

# THE ROMANIAN VERSUS MOLDOVAN LANGUAGE POLEMIC AS REFLECTED IN CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL DEBATES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA'S PRESS\*

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## Introduction

Michael Walzer defines civil society as “the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks—formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology—that fill this space” (Walzer 2022, p. 7). By placing this concept in a post-revolutionary Eastern and Central European context, he describes it as a space where past dissidence has transitioned into the desire to reconstruct the networks that had been eroded by authoritarianism, namely “unions, churches, political parties and movements, cooperatives, neighborhoods, schools of thought, societies for promoting or preventing this and that” (Walzer 2022, p. 7-8). Civil society, however, does not exist in a vacuum—its interactions with the individual and political spheres are noteworthy. An essential mediator of these interactions is the media—more specifically the press. This dates back to the wave of urbanization across Europe in the 19th century, which led to the advent of mass culture and the newspaper. This evolution deeply altered the fabric of the public sphere, and the press became a fundamental player in shaping public opinion, knowledge, and discussion (Calhoun 2012, p. 316-317). Simultaneously, the press has also played an essential role in shaping various forms of collective identities, including national identity (Schlesinger 1991, 303-304). By asserting this, we view the press not only as a mediator but as a part of the fabric of civil society.

Language is also an essential element of national identity. In the former Soviet republics, national movements had language at their core. Armenian-American historian Ronald Grigor Suny highlights how the independence struggle of 1988-1999 of the Soviet Republics was centered around language, using Lithuania, Estonia, and Georgia as examples (Suny 1991, p. 115).



Russian researcher Andrey Shcherbak provides a more nuanced perspective on the issue. He highlights how the limits imposed on the rights of nationalities in the late Tsarist Empire and the emergence of pan-Slavism as an ideology marked the starting point for an increasingly tense multinational struggle in what then became the Soviet Union (Shcherbak 2013: 9). Despite the initial “national self-determination” slogan of the Bolsheviks (Shcherbak 2013: 10), Russian nationalism and its subsidiary process of Russification started under Stalin's nationality policy with the introduction of Russian as a mandatory language in all schools beginning in 1938 (Shcherbak 2013: 3; 26). While the post-Stalinist era broke with this form of nationalism, a process of “slow-pace assimilation” ensued under Khrushchev, through policies such as the increase in the number of schools with Russian as the primary language of instruction. Nonetheless, a simultaneous process of ‘nativization’ gave more autonomy to local national elites. The Russification and assimilation policies were met with increasing resistance, triggering discontent and even mass protests in republics such as the Baltic States, Georgia, and Ukraine (Shcherbak 2013: 15).

A core idea here is that these national movements developed with the help of ethnic institutions that were established in the respective republics. In this sense, Shcherbak draws from Dmitry Gorenburg's distinction between political nationalism (separatism) and cultural nationalism (Gorenburg 2001; 2003). While the former refers to pursuing a people's right to self-determination, the latter involves “support for a titular official language and culture, the expansion of its teaching in schools”, in short, “ethnic institutions”. According to Gorenburg's theory, as summarised by Shcherbak, ethnic institutions give rise to “an educated class of national intellectuals (intelligentsia) who become a driving force for mobilization”. Their role is key as creators and distributors of national culture through, among other means, the media and press (Shcherbak 2013: 5–6). At the same time, under the process of Russification and in response to the policy of nativization, which granted more autonomy to the different nationalities while discretely ensuring assimilation, the Soviet regime “constructed ethnic identities and trained local elites” (Shcherbak 2013: 16). According to Estonian linguist and author Mart Rannut, Russification refers to “both official and covert ethnic and language policies which were implemented by the Russian authorities during the time of the Tsarist empire and the Soviet Union, and continue to be implemented by the contemporary Russian Federation” (Rannut 2020: 1). This proves the diversity of this process as well as its temporal extension.

All these separate points converge into the main argument of this paper. Within the civil society, subjected to politicization by both cultural nationalist and russification movements, we regard the role of the press as essential. Our case study, the Republic of Moldova (RM), is a telling example of how the press has shaped national identity through the issue of language. Various ethnic and linguistic stereotypes were created during the Soviet era. One is the fact that Moldovans are a nation different from Romania and speak the “Moldovan language”, deemed close to but different from Romanian.



