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## **State and Citizenship in Moldova: A Pragmatic Point of View**

Monica Heintz

What is the meaning of citizenship in Moldova today? 'Having a blue passport' was the most frequent answer given by inhabitants of a small village in the north of Moldova. However, having a blue passport is hardly a source of happiness for the Moldovan citizen – it is only infrequently accepted by Western countries and is decreasingly useful in the East, ever since hundreds of thousands of such passport holders invaded Moscow and St. Petersburg markets in search of jobs in the black market. For many Moldovan citizens having a blue passport means being deprived of the Soviet passport that allowed them to freely circulate in the East. That many perceived this condition as an irreversible loss was reflected in the fact that the communist party garnered 50% of the vote in the February 2005 elections. Having a blue passport means not (yet) having a red, Romanian passport, the possession of which allows for free passage through the West. No matter how one looks at it, having a blue passport is viewed as an intermediary, unsatisfactory condition that each citizen strives to change, individually rather than collectively.

One becomes aware of his or her citizenship identity when attempting to travel abroad when the colour of his or her passport becomes a source of difficulties at the border. In the Republic of Moldova, with its 600,000 migrants (as estimated by the International Organisation for Migration in 2006), the great majority of whom engage in illegal labour migration abroad, awareness of citizenship is very strong. Triggered by harsh treatment at the border, we might expect such an acute awareness of citizenship to extend to other fields as well, thus partially determining the individual's engagement in social and civic life, his or her ethnic or national identity, and his or her relation to the state. However, as the contributions to this volume reveal, apart from passport colour, all other aspects of Moldovan citizenship are uncertain.

## **Weaknesses of the Moldovan state**

### ***Territorial and identity conflicts***

The Republic of Moldova began its existence as an independent state on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1991 ('Independence Day,' later named 'Republic's Day'), the same day most other Soviet republics gained independence following the August coup against Mikhail Gorbachev. A favourable international context and a typical scenario brought the Moldovan state onto the world's map. Moldova was first recognised by Romania (an argument frequently advanced by Romanian officials in order to counteract recent accusations made by their Moldovan counterparts), then by the Western states. In December 1991 the USSR was officially dismantled, though economic, political, and military structures remained in place, being centralised by the Russian Federation<sup>1</sup> (notably, within the Commonwealth of Independent States). Moldova retained the borders drawn for the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) by Stalin after WWII. The MSSR included much of the historic region of Bessarabia formerly belonging to Romania in the interwar period; Stalin included the northern and southern extremities of Bessarabia in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. A strip of land on the left bank of the Dniester river called the Transnistrian region, the borders of which only vaguely corresponded to those of interwar 'Transnistria,' comprised the remainder of the MSSR.<sup>2</sup> These borders, inherited by the new Moldovan state from its Soviet predecessor republic, were called into question by a declaration of independence made by Transnistrian authorities. The left bank region of the MSSR had already declared its autonomy on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1990. Following Moldova's declaration of independence in August of 1991, an open conflict arose between the two banks of the Dniester and the Transnistrian and Bessarabian part of Moldova around the issue of Transnistria's right to independence. This conflict led to war on the Dniester in 1992, eventually ended by an armistice, but never fully resolved.

The Transnistrian confrontation is one of several 'frozen' conflicts in Europe. The contemporary Moldovan state officially controls the entirety of the territory of the ex- Soviet republic but *de facto* has no control over the Transnistrian region. The instability at the border first triggered by Moldova's declaration of independence remains one of the foremost weaknesses of the Moldovan state. Moreover, the Russian Federation and

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<sup>1</sup> Soviet passports also remained in use. As of 2003, twelve years after Moldova's independence, there were still 500,000 Soviet passports in use in Moldova.

<sup>2</sup> Between 1924 and 1944, Transnistria, then named the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), was part of the USSR.

the OSCE regularly propose solutions to the conflict that call into question the statehood of the Republic of Moldova. The federalisation projects Florentina Harbo analyses in this volume from the point of view of their juridical coherence and validity betray, through the very terms used to designate territorial entities subject to federalisation, the weak position that the right bank of Moldova would have in a future federation. Thus, Transnistria appears as a strong and coherent political entity despite not being internationally recognised, the Gagauzi-Yeri Autonomous Region appears as a coherent ethnic identity (in those federalisation plans that take it into account), while the Bessarabian region is diminutively referred to as 'the rest of the territory,' even if, from the point of view of surface area, demography, and international recognition, it should be considered the strongest entity in the Moldovan territory. While Transnistria solidified itself through (Stalinist) ideological claims (Troebst 2003) and the Gagauzi-Yeri region through ethnic claims, the rest of Moldova has avoided self-definition in ideological or ethnic terms, nevertheless being torn asunder by internal tensions linked to specificities arising from its own unique identity.

