government signed the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SPSEE), followed by consistent implementations of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in areas of democracy and economy; however Sturza's government was dismissed and in its place came a coalition which included communists who sought the integration of the country into the Belarus-Russia Union State, in spite of Moldova becoming the first post-Soviet country to join the SPSEE as a full member on 28 June 2001 (Wrobel, 2004, pp. 63-64).

Since the integration of Romania and Bulgaria into EU in 2007, the European Union now has access to the Black Sea, nearing Russia and the frozen conflicts in the region, especially the Transnistrian conflict; yet the approach of NATO and EU toward East contributed to a shift in the local geopolitical arena as was the case in 2008 over the conflict in South Ossetia (Matveev, et al., 2009, p. 9).

Corruption is another factor beside the external threats that plagues Moldova, the case of 2015 is probably the most eloquent example as poor financial management coupled with corruption have led to 1 billion US dollar fraud leading to protests and conviction of the responsible politicians who at the time were affiliated with pro-EU party including the former prime minister Vlad Filat; however the fraud was only possible due to Moldova's weak government institutions leading to the diminishing of citizens' trust in the government. Since the fraud, the EU had directed its efforts to eliminate corruption and strengthen the Moldovan National Anticorruption Centre (NAC) following a cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) (Montesano, et al., 2016, pp. 6-7, 10).

27 November 2013 was an important day for Georgia and the Republic of Moldova as the two countries signed the Vilnius Agreement¹⁰, marking a decisive approach toward the European Union;

¹⁰ The third Eastern Partnership summit held in Vilnius represented a number of goals to be attained by EU partner countries including the signing of Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA); Association Agreements between EU and other partner countries with the aim to accelerate political association and economic integration, strengthening democracy and the rule of law. (European Commission, 2013).

however we must take into consideration the geopolitical importance of the Republic of Moldova:

- The EU needs to consolidate its presence in the eastern part of Europe and for this reason the Republic of Moldova is an important partner;
- The United States of America have deployed a anti-missile shield, an action seen as a threat by Russia, and thus the USA have interest in the eastern part of Europe;
- The Russian Federation strives to keep the Republic of Moldova under its economic and political influence especially through the "peace-keeping" Russian forces stationed in Transnistria, which represent a threat for the security and existence of the Republic of Moldova (Mircea-Cristian, 2014, pp. 86-87).

The political instability and economic crisis of 2009, provided a great opportunity for Russia who offered a loan of 500 million USD to Moldova, a decision with ulterior motives as the objective was to gain control over the country and hinder any attempts at letting Moldova join the EU; yet the unexpected came from China who offered one billion USD which is more than Russia's offer or the loans from EU and International Monetary Fund. China's interest in Moldova is justified for reasons of market diversification, raising the level of literacy and investing into the potential of information technologies; however these reasons seem shallow and there is always more if you look deeper, Moldova's importance is rising, the country has been seen as a buffer zone at best and a frozen conflict at worst, as China's main reasons to invest in Moldova, and subsequently any other former USSR states, has military actions behind for if Moldova were to integrate into EU and later into NATO, the country could be used as a base to reach into Asia and especially due to globalization, as the world becomes smaller and smaller and events on one side of the globe have effects on the other side it is but logical to consider that distance between borders is shrinking (Harbo, 2010, pp. 10-11).

Since the trade embargo issued by Russia in 2014 against Moldova, as penalty for the country's association in the Association Agreement with EU, forced the country to look West for trade of its agricultural products which must undergo rigorous sanitary requirements and standards, yet the embargo on Moldovan goods helped deepening the ties with EU and subsequently NATO with whom Moldova associates and aims to

enter the EU but without abandoning their neutral status even through it would benefit economically and raised the chances of EU membership if Moldova were to relinquish its status as neutral country and enter NATO (Vardanean, 2018, pp. 11-13).

In its approach toward Moldova, the EU has to take into consideration Russia's influence which still affects parts of the elite prompting EU to take a careful engagement in bringing its reforms to fruition especially in the area of government institutions since the pro-EU elite was responsible for the fraud and in the same time it has to take into consideration the opposing forces which want to push the country into the Euroasiatic Economy Union and ultimately approach Russia. As for Transnistria due to the high economic cost Russia had paid for starting the conflict in east Ukraine, it now suffers the consequences of its failed attempt to border and integrate Transnistria for which it cannot offer economic support anymore thus leading to an increase in trade with EU members and higher chances for EU policies to be implemented in the separatist region (Montesano, et al., 2016, pp. 22-24).

The annexation of Crimea and start of Donbas conflict in 2014 had ripple effects on Moldova's policies, prompting the country to search refuge and align itself more with EU in the face of growing tensions from East where Russia is out for reaping new territories, to which uncertainties may add in case of elections when the population is manipulated with threats from Russia and unification with Romania, yet hiding the real dangers: migration, poverty and dependence on Russian gas despite the EU helping Moldova into the single energy market as a result of the Third Energy Packet aimed to cripple Gazprom's monopoly over the Moldovan market (Vardanean, 2018, pp. 16-17).

The Republic of Moldova has to maintain good relations with its neighbors on whom trade, border control and the country's economy is dependent; however to Russia it represents a zone of interest and threat were the country to unite with Romania, if it were to belong to Russia, Moldova will act as a base and front against the West and in case the country is independent as it is today, it will play as a buffer zone and kept under control due to its dependence on Russian resources and assistance in making any progress in ending the frozen Transnistrian conflict. Another important neighbor for the Republic of Moldova is Ukraine with whom a good collaboration is ideal for the economy and securing the east

border with Transnistria so that illegal activities in the separatist region can be stopped. Perhaps the only neighbor with good intentions for Moldova is Romania which supports the country's integration into the EU and aspires for unification, however this action is dependent on a variety of external and internal factors (Harbo, 2010, p. 22).

The EU member states have contributed to Moldova and subsequently to the issue posed by Transnistria, with a variety of projects and initiatives like the Peace building Framework Project initiated by United Kingdom, which saw an improvement in civil society engagement both in Moldova and Transnistria, as well as help from France in matters of cultural issues; Romania also had offered a 150 million euro toward its neighbor Moldova (Montesano, et al., 2016, p. 13). Despite the investments made by EU in Moldova, there is skepticism coming from minorities who don't trust EU and would likely join Russia which they perceive as liberator and freedom guarantor, however EU's image is distorted by anti-European political parties, Russia's media and even the Russian Orthodox Church, the distortion of EU's image turns the minorities in support for Communist parties and distrust any pro-EU government in Moldova for fear that it would lead to the unification with Romania and the loss of their current status-quo; the blame for skepticism toward EU can be partly attributed to Moldova's government for its lack of communication with its own citizens as well as the lack of any replacement for Russia propaganda in order to counter the effects skepticism (Kosienkowski & Schreiber, 2014, pp. 8-9, 13).

Moldova has to create dialogue between its state institutions and citizens, promote EU information campaigns and use the advantages of the Association Agreement which would allow Moldova to undergo modernization and regional development; a better cooperation between the central authorities and ethnic minorities is a must and in doing so Moldova shall seek integration of minorities by teaching Romanian and lessen the effects of Russia on the citizens, transparency and balance in its interaction with ethnic minorities in order to stop the spread of separatist manifestations (Kosienkowski & Schreiber, 2014, pp. 17-18).

2.1. SEPARATIST MOVEMENTS: THE CASE OF TRANSNISTRIA

The conflict in Transnistria ignited after the fall of USSR and the declaration of Moldova's independence leading to a brief war between separatists from Transnistria and Moldova's security forces until a ceasefire was mediated by Russia followed by the self-proclaimed independence of the Transnistrian region leading to a frozen conflict, yet not as violent as the conflicts over South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia or the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh territory (Wolff, 2012, p. 7).

Since its start in 1990 the conflict in Transnistria is far from ending, the parties implicated are awaiting a new situation to emerge, an event that can tip the balance while in the same time the conflict's nature is changing as uncertainty of any decisive action in the region threatens to cause more harm than good leading to economic and political fights among the elites of the two opposing countries as well as a regional arena for the international actors (USA, Russia, EU) which want to extend their influence. The conflict in Transnistria is likely to stay frozen as Russia, the main entity which can settle the conflict sees it as an opportunity for both security and military reasons (Matveev, et al., 2009, pp. 35-36).

From an ethnical point of view in the separatist region live: Moldovans, Ukrainian, Jews and other ethnicities who live separately and divided due to the lack of integration policies and a regressive type of nation building aimed toward Communism and Slavic nationalism to the detriment of other minorities, in stark contrast with the model of unification between East and West Germany, Transnistria does not accept any representation of a different view despite the different minorities living in the region (Matveev, et al., 2009, p. 71).

Currently the two main issues regarding Transnistria are military activity and organized crime which poses a threat for both Moldova and Transnistria due the lack of a proper and independent judiciary system coupled with widespread poverty thus resulting in human trafficking and other smuggling activities like: drugs, weapons, tobacco and alcohol. The Russian military presence questions Moldova's future neutral country status, another issue is the questionable objective of the 14th Russian army stationed as "peace keeping" force. The status of the 14th Russian army remains questionable especially due to their support of Transnistrian separatists during the conflict in 1992 where the 14th

Russian army fought alongside separatists and provided them with military equipment.

Since the ceasefire agreement in 1992 several attempts at completely withdrawing the 14th army and military equipment were made: The Russian-Moldovan agreement in 1994, a clause in the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe and Russia's commitment at the OSCE summit, held in Istanbul, to withdraw its troops from the region. After 1999 Russia began to withdraw its presence from the region until 2003 following the failure of the Kozak Memorandum prompting Russia to stop its withdraw and offer the necessity to guard the remaining military equipment, of 20.000 tones stored in a military depot, as an excuse to maintain its military presence (Wolff, 2012, pp. 15-17).