Such assumptions have become deeply rooted in individual and collective memory. Klaus Bochman made a scientific analysis of the Romanian and “Moldovan” language (Bochmann 2020: 49–72). This kind of interference in national and linguistic identity was not new—attempts had also been made by Soviet authorities to differentiate the Turkic languages to the greatest extent possible, in order to discourage linguistic unity and transnational solidarity that could undermine the Union as part of the ample process of Russification (Ornstein 1959: 7). The democratization processes that began in the Soviet Union in 1985 reduced the pressure from Soviet authorities on the formation of national consciousness. Old stereotypes started to fade, and the periodical press played an important role in this process. New views of ethnic and linguistic history were published in newspapers. Particular to the RM press was that in the late 1980s-early 1990s, new newspapers appeared that intensively disseminated these new concepts over history. Some of the old publications joined the democratization processes and intensively spread new knowledge. Other outlets published various materials according to the ongoing political changes. Periodicals also appeared alongside these and insistently propagated old ethnic and linguistic stereotypes.

## Methodology

The debate on the name of the Romanian language has crossed the boundaries of science, becoming a political issue between the followers of the rapprochement with the Russian Federation and those promoting integration into the European Union and closeness with Romania.

Jeffrey Alexander’s work on civil society shines light on why the press is crucial to this debate and marks the starting point of our analysis. In his book, Alexander defines civil society as a broader “civil sphere”, namely a “world of values and institutions that generate the capacity for social criticism and democratic integration at the same time”. He regards the civil sphere as a “competitive scene of partisan conflict”, falling within the broader context or “sea” of public opinion (Alexander 2006, p. 4). Critical to shaping it are its “communicative institutions”, in part made up of the press. His reasoning justifies the importance of the press for civil society. It not only records information but also helps structure and reconstruct the daily happenings of society (Alexander 2006, p. 5). Finally, Alexander explains how the civil sphere is at the same time “bounded by ‘noncivil spheres’, by such worlds as state, economy, religion, family, and community”, which “often interfere with the construction of the wider solidarity that is the sine qua non of civil life” (Alexander 2006, p. 7). This point is particularly important, as it builds the foundations of our examination of how the press is not only a shaper of public opinion but also subject to strategic forces of political actors to access and shape collective opinion and consciousness.



The press is therefore a very important and complex historical source. There are several types of press, as regards the way it has influenced the issue at hand. There is, first, the official press, which, through its published material, represents the official stance of the state. Then there is the press representing parties, the writers' union, socio-political movements, etc. All of these pursued certain objectives with the ultimate aim of influencing the reader, primarily politically. For this reason, they reflect the current reality while looking to achieve their objectives. They strive to influence citizen consciousness and behavior, regardless of ethnicity. In such a situation, examining periodical press materials on the researched issue requires close attention and a critical approach to analytical materials and the historical sources published and interpreted by various authors. This is because these explanations often contain conclusions formulated in the Soviet period when the phrase 'Romanian language' had undesirable consequences for its users.

For a correct overall image of the name of the language spoken in the Republic of Moldova, we analyzed what the language was called before this province was occupied by the Tsarist Empire and then by the Soviet Union. Additionally, our analysis focused on the main documents that were adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova on the official language issue, on the ideas and arguments for and against published in the press of the time, as well as on the initiatives of the ruling political parties.

In our analysis of the language spoken in the Republic of Moldova, we focused on the articles published in several newspapers—*Glasul Moldovei* and *Moldova Suverană*—, on the debates of several pro-Romanian and philo-Moldovan civic associations, as well as on the opinions expressed by linguists and historians. Behind all these debates reflected in the Moldovan press and the experts' points of view, however, stood the Moldovan political parties.

The language of discourse, polemics, and arguments must, however, not be neglected either. In some publications, language deviates from academic norms and scientific ethics. We have endeavored to avoid such examples, but they have been taken into account in the research process. The non-academic discourse reflects, among other things, the authors' level of training and scientific competence, being primarily aimed at a poorly prepared reader, who did not suspect the role of the Soviet repressive system in the state's language policy. This reader was the target of pragmatic, socio-economic arguments, referring to the material state of the citizens. The main cause for the economic situation at the time was considered to lie in the legitimate demands to have Romanian as the state language.

As Jeffrey Alexander explains, unpacking the discursive constructions inherent in press releases is important to understanding the role of the press in society. According to him, journalists choose both which events they bring to the public attention out of numerous daily occurrences, as well as the ways in which they portray the "who, what, where, and why" of each event—ie, the people involved, their acts, the reasons they acted in a certain way, and the consequences of their actions on society (Alexander 2006: 81–82).



Therefore, in our case, discursive analysis of newspaper articles will shine a light on how the press has contributed to shaping public opinion and structuring society more generally. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) helps us carry out this task. This interpretive method goes beyond linguistic terms and explores the underlying “ideological and political forces that shape particular forms of discourse”. Therefore, by deconstructing media discourse, we seek to uncover these quiet elements hidden behind “common-sense ideas that may go unnoticed by the general public” and, in turn, how these influence public opinion and ethical judgments of public issues (Alyahya 2023, p. 49). In our discussion of the linguistic issue in the Republic of Moldova, we extend the CDA analysis of press discourse to assessments of how it has contributed to shaping not only public opinion but national identity.

