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CONFIGURATION OF THE “BESSARABIAN QUESTION” IN TODAY’S ROMANIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Introduction

May 16 was an important date for Moldovan-Romanian history: 200 years ago, the Russian-Ottoman Bucharest treaty opened the way for cession of Bessarabia to the Russian Empire. This historical event is nowadays embedded in political tensions between Russia, Romania and Moldova (as well as within Moldova), thus adding much fervor to the historical debate. In fact, this situation leads to securitization of history, when historical narrative from a dialogue between various research approaches turns into instruments for particular national projects.

There are two dominating paradigms in the historical debate in this region of Europe: one claims that Russia and Moldova have been mostly partners and share a common legacy, while another portrays Russian imperialism as a tragedy for all Romanians. Zealots of both approaches on May 16 have organized political actions and conferences, which instead of providing opportunities for discussions, became more like playgrounds for transmitting the well-known over-ideologized positions.

The results of such a polarization are enhanced stereotypes in all countries involved. For example, the relatively liberal Russian internet portal Lenta.ru tends to publish normally news from Moldova which overemphasizes marginal political events, misrepresenting them as a position of official Moldova. For example, on the May 15 it reported about an initiative of the Young wing of Moldova’s Liberal Party, which sent a letter to the Russian president with the request to withdraw troops from Moldova. This piece was entitled “The Moldovans requested Putin to correct mistakes of Alexander I,”¹ yet the Liberal Party which tries to exploit anti-Russian sentiments is far from influential at all.

Consequently, policy approaches of Russia and Romania toward Republic of Moldova could be treated as an important subject for scientific investigation due to two main reasons. Firstly, the so called “Bessarabian issue” which is by itself a historical issue is still being taken up, predominantly in Moldova and partially by both Moscow and Bucharest. Nevertheless, overcoming the history (*Geschichtsbewaeltigung*) is a key aim of the “European project” and preservation of such issues damages the advance of European idea in the Eastern part of the continent. Secondly, the Russian-Romanian cooperation is a very important factor which would favor the formation of civic identity in Moldova. Moldova remains a society with dramatically split identity and if external powers will not contribute to the end of identity wars in Chisinau, Moldova will further be a state with a high internal conflict potential.

Methodologically, the author tries to deconstruct Russian and Romanian policy agendas not through geopolitical categories but from the poststructuralist perspective. Such concepts as “Transnistrianization” and “Romanization” which are being used to describe what the counteragent is doing in Moldova are not sufficient and they also hide the fact that the so called “Bessarabian issue” is today being sponsored first of all by some political forces in Moldova and not in Bucharest or Moscow. The foreign policy interests of both countries are a far more difficult subject of analysis than it usually seems to be. In the comparative perspective the approaches of two powers will be analyzed in order to find out similarities and differences in their political motivations and practices regarding Republic of Moldova.

Russia: Foreign policy mismanagement

In order to understand specific policies of two countries in Moldova we should begin with analyzing a more general framework of national foreign policies. If to look at Moscow’s approach, it seems to be that Russia has a pro-active strategy of regaining a status of great (or at least regional) power and is very obstructive toward pro-European course of Newly Independent States including Moldova. But an alternative methodological approach brings us to the idea that “near abroad” (and also Moldova) is a great “ideological illusion” of the post-Soviet Russian society, which remains traumatized after all the events happened with Russia in the twentieth century. Russian foreign policy is fixed on “near abroad”, this

fixation is quite important for Russian public opinion, in which the “great power” feelings are very desirable. All the sociological studies show that Putin’s foreign policy has been very popular among Russians; he skillfully manipulated these psychological needs of citizens of the former empire.²

But because of such a psychological burden the Russian foreign policy is rather reactive than pro-active.³ It means that Russian decision-makers simply react on external events which seem to be hostile to them. The Russian national fears of the post-Soviet period have been NATO enlargement, which is being perceived as an instrument of exclusion of Russia from Europe, and so called color revolutions, being portrayed as a complot of external forces to oust local governments. Besides, the Russian “ideological illusion” needed a great historical event which could be showed as a moment of maximal greatness of Russia in Europe and the whole world. The heritage of the Second World War became such a moment and for Moscow the treatment of this heritage by other nations is key criteria for evaluating them as hostile or friendly. All these discursive elements have played a very important role in defining the Russian priorities in Moldova.

But the Russian state is facing a great challenge of poor institutional capacity. The state institutions in Russia are in crisis, first of all because of dominating clan politics, ever-augmenting corruption and intransparency. Besides, the unstable socio-economic situation and shrinking of national economy do not favor the active foreign policy. All these factors lead to the limitation of Russian foreign policy resources, and, first of all, the inability to use the potential for soft power which is present in the post-soviet area. Consequently, two main institutional elements in the Russian foreign policy are interests of specific actors like Gazprom and emotions of key decision-maker like Putin. These institutional misbalances are very acute for the Russian approach toward Moldova. They make it negative, intrasparent and unpredictable for external audiences.