Many attempts were made in bringing the Transnistrian conflict to an end however each proposed project had failed to achieve its aim leading to what is today known as frozen conflict, ready to ignite at the smallest spark. The lengthy negotiations with Transnistria on reaching a favorable situation in ending the conflict can be traced back to 1997 with the signing of "Memorandum of the Normalization of the Relationships between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria" the aim of the memorandum was to redress the situation that formed in 1995 when negotiations ceased and to create the five sided negotiation format. In 2002 another project was proposed by OSCE, Ukraine and Russia who would also play the role of observers, the aim was to federalize Moldova and give administrative power to local counties but be subject to Chișinău's government however the project failed as it would give Transnistria recognition as country and hinder Moldova's integration into the European Union. A new attempt was made in 2003 by Russia, entitled: "Memorandum on the Basic Principle of the State Structure of A United State in Moldova" also known as Kozak Memorandum, after its creator Dimitri Kozak, was another failed attempt at federalizing Moldova but this time a change of Moldova's constitution was required greatly undermining the authority of Moldovan government beside other demands like making Russian language the official language and an overrepresentation of minorities in the senate that would likely leave Moldova as a puppet state for both Transnistria and Russia; nevertheless the project was rejected due to pressures from OSCE, United States and European Union, on at that time president of

Moldova, Vladimir Voronin. Yet the tenacity of Russian officials did not end here as in 2004 another project was devised by Stanislav Belkovski, which proposed the unification between Romania and Moldova, however from the start the Russian knew such a plan was impossible yet their aim was to hinder the integration of Romania into the European Union as the country would not be accepted were it to integrate a conflict zone, however on a positive note through this project, unintentionally Russia recognized the Romanian origins of the Moldovans since the area of Moldova was under heavy propaganda in order to turn Moldovans into Russians by erasing the nationalistic and ethnical identity. It is likely that the Transnistrian issue will persist no matter in what form as long as the opposing forces and the ones behind them won't cease their petty games and finally start in earnest to solve the issue which mainly concerns civilians above all (Cristina, 2006, pp. 909-915).

The survival of Transnistria is dependent on three key areas: economy, politics and security. In terms of economy, Transnistria is, in part, a hot spot for illegal trade of weapons as well as legal trade with textiles and steel yet the most important characteristic which allows the separatist region to exist is Russian gas for which they don't have to pay thus creating the conditions for competitive exports since the price of energy and gas to create goods is minimal. However the separatist region is more dependent on trade with the EU members thus this situation should give leverage for EU in conducting any further negotiations with Transnistria.

The politics in Transnistria are dictated by an elite who owns the power and benefit from the current status-quo; they have suppressed the civic society and any opposition to the government as well as imposing an authoritarian regime with minimal interest for freedom and human rights (Popescu, 2005, pp. 17-18).

Transnistria's existence is dependent on Russia to keep its "peace keeping" force in the area in spite of Moldova's intention to keep its neutral status; currently the Russian military presence in the region acts as border guard yet this action is what keeps the two sides from coming to a mutual agreement and end the frozen conflict, a conflict that is the result of the failed five-sided negotiation structure, having Russia, Ukraine and OSCE as mediators; Moldova and Transnistria as the opposing forces yet the strong interest in the area, coupled with the poor negotiation format that was supposed to end the frozen conflict

had allowed it to continue especially due to Russia's interest in maintaining its influence over Moldova and OSCE's limitations in taking risks (Popescu, 2005, pp. 19-20).

Another way in which Russia sought to implement its influence over Moldova is through former president Igor Dodon and the Socialist Party (PSRM) while continuing to support Transnistria and recognize the separatist region as part of the Republic of Moldova in the face of the international community, however a factor of instability, in the region, for Russia were the parliamentary elections of 2019 where Russia hoped for the success of the Socialist party which happens to be a failure as the Socialist failed to gain any seats in the government since the country's independence and coupled with the presidential elections of 2020 where the Socialists faced another defeat in the face of Maia Sandu supported by the pro-EU party PAS (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate) all victories for the pro-EU party shows that the communists influence over Moldova is crumbling and it is likely to reignite the frozen conflict in a last attempt for Russia to hold onto its power and influence (Hill, 2018, p. 7).

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 prompted Moldova to expect a Russian invasion in which case the country would last up to a few hours and yet these fears aren't without basis, considering the Russian military presence in Transnistria, the newly acquired Crimean peninsula and the Western Military District, which pose a threat for both Moldova and Romania as well as Europe as a whole not to mention the various conflicts ignited by Russia in order to gain more influence and territory, as is the case of Donbass, a conflict that evolved in a similar manner to the Transnistrian conflict where Russia plays the double agent role of mediator and participant to the conflict by supporting separatist movements and when it comes to put an end to the conflict, Russia does its best to lengthen the negotiation process and eventually involve foreign powers into the fray thus giving a new status to the disputed region, that of unrecognised country. The confrontations between Russia and West will lead to a domino effect, the smallest movement over the still frozen conflicts will lead to the ignition of all and thus to the worsening of social living standards for the population who inevitably will be caught in the middle of the fray (Vardanean, 2018, pp. 21-23).

Both Gagauzia and Transnistria are not internationally recognized, which is an important process for strengthening the independence of a

state, aside from other separatist regions and Russia opening a consular office in Tiraspol which can be seen as an indirect recognition of Transnistria, the region will remain of great geostrategic importance for Russia in order to put pressure on the Republic of Moldova (Jimenez, 2018, pp. 412-413).

In bringing the Transnistrian conflict to an end we must take into consideration the two main sides whose influence washes over the Republic of Moldova, East and West; the model of 5+2 negotiations, having Moldova and Transnistria as the opposing parties and OSCE, Russia, United States, Ukraine and United Europe as observers and mediators in the frozen conflict has yet to show significant progress due to both sides imposing their agendas over the other instead of finding a middle path (Matveev, et al., 2009, p. 10).

All policies intended by EU for Moldova, also have to take into consideration Transnistria and in this regard the EU developed Confidence Building Measures (CBM) whose aim are to improve the cooperation between: businesses, media, NGO's and strengthen civic society of both Moldova and Transnistria by promoting environment protection and development of social infrastructure which would lead to improvements in the socio-economic sphere and provide improved interactions between the two sides (Montesano, et al., 2016, p. 18).

One scenario for the future of Transnistria is to join the Republic of Moldova in a single state, despite the Transnistrian authorities being against reintegration into Moldova, an idea supported by Russia too however in this case it seeks to have a loyal territory within Moldova to easily manifest its influence, and considering that most economical activity of the separatist region goes through Moldova and into EU under the terms of DCFTA it would be likely that the region might join Moldova for better economic perspectives.

The Transnistrian conflict was close to be settled in 2003 with the Kozak Memorandum but ultimately this move proved to be ineffective as the region would succumb to Russia's influence and considering that if Transnistria were to join Moldova as one state it would affect Moldova's elections if the population from Transnistria were to be given voting rights and thus spread Russia's influence in the region (Waal & Twickel, 2020, pp. 38-39).

Another scenario would be the Europeanization of the region if the Transnistrian authorities would

pursue stronger relations with the European Union as a result from pressure coming from the crisis in Ukraine, reduced financial support from Russia and declining exports toward Russia which would leave the authorities from the separatist region without any solution but to seek closer relations with EU, however Transnistria's culture leans toward Russia and the likely supporters for Europeanization emigrate in search for better conditions and considering that Moldova's society does not want any engagement with the separatist region the most accurate outcome would be isolation.

Lastly, the separatist region would become isolated and survive from Russia's support and illegal activities, a scenario that can become reality if the government of Moldova does not stop illegal trade with Transnistria and the Ukrainian authorities do not intervene in the trading with contraband goods; however since the people of Transnistria are connected to Moldova and are able to travel and trade in Moldova, the outcome that the region could become a heaven for illegal activities is small especially that the region has access to the European market through Moldova (Waal & Twickel, 2020, pp. 40-41).

2.2. SECESSIONIST MOVEMENTS: THE CASE OF GAGAUZIA

The Gagauz are Orthodox Christians who speak a dialect of the Turkish language, beside the minorities who gained autonomy in the Republic of Moldova, they are present in Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine too, however in these countries they are fully assimilated (Wober, 2013, p. 7). Gagauzia is another territorial issue in the Republic of Moldova, the 1848 km² of territory which comprises 32 localities in three different districts are subject to a special legal autonomous entity of around 161700 inhabitants with the administrative center at Comrat; the formation of the second, small autonomous region is tied to Russia and Transnistria who helped the separatist movement flourish and provide a habitat of inequality where rights are not respected especially that of Moldovans and Romanians who are seen as the archenemy (Cornea & Cornea, 2014, pp. 35-37). The reason for Gagauzia's support for Russia is found in the year 1990 when the region was on the edge of civil war, prompting the intervention of Soviet troops in order to keep order (Schlegel, 2018, p. 17).

After the Great Unification of 1918, the Gagauz region was under the influence of Romania which

forced them to speak Romanian and undergo mandatory military service, all in an attempt to undermine the Russian influence; however during the occupation of USSR in 1944, they were sent to labor camps while others died in the famine of 1946-1947, yet they refuse to associate the Soviets with the negative experiences and shift the blame to Romania, which still persists today, as the society is heavily influenced by Russian propaganda coupled with discrimination coming from Turkey because the Gagauz minorities are seen as Orthodox and Russians which in turn are the effects of acculturation and economic development that started during the Communist period in the region, having the final effect of creating a discrepancy between Gagauz minorities and their Turkish identity (Wober, 2013, pp. 8-9).

The autonomy of Gagauzia began with the fall of Communism in 1989, which provided an ideal opportunity since most of East Europe was caught in revolutions and USSR on the brink of falling apart; the seat of power was located at Comrat where the Gagauz Autonomous Soviet Republic was formed, however the newly created "state" was deemed unlawful by Moldova and the situation was almost leading to armed conflict; since then Gagauz follows its own path with as little contact with Moldova as possible (Wober, 2013, p. 10).

The failed putsch in 1991, Moscow, was the last fissure in the USSR before it collapsed leaving the fate of ethnic minorities uncertain only to have dire consequences in the future in the form of separatism and conflicts; while the conflict over Gagauzia did not have the same level as that in Transnistria, nonetheless it represents a high risk of conflict ignition but the situation did not escalate since Russia had no need for another costly conflict and since there are not many Russians in Gagauzia the pretext of 'protection of Russian ethnics' could not be used thus the second separatist region could not dare enter into an armed conflict with Moldova since it lacked backing, however Gagauzia found an ally in Turkey who assumed the role of protector and provider of investments for Moldova while at the same time Turkey strives to offer a different orientation in the Gagauz society which favors Russia. A settlement of the Gagauzia conflict was reached in 1994, but the settlement was accompanied by a new law which stated that in case Moldova would merge with Romania, Gagauzia would hold its autonomy (Schlegel, 2018, pp. 6-9).