## Hypotheses

Our working hypothesis is that civil society in Moldova has been highly politicized on the language issue and remains divided: most recognize the existence of only one language, Romanian. At the same time, Russian speakers and some Moldovans continue to spread the concept of the “Moldovan language”. They are supported by external forces, pointing to the Russian Federation's influence on—and interference in—Russian-speaking society and beyond. This state of affairs requires considerable efforts to bring public opinion on the excessively politicized language issue into line, being the consequence of an imperial policy promoted for a long time by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

## The Origin of the Concept of a "Moldovan Language"

The phrase “Moldovan language” is found in the chronicles of Moldavia since the 1640s (Ureche 1958: 61), a phrase later used to designate the language of the native inhabitants until the 1830s. Alongside this, the phrase “Romanian language” [*limba română*] was also used to designate this language, known as the “Romanian language” [*limba rumânească*] in Transylvanian prints from the 1960s onwards (Romanian Texts 1982: 555–571).

The 1640s is also when scholars of Moldavia started using the phrase Romanian language in their writings. In 1643, the *Romanian Book of Learning* of Metropolitan Varlaam was printed in the typography in Iasi. It referred “to the whole Romanian tribe” and stated that it was printed in the “Romanian language” (Romanian Book 1643: 2). The second *Romanian Book of Learning* (1646) also indicated that it was translated from Greek into the “Romanian language” (Romanian Book 1961: 88). Varlaam also printed an *Answer against Calvinist Catechism* (1645) addressed to the believers “with us of a Romanian lineage” (Varlaam 1984: 185), mentioning that in Transylvania “a little book” was printed “in our Romanian language” (Varlaam

1984: 186), which "has also reached us, the Romanians of Moldavia and Wallachia" (Varlaam 1984: 190).

Another high prelate of Moldavia, Metropolitan Dosoftei, indicated in his Divine Liturgy (1679) that it was "printed in Romanian" (Dosoftei 1980: 3) and was addressed to "all the Romanian people", that it is a "gift of the Romanian language", and that the book is "written in Romanian" (Dosoftei 1980: 5).

Numerous historical narrative sources attest that not only the scholars of the time but also the inhabitants of Moldavia used both terms to refer to their mother tongue. One of the chapters of Miron Costin's *Polish Chronicle* was called *Despre moldovenească sau rumânească* [On the Romanian or Moldovan language], a sign that he equated these two terms, which designated the language of "this people" (Costin 1989: 221). For the chronicler, the "Moldavian and Wallachian" people were known as "Romanians to this day" (Costin 1989: 291). Moreover, the chronicler stated that now "we do not ask: do you know Moldovan?, what do you know in Romanian?" (Costin 1989: 320). Costin also used the term *româniia* (ромънийя) to designate the language (Costin 1989: 317).

Dimitrie Cantemir, one of the great scholars of the early 18th century, mentioned in his work *Hronicul chimed a romano-mold-valor*, originally written in Latin, that in 1717 it was translated into "Romanian language" (Cantemir 1999: 1). Its speakers were referred to themselves as a single people, the Romano-Moldo-Vlachs (Cantemir 1999: 19), the "Moldavians and the Wallachians" (Cantemir 1999: 105), "even today we call ourselves Romanians" (Cantemir 1999: 270).

In the Phanariot century, both of the phrases Romanian and "Moldavian language" were used. The Moldavian Voivod Constantin Mavrocordat, in a letter on 30 November 1742, warned the great captain of Soroca not to write to him in Greek, but to write to him in Romanian (Condica 2008 III: 40). Regarding the inhabitants, C. Mavrocordat had no doubt - they are Romanians (Condica 2008 II: 627). In 1744, in the printing house of the Bishopry of Rădăuți, *Catavasierul* was printed in the "Romanian language" (Schipor: 58). Grigore Ghica's 25 December 1747 Hrisov for schools provided for the establishment of Slavonic and Romanian schools, and requested that teachers be found to teach children "both Slavonic and Romanian" (Așezământ 1747).

After the annexation of Bessarabia to the Russian Empire (1812), the phrases Romanian and "Moldovan language" peacefully coexisted. At the metropolitan printing house opened in Chisinau, books translated into "Romanian from Slavonic" were printed, as well as books translated "into Moldovan" (Фуштей 2013: 32-38). In 1819, the Bible was printed in Petersburg, with the indication that it was printed in Romanian, according to the Blaj printing of 1795 (Iacob, Chindriș 2009: 273; Fuștei 1999: 1, 6; Фуштей 2013: 43), while Russian imperial officials claimed that it was printed in "Moldovan".