The second source of state weakness in Moldova is linked to the identity and symbols of the Moldovan state. In 1989, the year of revolutions in Eastern Europe, the Romanophone majority population of Moldova launched its ethnic revolution, claiming the rights to use the Romanian language and Latin script in the public sphere, and to national Romanian history. The independence obtained in 1991 was initially considered to be the logical continuation of a movement initiated two years earlier, which confronted and aimed to attenuate the consequences of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and led to the union with Romania. Moldova's independence opened up novel possibilities; local political elites found themselves leading a country in need of the creation of all the attributes of a modern nation-state. The first step to be taken was the creation of state symbols: the Moldovan state was endowed with a name, flag, coat of arms, national anthem, and state and local institutions. This process took several years, during which time political elites changed, as did their goals. The first Moldovan flag was the Romanian flag, the official state language was Romanian, the national anthem was the Romanian '*Desteapta-te romane!*' anthem, and the first territorial reform transformed jurisdictions from '*raioane*' into '*judete*' (which corresponds to Romanian territorial administrative organisation). Later, when the composition of the political elite changed following democratic elections, Moldovan replaced Romanian as the official state language (in 1994); territorial reforms were rescinded with '*judete*' administrative units transformed back into '*raioane*' (in 2003); and the Romanian anthem was replaced by the Moldovan '*Limba noastra*'

(the lyrics of which were written by Bessarabian poet Alexei Mateevici). The course of this transformation of national symbols between 1989 and 1994 resembled a general process found transpiring in many of the states of post-socialist Eastern Europe and was driven by a desire to return to the pre-socialist past. The change of national symbols in Moldova after 1994 was guided by a desire to distinguish Moldova from Romania, whose 'ownership' of these symbols seemed indisputable.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from state symbols, public discourses surrounding the identity of the Romanophone majority population have also undergone two series of changes since 1989. Unable to transcend the limitations of the nation-state model, Moldovan political elites set themselves to building a national project that would justify the existence of the new state and could be used to attract voters in electoral campaigns (Guragata-Zgureanu, in this volume). Two distinct national projects corresponding to two distinct factions thus crystallised. On one side were proponents of 'Romanianism,' claiming that the majority population was ethnically Romanian, the language spoken by this majority was Romanian, and that people living on both the left and right banks of the Prut river (separating Moldova from Romania) shared a common history up until the Russian-Ottoman treaty of 1812. On the other side were proponents of 'Moldovenism,' claiming that Moldovans were ethnically distinct from Romanians, that the language spoken by the majority of the population was Moldovan, and that any resemblances between the Romanian and Moldovan languages had come about as a result of the colonisation and 'Romanianisation' of the Moldovan population on both banks of the Prut river by Vlachs in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (Stati 2002).<sup>4</sup>

As both of these identity projects continue struggling to win adherents, Moldovan citizens, especially members of the young generation, are confronted with a complex and confusing discourse (described by Elisabeth Anderson in this volume): in a country in which Moldovan is the official state language (according to the 1994 Constitution), children are taught from Romanian language textbooks in schools; while officials celebrate 'the country's liberation from the fascist Romanian yoke,' children are taught in their history textbooks that Bessarabia was torn from the Romanian mother country; while (almost) all Romanophone newspapers came out in opposition to the publication of a Moldovan-Romanian Dictionary (Stati 2003), the 2004 census found that only 2% of the

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<sup>3</sup> Since 1998, there has been a cooling of Moldovan-Romanian state relations, with Moldovan officials constantly accusing Romania of having colonised Moldova through symbols.

<sup>4</sup> Thus the claims of the Vasile Stati, the official historian of the Moldovenist trend, extend themselves to the eastern part of Romania, which was part of the historical Moldovan principality to which Bessarabia also belonged until 1859.

Moldovan populace self-ascribed as 'Romanian,' while 76% self-ascribed as 'Moldovan.' It should be noted, however, that since 1994, each of the successive ruling governments of Moldova have attempted to rectify these 'inconsistencies' by undertaking such initiatives as the creation of 'Moldovan history' or 'Integrated history' textbooks (Stefan Ihrig, in this volume).

A third weakness of the Moldovan state stems from the ambiguous and ambivalent relations that festered between Moldova's various ethnic groups in the Soviet period. After 1989, there were numerous demands for territorial autonomy based on ethnic partitioning. Poly-ethnicity in and of itself has not generated conflict in the Republic of Moldova in the sense that daily inter-ethnic relations become problematic only when confrontation is politically instigated, as happened in the 1989 demonstrations of the majority population and during the Transnistrian conflict. Ethnographic studies of the Bulgarian minority (Boneva 2006) and Gagauz minority (Demirdirek 2006) reveal that relations between ethnic groups are generally peaceful, despite ethnic polarisation primarily of historic origin (as most villages are mono-ethnic) found at the local level. This, however, begs the question: If relations with the majority population have not been problematic and there is no tradition of ethnic autonomy in Moldova to be invoked, why have the Russophone groups in Transnistria (Russians and Ukrainians), the Gagauz in the Gagauz-Yeri Autonomous region, and the Bulgarians in Taraclia demanded independence from the new Moldovan state ever since Moldovan independence from the USSR in 1990?

