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The politicization of education: Identity formation in Moldova and Transnistria

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Abstract

This article examines how education, linguistic and citizenship policies have influenced the development of Moldovan identity and relations with the breakaway region of Transnistria. The article explores the influence of three specific education policies (Russian language instruction, an integrated history course and Romanian language school closures in Transnistria) on the debate concerning Moldovan identity and ultimately Moldovan statehood. The Romanian language school closures in Transnistria demonstrate that education is not only an important agent of identity formation, but also that such crude political tactics as school closures ultimately affect other education policies, reinforce negative stereotypes and make meaningful dialogue impossible. The larger issue than the school closures in Transnistria is whether devolution of authority on issues such as education policy is possible no matter how autonomy is granted.

Keywords: Education; Transnistria; Identity formation; State language

Introduction

More than a decade after the transition to democracy in Eastern Europe, the term ''post-communism'' has lost much of its relevancy as countries have become

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integrated into European institutions and as a new generation of citizens assume leadership positions without experience or identity in a communist system. Charles King (2000b) argues that we are in a "post-post-communist" stage in which the communist legacy is no longer a defining characteristic of the transition to democracy or the policies of former communist countries. Indeed, our geographic understanding of Europe has changed fundamentally since 1989. The terms "Eastern" and "Western" Europe once served to distinguish geographical and ideological points of reference. Today, the division between Eastern and Western Europe has been transformed by competing agendas and cultural processes into one that distinguishes between those that are members of the EU and those that are on the EU periphery.

Mungiu-Pippidi (2004) argues that since the EU border has been created by decree, it does not reflect a border of identities. Those that are the "out-group" are no less European than those that are part of the "in-group." While this may very well be true, the term "European" itself is contentious in some countries as it denotes a specific cultural and ideological identity that is not accepted among all of the citizenry. A good case in point is Moldova. In the last decade, there has been a search for the meaning of Moldovan identity which has led to political conflict and ultimately civil war. Moldova geographically and culturally is situated between Europe and Eurasia, and this location has made the development of a cohesive Moldovan identity problematic. The 1992 civil war and the de facto state status of Transnistria demonstrate the difficulty that Moldovans have had in coming to terms with their identity.

Transnistria's ethnic composition is unlike the rest of Moldova, and the region does not share the same interwar history as the rest of the country as part of so-called "Greater Romania." Moreover, many of the ethnic Russians and Ukrainians that currently reside in Transnistria were not born in Moldova and only recently came to the country in the 1980s and 1990s.[1] Therefore activities of the Popular Front (a pan-Romanian organization) in the late 1980s and early 1990s were especially disturbing in Transnistria. The Transnistrians refused to acknowledge the 1989 language law, and in early May 1990, the city governments of Tiraspol, Bender and Râbniţa refused to accept any of the measures passed by the Moldovan parliament. This began the transfer of authority from national to local institutions and the development of a competing claim of sovereignty and identity. After the formation of the Transnistrian Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic in September 1990, relations with the separatists emerged as the dominant issue for the Moldovan government and legislature.

After the declaration of Moldovan independence in August 1991, Igor Smirnov (leader of the separatist movement and later "president" of Transnistria) and other Transnistrian officials negotiated for the creation of a confederal government. During 1991 and 1992, several clashes occurred between the Moldovan military and Transnistrian paramilitary units. Since the end of violent hostilities in June 1992,

[1] Significantly, much of the current Transnistrian leadership, including Igor Smirnov, were born and raised in Russia and therefore not surprisingly have a different and hostile view of Moldovan identity and culture.

Transnistria has remained virtually independent of Moldova and sought to portray differences as based on ethnic and linguistic rights. The leadership has used these issues to cultivate a separate Transnistrian identity among youth and to socialize the population towards a Russian political space, rejecting European demands for democratization and conflict resolution. Transnistrian socialization has used traditional instruments including the media and school.

