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NEITHER OURS, NOR FOREIGN:
UKRAINIANS IN MOLDOVA

Abstract: Post-communist transition has challenged the new states and societies within the former Soviet bloc and the USSR with new threats and requirements. Moldova has faced domestic tensions, including the Transdnistrian crisis, that have undermined the country's unity; thus ethnonational relations and ethnopolitics remain a high priority both for the government and society. This article considers the history and present situation of Ukrainians in Moldova with an overview of the changes of their status and perspectives for their future. The authors also analyze the policy of Ukraine towards its co-ethnics in Moldova, outlining pros and cons of Kyiv's official stance in regard the local Ukrainian community. Conclusions are made and related suggestions proposed concerning the ways of resolving the remaining problems of Ukrainians in Moldova.

This article considers the political situation around the Ukrainian community in Moldova, presents the policy of Ukraine towards Ukrainians in Moldova (or lack thereof), briefly overviews how the Ukrainian community influences the domestic situation in Moldova (both Moldova state policy and Moldova politics), and considers how these problems affect the relations between Ukraine and Moldova. According to the 2014 census data, the total number of Ukrainians in the Republic of Moldova is 111,726 (4% of the republic's total population)¹. The other defined minorities are Russians, Gagauzs, Romanians, Bulgarians, Gypsies (as it is fixed in data), and others. Ukrainians constitute the biggest national minority in the state.

Moldova has been a multi-ethnic society for ages, and minorities have always played a very important role there. Among numerous ethnic communities, there were Ukrainians, who have been coming to the territory of modern day Moldova since the Middle Ages. Although a part of Ukrainians lived in Moldova for centuries, many of them settled there in the 19th and 20th centuries. Many were also settlers of the Soviet period because of labor migration flows. Thus, Ukrainians can be regarded as both a diaspora and autochthonous

1 Перепись населения и жилищ в Республике Молдова, 12-25 мая 2014 года [Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Moldova of May 12–15, 2014]. Available at: <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=ru&idc=479>.

population in the country. After Romanians, Ukrainians are the second largest minority in Moldova's ethnic composition. They are settled all over the country but concentrated mainly in the north.

Earlier research

There are a number of publications about Ukrainians in Moldova issued in Moldova, Ukraine, and other countries; they address the community's history, demography, culture, and education. A number of researchers in Moldova, Ukraine, Romania, Russia, and other states work upon the problems of interethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova, its social-political development, ethnonational policy, etc. Still, there remain some gaps in this sphere of scholarship. Some of topical problems remain overlooked by scholars and still lack both empirical and theoretical research.

Dorin Lozovanu, a Romanian researcher, in his article "Regional Distribution of Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Moldova according with the 2004 Census Data" pays attention to the problem of ethnic concentration of the titular nation and minorities in the context of geographical and administrative division.² Also, Elen Tsymbaliuk pays particular attention to the multicultural policies as a peculiar feature of the Republic of Moldova. She analyzes the historical roots of the current national composition in the Republic of Moldova.³

The findings of Irina Caunenکو, who analyzes the dominant attitudes of different ethnic groups toward social and cultural changes, significantly contributes to a deeper understanding of Ukrainians' cultural background in Moldova.⁴

The geopolitical context of modern social-political processes in the Republic of Moldova is analyzed by Ukrainian researcher Angelina Dobrovolska.⁵ Some issues of studying Ukrainians as a national minority and a diaspora are also addressed by a

2 Dorin Lozovanu, *Regional Distribution of Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Moldova according with the 2004 Census Data*, in *LUCRĂRILE SEMINARULUI GEOGRAFIC "DIMITRIE CANTEMIR"*, NR. 34 (2012): 93-101.

3 Елена Цымбалиук, Поликультурность Республики Молдова как историческое достояние [Elena Tsymbaliuk, Multiculturalism of the Republic of Moldova as a historical heritage]. Available at: <http://dir.upsc.md:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/1814>.

4 Irina Caunenکو, *The perception of social and cultural changes among the ethnic groups of the Republic of Moldova during the transition period*. Available at: https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/Patrimoniul%20cultural_ed11_pp98-99.pdf.