Russia has a “red line” in Moldova, namely the integration of this country into NATO. Romania is being perceived in this regard as the main driver of this process. Romania has still very ambiguous relations with Moscow, what is caused not only through Bucharest’s readiness to provide its territory for stationing the anti-missile defense system of the United States, but also through contradictory position of Romanian president T. Basescu on Moldovan statehood. Consequently, Russia is aware of Romanian attempts to gain cultural and political influence in Moldova and calls all related processes “Romanization”. This is a tremendous

oversimplification and politicization of identity issues on the Moscow's part, and it makes Russian position vulnerable. Social interactions between Romania and Moldova are growing on the basis of economic reasons and linguistic and cultural proximity. And Russia tries here to operate with inappropriate geopolitical categories.

Second problem of Russian foreign policy, also caused by "NATO background", is a story with the ratification of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe. Moscow's distrust toward NATO brings Russian decision-makers to the idea about the necessity to guarantee Moldova's (and to some extent Ukrainian) neutrality through further stationing of the 14th Army's remnants in Transnistria. This fact also contributes to the stalemate in Transnistrian conflict settlement. But we should also stress that the Western position linking the ratification of Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe and the withdrawal of Russian forces from Moldova is also tough.

There are also other contexts in which Russia perceives Moldova. Firstly, the Moscow's stance toward events in April 2009 in Chisinau should be mentioned. Looking at the reaction of Russian state mass-media we could see that Moscow interpreted these events as the latest in a series of "color revolutions".⁴ Much time was needed before Russian perception of the Alliance for European Integration ceased to be negative and related to the idea that the Moldovan government is a mechanism imposed by US and the EU. The second context is the politicization of heritage of the World War II. It is well-known that short-term Russian sanctions in 2010 were caused by provocative behavior of the Moldovan president M. Gimpu who tried to establish a new commemoration day – a day of Soviet occupation. Besides, Liberal Party of M. Gimpu, a part of the governing Alliance, has been openly speaking about Russian imperialism and occupation of Moldovan territory. Despite the fact that Moscow does not trust Vladimir Voronin (particularly after the story with the Kozak Memorandum and Voronin's "pro-Russian" orientation in 2001) the Party of Communists became the least evil for Moscow which understand very good that Mr. Voronin is simply manipulating the pro-Russian stance in the struggle with other Moldovan political forces.

At the end Russian foreign policy toward Moldova is not consistent. Such steps as the visit of Mr. Naryshkin (the Head of Russian Presidential Administration who tried after the elections in December 2010 to influence the formation of the Moldovan government), visits of representatives of the Russian parliament (who tried to convince Moldovans not to give up their statehood), short-term sanctions have been tremendously disturbing the

Russian image in Moldova and the EU and, most importantly, they were not successful. Russia gives by itself enough reasons to think about it as a neo-imperial power. But in the reality it is simply a failure to produce a long-term strategy and transparent instruments for gaining the positive influence in the country. Consequently, Russia fails to spread the message about today's pragmatic relations with Chisinau, which were interrupted but not undermined by sanctions and political misunderstandings.

Some analysts even come to the conclusion that Russia has been strongly opposing the Moldovan integration into the EU. It is rather an exaggeration. In Russian foreign policy practices no measures for curbing the EU integration of Moldova could be indicated. As it has been mentioned above, Russia is opposing only the military integration of Moldova into the West. Moldova's European integration could cause concern only if it would lead to the total destruction of integrationist regimes which already exist between Moldova and Russia within the CIS system. Moldova is pursuing the path of gradual integration into the EU and for example it has already been confirmed that Moldova's participation in the CIS Free Trade Area does not contradict with the regime of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU.⁵

Let us briefly characterize the Moldovan-Russian relations in their material dimension. In the 1990s, Moldova did not take part in any of the illusory projects within the Commonwealth of Independent States (like the Economic Union) and it was neither politicized nor securitized by Moscow, just acknowledged as a reality. In order to further the withdrawal of Russian forces from its territory, Chisinau declared constitutional neutrality as the basic principle of its national security identity. Like Azerbaijan, Moldova abstained from any substantial military cooperation with Moscow.⁶

Moldova also rejected any participation in Russian-led political integration. In this area, Chisinau has been more loyal to the GU(U)AM project, which is an expression of the ideological orientation of its member countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Uzbekistan which participated in this organization till 2005) toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration. When the "Concept on Further Development of the CIS" was worked out in 2007, Moldova made a reservation stating that the country would not participate in political cooperation among member states. Political cooperation was planned only at the level of exchanging views on major issues of world politics and cooperation in monitoring elections, without any further ambitions.⁷ The conversations about eventual Moldovan participation in institutions like The Union of

Russia and Belarus were held in the context of the domestic pre-election agendas of certain politicians including Vladimir Voronin elected to the Moldovan Presidency in 2001 with some pro-Russian slogans, and they did not lead to any serious changes in the Moldovan stance towards Russia.