In response to this question, one could cite the absence of civil rights, the presence of ethnic discrimination, and suppression of minority language and cultural rights. It is certain that the recognition of Romanian/Moldovan as the official national language in 1989 forced some ethnic minorities to learn these languages: for instance, within five years of its recognition, public employees were expected to be proficient in the official language (the deadline for this stipulation was ultimately extended several times and the regulation was never fully implemented [Chinn and Kaiser 1996]). Conversely, Russian remained the dominant language in public space<sup>5</sup> and was later officially recognised as the 'language for interethnic communication,' with official documents being provided both in Romanian and Russian. Specific legislative measures have been taken to bring the

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<sup>5</sup> In urban areas, cinemas show films in Russian, the music played on public transit and in shops is Russian, and the magazines sold on streets are in Russian. The Romanian language has its own areas: theatres, local newspapers, NGOs (whether they funded locally or by the West), and open markets. In rural areas, the language spoken is always that of the dominant ethnic group within the village.

Republic of Moldova in compliance with common European standards: for instance, the Department of Interethnic Relations officially promotes the languages and cultures of Moldova's various ethnic groups, and links between these ethnic minorities and their 'mother' countries are encouraged so as to preserve cultural heritage.

Given such institutionalised recognition and respect for minority civil and cultural rights,<sup>6</sup> we might suppose that claims for ethnic autonomy have been politically motivated, being promoted by political elites who do not recognise the legitimacy of Chisinau officials. This view is supported by research on the case of Transnistria (Troebst 2004), a territory that some have viewed as having been confiscated by political and military elites and supported, for geopolitical and strategic reasons, by the Russian Federation (see Nicu Popescu, in this volume). However, such a hypothesis fails to explain claims to autonomy by Gagauzia and Taraclia, given the widespread poverty and geopolitical strategic insignificance of these two regions. In the 1990s, Bulgarian villages in Taraclia pushed for autonomy, but this sentiment did not lead to regional autonomy; Gagauzia demanded autonomy in 1991, eventually realizing this end in 1994 with the constitution of the Gaguzia-Yeri Autonomous Region.

Over time, the presence of the Soviet Regime in the Republic of Moldova came to produce an image of Russian superiority, overshadowing the titular nation. Non-Russian minorities that had formerly acquiesced to learning Russian and living in a Soviet state within Russian public space, did not, after 1991, assent to learning Romanian and living in a state comprised of Romanian/Moldovan public space. The work of a team of researchers who compared interethnic relations and ethnic stereotypes in Estonia and Moldova (Kolsto 2002) underlines differences in the ways in which ethnic Estonians are perceived by their co-ethnics in Estonia on the one hand, and perceptions of ethnic Moldovans/Romanians by their co-ethnics in Moldova on the other. The fact that Estonians are more highly esteemed by their co-ethnics would explain why ethnic Russians in Estonia, who form 25% of the total population and did not receive Estonian citizenship in the early the 1990s, were more keen to learn Estonian (a language spoken by one million people worldwide) than were ethnic Russians in Moldova, despite the fact that ethnic Russians in Moldova represent only 5.5 % of the total population

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<sup>6</sup> While these rights are officially respected, one cannot assert whether or not they are respected in practice, as there are no studies addressing relevant issues such as employment discrimination. Ethnographic studies that might inform us about such practical realities are scarce (a rare exception is Demirdirek 2001).

and received unconditional Moldovan citizenship in 1991.<sup>7</sup> As the authors of this study conclude, the economic factor here plays a crucial role: Estonia, an urbanised country, which acceded to the European Union in 2004, offered better prospects for its citizens than did Moldova, thus earning the Estonian state legitimacy in the eyes of non-Estonian ethnic groups. The Moldovan state has failed to gain such poly-ethnic sanction.

### ***Economic problems***

The latter observation leads us to another set of weaknesses of the Moldovan state, weaknesses also underpinning the previously discussed territorial and social weaknesses. The economic fragility of the Moldovan state has manifested itself in widespread poverty, migration, and political and economic clientelism.

According to the 2004 census, 61% of the Moldovan population lives in the countryside, with most of these inhabitants working in the agricultural sector. Despite local pride in the black, fertile soil of Moldova, throughout present day Europe agricultural employment does not provide a solid source of income. During the Soviet era, as part of the rationalisation of production, the Moldovan SSR was assigned to produce cereals and wine for the USSR market. Agricultural production was encouraged, only partially complemented by the development of limited light industry (agro-industry and textile industry). Heavy industry, as much as it existed in the Moldovan SSR, was implemented in Transnistria, so as to reward the region's apparent loyalty to the Soviet regime with the placement of strategic assets. The logic of this strategy was extended during the Soviet period as political elites were recruited primarily from Transnistria. In such a context, the Bessarabian region was rendered dependent on the Transnistrian region to counteract a possible breakaway from the USSR. When it lost control of the Transnistrian region in 1990, the new state of Moldova also lost control of its energy resources. For instance, Cuciurgan Electrical Central, which provided for 70% of Moldova's electricity needs until the autumn of 2005, is located on the Transnistrian side of the Dniester, the 'common' river creating the border between Transnistria and Moldova.<sup>8</sup> Following Transnistria's secession,

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<sup>7</sup> The new state of Moldova granted citizenship to all individuals residing in the MSSR in 1991.