5 Ангеліна Добровольська, Протиріччя на шляху до політичної консолідації Молдови: геополітичний чинник [Angelina Dobrovolska, Contradictions on the way to the political consolidation of Moldova: a geopolitical factor]. Available at: <https://elibrary.ivinas.gov.ua/2731/1/Protyrichchia%20na%20shliakhu%20do.pdf>.

number of scholars from different states.⁶ The problems of political relations between Ukraine and Moldova are also a theme for academic researchers in both countries.⁷

General historical background

Historically, Moldova's statehood was first constituted as the Moldovan Principality, which had to defend its sovereignty in a fight against Hungary, Poland, and Turkey and finally lost it to the Ottomans. The principality was partitioned in 1812; one part on the right (western) bank of the Prut River remained under the Ottoman rule until the merger into the Romanian Principality and then the Romanian Kingdom in the second half of the 19th century. Moldova's other part—Bessarabia—on the Prut's left bank was annexed by the Russian Empire.

In the Soviet time, Moldova was established as a distinct political entity, first as the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR; where Moldovans ironically constituted a numerical minority) on the left bank of the Dniester/Nostrum River within the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, formally a constituent entity of the Soviet Union. In the course of Stalin's surgery of Eastern Europe's political map and after the annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union in 1940, the Soviet government administratively merged the MASSR and the largest part of Bessarabia and set up the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). The region was under Romanian and Nazi occupation during the Second World War from 1941 until 1944.

From the foundation of the MSSR in 1940, the ethnic composition of the Moldovan society has been complex, and Moldovans numerically prevail over other groups.

6 Віктор Кожухар, Катерина Кожухар, Українці в незалежній Республіці Молдова (1991–2018 роки) [Victor Cojuhari and Katerina Cojuhari, Ukrainians in the Independent Republic of Moldova (1991–2018)]. Available at: <https://nte.etnolog.org.ua/uploads/2018/4/publications/23.pdf>; Віктор Кожухар, Емпірична база етнотомографічних досліджень українців Республіки Молдова наприкінці ХХ – на початку ХХІ ст. [Victor Cojuhari, Empirical basis of ethnodemographic research of Ukrainians of the Republic of Moldova in the late ХХ – early ХХІ centuries], in *Știință, educație, cultură*, Vol. 2 (2021): 350–353; Надежда Беженарь, Антропологические аспекты образа жизни украинцев–этнического меньшинства Республики Молдова [Nadezhda Bezhenar, Anthropological aspects of the way of life of Ukrainians-ethnic minority of the Republic of Moldova], in *Analele științifice ale USM. Științe ale naturii și exacte. Științe umanistice* (2019): 88–92; Андрій Зубик, Дмитро Корнійчук, Сучасна українська діаспора в країнах колишнього СРСР [Andrii Zubyk and Dmytro Korniychuk, Modern Ukrainian Diaspora in the Countries of the Former USSR], in *Часопис соціально-економічної географії*, №1(2017): 161–167.

7 Юлия Секунова, Юлия Рыбак, Анализ сотрудничества и проблемных вопросов международной политики Украины и Молдовы [Yulia Sekunova and Yulia Rybak, Analysis of Cooperation and Problematic Issues in the International Policy of Ukraine and Moldova], in *Научный взгляд в будущее*, 19-02 (2020): 140–143.

The last Soviet census of 1989 shows that Ukrainians constituted 13.8% (600,336) of MSSR citizens. They were the third largest linguistic community in Moldova. The Ukrainian language had been the native tongue for 9.2% people in the MSSR (more than 400,000). The census of 2004 demonstrates that 282,406 Ukrainians in Moldova were residing in the territory of Moldova under the control of Chisinau. The census does not include inhabitants of Transdnistria and Bendery, where in 2004 more than 160,000 Ukrainians lived.⁸

According to the 2014 National Census of the Republic of Moldova, the share of Moldovans was around 75% of total population.⁹ The next in the list were the Romanians as the largest national minority in the country. The 2014 census shows that Ukrainians were the second biggest national minority in the country.

Table 1. Moldova's Ethnic Composition (2014)

Nationality	%
Moldovan	75,1
Romanian	7,0
Ukrainian	6,6
Gagauz	4,6
Russian	4,1
Bulgarian	1,9
Other	0,7
Transdnistria's ethnic composition (2004)	
Moldovan	31,9
Russian	30,4
Ukrainian	28,8
other	8,9

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Moldova/People#ref42813>

The complex issue of Moldovans' origins and ethnic identities exacerbates the societal fragmentation. Here, we just mention the controversies about Moldovans' relationship with

8 Українська діаспора в Республіці Молдова. Буковина толерантна [Ukrainian diaspora in the Republic of Moldova. Bukovina tolerant]. Available at: http://buktolerance.com.ua/?page_id=10.