All these circumstances contributed to changes in how Moldova has been perceived by Moscow. Unlike Belarus or Ukraine, Moldova began to outgrow the status of the “Russian near abroad” early.

Regimes of a common free trade area and visa liberalization let Moldova take great advantage of economic cooperation with Moscow during its own ongoing economic instability – without any substantial political concessions. The transfer of migrant workers provided an existential ground for the Moldovan society. The Russian market still remains one of the top priorities for Moldovan exports.

On the other side, this interconnectedness does not mean that a situation of asymmetrical dependence can be identified. Trade with Russia amounted in the last few years only to 14–16 percent of total Moldovan trade turnover with foreign countries.⁸ The visible politicization of bilateral trade relations began after the deterioration in bilateral relations in 2005. In 2006 Russia banned the import of alcohol produced in Moldova, mainly in response to the change of the border regime for Transnistrian exports, in what was perceived by Moscow as “political action” aimed at “bringing the whole of Transnistrian external economic activity under control of Chisinau, undermining the regional budget, and causing social unrest there.”⁹ In 2010 Russia restricted the import of vegetables and fruits from Moldova, supposedly because Moscow could not tolerate any more explicitly anti-Russian rhetoric of the interim Moldovan President Mihai Ghimpu.¹⁰ But in all the cases both sides were interested in normalization of the situation as soon as possible (the price stability of the Russian market also depends on the relatively cheap import from Moldova). In a strategic perspective it brought even some advantages to Chisinau: despite short-term economic damages, Chisinau was motivated to improve the quality of its exported goods and get rid of any kind of “special” treatment from the Russian side. This special treatment was there when Moldova was provided with unproblematic access to the Russian market in exchange of the symbolic strategic partnership demonstrated towards Moscow. The commercial logic of “just doing business” is one of the main results of all the trade sanctions and restrictions.

One of main external instruments to influence Moldovan policy is the allocation of credit. The country needs foreign loans because its integration

into world economy after dissolution of the Soviet Union brought many extreme challenges to its economy and social sphere. This instrument is fully controlled by the Western institutions like International Monetary Fund and World Bank. During 2009–2012 the country will receive \$588 million from the IMF, according to the agreement signed on October 28, 2009.¹¹ Financial assistance of €273.1 million is going to be transferred to Moldova from 2011–2013 by the EU.¹²

In 2009 Russia tried to negotiate the allocation of a \$500 million loan to Moldova. It was even reported that the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the federal law regulating this operation.¹³ But the agreement was not consummated and in the end the Moldovan authorities managed to receive funding from IMF.

Moldova's almost complete dependence on gas deliveries from Russia is a sensitive issue for both Moscow and Chisinau. Some criticize Russia for using gas prices in order to influence the political process in Moldova.¹⁴ This analysis is without solid empirical evidence, yet nevertheless it attempts to calculate moment by moment what Russia might have gotten politically from increasing gas prices. For example, it is an exaggeration to say that Gazprom increased prices for Moldova from 1998–2000 in order to influence the destabilized political situation. The policy of Gazprom was based instead on fiscal logic – the Russian government was seeking to fill out the budget in order to overcome the critical socio-economic situation in Russia and it dramatically restricted its tax policy toward the gas giant, putting it under the threat of non-profitability.¹⁵

It can be said, however, that the Russian government later used the energy dependence of Moldova as a political carrot and as a means to acquire energy transmission networks. For example, in the period of “strategic partnership” from 2001–2003 the gas prices for Chisinau were frozen and Moldova even received the right to delay payments. This carrot policy better illustrates the additional motivation on the Moldovan side to deepen relations – and it is as legitimate as the EU policy in the sphere of integration. Derek Averre speaks in this regard about structural power logic, according to which Russia should be involved with the events happening in its neighborhood, and try to influence them in order to have “friendly” relations with neighboring countries.¹⁶

The gradual increase of gas prices can be better understood in the Moldovan case through commercial logic. In contrast with Ukraine, the issue looks more economic than political. In the case of Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin officially acknowledged the political

motivation of Russian foreign policy standing behind the gas crisis in 2006: "Our European and American partners decided to support the "Orange Revolution" even to the point of breaking the constitution. They supported this. First, the political result is problematic enough and we see how the situation developed there. Second, if you supported this political outcome and want it supported further, you pay for it. You want to have the political dividends, but we should pay for it. This cannot be tolerated".¹⁷

That is why Moscow insisted on such a tremendous increase of gas prices for Ukraine and showed for such a long time no readiness to find a compromise in giving Kiev enough time to get accustomed to high energy costs. Moldova did not face this kind of treatment.