Indeed, one of the important agents of identity formation and socialization is education. There is a large political science literature that examines the impact that education has on group identity formation as well as on the process of individual political socialization. During the Soviet period, the education system in Moldova was used as a means to russify the indigenous titular population through the use of Russian language as the principle means of instruction. Before 1940, the Romanian government used education as a means to promote Romanian language and culture in the newly acquired region of Moldova (Livezeanu, 1995). Therefore, education and the language of instruction has been a highly politicized issue in the country and education was used by Romanian and Soviet leaders to form group identity as well as support the regime. In the early 1990s, there were numerous education reforms designed to support the use of the Moldovan language[2] in order to promote a unique Moldovan identity.

Education and linguistic issues have remained important vehicles of identity formation in the country. However, since 2001, education and language instruction have emerged as central political issues that have been used by various groups to define Moldovan identity in terms of Moldova's regional space. While the ruling Communist Party of Moldova (PCM) has promoted the use of Russian language and Moldovan integration within the CIS, opposition parties have promoted the use of the Moldovan language[3] and Moldovan integration within European structures. Therefore, there are competing political notions of Moldovan identity that are expressed within the education system and by the use of language instruction. While there is an ongoing debate within the Moldovan capital, the debate between the Moldovan central government and the breakaway region of Transnistria has been the primary focus of these competing visions of identity.

In July 2004, Transnistrian authorities began to close Romanian language[4] secondary schools. These closures resulted in the destruction of school property and were denounced not only by the Moldovan leadership but also the international community. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Rolf Ekeus, has correctly described the Transnistrian policy as "linguistic cleansing" (OSCE

[2] The Moldovan constitution recognizes Moldovan as the official state language. Moldovan is a dialect of Romanian. Language has been a contentious issue between Moldova and Romania since 1991. In the early 1990s, former president Mircea Snegur articulated a policy of "one people, two states" predicated on a difference in language.

[3] Many in the opposition, particular within the Christian Democratic Popular Front, would refer to the language as Romanian.

[4] The Transnistrian view is that the fundamental difference between the Moldovan language and the Romanian language is the script that is used. Therefore, the Transnistrians are not opposed to Moldovan per se, but more specifically to the use of the Latin alphabet. Therefore in this paper, I will refer to Romanian language schools as those that teach using the Latin alphabet.

Press Release, 15 July 2004). While there has been a great deal of focus on the events in Transnistria, these events need to be viewed within the larger context of how education and language instruction have been debated within the country.

This paper focuses on the politicization of education in Moldova, and how education curriculum and instruction are being used to create competing visions of Moldovan identity. The paper examines the influence of three specific education policies (e.g., Russian language instruction, an integrated history course and Romanian language school closures in Transnistria) on the debate concerning Moldovan identity and ultimately Moldovan statehood. The events in Transnistria demonstrate that education is not only an important agent of identity formation, but also that such crude political tactics as school closures ultimately affect other education policies, reinforce negative stereotypes and make meaningful dialogue impossible. The larger issue than the school closures in Transnistria is whether devolution of authority on issues such as education policy is now possible, whether in a federal state or a state that grants broad autonomy.

The evolution of Moldovan education policy in the early 1990s

In order to understand the current debates within Moldovan education policy and how these policies influence identity formation, it is instructive to consider the important changes that occurred in state education policies following 1991. Like almost all of the former Soviet republics, Moldovan education instruction was largely conducted in the Russian language, especially beyond primary school in the urban areas. For example in the capital of Chişinău, the polytechnic university treated Romanian as a foreign language, and only approximately 10% of kindergarten students were educated using the Romanian language. However, there were significant differences between the rural areas and the capital. In the census in 1989,[5] 40.9% of students studied in Russian while 59.1% studied in the titular language (Chinn and Roper, 1995). The situation in secondary and university education changed dramatically once the pro-Romanian Popular Front commanded a majority in the parliament. The 1989 language law recognized Moldovan (using the Latin script) as the official state language, and the initial cabinet was composed almost exclusively of ethnic Moldovans. By the 1992–1993 academic year, 71% of secondary school students were taught in the Moldovan language. While the number of courses offered in Moldovan increased dramatically, the quality of the courses was often poor as there were few textbooks and well-trained teachers. Therefore, there developed parallel school systems in which many of the best students continued in Russian language schools, studying Moldovan as a foreign language.