9 Перепись населения и жилищ в Республике Молдова, 12–25 мая 2014 года [Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Moldova, of May 12–15, 2014]. Available at: <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=ru&idc=479>.

Romanians and the grounds for claiming a separate Moldovan national identity. Since the beginning of the 1990s, many Moldova citizens have changed their identity and national loyalty either to Romania or to other available options. These drastic processes of identity transformation were, from our point of view, one of the triggers of the Transdnestrian crisis.

The Republic of Moldova is currently experiencing a rapid population decline because of low birth rate and emigration; these negative demographic trends also concern the Ukrainian community. Socio-political transformations in the republic have not yet been accomplished and can be hardly deemed successful. Politically, Moldova has not reached the level of a consolidated democracy. Since 1990, Moldova has strongly been affected by the Transdnestrian crisis and the country's partition into two separate parts. Political contestations around the Gagauz autonomous area in Moldova's south, where many Ukrainians live, also challenge the country's stability and integrity.

From the point of the country's uncertain future, the situation around the Ukrainian community is very important and deserves scholarly attention and research.

Double-sided value: Ukrainians as an autochthons group and diasporic minority in Moldova

The Ukrainian community first appeared in Moldova in the early Middle Ages, and there are many descendants of the then Rusin Eastern Slavic tribes who settled in the territory from at least the 6th century CE. They were the second largest group after Moldovans in the country; there are numerous historical sources from the Moldovian Principality that confirm a variety of Ukrainians' contributions to the Moldova statehood. Ukrainians played a very important role, to some extent equal to the Moldovans';¹⁰ in some ways Ukrainians can be regarded as co-founders of this statehood and society. Later on, Ukrainian Cossacks were also closely related to Moldova; it is worth mentioning that Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the leader of the Ukrainian rebel Cossacks in the mid-17th century offered the Moldovan Voivode Vasile Lupu a military alliance against the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Then during the period when the Russian Empire absorbed the Ukrainian territory and expanded the Russian legislation, including serfdom from 1783, many Ukrainian peasants fled the Russian Empire to the Moldovan territory looking for the freedom and free lands in Bessarabia.

10 Елена Цымбалиук, Поликультурность Республики Молдова как историческое достояние [Elena Tymbaliuk, Multiculturalism of the Republic of Moldova as a historical heritage]. Available at: <http://dir.upsc.md:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/1814>.

After the Russian Empire's annexation of Bessarabia in 1812 and the further russification of Ukrainian lands, more newcomers from Ukraine joined Ukrainian communities in Moldova's territory. Finally, during the Soviet period when the Moldovan autonomous and later the upper-level union republic had been created, Ukrainians resettled there as qualified workers, engineers, members of nomenclature, and or laborers of other professions. Since then, they have spread all over Moldova, but the majority is concentrated in rural areas of the north, with fewer in the southern and central parts of the country. Partly, Ukrainians are settled in the major cities and towns. Many of them live in Chisinau, Balti, Edinet, and other regional centres.¹¹

However, Ukrainians have been living in Moldova for centuries along with Moldovans, Bulgarians, and the Gagauz. Those long-term interactions and cooperations have been based on common values and standards of living as the people went to the same churches, belonged to the same Orthodox Christianity, and practiced almost identical rituals. From that time the tradition of very close and friendly communication and relations seemed to be laid as the foundation of Moldovan–Ukrainian relations in the country and the region.

Another uniting factor for both communities is that the Soviet nationalities policy aimed to assimilate Ukrainians and Moldovans into the so-called “Soviet people” (also labelled in publicism as *Homo Sovieticus* with definite negative connotations). This concept might have been naïve and idealistic, but nonetheless fitting in the Soviet government's purposes of having a controlled and manageable populace. This policy was forcefully carried out, and it is no wonder that it failed finally. However, at the same time, it left behind a lot of traces and remnants in personal and collective memories. The latter are still under a strong influence of Soviet nostalgia complemented with a certain geopolitical and value-based orientation towards Moscow and Russia as the centre of the bygone empire and presumably the post-Soviet space. For various reasons, the ethnic minorities of Moldova seem to be much more deeply affected by the socialist legacy than in neighboring Romania, for instance. Ethnic Moldavians are not far away from local minorities in that respect.