Contradictory policy is also demonstrated by Russia within the Transnistrian conflict settlement. On one hand, Russia is manipulating this conflict with the aim to keep its political influence in the whole Moldova. But on the other side, Russian motivation also contains the idea that Russian leadership in the conflict settlement could be demonstrated as positive contribution to the European security. If we look at the history of Russian participation in the conflict settlement, we can find not only Kozak Memorandum, but also Kiev Document (2002) and Memorandum on Normalization of Moldovan-Transnistrian relations (1997) which were two attempts of conflict resolution rather in the internationalized format.

Yes, after 2003 Russian policy became one-sided, obstructive and oriented on status quo, but it does not mean that no progress with Russia as a leading actor in the Transnistrian conflict settlement is possible. Signing of the Russian-German Meseberg memorandum in June 2010 was a good step forward, as well as contribution to the power change in Tiraspol. To our mind, foreign policy of President Medvedev was more open toward cooperation initiatives in relations with the West. It was driven by understanding of objective factors which does not favor the existing Russian position in Moldova and even Transnistria anymore. As factors gradual integration of Moldova with the EU (leading to marginalization of Transnistria and consequently Russian role in Moldova) and also the price which Russia should pay for Transnistrian de-facto independence should be mentioned. But Putin's return to the Kremlin means now that the Kremlin will perceive all "experiments" in relations with the West as dangerous games but the structural factors described will push Russia toward understanding that the status quo in Moldova should be reformed.

The appointment of Dmitry Rogozin, former representative of Russia in NATO and nowadays deputy prime-minister responsible for military

industry, has blown up the information space around Transnistria. Experts and politicians – Russian, Moldovan, and Romanian – tend to see in this nomination a symbol of Moscow’s readiness to initiate some kind of triumphal return to Moldovan politics and, more generally, one of the means to regain dominant positions within the post-soviet space. These comments are also being voiced in the context of Russian domestic politics: it is expected that the new-old president Putin will try to show new dynamism in both foreign and internal affairs. At least, the Customs Union project was one of his key pre-election moves.

It should be noted that the official job title of Rogozin is “special representative on Transnistria,” and the appointment took place alongside the similar appointments of “representatives” for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Yet Transnistria, unlike these Caucasian territories, is not recognized by any state, including Russia itself. But in the context of these appointments the Transnistrian issue was problematized in the same logic and with analogous formulations. This shows that Moscow draws parallels between all cases of secession, and looks for more or less similar mechanisms for conflict settlement which would take into due consideration the interests of Georgia and Moldova.

All three quasi-states have been going through their own election campaigns, yet by now the Kremlin-promoted scenarios turned out to be unsuccessful. In the Transnistrian election of December 2011 the pro-Kremlin candidate Anatoly Kaminsky failed. Evgeny Shevchuk, who was not associated with any political or financial organization in the region, won the overwhelming majority of the votes. During the pre-election campaign vast PR resources, including those coming from Moscow, were used for accusing Shevchuk in pro-Western or pro-Moldavian positions. Political distance between Shevchuk and Moscow was evident: in the Kremlin he was perceived rather as an unwelcome challenger of the officialdom and as an unpredictable politician. It is noteworthy that Shevchuk was the first local political figure who officially blamed former president of Transnistria Igor Smirnov for “monarchical ambitions” in 2009.

Besides these political circumstances, Transnistria is being now in the situation of permanent socio-economic crisis. Since 2006 it managed to preserve its autonomy only thanks to (in)direct support from Russia. The payment for the Russian gas has been reallocated to the Transnistrian budget in order to cover its enormous deficit. Russian financial help has been aimed at stabilizing social and financial situation. The mass media

has already announced that a new Russian tranche for Transnistria (150 billion dollars) is going to be transferred in the nearest future.

Yet Russia's control over political processes in Transnistria is far from certain. For Moscow, the close relationship with Tiraspol is a key instrument to prevent any serious (geo)political changes in and around Moldova, first of all its hypothetical NATO accession. It does not mean that Moscow is categorically against Moldova's reintegration to the West, but it wants it to happen only under Russian auspices and be conditioned by a gradual confederalization of Moldova.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the Kremlin decided to find a coordinator for Russian policies toward this unrecognized republic with sufficient political and administrative resources to implement such an understanding of Russian national interests. However, Rogozin's appointment does not mean that Russia tries to contrive a new proactive strategy towards the Transnistrian conflict settlement or Moldova in general. There is no evidence that Moscow will again (as it was the case in 2006-2007) come up with the sovereignization strategy towards Transnistria through recognizing it *de facto*. Currently Russia is short of economic and financial possibilities to accomplish an efficient integration of Transnistria (which even lacks a common border with Russia) into the Customs Union or on a bilateral track.