The region of Gagauz is defined as an autonomous territory with special status and own government within the Republic of Moldova which in the event the country unites with Romania or ceases to exist Gagauzia would maintain its status of self-governing territory. The administrative body is led by a governor called Bashkam, elected every four years, followed by Gagauz People's Assembly also called Halk Toplushu, formed by 35 deputies and the Executive Council, Bakannik Kometeti which is led by the governor and represents the permanent executive authority within the territory (Wober, 2013, pp. 12-13).

The conflict between Moldova and Gagauzia has three main key points, internal power shifts and competition in Gagauzia; Russia's attempts to create conflict between Chisinau and Comrat in order to strengthen and create separatist movements and contrary views over the level of Gagauzia's autonomy (Calus, 2014, p. 4).

From an ethno-political view, the secessionist region has two important actors with various interests in the region: Russia and Turkey; the former wants to consolidate its influence over the Republic of Moldova by creating conflicts that lead to the fragmentation of the country and economic control through energy dependence on Russia. The Gagauz conflict, despite not being on the same scale with the conflict in Transnistria, can be used by Russia if a unification between Moldova and Romania were to occur, in this case due to the geostrategic position of Gagauzia, the region would likely turn into an armed conflict (Brie, et al., 2010, p. 139).

Gagauzia's political and economic interests lean toward Russia which is considered essential for the development of the secessionist region, for this case Michael Formuzal, former leader of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, elaborated a policy "Eleven steps in greeting people" which aims to collaborate with embassies of Turkey, Russia and Bulgaria in order to open consulates within Gagauzia, a movement which would strengthen the autonomy of the secessionist region and unintentionally would gain international recognition. On the other hand the relations with Turkey started after the formation of the modern Turkish state, thus the first progress was in 1931, with the appointment of Hamdullah Suphi Tanriover, a Turkish ambassador in Romania, tasked with research on a group of ethnics called Gagauz which inhabit the region of South Bessarabia which was part of Romania at that time; following

this initiative, the Turkish government organized Turkish language courses with the permission of the Romanian authorities who paid the salaries of Turkish teachers. However the problems appeared due to religious differences, the Gagauz being Orthodox led to pressure from Turkey who required adoption of Islam for scholars and Gagauz ethnics who wanted to be repatriated to Turkey, however this plan was stopped with the invasion of Bessarabia in 1940 by Soviet Russia with whom since the time of the Ottoman Empire, the relations between Russia and Turkey were cold and the idea of establishing friendly relations with the Gagauz ethnics were stopped until 1991, when the relations with Turkey reignited after the visit of Turkey's president, at that time, Turgut Ozal.

Turkey's interest in the Republic of Moldova are based on ethno-historical origins with Gagauzia which they supports through development and preservation of culture, the ethno-political factor in the relations between Turkey and Russia represent another interest that was manifested through: regional-political influence after the fall of USSR which allowed Turkey to gain the status of regional power; consolidation of power and marginalization of Russia in the Black Sea was another objective so that it would allow Turkey to promote exports, protect and improve the identity of Gagauzians and other Turkish minorities, for this reason Turkey is interested in maintaining friendly relations and territorial integrity with the Republic of Moldova because it allows access to Gagauzia, an action that would not be possible if the region would fall under Russia's influence (Brie, et al., 2010, pp. 141-143).

Currently Turkey is undergoing radical changes under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leader of the country, who promotes Neo-Ottomanism,¹¹ a foreign policy aimed to obtain closer relations with the countries formerly under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, however Turkey is seen as having expansionist ideals beside its internal issues like human rights abuse and declining democracy which made integration into the EU impossible thus Turkey

¹¹ Neo-Ottomanism is Turkey's attempt to gain influence in the region and on an international scale by supporting the constructions of mosques and financing Islam education studies with the aim to spread Islam and create a favorable image for Turkey beside its envisioned desire to gain the former territories of the Ottoman Empire, yet Turkey's policies and military interventions have created tensions with its neighbors and threatens to create more tensions with China since it has economic interests and Turkey's hectic behavior threatens the stability and peace in the region (Maziad & Sotiriadis, 2020).

spreads its influence on the surrounding countries, especially in the Balkan region, seeking to rival the EU (Ghazi, 2019, pp. 42-43).

In the case of Gagauzia two issues stand out: firstly the Gagauz are Christians while the Turks are Muslims thus religious differences affect the affiliation with Turkey, however the two share a common history and ethnicity; but the only Turks that visit the region are businessmen while the Gagauz are mainly farmers, this leads to a discrepancy between the two groups which may hinder progress (Ghazi, 2019, pp. 45-46).

2.3. THE PROBLEM OF UNIFICATION

Due to the geographical position of Romania, being at the intersection between East and West, the area faced constant threats from multiple bigger foes making the appearance of a strong state in the region almost impossible. The question we must ask ourselves is: Can the unification between Romania and the Republic of Moldova occur in the near future? (Cazac, 2018, p. 277).

Moldova's constitution states that Moldova is a sovereign, independent and indivisible state; it is clear that under those circumstances, at least legally, a union between the two countries could not ensure, however the constitution stipulates that the country's status may change as to allow unification through the use of a referendum based on the majority of voters with voting rights. The unification ideal has support from different organizations from both countries as well as Romania's policies of granting Romanian citizenship to Moldovans, an action that would later lead to migration and brain drain in Moldova, especially that Romania is member of EU thus the prospect of free trade and access to Europe is alluring for many Moldovans who aspire to achieve better social standing.

Even if unification between the two countries would occur, the issue of Transnistria and the status of Gagauzia remain a questionable problem that need to be fixed, in the case of Gagauzia, due to their anti-Romania view, it would likely lead to an increase in separatist movement with the aim to maintain or create a new state free of Romania's influence and as for Transnistria, the situation is even worse, the region is under the direct influence of Russia and the presence of Russian military in the region add another layer of complexity to the situation. No matter the situation a union between Romania and the Republic of Moldova will have to wait however until then

Romania continues to support Moldova on its path to Europeanization and hopefully becoming EU member (Cazac, 2018, pp. 285-288).

The longer it takes for the unification between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, the harder it will become to bring the two countries together as Moldova evolves and builds its own identity, in the absence of heavy Romanian influence the region might forever be lost; ultimately what makes a nation is history, culture, religion and especially language yet these dots that connect Romania and Moldova are weakening with each passing moment as we wait for the ideal situation to undergo unification, a process dependent on geopolitics, power and the will of foreign entities, this raises the question: is Romania too weak to achieve its objectives? (Baar & Jakubek, 2017, p. 82).

The stalemate between East and West, the issue with the frozen conflicts over Transnistria and Gagauzia as well as the ethnic problems are a few of many issues for the Republic of Moldova; the presence of two different views on the ethnic identity dominates the political and social agenda, the existence of Moldovanism whose proponents advocate for alienation from Romania and Romanism who views the Republic of Moldova as a missing part of Romania and in the middle of these two opposing ideologies are the citizens who are caught in between two sides who try to get as many supporters as possible while in the same time ignoring the bigger problems and the need of development policies for Moldova (Szeles, 2021, pp. 7-8).

The identity controversy between Romania and Moldova can be traced as far as 1812 when the process of Russification began with the creation of a false Moldovan identity that is distinct from Romania, the hope of such false acclamations are the best strategy Russia uses not only in Moldova but everywhere it lost territories with the crumbling of USSR in 1991, yet this strategy of divide and conquer through identity manipulation had its successes especially after the Bolsheviks gained control over Russia. The alleged Moldovanist current highlights the importance of the moldovan language in the spheres of culture, politics, economics and social life as well as the importance of developing a separate identity to that of Romania's, such an action would not go unnoticed by the counter-force represented by the Romanianism current which seeks to oppose and reject the idea of moldovan language and offer the argument of similarities that exists between the two nations: ethnicity, history,

culture and language shared with Romania (Baar & Jakubek, 2017, pp. 84-86).

The best outcome for Moldova and subsequently for any possible union between the two countries would be if Moldova joins the European Union, however EU integration seems to be less important for the population who were direct victims of the internal power shift between pro-EU and pro-Russia governments, having more immediate problems to turn to like poverty and migration, the Moldovan society is less interested in the schemes between West and East and more interested in achieving a standard of living (Szeles, 2021, p. 2).

The discrepancy between Romanianism and Moldovanism is seen even in politics where the pro-EU government highlights the importance of the Romanian language and history. Especially in school, in contrast with the pro-Russia government which promoted the use of Cyrillic alphabet instead of Latin and going as far as imprisoning anyone who has contrary views on the language and history of Moldova than those of the pro-Russia government. The situation changed with the implementation of Perestroika which allowed for a window of opportunity to rise the importance of language and adopt the Latin alphabet, yet the situation remains tense as the proponents of Moldovanism sustain their ideals more in an attempt to keep Moldova independent while on the other side the Romanists demand unity and replacement of the term Moldovan language with Romanian language (Groza, et al., 2018, pp. 13-15).

3. THE GERMAN REUNIFICATION, A MODEL FOR ROMANIA AND MOLDOVA?

Having experienced Communism and the country split between the victorious forces of the Second World War into East and West Germany and later suffering the effects of an identity crisis, Germany is the optimal example of a successful reunification yet not short of problems. Due to the similar situation in which Romania and Moldova find themselves could the German reunification serve as a model for a potential unification between Romania and Moldova? This chapter attempts to offer a comparison between the case of Germany and the situation in Moldova.

On 7 May 1945, Germany signed the capitulation act, effectively ending the Second World War however the victors had different views in regard to the cause that led to war: on one hand the USA see the cause of war in the unequal economic development and national

egoismus and for this reason in order to avoid the spread of radical political stances they sought to implement liberal political systems around the world; on the other hand the Soviet Union felt threatened especially that Germany managed to come close to Moscow and thus it needed an area of influence to represent a buffer between East and West (Vogt, 1994, p. 728).

The next issue after Germany's capitulation was addressing the integrity of the country, whether it should function as a fragmented state or as a whole, it is here that it was decided to split Germany into four zones between the WW2 victors (Soviet Russia, USA, Britain and France), however due to different social and political systems imposed in those areas it would lead to conflict especially during the Cold War (Vogt, 1994, p. 730).