It is important to stress that the Soviet era's values, education, habits, and standards of living have affected all of the population of Moldova, but mostly ethnic minorities, namely Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Gagauzians, and Jews. This legacy creates very deep problems for both the titular nation and for the ethnic minorities to agree on a common vision of the past, present, and future of the country.¹² The citizenry has to elaborate approaches acceptable for all the parties involved towards the strategic issues on how the

11 Dorin Lozovanu, *Regional Distribution of Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Moldova according with the 2004 Census Data*, in *LUCRĂRILE SEMINARULUI GEOGRAFIC “DIMITRIE CANTEMIR”*, NR. 34 (2012): 93–101.

12 Ангеліна Добровольська, Протиріччя на шляху до політичної консолідації Молдови: геополітичний чинник [Angelina Dobrovolska, Contradictions on the way to the political consolidation of Moldova: a geopolitical factor]. Available at: <https://elibrary.ivinas.gov.ua/2731/1/Protyrichchia%20na%20shliakhu%20do.pdf>.

country should move from a ghost of failed state in the backyard of the post-Soviet space towards a prosperous, peaceful, and respectful European state. This is a very important if not key issue for public debates in Moldova. The minorities and the majority do not always reach the same conclusions on that yet not completed discussion.

Moldova's independence: a stressful challenge for Ukrainians

We would like to shed light on the choice that the Ukrainians were to make in taking their stance towards the country's future. The Moldova's statehood started in a very stressful situation,¹³ and from the very outset of Moldova's independence, three competing strategic scenarios were simultaneously set in motion. During the majority of that time, political leaders who occupied top positions at the very end of the Soviet era and at the beginning of the Republic of Moldova confessed their so-called unionist orientation, which represented their zeal for the fastest unification or reunification of Moldova and Romania. That idea was grounded in the belief that Moldovans and Romanians were the same folk, as far as they had a common history, language, and traditions. Accordingly, they had to be merged into one state—Romania. The second script aimed at the establishment of the new sovereign State of Moldova that should be distant both from Russia and Romania and based on its own national interests and concerns. Finally, there were and still are some people who want to keep Moldova as close as possible to Russia and see the country's future at the closest orbit centring on Moscow's regional and global plans.¹⁴

Initially, the first scenario prevailed in the official discourse. Yet, it was not warmly greeted by that part of the Moldovan society that belonged to ethnic minorities or originated from non-Moldovan nomenclature. They by and large welcomed neither the “Unionists” scenario nor a full-fledged Moldovan statehood. Moreover, many strongly opposed both scenarios and fought against them as far as they were able to do so. It led to the Transdniestrian conflict, which escalated to the proclamation of the so-called Transdniestrian Moldavian Republic (TMR). The latter is a self-proclaimed, unrecognized state in existence since the 1992 armistice. The conflict at large still remains unresolved. It has deeply affected both parts of the Moldova's society and the stability in the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁵ Another outcome of the internal confrontation was the

13 Irina Caunenco, *The perception of social and cultural changes among the ethnic groups of the Republic of Moldova during the transition period*. Available at: https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/Patrimoniu%20cultural_ed11_pp98-99.pdf.

14 Anatolie Iavorschi, *The problem of National Identity in the Republic of Moldova: Moldovanism and Romanianism*, in *Spazio aperto/Open Space*, numero tre (2012): 33–37.

15 Наталія Нечасва-Юрійчук, Придністров'я як фактор впливу на Республіку Молдову та Україну [Natalia Nechaieva-Yuriichuk, Transdniestria as a factor influencing the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine], in *Історико-політичні проблеми сучасного світу*, №31-32 (2015): 58–63.

establishment of the breakaway Gagauz Republic and then the Gagauz autonomous territorial unit within Moldova.

That situation puts minorities in a vulnerable position. For most local Ukrainians, the unionist scenario was hardly acceptable, and the Ukrainian community is still not consolidated with regard to Moldova's desired future.¹⁶ In Transdniestria, Ukrainians played a significant role in the creation of the breakaway republic, but in the northern part of the country as well as other parts of mainland Moldova, they took a different stance and predominantly remained loyal to the legitimate government and the Moldovan statehood. In other words, the Transdniestrian conflict splits the Ukrainian community into those who live in Moldova under Chisinau authorities and those who live in the self-proclaimed TMR. Worse, the two parts have divergent geopolitical orientations. Since the TMR is the Kremlin's puppet and survives mainly due to the presence of the Russian military and Russia's considerable economic and other kinds of support, most Transdniestrian inhabitants are basically pro-Russian. Some Ukrainians in the rest of Moldova are oriented towards Russia too, but they are not that vehemently adhered to this orientation as their co-ethnics in Transdniestria.