<sup>8</sup> On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Cuciurgan Electric Central increased distribution prices by 25%, forcing Moldova to import electricity from Ukraine. Chisinau officials interpreted this price increase not as a result of market fluctuations, but as an act of political retaliation due to the worsening of relations with authorities in Tiraspol, given that electricity purchased from Ukraine was ultimately cheaper than that formerly purchased from Transnistria (BASA Press, 14.03.2006).



Moldova lost control of its heavy industry - for instance, Moldova lost the Rabnita Steel Plant, whose production today provides for 60% of Transnistria's national budget. In the wake of Transnistria's secession, Moldova was reduced to an almost exclusively agricultural country, which in contemporary Europe means a poor country.

The dissolution of the USSR, on which Moldova was economically dependent, was strongly felt in the Republic of Moldova. As was also the case in Eastern Europe, economic restructuring had as its first effect the impoverishment of the population, but these effects were more pronounced in Moldova because of the concomitant retreat of Soviet state firms. The Moldovan state has had difficulties maintaining national infrastructure; schools have lost revenue while roads and hospitals, especially those far from the capital, are in decay. Aside from the return of formerly Soviet firms as private Russian firms and the arrival of a handful of Italian textile manufacturers induced by the presence of cheap labour, Moldova has failed to attract substantial foreign investment. The initiation of economic reforms has typically been incomplete and incoherent, with reform often abandoned at the local level at the first sign of conflict with the interests of local patrons (*'nacealnic,'* in Russian). In the village in which I conducted fieldwork in the north of Moldova, because of differing administrative interpretations of the law and the unpredictable intentions of local bosses, the process of de-collectivisation took seven years, stretching from 1992 to 1999. In 2004, five years after completion of the de-collectivisation process, peasants were still being encouraged to place their property in a large association that inherited the communist *kolkhoz* structure and continued to be popularly referred to as *kolkhoz* (the governmental press praised the efficiency of large-scale agriculture). Continuities with the Soviet period are not surprising in villages where local elites remained unchanged from the end of the Soviet period and continued to use the same human management methods deployed under the prior regime (i.e., using the Russian language within the association despite the fact that this was now a free association of Romanian/Moldovan landowners). Therefore there was a real basis for popular conflation of the terms *'kolkhoz'* and *'association.'*

Generated by the structure of the Moldovan economy during the Soviet period, the current composition of the Moldovan workforce has led to large-scale migration. In 1949 when *kolkhozes* were implemented in the MSSR, the entire adult rural population (with the exception of some specialists) was made to work in the fields. By the 1970s, agriculture had been mechanised and there was no longer a need to push the younger generation into agricultural production. The young rural population from the right bank of the Dniester was drawn into light industry. Following the

restructuring of industry after 1991, this younger generation faced widespread unemployment. After 1990, light industry factories were restructured or else shut down (according to official Moldovan figures, in 2003 only 12% of the workforce was employed in the industrial sector [Anuarul Statistic, 2003]). In 1992, de-collectivisation began and land was redistributed to individuals who were working or who had worked in the *kolkhoz*—in other words, to the older generations (although once ownership certificates are established, they can be passed on by the older generations). Younger generations were left without town jobs and without any other means of subsistence at a moment in their lives in which they needed work most.

Labour migration to towns and to the former USSR (facilitated by a knowledge of the Russian language) offered the only solution. The more highly educated segment of the population generally moved to the capital city, Chisinau, in which 20% of the total population of the republic resides. This segment of the population started small businesses or found work in the tertiary sector of the economy. Many of these small businesses participate in cross-border trade with neighbouring countries, especially within the CSI. It is estimated that 70% of Moldova's GDP comes from exports and imports along its borders. Such businesses, which generate jobs and income, are more difficult to establish in the rural milieu, where information, connections, and *savoir-faire* in business are lacking. For the rural population, gainful employment could only be found abroad, mainly in large Russian cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. Border crossing in the former USSR was easy as long as Soviet passports were in use and continued to be possible with later identity cards, which offered the advantage of not recording border passage, as they could not be stamped. This situation allowed Moldovans to remain in the Russian Federation for months and years, even though they were legally required to register with authorities within three days of their entry into the territory. The opportunity to migrate East in search of employment led to massive but short-lived migration, which, in rural areas, had a seasonal character, as villagers tended to work in Russia during winter, returning home to Moldova from spring to autumn when they could work on their parents' farms. Wages earned in Russia are seldom very high, but they are better than what can be obtained in Moldova, where, in some regions, there are virtually no jobs and the state does not provide unemployment benefits.

Migration to the West, more difficult because it requires a visa but preferable because of the higher wages found therein, is rare and those who manage to migrate to the West tend to do so for the long term. This is due to practical concerns - the often-illegal status of Moldovan migrants in the

West prevents them from freely and frequently circulating between Moldova and the Western host country; transportation costs are also higher in the West than in the East. The International Organisation for Migration estimates that 600,000 Moldovan citizens, representing 15% of Moldova's total population, are engaged in some form of migration.<sup>9</sup> By sending remittances back home, these migrants guarantee the survival of their families and contribute to Moldova's GDP. However, the absence of these migrants from Moldova affects the country's social structure and economic potential. Through remittances, migrants secure the daily survival of their families, build houses, and raise the standard of living of their villages, but they rarely invest in businesses that would provide for future sources of employment and income.