The Moldovan government adopted an accommodative approach towards language acquisition. The language law required state employees to speak both Moldovan and Russian by 1 January 1994; however, this deadline was never seriously enforced.[6] The result was that there developed during the early to mid-1990s parallel

[5] A new census has just been completed; however, the education statistics have not yet been released.

[6] In the current parliament, there are a handful of members that cannot speak Moldovan and ostensibly should not have been eligible for the party list.

course study at both the secondary and university level in which students could elect to take all their substantive course work in either Moldovan or Russian. While the number of Russian language sections at the state universities decreased throughout the 1990s, the number of sections offered at private universities increased. Private universities, such as the Free International University of Moldova (ULIM), attracted a number of Russian-speaking students from Chişinău and also from Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria.

While students were allowed to study in the Russian language, it became increasingly difficult for those that had no Moldovan language skills to find employment in the state sector. In the private sector, Russian remains the language of the business community while the public sector increasingly demands Moldovan language skills. Therefore, Russian-speaking university graduates either were employed in the private sector or left the country for Ukraine or Russia to find employment. Over the last decade, there has been a general transformation in Moldovan society in which Moldovan language acquisition has become recognized as beneficial. While Moldova is still a bilingual society, Moldovan has become a more important language of inter-ethnic communication.

Ironically, this change has occurred during a period in which relations between Moldova and Romania remain at best cordial and often tense. Moldovan language acquisition has not led to a process of "Romanianization." While Moldovan may be a dialect of Romanian, language acquisition in schools has not been accompanied by a Romanian socialization process. Some complain that there are not more educational and cultural exchanges between the two countries. However, the communist-led government wants to emphasize the uniqueness of the Moldovan identity without subsuming this identity into a pan-Romanian category.[7] The Soviet era theory of "Moldovanism" emphasized that the languages were distinct, and therefore, Moldovan was a distinct identity separate from Romanian (King, 2000a). Contemporary Moldovanism recognizes that the two languages are not distinct; however, the similarity in the languages does not mean that there is not a separate Moldovan identity.[8]

The delicate issue is how to establish the importance of Moldovan language acquisition without implying a Romanian identity.[9] As a corollary, the government has struggled with how to elevate the status of the Russian language to an official state language without threatening Moldovan language speakers who are concerned that the elevation of the Russian language as a state language will reduce the importance of Moldovan and revert to a pre-1989 status quo. These are the two central identity debates that occur within language and education policy. The events in Transnistria underscore the concerns of many Moldovan speakers that Russian

[7] Interview with Minister of Education Valentin Beniuc, 17 November 2003.

[8] However, there are members of the PCM that maintain that the two languages are distinct. Recently, a Moldovan-Romanian dictionary was published to emphasize the uniqueness of the language. However, no serious Moldovan academic regarded this publication as scholarly and increasingly the PCM members recognize too that the two languages can be regarded as virtually the same, without implying that there is no such thing as a Moldovan identity.

[9] More broadly, the difficulty for the Moldovan government has been to establish friendly relations with the Romanian government while maintaining a unique Moldovan identity.

will gain supremacy in educational institutions once it is promoted as a state language. However, the school closures must be viewed within the broader political and identity discussions that are underway in the country.

Russian as an official state language

During the 2001 parliamentary elections, the elevation of the Russian language to an official language was one of PCM's key electoral promises. The party mounted a sustained campaign in favor of promoting the Russian language. In late July 2001, the PCM-dominated parliament adopted a law on the legal status of national minority organizations, stipulating that the state guaranteed members of national minorities the right to education at all levels in Moldovan, Russian and their mother tongue. President Voronin asked the Moldovan government-run radio and television stations to refer to the country's official language as Moldovan, never Romanian. Moldovan education officials in December 2001 adopted a decision requiring compulsory Russian language instruction in all schools (beginning with the second grade) starting in January 2002. The Russian language had been taught as an optional foreign language since Moldova gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