The Bessarabian intelligentsia of the late 19th century, active in the capital of the Russian Empire, was aware of its belonging to the Romanian nation. One of them, Polihronie Sârcu, a native of Strășeni village (Bessarabia), in his address of



29 November 1884 to a representative of the Society for Romanian Culture and Literature in Bukovina, informed him that he was Romanian and taught Romanian language and literature at the University of Petersburg. He also sent two of his works to the Society's library and expressed his regret that they were not written in Romanian (Balan 2016: 113).

Therefore, the phrases "Moldovan language" and Romanian language were long used interchangeably, and their users did not see two separate languages. It was only after the unification of 1859 that the Tsarist regime gradually began to inoculate the idea that the language spoken by the natives on the left and right of the Prut River were two different languages as a way of addressing the threat to its domination in Bessarabia. This theory took on a new dimension during the Soviet era when considerable efforts were made to 'prove' that there were two distinct languages, 'Moldovan' and Romanian.

### **Civil Society and the Romanian-"Moldovan" Language Dichotomy in the Late 1980s–90s**

The Soviet legacy of the concept of "Moldovan language", deeply rooted in the consciousness of Moldovan Romanians in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), has been and still is a test for the part of the Moldovan people. The democratic processes that began in 1985 have enabled scholars to return to their true values and to speak out about the true linguistic and ethnic identity of the natives without fear of repression. The article by V. Mândăcanu, published in April 1988, clearly pointed out that the Romanian language "is the only generic term for the name of the Wallachian, Transylvanian, and Moldavian languages" (Mândăcanu 1988: 131). This was followed by the Letter of the 66, which called for the recognition of the identity of the "Moldovan language" as the Romanian language, and for a return to the Latin spelling (Pâslaru 2022: 350–360). The same conclusions were formulated in Ion Biga's article – the so-called "Moldovan language", the author claimed, is, in reality, Romanian, written with the Latin alphabet (Bugă 1989).

The end of 1988 was dominated by the desire of Romanians in the MSSR to enshrine the "Moldovan language" as the state language. The deputy editor-in-chief of the journal *Socialist Moldova* noted that in the last months of 1988, 300 letters were received from the inhabitants of the republic asking for the 'Moldovan language to be given the status of a state language', the recognition of the Moldovan-Romanian linguistic identity, and a return to the Latin spelling (Debates 1989: 41).

At the beginning of 1989, the *Resolution of the Plenary of the Steering Committee of the Writers' Union of Moldova* was published, calling for the Constitution to enshrine "the mother tongue of Moldovans as a state language" (Resolution 1989), as well as the *Decision of the Interdepartmental Commission for the Study of the History and Problems of the Development of the Moldovan Language* that "the Moldovan language" be decreed a state language (Decision 1989).



Indeed, the use of the phrase 'Moldovan language' was a remnant of the Soviet past. Specialists have explained that the idea of two literary languages, i.e. 'Moldovan' and Romanian, was 'absurd and unfounded from a scientific point of view' (Berejan 1989: 19), and that 'the Moldovan-Romanian linguistic identity is an objective reality' (Berejan 1989: 23).

As a consequence, on 31 August 1989, the Romanian language ("Moldovan") was decreed as a state language, along with its Latin spelling. This further complicated the situation, widely covered by the press of the republic, especially in connection with the discussions around the new Constitution of the Republic of Moldova. The Romanian language had to be defended from Moldovanist attacks, and on 27 August 1990, although the language legislation used the term 'Moldovan language', *Our Romanian language* was celebrated there for the first time.

On 27 August 1991, the Parliament voted for the Declaration of Independence, which confirmed Romanian as the state language. Nonetheless, the phrase 'Moldovan language' did not disappear. One of the authors of that time, while mentioning the day of 31 August 1989, clarified that he said "Moldovan language only out of respect for the law", and that the change to the Romanian language "is accepted with great difficulty... being interpreted, not from a scientific point of view, but from a political one" (Dohotaru 1991).

*Our Romanian language* was celebrated in the localities of the republic. Although the law of 31 August 1989 contained the phrase Moldovan language, the Romanian language was nonetheless celebrated (GoŃta 1991). The Christian Democratic League of the Women of Moldova also defended the Romanian language (Declaration of the League 1991).

Discussions around the terms Romanian and "Moldovan language" were resumed with maximum intensity after the publication of the draft Constitution of RM on 19 March 1993. *The Declaration of the Union of Moldovan Writers* stated unequivocally that the "Moldovan language" is a fabrication of the totalitarian communist regime and that "no one recognizes the existence of a fictitious Moldovan language" (Union Declaration 1993).