The Ukrainians passed through three major stages of development in modern Moldova. The first one was in the 1990s, when the Moldovan leadership opted for an ethnocentric policy and took the course towards building a united Romanian nation disregarding minorities. This ideal was borrowed from the brief period of Greater Romania (1918–1940) when Bessarabia was part of it. For sure, the then leaders of the country were against a separate Moldovan statehood as an appropriate and legitimate strategic goal in the long run. Therefore, this project inherently regarded ethnic minorities as the opponents of the Unionists' plans; they were treated this way and then truly became the adversaries. Soon after, the unionists' plans completely failed, as the national referendum of 1994 showed.¹⁷ Despite that, the Unionists remain a very strong faction in Moldovan society and among the political elites. However, a dominant part of Moldovans and of ethnic minorities confirm and grant their support for the ideal of the Moldovan statehood and the Moldovan civic identity as uniting factors for the country in general.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Ukrainians and other minorities enjoyed the improvement of the ethnopolitical situation in the country, which happened because Moldova adopted new legislation in accordance with the European standards of democracy and minority rights. The country's membership on the Council of Europe and the OSCE as well as Moldova's aspiration to become a member of the EU together stimulated the government's new legal steps towards adopting the European human rights standards. These

16 Віктор Кожухар, Катерина Кожухар, Українці в незалежній Республіці Молдова (1991–2018 роки) [Victor Cojuhari and Katerina Cojuhari, Ukrainians in the Independent Republic of Moldova (1991–2018)]. Available at: <https://nte.etnolog.org.ua/uploads/2018/4/publications/23.pdf>.

17 "Moldovan Voters Reject Reunification with Romania", *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1994. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-03-08-mn-31587-story.html>.

changes, along with other geopolitical and domestic factors, were beneficial for minorities including Ukrainians. The Moldovan legislation, governmental policy, and strategies, proclaimed to be oriented towards societal consolidation and based on European principles, made the official policies more friendly towards the interests of ethnic minorities, the protection of their rights, the preservation of cultures, and the development of educational opportunities. Minorities also enjoyed some financial and institutional support from the government on both the national and local levels.

Later, since 2010, this progressive development seems to have been slowed and obstructed. For now, minorities and Ukrainians in particular do not enjoy decent socio-economic standards of living as many Moldovans do. This disparity provokes certain tensions and disappointment with regard to the situation in Moldova as well as a distrust towards the very ability of the state to protect the vital interests of the citizens regardless of their ethnic origin. Economic hardships push many Moldova citizens to leaving the country temporarily or for an indefinite amount of time. Ukrainians, who mainly (and traditionally) reside in the countryside in Moldova's poor northern part seem to be most affected. This region is not economically prosperous, and therefore Ukrainians suffer there from stagnation and poverty.¹⁸ Besides the ongoing socio-economic crisis, political turmoil occurred several times in the contemporary history of Moldova. Against this background, the Ukrainians, as well as other ethnic minorities, are in a complicated position. Their prevailing mood can be characterized as frustrated, deprived, and suffering from common negative demographical, political, and social changes that took place in Moldova during the independence period.

For sure, the civil activities of Ukrainians in the main part of Moldova and in the so-called TMR differ. In mainland Moldova, the Ukrainians have organized dozens of civil society organizations that take care of the community's social and cultural development. As official sources state, The Agency of Interethnic Relations of the Republic of Moldova has registered several NGO of Ukrainians in the country, including the Ukrainian Community of Moldova (*Ukrain'ska hromada Moldova*), the Society of Ukrainian Culture of Moldova (*Tovarystvo Ukrains'koi kultury Respubliki Moldova*), the Society of Ukrainian Women of Moldova (*Zhinocha hromada Moldova*), the Taras Shevchenko "Enlighten" Society in Moldova (*Tovarystvo "Prosvita" imeni Tarasa Shevchenko v Moldovi*), the Association of Ukrainian Youth "Together" (*Asotsiatsia ukrainskoi molodi "Razom"*).¹⁹ The latest event proving a movement of Ukrainian organizations towards more coordinated

18 Віктор Кожухар, Емпірична база етнодемографічних досліджень українців Республіки Молдова наприкінці XX – на початку XXI ст. [Victor Cojuhari, Empirical basis of ethnodemographic research of Ukrainians of the Republic of Moldova in the late XX–early XXI centuries], in *Știință, educație, cultură*, Vol. 2 (2021): 350–353.