In January 2002, the ad hoc Committee for the de-Russification of National Education protested not only the PMC's decision to make the study of Russian compulsory in elementary schools but also the legislative proposal to recognize Russian as Moldova's second official language. Approximately 134 school principals sent a letter to the Ministry of Education protesting the compulsory study of the Russian language. Within days, large demonstrations began in the capital involving mainly students; these continued throughout February and March. As the protests grew, the government announced a moratorium on the plan to make the study of Russian compulsory, and the decision to elevate Russian to an official state language was postponed. In fact, much of the campaign platform of the PCM had to be abandoned as it became clear that many of the campaign issues ignited protests not only from the fragmented political opposition but also from large segments of the society. Indeed by the time of the May 2003 local elections, none of the linguistic issues were openly discussed by the Party members. While the government reversed important decisions of the previous government (most notable local government reform), the PCM government shelved its plan for language reform.

The Russian language, Romania and dual citizenship

The Romania government was predictably critical of the initial PCM decision to make the Russian compulsory. The Romanian Foreign Ministry called the decision "political interference in education and culture meant to give the Russian language a privileged status" (RFE/RL Newsline, 18 January 2002). The Romanian government's criticism over Moldovan education policy reflected the tense relations between the two countries since the PCM came into power. The poor historical relationship between the two countries contributed to a concern among Moldovan

speakers that eventually, the country would revert to a pre-1989 status quo in which Russian was the dominant and preferred language of communication. This fear combined with impending European Union (EU) restrictions on Moldovan travel, creating a huge demand for Romanian passports.

In 2001, the EU pressured the Romanian government to require an international passport for all Moldovan travelers. Moldovans began to worry that the Romanian border would once again be closed to them, as it was during the Soviet period. Therefore, Moldovans began to apply for Romanian citizenship. It was a well-known secret that many Moldovans held dual citizenship in countries such as Romania, Ukraine and Russia. Indeed, unofficial data in 2001 indicated that as many as 200,000 Moldovans held Romanian citizenship (Basapress, 13 April 2001). Although dual citizenship was illegal, the number of Moldovans applying for Romanian citizenship in 2001 and 2002 increased dramatically, and eventually the Romanian Embassy in Chişinău enacted a passport moratorium. The passport moratorium and dictate from Brussels have effectively isolated many Moldovans from Europe and contributed to a concern among them that with Europe closed, Russia's already considerable influence would grow.

Dual citizenship became an increasingly important issue following the 2003 local elections, and in November 2003, the Moldovan parliament passed a law that allowed Moldovans to hold dual citizenship. While Romania had been pressing for this reform for some time, those Moldovans that held Ukrainian and Russian passports also benefited from this change. The amendment eliminated the previous prohibition on holding double citizenship and from an identity perspective demonstrated that an individual could be both a Romanian and a Moldovan simultaneously.[10]

While the Moldovan education system maintained a distinction between being a Romanian and a Moldovan, the government in Chişinău was concerned that the students who attended school in Romania would be socialized in such a way that in future would reject this distinction. Therefore as part of its program to develop Moldovan identity, the Moldovan government refused to accept Romania's offer of scholarships for young Moldovan students in 2002. Historically, the Romanian government had provided scholarships to Moldovan students (via the Moldovan Ministry of Education) at all educational levels to attend Romanian schools and universities. In a cooperation protocol submitted by the Romanian Ministry of Education, for the 2002–2003 academic year, the Romanian government offered a total of 850 scholarships for Moldovan high school students, 1000 for undergraduate students and 150 for graduate students (65 were reserved for doctoral candidates).[11] Negotiations between

[10] The amendment also allowed those who lived on Moldova's territory before its 23 June 1990 declaration of independence and continued to live there to be automatically granted citizenship upon recognizing the existence of the state. The amendment also stipulated that pensioners and invalids applying for citizenship would be spared the obligation to pass examinations on the constitution and on Moldovan language skills.