Several scholars had called for the Romanian language to be made official. Anatol Ciobanu recalled the demand of the majority of society: for the RM Constitution, in the process of being finalised, to enshrine the Romanian ethnonym and the Romanian language glottonym (Ciobanu 1993). The participants in an international colloquium (39 scholars from Germany, Italy, Romania, Austria, Switzerland, France, Russia, and Finland) signed an *Appeal* on 2 April 1993 recommending that the Romanian language glottonym be made official (Appeal 1993), a request also made by the *Association of People of Science, Culture and Art and the Congress of Intellectuals of Moldova* (Opinion 1993). Discussions on the terms Romanian and "Moldovan language" also included teachers in pre-university education who claimed that the RM's state language is Romanian (Declaration of Teachers 1993).

Nevertheless, on 29 July 1994, the agrarian majority of the Parliament voted for the Constitution with the formula "the state language of the Republic of Moldova





is the Moldovan language functioning based on the Latin spelling", which sparked a wave of discontent, widely reflected in the periodical press (Council Declaration 1994, I; Council Declaration (1994, II); Council Protest (1994)). The press expressed indignation at the inclusion of the glottonym "Moldovan language" in the Constitution (1994 Institute Declaration; 1994 Resolution; 1994 Society Appeal; 1994 Council Appeal). Various authors voiced their disagreement with the glottonym "Moldovan language", accusing the parliamentary majority of being blinded by "political enmities in their fight with the opposition" and that it defied the Romanian language (Cosniceanu 1994; Angheluță 1994; Reply 1994).

*The Declaration of the Council of the Union of Moldovan Writers*, published in October 1994, stated that Moldovans are "part of the Romanian nation", speak Romanian, do not recognize the glottonym "Moldovan language", and would refuse to have their works included in textbooks if the ministry were to rename textbooks from Romanian language (literature) to "Moldovan language (literature)" (Declaration 1994).

### **Civil Society in the Process of Solving the "Language Conflict" in the Republic of Moldova Nowadays (1994–2023)**

After the phrase "Moldovan language" was included in the Constitution, Moldovanists jumped in its defense. In January 1995, the newspaper *Moldovanul* published a *Letter to the Editor* signed by 15 people, in which the country's leadership was accused of betraying the ideals of the "Moldovan people" and of disrespecting the Constitution. This was because radio and television contributors allegedly violated the Constitution daily and confused the people by using the terms Romanian schools, Romanian country, and Romanian language (Unire 1995).

On the other hand, on 20 January 1995, a joint meeting of representatives (about 400 people) from 32 educational institutions took place. They spoke out against the pressure exerted by the organs of state power to return to the false denominations of language and history as subjects of study and demanded an immediate halt to the slanderous actions against pupils, teachers, and scientists, the establishment of a moratorium on the use of the glottonym "Moldovan language", and the maintenance in the educational system of the glottonym "Romanian language" (In Defence 1995).

The agrarians's victory in the February 1994 elections led to their gaining control over the government newspaper *Moldova Suverană*, which paved the way for Moldovanists in the pages of this newspaper, where they promoted the glottonym "Moldovan language" (Stati 1995). For their part, the proponents of the Romanian language glottonym patiently explained that the language "cannot be called Moldovan, because the literary language 'Moldovan' does not exist" (Berejan 1995).

The students' strike in the spring of 1995 succeeded in changing President Snegur's opinion. On 27 April 1995, he proposed to the Parliament to amend Article



13 of the Constitution to write that the state language of Moldova is Romanian. In this situation, agrarian parliamentarians supported by socialists and interfrontists submitted a draft resolution on the holding of a republican referendum, considering that the replacement of the glottonym "Moldovan language" by the glottonym Romanian language could be done only after a vote of the whole people (Voda 1995). Some people in the republic accepted the idea of the referendum (Ciobanu 1995), others rejected it (Rotaru 1995).

The Moldovan newspaper *Moldovanul* resorted to various tricks aimed at influencing the inhabitants of the republic. To this end, on 12 August 1995, the newspaper published two studies by linguist Silviu Berejan, one from 1974 and the other from 1995, and asked the question: When was academician Silviu Berejan's objective? In 1974, when he fought against the bourgeois falsifiers of the Moldovan language, or in 1995 when he claimed that there was no Moldovan literary language? (*Moldovanul*, 12 August 1995). Such questions were addressed to the unprepared public. While they seemed logical, in reality, they were not, because the newspaper did not explain to the reader that the political conditions had changed and the communist regime had been overthrown, during which the recognition of Moldovan language as a Romanian language was punished.