In the meantime, during his stay in Brussels Rogozin had been a clear symbol of Russia's distancing from the West. For his future counterparts from Moldova, Romania and the EU he appears to be a much less convenient interlocutor that, for example, Sergey Gubarev, Russian Foreign Ministry's coordinator of the Russian position in the Transnistrian settlement. However, Rogozin's appointment does not mean that Russia prefers to let the Meseberg process fail. Perhaps he will try to add some dynamism into the negotiations, but he will have to act in the multilateral context. Unilateral activities, like those related to the so-called Kozak Memorandum in 2003, are not possible any more, taking into account the Moldovan realities: the Alliance for European Integration seems to be rather successful in overcoming the internal political crisis, and the EU is more engaged now into Moldovan affairs. But due to his image of Russian intransigent nationalist, Rogozin is a rather questionable appointee for multilateral diplomacy. Rogozin got his new job for keeping the status quo and Russian role in Moldova as it is, despite all its ambivalence. It is premature to await any serious changes in the situation around Transnistria with his new role.

Romania: unfinished transition and hidden meanings of political language

While speaking on Romania we can say that the main tendency of the Romanian politics is gradual deactualization of the “Bessarabian issue” because of tremendous mental, socio-economic and political transformation which by its success should lead to: de-nationalization of the public opinion in Romania and its turn toward pragmatic issues and, secondly, to contextualization of Romanian national priorities according to norms, institutions and practices of European and Euro-Atlantic community.

The greatest politicization of the Moldovan topic took place in Romania in 1992 in connection with the activity of 14th Army in the Transnistrian issue which was perceived as Russian interference into Moldovan/Romanian affairs. Once again shadow of Russian imperialism appeared and a “rich” historical heritage of Russian-Romanian history, written in Romania as a history of complots against Romania, was activated. For example, during the Soviet era a Romanian historian in exile G. Cioranescu found out three such complots of Russia against Romania, aimed at depriving the Romanian state of Bessarabia as its integral part: that of Alexander I. with Napoleon, Alexander II. with other European great powers and that agreed between fascist Germany and Soviet Union in 1940.¹⁸ In 1992 a new commander-in-chief of the Russian 14th Army Alexander Lebed had many times threatened rhetorically not only Moldova, but also Romania. One of his most “hot” sentences was:

If Romania does not stop its belligerent rhetoric, Russian armor will stay in Bucharest in two days... If we will have to do it, we will have a breakfast in Tiraspol, have a lunch in Chisinau and have a dinner in Bucharest.¹⁹

Nevertheless, many factors curbed any active engagement of Romania in Moldova. Firstly, a pragmatic position of the Romanian president Ion Iliescu toward Russia was a critical point for many observers. A more important factor had been the fear to create the precedent for the Transylvanian issue. Instead of appeals to support Chisinau at any price the key Romanian nationalistic parties – Greater Romania Party and Vatra Romaneasca – preferred to prioritize Transylvania. It was understandable first of all in the context of deteriorating Hungarian-Romanian relations at the beginning of 1990s.²⁰ Besides, any adventurism of Romania in

Moldova would not have been supported by the West which at that time was challenged by other issues like Middle East, Africa and integration of Central Europe. The pragmatic decision-makers in Bucharest should have made concessions to the public, but their support for Chisinau did not go beyond limited military assistance and diplomatic statements.

The Transnistrian problem, understood also in connection with the Transylvanian issue, created an insurmountable hurdle for the reunification movement, which had the biggest amount of supporters among the Moldovan National Front. But the external factor should not be overestimated: pro-Romanian forces in Moldova began to lose their popularity very soon and in 1994 a "Moldavenist" Agrarian-Democratic Party came to power. A "public opinion poll" was held on 6 March 1994 on the future status of Moldova. Although the nationalistic opposition had called for a boycott of this non-binding referendum, the turnout was 75% of the total population, of whom more than 95% expressed their support for the continued independence of Moldova.²¹ The behavior of the Moldovan President Mircea Snegur had shown the tendencies very good: the Moldovan elites together with the de-nationalizing electorate decided to preserve the independent Moldova, despite all its economic and political perturbations.