The first part of Germany's unification starts with the formation of Bizonia, in 1946, by merging USA and Britain's occupation zones and later France would join too in 1949 thus forming Trizonia which later became known as the Federal Republic of Germany, commonly called West Germany, while on the east side, the soviets founded the German Democratic Republic, known as East Germany, the discussion over any potential union ceased as the Cold War ignited conflict all over the world. The divide between the two opposing political ideologies led many people leave East Germany, a problem which would be solved with the creation of the Berlin Wall, a symbol for the Communist oppression (School History, 2020).

The situation at that time is similar to the case of Moldova and Romania however the uncertain situation with Transnistria and Gagauzia is what makes any potential union difficult since Germany was not confronted with the element of ethnicity in its reunification process nor did it had military conflicts save for the ideological propaganda of Communism which contributed to a potential identity problem between East and West Germany.

On August 12 in 1961, all connections with West Germany were closed and soon by the orders of Walter Ulbricht¹², the leader of East Germany, who previously condemned West Germany for its espionage activities and for trying to convince as many people as possible to migrate into West Germany, a wall was built to separate the same people into two different ideologies and identities (School History, 2020).

¹² Walter Ulbricht (1893-1973) was a communist and leader of Democratic Republic of Germany (East Germany), his economic policies led to food shortages and migration into West Germany; in order to stop any attempts to flee East Germany and maintain communism in the region, the borders were closed and a wall was built in Berlin (Llewellyn & Thompson, 2018)

The Soviet part of Germany (East Germany) represented an opportunity for Stalin who wanted to expand Communism further west and establish the Soviet Union as the center of Europe, yet his ambition is cut short with the introduction of the Marshall Plan¹³, backed by the United States, which offered help for reconstructing the infrastructure destroyed by the Second World War and limit the Communist influence in Europe (Bromley, 2017, p. 47).

9 November 1989 marks the fall of the Berlin Wall that separated families and limited human rights, but the complete reunification took place on 3 October 1990, and in order to achieve this outcome, a balance between approach and demarcation had to be taken by West Germany in its relation to East Germany in such a way as to not force the other to close itself completely and to keep the question of unification fresh in the mind of both citizens separated or not by the wall, however external events such as the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War are factors which too contributed to the reunification of Germany (Kohl, 2009, pp. 1-2).

The reunification brought with itself economic issues as the East German currency was to be replaced by the Deutsche Mark on a 1-1 exchange rate, an action which would shift the burden on West Germany and cause inflation, threaten Germany's international economic role and affect its industries, not to mention the rise in taxes, all these effects are caused by merging the opposite economic system, the planned economy specific to communist states, that functioned in East Germany. The greatest threat posed by the reunification was the high unemployment rate which had to be solved by increasing wages and offering subsidies for industries in order to stimulate production and increase exports. However problems were not short to arrive as migration to west, asylum seekers and ethnic Germans from east Europe led to housing shortage which in turn led to higher rents affecting the wages and finally led to higher inflation in West Germany which adopted restrictive policies in order to limit the rate of inflation.

Having been under socialist economy, East Germany's industry had to be privatized in order to switch to a market economy yet the task ahead was complex since the industries in the East side were mainly specialized in heavy industry neglecting the

modern service industries. Another issue after the merge of the two opposing economies was the exposure of Germany's industry to international competition thus adding another level of strain on the economy and industry which were outdated and needed to be brought to international standards (Paul, 1992, pp. 174-178).

Having experienced two different economies, merging them and suffering all consequences of such an attempt and still emerge victorious represents a proper model to follow and learn from in the case of a potential unification between Romania and the Republic of Moldova, however we must take into account the unique elements of our issue and plan accordingly.

Germany's fast development is a result of an equilibrium between labor, businesses and wage which become more flexible since the country faced global competition and in this regard three areas of importance helped Germany's industry to restructure and face global competitiveness:

- The first step was to reduce the working time in order to prevent unemployment and later to create production plans by rising the working hours during economic stability and lower the working time during economic crisis.
- Introduction of clauses that give bargain power to the employees as well as collective wages and working hours that had to be applied by all companies, these clauses helped the country during economic crisis and even after by increasing competitiveness or preserving the employment level.
- The third area involves contracts between companies and work councils which involve job guarantees for an extended period as well as flexible working hours which proved to be more effective than firing high skilled workers whom the companies have invested into.

These key areas have contributed to increase productivity through restructuring and flexible working time which contributed to Germany's increase in exports (Unger, 2015, pp. 67-68).

Perhaps one of the most important functions of history is that we can learn from it, avoid mistakes and try new ways of approaching issues. The German reunification is an important lesson of what effects the process of unification may pose for Romania and Moldova however we must identify the unique elements in our case and calculate the cost and

¹³ The Marshall Plan, named after US army leader George C. Marshall, was a set of economic reforms intended for rebuilding the war affected Europe and limit the spread of Communism. (The George C. Marshall Foundation, 2015, pp. 1-2)

benefits of a potential unification by understanding the complexities of both countries, take into account the options available and decide on the best course of action.

Certainly the German reunification was a great achievement, however in the case of Romania and Moldova we must take into consideration the internal issues of Moldova (identity crisis, frozen conflicts, minorities rights and Russia's attempts to impose its influence especially through economic and military means) and the wider geopolitical context before we take any action. First of all, since its independence in 1991, Moldova was faced with conflicts and secessionist movements which affected the economy, not to mention the pressure from Romanian nationalists arguing that Moldova should unite with Romania but since the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia they fabricated a false identity which makes the process of unification harder compared to that of Germany's (Baleanu, 2000, p. 16). One might argue that Moldova and Romania should aim to coexist like Germany and Austria, two countries one language, however such an action is impossible for Moldova considering that it does not have its own history nor culture to justify its existence as an independent country especially since it misses more than half of its former territory as a principality during the reign of Stephan the Great thus it would be more convenient for Moldova to pursue unification with Romania especially that we find ourselves at the crossroads of many great empires and if there is a chance for survival it is only as one country.

Moldova's relations with the European Union started after 1991 when the country obtained its independence and joining the EU remains one of the top priorities for Moldova, but this action is not likely to happen as external as well as internal factors hinder the process of Europeanization and any potential unification with Romania. Moldova's aim in pursuing and developing relations with EU was to consolidate the statehood and gain recognition of its independence and to gain leverage against Russia's influence (Calus, 2018, pp. 101-102).

Four reasons can be identified in Moldova's desire to pursue European integration:

- The first reason was to gain the support of pro-European Moldovan citizens, during elections, who were more likely to vote for a pro-EU political party which would push the country on a modernizing and democratic path.

- Another reason was to limit Russia's influence and gain international recognition which would allow Moldova to follow its own way.
- The promise of development and investments are another reason why Moldova pursued favorable relations with EU, such an action would create job opportunities, better access to EU loans and access to European markets. In this regard in order to limit its dependency on Russian energy, Moldova joined the Energy Community which would allow the country access to the European energy market
- The last reason was to tempt the Transnistrian authorities to approach EU through the development and economic conditions that take place in Moldova and thus lead to a collaboration with Moldovan authorities in order to end the conflict (Calus, 2018, p. 106).

One of the first steps undertaken by Romania in limiting Russia's influence over Moldova is energy delivery and development of economic relations between the two countries which helps limit Russia's influence, another step was to grant Romanian citizenship to Moldovan citizens, an action which was seen as a mean to assimilate Moldova (Baleanu, 2000, p. 18). Romania is following the German model in its interaction with Moldova by not overwhelming the country through unreasonable requests and making small steps that are sure to lead to a greater outcome.

On 30 March 2016, the ministries of education from Moldova and Romania initiated negotiations for signing a Protocol which would strengthen the relations between the two countries, offer training for teachers and allow joint research on educational and scientific projects as well as to modernize the education system and promote Moldova's integration into the European Union; however Romania's cultural actions in the neighboring country are aimed mainly for the Romanian speaking population, yet this changed in 2015 with the implementation of a Romanian Information Centre at the University of Comrat in Gagauzia. Another major step was in 2016 when a conference, organized by George Simion¹⁴, then leader of the unionistic platform 'Action 2012,' was held at Bucharest with mayors from both countries aiming to establish partnerships that would lead to closer a relationship between Romania and Moldova.

¹⁴ George Simion, born on 21 September 1986, is a Romanian politician, vice-president of the Alliance for the Unification of Romanians (AUR) and activist for the unification with the Republic of Romania (Delcea, 2016).

As for the cost of a potential unification it is estimated that Romania would have to spend about 90 billion over a period of 25 years which would bring the economic level to that of the year 1990, however the future benefits outweigh the risk, estimating that the GDP would double over a period of 14 years but this is dependent on the amount of help the EU will offer as well as investments from the private sectors. (Bodrug & Petre, 2016, pp. 32-34). Depending on when the unification might take place the costs and benefits are likely to change.

Being a rather young state, emerging as a result of its independence from USSR, Moldova is faced with multiple threats coming from within and outside the country, understanding these issues is the first step to attempt unification:

1. The lack of experience in managing its internal state affairs is seen through the conflict with Transnistria and Gagauzia, to which a lack of national awareness adds another layer of issues since Moldova's society is divided between West and East, Româanism and Moldovanism making impossible the development of a unique identity.
2. The lack of a unique identity is what keeps the country from creating nationalistic or patriotic movements yet this is caused by the lack of proper communication between government and citizens leading to weakening of credibility in state institution and limit any attempt at unification since the government efforts are negligible.
3. Perhaps the most threatening issue for Moldova is represented by external factors and especially because of its geographical location between two opposing geopolitical actors, the EU and Russia, who meddle in the internal affairs of Moldova in order to serve their interest.

Seen from this perspective the German reunification model might not apply entirely to the case of Moldova and Romania, certainly there is a lot to learn from the German model but we must take into consideration the unique issues we are facing coupled with an unfavorable geopolitical situation which would likely lead to more conflict if the unification were to occur in the present (Kosarova & Usiak, 2017, pp. 51-52).