19 Українці в Молдові. Українські організації. Посольство України в Молдові [Ukrainians in Moldova. Ukrainian organizations. Embassy of Ukraine in Moldova]. Available at: <https://moldova.mfa.gov.ua/spivrobitnictvo/140-ukrajinci-v-moldovi>.

and consolidated activities is the establishment of National Congress of Ukrainians in Moldova, which took place in May 2021.²⁰

They have enjoyed a certain support from the government regarding media and education, including on Ukrainian studies programs at the Balti University²¹ other schools.²²

It is worth recalling the previous Soviet system of ethnic minority education, which ostensibly picqued the interest and met the expectations of some “non-titular” groups. From the statistical point of view, the needs of small ethnic groups in Moldova were presumably satisfied. This seeming harmony ended in the early 1990s, and since then Moldova has no schools with Ukrainian as the main language of instruction despite the existence of a large, nationwide Ukrainian community. Still there are around 60 schools where Ukrainian language is taught.²³ The only college, which was located in Lipcani, that trained teachers for pre-schools and schools with Ukrainian as the language of education was shut down more than a decade ago. Some academic research concerning the culture and history of Ukrainians in Moldova is carried out. For example, there is the Department of the History, Language, and Culture of Ukrainians of Moldova, Institute of Cultural Heritage (which was later diminished to a division),²⁴ but nonetheless, it is an isolated island in the ocean of negative trends affecting the Ukrainian community.

One of the topical issues for Ukrainians and all of Moldova’s society is the hotly debatable problem of how to harmonize ethnic and civic identities. It is growing clear that Ukrainians are subjected to an assimilation process in Moldova.²⁵ Inter-ethnic marriages, closeness in religion and culture, and common habits and values with Moldovans make this process’s progression easier and faster. Hereby one might observe a contradictory trend.

20 Діаспора заснувала Національний Конгрес українців Молдови. Укрінформ [The Diaspora founded the National Congress of Ukrainians of Moldova. Ukrinform]. Available at: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-diaspora/3244490-diaspora-zasnuvala-nacionalnij-kongres-ukrainciv-moldovi.html>.

21 Кафедра славистики Бельцького університету імені А. Руссо [Department of Slavic Studies, A. Rousseau University of Balti]. Available at: <http://www.old.usarb.md/ru/facultati/filologie/catedre/catedra-de-slavistica/personal/>.

22 Марія Штур, Іванні Трутненко, У яких школах вчать українці в Молдові? [Maria Shchur and Ivanna Trutenko, In which schools do Ukrainians study in Moldova?]. Available at: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28745044.html>.

23 Петро Крالیук, На шляху до ЄС. Чи потрібна українізація українців Молдови? [Petro Kraliuk, On the way to the EU. Is it necessary to Ukrainize Ukrainians in Moldova?]. Available at: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30957032.html>.

24 Надія Тисячна, Про культурне життя українців Молдови в одному бібліографічному покажчику, [Nadia Tyshachna, On the cultural life of Ukrainians in Moldova in one bibliographic index]. Available at: <https://m.day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/den-ukrayini/pro-kulturne-zhittya-ukrayinciv-u-moldovi-v-odnoymennomu-bibliografichnomu>.

25 Надежда Беженарь, Антропологические аспекты образа жизни украинцев–этнического меньшинства Республики Молдова [Nadezhda Bezhenar, Anthropological aspects of the way of life of Ukrainians-ethnic minority of the Republic of Moldova], in *Analele științifice ale USM. Științe ale naturii și exacte. Științe umanistice* (2019): 88–92.

Should we take into account the situation of Ukrainians in Transdnistria, there are some trends that resemble the Soviet-style process of the russification of Ukrainians. However, regarding the rest of Moldova, the situation is rather of a complex character. Together with some inertia of making Ukrainians a part of a so-called Russian speaking community, many of them are subjected to an assimilation process into the Moldavan community. Still, those trends need further accurate research and clarification. Plus, active migration and emigration processes and the general population decline in Moldova cause the Ukrainian community to substantially shrink from census to census. Of course, many of the distinguished researchers question the results of the last census held in 2014, claiming that it was falsified and the results have no credibility. Still, without any doubt, the figures available speak against an optimistic vision of the Ukrainian community's prospects to survive and grow.