In 1990s a gradual political distancing of Chisinau and Bucharest from each other took place. The Romanian society went through a difficult process of social, mental and economic transformation. The public opinion turned rather to daily issues. And Moldova learnt to cope with its dramatic socio-economic problems alone, losing illusions about any massive external support. The same processes could be indicated in Russia: while in 1992-1996 the rights of compatriots in the "near abroad" were a big political issue, since 1997 it became a marginal problem. Such a "collective forgetting" is still there: during Putin's times the incoherent politicization of minorities' rights could be registered only regarding the Baltic countries.

To the end of 1990s in Romania a societal consensus about the priority of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the country was reached. The main countries of the European Union and USA invested many resources, material and non-material, into processes of normalization of international relations in Central and Eastern Europe. Overcoming of historical contradictions is one of the key elements of the European political project, that's why if Romania had wanted to join the EU and NATO, it should have searched for mutual understanding with the

neighbors (Hungary and Ukraine in particular) and started to work on such controversial historical problem as the Romanian Holocaust (including in Bessarabia and Ukraine during the Second World War). Conversations about Bessarabia as a Romanian soil which should be returned became inappropriate in the wider international context. As the Romanian political scientist S. Bocancea pointed out, “new status of Romania urged it to rethink its foreign policy and the approach to the relations with Republic of Moldova in particular”.²² About the priority of the European political framework for the Romanian foreign policy the first (after Ceausescu’s overthrow) Romanian foreign minister S. Celac also spoke in the interview with the author.²³

Due to the president Basescu the Bessarabian issue has been politicized again since 2004. A new leader announced the policy of “one nation - two states”, which was explained in the following way: “A part of the Romanian people is living in Moldova. We are the one nation in the framework of two independent states”.²⁴ On one side, Basescu should have acknowledged the fact that Moldova and Romania are two independent states. But on the other side, his logic was aimed at demonstrating Moldova as a part of the Romanian nation, which sooner or later has to reunify with Romania.

In April 2010 the Romanian president promised to Chisinau to grant 100 Mio. Euro of economic assistance. The priorities in the framework of bilateral partnership were also determined: the construction of gas pipeline Iasi – Ungheni (which is aimed at helping Moldova to reach energy independence) and of some trans-border electricity lines. Not to forget about 5000 scholarships per year which Moldovan students have been getting for the study in Romania. During the visit of the newly elected Moldovan president N. Timofti to Bucharest at the beginning of May 2012 T. Basescu has confirmed the importance of aforementioned projects and his commitment to assist Chisinau financially.²⁵

Nevertheless, the unionism of the Romanian president should not be overestimated. As one of the memos of the American Embassy in Bucharest, published by WikiLeaks, is saying:

We have learned not to pay too much heed to the shifting rhetorical winds across this border, which blow hot and cold according to the exigencies of domestic politics in both countries.²⁶

Actually the rhetoric about the defense of national interests, including in Moldova, has become like a political credo of the President Basescu.

From the point of view of pragmatic politics the engagement in Moldova was aimed at creating political support and electoral basis for the Romanian leadership. The seriousness of Basescu's popularity among some Moldovans who obtained the Romanian citizenship can also be illustrated due to the visit of the Basescu's main political rival prime-minister V. Ponta to Chisinau on 17. July 2012. It was a message to the Basescu's supporters that no change will happen in the Romanian policy toward Moldova if Basescu will resign. No new projects, initiatives or statements going beyond those reconfirmed by Basescu in May 2012 during the visit of N. Timofti were mentioned.²⁷ Such a populist approach of Basescu only increased while it became clear that the Romanian president was losing the electoral support inside the country. Gallup has found out at the end of 2011 that among the EU leaders the Romanian president rates at the worst level: only 11 % of Romanians still support Basescu and this rating had taken shape even before Basescu announced unpopular reforms.²⁸

The experts drew attention to the instrumental usage of the Moldovan issue in Romania long time ago. The experts of the influential Romanian Center for European policies (CRPE) have described the substance of the Moldovan-Romanian relations in their report: "Currently there is no public call, no plan, not to mention a project actually started. The only money effectively spent is the almost 8 million EUR worth of emergency aid after the floods in 2010".²⁹ S. Secrieru, the associate expert of the same Center, was more concrete in his conclusions: he appealed to the Romanian political elite to put attention firstly not to the problems of identity, what leads only to the polarization of the Moldovan society, but to the Europeanization of Moldova through the development of various concrete projects, which would bring Chisinau into the European space at the practical level.³⁰