4. THE FIGHT FOR IDENTITY: MOLDOVA BETWEEN ROMÂNISM AND MOLDOVANISM

Identity was and is a matter of constant shifting and change in the Republic of Moldova, as powerful entities come and go leaving the Moldovans cut short from important events that build Romania, having been subjects to Russification then Romanisation during the two World Wars and culminating with Moldovanisation during, and even after, the period of Soviet rule, having experienced a great many identity shifts it is no wonder that up to this date Moldova is suffering from a lack of identity and a sense of belonging as powerful entities from the West and East struggle to extend their influence while Moldova is caught in the middle of a geopolitical game in which willingly or not it must play a role and ultimately choose a side (Panici, 2003, p. 37).

Other soviet republics, after obtaining independence, embraced their own history, culture and identity while in the case of Moldova their independence was brought together with a cultural crisis, whose effects are still felt to this day, by denying their belonging to Romania. For fear of unification with Romania and later assimilation, the minorities from Transnistria and Gagauzia deflected from Moldova and since today they follow their own path, yet Moldova remains in a perpetual identity crisis between its Romanian roots and its Soviet legacy. Despite receiving a high level of Sovietization and linguistic assimilation, the MSSR was caught in massive conflicts between the supporters of independence and those that wanted to remain part of USSR, however after its independence in 1991 the desire to unite with Romania is still present, however equally present is the desire to remain an independent nation, in spite of Russia's attempts at assimilating the region, still the problem of Moldova's national identity remains to this day questionable as separatist movements and poverty are more important problems for the citizens than their national identity and thus they are easy targets for propaganda and manipulation.

The first country to recognize the independence of the Republic of Moldova was Romania, since then the relationship between the two countries oscillated based on the internal power shifts in Moldova yet this had not kept Romania from consolidating its position as Moldova's largest trading partner and take measurements against Moldovanism movement by sending textbooks to schools and libraries as well as granting scholarships for Moldovan students in Romania. In regard to the ideal of unification we

must take into consideration the many minorities living on the territory of Moldova as well as the separatist movements and Russia's influence which as time passes can turn into a matter of time before the Republic of Moldova develops its own fabricated identity and cease any means of desire for unification (Panici, 2003, pp. 41-46).

The Great Unification of 1918 represented a great opportunity for Romania to initiate a process of Românisisation of Bassarabia but at the same time the Soviets had planted the seed of discord next to the border of Romania in the territory known today as Transnistria where the Moldovanian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) was born and later will serve as the start of Moldova's identity problem, the Soviets had one goal in mind when they orchestrated this coup against identity: to gain the lost territories from Romania and in doing so the Soviets prepared for a long time until Moldovanism succeeded as intended and in 1940 due to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact which saw the annexation of Bassarabia and later merged with the fake MASSR into what was known as Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) where moldovanian became the official language and forced the pro-Romanian elite to fled the region or face extermination and yet the ideal of Româanism or pan-Româanism survived and continues to survive.

The pan-Româanism current began once again, it found its way through the cracks of the crumbling Soviet Union and reached Moldova and by the end of 1989 the Popular Front of Moldova (FPM) was formed by intellectuals, anti-communists and pro-Romanian activists who worked to reignite the Romanian roots in the Moldovan population. After the FPM came to power, the pro-Romanian government desired the unification with Romania, the first steps in this regard were Moldova's Declaration of Independence, establish Romanian as the official language and the adoption of symbols like the Romanian flag and anthem, yet the desire of unification quickly faded as the authorities from Bucharest failed to take measures and the growing opposition within Moldova coming from the Russian minorities and the conflict areas of Transnistria and Gagauzia contributed to a shift in the perception of unification with Romania forcing Moldova to engage in conflict over the area of Transnistria and Gagauzia (Calus, 2016, pp. 14-16).

Since the parliamentary elections of 2001 when the communist party came back to power, the Moldovan identity ideology was given new importance and the

first objective was to change the education system from the Republic of Moldova as to remove any history about Romania; this action alone was not enough and the next step was to change the national symbols, anthem, coats of arms, language and history, everything had to be changed in order to manipulate the masses and create an independent alternate version of Moldova's history and culture (Cimpoeșu, 2017).

The element of culture had a shaky evolution in the history of Moldova, however three distinct phases can be identified based on outside interferences such as the Sovietization of the country and internal power shifts:

1. The first phase takes place during Sovietization, where the Communist party took control over all cultural activities, subjected them to intense surveillance and infiltration by secret services as well as censoring elements that were not in accordance to the Communist view; it is during this time that the use of Romanian language was faced with discord and all cultural materials had to be in Russian language which promoted indoctrination and glorification of Communism.
2. The beginning of Moldova's democratization in 1991 ignited the population's desire for Romanian culture which was promoted by intellectuals, especially in literature where poetry and national myths promoted unity with Romania, however in the same time due to a great many generations that undergo Russification the quality of Romanian language had suffered.
3. The third phase presents Moldova in a state of identity crisis and a clash of ideologies that shift the public perception of Romania and Moldova whenever a change in politics occurs (Ohana, 2007, pp. 8-10).

Culture remains one of the most underfunded areas in Moldova, that receives its funds from foreign institutions and using its own resources, the lack of social protection and perception of art as an elitist activity makes the artistic profession less favorable for pursuit especially that the government still excludes artists that go against the desired values (Ohana, 2007, pp. 20-21).

Unlike the Româanism ideology, Moldovanism is present in two versions: Ethnic Moldovanism and Civic Moldovanism; the first was used during Sovietization of Bassarabia in order to manipulate the population

by creating a parallel identity, still the Ethnic Moldovanism sees Moldova as successor of Moldova Principality dating back to the 14th century and the key historical figure is Ștefan Cel Mare; emphasis is put on tolerance, acceptance and multi-ethnic character of the country while Româanism is seen as a threat to Moldova due to the denial of Moldova's parallel identity and thus threatens the country's existence. On the other hand Civic Moldovanism is relatively new and started in 2000, promoted by Vlad Filat and the Democratic Party; the main aim of this current was to create a Moldovan political nation in which ethnic identity is a matter of privacy and has little to no role in the self-identification as Moldovan citizen thus Civic Moldovanism tries to present Moldova as a common good for all citizens regardless of their identity and history and while Civic Moldovanism is oriented both toward West and East it strives to maintain the independence of Moldova and crush any unionist tendencies; yet Civic Moldovanism did not gain popularity and many Moldovans place their identity based on values and attitudes between East and West rather than identifying with one ideology or another. Moldova's failed efforts to create an identity that could be accepted by everyone results in fragmentation for its minorities and even majority, a fragmentation based on language and ethnicity whose effects contribute to the impossibility to solve the Transnistrian and Gagauz crisis as well as to develop loyalty or patriotism in its citizens. The issue of identity is present even in Moldova's political system which lacks the typical left-right characteristic, the right political side favors cooperation with Romania and the West and associate Communism and USSR with suffering and oppression as was the case with mass deportations and famines on the other side, the left political side promotes Moldovanism and maintains friendly relations with Russia which is seen as the guarantee of Moldova's independence (Calus, 2016, pp. 17-19, 29-30).

Language plays an important role in the issue of Moldova's identity crisis and can be separated into four transformational phrases over four different periods:

- The first phrase takes place from 1989 to 1994 and represents an ethnic mobilization against the effects of Sovietization the country received during the communists rule, it is during this period that the relationship between Moldova and Romania were at its peak and unification was highly desired, yet external and internal factors decided otherwise.

- The second phrase starts after the fall of the Popular Front party which split into smaller political parties and since then the overall desire of unification and pro-Romania seems to dwindle as time passes.
- The return to Communism during the years 2001-2009 when the country appeared to make progress backwards and it is in this period that the identity issue was further manipulated and the citizens' desire toward unification with Romania reached low desirability.
- The final phrase starts after the events of 2009 where political instability, acts of corruption and an apparent democracy which saw the introduction of Russian as a second language thus giving power to ethnic minorities, who don't know Romanian, to rise to power.

In order to understand the identity crisis that lingers even today over Moldova, we must trace the problem back to its roots and that is during the Sovietization of the country where Soviet policies sought the manipulation of ethnic groups who were perceived as evolving entities that could be molded as to form specific traits which would be implemented under Soviet guidance in order to form the Soviet narod¹⁵ and finally Homo-Sovieticus¹⁶ which would be attended by dismissing all ethnic differences or any differences at all and find unity through and within Communism. In order to overcome the differences posed by a multitude of ethnic groups and identities, language was the best tool in the Soviet's arsenal for fabricating and shaping identities with the intention to create a melting pot of ethnical groups without any differences yet the result was division among ethnicities, confusion and lack of nationalism because identity was stripped and forcefully replaced with a fake one based on communism and alien values.

The fall of USSR left its former republics to seek their own way but the identity manipulation they were subject to created problems whose effects can be felt even today; in the search for identity we must first differentiate between civic identity which refers to

¹⁵ Soviet narod encompasses a Pan-Russian movement who aims to integrate all Slavic countries into Russia and use identity manipulation for the territories occupied by Soviet Russia, in order to suppress any ethnic uprisings and greatly increase Russia's influence (Panov, 2010, pp. 92-93).

¹⁶ Initially, Homo-Sovieticus was meant to be a new universal human who aims for social justice, development and progression, yet the concept changed to reflect the inability of some people to accept democracy and freedom due to intense communist doctrines aimed at shaping a specific type of mentality in society (Willemans, 2000, p. 1).

members of a state while ethnic identity represent the values of each ethnic group having the aim to create a distinct society formed through the acceptance and collaboration between all ethnic groups thus fill the void left by the Soviet policies (Prima, 2013, pp. 4-6).

5. SIGNIFICATION OF UNIFICATION DURING AND AFTER COMMUNISM

The contents of this chapter represent a discourse analysis taking into consideration the relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova for both Communist and post-Communist periods with the aim to show how the desire for unification changed during the two opposing eras and how is unification perceived today in comparison to the Communist period, for this reason various sources have been used in order to understand the relations between the two countries.

1970 marks the end for Frontul National Patriotic, a resistance movement in Bassarabia founded by Gheorghe Ghimpu, Alexandru Usatiuc and Valeriu Graur, which aimed to hinder the effects of Russification and opt for the unification with Romania however the movement was betrayed by Ion Stănescu, president of of State Council Security of Socialist Romania, since he came into possession of a letter written by Alexandru Usatiuc who requested an audience with Nicolae Ceaușescu, which never happened since the letter was sent to Vladimirovici Andropov, the head of the KGB, effectively ending the resistance movement by sending its members to prison where many had died (Tasca, 2011).