On 20–21 July 1995, at the initiative of the Parliament leadership and under the auspices of the ASM, with the participation of scholars from Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine, the conference *Romanian Language is the Correct Name of Our Language* was organized in the country's legislature, with the subsequent publication of materials (Limba Română, no4, 1995). The conference Resolution called for the amendment of Articles 13 and 118 of the Constitution, the establishment of the correct name of the language – Romanian language – and rejected the idea of a referendum on the language issue (Ciocanu 1995; From the 1995 Resolution; Declaration of the 1995 Committee).

To justify their opinions, the Moldovanists appealed to the Constitution voted by the agrarians. *Glasul Moldovei*, the weekly newspaper of the *Pro Moldova* movement (appearing since 1996), published a letter by seven people from the Ungheeni district, addressed to the headmaster of the village school, the head of the District Education Department, and the Moldovan Minister of Education, in which they demanded that children study "Moldovan language", as provided for in the Constitution (*Glasul Moldovei*, 25 August 1996).

A typical feature of the Moldovanist press in Moldova was the falsification of the opinions of Romanian authors and the falsification of historical sources. When someone pointed this out, the press accused its opponents of ignorance (*Glasul Moldovei*, 19 November 1996). Moldovanists accused scholars in Chisinau of being "a docile instrument in a foreign political game", claimed that "the language is Moldovan", and that the solution to the crisis required "recognition of the Russian language as the second mother tongue of the majority of Moldovans" and "its investment with the status of the second state language and a language of inter-ethnic communication" (Dziubinski 1996).



On 20 January 1998, *Glasul Moldovei* published the address of a group of Moldovans accusing the government of violating the Constitution, stating that "the Romanian language originated from the Moldovan language" and "our true brothers are the Slavs". The address called for protests against the process of Romanianisation, boycotting lessons in Romanian history, Romanian language and literature, etc. (Să opened 1998).

To attract Russian-speaking readers, *Glasul Moldovei* also published material in Russian. On 24 February 1998, the newspaper published a letter in Russian in which the "reformers" were accused of "making us ... Romanians, taking the Moldovan language away from Moldovans, spoiling our children in primary schools with Romanian language and grammar" (*Glasul Moldovei*, 24 February 1998).

Moldovanists also formed various associations, including the *Association of Moldovan Scholars in the name of N. Miclescu-Spătaru*. On 16 June 1998, *Glasul Moldovei* published a request in Russian, which shows that most of the members of that Association were Russian speakers, expressing their dissatisfaction with the Romanian language (Заявление 1998). The newspaper published the *National Policy Concept* proposed by the Communists, which called for the inclusion of Moldovan language and literature courses in the curriculum instead of Romanian language and literature (Concept 1998). Also in Russian, the newspaper published a story titled *A State Without "Rudder and Sails"?* Signed by *A Group of Internationalist Moldovans*, who declared that their aim was "to stop the process of Romanianisation" and to achieve "de-Romanianisation". They demanded the granting of national minority status to Moldovan citizens who consider themselves Romanians, the introduction of Russian as a second state language, the possible return to the Cyrillic script, a boycott on the teaching of Romanian subjects in educational institutions, and called on Russian speakers "not to call our Moldovan state language Romanian". They also allude directly to some historical rights of Slavs and their descendants (Государство 1998). These "internationalist Moldovans" were the communist party and partners in the Alliance of Centre-Left Forces (Андрущчак 1999).

Moldovanists also spoke out against the celebration of *Our Romanian Language* (Буков 1998) and accused the representatives of national minorities, who, "wishing to please their superiors ... call the state language Romanian, unscrupulously violating the Moldovan Constitution" (Costachi 1998). One of the defenders of the "Moldovan language" declared that the Moldovan language had always existed (Chiflac 1998), that since 1859 Moldovans had been deprived of their mother tongue, that the glottonym "Moldovan language" was anathematized, and that "Moldovans were manifestly superior to Wallachians in almost all fields of activity" (Chifiac 1999a).

Moldovanists advocated for the election of Petru Lucinschi as president of Moldova, assuming that he would satisfy their "Moldovanist" desires. It was not to be, however, and they furiously pounced on him, seeking, in a far from academic manner, to prove that the name of his parent's language was "Moldovan" (Stati 1999).



Lucinschi was declared a "promoter of Romanians", which was part of the realization of a foreign national program (Stati 1999). The Republican Coordinating Council of the "Pro Moldova" movement declared itself concerned that the leaders of the RM declare the state language to be Romanian (D. Diacov), and Prime Minister I. Sturza submitted to the Parliament the initiative on the modification of Art. 13, asking the followers and sympathizers of the movement to stop by all legal methods this invasion of Romanianism (Declaration of the Movement 1999). Accusations continued against the leaders of the RM for promoting Romanian politics (Stati 2000).