Apart from the unfortunate state of the economy and the weakening of the Moldovan state through migration, the role of political and economic clientelism in undermining the state should also be noted. In the first chapter of this volume, Florent Parmentier shows how clientelism has come about as a manifestation of the weak Moldovan state. In this introduction, I refer only to the unpredictability of public order in Moldova and to the inability of the state to guarantee law enforcement. In a country where arbitrariness is the rule, only networks and patron-client relations seem to guarantee the physical, civic, and economic integrity of citizens.

The Moldovan Constitution and legal system are elaborated according to European democratic models; despite this, the country has been brought to trial in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in several ongoing cases. This contradiction stems not from the content of Moldovan laws, but from their implementation and enforcement. The case of *The Bessarabian Metropolitanate vs. the State of Moldova*, brought before the ECHR after having been held up for nine years (1992-2001) in the Moldovan judiciary (described at length in a recent volume by Dan Dungaciu [2006]), reveals the continuing arbitrariness of the Moldovan juridical system. This case also shows that even when officials decide to sidestep the laws they themselves have created, they are not held publicly accountable. The case of the Bessarabian Metropolitanate,<sup>10</sup> a church that state officials persistently refused to register, is a special case, as its registration was perceived as a threat to the very statehood of the republic (Heintz 2006). Seen from this angle, the refusal of Moldovan officials to register this new church appears not as an arbitrary act, but to the contrary, as resulting from the clientelist cast of relations between the Moldovan state and the Moldovan

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<sup>9</sup> According to the 2004 census, only 273,056 citizens (8% of the total population) are reported as being abroad (according to the governmental site [www.statistica.md](http://www.statistica.md)).

<sup>10</sup> This is a local church, but it is tied to the Romanian Patriarchate.

Metropolitanate (whose direct contemporary is the Bessarabian Metropolitanate), and is reminiscent of Soviet-style authoritarianism.

At the local level, police conduct is the most representative incarnation of the actual laws that govern the state. Embedded in a local social network, the policeman serves the interests of those he befriends, while intimidating others and thus gaining a potential source of bribes. The present-day Moldovan police officer is menacing only because he asks for money. Soviet-era fear of authorities disappeared in Moldova with the abolition of the Soviet totalitarian state. Contemporarily, the Moldovan state is composed of a web of social networks, within which each individual seeks a better position for himself. Given this fact, one should not simply assume that the weaknesses of the Moldovan state affect the quality of citizenship, but should instead first inquire into the state's ability to influence the lives of citizens.

### **The state-citizen relation**

Is the Moldovan state's inability to guarantee adequate economic and social conditions a significant determinant in the lives of Moldovan citizens? Answering this question requires a consideration of the relation between citizens and the state and a determination of whether or not the citizenry identifies with the state to which it belongs and/or on which it is dependent. In order to address this question, in this section I discuss the absence of national- and state- consciousness adhering in the majority population, the lack of public space for debates, and the lack of civic education that could support the emergence of such a public space. Moreover, I emphasise the paucity of actors capable of entering into a dialogue with one another and with the state—a situation generated by migration and resultant generational disequilibrium.

### ***National and state consciousness***

Looking back at the history of the Soviet period (as Jennifer Cash does in this volume), one notices recurrently strong ties between individuals and their native villages, but a comparatively weaker sense of identification with the wider entity of the nation or state. As Moldovan intellectuals frequently assert when forced to explain peasant 'Moldovenism,' which runs counter their own 'Romanianist' position, the inhabitants of Bessarabia missed the essential moment of the 1859 unification of the principality of Moldova and the principality of Walachia, a moment that marked the birth of the Romanian state. After the unification of Bessarabia with Romania took place on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the project of transforming Bessarabian peasants into

Romanian citizens achieved weak results; the most obvious consequence of this failure can today be seen in the fact that the majority population self ascribes as 'Moldovan' in terms of regional belonging. In a similar vein, Charles King (2000) argues that the Stalinist project for the creation of a distinct Moldovan ethnicity and nation also failed, with the 1989 Romanianist revolution providing the most obvious proof of this.<sup>11</sup> This failure results from the 'intractability' (Fruntasu 2003) of the Bessarabian peasantry: Living in villages poorly interconnected because of deficient national infrastructure, Bessarabian peasants avoided 'foreign' towns (with majority Jewish and Russian populations), practiced local endogamy, and were generally lacking in information. Hence it is no surprise that Bessarabian peasants were not readily convinced by supra-local myths and ideologies, instead remaining loyal to their local rural identities. Jennifer Cash goes as far as to ask whether Moldova is not actually a nation of villages, showing how individual ties to native villages were cultivated during the Soviet period and continued to be propagated by Moldovan folkloric movements after 1989.