"Dear comrade Andropov! On 12 June at the State Council of R.S. Romania the soviet citizen USATIUC Alexandr Vasilievici, born on 23.02.1915, domicile in Chisinau, str. Lemonosov nr. 24, possessing passport N 482230 demanded a conference with comrade Nicolae Ceausescu, stating that he has "an important problem" to discuss. With this occasion the named has left a letter addressed to the President of the State Council, which contained a typist material of 6 pages, relating of some actions of elements from R.S.S Moldova against the soviet state. Usatiuc Alexandr Vasilievici did not received audience. Considering that these actions present interest for the soviet security institutions, we send the letter and material left behind by the named at the State Council of R.S. Romania. With the comrade salute, President of State Council Security of Socialist Republic of Romania, Ion Stănescu." (Tasca, 2011).

The above text is a clear indication that at that time the desire for unification was considered taboo and any nationalistic thoughts had to be spoken behind closed doors or else the consequences were dire this is also enforced by people like Ion Stănescu who sought personal gain and profited from Usatiuc's naiveté which in a way or another led to the movement's end.

On 17 August 1977, a meeting between Ceausescu and L. I. Brezhnev was held in Crimea; among the topics discussed the issue of Bassarabia was brought into attention when Brezhnev addressed the negative effects of 'damaging opinions' in the Romanian media and literature which prompted Ceausescu to point three areas where truth is distorted:

1. The usage and presenting of Tsarist Russia in a favorable position in referring to the issue of Bassarabia.
2. The attempt to create a parallel Moldovan identity separate from Romania.
3. The issue where classics from Romanian literature are labelled as Moldovans.

Addressing the first issue Ceausescu states that:

"The incorporation in 1812 of Bassarabia as a component of Russia was legitimate and in conformity with the will of people is incorrect not only from historical, social and class struggle perspectives but also from a Marxist perspective. There was nothing legitimate in the act. The absorption was produced against the will of the people and against the desire of the Moldovan government. We would like Soviet authors to call these things by their rightful names."

Ceausescu's statement is not without meaning in addressing the issue of Bassarabia however his words lack essence, he remains an idealist unable to understand that, no matter how hard he wants to believe in Communism and the Soviet Union, the Russians merely see Communism as a tool of control and are more worried about Ceausescu's statements which seem to walk on the dangerous line between submission and revolt.

Brezhnev was quick to remind Ceausescu that last year he declared that Romania has no territorial pretenses against Soviet Russia, addressing him the question: *"Do you have some territorial pretensions regarding us?"* (Arhiva Organizatiilor Social-Politice din Moldova, 1977, p. 4).

This question was more of a trap than anything intended to see if the communist leader from Romania harbors any solid intention to revolt against the Soviet

Union and Ceausescu's answer was quick stating that *"Romania does not want territories from USSR but to mention that Tsarist Russia occupied Romanian lands at that time."*

Brezhnev's response was to compare Ceausescu's statement with China's pretenses over Outer Manchuria, stating: *"Today they ask us to recognize that this territory is theirs, while tomorrow they will ask that we restore it to them. However we will never do such a thing."*

Brezhnev's statement is clear and meant to intimidate Ceausescu, remind him that his demands wherever upfront or behind scene will not succeed.

Regarding the second issue Ceausescu states: *"the Romanians promised to recognize the Moldovan SSR and not to ignore it. We have done this but we will never agree with the idea and we will never recognize that there exists some separate Moldovan nation and separate Moldovan language."*

A strong statement that underlines the biggest issue for that time, the Russification of Moldova which will later lead to the identity crisis, yet Brezhnev continue to support and enforce the so called discrepancy between Romania and Moldova insisting that Moldova's culture exists and is different from Romania's, stating: *"You, Comrade Ceausescu visited the Moldovans along with others and you had the opportunity to convince yourself that they exist in reality."*

"Yes, I did, but they spoke with me in Romanian." Ceausescu's response is simple and filled with the innocence of a child who expects his parents to solve his problems; in the face of reality one can't help but wonder: did Ceausescu knew that the one country he expects to understand and offer help is the one which created the identity crisis in Moldova or was he blinded by Communism and thus failed to see reality for what it is?

In response Brezhnev offered the example of other countries that speak the same language yet exist separately: *"Even if the Moldavian and Romanian languages would be absolutely alike, not even then could there be thought of one nation."* However much of the discussion between the two, at that time, politicians is a game of tag more intended on measuring Ceausescu's desire for rebellion against USSR rather than reaching a constructive agreement.

And at least regarding the third issue, that of Moldovans stealing and distorting Romanian literature, Ceausescu states:

"Further confirming proof that the Moldovan language and nation do not exist apart is the fact that Moldovans steal the Romanian classics and name them Moldovans. This includes even M. Eminescu, a devoted adept of the unification of Moldova and Muntenia, who always considered himself Romanian, who is the founder of Romanian poetry and who did very much for the development of the Romanian language and literature, the Moldovans name him a Moldovan."

Brezhnev remains silent for lack of counter-arguments. The entire discussion between Ceausescu and Brezhnev remains a one sided game where one party demands answers and clarity while the other plays pretend and attempts to fabricate reality, the meeting was likely to measure Ceausescu's desirability and potential as puppet for USSR and not to reach an understanding. One can't help but notice Ceausescu's naiveté coupled with a fierce belief in Communism that dictated his views, often in the realm of fiction for that period, still no matter how innocent or naive he might have been, he had the courage to address the issues regarding Bessarabia and the process of Russification going on, which indicates that the Romanian authorities of that time did not turn a blind eye as much as USSR would have hoped for. (Arhiva Organizatiilor Social-Politice din Moldova, 1977, pp. 5-6).

On 25 January 1988, in the *Scînteia* newspaper, a reference against the Vienna Diktat¹⁷ and likely against the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact too, belong to Ceausescu, stating:

"During this dangerous situation for the existence of our country, the Romanian Communist Party was the sole force which stood against the Vienna Diktat to defend the integrity and sovereignty of Romania which fought with great zeal against the fascist dictatorship, against the anti-Soviet war. A lot can be spoken and more can be written about the events of that period. But life, the true judge, has proved that no agreement with Hitlerist Germany has served the peace and independence of the people, but rather all these had created a strong support for the preparation of the war which has cost the world so much and more so the Soviet Union." (Scînteia, 1988).

Shifting the blame on Germany when the Soviet Union is equally as guilty is a clear indicator of manipulation and propaganda for USSR however it

¹⁷ The Vienna Diktat or Second Vienna Award represent a series of territorial concessions by Romania in favor of Hungary during the Second World War, the dispute was mediated by Nazi-Germany and Fascist Italia (Historical Boy's Clothing, 2004)

is likely that Romania at that time did not have any choice but to please the Soviets, despite going against the Vienna Diktat and Ribbentrop-Molotov pact in its meager attempt at voicing its discomfort for the territorial losses to the USSR.

A year later, following the worsening of relations between Romania and USSR, the problem of Bessarabia is again raised during the Executive Political Committee in 13 November 1989, the transcript of the meeting belongs in the National Archives under the file code 63/1989.

"The problem of Bessarabia is tied to the deal with Hitler, the deal between Hitler and USSR. The cancellation of this deal, without fail, must raise the issue of ending all deals that took place and consequently solve in a proper way the problem of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina. We must rise this issue in the Soviet Union during the following period." (Bichir, 2018).

Ceausescu's geopolitical view regarding the issue of Bessarabia is naive by blaming the past for today's problems since the effects of the pact have already taken effect the real issue at that time was the Sovietization ongoing in Bessarabia; the lack of necessary power in order to discuss the matters with USSR is another issue for Romania who at that time did not have enough leverage to properly raise the issue of Bessarabia. All in all Ceausescu's statements remain words without power or backed by action, yet carefully build as to not upset the USSR.

"[...] we must raise the issue with the people from the Moldovan Republic anyway, based on the soviet constitution and what they [USSR] support now. [Reference for Petraskoia and Glasnost] They must let them use their language, to let them, because they are a republic, a nation. They themselves claim to be the Moldovan nation. They are Romanians and they don't let them use the language they desire, and at least, in the first phrase proper communication should be established between Moldova and Romania. Surely we do not want to demand, right now, the change of borders but this problem must think about this problem, discuss and solve." (Satu-nou, 2009).

Ceausescu continues to look for help and understanding from the USSR, unable to overcome his dependency on the big brother, yet the problems in Moldova were known but decisive action seems to be lacking and wavering based on the relations between Romania and USSR; surely we must take

into consideration that any action over the issue of Bessarabia would trigger a potential invasion from the Soviet Union and on the other hand the end of communism was drawing near, still the lack of power and diplomacy coupled with fear is what held Romania all these years during Communism from making progress in the issue of Bessarabia.

1989-1994 Regarding the issue of identity partly fueled by improper recognition of the Romanian language, which is constantly referred as Moldavian throughout the MSSR during the soviet occupation, can be traced in a body of law titled "On the functioning of languages on the territory of the Moldavian SSR" which stipulates the usage of Moldavian as state language

"Article 1. In accordance with the Constitution of the Moldavian SSR, the state language of Moldavian SSR is the Moldavian language, which functions on the basis of the Latin script. The Moldavian language as a state language is used in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life and, in this regard, performs the function of the language of interethnic communication on the territory of the republic. The Moldavian SSR guarantees all residents of the republic free training in the state language at the level necessary for the performance of official duties." (Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, 1989).

The independence of Moldova might lead some to believe that the status of the language changed yet in article 13 of the Republic of Moldova, states the use of Moldavian language as the official language of the country thus further increasing the confusion of identity even after the fall of Communism and independence of the country.

"Article 13. State language, use of other languages 1. The State language in the Republic of Moldova is the Moldavian language and its writing is based on the Latin alphabet." (The Republic of Moldova, 1994).

The above statement found in the constitution of the Republic of Moldova is proof that the identity factor has effects that can be seen even today; as language plays a key part in the identity of a country, preserving and maintaining the common roots between Romania and Moldova should be of utmost importance in order to unite the two countries.

2001-2009 marked a period of tensions between Romania and the Republic of Moldova as Vladimir Voronin became president and started a policy against

Romania and seeking support from Russia, during his terms as president, the country saw a decline in democracy and showed regress toward communism.