Of course speaking about Basescu's policy toward Moldova, we should take into consideration that there is a team of experts around him which has been working for the re-actualization of the "Bessarabian issue" and, more generally, for making conflict-driven relations with Moscow. I. Chifu, political advisor of the President, and D. Dungaciu, the head of the Institute of International Relations (Romanian Academy of Sciences) have clearly belonged to this circle. To present their discourse, the following part of one of the latest interviews with D. Dungaciu can be cited: "A European Russia in Russian formula would clearly be no Denmark, and it will turn into the biggest enemy of the East, including of Romania". In order to make his thoughts clearer he added:

We have got used with an aggressive Russia. Actually, we have the strategic partnership with the USA, very importantly, and we are NATO members, so we have maximum protection. But what about a European Russia? It would attract all investments to it, and so Romania, Ukraine and of course the Republic of Moldova, the entire area will be dismantled. At that moment, we can read this scenario by means of Putin's agenda, for he is the candidate of the West.³¹

Because T. Basescu is only a part of the Romanian political landscape and is now de facto in the difficult situation of cohabitation, messages of other political forces in Romania should be carefully observed. The key Romanian parties perceive Moldova as one of the foreign policy priorities for Bucharest but no unionist formulations are visible in their approaches. For example, the political program of the National Liberal Party contains the following ideas:

Romania supports the sovereignty, real independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and sees the basis of bilateral relations in a special partnership and common identity and also the determination to integrate with the European Union, what should be followed by consistency of reforms and realistic hopes.³²

Actually such a formula presents the consensus within Romania regarding Moldova.

The explicit unionism is a marginal phenomenon in modern Romania. Actively this kind of political program is being supported by some non-governmental organizations (student unions, political foundations). S. Popa, by himself a pro-unionist young researcher, described them in the following way:

Non-governmental organizations with which I have been worked with are represented by those structures as "Basarabia – pamant romanesc" and "New hooligans". They have *hundreds* of adherents in Romania and Moldova and they are active in various regions. The main part of their members is formed of Moldovan citizens who are studying in Romania. They also have strong connections with the Moldovan diaspora in the whole Europe.³³

The majority of pro-unionist organizations organized 2011 a civic platform "Actiune 2012", whose main and actually exclusive achievement was

spreading of stickers and inscriptions with the slogan "Bessarabia is Romania" in the main Romanian towns.³⁴ Besides, in Romania various elitist pro-unionist organizations are created. The Unification Council established in 2012 is one of them, but it consists predominantly of Moldovan politicians and intellectuals (M. Druc and A. Mosanu, key political figures in Moldova at the beginning of 1990s, V. Pavlicenco, the head of the Moldovan National Liberal Party, some Moldovan writers, musicians, etc.).

Nevertheless, the Bessarabian issue still exists at the level of "hidden meanings" of Romanian national discourse. The concept of "hidden meanings" belongs to the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who understood under them political meanings, still persisting in our textual reality in a changed form while they had been inherited from discourses in the past. Unionist ideas are existing in today's Romania at the level of such hidden meanings, which are not expressed clearly but they implicitly contain the substance coming from earlier periods of national history. A concrete example is a popular thesis that Romania and Moldova will reunify in the framework of the European Union, where borders will be for them symbolic despite they will remain independent states. Such meanings are present in the statement of the Romanian prime-minister V. Ponta, who is the representative of Party of Social Democrats. This statement was made on 16. May 2012 in connection with the bicentenary of the Bucharest Treaty (according to its conditions Bessarabia was ceded to the Russian Empire). V. Ponta said that this treaty is still influencing the fate of both states, that it had divided families, disrupted common linguistic, cultural and social connections. Nevertheless, the Romanian prime-minister was very moderate in his political conclusions: he confined himself to expressing support for a difficult way of Moldova into Europe, in which borders between two countries will become symbolic.³⁵

"Hidden meanings" exist first of all because processes of socio-political and economic transformation in Romania are still underway. One interesting research project, figured out by order of the Soros Foundation Romania, demonstrated that around 52 % of Romanians think of a reunification of Romania and Moldova as of an indispensable national priority for the country. Besides, the survey has also showed that the opinion of the interviewed persons depended on the type of nationalism specific for them. People with a moderate distancing from people of other nationalities (38 % from the total amount of the participants) supported the idea of reunification at the level of 56 %, while people with a moderate

national self-identification (around 15 %) expressed the support already to 40 %. Among less “nationalistic” citizens the reunification idea is even less popular.³⁶