Forgotten compatriots: Ukraine's policy towards co-nationals in Moldova

The actual ethno-political situation in Moldova seems to not match the official political course pursued from both countries' capitals: Chisinau and Kyiv. The compact settlement of national minorities provides, on the one hand, opportunities for their cultural identity preservation but, on the other, a political challenge. In the Moldovan context, this stems from the political orientation of the minority communities' active parts. The situation is complicated by significant political and financial support provided by the Russian Federation to Transdnistria (where around 1/3 of the population are Ukrainians by origin and in fact mainly Russian speakers).

Despite some inconsistencies in the available demographic data, the very presence of a large amount of co-nationals in a neighboring country requires special attention from the kin-state. Both Moldova and Ukraine are still suffering from social-economic instability, political uncertainty, and the "Russian World"²⁶ policy pursued by the Kremlin. After 1991, both Ukraine and Moldova opted for national independence and declared support to co-ethnics abroad.

What has Ukraine been doing in the latter respect? The Ukrainian officials (starting from President Leonid Kravchuk) at the outset of Ukrainian statehood announced their far-reaching plans concerning the Ukrainian diaspora. In fact, the government paid more attention to the Ukrainian diaspora in the richest countries of Europe and North America

26 The motto of "Russian World" denotes a doctrine of the Russian government justifying Russian expansionist policy on the grounds of alleged cultural and linguistic unity of a large part of the ex-Soviet Russian-speaking and predominantly Orthodox population.

than in the post-Soviet states. From this point, Moldova's Ukrainians have never been a priority for Kyiv despite the attempts of some experts and politicians to draw its attention to Ukrainians in neighboring Moldova.²⁷ Ukraine prefers building relationships with prosperous countries, and this approach is detrimental to the relations with Moldova and to Moldova's Ukrainians.

Notably, there used to be some positive dynamics, and the Transnistrian crisis was a factor contributing to Ukraine's involvement in the issues of Moldova's Ukrainians. There used to be a real danger to the lives and security of Ukrainians in Moldova and a threat of a spill over of the armed conflict to the territory of Ukraine. Ukraine thus was engaged as one of the peacekeepers and a mediator. In this framework, Ukraine tried to support the Ukrainians in both parts of the country (i.e., in Transnistria and in mainland Moldova). Certain political, cultural, social, and symbolical aid was provided in the 1990s, the years immediately following the armed clashes. The Ukrainian government strived to help with library funds, cultural exchanges, artistic, and educational events such as festivals and financing Ukrainian civil society organizations (CSOs).

Ukraine adopted a state program of cooperation with foreign Ukrainians until 2020, as well as Strategy of State's migration policy of Ukraine up to 2025. Several ministries established departments on foreign Ukrainians. The diaspora members themselves make an effort to be better self-organized.²⁸

In general terms, all of those efforts were not effective as well as a wholesale strategic course of the Ukrainian authorities in regard to the diaspora in neighboring countries. The leaders of the Ukrainian cultural societies and other CSOs in Moldova reasonably complained about insufficient support and poor interest from Kyiv towards their needs and claims. From that point of view, the Ukrainian policy seemed to be weak, inconsistent, and therefore ill-equipped to bring about considerable results.²⁹

27 Андрій Зубик, Дмитро Корнійчук, Сучасна українська діаспора в країнах колишнього СРСР [Andrii Zubyk and Dmytro Korniyuchuk, Modern Ukrainian Diaspora in the Countries of the Former USSR], in *Часопис соціально-економічної географії*, №1 (2017): 161–167.

28 Анна Сергеева, Діаспоральна політика держав-членів ГУАМ (1997-2021РР): інституціональна історія та етапи формування [Anna Sergeeva, Diaspora policy of GUAM member states (1997–2021): institutional history and stages of formation]. Available at: http://enpuir.npu.edu.ua/bitstream/handle/123456789/34090/Humanitarnyi%20Korpus_38.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y#page=133.

29 Анатолий Круглашов, Новая и старая украинская диаспора: сбывшиеся и несбыточные ожидания», Диаспоры в современном мире: региональный контекст и потенциал для устойчивого развития страны происхождения. Материалы международной научной конференции Кишинэу, 21 декабря 2017 года [Anatoliy Kruglashov, New and old Ukrainian diaspora: fulfilled and unrealistic expectations", *Diasporas in the modern world: regional context and potential for sustainable development of the country of origin. Proceedings of the international scientific conference, Chisinau, December 21, 2017*] (Chisinau, International Organization for Migration, Mission in Moldova, 2018), 112–113.