On 10 December 2005, in Bucharest, president Traian Băsescu had a meeting with Vladimir Voronin, among the topics discussed were the issue of Transnistria and Moldova's energy dependency on Russia.

"We will be always ready to support Moldova, no matter how big the difficulties." Assured the Romanian president. The statement comes after the results of OSCE meeting in Ljubljana which failed for the third time to find a viable solution for the Transnistrian issue; however in this case president Traian Băsescu openly supports Moldova, which is a huge change from the Communist era where such a statement would likely attract punishment from the Soviet Union.

"Our point of view regarding the Transnistrian conflict is very clear: Chisinau must obtain political control on its whole territory in accordance with the constitution of the Republic of Moldova."

Continues Traian Băsescu, addressing the conflict going on in Moldova and strengthening his statement of supporting Moldova (Tormiuc, 2005).

Vladimir Voronin on the other hand was disappointed by the EU's results on monitoring missions along the border between Transnistria and Ukraine, aiming to disrupt the illegal traffic taking place there.

"We have been expecting positive results but our initial information does not prove that such results can actually take place."

A statement mean to question the EU's authority and subsequently mention a parallel source of information which should question Voronin's affiliation.

The discussion turns over the energy issues faced by Moldova since Russia decided to put pressure on the former soviet states which seek help from the West. In this case the Romanian president states:

"I reassure Mr. President Voronin that in case of any difficulties which Moldova could face regarding an excessive rise in the price of natural gas and electricity, it should not hesitate to appeal to Bucharest's help. We will be always ready to support Moldova, no matter how big the difficulties."

Băsescu's statement is a clear indicator that Romania sought closer ties with Moldova despite Voronin's later accusations that would affect the relationship between

Romania and Moldova (Tormiuc, 2005).

In 2007, in an interview offered for Moldpress news agency, president Voronin makes shocking statements with reference to Romania, stating that: *"10 million Moldovans live in Romania."* However one can't help but notice that such a number is half the population of Romania and even if Voronin referred to the region of Moldova after Prut, it would still lack the afore mentioned number; still his statement must not go unnoticed for its psychological and political factor in manipulating citizens.

"I was astonished by the sincerity of these people, their courage, their desire to restore historical equity for the Moldovans, the moldovan language and history of Moldova in present Romania. We all know well that in today Romania, not long ago, it wasn't that simple to state your Moldovan identity."

States president Vladimir Voronin, referring to the so called 10 million Moldovans living in Romania; on a closer look two words stand out from his statement: identity and history, which are yet again enforced over the citizens in an almost twisted return of Communism.

"We do not see ghosts of the past, it is not us that recreate the name of some monsters which exterminated in the years of the Second World War hundreds of thousands of peaceful citizens of my country. Moldova, from Carpathians to the Black Sea, is our history. We do not have to use historical memory for territorial pretenses."

The statement comes after Romania refused to sign the bilateral treaty which would recognize the borders between the two countries. Voronin's statement is a clear reference to Nazi Germany which whom Romania is compared and metaphorically given monstrous appearances, all in order to manipulate public opinion and create false historical events especially through the use of the strong word 'exterminated' which would apply more during Soviet rule as mass famine, deportations and banishment of free speech led many to their demise. (BBC Romanian, 2007).

On another occasion in 2009, during a press conference, Vladimir Voronin criticized Romania along with NATO and IMF, adopted a pro-Russian view and attempted to jeopardize the relations between Romania and Moldova along with his support for another presidential term.

"I don't know what the Council of Ministers had decided, I don't know what they will decide in the future... We do

not abandon the visa regime until the visa problems for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova in Europe won't be solved. Romania, slyly entered NATO without having defined borders with Moldova... I told the former General Secretary Mr. Scheffer¹⁸ about this problem. I say: what does this means? Why this, you have broken all NATO agreements. With an ex-soviet country such as Moldova, you have sided with NATO but we don't have defined borders. What does this mean? On whose side is NATO? Or on whose side are we, with NATO or against?"

It goes without saying that such a statement conveys no meaning at all but confusion and fear among Moldova's citizens yet the lack of a clear meaning to his accusation can be counted on Voronin's fear of losing his grip on power and thus attempts to create outside enemies in order to legitimize his position within Moldova. (Calugareanu, 2009).

The departure of IMF was another blow over Voronin's iron grip yet Russia was quick to offer a loan of 500 million dollars, such an occasion would not slip by without the proper mention and glorification offered by Voronin to Russia:

"Good friends help each other in bad times. So it's said in moldovanian and Russian. Yet again Russia has proved that it is a very friendly country for us and is not indifferent for our fate and what is going on in our country. IMF has rescheduled the negotiations with our country and left the country. They leave for the second time, like a wife might leave a man that did not behaved properly. In 2001 they left and said they don't work with communists... After 4 years they appear again, and now again they took their wallets and left the country. And they think that we must stretch our legs, close our eyes and faint from the beginning and then die without them."

The irregularities in his speech coupled with accusations everywhere denote panic and the crumbling of his communist regime, however not before endorsing Russia and criticizing IMF for Moldova's situation which in turn is the result of a forced return to Communist which fortunately didn't succeeded (Calugareanu, 2009).

In 2020, in an interview offered by Igor Dodon for 'Primul in Moldova' stated that the article 142 from the constitution of the Republic of Moldova must be removed, the respective article states:

"The provisions regarding the sovereignty, independence and unity of the State, as well as those regarding the

permanent neutrality of the State may be revised only by referendum based on a majority vote of the registered voting citizens." (The Republic of Moldova, 1994)

Cancelling this article would strip Moldova's citizens from their right to decide their fate and would create the necessary environment for the rebirth of Communism in the country besides reducing the number of options for any unification attempt between Romania and Moldova.

"For those who plead for the termination of the Republic of Moldova, active measures must be taken. But in such a way that those must not address international institutions, as it happened before, it is needed to modify some articles from the Constitution. In the Supreme Law it is written that those pleading for the destruction of the state, sovereignty are outside the law. However in an article it is said that through a referendum the decision to unite with other states could be adopted."

First of all we must point out that his statement comes as elections draw near and as such this declaration might represent a way to gain support from the masses however his position is similar to that of Voronin, seeking legitimization for his actions and struggling to hide the fissures in power as his new presidential term is threatened (Digi24, 2020).

Igor Dodon's declaration is not left without response as the Union Political Movement (MPU), a political party from Moldova, retaliated against Dodon's aims, stating:

"In order to accomplish his 'genial plans,' Dodon must modify not only the Constitution but the Declaration of Independence and the Final Act from Helsinki, as well as other international documents, which is impossible and surely a fantasy."

Surely it would be hard for Dodon to achieve his aims, however we must not ignore that such statements regardless if they are powered by actions or not are a clear indicator of larger geopolitical actors whose interests must be protected by puppets elected through rigged elections (Digi24, 2020).

The 2020 elections in the Republic of Moldova brought a huge political change with the win of a pro-EU and pro-unification party supporting Maia Sandu, who became the first female president and subsequently bringing an end to the many years of communist party's rule and hope for unification; yet it is important to analyze each candidate and what their actions would pose for the future of Moldova.

¹⁸ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, a retired Dutch politician who served as NATO General Secretary between 2004 and 2009 (NATO, 2009).

The elections saw two different leaders with totally opposed views, Maia Sandu, in favor for unification with Romania and an approach toward EU, states during the show 'In PROFunzime' on the news station PRO TV Chisinau:

"If there would take place a referendum for unification with Romania, personally I would vote yes." (Nastase, 2020).

On the other hand Igor Dodon, supported by the communist party, is in favor for an approach toward Russia, banishing Romania's history in Moldova, a movement that was only seen during the Soviet rule over Moldova and stopping any attempts of unification.

"The Romanians are our friends, our neighbors but there is a say: brothers, brothers but everyone at their house. I was never anti-Romanian and will never be. I am for good relations with Romania but I will be strongly against those that want to end the independence of the Republic of Moldova, like Maia Sandu. The unionists from the Republic of Moldova stand no chance."

The statement is only meant to gain support for the elections and create panic among citizens for fear that Romania will take over the country were he to lose the elections. However a more problematic statement refers to the problem of identity going on in Moldova:

"I will insist that the history of Moldova to return in schools. Our children must know the historic truth. There are many things in the history of the Romanians that do not match reality. I base myself on the Constitution where it stands written moldovan language."

As stated above the constitution of the Republic of Moldova mentions the moldovan language as state language yet his other remarks about the 'true history' are yet again seen only during the time when Moldova was part of USSR and are used, again as arguments by Igor Dodon in order to gain votes from supporters of communism (Nastase, 2020).

2021 marches the beginning of a new period in the relations between Romania and the Republic of Moldova with the victory of Maia Sandu from the pro-EU party thus putting an end to the communist regime represented by Igor Dodon.

During the Romanian president, Klaus Iohannis', visit in Moldova, following the elections, a number of topics were discussed, ranging from aid for the current pandemic to support for the independence of Moldova's media, however the most important remain

the fight against corruption and the flourishing relations between the two countries that had to suffer during the former president.

"Romania and Republic of Moldova reaffirm the special feature of the bilateral relation based on the language, culture and history, Romania and Republic of Moldova also reconfirm that the Republic of Moldova's natural place is within the European family."

The statement was signed by both heads of state thus officially ending a long period of conflict and uncertainties between the two countries and paving the way for Moldova's integration into EU (Romania Journal, 2020).

"As of today, Moldova and Romania reenter a natural, open and fraternal interaction. We are starting today a new stage of bilateral cooperation that will bring benefits to the citizens of both countries, Romania has been standing by us for better and for worse; Romania has also come up with investments in strategic fields such as the Ungheni Chisinau pipeline. Romania is our most important commercial partner. I underline our openness to the Romanian investments. Here is why it is so important for us to reform the judiciary and to fight an efficient battle against corruption".

Stated Maia Sand, a statement meant to rise Romania's popularity within Moldova and attract a possible electorate for an attempt to unify the country, however such actions will have to be answered with time as the country's progresses in a democratic direction and history is written with every moment.