In Romania there are supporters of unionism, who can be politically inactive, but provide substantial intellectual contribution. First of all, we can speak about a part of Romanian historians. It should be noted that historians have always had a special status in the Romanian society because of enhanced demand for the construction of national history. Taking into consideration the bicentennial of the Bucharest Treaty the historical community published some materials on Bessarabian history. For example, “Magazin Istoric” made an issue with a leading article entitled “Bessarabia, victim of the European diplomacy”.³⁷ On the cover page of “Historia”, published monthly by influential Adevarul Holding, a Russian soldier with spiteful face capturing a young girl dressed in national costume was represented. The subscription was “May 1812. 200 years since Russian Empire has stolen Bessarabia”.³⁸ The Romanian National History Museum and Romanian cultural institute (key sponsor of Romanian culture and language abroad) have organized an exposition titled “Bessarabia 1812-1947: people, places, borders”, where some important documents and materials were presented: the decision of Sfatul Tarii (Council of the Country, key power institution in Bessarabia in 1917-1918) about accession to Romania; the Soviet ultimatum about returning Bessarabia in 1940; various maps, including Bessarabia into Romanian national history.³⁹

“Hidden meanings” are a good resource for Basescu to initiate political practices which are ambiguous in terms of their content. Firstly, this is a principal unwillingness of the Romanian president to sign a Basic Treaty with Moldova, which would mean the definitive mutual acknowledgement of each other sovereignty and territorial integrity. Basescu called such form of agreements an outdated way of making international relations. But there are such treaties among the majority of Eastern European countries, their relations have been historically overburdened with territorial issues, political contradictions, etc., so basic treaty would be useful also in the Romanian-Moldovan case. Even those Moldovan experts who do not have anything in common with the so called Moldavenists and the Moldovan Party of Communists (like for example V. Chirilla, the executive director of the Moldovan Foreign Policy Association) share the opinion that the Basic Treaty should have been discussed in order to put all the identity issues away from the political agenda.⁴⁰

The second example of ambiguous political practice is an active granting of Romanian citizenship to Moldovans. On one side, Bucharest has acted in this case symmetrically to Russia, which on its part provided more than 100 000 Transnistrians with Russian passports. Nevertheless, Moscow can not be blamed for the wish to “annex” Transnistria, because in fact influence in the reunified Moldova seems to be a much more attractive political goal for Moscow. Through the so called passportization Russia manages to keep its soft power potential in Transnistria. The results of the active Romanian soft power promotion could also be perceived beyond geopolitics: “Romanization”, the main fear in some “patriotic” Russian and Romanian mass-media, is based first of all on close ethnic, linguistic and cultural proximity of Moldovans and Romanians. It is a far more complicated process which does not mean the disappearance of Moldova as a political community. The fact, that people get the Romanian passport (which gives them opportunities for free traveling within the European Union) with instrumental motivation should not be underestimated.

But the dynamic of Romanian citizenship policy is astonishing: 22 000 passports in 2009, 41 800 in 2010 and around 100 000 in 2011.⁴¹ De facto it is a paradoxical situation: the majority of Moldovans are crossing the EU border with passports of another country. To some extent , it undermines the stateness of Moldova.

Making a conclusion about hidden meanings in the Romanian political language we can say that they are not positive phenomenon but they can be “jugulated”, isolated, if all actors involved can agree on a positive agenda. Russia also has such a hidden meaning with the Crimean, but after Basic Treaty was signed between Moscow and Kiev no serious Russian politician dares to take up the question about Crimean.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that both Romania and Russia are strongly engaged in Moldovan affairs but notions like “Transnistrianization” or “Romanization” can hardly describe the foreign policy goals of both actors. They have various motivations: Russia is trying to keep NATO away from its borders and pursues in fact the way of reactive foreign policy mismanagement. Romania also has contradictory aims but its goals cannot be described as fulfillment of any reunification agenda. The Romanian decision-makers can make references to “hidden meanings” but the European and Euro-

Atlantic context seems to be now more important for Bucharest than any external adventurism. Identity issues are politicized in this framework but they are not key contradictions.

What is absent both in Romania and Russia is a clear political will of the governing elites to “reset” bilateral relations, which nowadays can be described as “neither conflict, nor cooperation.” This ambiguity is a fertile ground for politicians to freeload on the conflictual rhetoric, instead of formulating and implementing cooperative policies. Arguably, nowadays there are all prerequisites for ironing out many contradictions between Moscow and Bucharest, using economic tools, as well as taking advantage of mutual interest in fostering academic and educational exchanges. The Romanian-Russian “reset” in the near future could be also a good chance for the Kremlin to reinvigorate its policy in Moldova, particularly in the Transnistrian conflict settlement, which had been perceived some time ago as a test-case for the EU-Russia common neighborhood concept.

The context of Russian-Romanian relations is quite important for Moldova’s future. If Russia and Romania will find a way toward “reset” (through economic and political interests of both countries), as it happened between Poland and Russia, the Bessarabian issue can be solved once for all through applying for example an Austrian-German model. In this framework a civic, not an ethnic identity of Moldovan citizens should be a subject of intensive political construction. Romania and Russia can substantially contribute to this process.

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