Another obstacle is that although Ukraine and Moldova are neighbors, Moldova remains a low priority for the Ukrainian foreign policy.³⁰ Since 2014, they have been placed in a very dangerous situation by the same geopolitical actor, being part of the same scenario first applied in Transdnistria. Ukraine underwent even greater damage with the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. Reasonably, the two countries should make their cooperation as strong as possible. In these conditions, the Ukrainians of Moldova are natural allies and mediators between the Ukrainian state and society and the Moldovan state and society, respectively. Vice versa, the policy regarding Moldovans in Ukraine shall be consistent.³¹

After 2019, the dialogue between political leaders of the two states resumed and intensified. In January 2021, a meeting between the President of Moldova Maia Sandu and the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky brought new dimensions to interstate relations and the Ukrainian diaspora's perspectives. The questions discussed between the two presidents included the issues of national minorities and the protection of their civil and cultural rights.³² In the context of both states' European integration policies, this issue has to be not only discussed at a high political level, but also duly regulated in the framework of national legislation.

Over the last decades, administrations and councils of the Ukrainian regions neighboring Moldova, first and foremost Chernivtsi and Odesa Oblasts and to a lesser extent Vinnitsa Oblast, have tried to boost cooperation with the Ukrainian societies in Moldova. For this purpose, regional councils and state administrations have carried out diaspora-related programs that also targeted Ukrainians in Moldova. They were heavily funded and achieved at least some goals. At the same time, one has to admit that these programs are rather of symbolical character. They can hardly compensate for the lack of central governmental support that could adequately meet the still unsatisfied demands and expectations of the Ukrainian community in Moldova.

30 Юлія Секунова, Юлія Рыбак, Аналіз співробітництва і проблемних питань міжнародної політики України і Молдови [Yulia Sekunova and Yulia Rybak, Analysis of Cooperation and Problematic Issues in the International Policy of Ukraine and Moldova], in *Научный взгляд в будущее*, 19-02 (2020): 140–143.

31 Юлія Тищенко, Анатолій Круглашов, Владислава Бакальчук, Світлана Дубова, Наталія Нечасва-Юрійчук, Румунська та молдовська національні меншини в Україні: стан, тенденції та можливості співпраці [Yulia Tyshchenko, Anatoliy Kruglashov A., Vladislava Bakalchuk, Svetlana Dubova, and Natalia Nechaieva-Yuriichuk, Romanian and Moldovan national minorities in Ukraine: status, trends and opportunities for cooperation] (Kyiv: National Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019), p. 112.

32 Зеленський і Санду обговорили шість основних тем на зустрічі у Києві – ОП [Zelensky and Sandu debated six major issues at a meeting in Kyiv]. Available at: <https://www.euointegration.com.ua/news/2021/01/12/7118426/>.

Conclusions

The Ukrainian community in Moldova is a part of a very complicated and dynamic picture that is basically of dark and depressing colors with spots of brighter optimistic hope. This hope comes from the fact that after the last presidential and parliament elections, Moldova seems to be strongly consolidated around the pro-European course. At the same time, a deep cleavage inside the titular nation has not been overcome, and the three principal scenarios of the country's choice are still relevant: Unionist, pro-Moldovan, and pro-Russian. The adherents of the three ideological positions are still contenders. Ukrainians are also divided into pro-Europeans (and supportive of Moldova Statehood) and those who remain oriented towards Russia (and supportive of a pro-Russian course for the country as an option).

Facts and figures discovering the situation of Ukrainians in Moldova need to be further scrutinized. There is an urgent need for more empirical research to be done. Some figures contradict others including the last census results. The truth is that many Ukrainians there are not against the European course of Moldova. However, at the same time, they are cautious about the implementation of this course and its consequences as well as some of Russians, Gagauzians, Bulgarians, and others in Moldova too. Therefore, they are still uncertain about their geopolitical preferences and values. That is why it is really important for the Ukrainians to find a proper place in the changing structure of the Moldova's polity and society, and it is crucial for them to be better consolidated and organized. In order to do so, they need much more support from Ukraine's government and civic society.

Ukraine has to work out and consistently implement a clearer strategy towards its diaspora. That is a vital necessity, because the diaspora is growing worldwide due to ongoing active emigration from Ukraine.

Of course, the common ground for closer and fruitful cooperation between Moldova and Ukraine with regard to their minorities is within the framework of both countries' European choice and common national interests. Still, Moldova and Ukraine have not succeeded in developing a kind of partnership that corresponds with their ambitions and needs. Moreover, that is a clue towards making Ukrainians' status and prospects in Moldova more positive and attractive.