The idea of unification had evolved from the time Ceausescu and Brezhnev discussed the topic behind closed doors and away from curious eyes, in a period dominated by communism and lack of free speech, where dangerous topics such as the unification between Romania and Moldova would trigger a Soviet invasion much like the case of Czechoslovakia, one would walk a dangerous and narrow path between submission and revolt by bringing such a topic upfront, such was the case with Ceausescu, whose ideal, naivety and trust in communism led him into believing that Soviet Russia would give Bassarabia back. As the balance of power shifts and geopolitical actors change inevitable consequences would send ripples across the world, such was the case with the fall of communism and independence of Moldova which emerged with an identity crisis, torn by internal conflicts and desperate to find its origins in an ever

shifting geopolitical chess game, all the while the ideal of unification is morphing with each passing moment especially during power shifts and external influence which affect the population of both countries and subsequently any desire for unification (Romania Journal, 2020).

6. DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES FOR MOLDOVA

Since Moldova's independence the country suffers from poor standards of living coupled with corruption and migration whose effects lead to brain drain which further makes development less likely. The migration issue began after 1990 due to the poor economic situation of Moldova which did not have industries or natural resources or any policies to sustain the economy; Romania too contributed to the migration crisis by granting Romanian citizenship as an act of justice for the Moldovans who were stripped of their Romanian citizenship during the Soviet occupation, however the Moldovans quickly saw this as an opportunity to escape the harsh conditions within Moldova thus leading to economic instabilities as more and more Moldovans seek to build a life outside the country (Calus, 2016, pp. 54-56).

The effects of migration are being felt in the areas of economic growth and poverty reduction which become correlated with the income generated by the Moldovan migrants from abroad and sent into the country which in turn created higher disposable income for households leading to demand of goods and services which had to be imported thus leading to a trade deficit between exports and imports. An economy sustained by income generated from abroad faces the challenge that at some time this income might decline as the migrant workers move their families from Moldova and in the absence of adequate working and living conditions it would be likely that Moldova is heading toward an economic crisis in the absence of a growth model based on investments in goods, industries and services with the aim to export products.

Moldova is in need of a new development ideology which can only be brought into existence by the common efforts of the government and citizens which must identify and address the issues that keep Moldova's economy from functioning properly and increase investments and productivity. In order to increase productivity, the country needs to develop a robust export industry by developing a knowledge based society, investments in research and innovations

aimed to create efficiency and competitiveness yet in order to achieve these objectives, the Republic of Moldova must ensure that all social categories across all stratification levels are to benefit equally (International Monetary Fund, 2020, pp. 5-7).

An important issue for Moldova is labor migration, which tends to follow the path toward Russia or west Europe, especially through the use of Romanian citizenship, and having three main causes as to why this phenomenon occurs:

1. After Moldova's independence, the country faced economic crisis as it did not have the necessary investments to function on its own thus leading to migration within former Soviet states that gradually changed course in favor for Russia.
2. By becoming a democratic state and opening its borders for exit and entry, the country became part of world migration and became a transit country for both legal and illegal migration which means development of complex socio-economic policies in order to face this new challenge.
3. The democratization of the economy, politics, social life and switching to market economy contributed to worsening of the peoples' situation especially that the democratization of the country will not have favorable effects in short term and thus represents another cause for migration (Cebotari, et al., 2012, pp. 124-125).

The consequences of migration can be both positive and negative; migration represents a key area in strengthening transparency, democracy and contributing to development as the migrants return, even if it was for a short term, bringing with them knowledge, languages, culture and new ideas thus reducing the discrepancy between Europe and the Republic of Moldova. On the other hand as a negative consequences brain drain and brain exodus are phenomenon that affect Moldova especially in the area of labor market and prevents developments and innovations. (Cebotari, et al., 2012, p. 133)

In 2010 the project PARE 1+1 was aimed to encourage Moldovan migrants to invest in Moldova by offering support from the state budget for investments done in Moldova, however the project was subject to harsh restrictions and had a limit on the amount of money offered by state thus the expected results failed to appear as many Moldovans prefer to invest and open businesses outside Moldova (Calus, 2016, p. 60).

Another effect of migration is the relationship between remittances (money sent by migrants into the country) which led to an increase in households income but did not contribute to the country development (Marandici, 2008, p. 1).

The Moldovan currency had gained value against US dollar and Euro thanks to remittances, however the real exchange rate affects the exports which tend to be expensive and less competitive, however the National Bank tries to redress the exchange rate by buying huge amount of US dollars in order to increase the foreign currency reserves, a process called sterilization which does not invest money but rather it conserves the value. On the other hand remittances contribute to state budget revenues which can be used for providing public goods and investments (Marandici, 2008, pp. 4-5).

Remittances affect social structures by underlining gender roles mainly in rural areas where the man has the task of earning money and the woman housekeeping yet even if the family has a good financial situation the rate of divorce is increasing coupled with lack of parental care for children and younger people who can take care of the old but perhaps the most threatening effect is the rise in crime as migrants come home they are attacked often because it is expected that they own money and even their families are not excluded as they often fall victims to stealing and blackmailing from local mafia groups (Marandici, 2008, p. 7).

Beside migration, inequality is another issue for Moldova, yet the term is complex and as such a classification must be undertaken in order to differentiate between the various forms of inequalities affecting Moldova's society.

- There are two types of social inequality: income inequality generated by unemployment, unequal opportunities and access to education as well as gender segregation; on the other hand non-income inequalities are generated by marginalization or social exclusion and unequal access to public goods. In this regard the Republic of Moldova must create policies to ensure that all its citizens are included and offered equal access to public goods and decrease the effects of income inequalities.
- Poverty, especially in rural areas due to lack of access to quality services such as medical assistance, drinking water and high costs of energy and gas are problems which need to be addressed by improving rural roads and offer transportation which would connect rural

areas to urban conglomeration. Investments in infrastructure are necessary in order to offer integral access to Moldova's citizens to public goods as well as to create new job opportunities and connect the rural and urban communities.

- Political inequality may lead to weakening of democracy, freedom and overall image of good governance leading to discrepancies within society and corruption thus the strengthening of political institutions is necessary in order for transparency and democracy to function properly (Antonov, 2016, pp. 9-10).

The Republic of Moldova had implemented economic reforms and switched from a planned economy to market economy and despite the economic recession from 2009, the country experiences an upward economic trend as a result of implementing reforms, yet high migration rates and remittances coupled with income inequality and poverty remain problems that if unattended may hinder economic development and as such the Republic of Moldova requested assistance from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in implementing green economy measures which need to be sustained by policy interventions especially in the area of agriculture and energy, the areas with the most interest for Moldova (UNEP, 2014, pp. 8-9).

The term green economy was first coined in the report "Blueprint for a Green Economy" and features a long term strategy for rising national economies after a crisis as well as to promote green energy sources that would limit pollution and prevent the loss of biodiversity; however the effects of green economy don't limit on the environment but on societies too by creating employment opportunities and economic growth (UNEP, 2014, p. 12).

The 2009, the Twitter Revolution¹⁹ in the Republic of Moldova caused mass demonstrations for political change, these events show that civil society and awareness of the citizens is growing thanks to access to knowledge and empowerment given by social media yet the communist legacy of the former Soviet state continues to influence the process of democratization and the development of a strong civil society which needs: rule of law, separation of power, an independent media and an active society all of which are the basics of any democracy.

¹⁹ Twitter Revolution refers to the protest in 2009 in Moldova after the win of communist party, the protests were coordinated through the use of technology and social media (Radio Free Europe, 2009).

A strong civic society is the foundation of any democratic system, as it allows for people's voices to be heard and included in policy making. A characteristic of strong civic society are independent organizations which have the task to represent the interest of their members or social category; in the case of post-Soviet states development for civic society comes from the West in the form of financial and technical aid for independent organizations which played an important role on mobilizing youth and voters at elections and protests (Lutsevych, 2013, pp. 2-3).

On September 2017 the Republic of Moldova initiated the National Development Strategy "Moldova 2030" which aims to create a sustainable and inclusive economy, developments in human and social capital, transparent institutions and healthy environment, beside its main goals for 2030, Moldova has to fulfill its obligations under the Association Agreement and the European Union.

In order to create an inclusive society which cares for the well-being of its citizens, the Republic of Moldova has made poverty and social exclusion top priorities aiming to improve the quality of life and integrate disadvantaged groups within the population, however the social protection system still remains centralized and redistributive yet progress is being made. Notable progress in reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion was achieved with the creation of multifunctional social service networks which help disadvantaged groups to access services and basic needs; however the Roma population still faces discrimination and its representation in public positions is minimal (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2020, pp. 7-8, 11).

CONCLUSIONS

The Republic of Moldova remains one of the most affected countries by separatist movements and geopolitical games where it falls victim to the influence between East and West; the effects of various external influences coupled with internal issues makes the stability in the region a dangerous matter that is ready to ignite at any moment as was the case in 2014 with

the annexation of Crimea by Russia which terminated the relations with Ukraine prompting the country to follow a pro-EU and NATO course in order to maintain its existence, for the separatist regions this prompted them to become more aggressive (Waal & Twickel, 2020, pp. 15-16).

Since Vladimir Putin came to power, the relations between Russia and West deteriorated due to Russia's aggressive policies aimed toward the former Soviet Republics over which Russia wants to impose its influence; in the case of the Republic of Moldova, Russia adopted an assertive position, counting on the large pro-Russian electorate which would elect a leader that would be loyal to Russia, as was the case with Igor Dodon, thus the best course of action would be to maintain friendly relations with the Moldovan authorities and the best example in this case is Russia's refusal to recognize Transnistria, in 2008, as an independent country as it did with South Ossetia and Abkhazia instead it is in favor of remaining within Moldova but with a special status as desired by Russia.

Russia's relations toward its neighbors remain contradictory since it offers support for separatist regions and at the same time it continues to maintain economic relations with the countries affected by separatist movements, however the main reason for these conflicts is the struggle against West for influence (Waal & Twickel, 2020, pp. 22-23).

The unification with the Republic of Moldova continues to be a long and desired process that has changed and evolved from the Communist period when the issue of unification was discussed behind closed doors and supported by an idealist leader who lacked any sense of diplomacy and reality to the independence of Moldova and its many ethnical conflicts, found between two opposing geopolitical players and instabilities within the country, nonetheless it still continues to persevere and until today when now there are more chances for unification than in the past, especially considering the favorable government that came into power in Moldova after the 2020 elections, yet the process of unification is a long and arduous journey taken with small steps toward a big outcome (Szeles, 2021, pp. 19-20).

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