Moldovanists were mobilizing all their forces against the position of some political leaders. One of them wrote that it had been proved that the 'Moldovan language' was more Roman than the Italian language, calling for a halt to the Romanianisation of the country and threatening that 'civil disobedience will be immediately unleashed' and that 'parents will block schools and will not give their children into the dishonest hands of those who have kept the seeds of Romanian-ness in their genes' (Chifiac 1999b). Ethnic Russians who claimed that the language is Romanian were also continuously criticized (Антосяк 2000).

On 28 October 2000, a meeting of the coordinating council of the "Pro-Moldova" movement was held, at which it was noted that right-wing parties fly the banner of unionism and Romanianisation, ignore the glottonym "Moldovan language", and publish newspapers whose mastheads say "published in Romanian" (Glasul Moldovei, 31 October 2000). Proponents of the Romanian language, including the poet Grigore Vieru, were criticized for denying the existence of the 'Moldovan people' and the 'Moldovan language' (Stati 2000a; Țurcanu 2001).

To prove to its readers the existence of the "Moldovan language", the newspaper *Glasul Moldovei* republished an article by USSR linguist R.G. Piotrovski (Piotrovski 2001) under the heading *Great Foreign Scholars on the Moldovan language* (Piotrovski 2001). But in 1951 R. Piotrovski was not only a foreign scholar he was also a Soviet citizen, like all the inhabitants of the USSR. R. Piotrovsky's article was originally published in Russian (1951) under the title *Slavonic Elements in Romanian* (Пиотровский 1951). The phrase "Moldovan language", used in several lines, signified the *Moldovan dialect* of the Romanian language (Пиотровский 1951: 144). Chisinau showed great interest in this article and the editors here decided to publish it, but under a modified title. However, they changed not only the title but also the phrase 'Romanian language'. The article published in Leningrad R. Piotrovski wrote that "in the Romanian language two kinds of palatalisations are distinguished" (Пиотровский 1951: 144), and in the study published in Chisinau it was written that "in the Moldovan language two kinds of palatalizations are distinguished" (Piotrovski 1951: 87). R. Piotrovski wrote about the phonetic system of the Romanian language (Пиотровский 1951: 146), while the study published in Chisinau wrote about "the phonetic system of the Moldovan language" (Piotrovski 1951: 87). The editorial staff of the newspaper *Glasul Moldovei* either did not know about these "changes" to R. Piotrovski's study or deliberately presented the falsehood as a scientific argument.



In the summer of 2008, journalist Viorel Mihail was involved in a discussion on the Romanian language versus "The Moldovan language". He declared that "the Romanian language of Muntenia and Ardeal was called Wallachian" and "the Romanian language of Moldova was called Moldovan". He went on to say that "its present name was arrived at by agreement", without clarifying who agreed with whom and when they did so. "The name Romanian language", he considered, "is a conventionality" and contains "absolutely no ounce of scientific truth", "everyone calls it what they want" (Mihail 2008).

In March and September 2013, a group of MPs submitted petitions to the Constitutional Court (CC) on the interpretation of the provisions 13 para. (1) of the Constitution in relation to the Preamble of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova. On 5 December 2013, the CC ruled that "in case of discrepancies between the text of the Declaration of Independence and the text of the Constitution, the primary constitutional text of the Declaration of Independence shall prevail". Since the text of the Declaration of Independence confirms that the official language of the Republic of Moldova is Romanian, this provision prevails over the text of the Constitution where it is written that the state language of the Republic of Moldova is the "Moldovan language". It was a reason for satisfaction for the supporters of the correct syntax of the language name - Romanian (Vorbim 2013; Romanian language 2013).

But the linguistic confrontation was not over. In August and September 2016, the newspaper *Moldova Suverană* published two articles in which it returned to the issue of the "Moldovan language" as the official language of the Republic of Moldova, resorting to serious falsehoods and stating that by the Tsarist Act of 29 April 1818, "the Moldovan language became the official language of Bessarabia", and in the years 1818-1850 the Moldovan language became the official language of the institutions of Bessarabia (Stati 2016a; Stati 2016).

On 31 October 2017, the CC gave a positive opinion on a draft amendment to Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova on the state language (Nicu 2017), which provided for the replacement of the phrase "Moldovan language" with Romanian, which was endorsed by three parliamentary commissions (Three Commissions 2017; Romanian Language 2017a) and the Cabinet of Ministers (Romanian Language 2017).

In such a situation, Moldovanists again lashed out with criticism at those who supported the Romanian language syntagm, stating that there are two national languages: Moldovan and Romanian (Stati 2017) and invoking false arguments that "the ethnonym Moldovan/Moldovans is documented in writing from 1359/1360" (Stati 2017a). But the claim is false because the act of 20 March 1360 mentions *terre nostre Moldauane* (*our country of Moldavia*) (Documenta 1977: 76).