[11] The Russian Ministry of Education also provides scholarships for Moldovan students; however, the number of scholarships has been much lower than the amount provided by the Romanian government. For example for the 2001-2002 academic year, the number of Russian scholarships provided was thirty which was the highest level to that point (Prima News Agency, 21 July 2000).

representatives of the Romanian and Moldovan education ministries on scholarships broke down in July 2002.[12] Since then, the ministries have resumed the protocol; however, the number of Moldovan students that have received a scholarship to study in Romania has decreased substantially since the mid-1990s.

The teaching of history as a process of identity formation

The struggle between the Moldovan and the Romanian governments over scholarships and exchange programs reflects the broader program of the PCM to separate Moldovan and Romanian identities. When the Ministry of Education took the decision to mandate compulsory Russian language education, it also proposed the replacement of the "history of Romanians" course with an integrated history course entitled the "History of Moldova" and the "History of Moldovans." However when the compulsory Russian language course was eliminated, the Ministry withdrew the integrated history course. Several Moldovan scholars, led by historian Valentin Beniuc, continued to support the idea of a history course specific for Moldovans.

When Voronin appointed Beniuc Minister of Education, one of his first decisions was to implement a pilot project in which 50 schools introduced the new history course for the 2003–2004 academic year. The integrated history course focused on Moldova and Moldovans and initially was scheduled to replace the history of Romanians. Opponents of the change in the curriculum argued that the course was designed by the communists to eliminate the memory of Moldova's historic and cultural links with Romania. Beniuc sought to reassure the history teachers and parents that the course was based on the experience of teaching history in Central and West European countries. Ultimately, the Ministry of Education reversed its earlier decision and allowed the both courses to be taught simultaneously.

In academic year 2004–2005, the number of schools in which the course was introduced expanded to over 360. The decision as to whether the Romanian history course will be withdrawn from the curriculum has not been decided. Many specialists in the field have bitterly criticized the integrated history course arguing that it was based on politics and not good scholarship. Ion Varta, Chairman of the Department of Modern History at the Moldovan Academy of Sciences, argued that "the Communist regime (which neglects the opinion of historians) actually wants to substitute the Romanian history book with an integrated history course in order to raise a generation of loyal and corrupt people" (Moldova Azi, 7 September 2004). While many historians and those in civil society argued that the course further isolated Moldova from Europe, Voronin stated that the course will "help the government continue the efforts of European integration and raise good patriots and Europeans" (Moldova Azi, 7 September 2004).

At the same time that the integrated course was implemented, the Ministry took a decision to eliminate a test of Romanian history from the high school graduation

[12] The Romanian government announced after the failure of the negotiations that the scholarships to Moldovan students were still available; however, students would have to apply directly to the educational institution to receive the grants.

exam known as the baccalaureate. This high school degree can only be offered by the best high schools and allows a Moldovan student the right to enter university with a credit for one year of higher education. Therefore, the degree and the exam are an important component and bridge between secondary and higher education. The Moldovan Association of Historians (AIM) severely criticized the Ministry for this decision. Anatol Petrencu, Chairman of the Association, argued that "our children are deprived of the right to know the history of their people, as well as of the right to affirm their own national identity, while this decision of the Ministry of Education is an attempt on values of national and universal cultures" (Basapress, 27 October 2004).

Schools closures in Transnistria

While the issue of Russian language education and a change in the history curriculum engendered heated discussions concerning equality, minority rights and fundamentally the nature of Moldovan identity, no education issue in the last few years has stirred such emotional and political responses as the Romanian language school closures in Transnistria. The closures touched on important issues of identity within both Moldova and Transnistria and have had an enormous impact on negotiations between the two sides and more broadly whether a system of federalism can be implemented which would allow for the de-centralization of education policy. Therefore, these school closures will have a lasting influence on the subject matter of further negotiations and ultimately what the Moldovan government system will look like in the future. In this section, I will detail the events surrounding the school closures and address their importance in terms of issues of identity and politics.

Language and identity in Transnistria

The issue of language and identity has been used skillfully by the Transnistrian regime to maintain their power and prolong the conflict with Moldova. In Transnistria, approximately 55% of the population are ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians, and aside from Bender and a few right-bank villages, the region was never part of Romania.[13] Therefore pan-Romanian appeals by the Popular Front in the early 1990s caused considerable fear among many Transnistrians. Language represented an important cultural marker as well as a symbol of political and economic power. The Transnistrians refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the 1989 language law,[14] and in January 1990, a referendum on territorial autonomy was held in Tiraspol and passed by 96% of the population.