The migration of Romanophones to Chisinau was officially discouraged by the Soviet regime (see Jennifer Cash, in this volume). Nevertheless, such migration became possible and accelerated after 1989. Even so, many rural dwellers migrated directly abroad, without first passing from the countryside to a Moldovan city.<sup>12</sup> Cities house the national headquarters of administrative and cultural institutions, and the imprint of the state and post-1989 transformations have been most strongly felt in urban centres. By 'skipping' towns, villagers missed an occasion to familiarise themselves with the existence of the Moldovan state and the changes transpiring with the dissolution of the USSR. Working abroad in nearby former Soviet countries, for quite some time on the basis of USSR passports, such villagers did not internalise the fact that the USSR had disappeared and that the Moldovan state was now, or should be, the determining factor in their lives.<sup>13</sup> In many cases, those who voted for the communist party in the

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<sup>11</sup> Foreign researchers have been particularly interested in the more Stalinist practices of Moldovan national identity construction, a fascinating phenomenon the consequences of which falsify a purely constructivist interpretation of nationalism (Van Meurs 1994; Eyal and Smith 1998; King 2000; Hegarty 2001).

<sup>12</sup> I refer here mainly to Chisinau in which 25% of the total Moldovan population is concentrated; other towns are rather small and offer too-limited employment prospects to justify long distance migration.

<sup>13</sup> During my fieldwork, for instance, a female Moldovan villager (43 years old) whose income was derived from her husband's employment abroad in Ukraine corrected her initial utterance, 'here in our Union' to 'here in our Russia.' She did not correct her second utterance.

2001 and 2005 elections (the act of which is usually interpreted as indicative of a nostalgic longing for the Soviet past) did so due to a lack of information regarding the irreversibility of the USSR dismantlement, reinforced by what became a common sense observation that during the Soviet period, 'Life was better.' Considering the fact that in a September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006 referendum 97% of the Transnistrian population voted in favour of independence followed by union with Russia, it is not so surprising that some Moldovans consider a return to the Soviet past not only a desirable but also a viable choice. This 'skipping' past the national level is even more pronounced in the case of Bulgarian and Gagauz minorities, which maintain strong economic relations with their 'mother countries' (Bulgaria and Turkey); these economic ties circumvent the regulation of the Moldovan state, despite the fact that they originate in localities within its legal jurisdiction (Demirdirek 2006; Kaneff and Heintz 2006).

The link between rural inhabitants and the state is weak: they neither expect anything from, nor do they have a strong sense of civic duty towards the Moldovan state. For many, the existence of the Moldovan state is understood to be due to the will of members of a political class aiming 'to come to power to fill their pockets,' as one villager put it, despite the fact that he was a fervent supporter of the then regnant communist party. Even if the Moldovan state is ignored, there is a lingering memory of the totalitarian Soviet state and its ruthless officials that produces a certain degree of reservation about openly addressing political questions in the public sphere for fear of stepping outside the norm.

### ***The existence of a public space***

To understand contemporary state-citizen relations in Moldova it is necessary to consider the widespread lack of information in the public sphere. Radio and television media that could be used for communication with the rural population are monopolised by officials in power; even when officials do not directly enforce censorship, self-censorship often prevents the objective communication of relevant information and the unfolding of real public debates on controversial economic, political, or national identity themes. The written press in Moldova enjoys greater freedom but almost exclusively reaches intellectuals and the urban population (Dungaciu 2005). One reason for this is that the 1989 introduction of the Latin script left large parts of the population semi-analphabetic, unwilling to invest time and effort in deciphering the high-quality articles, often too 'academic' in form, which abound in democratic newspapers. The written press is also a victim of the Soviet legacy, with articles oscillating between Stalinist style acute criticism

and the laudatory, wooden language of the Brejnev period,<sup>14</sup> often failing to strike a tone conducive to constructive criticism and democratic debate. The written press itself lacks information: political activities are not transparent, journalists' access to information is blocked, politicians do not cooperate on sensitive topics, financial resources that would allow in-depth investigations are limited, and intimidation is frequent.

Lack of information and lack of a public space for debate are two characteristics that mutually reinforce one another, together leading to the estrangement of the Moldovan citizenry. As Benedict Anderson asserts, national consciousness arose only with the 19<sup>th</sup> century development of a national press (1991 [1983]), which allowed individuals located in disparate local communities to transcend their provincial identities by imagining themselves as part of a larger community, the nation. The mass media should play a crucial role in cementing the nation and Moldovan state. However, the varying viewpoints found in newspapers as to what constitute legitimate state projects, even if democratic in their pluralism, introduce tensions into Moldovan society and the still precarious, not yet consolidated, Moldovan state. In the absence of public debate and confrontation, and with each newspaper publishing its own position, the resultant multiplicity of viewpoints regarding issues such as Moldovan identity and possible union with Romania tends to obstruct rather than promote the creation of a national community. It is certain that many of the journalists working for Romanian language newspapers in Moldova do not have such intentions, with their project instead aiming to reveal the illegitimacy of the Moldovan state and to stimulate the creation of a pan-Romanian national community. To the degree that these journalists promote democracy, it is mainly because they are inspired by the Romanian model of democracy and European integration and not due to their own democratic convictions. This often leads to undemocratic media coverage, which polarises the political sphere with an 'us' vs. 'them' logic that approbates political actors on the basis of their sympathy to Romania and not on the basis of democracy promotion. Such media bias generates certain prejudices towards political actors, and in this sense it is unfair.