The issue was resolved in the spring of 2023. After examining the draft law submitted by a group of deputies, the parliament received the law No. LP52/2023 on 16 March 2023, by which "the words "Moldovan language" in any grammatical form shall be replaced by the words "Romanian language" in the corresponding



grammatical form; the words "state language", "official language", and "mother tongue" in any grammatical form, if the state language of the Republic of Moldova is considered, shall be replaced by the words "Romanian language" in the corresponding grammatical form" (Official Gazette, 24. 03. 2023: 9).

The parliament's decision has aroused the obvious discontent of both local Moldovanists and Moscow. Maria Zakharova, the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, is a staunch defender of the "Moldovan language", the "Moldovan nation", and the Moldovan state (В языкознании). She considers that "according to historical logic, we should call the Romanian language the Moldovan language, but not the other way around", because the Moldovan language is the old language of the Moldovans, as it is recalled in the 16th century (Захарова (I)), and the Romanian language at that time was not yet, it was the old Romanian language, which, more correctly, should be called the Wallachian language (Захарова (II); Урок истории; Захарова (III)). The Romanian language, according to M. Zaharova, was formed only towards the end of the 18th century (Захарова (IV)). In the opinion of the "experts" from the Russian Federation, the negative consequences for Moldova as a result of this change would be that Chişinău raises a territorial problem – to whom does Bessarabia and the territories on the left bank of the Dniester River belong, the Moldovan self-identification of the inhabitants of Moldova will disappear (Захарова (V)), the independence of Moldova is undermined, because the organs of state power are destroying Moldova (Захарова (VI)).

## Conclusions

The supporters of the existence of the Moldovan language in the Republic of Moldova are generally foreigners (notably Russians) or Romanians who were educated during the communist regime and learned in school that there existed a Moldovan language which is different from the Romanian language. This part of the population of Rep. Moldova voted in most cases for parties that led to a narrow and anti-Western policy. Therefore, the analysis or the history of the language has moved from the laboratories of scholars into the political discourse, becoming a political argument in what means a pro-Russian or pro-Western stance.

The examination of the materials published in the Moldovan press from the late 1980s to present day on the issue of Romanian versus "Moldovan language" shows a harsh confrontation between the adherents of the old stereotype, who recognize the "Moldovan language" as a language distinct from Romanian and consider that this name should be maintained for the Republic of Moldova, and the adherents who recognize that the correct name of the language is Romanian. While the latter group uses scientific, linguistic, and historical arguments, the other group, the so-called Moldovanists, often uses vulgar and offensive vocabulary in their published material, falsifying historical and linguistic sources.



Moreover, they appear to strive to create a negative image of Romania and the Romanian people. The appeal to the fact that during the Soviet era, researchers used the phrase 'Moldovan language' and demonstrated that such a language existed, is not an argument to prove the real existence of the 'Moldovan language'. Scholars were forced to write in this way so as to adapt to the demands of the totalitarian regime, which acted according to the principle of divide et imperia, and strove to create a 'Moldovan nation' and a 'Moldovan language', distinct from the Romanian nation and language. The regime's ultimate goal was to avoid separatist movements in the republic and any territorial claims by Romania.

Even foreign literature on the linguistic structure of the Soviet Union, however, recognizes that Moldovan was a dialect of Romanian, which the Soviets attempted to present as a separate language (Bruchis 1982 in Marshall 1992: 61). The analysis of the materials published in the periodical press shows that some of the most zealous defenders of the "Moldovan language" and "Moldovan identity" were the so-called "internationalist Moldovans". They were registered with the Communist Party and other center-left parties and formed part of various associations declared to be cultural and scientific. Most of them, however, did not speak this language. This state of affairs helps explain why, after the historic decision of the Parliament of 16 March 2023, M. Zaharova, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, expressed enormous 'concern' for the 'Moldovan language'.

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- Захарова (IV): следуя исторической логике, стоит называть румынский язык молдавским <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2023/03/18/19999189.shtml> (accesat 30. 12. 2023.)



Захарова (V) прокомментировала отказ Кишинева от молдавского языка <https://ria.ru/20230318/moldaviya-1858807408.html> (accesat 30. 12. 2023.)

Захарова (VI) уличила МИД Румынии в незнании истории: «Называйте румынский язык молдавским» <https://www.5-tv.ru/news/424496/zaharova-ulicila-mid-rumynii-vneznanii-istorii-nazyvajte-rumynskij-azyk-moldavskim/> (accesat 30. 12. 2023.)

Study translated by Paul Sipos.



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