While there were legitimate concerns in Transnistria regarding the issue of language, these concerns were manipulated and amplified by the Transnistrian regime. Very

[13] Ethnic Ukrainians constitute approximately 28% of the Transnistrian population while ethnic Russians are 25%.

[14] For Transnistrians, the return to the Latin script in the 1989 language law was unacceptable. While the Transnistrian constitution guarantees that Moldovan has an equal legal status with Russian and Ukrainian (Article 12), it is always in the Cyrillic alphabet.

quickly, the linguistic and cultural issues became superceded by the political ambitions of the Transnistrian elite. As Pal Kolsto, Andrei Edemsky and Natalya Kalashnikova argue, "it is a gross simplification to present the conflict as a showdown between ethnic Moldovans and the 'Russian-speaking' part of the Moldovan population … it [the conflict] is essentially political in character" (1993, 975). Even Kaufman who views the situation essentially as ethnic conflict admits that the "Dniestrian Russophones are not, then, an ethnic group; they are a coalition of ethnic interests" (1996, 11).

Since the early 1990s, language rights have been used by the Transnistrian leadership to justify their political position. The irony is that while the Transnistrians have demanded linguistic autonomy and freedom, they have not been willing to provide these same freedoms to ethnic Moldovans. While the Moldovan language has been taught at secondary schools and even at Transnistrian State University, the language has always been taught using a Cyrillic alphabet. The few secondary schools that taught Romanian using the Latin alphabet were always harassed by Transnistrian authorities but allowed to operate. However, following the failure of President Voronin to sign the Kozak Memorandum which would have created a Moldovan federal state with significant powers devolved to Transnistria, it is clear that the Transnistrians have abandoned sincere negotiations and that the school closures had little to do with educational issues and everything to do with exerting political power.

Chronology of the events

The MPs of the Transnistrian Supreme Soviet on 28 January 2004 issued a directive to the Ministry of Education to begin the process of closing Romanian language preuniversity institutions in Transnistria before the opening of the next academic year. The Transnistrian Minister of Education, Elena Bomeşco, stated that the decision was a result of failure of Romanian language institutions to comply with local education laws, to obtain a license and accreditation. She stressed that "the ideology and content of humanities taught in these schools do not correspond the education policy of Transnistria" (Moldova Azi, 4 January 2004). There were seven schools that studied the Romanian language in Transnistria enrolling approximately 5000 students. These institutions used the Moldovan approved secondary education curriculum and were Moldovan approved institutions. The Moldovan Ministry of Education immediately denounced the decision to close the schools and issued a communiqué that read that these schools in Transnistria were subordinated to the Moldovan central government and had been opened during the Soviet period. Therefore, these institutions studied the Romanian language before the Transnistrian armed conflict broke out and could not be de-registered by Transnistrian officials.

The Transnistrian authorities took no action until the summer. In July 2004, the first school targeted for closure was School No. 20, located in Tiraspol.[15] The irony was that the school was closed just one day after Rolf Ekeus, OSCE High

[15] There are a handful of schools located on the left bank of the Nistru River that are under Moldovan central government authority. These schools are located in and around the city of Bender. During the summer, Transnistrian authorities also cut off the water, gas and electricity to a Moldovan school for handicapped children.

Commissioner on National Minorities, had visited the school and was told by authorities that all Romanian language schools would be registered within a week. Instead the next day, police surrounded the building so that no parents or teachers could enter. In a statement released by the OSCE, Ekeus stated that he was

> deeply disappointed by this illegal and inhuman action today in Tiraspol. It is further evidence of the Transdniestrian disregard for basic human rights and education standards. This indifference is damaging to thousands of children who are being used by the Transdniestrian authorities as pawns in a political game. (OSCE Press Release, 2004).