The absence of any national debate between officials and in the printed press is echoed at the local level. Here, this lack of communication is generated by a fear of creating prejudicial divisions within the community. The 1990s witnessed a novel division of local communities along the lines of political sympathies. In Romanophone villages, self-ascription as either Romanian or Moldovan, for instance, introduced conflicts into kinship

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<sup>14</sup> Yurchak (2006) identifies these two styles as characteristic of the Soviet period.

networks. Having no viable model for public debate, locals opted to avoid debates altogether so as to maintain peace in their families. Supporters of the communist party themselves abstain from political commentary because they fail to fully appreciate their freedom to publicly criticise or support the state; supporters of democratic parties, being in the minority, abstain from open political debate out of a sense of fear. The result is that the few political debates that actually occur are often uninformed and generally take place between individuals who already share the same opinions. Paradoxically, one's political opinions can be easily surmised from the conversational terms one employs, thus indicating to an interlocutor whether or not a dialogue can start on common ground: the very fact of the language one uses is enough to establish such a political stance. Those who speak 'Romanian' tend to vote for one of the democratic parties; those who speak 'Moldovan' tend to vote for the communists.

### *The lack of actors in the public sphere*

Apart from the written press, there are other actors in the public arena whose presence is synonymous with democracy. These are civil society actors such as NGOs functioning with Western and, sometimes, local funding. NGO employees typically share the same social profile as journalists from the democratic press: they are intellectuals, generally live in urban areas, and have pro-Romanian and pro-Western sympathies. Even if NGO activity is impressive, it concerns only this minority of well-educated and better-informed individuals and thus reveals little about how (if at all) Moldova's majority population is involved in the public sphere. Civil society activity is thus restricted to a small number of NGOs and seldom includes grassroots initiatives.

This lack of engagement in the public sphere is a legacy of the communist era, characterised by a situation in which the state determined the 'rules of the game' and the citizenry had no choice but to conform, lacking both the freedom and obligation to take on initiatives themselves. However, it would be wrong to consider the current lack of engagement in the public sphere only from the perspective of continuity with the communist past. It is certain that widespread absenteeism – such as was apparent in the 2005 Chisinau local elections, which had to be rescheduled four times before a sufficient number of votes were cast to validate election results – is a symptom of low levels of involvement in civic life. However, if we consider the great number of demonstrations that occurred in Chisinau between 1989 and the present, we are confronted with a different mode of political engagement. The widespread lack of involvement in democratic procedures



might thus be interpreted as a manifestation of a generalised distrust of so-called democratic state institutions, which are perceived as only responding to violent actions such as street demonstrations.

This lack of civic engagement is also symptomatic of a growing weariness towards over-optimistic expectations for democratic action to induce meaningful change. If political participation, through either voting or through demonstration in the streets, is today becoming increasingly rare, this is because Moldova's citizenry has over time lost hope, as repeated demands for various initiatives have continuously come to nothing. For instance, the case of street demonstrations that occurred in support of retaining Romanian history textbooks in public schools (described by Sergiu Musteata, in this volume) reveals that negotiation with the state is never definitive. People took the streets in 1995 and again in 2002 to defend their rights to use these textbooks, but it remains to be seen whether or not such demonstrations will occur again in response to the 2006 introduction of 'Integrated History' textbooks, which were rejected by the Academy of Sciences of Moldova for being inaccurate and even consciously manipulative.

In rural areas, the lack of political engagement is due to a loss of any hope that grassroots initiatives might help people solve their most urgent problems: obtaining employment and income. This lack of political participation should be put in proper perspective: when a third of the active population of Moldova is engaged in short- or long-term labour migration and is thus absent from the country, low levels of political participation become more understandable. In such a milieu, who can negotiate or resist state measures? Who can actively participate in debates in the public sphere? The children and elderly left behind? Above and beyond the relatively low levels of civic education in Moldova and the lack of support for collaboration with the Moldovan state, the most significant obstacle to the emergence of a vital public sphere in Moldova is the transnational dispersion of a large part of what might otherwise be its actively engaged population. Living abroad, migrants enter into a dialogue with the authorities of the states in which they reside; it would thus be interesting to learn whether under different circumstances (i.e., living back in Moldova) these Moldovans would become more actively involved in the Moldovan public sphere. Unfortunately their status as (often illegal) migrants does not allow us to identify these individuals and evaluate their behaviour. Returning home to Moldova, their opinions often bear the impression of the country in which they were living abroad: We thus notice democratic sentiments expressed by many migrants returning from the West, while those returning from Russia tend to express authoritarian preferences.

In closing, I will revisit the issue with which this chapter began—passport colour and citizenship. After the accession of Romania to the European Union on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007 and the prospect of the introduction of visa requirements at the Moldovan-Romanian border, 300,000 Moldovan citizens demanded reacquisition of Romanian citizenship (Marin 2006), a total more than that of the previous fifteen years combined. As the number of such demands continued to increase in 2007, this led to heightened diplomatic tensions between Moldova and Romania. Demands for Romanian citizenship should not be interpreted as proof of increased Romanian patriotism, but rather as an aspiration for a better life within the European Union. As the prospect of European integration for Moldova remains quite distant at present despite assurances from Moldovan officials to the contrary, Romania has for the first time found itself in a position to erect, legally and wilfully, a barrier to pan-Romanianism through the recent introduction of visas (free of charge but difficult to obtain) at its frontier (Odette Hatto, in this volume). Through the extension of Romanian citizenship to inhabitants of its former provinces, a move that signals the sense of obligation the Romanian state feels towards these individuals, Moldovan citizens enter into an active relation with another state, the Romanian state, and through it, the European Union. The future will reveal what implications this new citizenship identity brings to Moldovans and how this unique identity will evolve in Europe.

## **Volume outline**

How are civic, political, and social rights articulated in a ‘non-Western’ European state, the very statehood of which is disputed? What does it mean to be a citizen of a state that is internationally known only for its high levels of poverty?

These are the overarching questions to which this volume seeks answers by starting from theoretical debates surrounding the theme of citizenship (a field of scholarship that witnessed major contributions in the 1990s), while taking the additional step of relating theory to historical and political developments on the basis of recently collected empirical evidence. The contributions to this volume reveal that economic conditions play a crucial role in determining state loyalties and citizenship identities, or, to put it in Marshall’s terms (Marshall 1950), social rights rather than civic and political rights determine state loyalties in formerly socialist states.

Definitions of citizenship often lack a solid grounding in the lived realities of ordinary citizens, focusing instead on the debates of elites and/or on geopolitical processes. Citizenship in the post-socialist context overflows

narrow definitions given by political elites, primarily because such political elites (i.e., representatives of the state) are unable to guarantee the 'social rights' that citizens expect. This volume intends to compensate for this gap in the literature by looking both at the making of citizenship from above and at the perception and response of citizens from below. How citizens conceive of their relation to the state determines: their involvement (or lack thereof) in public life (from voting to participation in social movements); whether or not they will seek to gain alternative citizenship; and whether or not they will participate in or aim to temper ethnic conflicts. Therefore, the possibilities of citizenship offered by the state constitute an important consideration in explaining political, economic, and social facts.

Contributions to this volume revolve around four research themes. The first theme, taken up in a series of contributions from political scientists, concerns the Moldovan state and its political elites. The second theme deals with the way in which the Moldovan citizenry enacts and remembers previous and current political regimes, a theme that the authors in this volume have approached via long-term ethnographic research. The third research theme, dealt with by historians and educational specialists, takes as its starting point the case of disagreements surrounding history textbooks in Moldova in order to address the issue of civic education of the young generation. The last theme in this volume is political in essence and addresses the question of political and geo-strategic alternatives for the Republic of Moldova.

### ***The weaknesses of the Moldovan state***

Florent Parmentier measures the 'weakness' or even 'failure' of the Moldovan state by analysing its (in)capacity to secure the civic, political, and social rights of its citizens. Catalina Zgureanu-Guragata describes the types of national discourses encountered in Moldova and their links to the electoral needs of different political parties. Together, their contributions address the question of whether there is a viable civil society in Moldova given its (civil society's) limited actions and the current state of press freedoms. Does there exist a public sphere in which state initiatives can be debated? What is the role of political parties in citizen-state relations and the reconfiguration of the state? Nicu Popescu addresses international issues and interests at stake in the continuation or resolution of the Transnistrian conflict—the heavy weight of which has burdened the Moldovan state since its birth—and evaluates the implications of the European Union for the Moldovan state.

### ***Memories and imaginations of past regimes***

The relations between ordinary citizens and the state are considered by social anthropologists who address aspects of citizens' memories and perceptions of the projects and failures of regional nation building. Jennifer Cash investigates ordinary citizens' memories of the Soviet-era project of building a multi-ethnic, 'internationalist' state. Hulya Demirdirek analyses the aspirations of minority ethnic groups (particularly the Gagauz in autonomous Gagauzia-Yeri) in the context of the creation of the new state of Moldova. Issues surrounding the identity of Transnistrian Romanian-speaking citizens, a relative minority within Transnistria, are analysed by Rebecca Chamberlain-Creanga.

### ***Can citizenship and national identity be disconnected?***

The issues of language and history dominate much of what debate actually occurs within the majority Romanian-speaking population, whose national and citizenship identity is no less problematic than that of minority groups. Sergiu Musteata studies the social movements and emotional involvement that accompanied debates about history textbooks. These debates receive special attention from two education specialists: Stefan Ihrig considers elite cultural and political debates on history textbook writing; Elisabeth Anderson discusses the responses of local history teachers to state educational directives.

### ***The uncertain future***

Florentina Harbo analyses the various federalisation initiatives proposed as solutions to the Transnistrian conflict. Odette Tomescu-Hatto concludes the volume with an analysis of the effects of Romanian EU integration on Moldova and the security of the new EU border. She also analyses the sharing of security zones between Russia and the EU, related strategies, and their effects on Moldova.

These contributions offer a social and political overview of the Republic of Moldova, based on empirical evidence collected over the course of the last ten years. Altogether they propose an interdisciplinary approach to a single empirical object, the Republic of Moldova, and support a pragmatic approach to citizenship, seen from the angle of the rights and conditions the state creates for its citizens.