Ekeus concluded that the Transnistrian actions were "nothing less than linguistic cleansing" (OSCE Press Release, 2004). In response, the Transnistrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Valeri Litskai, stated that the remaining six Romanian language schools were like military outposts installed by Moldova to destabilize Transnistria and that they would soon be closed because they did not adhere to local regulations and would need to register as private schools offering classes in a foreign language.

Approximately 2 weeks later, police forces entered into the Eureka Lyceum in Râbniţa and arrested six teachers staging a sit-in to prevent the school's closure. Television footage showed the authorities taking down a sign identifying the school as a Romanian language school and replacing it with one that said it was a Russian language school. Soon after, schools in other cities were closed and forced to negotiate a new registration. The Transnistrian authorities attempted to justify such drastic actions by explaining that the Romanian language creates an artificial Moldovan/Romanian identity. For example, Minister of Education Bomeşco labeled Moldovan using the Latin script a "pseudo-language." In a local television appearance she stated that:

> Struggling for the Moldovan language, we also struggle for people's other rights. … Nowadays we are the only state that protects a language, the language of a nation that has existed for many centuries, the language of a nation that has the right to have a native language. The Moldovan language that uses the Latin alphabet is but a pseudo-language, and we will soon issue a textbook on the literature of Transnistria; a book that will add to the support and development of the real Moldovan language that has been using the Cyrillic alphabet for centuries (Moldova Azi, 13 August 2004).

In October, the schools had gone through a new process of registration. Schools that taught Romanian language courses were registered as a "foreign institution of learning." Even with the registration, classes could not begin as all the schools suffered heavy damage during their closure. Police units broke windows and desks and most of the equipment was confiscated. For example in the case of the Lucian Blaga Lyceum in Tiraspol, where more than 500 students were enrolled, the destruction of school property meant that it was impossible to begin classes after registration. The director of the school, Ion Iovcev, told Moldovan news agencies that this was part of a plan to de-register the schools. "The Transnistrian authorities demanded the parents to transfer their children to other schools while our school is being renovated.

They first register us, and then demand to transfer the students to other schools, so that they could later declare that we don't have any students and therefore the lyceum must be closed.'' He stated that it might be six months before classes could resume because the school building suffered extensive damage when it was occupied by police force. Indeed, Minister Bomeşco, stated that the students could return to the school as soon as repairs were completed and until then recommended parents to transfer their children to other schools (Moldova Azi, 4 October 2004).

The international community reaction

The OSCE was the first member of the international community to voice its concerns over the schools closures, but very quickly, the issue became an agenda item for several organizations. In July, the EU's Permanent Council issued a statement condemning the school closure and fully supporting the OSCE's view that this action was ''linguistic cleansing.'' Later in August, the EU issued another statement affirming the right of the children to be taught in the Latin script and indicated that it would extend a prior travel ban imposed on the Transnistrian leadership and to other individuals responsible for the school closures. The Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in October approved a resolution criticizing Transnistria and unconditionally demanded that all damaged schools be repaired and re-opened.

While individual countries agreed that a resolution to the crisis required that the schools re-open, countries took different positions regarding the culpability of the Transnistrian leadership. The US, in conjunction with the EU, announced in August a ban on ten Transnistrian officials deemed responsible for the school closures from traveling to the US. While in principle Russia agreed that Transnistria should reopen the schools, Special Russian Envoy for the Transnistrian Conflict, Ambassador-at-Large Igor Savolskii, focused much of his criticism on the Moldovan leadership and their response to Transnistrian actions. Romanian Prime Minister Adrian Nastase in August suggested that the EU should appoint a special envoy to negotiate a settlement to the crisis. Moreover, he also said that Romania was willing to grant scholarships to students of the closed schools, but that this would have to be done with care, as that was precisely what the Transnistrian authorities were after: a purge of the Romanian-speaking population in the region (RFE/RL Newsline, 18 August 2004).

The Moldovan reaction—impact on negotiations and federalization

Within a week of the first school closure, Minister for Reintegration, Vasile Şova, announced that Moldova was temporarily withdrawing from the five-party negotiations[16] with Transnistria until the issue was addressed. The next day, President Voronin told a meeting of the Supreme Security Council that ''if by 1 August the Transnistrian administration does not eliminate all obstacles to the [normal]

[16] The other parties to the negotiations include the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine.

functioning of Moldovan schools that teach with Latin script … then the Moldovan Republic will stop issuing export certificates to all Transnistrian enterprises'' (Basapress, 27 October 2004). On 30 July, the Moldovan government announced that it stopped issuing export certificates for Transnistrian-based companies creating an effective economic sanction regime against those Transnistrian-based companies that had not registered in Moldova.

In retaliation against Moldovan economic sanctions, Transnistrian authorities on 1 August detained four freight trains headed for Gagauz-Yeri at the Râbniţa crossing. Transnistrian transportation authorities also announced that all Chişinău-bound trains arriving from Moscow, Kiev and other CIS locations would be stopped for customs inspections. This was a significant action as the last time Transnistria resorted to blocking rail transportation was during the armed conflict in the early 1990s. Moldova responded by re-routing international train traffic away from Transnistria as well as continuing economic sanctions. The school closures have had an impact on the thinking of the Moldovan leadership on the viability of a federal solution. President Voronin, who in November 2003 was ready to sign the Kozak Memorandum on federalization, announced in September 2004 that ''I confess that I have become considerably cooler toward the federalization idea. There are other ways [to settle the conflict] … the five-sided format has been in existence for twelve years but produced nothing'' (RFE/RL Newsline, 30 September 2004). Ironically, the events in Transnistria have moved Voronin and the PCM closer to the West. Voronin has asked for the EU and the US to become more involved in the negotiation process and recently boycotted the CIS Summit held in Astana (the first Moldovan president to do so).

Conclusions

The school closures in Transnistria are one of the recent events in education that has highlighted the development of Moldovan identity. At its core, the struggle over Moldovan identity involves more than just education policy and language—the issue of Moldovan identity concerns the orientation of the country. For some, Moldova is a European country that should embrace its Romanian heritage and integrate into Western institutions. For others, Moldova is a country in which the best markets and relationships remain with Russia and Ukraine, and therefore Russian language and Russian-orientated institutions remain the best option for the country. Most of the opposition parties view Moldovan identity as European, while the members of the PCM tend to embrace Russian and Ukrainian orientation. Although there is a generally accepted belief that Moldovan identity is distinct, there is no agreement among elites or the general population as to the exact nature of this identity. For some, the elevation of the Russian language to a state language represents part of Moldovan identity, while others see this action as a challenge to their view of identity.

The struggle over identity is an important issue for any country that is considering implementing regional autonomy or a federal structure as these options provide for competing local identities. An important debate within Moldovan civil society over the issue of federalization has involved how a federal system devolves power to local

Transnistrian elites that reject contemporary Moldovan identity. The school closures in Transnistria are a reminder that even within federal structures, there are minorities within minorities. Federalism is often instituted in order to provide rights and certain guarantees to local groups whether these groups are racial, ethnic or religious, but there is always the question of how to protect a national majority that is a territorial (federal) minority. For example in Moldova, the question remains how to protect the rights of Moldovan speakers within a federated Transnistria. This is an especially important issue given that Transnsitrians are not an identifiable ethnic group and that Moldovans are the plurality ethnicity in the region. The question that confronts Moldovan policy-makers is how you protect the linguistic and education rights of an ethnic majority in a federal entity controlled by the ethnic minority. The school closures have made these ethnic and identity distinctions much more important to the federal debate.

By November, most of the Romanian language schools remained closed. Students, therefore, have either transferred to Transnistrian schools that teach the Moldovan language or take a bus into Moldova for classes. For the students, the situation has not been resolved and does not look likely to be resolved any time soon as the damage to all of the schools was extensive. The school closings were a political act in which Moldovan identity and language were once again cynically used by the Transnistrian authorities to undermine negotiations. The closures had an immediate and important political impact but also had a psychological impact on the nature of Moldovan identity and once again called into question the language that is spoken and the name that it should be known by, issues central to any identity.

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